

A REPORT OF NEGRO PARTICIPATION IN THE
INAUGURAL COMMITTEE 1957

February 16, 1957

The inauguration of President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon 1957 saw the American Negro cast in an exciting, challenging and difficult role--exciting because inaugural visitors would witness, for the first time in the nation's history, white and Negro people eating at the same restaurants, living at the same hotels, attending the same schools, places of amusement and entertainment; challenging because the whole concept of "Negro full-equality and rights" is relatively new; and difficult because the new freedom has produced a backwash of unforeseen emotional and psychological problems for the newly emancipated Negro, and places upon the majority group the responsibility for working-out an entirely new pattern for white and Negro relations.

This break with tradition and alterations in a pattern, while not reckoned with at the original policy-making levels, was met courageously and resolved during the course of preparations, planning and programming of Inaugural events by the skillful treatment and sympathetic understanding of the Inaugural Committee 1957 under the leadership of Messrs. Robert V. Fleming and Lewis T. Breuninger.

Caught, as it was, in the conflicting currents, being analyzed and criticized as never before, the Sub-Committee, under the direction of Mr. J. Franklin Wilson, concerned itself largely with helping to integrate Negroes into overall inaugural activities and events and with the planning of certain special events tending to broaden the base of Negro participation. The Committee showed it had flexibility and imagination.

When the Committee took office, there was talk of the disaffection of the entire Negro press on a national level and rumors of a possible boycott. Highly sensitive to the political necessity of winning the press, the Wilson Sub-Committee worked tirelessly to combat unfavorable propaganda and to disseminate true and proper information..

Desiring to reach Washington, D. C., citizens at grass-roots levels, and hoping to arouse a keener interest in the Inauguration and in President Eisenhower, himself, the Sub-Committee sponsored six inter-racial receptions in private homes for Inaugural visitors. This was done in cooperation with the Official Inaugural Hostesses and Hospitality Committee under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Howard A. Coffin. The six homes involved were: Mr. & Mrs. W. Spurgeon Burke, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Carter, Mr. & Mrs. George Fleming, Mr. & Mrs. Elonzo Freeman, Mrs. Higginson Rogers, and Mr. & Mrs. Wesley Williams.

These receptions were held on Sunday, January 20, 1957, from 5 to 7 P. M., and brought together United States Senators, Congressmen, members of the President's Cabinet, foreign diplomats, and high echelon members of the Republican Party to meet with influential Negroes from communities scattered from coast to coast.

This was a classical function--providing a social background for talking politics.

This activity was planned and directed by Mrs. Ida Smith Taylor, President of Virginia White Speel Republican Women's Club of the District of Columbia, and Miss E. Pauline Myers, Executive Assistant to Mr. J. Franklin Wilson.

Assisting in the promotion of these affairs were Mesdames Beulah J. Murphy, Regional Director, Iota Phi Lambda Sorority; Marion Seymour, American Red Cross; Isadore Letcher, prominent Washington, D. C., clubwoman and Jeannette Dodson, Treasurer, Virginia White Speel Club.

This Committee also served at the Phyllis Wheatley Y. W. C. A. Official Welcoming Booth. This activity was in cooperation with the Official Welcoming and Hospitality Booths Committee under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Irene B. Caldwell.

Volunteer clerical and stenographic assistance was donated to the Committee by Miss Denise Boyd of Putney School, Putney Vermont, and by the Washington Chapter of Iota Phi Lamda Sorority, through the courtesy of Mrs. Beulah J. Murphy, who is also the Vice-President of Virginia White Speel Club.

The Committee wishes to Thank the Inaugural Committee 1957 for the opportunity to work with them in such close cooperation. It was a high privilege and an honor to serve so great a cause.

The Inaugural Committee 1957 was conscious of our needs at all times and receptive to our entreaties. It was a joy to participate in such a fellowship.

In submitting this final report, may we make specific reference to the Editorial comment of the Washington, D. C., Afro-American Newspaper, January 25, 1957, "This was the most democratic inauguration Washington has ever witnessed..!"

Respectfully submitted,

E. Pauline Myers

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Ida S. Taylor

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To the attention of:
Mr. J. Franklin Wilson,
Chairman