THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH —

AN AJC REPORT

Enclosed herewith is a mimeographed report on the White House Conference on Children and Youth held in Washington the week of December 3rd. This report provides background information on the Conference, discusses its scope and method of operation, the resolutions that came out of it, and the post-conference machinery set up to carry them out. It also includes a brief report on the role of the American Jewish Committee in the planning and operation of the Conference.

An appendix on the findings and recommendations of the Conference that specifically concern prejudice and discrimination is also attached.

A limited number of additional copies of this report are available on request.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The White House Conference on Children and Youth meeting in Washington the week of December 3, 1950, was the fifth in a series of White House Conferences on Children and Youth which have been convened every ten years by the President of the United States since 1909.

Attended by nearly 6,000 delegates from every state in the Union, as well as several hundred foreign observers, the 1950 Conference was concerned with the development of healthy personalities in children and youth. Its purpose, as officially stated, was "to consider how we can develop in children the mental, emotional and spiritual qualities essential to individual happiness and to responsible citizenship, and what physical, economic and social conditions are deemed necessary to this development."

The delegates who came together at the Washington Armory during the week of the Conference represented a cross-section of every profession and discipline concerned directly or indirectly with the physical, mental, emotional or spiritual well-being of the child.

In addition, over the preceding twelve months, some 100,000 people in every part of the country had participated indirectly in the planning and preparation for the actual Conference sessions. Several hundred national voluntary youth-serving organizations had set up discussion groups and studied their own programs in the light of the Conference focus. Nearly forty departments, agencies and bureaus of the Federal Government conducted studies and made technical information and other resources available. State, regional, county and local committees concerned themselves with local surveys and prepared recommendations and program for the Conference. Furthermore, for the first time, youth was invited to participate; 500 young people were official delegates and played an important and active role in the planning stages as well as in the Conference itself.
SCOPE

From the earliest planning stages it was clear that any conference concerned with "mental health" would, of necessity, concern itself with all those many areas of modern life which have a direct bearing on the personality development of adults and young people alike. Thus, it is not surprising to find, among the subjects under discussion by the Conference, such topics as: the role of the family, the school, the church and the synagogue in the development of personality; the importance of youth-serving and youth guidance organizations; the effects of prejudice and discrimination on the development of healthy attitudes; the influence of mass communications and mass entertainment media (with timely interest in the effect of television); the importance of civil rights and civil liberties; and other subjects of vital interest to individuals and groups concerned with the improvement of intergroup relations. Staff members of the American Jewish Committee who were represented both in the Conference and in the numerous committees charged with the preliminary planning and preparation, therefore found themselves deeply interested in suggesting suitable subjects for discussion, as well as in the actual conduct of those discussions during the Conference sessions.

METHOD OF OPERATION

In order to understand how the various discussions were conducted and the manner in which the conclusions were arrived at, it is important to know something about the actual machinery of the White House Conference.

Obviously it would have been impossible for the more than 6,000 delegates to cover the many different subjects of concern to the Conference or to make any real contribution to those discussions of particular interest to the individual delegates, if all 6,000 had attempted to meet together on every subject.

In the pre-Conference planning, therefore, it was decided to divide up the subjects to be discussed into five separate sections and to set up, under each section, a series of separate work groups to consider different aspects of the broad topic covered by that section.
In the first section, six work groups concerned themselves with the overall subject of "Furthering Healthy Personality Development in Children and Youth." The second section, with nine work groups, was devoted to "Furthering Healthy Personality Development through the Family, the Church, the School, and Other Social Institutions." The third, with eight work groups, discussed "Making More Positive the Influence of Religious, Social and Economic Forces on Personality Development." The fourth, with six work groups, concerned itself with "Furthering the Healthy Personality Development of Children in Special Situations," and the fifth, also with six work groups, dealt with "Mobilizing Citizens for the Improvement of Conditions Affecting the Personality Development of Children and Youth."

As the delegates registered, they were assigned to work groups in the areas of their major interest. Every work group met in three sessions of 2½ hours each. In their final session they each drafted a number of conclusions, which were forwarded, as resolutions, to the Section Committee.

The Section Committee was then charged with consolidating the resolutions of all the work groups in the Section and forwarding them to the Resolutions Committee of the Conference as a whole, for presentation at the Plenary Session.

RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE

Working under the double pressure of time and the need to satisfy many divergent groups, the Resolutions Committee tried to do justice to all the conclusions of the individual work groups in the resolutions that were proposed for consideration by all the assembled delegates at the Plenary Session. There were, however, many work group resolutions which never reached the Conference floor, first because it was impossible to deal with all the suggested resolutions in the time allotted for Plenary Session discussion, and second, because a number of resolutions, stemming from different workshops, represented conclusions in direct conflict with those of other workshops. The Resolutions Committee tried to resolve these differences, either by wording the final resolutions in such a way as to satisfy both groups - an attempt
which more often satisfied neither - or by omitting the subject entirely from the final discussion in the interests of overall harmony.

