

FOR THE RIGHT KIND OF NEGRO, WHAT DOES TACOMA OFFER?

(By Gustave B. Aldrich, Attorney.)

To many people, the idea suggested in the foregoing query comes as a surprise. That Tacoma, or any other town outside the Southern states, has anything to offer for the presence of a "problem" seems impossible. And this is as true of Negro people as of others. The Negro people have so long measured themselves by the estimates of their enemies and ill-informed friends that it has never occurred to them, not only in reference to Tacoma and the West generally, but to other desirable places, persons and things. And this attitude has undoubtedly handicapped black folk in their efforts to rise in the world, for the world in its estimate of persons, places and things, is governed largely by the subject's own opinion in the first place. The habit of constantly deprecating Negro people, despising Negro efforts, instead of helping the situation, has generated a timidity, a fear to branch out, a distrust of Negro enterprises and of Negro business and professional men. It has prevented Negro men from going into a new community with that self-assurance which comes to every man who holds a good opinion of himself and his people.

Very different the white man. The first thing he does is to assume that he is as good, and has as good rights as any one else under any conditions. He never inquires if such and such a place is a good place for a white man? He never inquires how are white men treated there? Or do they allow white people to live there? He goes there whether he is wanted or not and if he finds he can better himself or attain his objects there he goes without regard for the other fellow's feelings on the subject, and very often the other fellow has to move.

With reference to Tacoma, it has been my observation, that the masses of whites occupy as nearly neutral an attitude toward Negro people as can be found anywhere. They are not especially friendly nor especially hostile to them. I have lived in various neighborhoods in this city during five years, and my family has invariably made friends of their neighbors, so much so that we have been invited to dine time and again and to attend parties (private) by people who lived around us. Personally I have never accepted such an invitation, but my wife has attended some and has been treated with the greatest cordiality. I mention this not by way of glorification, but in order to show the almost perfect neutrality which exists. Of course, persons who would form a dislike for our family would naturally show it by bringing up the color question at the first opportunity, but by specially cultivating friendly feelings we manage to avoid such things. This has its effect upon my law practice for such persons, who have been favorably impressed by my family, give me some of their legal work to do when they have any,

and recommend me to others. A large proportion of these people are descendants of New England Yankees, and Pennsylvanians, with a large sprinkling of New Yorkers and Middle Westerners; many foreigners and some Southerners who are very liberal concerning the activities of Negro people when you consider their antecedents.

I have paid special attention to the conduct of the police and the magistrates, and while the usual dislike of relations between Negro males and white women crops out occasionally, I do not know of a single instance during five years here, even where such relations have existed, that any Negro has been severely dealt with, and in every instance that has come to my knowledge the Negro man has been punished less severely than he deserved, as it was evident that he had broken the law, even had the female been of his own race.

This has its effect upon Negro business men, because they come most frequently in contact with women of the dominant race; in the South the best Negroes are always nervous when they have dealings of the purest nature with a white female, because of the petty jealousy of Southern white men, but in Tacoma and the West generally, so long as one obeys the moral laws and exercises good judgment, there is little likelihood of trouble.

Places of public accommodation, amusements and recreation are open to Negro people on the same terms as to others, with one or two exceptions; men and women obtain employment so long as they will work, the greatest trouble being that many of these who are here now fail to grasp the opportunities presented them. Labor unions are, in the main, friendly, and several unions have Negro members; every labor parade shows Negro union men in almost every department.

It is probably true, that where two men apply for work, one white and the other black, other things being equal the white will have the preference; this is to be expected, but ordinarily the Negro man has a chance to show his ability and if he makes good he is the man. Along business lines: as grocers, small dealers, etc., Negro chances are limited only by his capacity and astuteness. Rented houses are somewhat difficult for the unknown black family, but if well-known and of the higher grade of Negro people, there is very little trouble in obtaining what you can pay for. What trouble there is, has been caused by some well-known Negro people occupying property and defacing the same, without paying rent. There is a newspaper man well known over the West here (Negro) who poses as a leader of the race, and who lives in an adjoining state, who occupied an office in one of the best buildings in Tacoma for six months and would not pay his rent; he also owes the various dry-goods stores for clothing. There are three or four Negro families here who occupy house after house and will not pay till they are compelled. These people together with one other class are the greatest drawbacks here.

For this kind of Negro Tacoma has nothing to offer. There are Negro men here, grocers, barbers, brickmasons, asphalt laborers, caterers, cooks, home owners, who pay their way as they go; are at all times polite, yet they stand back for no man. These men are building Tacoma, as much in their sphere as the white. And the whites know of and appreciate the same. This kind of Negro will find his chances good in Tacoma, for it is the city of the "square