Mildred Brown and the De Porres Club: Collective Activism in Omaha, Nebraska's, Near North Side, 1947-1960

(Article begins on second page below.)

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Article Summary: Mildred Brown was the owner, publisher, and editor of the *Omaha Star*, which she cofounded in 1938. A member of the De Porres Club, a pioneering civil rights organization in Omaha, Brown used the newspaper to publicize the club's boycotts in support of equal opportunity employment in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Cataloging Information:
Names: Mildred Brown, Rev John Markoe SJ, Denny Holland, Marvin Kellogg Sr, Jean Waite Holland, Mac L Gothard, C C Galloway, Johnny Rosenblatt, James P Lee, Woodrow Morgan, Warren Swiggart

Place Names: Near North Side, Omaha, Nebraska

Boycotted Omaha Businesses: Harkert Café, Edholm-Sherman Laundry, Omaha & Council Bluffs Streetcar Company (O & CB), Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Reed's Ice Cream Company

Keywords: Mildred Brown, Rev John Markoe SJ, Denny Holland, Omaha & Council Bluffs Streetcar Company (O & CB), De Porres Club, equal opportunity employment, discrimination, racism, Jim Crow, *de jure* laws, segregation, 1893 Nebraska Civil Rights Statute, boycotts, American Communist Party (ACP), Omaha Urban League, *Omaha World-Herald* "Public Pulse," Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), Mayor's Human Relations Committee, St Philip's Episcopal Church, St John's African Methodist Episcopal Church, Citizens Coordinating Committee for Civil Liberties (4CL), Harkert Café, Edholm-Sherman Laundry, Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Reed's Ice Cream Company, Near North Side

Photographs / Images: Mildred Brown at a luncheon with ministers and businessmen; inset upper half of front page of first issue of the *Omaha Star* (July 9, 1938) with picture of co-founder Mildred Gilbert (Brown); Brown with Rev John Markoe S J; Marvin Kellogg Sr; inset *Omaha Star* photos: "De Porres Club Presented $50 by Midwest Athletic Club" (June 8, 1951), De Porres Club-sponsored bus boycott (September 28, 1951), De Porres Club sponsored boycott of Reed's Ice Cream (July 28, 1953); second view of Reed's Ice Cream boycott (*Omaha Star*, September 4, 1953); Brown with President Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s; bust of Brown in the Mildred Brown Strolling Park near the *Omaha Star* offices

STEREOPHONIC

MILDRED BROWN AND THE DE PORRES CLUB:

Collective Activism in Omaha, Nebraska's, Near North Side, 1947-1960

By Amy Helene Forss

Precisely at 10 a.m. on June 20, 1952, a stylishly dressed middle-aged black woman named Mildred Brown urged the Omaha City Council to "do all in their power to see that Negroes were hired as bus drivers and therefore end the lily-white hiring practices of the Omaha & Council Bluffs Street-car Company." Speaking slowly, enunciating each word and standing at her tallest, five feet, five inches, the publisher of the *Omaha Star* newspaper and representative of the De Porres Club directed her comments to the council chairman: "I say to you, your honor, the mayor, if the tram company will not hire Negroes as drivers we prevail on you to remove the franchise of the bus company." Straightening the corsage fastened to her fuchsia colored suit jacket, she abruptly turned on her matching colored high heels. Approaching her chair, Brown looked over her shoulder at the row of white men in ties, and said, "If our boys can drive jeeps, tanks and jet planes in Korea in the fight to save democracy, make democracy work at home."[1]

Mildred Brown is the only woman in the room in this undated photo of a luncheon with ministers and businessmen. NSHS RG5503-2

THE OMAHA STAR

Dedicated to the Service of the People That No Good Cause Shall Lack a Champion, and That Evil Shall Not Thrive Unopposed

Vol. 1 No. 1 — THE OMAHA STAR, OMAHA, NEBRASKA SATURDAY, JULY, 9, 1938 — Vol. 1 No. 1

Last Tribute Paid to Prominent Pioneer Citizen

Resident Here For 60 Years; In Mail Service 31 Years

Mr. Rufus W. Freeman, 2926 North Twenty-seventh street, age 87, died Sunday afternoon, July 3, at 9:55 at the Methodist hospital.

Mr. Freeman came to Omaha over 60 years ago from Lexington, Ky., his birthplace.

Being a progressive young man he aspired to become a mail carrier and was subsequently appointed to the service, February 15, 1888, a position, which he honorably held until August 20, 1920, on which day the Federal retirement act went into effect and Mr. Freeman was among the first to reap the benefit thereof.

Mr. Freeman, who was an ardent member of St. John A. M. E. church, leaves as survivors a wife, Mrs. Malinda Freeman; a son, Mr. Winifred Freeman, city fireman; one brother, Mr. George Freeman of Lexington, Ky., and a daughter-in-law, Mrs. Geraldine Freeman, the wife of Winifred Freeman.

The funeral was held at the Joseph Lopin Mortuary Wednesday afternoon at 3:30 p. m. Interment was in Forest Lawn cemetery.

Spirit of Fourth Sends Father, Child to Jail

With an edict coming down from the Police Commissioner to swoop down on all firecracker-shooters, a youth near Twenty-second and Cuming street, being to stay within the law, selected as his implement with which to give vent to his July 4th exuberance a sling shot.

Armed with his King David protector, he set out to find a Goliath. Finding his victim across an alley, he let him have it.

Lo and behold, his target turned out not to be the ancient Goliath, but our genial Detective Sergeant William Birch.

At the police station, the boy's father interviewed so vociferously that night Lieutenant Harry Green ordered both father and son held in a cell until the Fourth of July spirit cooled down.

OHIO VISITORS

MILDRED GILBERT

Mildred Gilbert, Advertising Manager and Financial secretary, a daughter of the late Rev. and Mrs. Bennie J. Brown of Birmingham, Ala., comes to the staff well qualified. She has studied at Miles college, Birmingham, Ala., Chicago Normal college and specialized in Journalism at Drake university, Des Moines, Iowa, and at the University of Omaha.

Facts On... Relif Bill...

$1,425,000,000 was appropriated for WPA for 8 months from July 1, 1938 to February 28,1939, allowing the President to spend it in 7 months if an emergency occurs. This fund can be made to suppy between three million and three and a quarter million jobs.

Relief—

$25,000,000 of the WPA appropriations may be spent for direct relief to ease emergencies where state and local appropriations for relief have been exhausted or the machinery has broken down.

Rates of Pay—

Hourly rates of pay on WPA shall not be less than the prevailing rates for work of a similar nature in each locality, and the minimum must not be less than the rates provided by the Wages and Hours Act.

Eligibility—

Applicants need not be on relief rolls in order to be eligible for WPA jobs. No worker need take a job in private industry which pays him less per pay period than his WPA job. No alien can receive a job on WPA unless he has made a Declaration of Intention to become a citizen and it is valid and has not expired at the time of the passage of this bill.

Unionism—

The law forbids any person to discriminate against WPA workers on the grounds of religion political affiliation, or membership in a labor organization.

Final Tribute Paid to Marcellus Ritchie

Marcellus Ritchie, Inspector of Weights and Measures for the city of Omaha, and a graduate of the University of Nebraska, was buried from St. John A. M. E. church here Friday afternoon, July 1, amid a setting depicting a host of friends.

Fully and hour before schedule time of the funeral, the church auditorium was filled with friends and admirers of one of the best liked young men in Omaha.

The death of Marcellus Ritchie was a shock to the city of Omaha and a heartfelt loss to the race. That the end had come as it did brought sorrow even to many who did not know him.

He was returning from a visit with friends in Elmole, when his car was struck by an oncoming

James W. Johnson Killed By Train

James Weldon Johnson, one of the foremost leaders of the Negro race, was killed by a train last Sunday, and his wife was seriously injured in Wiscasset, Maine.

Mr. Johnson is one of the most widely known Negro citizens of America, outstanding in statemanship and the field of literature, and education. Their automobile was struck by a Maine Central railroad train, and he died a few minutes after he was removed from the wrecked car.

Mrs. Johnson was driving, and it is presumed that on account of a severe storm, she failed to see

THE OMAHA STAR MAKES ITS DEBUT

To the Citizens of Omaha:

It is with profound pleasure that the Omaha Star Publishing Co., and organization of energetic, well trained journalistic minds, give to you this day a paper of the people, by the people and for the people. We here and now wish to have you know that the Omaha Star dedicates its existance to the task of serving the general public in every way humanly possible.

