

Action After The Riot

Did Suburbia Get The Message?

by TIM RICHARD

EDITOR'S NOTE: In July of 1967 there was a week-long riot in Detroit.

In February of 1968, Kent Mathewson, president of the Metropolitan Fund Inc., made a widely-quoted speech entitled "The Message, Suburbia, Is Dignity." In it, he suggested ways that suburbanites could work concretely to improve race and social relations.

Last week the Observer Newspapers interviewed Mathewson, asking him a single question: "What has actually been done since then?"

On the lawn of the former Dodge farm adjacent to Oakland University and Meadow Brook, Mathewson said of the New Detroit's work: "Nobody thought it would change things overnight. And there's not time to get all cities to pass it."

"There's been a definite movement... an attitudinal change. I don't know if it's been enough. Perhaps there could have been this much progress."

He held his hands about 18 inches apart.

He quoted a friend who late in 1967 predicted that there would be no major problem in 1968, but watch out for 1969. Mathewson of the New Bethel Church Killings: "If it hadn't been for that massive (months-long) effort to acquaint the white community with racism, this damn town could have gone up."

He added hastily: "I can't prove that. If we have another New Bethel next week, I don't know." Then he brightened: "We've definitely lengthened the fuse."

But as for Mathewson's positive suggestions to suburbanites in the winter of 1968 and how they turned out:

● OPEN HOUSING legislation was suggested on state and local levels.

Progress: "Your people at Plymouth and in Birmingham, in the shadow of where I made this speech, have approved ordinances. And the Detroit ordinance held up in court."

He noted that Livonia had passed open housing at the city council level, but he considered Birmingham and Plymouth "more the significant because it went to a vote of the people." The State Legislature also enacted open housing, covering everybody.

Mathewson saw more work being done by young people, through churches and schools, than in any other area.

● A "MIDDLE LEADER-SHIP" massive work plan with such groups as Jaycees, Kiwanis, Rotary, American Legion, League of Women Voters and so on. "We will suggest that each interested group send a man-or delegation-to meet with a similar inner city organization..."

Progress: Not much in terms of work; a good deal in terms of attitude changes.

"These groups have been a prime outlet for our speakers bureau and the film 'The Black Eye.' It shows the white suburbanite a picture of Negro culture, not just race and deprivation, but even Negro millionaires talking of their years of study in England."

In 10 months--from August 1968 until June 1969--"The Black Eye" was seen by 130,000 persons. Among the 1,000 addresses were 226 churches--two-thirds in the suburbs; 253 school groups--three-fifths in the suburbs; 70 clubs such as Kiwanis and Rotary--two-thirds in the suburbs; plus 53 college classes, 135 business groups, 27 human relations groups, 28 PTAs and seven hospitals.

Hence, the feeling that there has been some "attitudinal change."

As for suburban civic clubs helping to start inner city chapters--there wasn't much to report.

But in Pontiac, he said, "Junior League women have 'adopted' Negro families in a non-paternalistic way. They've been working with ADC mothers, helping them find housing. One woman went with an ADC mother to appliance stores to help her buy a refrigerator and stove, to keep her from going to the type of dealer who would victimize her."

● SCHOOLS could work on student exchanges.

Progress: "There has been some of this. I can't cite chapter and verse. We have personally been involved in an exchange between Cranbrook and inner city schools."

● AN INTERNATIONAL Afro-American Museum had already been created, and New Detroit proposed to "send it, and hopefully others like it, out into the suburbs to expose the white community to a proud black culture."

Progress: "New Detroit has made a grant to that, to expand it. The project got downgraded in the priority system, although it was never turned down; it just didn't move to the surface with all the other pressing things we had."

The museum is now on display in the former Kern Book in downtown Detroit. Many suburban classes have been there to see it. But it hasn't been out to the suburbs yet.

MATHEWSON summed it up: "The big areas are jobs, housing, education and attitudinal change."

"We've scored very well on jobs."

"In education, there's still great diversity... a need for a great deal more."

"Attitudinal change? Here's where we get A-plus. The extent of dialogue and accomplishment has been great... We have definitely lengthened the fuse."

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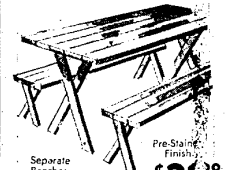
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Metropolitan Fund: What, Who, Why, Whose Money?



WHAT IT IS: Metropolitan Fund, Inc. is a non-profit research corporation interested in the six counties of southeastern Michigan and their metropolitan problems.

WHO IT IS: The 63-member board includes the names of executives of auto companies, utilities, banks, colleges, labor unions, churches, local governments and civic groups. Board chairman is merchant J.L. Hudson Jr. Vice president is Farmington politician Delos Hamlin.

HOW IT'S FINANCED: A recent year's budget was \$400,000. More than half came from business and labor contributions. Other chunks came from the Ford Foundation and the federal housing department.

HOW IT'S ORGANIZED: There were three divisions, but New Detroit was "spun off" as a separate organization. The two remaining divisions are Citizen Information and Intergovernmental Relations.

WHAT IT'S DONE: At one time, a single telephone operator served Metropolitan Fund, New Detroit, the Council of Governments and the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority. MF has researched the need for those organizations, funded them, staffed them and helped write enabling legislation. MF, in Kent Mathewson's words, is "a causer of good deeds, not a doer of good deeds."

WHAT'S NEXT: Urban communications...new towns.



IN LANSING —Larry Nelson of Farmington went to Lansing recently with his Alma College in Republican Club for a tour of the Capitol. Gov. William Milliken greeted the troupe and posed with each student individually. Nelson is chairman of the Michigan Federation of College Republicans.

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