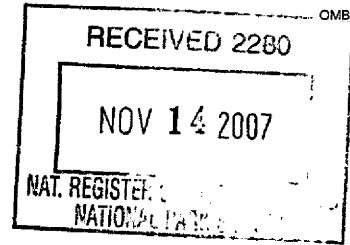


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name The Omaha Star

Other names/site number DO09:0221-012

2. Location

Street & number 2216 North 24th Street

Not for publication

City or town Omaha

Vicinity

State Nebraska Code NE County Douglas Code 055 Zip code 68110

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Michael J. ...
Signature of certifying official

Nov. 7, 2007
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

Entered in the National Register.

see continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.

see continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 12-27-07

[Signature]
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		Buildings
		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
1	N/A	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/professional
- DOMESTIC/apartment
- SOCIAL/civic

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/professional

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Commercial

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Foundation Brick
- Walls Brick
- Roof Tar
- Other

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** Removed from its original location.
- C** A birthplace or a grave.
- D** A cemetery.
- E** A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** A commemorative property.
- G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMUNICATIONS

SOCIAL HISTORY

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

Period of Significance

1940-1957

Significant Dates

1940

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Brown, Mildred

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

G P Prinz - Architecture Firm

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- Previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- Designated a National Historic Landmark
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location for additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property _____

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	15	253181	4573795	3.			
2.				4.			

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jill Dolberg/Survey Coordinator and Melanie Sharpnack/SHPO Intern
organization Nebraska State Historical Society date August 9, 2007
street & number 1420 P Street/ Box 82554 telephone (402) 471-4773
city or town Lincoln state Nebraska zip code 68501-2554

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Marguerita Washington/Publisher
street & number 7189 North 78th Street telephone (402) 346-4041
city or town Omaha state Nebraska zip code 68110

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, (15 USC 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The *Omaha Star* bought their current building in 1940. It had been built in 1923 as a funeral home for Allen Jones by architectural firm G. P. Prinz. Charles A. Carr was the draftsman on the project.¹ Herron Home Building Company was the contractor.

The *Omaha Star* is located on the Southwest corner of 24th and Grant Streets. This commercial building is a rectangular, one story structure that has a flat roof with a crenulated parapet. It has a brick foundation and brown brick veneer exterior. The façade contains a corner entrance covered by a metal awning with a two light transom above the awning. The main entrance on the southeast corner of the building contains two metal screen doors, which cover two white doors with chain link fencing over the windows of the doors. Windows are present on the south and east sides of the building. The windows are all recessed and sit on limestone sills. Chain link fencing covers each window. Above all the windows are red and white scalloped metal awnings. Between the windows on the south and east sides of the building are decorative brick piers, which rest on limestone bases. In between the piers, below the windows, is decorative brickwork with limestone details. On the east side of the building, above the windows, is a painted metal sign publicizing the *Omaha Star* with a bright yellow star, "THE OMAHA STAR" in red lettering, and the continent of Africa in red, black, and green in the corner, all on a white background.

¹ City of Omaha building permit.

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The Omaha Star is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with African-American newspaper publishing in Omaha, as well as the early Civil Rights Movement in Omaha. The building is also eligible under Criterion B for its association with Mildred Brown, its publisher and owner for just over fifty years. The Omaha Star building is located one block south of 24th and Lake, the central business district and heart of the African-American community of North Omaha.

North Omaha was largely a black community by World War I, the end of a period of mass migration of African-Americans from agrarian areas in the South to the urban centers of the North.² An estimated one million southern African-Americans left the South in the early decades of the 20th century due to crises in agriculture including the boll weevil epidemics of 1915 and 1916 which destroyed cotton crops, as well as outdated sharecropping systems that restricted the profits tenant farmers could earn when they had to unreasonably share their profits with their landowners. In addition, Southern cities had attracted new industries and jobs, but had largely left African-Americans out of the hiring pool. Still staunchly segregated, the South had little to offer African-Americans looking for a change in their situation.