It shall be our policy to move in an unerring path of duty in the behalf of Black America in Omaha, bringing to you the local news of the city as we find it, as well as the national highlights. Promoting and backing for the welfare of the citizens of Omaha and Black America in general.

We emphatically state that this shall be an organ of the people, by the people and for the people. As we launch out into the sea of journalistic adventure, we sincerely request the support of the general public. The time is at hand when we a a group must begin to build. Give the Omaha Star a firm foundation by way of subscribing and reading support and we will assure you that we in turn will build an enterprise worthy of consideration, a mouthpiece and a force for the people of Omaha.

EDWARD BRUCE

The Omaha Star will have as its circulation manager, Edward J. Bruce, formerly district circulation manager for the Oklahoma Publishing company, publishers of the Daily Oklahoma and The Oklahoma City Times, two of the southwestern dailies.

JAMES BRUCE

One will find listed on the editorial board of the Omaha Star, the name of James L. Bruce as city editor. He is a former University of Kansas student of Journalism and has recently completed all of his resident requirements for the master of arts degree in Journal-

5c and 10c Store Opens

The 5-Cent Center, a 5 and 10 cent store at 2035 North Twenty-fourth street, has opened for business with a full staff of Negro employes and is well-deserving of the Negro patronage of Omaha because of this fact.

The Omaha Star heartily congratulates this concern and endorses this policy as it is in keeping with the Omaha Star Platform.

To trade at the stores where the Negro is represented in employment other than a porter, if a store has its business in the Negro belt, then its employers shall be Negroes. We are spending our dollars with these merchants, and our boys and girls are finishing from the Omaha schools, the best in the West, and they should be able to use their education other than to work as domestics and porters. Our spending dollars must make these places for them.

Miss Alma Goodlett of 1423 No. Twenty-ninth street, a clerk in this new store told a representative of the Omaha Star, she has attended Technical high school, where she majored in art and cooking and while she was unable to graduate, is very happy to find employment as a clerk with this store. She finds her work very pleasant and says Mr. Horwich, the manager, is very pleasant to work with. She feels that this store is entitled to the patronage of colored Omaha, not only because of the Negro employes, but that they handle a very fine line of merchandise.

Mr. Jack Shields, who is serving as porter, has also been a stu-

C. M. E. Church Ends Five-Day Meeting

S. EDWARD GILBERT

S. Edward Gilbert, editor and general manager, brings a wealth of experience in dealing with the public.

Mr. Gilbert, who holds the degrees of Ph. C., B. S. from Howard university since his graduation as prof. of science, Campbell college, Jackson, Miss., Y. M. C. A. secretary, Des Moines, Iowa, Assistant Research Editor, Historical Department State of Iowa, Editor Silent Messenger, Sioux City, Iowa and recently circulation manager of the Omaha Guide and Application Clerk for the Logan Fontenelle Apartments, Mr. Gilbert is a member of the National Phi Beta Sigma fraternity.

The annual convention of the Young People's Organizations of the C. M. E. church, closed its five day session Sunday, June 26, at Clayton Temple C. M. E. church, 25th and Decatur streets.

The general theme of the Young People's conference, which includes all the churches of this denomination situated within the mid western states, was, "Present Day Trends Toward A World Church." The following topics affecting the status of the Negro youth were carefully discussed with the assistance of the leading authorities in their respective fields: Youth's place in the future church; Youth of today as leaders of tomorrow; The Sunday school, broadcasting its lessons and the best methods to be used to develop a model missionary society.

The program committee of the Youth conference selected the following inspirational speakers: Bishop E. Squires, executive secretary of the Omaha Urban League; Rev. G. E. Stevenson, pastor of Pilgrim Baptist church, Omaha; Rev. G. D. Hancock, pastor Calvin Chapel M. E. church; Rev. B. Jones, general secretary Religious Education C. M. E. church; Rev. C. E. Chapman, Presiding Elder, Kansas District, general secretary public relations department C. M. E. church.

The executive committee, consists of all pastors within the mid western district, Rev. C. E. Chapman, Presiding Elder, Kansas District, Rev. L. E. B. Rosser, Presiding Elder Missouri District, and Bishop J. A. Hamlett.

CITY YOUTH SKILLED IN IN ELECTRICAL WORK

Bluette B. Washington, 2110 No. Twenty-seventh, was employed last Wednesday in the rewiring of the entire traffic signal system of the city.

Young Washington is an accomplished electrician, having completed a 2 year course in electrical engineering at Technical school and working under a licensed electrician for the past two years. He is the only Negro having skilled classification sufficient to warrant being employed in this capacity.

The work is being done under the supervision and direction of the Works Progress Administration. The Star extends to him the best

Death Sentence of the Scottsboro Boy Appealed

All America was surprised Tuesday afternoon when Governor Bibb Graves commuted the death sentence of Clarence Norris, one of the defendants in the famed "Scottsboro Attack Case" to life imprisonment.

Such action on the part of the Governor was influenced by the unanimous recommendation of the state pardon board.

The action was unexpected in that consideration of the case by the board had been kept in a vale of secrecy.

Less than three weeks ago the state supreme court had confirmed

Doctor Feted On 31st Anniversary

Scott, Ark., July 2—More than 1,000 residents of this and surrounding cities, assembled here recently to observe the thirty-fourth anniversary of Dr. Arthur Hicks as a practicing physician. Dr. Hicks is a native son and excepting the years that he was away in college, has never resided in any other locality.

That the people of the community appreciated the man and his 34

The first issue of the *Omaha Star* appeared on July 9, 1938. Co-founder Mildred Gilbert, as Mildred Brown was then known, is pictured in the second column; her husband Dr. S. E. Gilbert is shown in the second column from the right.

Born in Alabama in 1905, Mildred Brown was the owner, publisher, and editor of the *Omaha Star*, which she cofounded in 1938. An iconoclastic leader, Brown nurtured, encouraged, and spoke for her black readership until her death in 1989. But the years of her most intense civil rights activity coincide with the existence of the De Porres Club, a pioneering civil rights organization in Omaha that was active between 1947 and 1960. Brown "was one of those individuals who became involved in the civil rights struggle long before it was fashionable."[2]

As one of the nation's few black newspaper women and the only black woman to publish a newspaper in Nebraska, Brown occupied a unique historic position. During the 1940s and 1950s, she and other De Porres Club members successfully created equal employment opportunities through boycotts and through the auspices of the *Star*. Brown's weekly not only provided a voice for Near North Side residents, but also provided the necessary communication for collective neighborhood activism. For her, it was more than a moral campaign; she felt it was her civic responsibility as a middle-class businesswoman living in the black community.

In February 1947, the Omaha *Star* printed a request for a community meeting. Brown wanted Near North Side residents to meet her downtown at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) building. She chose the location not only because she was a member of the YWCA, but also because of the organization's interracial goals of anti-lynching laws, race relations, and female empowerment.[3] Brown wished "to acquaint the people of the community with the facts of the lack of employment in the business places of this community." She wanted "freedom from fear, want, and the right to equal opportunity."[4]

At the meeting, an interracial group of approximately thirty-five people listened to Brown expound on the unfairness of white business owners accepting the black community as customers but refusing them as employees. Brown's staffers researched 534 available occupations listed in the 1940 census. They discovered that Omaha's "Negroes have no employment in as many as 96 occupations." Skilled black men and women applied for these positions, but their applications were rejected. Approximately a thousand black Near North Side citizens seeking work remained unemployed, while the few who found employment were "working for a livelihood at jobs far below their status, both in rank and pay."[5]

Brown told her audience they "must approach industry, commerce and big business with our problem and seek the opportunity to work and grow." She demanded that those present act quickly: "Let us resolve to be a people, and subsequently act in a way to show we appreciate employment of members of our group by patronizing all business where there can be found Negroes working." The interracial assembly agreed to convene again and elected Brown as their chairperson.[6]