Thus, there are important differences between some of the resolutions adopted by the Plenary Session and those adopted by the individual work groups. Also, in some instances, most notably in connection with a resolution concerning released time for religious education, a dramatic revolt from the floor managed to over-rule the decision of the Resolutions Committee and bring before the Plenary Session for discussion and approval the conclusions of some of the work groups.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

The Federal Security Administration is now in the process of preparing the Findings and Conclusions of the Conference for general distribution and the complete report should be available within the next few weeks. There are, however, several conclusions of particular interest which can be mentioned briefly at this time.

A number of work groups submitted resolutions which touched upon the relationship of church and state, particularly with regard to released time for religious education. Two resolutions, one opposing and one in favor, were sent to the Section Committee. This issue touched off a stormy debate in the Plenary Session which finally resulted in a 2-1 vote in opposition to released time (see Joint Memorandum from AJC and ADL, December 14, 1950).

A resolution favoring Federal aid to publicly-supported education was passed both by the appropriate work group and by the Plenary Session, as was a resolution urging the elimination of segregation and quota systems in the schools.

In addition, numerous resolutions submitted by separate work groups called for greater participation by religious groups in community life; greater participation of youth in religious organizations; continued support of the President's civil rights program; the elimination of discrimination in employment; safeguards for academic freedom and similarly significant conclusions.

It will be of considerable interest to everyone directly or indirectly concerned
with children and youth to read the full report of Conclusions and Findings as soon as it becomes available.

POST-CONFERENCE PLANNING AND MACHINERY

Almost from the outset it was agreed that the Conference must not lose the benefits of its findings by failure to set up adequate machinery for follow-up programs on national, state and local levels.

The Plenary Session voted overwhelmingly for the creation of machinery and channels of communication for post-Conference programs. It was agreed to establish a national advisory and consultative committee to work through all the groups having a primary concern for the well-being of the nation's youth. This committee will concentrate on disseminating the Conference findings, and on stimulating action on its recommendations and promoting research designed to fill in the gaps of knowledge which the Conference has brought to light.

State and local follow-up organizations are to be formed, which will work with the national committee to bring the implications of the Conference down to the local level.

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE CONTRIBUTIONS

The AJC played an active role in the activities of the Conference, from its earliest planning stages through the floor debates at the Plenary Session. Mr. Samuel S. Fishzohn, Director of the AJC Youth Division, served on two important Advisory Councils as well as on the Reports Committee and did much to insure the proper emphasis on the relationship between prejudice, discrimination and mental health. Seven other staff members of the AJC were involved either in the pre-Conference preparations and plannings, the actual Conference sessions, or both.

Dr. Kenneth Clark, professor of psychology at City College, was engaged by the AJC Scientific Department and assigned full time to the White House Conference staff for several months. He served on the Committee on Fact Finding and prepared a 200-page report, "Effects of Prejudice and Discrimination on Personality Development"
which was summarized in the printed digest of the Fact Finding Committee distributed to every delegate.

Dr. Moses Jung, who served as chairman of one discussion panel and member of a second, was co-author, with two other experts representing the Catholic and Protestant faiths, of a joint document on religion and personality development which was also summarized in the Fact Finding Committee digest.

In addition, Dr. John Slawson, Dr. Samuel Flowerman, Dr. J. V. Thompson and Mr. Philip Jacobson participated, either as chairmen or discussion members, of panels and work groups concerned with various aspects of intergroup relations problems, while Mr. Walter Myden supervised an effective and much commented-upon AJC exhibit at the Conference headquarters.

**SUMMARY**

The White House Conference was an important and successful venture in behalf of children and youth. The emphasis of the Conference on the importance of the emotional health of the child pervades all of the Conference literature and it is highlighted in the agenda and thinking of the panels and workshops. This advanced approach to psychological health on the part of so many groups is a heartening sign for all who are concerned with improving the world in which our youth are growing up. This certainly includes those concerned with fighting prejudice and discrimination.

One of the most salutary results of this epochal Conference was to bring together people from all over the country, representing every community, almost every professional discipline and every type of agency interested in the welfare of youth. The mutual experience of sharing of views by teachers, social workers, clergymen, scientists, intergroup workers, lay people, and youth itself, afforded great benefit and stimulation to those who attended this Conference. This example of interdisciplinary and intergeographic exchange of views and programs may represent an excellent guide to future gatherings and conferences.

There are, for example, suggestions for youth participation with adults on a community and agency level. There are recommendations for the extension and development
of interorganizational youth councils, to include young people of every race, color and creed. There are recommendations for the promotion of intergroup education for school children, as well as for in-service training of teachers in this area. There is approval for full support of the program recommended by the President's Commission on Civil Rights. There are, also, pertinent views on the use of mass media (television especially) which may be of particular import to intergroup relations agencies and organizations.