Omaha was one of the communities whose black population grew significantly during World War I. From 1909 to 1919, the black population in Omaha grew 113% to 10,000, most of whom were living in North Omaha.³ Between the World Wars, Omaha's black residents were largely restricted to working in a handful of occupations. The bulk of men were employed in manufacturing or mechanical industries, such as the meatpacking industry, and men and women were working in domestic or personal service in large numbers as well.⁴ After the stock market crashed in 1929, North Omahans felt the Great Depression in two areas: employment and housing. Because many African-Americans were unskilled laborers, they were among the first laid off from their jobs. This trend was consistent throughout the nation: unemployment rates for African-Americans were far higher than those of European-Americans, and by 1935, one-sixth of those on relief were blacks, while they made up only one-tenth of the population of the United States.⁵ Their situation did not necessarily improve as time passed. After World War II, of Omaha's 8000 employers, only 804 would hire African-Americans, and then mostly only at a service level.⁶ Forty-six percent of children cared for in the Aid to Dependent Children Program were black, while they represented only seven percent of the general population.⁷ When African-Americans were able to obtain a college education, seven out of ten college graduates would leave the Omaha area for lack of opportunity to use their education.⁸

In terms of housing, the influx of African-Americans had followed other immigrant groups into Omaha, first into the southern sections of the area and then gradually north and west as their economic status improved. However, racism halted the movement of African-Americans out of North Omaha with "invisible walls that formed the ghetto."⁹ Middle and upper class African-Americans stayed in the neighborhood for lack of another place to move to, forced to remain in overcrowded, deteriorating housing. The one positive outcome of this segregation was the sense of community that developed during the 1920s and 1930s, a community that both supported, and was supported by, Mildred Brown's *Omaha Star*.

² *Patterns on the Landscape*, 42.

³ Olson, *History of Nebraska*, 289.

⁴ *Patterns on the Landscape*, 46.

⁵ *Patterns on the Landscape*, 52.

⁶ *Omaha Star*, 9 January 1953, "Facts about Omaha Negroes To be Presented."

⁷ *Omaha Star*, 9 January 1953, "Facts about Omaha Negroes To be Presented."

⁸ *Omaha Star*, 9 January 1953, "Facts about Omaha Negroes To be Presented."

⁹ *Patterns on the Landscape*, 53.

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MILDRED BROWN

Mildred Brown was born to parents Reverend B. J. and Maggie Brown in Birmingham, Alabama in 1913. At the age of 16, she graduated from Miles Memorial Teachers College and taught elementary school. In 1936, she met Dr. Edward Gilbert, a pharmacist, and they were married later that year. They moved to Chicago where she continued her education, and eventually moved to Sioux City, Iowa. Mildred Gilbert began her career as a newspaper owner in Sioux City in the mid-1930s when her pastor, Reverend D. H. Harris, suggested it would be a good career for her. She published a small weekly paper in Sioux City called the *Silent Messenger*, and organized the Booker T. Washington Community Center for young people in her neighborhood "who were wandering aimlessly in the streets."¹⁰

In 1937, the Gilberts moved to Omaha, and Mildred secured a job at the *Omaha Guide*, a black newspaper, selling ads. After eighteen months, she started the *Omaha Star* with its inaugural issue appearing on 9 July 1938, with the motto: "Dedicated to the service of the people that no good cause shall lack a champion and that evil shall not go unopposed."¹¹

In an introduction to the newspaper, Mildred Gilbert wrote:

To the Citizens of Omaha: It is with profound pleasure that the Omaha Star Publishing Co., and [sic] 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 existence 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...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 as 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.¹²

In addition to offering the *Star* as a mouthpiece for the African-American community in Omaha, the Gilberts also encouraged the community to realize the positive effect the buying power 16,000 African-Americans could have if they would carefully cater their purchases only to businesses that employed African-Americans and treated the community well. Specifically, in the second issue of the paper, Edward Gilbert pointed out that members of the North Omaha black community were patronizing an ice cream shop at 24th and Lake, Reed's Ice Cream, which would be targeted for their discriminatory hiring practices over a decade later by the De Porres Club. Gilbert spent an hour outside the ice cream shop and counted at least one hundred African-Americans approving of their hiring practices through their purchasing power.¹³ Mildred and Edward Gilbert divorced in 1943, and Mildred resumed using her maiden name, Brown.

