

THE NEGRO FACES NORTH
Where a Negro



Captain King, wife Rachael and their children wait for a friend on "Near North Side," Omaha's Negro ghetto. Like King, most of the Negro officers at Offutt AFB live here.

captain lives:

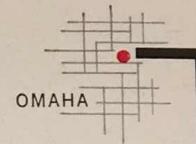
HIS PROBLEM OR OURS?



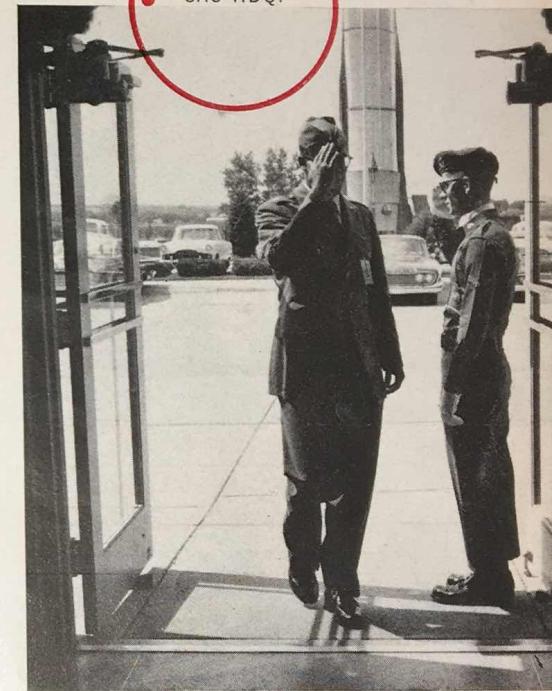
A sneak attack on the U. S. might find our vaunted air defense crippled by an enemy named Jim Crow

THIRTEEN MILES south of Omaha, Nebr., lies Offutt Air Force Base and, under it, the nerve center of the Strategic Air Command. A gray telephone at the Pentagon Command Center leads directly here, and every man, presumably, can be at his post within 15 to 30 minutes to help mount this nation's retaliatory punch against any aggressor. But not Capt. Michael King, 32, of Chicago, a member of a SAC intelligence unit and a Negro.

From Omaha's Negro ghetto—the only housing available to him—it takes King about 50 minutes to get to work. In a real alert, with his foot jammed to the floor, he might make it in 35. Well within a 15-minute radius of Offutt AFB is Capehart, a huge development where many Air Force men and their families live. In December, 1961, King applied for a house there. "They told me I was No. 361 on the waiting list," he says. "I checked again at Capehart the other day. I'm 420 on the list now." Captain King expects to be sent to South Vietnam soon. If the telephone rings at SAC in the meantime, he will have 180 million people in his back seat urging him to drive faster—faster!



White officers live in nearby suburbs (A and B). King's home is outside 15-minute travel zone (circle).



King takes guard's salute at entrance to SAC.

King was barred from an Omaha park pool "for public safety," and sued. Below, he romps with son Kris, 4.



THE NEGRO FACES NORTH

OMAHA, NEBRASKA: THE NEW MOOD SHOCKS THE CITY



A prairie city that thought it had reason to be satisfied finds a deep chasm between its races

BY SAM CASTAN
LOOK SENIOR EDITOR

OMAHA, NEBR., has an easy-going temperament. The people who get along best there learned long ago that you don't ask for anything outright until you've passed the time of day. So Omaha was scarcely ready for the Negro Summer Revolt of 1963, and most folks were plumb shook when it hit.

"Why here?" many asked. Omaha has had a Negro state senator for years. One of the town's most prominent surgeons is Dr. Claude Organ, a Negro, who had no difficulty getting office space in the Medical Arts Building downtown. Negroes hold well-paying jobs in the packing-houses, Omaha's main industry. There are colored bus drivers, mail carriers and policemen. Mayor James Dworak in July set up a biracial committee of top-level white and Negro leaders to investigate and resolve alleged discrimination in housing, jobs, etc.