Brown's newspaper campaign for equal opportunity employment gained momentum from the De Porres Club. The Rev. John Markoe, S. J., and six white Creighton University students founded the activist organization on November 3, 1947; additional branches appeared in Kansas City, Missouri, and Denver, Colorado, by the mid 1950s.[7] The non-university-sanctioned club demonstrated a nationwide trend between the Catholic Church and impoverished black communities. Patrick Jones's book *The Selma of the North* examines Father Groppi and his Milwaukee, Wisconsin, congregation joining black urban residents in a church-approved fight against racism and discrimination, while John McGreevy's *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* includes an exploration of Father Markoe and his brother William's commitment "to give and dedicate our whole lives and all our energies, as far as we are able for the work of the salvation of the Negroes in the United States."[8]

Mildred Brown with the Rev. John Markoe, S. J. (front). The other men in the photo are not identified.
NSHS RG5503-8

The De Porres Club's first meeting in Omaha attracted an interracial crowd of forty-seven people. Markoe, an eccentric, tall, silver-haired former West Point graduate recently banished from St. Louis University's Jesuit community for his civil rights advocacy, delivered the opening prayer. Afterwards, he explained to those gathered that the organization borrowed its name from black Dominican Friar Martin de Porres, the seventeenth-century biracial monk best known for his slave ship ministry. (The Catholic Church canonized him in 1962.)[9] Markoe informed his audience that although the club's goals were "better racial relations through constructive actions, to banish every form of compulsory segregation and abolish any and all forms of discrimination against individuals because of race, color or creed," its real purpose was "to kick Jim Crow's ass out of Omaha."[10] At the end of the initial meeting, members elected twenty-one-year-old Denny Holland as club president, and *Omaha Star* reporter Harold Tibbs as vice-president.

The De Porres Club taught its members to challenge discriminatory behaviors in the city of Omaha. Bertha Calloway and her husband James joined the club "because Omaha was a racist town; you couldn't eat downtown." She recalled the Jesuit priest encouraging members to fight against racial superiority. "Father Markoe tried to keep quiet, but he talked about white people like you wouldn't BELIEVE, and then after he'd do his little talk, we would get together and have little meetings." De Porres member Dorothy Eure remembered these original breakout sessions. "Not only did we discuss the evils of racism, but we developed plans and strategy, maneuvering our small force to correcting the vicious acts."[11]

The city of Omaha, similar to other urban Midwestern cities, reinforced Southern *de jure* laws as accepted *de facto* segregation. A 1943 editorial in a mainstream Iowa newspaper, the *Des Moines Tribune*, indicated a common feeling among several pro-segregation citizens living in one of Brown's former cities of residence. "Conditions are getting to be rather rotten in Des Moines, when Negroes are given the right by our damnable state law to enter the first class restaurants and be served food in the booths with white customers."[12]

Marvin Kellogg, Sr., from an undated newspaper clipping given to the author by Marvin Kellogg, Jr. Kellogg filed suit after being refused service at a bus station café in 1948.

The De Porres Club first joined forces with Brown when Marvin Kellogg, Sr., her adopted son-in-law, filed a discrimination suit against the downtown Greyhound Bus Station's Harkert Café.[13] The eatery refused service to Kellogg and his interracial party of six, one of whom was Brown.[14] The club hosted a "Marvin Kellogg Rally" to pay his legal fees while the *Star* publicized the event. The response from Near North Side residents was overwhelming. Possibly intimidated, the Harkert Café owner failed to appear on his court date. Specifics of Kellogg's discrimination case might offer a better assessment of the city's latent racism, but records of Kellogg's suit and all other northern Omaha grievances filed at Omaha's Police Court, remain unavailable to the public. The author was first denied access to these records by the Omaha Police Department, and upon further inquiry was told that these records no longer exist.[15] Research at Omaha's Roman L. Hruska United States Courthouse revealed no documentation of federal discrimination suits filed by either Mildred D. Brown or Marvin Kellogg, Sr.[16]

Because of possible public backlash against the university, Creighton administrators insisted that the De Porres Club convene elsewhere. According to Dennis Mihelich's, *The History of Creighton University, 1878-2003*, the club "moved its meetings off campus due to controversy." As the organization's sponsor, Markoe was aware of "a few college professors and citizens [finding] fault with the program." Outsiders viewed the club as "radical, a group of crack-pots, disturbers of the peace. Because it was interracial in character, it was accused of fostering interracial 'dating' designed to culminate in interracial marriage."[17]

Several Creighton priests ostracized Markoe after he organized the club. It began in the dining hall. Markoe, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, somehow always ended up eating alone. He heard the not-so-quiet mumblings; his colleagues labeled him "the nigger lover."[18] Undaunted by the lack of support from his fellow professors and the university, Markoe temporarily moved the club to a storefront office on Twenty-fourth Street, but the rent money proved difficult to sustain. Brown invited the De Porres Club into the *Star*'s office building, which was also her home. She told Markoe, "You don't need money to operate out of my place."[19] The De Porres Club planned to meet at the *Star* on Friday nights. Brown announced the organization's new arrangement in the newspaper's October 27, 1950, edition: "Through the courtesy of Miss Mildred Brown," the De Porres Club would be meeting at the newspaper office "for the foreseeable future."[20]

Father Markoe and Mildred Brown thus became the parents of the De Porres Club. The Rev. Kenneth Vavrina of St. Benedict the Moor saw Markoe as "the father of the civil rights movement in Omaha. Markoe led demonstrations on Twenty-fourth Street when no one knew what was going on." Vavrina, the leader of northern Omaha's largest black Catholic congregation, understood Markoe's dual role in the northern community and the De Porres Club. Serving as a priest, Markoe had neither wife nor child, but he mentored club president Denny Holland. Because the activist liberal arts student lost his father at a young age, he regularly asked Markoe for fatherly advice, especially when Holland received hate mail threatening to kill him because of his involvement in the club.[21]

Brown was the mother figure in the De Porres family equation. The *Star's* owner became the organization's staunchest ally. When club members invited activist organizations, such as the Friendship Houses of America, to Omaha, Brown provided rooms for their meetings at her Carnation Ballroom. Interacting with the De Porres organization became a shining part of the publisher's life. Brown hired Holland as a *Star* reporter, photogra-

Under Mildred Brown's leadership, the *Omaha Star* did much to publicize the activities of the De Porres Club. *Omaha Star*, June 8, 1951.

pher, advertising salesman, and driver.[22] Employing the club president as her chauffeur allowed Brown to teach him salesmanship while acting as a surrogate mother. When Holland married De Porres Club reporter Jean Waite, the *Omaha Star* not only ran a long article on the nuptials, but also accompanied it with a large wedding photograph of the happy couple.[23]

Father Markoe, who had a history of using the press to make change happen, "used the *Omaha Star* to his advantage." The paper printed summaries of weekly club minutes, featured articles charting the organization's actions and published members' editorials critical of racism. Brown supported club activities by printing letters sent to business owners refusing service to black Omahans. In return, the club provided exclusive pictures and sensational news stories every time it picketed a discriminating business.[24]

Brown was well aware that "editorializing for social causes was not always acceptable to white business enterprises that might be chief advertisers." Challenging mainstream Omaha proved costly for her business. Denny Holland's son Matt remembered Brown "had the constant worry about money and was nervous about the *Omaha Star* going out of business." Jean Waite Holland recalled Brown "running out of the *Star* to stop workers as they were about to shut off the electricity."[25] Brown persevered despite her financial difficulties.

The De Porres Club jumpstarted northern Omaha's equality campaign when it discovered an old but valuable Nebraska legal precedent. The 1893 Nebraska Civil Rights Statute supplied necessary legal leverage against discrimination:

> All persons within this state shall be entitled to a full and equal enjoyment of the

accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of inns, restaurants, public amusements, conveyances, barber shops, theaters and other places of amusements; subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and applicable alike to every person. If the Equal privileges were denied, a penalty ensued. Any person who shall violate the foregoing section by denying to any person, except for reason by law applicable to all persons, the full enjoyment of any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, or privileges enumerated in the foregoing section, or by aiding or inciting such denials, shall for each offense be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and be fined in any sum not less than twenty-five dollars nor more than one hundred dollars and to pay the costs of the prosecution.[26]

The judge turned to Calloway and said, "Now that DePorres Club, what are you guys up to? Are you all Communist or something?"