As the publisher of the *Omaha Star*, the longest operating black-owned newspaper run by a woman, Mildred Brown provided neighborhood news and commentary for more than fifty years. The paper served an important function by calling attention to the accomplishments of people in the black community and emphasizing positive values. The newspaper recognized individuals who received awards, or got new jobs in industries that had previously been closed to African-Americans. It announced acts of civic pride and community charity. They highlighted one neighborhood family per week in order to continue to foster a sense of community. On the occasion of the *Star's* ninth anniversary, Ms. Brown

¹⁰ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989.

¹¹ *Omaha Star*, 9 July 1938, banner.

¹² *Omaha Star*, 9 July 1938, "The Omaha Star Makes Its Debut."

¹³ *Omaha Star*, 16 July 1938, "An Echo From My Den."

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again pledged her support to the community, congratulated North Omaha on the growth of its businesses and fast development, and offered up this advice for her neighbors.

The Star on its anniversary wishes to urge that you continue to repair and buy homes as you are now doing, save your money and invest it wisely. Buy more Savings bonds that you may be comfortable if and when things change.¹⁴

Reverend Joseph Forbes, a former pastor of St. John A. M. E. Church said, "Mildred was a friend of the pastors... she made her paper available anytime we needed a platform. She saw her work as a ministry. She believed that God had given her a calling."¹⁵ One entire page was per edition was devoted to the work of the churches in the community, submitted by the pastors.

Among her concerns was the struggle for racial equality. Mildred Brown's primary early role in the *Omaha Star* was in selling ads. She was not only an excellent salesperson; she found that she could use the ads as a tool of her activism. She refused to sell newspaper ads to companies that did not employ black workers. She also used editorials to encourage her readers to protest the segregation of the military and she challenged them to apply for jobs that the Martin Bomber plant at Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue, Nebraska. She hired Charles Washington, who is widely remembered for his work for civil rights, as a reporter and columnist. Whitney Young, who was the executive secretary of the Omaha Urban League before eventually becoming the executive director of the National Urban League, contributed editorials. The paper supported boycotts to call attention to discrimination, and she and her staff were often labeled "troublemakers."¹⁶ She guided the newspaper through the tumultuous eras of the Civil Rights Movement, from segregation to the demonstrations of the 1950s and 1960s, to the racial unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The *Omaha Star* reported the triumphs and the tragedies that occurred both locally and throughout the nation.

Mildred Brown was not interested in letting discrimination get any further a foothold in Omaha than it already had. She worked tirelessly with many organizations to work for equality and peace. She was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Black Publishers Association, the National Business League, the Urban League of Nebraska, and the Great Plains Black Museum.¹⁷ During the time during which it was active, she was the spokeswoman for the De Porres Club, and also allowed it to meet in the Omaha Star building after the club ran out of funds to support their own facility. She spent countless hours working in the community, receiving over one hundred and fifty community service awards, including the "Unsung Heroine Award" for service awarded by the NAACP, one of only thirty-five people in the country to be honored with this award by the time of her death. She was also appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as a goodwill ambassador to East Germany to investigate alleged human rights violations following the construction of the Berlin Wall.¹⁸ She also worked to improve the lives of the newspaper carriers and her office workers. If she learned that someone did not have enough food at home, she would buy them bags of groceries to supply their larder.¹⁹ The newspaper carriers often received a special Christmas or Easter party in gratitude for their hard work, when they might receive the only gifts they were given all year.