Why then, in the summer of 1963, did pray-ins, sit-ins, picket lines and

threats of a boycott disturb the social and economic tranquillity of a solid town like Omaha?

"This town is sick, that's why," says the Rev. James T. Stewart, director of Social Action for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Omaha. "I'm not speaking of open sores, either—nothing as simple as the ghetto on the 'Near North Side,' where all but a handful of 30,000 Omaha Negroes live. No, our sickness is in the bloodstream—in our inner posture. We are an undemocratic city."

"It's worse than that," declares a Negro, the Rev. Kelsey Jones, pastor of the Cleaves Temple (Christian Methodist Episcopal Church). "There's no place Negroes can turn without being denied right of access. No house, no school, no job opportunity—except for those in the Near North Side, or the 'Neighborhood,' as we call it."

Last May, the Rev. Mr. Jones and several other young ministers formed the 4CL, or Citizens' Coordinating Committee for Civil Liberties. "They barged into my office," angrily recalls Mayor Dworak, "with a series

of outrageous demands. I offered to appoint one of them, the Rev. Rudolph McNair, to my biracial citizens' committee. Apparently, that wasn't enough, because they picketed the very first meeting of the committee. We won't stand for that here in Omaha."

Made up of Omaha's most influential citizens, the Mayor's Bi-racial Committee claims it is carefully laying the groundwork for the correction of Negro complaints. Says Morris E. Jacobs, a prosperous Omaha businessman and one of the leaders of the committee, "We're trying to set up an ideal that can serve as an example for the whole United States. And what happens? They picket! I got wind of it beforehand, and phoned Reverend McNair. I said, 'We didn't know about your grievances. Now that you've made them known, give us a chance to settle things and redeem ourselves with dignity—don't crowd us.'"

But Jacobs's words were not very comforting to the impatient residents of Omaha's Near North Side. The Neighborhood is a classic example

of the Northern Negro ghetto. Run-down, ill-policed and badly serviced by the municipality, it exists in a pervasive miasma of lethargy, hopelessness—and rage.

Dr. E. D. Lyman, health director of Omaha-Douglas County, has maps showing that the Near North Side contains the lowest average value of dwellings, the highest percentage of deteriorated housing, the highest percentage of dilapidated housing, the highest population density per room, the highest percentage of public-school dropouts, the highest percentage of illegitimacy, the highest percentage of arrests.

"White people don't want to go down there—unless it's to sell something, and Negroes are either frightened, ashamed or unwilling to come out," Dr. Lyman contends. "We have, then, almost complete isolation between the races."

A handful of men control most of Omaha's money and businesses and set the city's political, social and moral climate. Almost everyone agrees that atop this small pyramid sits Peter Kiewit, the personable,

continued

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARCHIE LIEBERMAN

Said one leader, "I've run into a lot of inflamed white people."

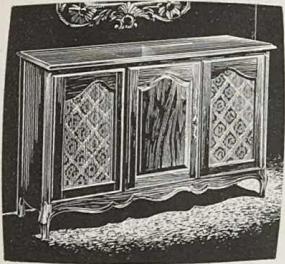


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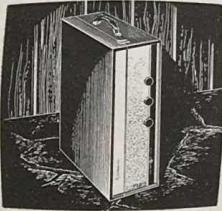
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easy-going native Omahan who presides over Peter Kiewit Sons' Co., one of the nation's largest construction firms. Kiewit, with Morris Jacobs, heads the employment subcommittee of the Mayor's biracial group. "We called in the heads of Omaha's 125 largest businesses," he says. "We requested more jobs for Negroes and complete cooperation in the Mayor's project. Jobs will be coming—we already have pledges from the business community.