Although the statute explained how Nebraska's civil rights applied to all residents of the state, the current issue depended on convincing the city of Omaha to prosecute violators. Club members distributed hundreds of handbills documenting the civil rights statute. Brown supported the organization's activism. "I believe in economic measures, like boycotts, to achieve goals. A business man who won't hire you, but wants to rip you off, shouldn't be patronized." She encouraged De Porres members to file discrimination suits against local venues, such as Harry's Tea Club, Pignotti's Donut Shop, the Paxton Hotel, Eppley Airfield, and the Greyhound Bus Station; sometimes the De Porres organization "had 8 or 10 different suits going."[27]

Bertha Calloway recalled visiting Pignotti's Donut Shop with a white girlfriend named Peggy. The waitress refused to serve them. The two women asked the owner, Mr. Pignotti, to come to their table. The following conversation ensued. Peggy said, "Don't you know me Mr. Pignotti, [we] go to the same church?" Mr. Pignotti replied, "Yes, I know you but I'm not serving them, you're gonna have to leave." Peggy said, "In the name of Christ, how can you do this?" He replied, "Hey, if I serve them I'll lose business, I'm not gonna start serving colored people in here." Calloway let him know she had the right to file charges. Pignotti replied, "I don't give a damn whether you file charges against me or not, I'm not serving you." Calloway filed charges at Omaha's Police Court.[28]

The following day, an officer served Pignotti with a warrant during his lunch break. At the court proceedings, Pignotti pointed to Calloway and said, "That's the one that had me arrested like I was a common criminal. All I did, [was say] I'm not serving colored in my place." Judge Palmer replied, "Well, I don't blame you but you're gonna have to pay [the] $25 fine." The judge turned to Calloway and said, "Now that DePorres Club, what are you guys up to? Are you all Communist or something?"[29]

Club members assured northern Omaha and the city of Omaha that it was a patriotic American organization. Members refused to react to the practice of red-baiting, accusing someone of being a Communist. Their strategy was common for those harassed during the Cold War years. The fear of interracial organizations dabbling in Communism was not so farfetched. During the 1930s, "the prevalence of blacks in the Communist Party earned it the epithet 'nigger party' throughout the South," especially in Brown's home state of Alabama. The De Porres Club weighed the benefits of becoming members of the American Communist Party (ACP), but Father Markoe dissuaded members by stating, "I'd do business with the devil himself to stop racism," but Communism would not change Omaha's discriminatory practices. Besides, he disclosed, the club was already under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).[30]

Federal agents kept surveillance logbooks and questioned club president Holland. He informed the FBI there were several members, whom he called "confused individuals," such as vice-president and *Star* reporter Harold Tibbs, who did not know if they were Communist or not, but just because the interracial organization supported civil rights did not mean its members were more apt to join the ACP. Thomas Borstelmann's *The Cold War and the Color Line* explores how several self-righteous Americans, such as Georgia's Governor Herman Talmadge, claimed Communism as a rationale for supporting segregation of the races: "If Communists supported racial integration, could there be any clearer sign of its immorality?"[31]

In March 1950, the De Porres Club explained its moral stance by staging the play *Trial by Fire*. Members of the cast placed an article in the *Star*

summarizing the production's script. Written by Father George Dunn, a friend of Father Markoe, the play focused on the true story of a black family moving into an all-white neighborhood in California. A mob burned down their home and several family members died.[32]

The dramatic presentation proved timely because an incident, albeit less severe, had recently occurred in Omaha. Woodrow Morgan, a World War II black fighter pilot and prisoner of war, bought a home in one of the city's covenanted white neighborhoods. According to Jack Angus's text, *Black and Catholic in Omaha: A Case of Double Jeopardy*, prior to the Morgan family moving into their new home, "someone broke some of the windows." Markoe and the club arrived the morning of the Morgans' intended relocation and seated themselves on the front porch. Looking imposing in his clerical collar, the priest told inquiring neighbors, "We're here to welcome the new family." The Morgan family moved into their home without any trouble. A review of the play appeared not only in the *Star*, but also in the establishment newspaper, the *Omaha World-Herald*. Holland clarified the two-review situation by explaining that the mainstream newspaper viewed a theatrical production as an innocuous activity. If the media "publicized [desegregation actions] it might lead to riots, therefore, they would never give us publicity on our more militant kinds of activities."[33]

The *Star* printed details of the discriminatory employment practices in the northern Omaha community. In tandem with club minutes, newspaper articles focused on "sensitive positions, entry jobs that were visible to the public, such as counter clerks and drivers.[34] The Near North Side's Edholm-Sherman Laundry refused to hire black employees. Brown published Mrs. Edholm's conversation with a club member. The laundry owner disclosed that even though 70 percent of her clientele were black, her policy was not to hire black men and women. "The white people might object to a Negro waiting on them." Although the club member was flabbergasted with the proprietor's logic, Brown validated the laundry owner's right to hire whomever she chose, but noted that if Mrs. Edholm did not change her beliefs soon, it would be a great loss to the community. After another week of Mrs. Edholm continuing her unfair hiring policy, the *Star* supported the club's "Do Not Patronize Campaign," since it "has no alternative but to ask the Negroes of the city for a boycott against this business." By October, the club's campaign resulted in a surprising result: the owners of the Edholm-Sherman Laundry put it up for sale.[35]

The De Porres Club passes out handbills to protest the local bus company's refusal to hire black drivers. The club organized a successful bus boycott four years before the famous bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. *Omaha Star*, September 28, 1951.

Excited by their success, Brown and the De Porres Club attempted collective activism against Omaha's Central High School. The secondary institute was the alma mater of the publisher's foster daughter, Ruth Harris Kellogg. As a club member, Brown paid for the printing of four thousand handbills which described why the activist organization needed to protest the high school's production.

> This is discrimination. Negroes at Central are not allowed full and equal participation in some activities at this school. How is it that the opera tonight, put on by the student body, has no Negro students in the cast? The last road show here humiliated the Negro students by presenting a degrading black face in the show. Isn't it about time for public school officials to catch up with public opinion on this matter? With democracy on trial all over the world is it not time to eliminate on the local scene that which is against the spirit of democracy and thus weakens her at home and abroad?[36]

Before police officers halted the leaflet protest, members managed to hand out approximately three hundred missives to opera attendees. The police warned the club protestors that they were not allowed to distribute the flyers on school property.

President Holland keenly remembered what happened next. A man strode up to him and accused him of being a Communist. Holland replied, "May God have mercy on your soul." The club's administrator had "never seen anybody so full of hate. Now that was the closest I ever came to violence."[37]

Refusing to be intimidated by false accusations, the club and the *Star* next targeted the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. Brown met with General Manager Mac L. Gothard on May 7, 1951, and informed Gothard that the club was launching a "Don't Buy Coke Campaign." Brown said that she "agreed with their activities completely." In fact, she told Gothard, "every thinking person in Omaha should support the De Porres Club." But not everyone in northern Omaha agreed with her assessment. Peter C. Doss, advertising manager of the black *Omaha Guide* newspaper, the *Omaha Star's* competition, met with Gothard and informed the bottling company's manager that "most blacks in North Omaha do not support the boycott." Shortly after this conversation, C. C. Galloway, the *Guide*'s publisher and Brown's former boss, met with De Porres Club members. Galloway stressed the importance of the black press and how it molded public opinion.[38]

Brown ignored Galloway's veiled judgment of her paper. However, after Doss paid photographer Erwin Miller to take pictures of Coca-Cola's two token black hires, Brown accused Doss of being an Uncle Tom. A concerned Miller gave his photographs to Holland, who later handed the images to Brown, whose instincts proved correct. According to FBI records, Doss visited their Omaha office seeking incriminating evidence against the De Porres Club.[39] Doss informed FBI Agent John Barnes that the club caused "discontent and disunity among the Negroes . . . and hate between the white [*sic*] and Negroes."[40]

Brown and her staff stayed up most of the night printing an extra edition of the *Star*. The June 8, 1951, special issue displayed an image of a smiling Gothard shaking hands with his two new *permanent* black assembly line employees. The *Star* quoted the Coca-Cola manager insisting that "the De Porres Club didn't have anything to do with our hiring Negroes." Fourteen years later, in 1965, Gothard publicly amended his previous comment: "If there is anything I can say about the De Porres Club, it is that they were ahead of their time. The methods and pressures they used were not thought of in those days. I was shocked by their tactics. I was ignorant of the whole thing."[41]