At the time of her death in 1989, the *Omaha Star* had a staff of twenty, and a circulation of 30,685 in thirty-nine states. In 1969, Mildred Brown wrote, "Why then do Negro publishers persist? The answer is clear. If the Negro is deprived of his

¹⁴ *Omaha Star*, 31 July 1947, "An Expression of Gratitude."

¹⁵ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989, "Service Celebrates Life of Mildred Brown."

¹⁶ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989, "Mildred Brown Had a Key Role."

¹⁷ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989, "Funeral Notices."

¹⁸ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989.

¹⁹ Dr. Marguerita Washington, Oral history interview by Jill E. Dolberg, 7 August 2007, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

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press, all of the tortuous gains achieved through the years since his emancipation will be lost, and tomorrow's Negro youth will be at the mercy of the powerful forces, North and South, that still man the ramparts of bigotry, prejudice and discrimination."²⁰ Mildred Brown persisted because she felt compelled to do so. From the first edition of her newspaper, she had established a challenge to herself and her staff, "that no good cause shall lack a champion and that evil shall not go unopposed." Mildred Brown and her staff were certainly champions of their community, Brown in particular. She was an outspoken voice in the wilderness that the tortuous gains of their emancipation not be lost, and she worked tirelessly toward that end.

DE PORRES CLUB

The De Porres Club, at its inception, did not have a connection with the *Omaha Star* newspaper. However, a relationship with the newspaper grew over time. As a civil rights organization that was working on behalf of the people of the Near Northside, the community that the *Omaha Star* considered its readership, it was natural that the two would develop a working relationship. Over time, the newspaper would advertise the organization's events and rallies, and act as a booster for its causes, which were in essence the community's causes. Eventually, Mildred Brown invited the club to meet in her building as their funds became tight and they needed a meeting space. She became their spokesperson when they needed one, and she even hired their president to work for her paper. Their relationship was quite intertwined, although at times she would distance herself in order to maintain an illusion of professionalism and a lack of conflict of interest. There were instances when she would say she was not a sponsor of the De Porres Club, such as when she met with Mr. Gothard of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, however she was letting them use her building as an office space. If not a sponsor, then what did she consider herself? Regardless, Mildred Brown and the De Porres Club had a long standing relationship working for the betterment of the community in which they were placed.

The De Porres Club organized on 3 November 1947 by a group of Creighton students under the leadership of Father John P. Markoe, S. J. for the purpose of promoting civil rights for blacks in Omaha.²¹ The first meeting brought together six white students and Father Markoe, and the group selected the Blessed Martin de Porres for their patron because the Catholic Church recognized him as the universal patron of social justice.²² The club specifically sought to "bring about 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."²³

The club's early activities were largely confined to studying the various aspects of racism and the challenges to racial equality in the United States and Omaha in particular. From early on in the club's history, they published their minutes and announced their plans in the *Omaha Star*. Within ten months of their founding, the club issued an open invitation to the *Omaha Star's* readership.

The Omaha DePorres Club which meets every Monday evening at Creighton University, has opened an inter-racial center at 1914 N. 24th St. The purpose of the DePorres Club is to study the problems of the Negro in Omaha, to work for better understanding between Negroes and whites, and thus to help promote...American ideals... The Club is composed of Negroes and whites, students, working people and housewives, who are interested in helping make Omaha a truly American city. The store-front that the DePorres Club has rented will provide a center of contact for people of all races and creeds on a basis of equality and friendship.²⁴

²⁰ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1989, "Rites Monday for Publisher Mildred Brown."

²¹ *Patterns on the Landscape*, 56.

²² *Omaha Star*, 19 November 1948, "Father John P. Markoe, Founder of Omaha De Porres Club."

²³ *Omaha Star*, 19 November 1948, "Father John P. Markoe, Founder of Omaha De Porres Club."

²⁴ *Omaha Star*, 30 September 1948, "DePorres Club."

