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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1979

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Status of Black New York 1979

NEW YORK URBAN LEAGUE
Ms. Dolly Christian, President
Horace W. Morris, Executive Director

During 1978 New York City went through a series of changes - economically, socially and politically - that severely distressed the lives of black and other minority citizens.

The New York Urban League since 1919 has dedicated itself to developing and implementing programs that promote minority group advancement and equal opportunity in health services, housing, youth guidance, education and employment. We wrote this report, "Status of Black New York 1979," to further the cause for which the New York Urban League has labored over the past 60 years.

Last year at this time the Urban League described the seriously deteriorated condition of large numbers of New York's black and minority citizens. Nineteen seventy-eight brought further deterioration particularly in police-community relations, public education, youth employment, and human service delivery. Most discouraging was a break in communication with the Mayor and the new City Administration.

Forecasts of continuing inflation and recession, budget cuts locally, and tightened Federal spending for programs which directly affect black and poor people makes us believe 1979 will be more severe. The early warning signs are that continued frustration and alienation will inevitably accompany the planned cuts in human services.

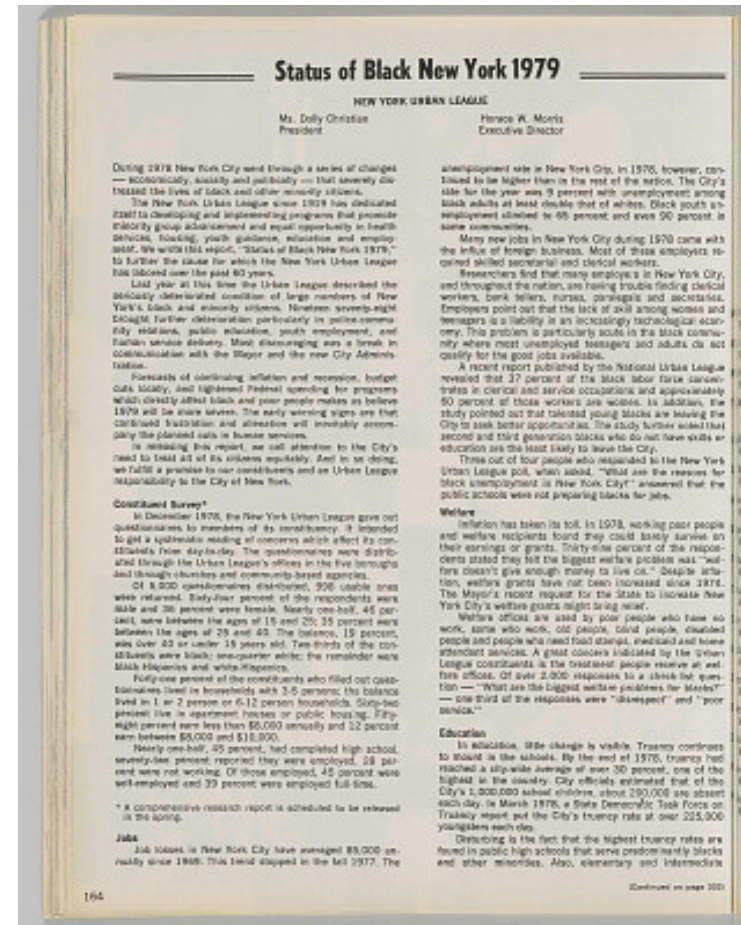
In releasing this report, we call attention to the Cities need to treat all of its citizens equitably. And in so doing, we fulfill the promise to our constituents and an Urban League responsibility to the City of New York.

Constituent Survey*

In December 1978, the New York Urban League gave out questionnaires to members of its constituency. It intended to get a systematic reading of concerns which affect its constituents from day-to-day. The questionnaires were distributed through the Urban League's offices in the five boroughs and through churches and community-based agencies.

Of 5,000 questionnaires distributed, 998 usable ones were returned. Sixty-four percent of the respondents were male and 36 percent were female. Nearly one-half, 46 percent, were between the ages of 15 and 25; 35 percent were between the ages of 25 and 40. The balance, 19 percent, was over 40 or under 15 years old. Two-thirds of the constituents were black; one-quarter white; the remainder were black-Hispanics and white-Hispanics.

Forty-one percent of the constituents who filled out questionnaires lived in households with 3-5 persons; the balance lived in 1 or 2 person or 6-12 person households. Sixty-two percent live in apartment houses or public housing. Fifty-eight percent earned less than \$8,000 annually and



12 percent earn between \$8,000 and \$10,000.

Nearly one-half, 45 percent, had completed high school, seventy-two percent reported they were employed, 28 percent were not working. Of those employed, 45 percent were self-employed and 39 percent were employed full-time.

*A comprehensive research report is scheduled to be released in the spring.

Jobs

Job losses in New York City have averaged 85,000 annually since 1969. This trend stopped in the fall 1977. The unemployment rate in New York City, in 1978, however, continued to be higher than in the rest of the nation. The City's rate for the year was 9 percent with unemployment among black adults at least double that of whites. Black youth unemployment climbed to 65 percent and even 90 percent in some communities.

Many new jobs in New York City during 1978 came with the influx of foreign business. Most of these employers required skilled secretarial and clerical workers.

Researchers find that many employers in New York City, and throughout the nation, are having trouble finding clerical workers, bank tellers, nurses, paralegals and secretaries. Employers point out that the lack of skill among women and teenagers is a liability in an increasingly technological economy. This problem is particularly acute in the black community where most unemployed teenagers and adults do not qualify for the good jobs available.

A recent report published by the National Urban League revealed that 37% of the black labor force concentrates in clerical and service occupations and approximately 60 percent of these workers are women. In addition, this study pointed out that talented young blacks are leaving the City to seek better opportunities. The study further noted that second and third generation blacks who do not have skills or education are the least likely to leave the City.

Three out of four people who responded to the New York Urban League poll, when asked, "What are the reasons for black unemployment in New York City?" answered that the public schools were not preparing blacks for jobs.

Welfare

Inflation has taken its toll. In 1978, working poor people and welfare recipients found they could barely survive on their earnings or grants. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents stated they felt the biggest welfare problem was "welfare doesn't give enough money to live on." Despite inflation, welfare grants have not been increased since 1974. The mayor's recent request for the State to increase New York City's welfare grants might bring relief.

Welfare offices are used by poor people who have no work, some who

work, old people, blind people, disabled people and people who need food stamps, medicaid and home attendant services. A great concern indicated by the Urban League constituents is the treatment people received at welfare offices. Of over 2,000 responses to a check-list question — "What are the biggest welfare problems for blacks?" — One third of the responses were "disrespected" and "poor service."

Education

In education, little changes visible. Truancy continues to mount in the schools. By the end of 1978, truancy had reached a city-wide average of over 30 percent, one of the highest in the country. City officials estimated that of the city's 1,000,000 school children, about 200,000 are absent each day. In March 1978, a State Democratic Task Force on Truancy report put the City's truancy rate at over 225,000 youngsters each day.

Disturbing is the fact that the highest truancy rates are found in public high schools that serve predominately blacks and other minorities. Also, elementary and intermediate
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