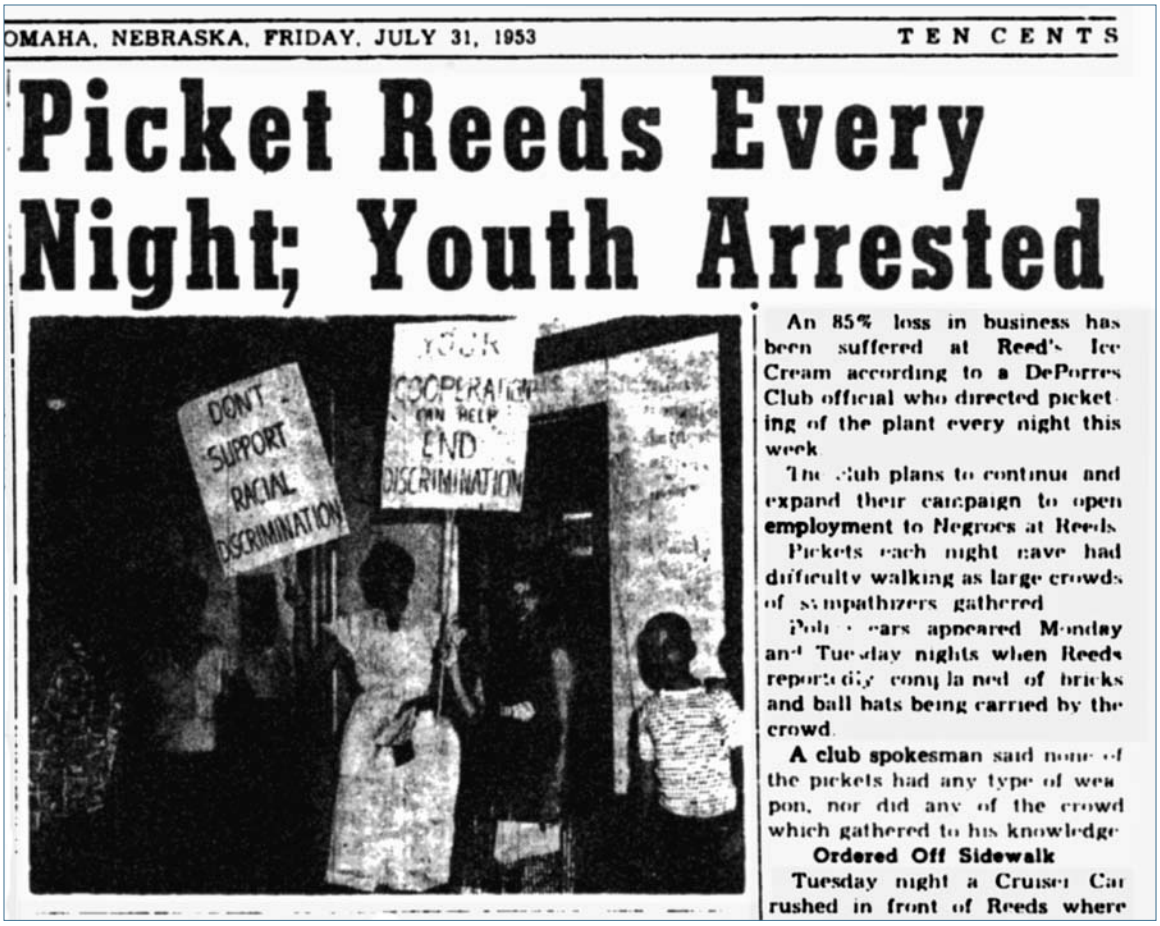
Energized by their employment victory, the club and the *Star* next contacted the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company (O&CB), whose busses and electric streetcars crisscrossed Omaha, northern Omaha, and Council Bluffs, Iowa.[42] In the early 1940s, the Omaha Urban League challenged the local corporation's steadfast refusal to hire black bus drivers. Like the De Porres Club, the Urban League was accused of ties with the American Communist Party.[43] The Urban League questioned the company's personnel manager, Chester Colvin, about the unfair hiring practices, but to no avail.[44]

Reform did not occur until the De Porres Club and Brown challenged the policy in 1952. The streetcar management used stereotypical rhetoric: "No white woman would be safe on a street car if there was a black [man] driving." The club printed and distributed pamphlets, and the *Star* provided irate readers with the home addresses and phone numbers of the company's officials. Shortly thereafter, the O&CB bought its last full-page ad in the *Star*.[45] Brown wrote:

> It is this paper's duty to take a stand on vital issues. We are convinced that two great evils facing us are racial discrimination and racial segregation. This paper will expose and oppose these evils. We accept this not only as a right but as a duty. The price of the duty which we accept comes high. It would be financially more profitable for us to remain silent. In the past few months we have opposed racial discrimination as practiced by several business places. Others have found it to their liking to remain silent or to completely sell out. We have and still are losing money for taking the stand of exposing and opposing these evils.[46]

Brown also printed a blanket statement addressed to Omaha's city commissioners, warning that the *Star* would run a tireless campaign for civic and economic improvements for the Near North Side. She encouraged *Star* readers to send editorials to the *Omaha World-Herald's* "Public Pulse" column. She raised the hopes of Near North Side readers by printing stories of successful bus campaigns, such as a protest in St Louis, Missouri. "The St. Louis Company now is accepting applicants for bus and street-car operators regardless of race, creed or color. It is Omaha's turn now." She made sure that articles concerning the De Porres Club's bus protest ran in the *Kansas City Call* and the *St. Louis Argus,* both black weekly newspapers.[47]

Brown devised this progressive strategy nearly four years before the famous Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955-56. As a De Porres Club



OMAHA, NEBRASKA, FRIDAY, JULY 31, 1953 TEN CENTS

Picket Reeds Every Night; Youth Arrested

An 85% loss in business has been suffered at Reed's Ice Cream according to a DePorres Club official who directed picketing of the plant every night this week.

The club plans to continue and expand their campaign to open employment to Negroes at Reeds.

Pickets each night have had difficulty walking as large crowds of sympathizers gathered.

Police cars appeared Monday and Tuesday nights when Reeds reportedly complained of bricks and ball bats being carried by the crowd.

A club spokesman said none of the pickets had any type of weapon, nor did any of the crowd which gathered to his knowledge.

Ordered Off Sidewalk

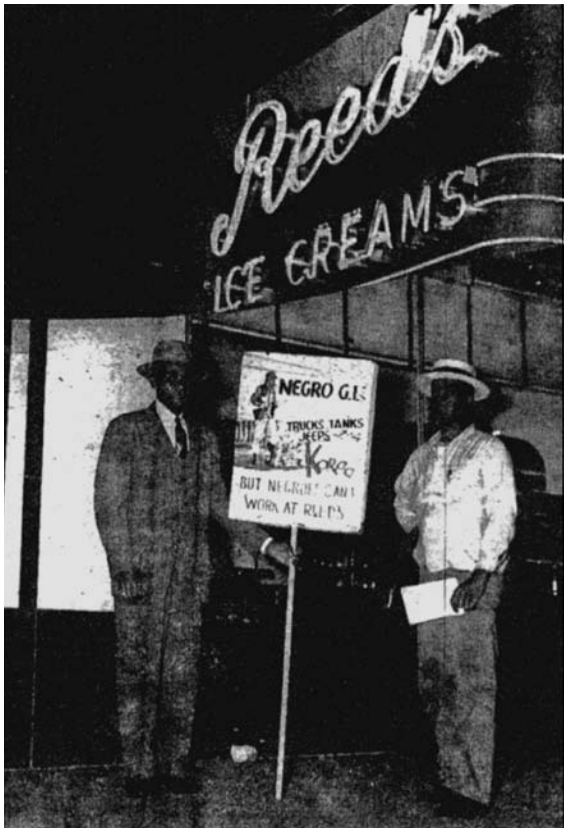
Tuesday night a Cruiser Car rushed in front of Reeds where

Located in north Omaha, Reed's Ice Cream served black customers, but refused to hire black employees. The De Porres Club led a successful boycott of Reed's in 1953-54. *Omaha Star*, July 28, 1953.

