

STATE OF MICHIGAN



GEORGE ROMNEY, Governor

CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

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May 26, 1967

*MRG*

To: Mayors, City Managers, City Officials

From: The Michigan Civil Rights Commission

Subject: THE SUMMER AHEAD

The experience of past summers has shown that communities must take steps to insure better race relations. Realistically, we must face the fact that many cities with a significant minority group population are tense and have the potential for racial conflict. The Commission is urgently requesting that city officials use every possible means to lessen tension and reduce the possibility of civil disorder. Here are several suggestions:

1. Establish and strengthen communication between Negro leadership and the community, and between the city and the leaders of the minority community. Every attempt should be made to involve more than just the traditional leaders who have always spoken for the Negro community. Like other leadership, leadership among the Negro community also changes. It is particularly important that there be communication established between the majority community and grassroots leadership in order that the needs and concerns of the people in the minority community are understood and acted upon. Particularly, it is important that young people be represented and their needs recognized.

2. Summer employment for youths in the minority community is essential. You are urged to use your official position to encourage local employers to give minority youths a fair share of the summer employment. Many mayors and city officials have already held meetings with local employers to emphasize this point, and are seeking actual commitment of jobs. The city itself may have a number of such jobs in recreation and other areas.

3. A recreational program that will appeal to and involve a broad age group is important. Most communities lack recreational programs that appeal to the most critical age group, 17 to 21 years. This age group needs programming that will keep them occupied during the evening hours. Otherwise they spend their unoccupied time on the streets and are a potential source of trouble. Some communities have found it beneficial to involve leaders of this age group in planning programs.

4. Deal with rumors by using the local news media to give the community truth and facts. Citizens react to what they believe to be true, and the failure to expose rumors may well give them credence and cause a racial situation.



5. Most importantly, act to convince those who have been the victims of segregation and discrimination in jobs, housing, education, public accommodations or law enforcement, that the city government and those in a position of power and influence are sensitive to the problems, and are acting, in cooperation with those who have been the victims, to correct these problems.

6. The Police Department should reemphasize the equal application of its rules and regulations regarding courtesy, conduct and language. Many incidents of civil disorder have escalated from an incident involving a citizen and a police officer. While the police themselves are not responsible for the underlying social and economic problems in the city, they must do everything possible not to have their action serve as the spark of civil disorder.

The Civil Rights Commission's Regional Director assigned to your area will be able to give you further assistance. The local Directors have made many significant contacts in the various Negro communities and will be of assistance in clarifying specific issues and initiating a communication channel.

We offer to you the cooperation and resources of the Civil Rights Commission. We have assisted communities during previous summers in periods of racial tension and conflict. Do not hesitate to contact the Regional Director of your area, or the Commission, at any time--day or night--in the event of difficulties, or for assistance in establishing preventative programs. Included is a list of office and home telephone numbers for your convenience.

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Attachment