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The inter-racial center was an excellent vehicle for the club to help develop understanding between the white members of the club and the African-American community in which it was placed. The center had clothing drives, activities for children, Christmas parties, speakers, and many other activities. On several occasions, the De Porres Club heard of African-American families attempting to move into white neighborhoods where they were given a distinct message that they were not welcome. The De Porres Club would then arrive, help the family move in, and linger as a multi-cultural group, mingling with neighbors. The presence of Father Markoe was particularly helpful in quelling bad feelings about the new neighbors. Violence was always avoided.

Father Markoe also encouraged their first forms of non-violent protest, methods that would come into vogue throughout the country later. The Club held "sit-ins" at various restaurants in Omaha to stress the point that restaurant owners ought not deny service to African-Americans. Several members had filed lawsuits to further this cause, and while not immediately successful, they caused ripple effects throughout Omaha. In 1950, the De Porres Club found a new way to utilize the power of the press, specifically the extremely cooperative *Omaha Star* under the leadership of Mildred Brown. In order to muster support for their causes in the community and to make the people aware of the actions the club was taking on their behalf, they began to print letters the club sent to businesses and organizations seeking change. In regard to the restaurant issue, they wrote to the secretary of the Omaha Restaurant Association.

The Omaha De Porres Club wishes to write your organization calling your attention to Section 20-101, in the Nebraska Code on Civil Rights. It has been the sad experience of some of the members of our club to have been deprived service in some of the cafes and restaurants of the city, because of their national origin. It is not the desire of our group to antagonize and cause ill feelings when we have been compelled to take recourse to the courts, but with the thought in mind that Jim Crowism is definitely not American nor democratic and is a cancerous growth which must be stamped out for an individual to be repulsed and humiliated by refusal to serve him because of his color denies to him his dignity, respect and courtesy due him as a human person. The Omaha De Porres Club is seeking to bring forth the true principles on which our country was founded. "That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable [sic] rights. The true brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God."²⁵

Although the letter did not have the desired effect, resulting only in a letter replying that the restaurant association would not be dealing with the issue and restaurants would deal with it on an individual basis, the letter marks a new methodology in their campaign for more rights for African-Americans, as well as helped win the respect of the black community in Omaha for the De Porres Club.

While their early activities remained confined to speakers, charitable activities, letter writing and prayer, their activities were welcome to remain on Creighton University's campus. As club president Denny Holland wrote two years after the club's founding, "Study was in due time supplemented by action."²⁶ Within a short period of time, their activities became more overt and the club recruited more people from the community, both blacks and whites. The University argued that since the membership of the club had ceased to include only University students, it was no longer a University club, and invited them to find a new place to meet. The 22 April 1949 *Omaha Star* announced that for the foreseeable future, the DePorres Club would be meeting at the DePorres Center on N. 24th Street.²⁷ Meetings were held there quite comfortably while the club had the funds to pay for the rent on the building, however, campaigns such as the ones they would soon undertake would become expensive, and eventually they would have to find a free meeting place. In the end, De Porres Club supporter Mildred Brown offered up the Omaha Star building as a meeting space for the De Porres Club, and the

²⁵ *Omaha Star*, 10 March 1950, "De Porres Club Notes."

²⁶ *Omaha Star*, 11 November 1949, "De Porres Club Two Years Old."

²⁷ *Omaha Star*, 22 April 1949, "DePorres Club Notes."

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club announced their first meeting at the Star building in the 27 October 1950 edition of the *Omaha Star* "through the courtesy of Miss Mildred Brown."²⁸

The following are details of several of their campaigns. While the De Porres Club undertook far more campaigns than are mentioned here, these highlight the evolution of their protest methodology, as well as the different ways they found to use the *Omaha Star* to their advantage. The campaigns are also peppered with the involvement of Mildred Brown.

CAMPAIGNS

Central High School

The De Porres Club's first action in regard to Central High School was to write a letter to the principal of the school and to the Omaha School Board in the spring of 1950 protesting "comedy" presentations in black face at Central's Annual Road Show. They objected to the presentations stereotyping of African-Americans in the name of "humor."²⁹ Creighton University had also allowed such performances, but the President of the University stated in a letter that they would no longer be tolerated after the De Porres Club protested a performance there.