Street Railway committee member, Brown instructed her readers, "Don't ride Omaha's buses or streetcars. If you must ride, protest by using 18 pennies." De Porres Club leaflets repeated her words; the club's FBI file still contains a copy of the flyer. The club advised local merchants to stockpile pennies to aid the protestors. As the boycott—or what ministerial activists in Philadelphia later dubbed "selective patronage"—stretched into its second year, Brown asked her subscribers to donate money to the cause. "It is obvious that we are gauged for a long campaign. A campaign of which can be won only through much hard work, planning, and finance of which must come from the Near North Side Citizenry."[48] In a grassroots tactic used later in Montgomery, De Porres Club participants organized carpools to keep black Omahans off the buses. Realizing the importance of communication during the boycott, Brown kept readers updated by printing the club's daily activities.

On March 3, 1952, the De Porres Club voted to affiliate with the Congress on Racial Equality, better known as CORE. Club members elected Brown as their CORE spokesperson. Glenn Eskew's *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movement in the Civil Rights Struggle* discussed how CORE made a difference, especially with college students. Its Journey to Reconciliation campaign nonviolently challenged segregation, while its Freedom Rides ended in publicized violence.[49]

Brown's first assignment as a CORE representative consisted of presenting the club's arguments to the Omaha City Council. Brown asked the council to encourage the O&CB to hire black bus drivers, especially since black men served as drivers during the current Korean War. She noted that President Truman had ordered the desegregation of the military in 1948, but this failed to impress Omaha's administrators.[50] The council recommended the *Star*'s publisher investigate the O&CB situation by speaking with the newly formed Mayor's Human Relations Committee.[51] The chair of the city committee, who was none other than De Porres Club sponsor Father Markoe, commended Brown "for the fearless presentation of facts dealing with racial discrimination," but he was unable to increase pressure on the streetcar company to hire black drivers. By November 1952, De Porres Club picketers were marching in front of the railway company headquarters, carrying signs reading, "Negro G.I.'s drive tanks, jeeps and trucks. Why not buses and



A sign points out that black soldiers were driving trucks, tanks, and jeeps in the Korean War, "but Negroes can't work at Reed's." *Omaha Star*, September 4, 1953.

street cars in Omaha?"[52] The protests and boycotting against the transportation company continued for another two years.

Finally, the city council threatened to attach an antidiscrimination amendment onto the streetcar's franchise agreement. The company soon hired three African American men as drivers. Omaha administrators trusted the O&CB's new hiring policy. Mayor Johnny Rosenblatt said, "They have had a change of mind. I think we have got the thing licked." Public Property Commissioner Warren Swiggart agreed to leave out the policy amendment since now "the clause would be discriminatory against the streetcar firm."[53]

O&CB President James P. Lee insisted their final decision to hire the three black employees "was merely coincidence." Lee denied that the O&CB had refused to hire applicants because of their race. Apparently, previous applicants were either unqualified or failed to pass the required tests. Enraged, Brown asked her readers, "How gullible and naïve do they think people are!! For lo, these many years they have with utter disregard refused to hire Negro applicants. Suddenly they hire three and want you to believe they have never refused bus and train operator employment to anyone solely because of the applicant's race or color." A *Star* reporter interviewed Lee. When asked if he would let them go after the risk of his losing his franchise passed, he patronizingly responded, "These drivers can stay with the company as long as they want it if they do their job right and behave themselves."[54] The O&CB even attempted to hire De Porres Club member and International Sweethearts of Rhythm trombonist Helen Jones Woods as a driver. Not knowing how to drive, she turned down the offer.[55]

The first of the O&CB public hearings convened on August 17, 1954. The *Star* publisher attended the meeting along with two hundred other Omahans. Brown happily noted that the northern Omaha community sent representatives "from every club, group, church, and special interest" to the meeting. At the second hearing, held on August 24, the City Council made a motion to add an antidiscrimination clause to the company's amended franchise: "In the employment relations of the Company there shall be no discrimination in the employment because of race, creed or color." O&CB administrators realized the ramifications of the clause. On the front page of the *Star's* October 22, 1954, edition, the newspaper displayed a large photograph of an additional four black men hired as drivers by the O&CB.[56] Brown and the De Porres Club's hard fought campaign was a success.

One of the last protests spearheaded by the club and the *Star* concerned the discriminatory employment practices of Reed's Ice Cream Company. Initially, Bell Griffin, a representative of the De Porres Club, spoke with Reed's personnel manager, a Mr. Becker, who assured Bell that he would think about hiring black employees. Two years of noncompliance later, Holland wrote a letter to Reed's management. The *Omaha Star* printed his missive:

> This unfair policy of denying equal job opportunities to Negroes, especially because of your large number of Negro customers has for too long stood in complete violation of the American ideal of equal opportunity. It is becoming ever more urgent that we live up to this ideal as Americans in Korea, regardless of color, fight and die to preserve democracy. Beginning Monday, January 19, unless we hear from you before then, we will stop supporting your unfair policy by not buying Reed's ice cream. We shall ask all our friends who believe in equal opportunity, regardless of color, to do the same until you open employment at all levels to qualified Negroes. We remain anxious to discuss a change of policy with you.[57]

Mildred Brown (right) and an unidentified woman with President Lyndon Johnson in an undated 1960s photo. NSHS RG5503-3

A bust of Mildred Brown (1915-1989) stands in the Mildred Brown Strolling Park next to the offices of the *Omaha Star*. Author's photo.

The club and the *Star* insisted that Near North Side residents boycott the ice cream shop at Twenty-fourth and Wirt streets. Protestors distributed handbills in front of the store. After one potential white customer read the De Porres flyer, he stated, "My boy's life was saved by a Negro in Korea. As a small token of thanks to him, I'll tell my friends not to buy Reed's Ice Cream." The store's manager responded through the *Star*. "We don't care if they buy our ice cream or not." Near North Side resident Richard Artison remembered watching the Reed's demonstration when he was a young child. He witnessed Brown marching with the picketers. The *Star* owner stopped to talk with him. She explained why he should not purchase ice cream from Reed's. He did not buy his customary treat.[58]

Later on, the *Star*'s publisher witnessed a woman asking a child to buy her an ice cream cone. The child asked the woman, "What's wrong with you lady? Don't you know they don't hire our people at Reed's? I wouldn't go in there for no money." Max Brownell, Mildred Brown's common-law second husband and De Porres Club member, kept track of noncompliant residents. He noted the names of four young black men who read the club's handbill but still purchased ice cream; they knew about the racist hiring policy but they liked the frozen dessert better. The *Star* not only printed Brownell's list of "Uncle Toms supporting white supremacy," but also promised to print photographs of anyone seen buying ice cream. The paper threatened to include the patron's "name, license plate, and the amount of time they were in the store."[59]

By September 1954, the *Star* reported there were very few blacks visiting Reed's, and that hundreds of whites turned away as well when they learned of the store's "un-American employment policy." Occasionally, club protestors needed the protection of the law when white citizens "would go by and throw things" at them. Reed loudly told the picketers to leave the premises, but the police "watched the entire affair from a block away and did not interfere."[60]

After nine months of protests and picketing, Reed's capitulated in January 1954 by hiring Virginia Dixon. The black saleswoman worked the 5 p.m. to midnight shift. The De Porres Club and the *Star* proclaimed a victory. Insisting in print that they "bore no grudges," organization members joined Brown in a celebration. The *Star* publisher treated them to an ice cream cone at Reed's.[61]

Although Brown and the De Porres Club's fair employment campaign raised residents' hopes of attaining more rights, the black community showed signs of class factionalism. Brown scolded her readers in an editorial:

> Today we are deeply concerned with the role of the colored man in the advancement of democracy. Specifically, we refer to those colored citizens of Omaha who by good fortune in some cases and hard work in others are looked upon as leaders. We know there are those among the leadership who for some petty and selfish reasons are leaders in name only. Traitors and do-nothings are dangerous not only to the cause of non-whites but also the cause of the nation.[62]

Omaha's black class system was causing a schism among civil rights leadership. Former resident Joan McCaw Lincoln explained northern Omaha's hierarchy. Status depended upon an individual's employment and his place of worship. For instance, Christian congregants at St. Philip's Episcopal Church and St. John's African Methodist Episcopal tended to be the professional and elite blacks. Their children went to museums and attended the opera. St. Philip's showcased their wealthy members by sponsoring the Coronation Ball; St. John's held a comparable event, the King Solomon Wedding. The two black high society events were the equivalent of Omaha's Ak-Sar-Ben Ball, a lavish annual affair since 1895 which had a "whites only" policy for many years.[63]