These many important recommendations, which lend the prestige and support of the White House Conference to programs of vital concern to intergroup relations workers, can, with proper insight and emphasis, prove immeasurably helpful in carrying out their own programs.

Attached is an appendix summarizing the findings and recommendations touching on prejudice and discrimination. These have been culled from two sources:

(a) Recommendations of a Work Session of the national organizations that met in preliminary meetings two months before the final December meetings, and

(b) selections from the Conference Platform which was adopted the last day of the Conference.

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Appendix

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

The following findings and recommendations culled from the Conference Platform relate to the great concern with prejudice and discrimination that was evidenced not only in the spirit of the general sessions, the discussions in the work groups and the resolutions of the final plenary session, but also in the special report prepared by the Fact-Finding Committee on "The Effects of Prejudice and Discrimination." It should also be noted that throughout the course of the several preliminary meetings held during the year by both the Advisory Council on Participation of National Organizations and the Advisory Council on Youth Participation, the role of prejudice and discrimination in our country was earnestly dealt with. In the PLEDGE TO CHILDREN, which was adopted the last day of the Conference, is included the commitment that "we will work to rid ourselves of prejudice and discrimination so that together we may achieve a truly democratic society."

Among the numerous recommendations made for programs to counter prejudice and discrimination, should be stressed the recommendations prepared by the Work Session on Prejudice and Discrimination held by the Advisory Council on National Organizations during October. This ten-point program, voted upon and overwhelmingly approved by the national organizations, does not appear in detail in the abbreviated summaries of recommendations that were submitted for the Conference Platform, but the general spirit and intent of these recommendations are embodied in the more generalized resolutions that were adopted at the plenary session.

I. Recommendations on Prejudice and Discrimination Approved by the Work Session of the National Organizations on October 19

1. All basic services should be made available to all children and youth without segregation, and regardless of race, creed, color, national background, or economic status.

2. All national, state and local organizations, institutions, churches and schools should be urged to provide guidance and direction for the elimination of prejudice and discrimination within their own programs, and every effort should be made to expedite the elimination of these handicapping factors from the schools and other organizations serving children and youth.

3. To accelerate progress in these areas, the following methods should be utilized:

   a. Study and interpretation of the problems inherent in good intergroup relations by boards, staff volunteers and membership, and a continuous program of interpretation to the general public.

   b. Encouragement of joint conferences and experiments, and the mutual exchange of the experiences and results of such activities by national and local organizations and groups.

   c. Use of records and reports, particularly those of the Fact-Finding Committee of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth.

4. Use of community resources, including the media of mass communication, in programs and other activities to further intergroup understanding.

5. Development of courses in intergroup understanding, programs and other activities furthering intergroup relations in schools and community groups.
6. Creation of pre-service and in-service courses in the field of intergroup relations for all teachers and leaders dealing with young people.

7. Elimination of prejudicial materials from text-books, and the selection and development of text-books free from prejudice and all forms of discrimination based on race, creed, color, national background or economic status.

8. Elimination of quota systems based on any forms of discrimination for admission to colleges and universities. (This does not apply to denominational schools.)

9. Legislation for fair employment practices and fair education practices.

10. Laws to encourage the elimination of discrimination and prejudice.

II. Recommendations Regarding Prejudice and Discrimination Culled From the Conference Platform

1. Professions dealing with children should have, as an integral part of their preparation, a training in the fundamental concepts of human behavior, including the need to consider the total person as well as any specific disorder; the interrelationship of physical, mental, social, religious, and cultural forces; the importance of interpersonal relationships; the role of self-understanding; emphasis on the positive recognition and production of healthy personalities and the treatment of variations; and the need to orient lay people through formal or informal education to an understanding of the importance of the foregoing concepts.

2. Professional workers should be trained for an understanding of and respect for other professional skills and contributors in order that they may work together to further community growth. Schools preparing for professional work should include in both the classroom and field experience opportunities for cooperative work on problems common to all professional interests, including study in human growth and change and in family counseling.

3. Racial segregation in education should be abolished.

4. A comprehensive study of laws relating to children and families and the methods of implementing such laws should be initiated.

5. Full support should be given to the program recommended by the President's Commission on Civil Rights and prompt steps should be taken to eliminate all types of racial and religious segregation. Immediate abolition of segregation in the nation's capital, to make Washington the world example of a truly working democracy, is urged.

6. Since goals and methods are closely intertwined, the methods used in undertaking these tasks should be based on the following principles:

   a. Broad-based participation of all groups without discrimination as to age, sex, race, creed, national origin or economic level.

   b. Well-established channels of communication between individuals and groups for the purpose not only of furthering common social objectives but also for the improvement of relations between groups.