The most effective protest that the De Porres Club undertook against Central High School was in response to learning that an African-American young man had been denied a part in an opera, although he had been considered by all accounts to be completely qualified to undertake the part.³⁰ It seemed obvious to the student and to the De Porres Club that the school's refusal to give him the part was based upon his race. In response, the club printed four thousand pamphlets to be handed out to those attending the opera from December 7-9, 1950. Under a banner headline stating "DePorres Club Exposes Central High School", the *Omaha Star* reprinted the text from the pamphlets that were to be handed out in order to reach their broader audience.

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?³¹

Two weeks later, the club learned that their efforts had yielded positive results. At a faculty meeting at Central High School, a decision was reached that "no more discriminatory policies such as the one practiced on a talented negro youth desiring a lead in the opera would be tolerated in the future."³²

Coca-Cola Bottling Company

The De Porres Club and other civil rights organizations in North Omaha were frustrated with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company's hiring practices in Omaha long before the De Porres Club took on the company by rallying the community to

²⁸ *Omaha Star*, 27 October 1950, "De Porres Club."

²⁹ *Omaha Star*, 14 April 1950, "DePorres Club."

³⁰ *Omaha Star*, 8 December 1950, "De Porres Club," 2:5.

³¹ *Omaha Star*, 8 December 1950, "DePorres Club Exposes Central High School," 1:8.

³² *Omaha Star*, 22 December 1950, "DePorres Club."

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action. The first mention of this frustration in the *Omaha Star* is from November, 1950, when the YWCA replaced their Coca-Cola machine in response to the company's policies.

Word was received of the Northside Y. W. C. A. having their Coca-Cola machine replaced with a Pepsi-Cola one. This step proves that when our people learn of the facts surrounding the lily-white employment practices in local plants like Coca-Cola, they are more than willing to cooperate.³³

By April, the club was ready to contact the company in hopes of having a meeting with the General Manager to discover what his hiring policies were in regards to people of color. The task of contacting the Coca-Cola was delegated to Miss Tessie Edwards.³⁴ At this meeting, Mr. M. L. Gothard stated that the company had considered hiring African-American drivers, however had decided "the time was not ripe."³⁵ A second meeting was scheduled with Mr. Gothard, at which he was urged to hire African-Americans for the sake of justice. Mr. Gothard promised he would contact the Urban League the next day to hire some workers to work on the line inside the plant. The call was never made. A third meeting was held, attended by Mr. Gothard and De Porres Club President Denny Holland. Holland urged him to hire African-Americans for business reasons. Gothard again promised to contact the Urban League, and again failed to follow through. According to the De Porres Club's Public Statement, printed in the *Omaha Star* on 8 June 1951, "At these three conferences with Mr. Gothard the club representatives only listened to the points Mr. Gothard presented and tried to urge the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company to hire Negroes. This was done at these conferences with NO intention of any action on our part to get people to stop buying Coca-Cola."³⁶ Regardless, the club gave Mr. Gothard a deadline to hire African-American workers by April 30th, and when he failed to do so, they initiated the boycott to call attention to the company's hiring policies, and to rally the community. The *Omaha Star* played a major role in transmitting the rallying cry to support the boycott.

Mr. Gothard met with Father Markoe on 4 May 1951, at which meeting Mr. Gothard stated that "a new light had been thrown on the subject" and assured Father Markoe that he intended to end his policy of discrimination.³⁷ Father Markoe encouraged him to contact De Porres president Denny Holland to inform him of his decision so that Holland could "head off the committees and Club members who were making arrangements for the boycott." Mr. Gothard did not contact Denny Holland and did not keep his word. Additional meetings with the De Porres Club and the Urban League would follow over the next several weeks.