Although Brown belonged to St. John's A.M.E. Church, she was not originally on black Omaha's social "A" list. Despite being crowned the reigning church queen for 1952-53 at the annual King Solomon Wedding, several of the black elite derogatorily nicknamed her "Miss Carnation" because of her over-sized carnation corsages. She was not accepted in the higher echelon of northern Omaha's society because she had slighted black elite C. C. Galloway, publisher of the *Omaha Guide*, when she and her first husband, Dr. S. E. Gilbert, took five *Guide* staffers with them when they founded the *Star* in 1938.[64] Dorothy Glenn, co-owner of the short-lived *American Record* newspaper, explained that since the people of the Near North Side accepted the *Star* as an alternative to the *Guide,* eventually they accepted Brown as well. But she was "not a part of the *crème de la crème* until she was older."[65]

Several weeks after Brown's printed outburst, Holland wrote a follow-up article entitled, "Those who don't make mistakes." Addressing his remarks to readers disgruntled with the club and the *Star*, he said, "Spending all our time criticizing those who are in a position of leadership is like rocking a rocking chair, it keeps you busy but doesn't get you anywhere." He challenged readers, some of whom he knew to be biased against Brown and the club, to "throw aside all pettiness and unite to work for common cause . . . it is only those who do nothing who make no mistakes."[66]

Part of the class issue stemmed from a misunderstanding. Several middle-class northern Omaha citizens incorrectly assumed the De Porres Club's employment discrimination interests only helped the black Catholic community. Residents interviewed for this article still believed this to be true. "They were Catholics. That was St. Benedict's" department. However, the black church's jurisdiction in Omaha's Second Ward connected it to the city's thirty-three other houses of Catholic worship. After Omaha's Archbishop Gerald Bergan committed Omaha parishioners to fighting against racial discrimination, northern Omaha gained significant support for its next round of protests in the 1960s.[67]

Between the late 1940s and early 1950s, Brown and the De Porres Club successfully enacted a minority employment campaign through collective activism. The *Star* publisher, Father Markoe, and Denny Holland reformed the discriminatory hiring practices of the Edholm-Sherman Laundry, Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the O&CB Corporation, and Reed's Ice Cream Company. Decades later, Brown's close friend Paul Bryant recalled that she and the De Porres Club were simply practicing what she regularly preached to him: "Do right because it is the right thing to do. Don't do right in search of reward or in fear of retribution."[68]

In October 1954, a special meeting took place at the back of the *Omaha Star* office. The eight remaining members of the De Porres club voted to disband after seven years of protesting. Brown's days of collective activism were over. "She had to walk a narrow line, wooing white advertisers while informing black readers. And she paid the price in lost revenues and broken windows."[69]

Although the club reconvened in May 1955, Holland was no longer president and activities dwindled. Father Markoe remained the club's sponsor throughout its thirteen years of activity. It was time for another organization to take over black northern Omaha's fight. The Citizens Coordinating Committee for Civil Liberties, better known as the 4CL, replaced the De Porres Club in 1960.[70] By now Markoe was an elderly man, and Brown only a decade and a half younger. They served as members of the new activist organization but followed its black clergy leadership. Brown no longer picketed businesses and the De Porres Club members no longer convened at the *Star* on Friday nights, but their years of boycotting together laid the foundation for Omaha's national civil rights movement. It would be the next chapter in Brown's commitment to the Near North Side's struggle for equality.

Notes

[1] *Omaha Star*, June 20, 27, 1952, 1. See also Jeffrey Spencer, *Historic Photos of Omaha* (Nashville: Turner Publishing Company, 2007), 36. The Omaha and Council Bluffs Railway and Car Company's electric streetcars started operations on Nov. 1, 1888.

[2] *Omaha World-Herald*, May 27, 1984.

[3] Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 128-52. White and black Protestant women originally founded YWCA offices to empower women. Christian sisterhood revolved womanhood and motherhood; a member's race was inconsequential.

[4] *Omaha Star*, Feb. 27, 1947, 1.

[5] Ibid., June 27, 1947, 1.

[6] Ibid., Mar. 7, June 27, 1947, 1, Feb. 27, 1948, 1.

[7] Jeffrey H. Smith, "The Omaha De Porres Club" (M.A. Thesis, Creighton University, 1967), 194.

[8] Patrick Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). See also Patrick Jones, "Not a Color but an Attitude," 261. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 39-41.

[9] Dennis N. Mihelich, *The History of Creighton University, 1878-2003* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2006), 259; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries,* 64; Herb Rhodes, interview, Omaha, Mar. 31, 2009. According to Rhodes, Father Markoe had an eccentric habit of smoking old cigarette butts he found on the ground. The priest took a vow against luxury, and only allowed himself used cigarettes.

[10] *Omaha Star*, Nov. 19, 1948, 1; C. Denny Holland, interview, Sept. 14, 1982; Alonzo N. Smith, *Black Nebraskans: The Nebraska Black Oral History Project* (Omaha: Black Studies Department, 1984), Tape 2, Side 2; Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS), Lincoln, Nebraska. The Catholic Church was in the process of the friar's beatification; the monk's canonization was finalized in 1962.

[11] Bertha Calloway, interview with Alonzo Smith, Apr. 27, 1982, *Black Nebraskans*, Tape 1, Side 1; Dorothy Eure letter to Mildred Brown, June 1, 1984, NSHS Clippings File.

[12] *Des Moines Tribune*, Aug. 16, 1943; *Federal Bureau of Investigation Omaha file number 100-OM-2225, Volumes 1 and 2*, Aug. 19, 1943, Freedom of Information Act (FOI) file, courtesy of Section Chief David M. Hardy, Record/Information Dissemination Section, Records Management Division, Washington, D.C. The *Tribune* editor added a disclaimer at the end of the published editorial: "We are not afraid, but we are ashamed to have to publish it. Incidentally, Jefferson was ashamed of slavery as were most of the Founding Fathers."

[13] *Omaha Star*, Apr. 30, 1948, 1. Brown's foster daughter, Ruth Harris, married Marvin Kellogg, Sr. See also Jeffrey Spencer, *Historic Photos of Omaha,* 158. Walter E. Harkert originally opened his Harkert's Holsum Hamburgers at Dodge and Sixteenth streets in 1925. Eventually, he opened twenty-one small restaurants.

[14] Marvin Kellogg, Sr., interview, Omaha, Nov. 25, 2008. Kellogg, Sr. stated that Mildred Brown, Margaret Wright (Brown's dressmaker) and Jean Waite (Denny Holland's future wife), along with two other white women from the De Porres Club, accompanied him to test the racial policy of the Harkert Cafe.

[15] Police Liaison Shelly Lesac informed the author that discrimination cases prior to 1980 exist in unfiled boxes in the basement of the Omaha Police Department, and that the OPD denies the public access to these files. Later the author contacted Chief of Police Alex Hayes, who replied that he checked with the director of records, who said that no Omaha Police Court files exist. The city of Omaha was also unable to locate police court records.

[16] United States District Court, District of Nebraska. A notarized certificate stated there were no criminal or civil records found concerning the Central Violations Bureau. Courtesy of Denise M. Lucks, Clerk of Court, Apr. 30, 2009.

[17] Mihelich, *History of Creighton University,* 259; Father John Markoe, "Omaha De Porres Club," *Interracial Review* (February 1950), FBI Clipping File.

[18] Buddy Hogan, telephone interview, California, Mar. 8, 2009.

[19] Mildred Brown and Henry La Brie III, interview, *Omaha Star* office, Aug. 27, 1971, digitized CD purchased from Columbia University Archives. Permission given to author by Henry La Brie III.

[20] Shirley Harrison, interview, Omaha, July 29, 2008; *Omaha Star*, Oct. 27, 1950, 1.

[21] Father Kenneth Vavrina, interview, Omaha, Aug. 7, 2008; Matt Holland, interview, Omaha, July 18, 2008; D. Holland, *Black Nebraskans*.