"As for housing, I've seen little solid proof that Negroes want to move away from their own neighborhood. I happen to know that 135 FHA-owned houses are up for grabs in Omaha; each of these medium-priced houses is available to anyone who wants it. Not one Negro has applied. In time, I feel, as their leaders prepare them for better jobs and higher educational goals, many will apply. I don't think that certain activities of the 4CL are going to help at all. These demonstrations are bound to cause resentment, and there is a real danger that harassment and intimidation of businessmen will hinder or even set back their cause."

Between the urgent militants of the 4CL and the plodding moderates of the Mayor's Bi-racial Committee stands a Negro, Dr. Claude Organ, Texas-born Organ, 36, and the father of six, is a distinguished academic surgeon, a professor of surgery at Creighton University, president of Omaha's Urban League and on the board of the Catholic Interracial Council. Organ lives in two worlds—the white one owned and operated by Omaha's power elite, and the black one enclosed within his skin. He has managed both skillfully.

It was Dr. Organ who, early last year, suggested to members of the Negro Ministerial Alliance that the time was right for a more concerted push than either the Urban League or the Omaha branch of the NAACP was equipped to make. The result was the 4CL, which splintered off to become the most active arm of Negro leadership in town. Organ himself, as a man deeply respected by both whites and Negroes in Omaha, is a member of the Mayor's Bi-racial Committee. "I know some people say I wear two hats. I just do what I can," he says.

In Omaha, the rules of the race game are known to everyone. Alfred C. Kennedy, the city's leading realtor, has said that he would inquire about property for a Negro buyer in a white neighborhood, but would not participate in the closing of the deal or accept any commission, to protect his firm against possible reprisals.

Daniel J. Monen, chairman of the Mayor's biracial housing subcommittee, adds, "I've run into a damned lot of inflamed white people." He

urges his group to avoid extremism. Thus, the ghetto way of life goes on in Omaha, and Negroes there grow increasingly impatient.

Peter Kiewit and Morris Jacobs have become special targets of the 4CL. In early September, Kiewit's newspaper, the *Omaha World-Herald*, was silently ringed by picketing members of the group, which accused the *World-Herald* of employment bias and slanted reporting.

Jacobs called the demonstration "unfair," but Omaha Public Safety Director Chris Gugas, who had threatened to invoke the city ruling that prohibits unlicensed demonstrations, made no arrests.

According to Elizabeth Davis Pittman, an attractive Negro attorney, "The powers in this city are not so much angry as they are resentful because it is their consciences that are being picketed."

Those consciences are getting a workout. Though there is comparatively little social interaction between whites and Negroes in Omaha, the town's ordinary Negroes, so long docile and silent, have begun to speak out, now that the 4CL has prodded white Omahans into listening.

Last summer, when Omaha school superintendent Dr. Paul Miller cited "126 Negroes" in the school system, Mrs. Mildred Brownell challenged, "One hundred and twenty-six teachers?" As it turned out, the figure 126 included some 78 teachers; the rest were employed in custodial and other nonprofessional jobs.

Signs of change are small but promising. Sixteen Omaha clergymen of various faiths last July issued a "statement of purpose for action and a basis for involvement." Laymen, too, are beginning to see the problem as basically a moral one. A white newspaper reporter confides, "We've let ourselves be led by men who are business leaders—people who stress land values, property values, aesthetics—none of which have allowed us, so far, to see the reality of the Omaha Negro's plight. Well, we can't avoid seeing it now."

Most of Omaha's Negroes take this "moral realization" with many grains of salt. Says Charles Washington, a reporter on the Negro weekly, the *Star*, "So they see it as a moral problem, finally. Maybe now all the colored fellows in the police department will get duty somewhere out of the Neighborhood, for a change."

Claude Organ feels the same way. "I'll believe it," he says, "when I can not only get an office in a decent spot, but a house too."

"The trouble, I think," reflects Dr. Organ, "is that Omaha is run by men who are masters of business. But they've never had any experience closing a business deal that is a hundred years old."