Before it even began, the boycott was fraught with controversy, of an unexpected sort. Mr. Gothard met on three occasions with Mr. Peter C. Doss, advertising manager of the *Omaha Guide*, a competing Black newspaper in North Omaha. According to the *Omaha Star*, "It appears that Mr. Doss in an effort to cement an already solid friendship with Mr. Gothard, saw fit to do a bit of 'Uncle Toming.'"³⁸ Mr. Doss allegedly made false statements to Mr. Gothard about the De Porres Club, and assured Mr. Gothard that most blacks in North Omaha did not support the boycott. Mildred Brown met with Mr. Gothard on 7 May 1951 and stated that while she was not a sponsor of the De Porres Club, she agreed with their activities completely. She also stated that "Every thinking person in Omaha should support the De Porres Club."³⁹

³³ *Omaha Star*, 3 November 1950, "De Porres Club."

³⁴ *Omaha Star*, 6 April 1951, "De Porres Club."

³⁵ *Omaha Star*, 8 June 1951, "DePorres Club Public Statement."

³⁶ *Omaha Star*, 8 June 1951, "DePorres Club Public Statement."

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Omaha Star*, 11 May 1951, "DePorres Club Continues Fight."

³⁹ *Ibid.*

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The boycott began on 11 May 1951, and in addition to recruiting drinkers of Coca-Cola to stop purchasing the products, they also convinced businesses in North Omaha to stop restocking the products in their businesses.⁴⁰ From the beginning of their protest, their goal was not simply to convince Mr. Gothard to hire a few token African-American employees that he could hold up to the press to escape the club's momentary scrutiny; they wanted a public statement that he would abandon his Jim Crow hiring policy and open all future openings, including coveted delivery positions, to African-Americans.

In the meantime, the remainder of the De Porres Club members busied themselves handing out pamphlets at 24th and Lake and at the Blackstone Hotel, site of the UNESCO (United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) meeting on May 14th and 15th. The purpose of this UN organization was and is to encourage international peace and universal respect by promoting collaboration among nations. Racism would and does run counter to their goals. On May 19th, the committee in charge of picketing the bottling company did so at the plant at 30th and Emmet. Both the *Omaha World Herald* and the Omaha Police Department were notified of the protest in advance. An additional committee circulated a pledge to businesses in the North Omaha community to ensure their support of the boycott and asking them to pledge not to restock Coca-Cola. Ninety-eight percent of the businesses in the area pledged their support, which included forty-three different companies. Ten thousand handbills were distributed regarding this issue by 25 May 1951, and the support of the public became widespread. The students of Omaha University were said to have been supporting the boycott. Even the employees of the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant that were witnesses to their protest made comments in sympathy with their cause.⁴¹

By the end of May, Gothard hired two African-American men to work on the production line, although he would not admit that his decision to hire them was in any way due to pressures exerted through the actions of the De Porres Club. Photographs of a smiling Gothard with his hands clasping those of Mitchell Reeves and Harold Donaldson, his new employees, appeared in the *Omaha Star*.⁴² In an interview with the *Omaha Star*, when asked what led to the company hiring African-Americans, Gothard replied, "We just hired. We had [an] opening, so we hired." When asked directly if the De Porres Club's Don't Buy Coke Campaign had anything to do with his hiring them, Gothard stated, "The De Porres Club didn't have anything to do with our hiring Negroes."⁴³ Still, the De Porres Club's early demand that the Coca-Cola Bottling Company announce their intention to reverse their discriminatory hiring practices in the press was not met, and President Denny Holland insisted that the Don't Buy Coke Campaign continue.⁴⁴

Within three days of the article indicating that the campaign would continue, a final meeting was held between Holland and Gothard, arbitrated by the Urban League. At that meeting, Mr. Gothard agreed to issue the following statement:

The policies of Coca Cola Bottling Company have changed in that two qualified Negro citizens have been employed at the production level and in the future equal consideration in employment will be given without regard to race, creed or color.⁴⁵

With this press release, the demands of the De Porres Club were satisfied. The Club voted to terminate the boycott, and set about communicating to the public that they may recommence purchasing Coca-Cola products.⁴⁶ This protest marks

⁴⁰ *Omaha Star*, 11 May 1951, "DePorres Club Continues Fight."