[22] *Omaha Star*, Jan. 19, 1951, 1. In addition to the *Omaha Star*, Brown owned the Carnation Ballroom during the 1950s. Walter Brooks, interview, Sept. 29, 2007; Matt Holland, "The Priest and the Troublemaker," *Creighton* (Fall, 2005), 3.

[23] D. Holland, interview, *Black Nebraskans,* 11; *Omaha Star*, Aug. 28, 1953. It was a surprising courtship. Waite left the previous year to enter a convent.

[24] M. Holland, interview; Leo Adam Biga, "Killing Jim Crow," *The Reader*, January 20, 2005.

[25] Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971, 1990), 5; M. Holland, interview. Jean Waite Holland reminisced with her son Matt Holland. She has Alzheimer's and was unable to interview with the author.

[26] *Compiled Statutes of Nebraska, Annotated 1893* (Lincoln: 1893), 283.

[27] *Omaha World-Herald*, Sept. 19, 1992; Bertha Calloway, interview, *Black Nebraskans*.

[28] Bertha Calloway, interview, *Black Nebraskans*.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Robin D.G. Kelly, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 92; M. Holland, interview. De Porres Club FBI files gained through the Freedom of Information Act. FBI officials originally stated De Porres Club file destruction took place on Jan. 1, 1990, Mar. 1, 1990, and Dec. 1, 1994, but a few documents remained for the author's perusal, according to correspondence, July 31, 2009.

[31] United States Government Office Memorandum from Strategic Air Command to FBI agent Walter E. Taylor, Jr., Dec. 20, 1950, courtesy of David M. Hardy; Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 4-9; Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 108.

[32] *Omaha Star*, Mar. 10, 1950, 1; Markoe, "Omaha De Porres Club"; D. Holland, *Black Nebraskans*.

[33] Jack D. Angus, *Black and Catholic in Omaha: A Case of Double Jeopardy* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004), 57; D. Holland, *Black Nebraskans*.

[34] Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 103.

Amy Helene Forss is a faculty history instructor at the Elkhorn Valley campus of Metropolitan Community College in Elkhorn, Nebraska, and recently earned her PhD in African American history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This article is adapted from a chapter of her dissertation.

[35] *Omaha Star*, June 30, July 7, Aug. 4, 1950, 1; D. Holland, *Black Nebraskans*. The *Star* is vague on what became of the laundry, but the author believes that the Puritan Laundry replaced it. The De Porres Club confirmed that Puritan was practicing fair employment policies.

[36] *Omaha Star*, Dec. 8, 1950, 8.

[37] *Omaha World-Herald*, Dec. 9, 1950, FBI Clipping File; D. Holland, *Black Nebraskans*.

[38] Unpublished minutes of the De Porres Club, May 7, 1951, courtesy of Matt Holland; *Omaha Star*, May 11, 1951, 1, Mar. 25, 1949, 1.

[39] *Omaha Star*, May 11, 1951, 1; FBI agent Edward Abbott report, Apr. 3, 1944, *Federal Bureau of Investigation Omaha file number 100-OM-2225, Volumes 1 and 2*, Freedom of Information Act (FOI) file, courtesy of David M. Hardy. The FBI used the directory to create a list of subversive black men and women for city of Omaha administrators. Rapid Printing Company, which printed the *Omaha Star* from 1938 to the late 1970s, published the directory.

[40] *United States Government Office Memorandum* from Special Agent John V. Barnes to Strategic Air Command, May 19, 1951, courtesy of David M. Hardy. According to the government missive entitled "Foreign Inspired Agitation Among the American Negroes in the Omaha Division," Peter C. Doss designed the 1941 *Omaha Negro Directory*, a much more comprehensive listing of Omaha's black population than the *Omaha City Directory*.

[41] Unpublished notes from Omaha De Porres Club special meeting, June 5, 1951, courtesy of Matt Holland; *Omaha Star*, June 7, 1951, 1; Kathleen M. Davis, "Fighting Jim Crow in Post-World War II Omaha, 1945-1956" (M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2002), 246. See also Jeffery H. Smith, "The Omaha De Porres Club," *Negro History Bulletin* 33 (December 1970), 198.

[42] Lawrence Larsen and Barbara Cottrell, *The Gate City, A History of Omaha* (Omaha: Pruett Publishing Company, 1982), 107.

[43] FBI agent Edward Abbott report, June 6, 1945, *Federal Bureau of Investigation Omaha file number 100-OM-2225, Volumes 1 and 2*. According to FBI records, 35 of the approximately 69 people attending CPA meetings were black northern Omaha residents. One of the attendees was C. C. Galloway, publisher of the *Omaha Guide*. In spite of possible Communist Party members in Omaha, FBI agents informed Hoover there were no manifestations of Japanese subversive activities among the Negroes.

[44] Ibid., Apr. 25, 1945. FBI informants observed Galloway frequently in the New World Book Shop, a known venue of Communist literature.

[45] D. Holland, *Black Nebraskans*; *Omaha Star*, Mar. 23, 1951, 1.

[46] *Omaha Star*, Nov. 28, 1952, 1.

[47] Ibid., May 31, Sept. 28, Nov. 9, 1951, 1, Apr. 24, 1953, 1.

[48] Ibid., Apr. 18, May 16, 1952, 1; FBI Clipping File, courtesy of David M. Hardy; Countryman, *Up South,* 107.

[49] *Omaha Star*, Mar. 7, June 27, 1952, 1; Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 155-65. The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, one of the leaders of the Freedom Rides, was a star pupil of Annie Breeding Windham (Mildred Brown's aunt).

[50] Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line,* 60. Although Executive Order 9981 desegregated the United States military in 1948, it was not implemented until the Korean War started in 1950.

[51] *Omaha City Council Chamber Minutes*, June 17, 1952, City Council Archives, Document 2665, 1952.

[52] *Omaha Star*, Nov. 2, 1951, 1, Dec. 12, 1952, 1.

[53] Ibid., Aug. 6, 1954, 1.

[54] Ibid., July 30, 1954, 1.

[55] Cathy Hughes, telephone interview, Aug. 3, 2007. Helen Jones Woods was the mother of former *Star* staffer Cathy Hughes. Ms. Hughes owns *Radio One*, a company operating 69 radio stations in 22 cities throughout the United States. Hughes credits Mildred Brown for presenting her with a special birthday gift: her first transistor radio.

[56] *Omaha Star*, Aug. 27, Oct. 22, 1954, 1.

[57] Ibid., Apr. 6, 1951, 1, Jan. 16, 1953, 1.

[58] Ibid., Jan. 30, July 10, 1953, 1; Richard Artison, telephone interview, Sept. 28, 2008.

[59] *Omaha Star*, May 8, May 22, Apr. 30, 1953, 1.

[60] Ibid., July 10, Sept. 4, 1953, 1; D. Holland, *Black Nebraskans*.

[61] *Omaha Star*, Jan. 29, Feb. 5, 1954, 1.

[62] Ibid., Jan. 9, 1953, 1.

[63] Spencer, *Historic Photos of Omaha,* 132.

[64] *Omaha Star*, Oct. 17, 1952; Joan McCaw, telephone interview, Lincoln, Apr. 19, 2009.

[65] Dorothy Glenn, telephone interview, Omaha, Oct. 11, 2008. William and Dorothy Glenn published Plattsmouth, Nebraska's *American Record* newspaper from 1945 to 1948. Joan McCaw, interview, Lincoln, Apr. 19, 2009.

[66] *Omaha Star*, Jan. 23, 1953, 1.

[67] Corrine White, telephone interview, Mar. 17, 2009; Lawrence Larsen, Barbara Cottrell, Harl Dalstrom and Kay Dalstrom, *Upstream Metropolis: An Urban Biography of Omaha & Council Bluffs* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 297.

[68] Paul Bryant, interview, Nov. 7, 2008.

[69] *Omaha Star*, Oct. 29, 1954, 1; Bob Reilly, "It Has Been the Few Who Have Acted, Who Have Saved Us from Unspeakable Scandal," *Creighton University Window* (Winter 1995-96), 5.

[70] Unpublished draft for Press Release, courtesy of former De Porres Club member and minutes correspondent Agnes Wichita Stark; *Omaha Star*, May 27, 1955, 1. After Denny Holland married Jean Waite (and subsequently fathered seven children) he was unable to afford serving as the unpaid president of the De Porres Club.