

Middle class families face raw deal...

By TOM LONERGAN

Add an item to the traditional civil rights agenda of equal education, housing and job opportunities for minorities — the rights of the middle class.

"The average American family in the middle class is being exploited," says Rabbi Richard Hertz of West Bloomfield, recently named to a state advisory civil rights commission. They are "being squeezed where they never have been" by inflation and the energy crisis.

"Their affluence is a fable," Rabbi Hertz said in a recent interview. They are the "forgotten victims of rising costs... for whom there is no spokesman or champion."

Middle income families bear the heaviest tax burden, according to the senior Rabbi of Temple Beth El in Birmingham, "not the rich or super rich or very poor."

Rabbi Hertz likely has a bit of negotiating to do, however, before the 22-member Michigan Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights takes up the plight of the middle class.

He agrees with his fellow civil rights advocates that while progress has been made towards equal opportunities for minorities — largely by the black middle class — much remains to be done.

"We have a long ways to go towards achieving equal opportunities for all people," he said.

The nationwide black unemployment rate of nearly 12 percent is more than double that for whites. The unemployment rate among black youth, 16-19, is 34.5 percent nationwide. The median income of a black family in 1977 was 57 percent of a white family's.

Yet in the relatively silent '70's, the civil rights movement has continued without the almost daily monitoring by television and newspapers during the mid-1960's.

"THERE IS some sense of weariness with the subject (civil rights)," said Wilma Bledsoe, director of urban affairs for Oakland University, who also serves on the civil rights panel with Dr. Hertz.

But, she added, the civil rights commission's role is one "that is still necessary." A North Carolina native, Mrs. Bledsoe has lived in the Detroit area for 15 years.

The advisory commission conducts occasional public hearings and makes



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recommendations to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, based in Washington D.C. Its most recent meeting in July covered reinvestment and housing equality in the state, an issue it may study further.

"We don't have the power to do much more than fact finding and reports," said Mrs. Bledsoe.

The advisory commission has "the powerful arm of exposure," according to Dr. Hertz, through public hearings.

"No one likes to be caught in the spotlight of injustice and discrimination," he said.

The advisory committee may do some "fact finding" on the reverse white migration in the Wayne State University and New Center areas, Mrs. Bledsoe said. Gentrification has been criticized for causing a displacement of the urban poor, particularly in older inner city areas declared historical districts.

Among religious civil rights efforts, "there has been a polarization and retreat since the 1960's," the rabbi said. "Aggressive" black leaders who "wanted to do it alone" and the "withdrawal of religious leaders into their individual parochial needs" broke up an integrated religious civil rights coalition, Rabbi Hertz said.

"The 1970's have been a period of withdrawal," he added.

4-H'ers to get horses

Fifteen Michigan 4-H members will be selected to raise harness horses donated by the Michigan Standardbred Breeders Association.

The 4-H leaders and county youth agents throughout the state may nominate youngsters 15 years old or older for the project, and state 4-H officials will make the final selection in early September.

In October, each participant will receive a foal born last spring. They will raise the horses until October 1980 and then sell them at a standardbred auction. The 4-H'ers will receive the year's expenses plus one-third of the sale price, with the remainder going to Standardbred Breeders Association.

"The project gives the kids a chance to learn the responsibility which comes with caring for a horse," says Dick Dunn, state 4-H horse specialist. "A unique aspect of the standardbred project is that it gives the kids a rare opportunity to learn about the economics and career possibilities in the harness racing industry."

The youngsters will participate in a number of programs throughout the year through the cooperation of the Michigan Harness Horsemen's Association. They will attend a meeting on care of the standardbred foal, visit breeding and training facilities, show the horses in halter and driving classes, and attend a workshop on preparing a yearling for sale.

Any 4-H member 15 and older who is currently involved in the horse project is eligible for the program. Members must have written permission from their parents or guardians; have recommendations from their 4-H leaders, and county youth agents; demonstrate experience with horses; and have proper facilities. Applications are due in Dunn's office Aug. 24.

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"OPEN HOUSING is still an American dream, not a reality," said Rabbi Hertz.

Several suburban cities, most notably Livonia and Birmingham, dropped out of federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs in recent years rather than comply with low-income housing requirements.

The "attitude and resistance" to open housing in suburban communities is "still intense," said Mrs. Bledsoe. Add the skyrocketing cost of housing and energy and "it's a mere hope that desegregation of housing will occur," she added.

Further integration in the Detroit area may occur via what the social scientists call "gentrification" — the movement of young white middle class people back to the city.

"There's terribly fine housing stock in the city of Detroit," Mrs. Bledsoe said. "We may be finding integration occurring that way."

The concerns in Southfield now is whether or not steering is the major problem," she said. Blacks have been "accepted," she added, but largely between Eight and Ten Mile roads.

The Michigan Department of Civil Rights is investigating six Birmingham real estate agencies to determine if they have been racially steering customers.

ACTIVE IN religious based civil rights groups since he became Senior Rabbi of Temple Beth El in 1953, Rabbi Hertz moved with his congregation to Birmingham after the turbulent '60's.

"I kept our temple in Detroit on Woodward for longer than people wanted to stay," he said.

Building a temple in the suburbs, "drained a lot of effort away from the concerns of the city," he added. "The

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