⁴¹ *Omaha Star*, 25 May 1951, "DePorres Club."

⁴² *Omaha Star*, 7 June 1951, "DePorres Club Wins First."

⁴³ *Omaha Star*, 8 June 1951, "Omaha Star Presents Both Sides."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Omaha World-Herald*, 15 June 1951, "Urban League Arbitrates In Coca-Cola Dispute."

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the first widescale demonstration undertaken by the De Porres Club, and the first to require the concentrated coordination of communication with the public through the press, specifically the *Omaha Star*.

Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company

From the earliest days of the DePorres Club, the Industrial Relations Committee began contacting the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company to agitate against their discriminatory hiring practices. In 1949, the De Porres Club met with company officials Mr. James Lee and a Mr. Hamilton regarding the possibility of hiring African-Americans. They were told that the Board of Directors had discussed the possibility during the labor shortage of World War II, and decided they would rather cancel lines than hire African-Americans.⁴⁷ One of the officials stated that they believed that no one would ride the buses or street cars if they were driven by blacks.⁴⁸ After a series of letters asking for future meetings that went unanswered, the DePorres Club resorted to circulating a petition against the company's discriminatory employment policy, a copy of which the company refused to even accept.⁴⁹ Eventually, the club resorted to sending the petition to the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street and Railway Company via registered mail with the United States Postal Service, so that they were at least certain that the petition had been delivered. The company never acknowledged receipt of the petition.

After the De Porres Club's success with the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the club returned their attention to the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company. Additional requests for meetings were again ignored. One final letter was sent, stating that if the company still refused to meet, the club would assume their stance on hiring African-Americans had not changed. Further, "The club would then take action to inform the public. This project of informing the public is but the first step in a very complete program. There is much more to follow until qualified Negroes drive Omaha buses and street cars."⁵⁰ Judging from the number of pamphlets the club began to circulate, the De Porres Club did not receive a response from the Railway Company. The club began to distribute handbills to explain their stance on the issue.⁵¹ Several thousand pamphlets were circulated per week, asking members of the public to write letters of protest to Vice President Lee of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company. Alternatively, they were invited to call him personally, and included both his address and his phone number in the article in the *Omaha Star*.⁵² The pamphlets were distributed throughout the neighborhood, but also in front of the courthouse, where there was a display of the oldest street car and a brand new bus. Post cards were also sent directly to neighborhood homes, requesting calls and letters to Mr. Lee, and letters to the *Omaha World-Herald* "Public Pulse." Further, the club galvanized the creativity of the public by soliciting slogans for the campaign, and offering five dollars for every slogan they selected to use.⁵³ Volunteers also wrote letters to over fifty "leading and key citizens who might be able to help bring pressure to bear" on the company.⁵⁴ Press releases were sent to other cities in the nation, and the protest garnered front page coverage in the *Kansas City Call* and the *St. Louis Argus*.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ *Omaha Star*, 22 June 1951.

⁴⁷ *Omaha Star*, 5 October 1951, "Report From The DePorres Club."

⁴⁸ *Omaha Star*, 21 December 1951, "Report From The DePorres Club."

⁴⁹ *Omaha Star*, 29 April 1949, "DePorres Club Notes."

⁵⁰ *Omaha Star*, 5 October 1951, "Report From The DePorres Club."

⁵¹ *Omaha Star*, 21 September 1951, "Report From The DePorres Club."

⁵² *Omaha Star*, 28 September 1951, "Report From The DePorres Club."

⁵³ *Omaha Star*, 12 October 1951, "Report From The DePorres Club."

⁵⁴ *Omaha Star*, 19 October 1951, "Report From The DePorres Club."

⁵⁵ *Omaha Star*, 9 November 1951, "Reports From DePorres Club."

