

FRANCIS KORNEGAY

I came here to work June 1, 1944. We moved into the present building July 1, 1944.

My title here was vocational secretary. My job was to find day work for women and day labor work for men. And for day work they got \$6.00 a day, carfare and perhaps lunch. I served in that capacity for one month. Then I went into Mr. Dancy and said, "Mr. Dancy, I'm here with a Masters Degree, and all I'm doing is sending Negroes on menial jobs. There's nothing wrong with that, but my position is that we ought to do more. I had 600 young Negroes, men and women with degrees who had registered with the Urban League and there wasn't any place to send them. We sent them to the factory, and occasionally we sent one as a secretary, but that was few and far between. I had two networking sources. One was a board member whose wife was very fair and passed for White. The other was a very fair Negro who also passed and worked at J. L. Hudson's. She was the secretary to Jimmy Webber, the president of Hudson's. They knew me very well, and they would pipeline things to me in terms of asking their bosses for breakthroughs. This was sort of under the table.

When I went to talk to the top official, I knew what I could ask for because I knew what they were doing. I was very bold and very frank and said, "Why can't we put Negro boys and Negro girls who are out of school to work on part-time jobs like you are hiring White youth. Most of the companies then had work study programs, and they would accept White boys and girls from the Board of Education but they would not accept Negro boys and girls.

John Dancy said, "I'll have you see Prentice Brown because he's on the board of the Detroit Edison Company." He said "I'll call Parker now and set up an appointment." Mr. Parker was president and he said he was a very fine man.

I went to see Mr. Arthur Dondineau who was superintendent of schools. He said he could not have the board of education send Negro boys and girls to the Detroit Edison Company because he didn't know whether they would accept them, and that would give us kind of a negative reputation. He said, "If you can make it straight with the Detroit Edison Company, we'd be glad to do it." So Prentice Brown set up the conference for me with Mr. Parker. I went to see Mr. Parker, and I told him the story about the Edison Company accepting White boys and girls from the school system and that they would not accept Blacks. He was dumbfounded. He called in Mr. Sullivan who was on our board. When Sullivan walked in and saw me he was really surprised. Parker said, "Joe, do you know Mr. Kornegay?"

"Yes, I serve on the Board of the League."

"He's telling me that you do not accept Negro boys and girls into our work study program. Is that right?"

Sullivan said, "Yes, it is."

Parker said, "As of this moment I want you to call Mr. Dondineau, superintendent of schools, and tell him that our policy is to accept Negro boys and girls the same as Whites." That was our first breakthrough. That was one of the most important breakthroughs that we ever had.

I got into only one argument, a big argument with Mr. Parshall, President of the Bank of the Commonwealth. He said, "We don't want any Negroes here because they might marry the White girls." I said, "Then you don't want any more money from Negroes, do you?"

"Oh, yes, we want your money."

I talked with him at least several months and finally I found out that he was a deacon at his church in Grosse Pointe. I said, I'm going to throw the book at him today because he's supposed to be a Christian. I went up to him and said, "Mr. Parshall, I understand you're a deacon in your church."

He said, "I am and I'm very proud of it."

I said, "That's fine. I'm not a deacon in my church, but I'm a good Christian. You know what? If I were you, I would be afraid to go to sleep at night because you are dishonest to yourself, to this bank, to this community. You will not take Negro boys and girls, and you know that the National Bank has done it, the Detroit Bank has done it and Industrial National. Now why do you hold out to those people? I'd be afraid to go to sleep at night because I'd be afraid I might not wake up." In less than a minute, the man began shedding tears and shaking. I said, "Great Lakes Insurance Company has \$50,000 in checking at your bank. Mr. Charles Mahoney is on the board of the Urban League, and I'm going back and tell him to take the money out."

I went back and told Mahoney. He called up Mr. Parshall. He said, Mr. Parshall, Mr. Kornegay has told me your story. Three banks have taken Negroes in as tellers. If you don't do that, I will take my \$50,000 out and put it in the National Bank of Detroit which is one block up from your bank."

He said, "Tell Mr. Kornegay to come in tomorrow." I went back the next morning and Mr. Parshall gave in. He said, "Mr. Kornegay, send me Negroes. We are ready."

Lou Franks was the manager of Lane Bryant, and he had heard about us putting on sales persons at Hudson's and said, "Francis, I want you to send me a bookkeeper, and I want her to be a light-skinned Negress."

I said, "Just a minute, and I called Hilda Watkins who was my secretary and said, "You pick up the phone before I go back. I want you to record everything we say." We must have talked almost

an hour. I said, "Lou, as well as you know me, are you asking me to discriminate against my people.? What is a light-skinned Negress?"

He said, "Anyone who is almost White."

I said, "I can't do this. If I would report this to the NAACP, they would sue you."

After talking about an hour, he said, "Francis, send me a good one."

I had many professional people on file. I did not do this purposely. I picked out a bookkeeper's application that was very good and called the lady in. She was almost as black as coal, but she had a charming personality. I called Lou and said, "I have a fine lady I'm sending. He interviewed her and hired her. She retired from that company 30 years later."

John Dancy would say, "Give them hell, Francis. If they call me up, I may tell them that I'm going to put it on the agenda, but I'm not going to call you on the carpet because you're doing things that I could never do."

John Dancy did everything he could do in his time and he did it well. He could not do in his time what I did because they would have run him out of this town. But he knew how to handle the people in his time.

Henry Ford II was one of my closest friends and best resource persons. He'd tell me about his family and White people in Grosse Pointe, and I'd tell him about Black people. When Henry had social affairs, my wife and I were invited to many of them. Christina Ford had a big party at the Whittier. She entertained the Ambassador to the United States from Italy. My wife and I were the only Blacks invited. Christina called and said, "Francis, you have got to come."

I said, "Our son gets his Masters Degree at Howard University the same evening of the party, and we are doing down a day early so we can take him around."

She said, "Tell Geraldine one of you have got to be there."

My wife said, "I don't dance as well as you do. You go."

I took my tuxedo with me to Washington. When I got into Detroit, I went into a little restroom and put on the tuxedo. Can you imagine a big man squirming into a tuxedo in a little restroom?

I got in my car and drove over to the Whittier. They had over 200 couples as guests. Henry and Christina had a table all by themselves. She sat in the middle and Henry was to the right and I was to the left. I danced all night, and some of the women came

up and said, "Francis, I'd like to have a dance with you."

I said, "Ask Christina."