The reason

Though there has been significant progress in race re instances of discrimination continue in many facets of A

Rare camaraderie: This photograph was taken

A FEW years ago, Charlotte's Athletic Club admitted its first black member. The City Club did, too. But the elite among clubs-Charlotte, Myers Park, Quail Hollo and Carmel country clubs-still have no black members. Charlotte is the largest city in North Caroline in the United States of America. Charlotte has a 26 per cent Black population out of 314,447 citizens. However, in Charlotte, as in many other cities, 11 a.m. Sunday is still the most segregated hour of the week. For years, Mount Carmel Baptist Church has reached out to needy whites in its Endarly Park neighbourhood with food, clothing and emergency money. But not once has a white person from the west Charlotte neighbourhood attended services at the 1,350 member black church.

In Charlotte, American journalists were asking me about the problems of Harijans in India and the discrimination of the minority community. Now the American Press again crying about human rights in India. I also tried to study the living conditions of black and Hispanic communities in the United States of America. In Charlotte I took the help of Mr David Emna, Editor of a local daily newspaper, to visit the colonies of blacks. In Charlotte and Macklaanburg County, blacks now live next to whites in almost every neighbourhood. The city is far less segregated than in April 11, 1968, when President Lyndon Johnson signed the federal fair housing law that banned discrimination, erasing a legacy of whites — only streets and deed restrictions. "Things are a lot better", says Martin Sloane, executive Vice-President of the National Committee Against Discrimination in housing. But Sloane quickly adds that despite progress, desegregation of neighbourhoods has been slower than expected. "It's been disappointing for these first 19 years", he says.

In Macklenburg County, 6 out of 10 blacks still live in predominantly-black areas, 9 out of 10 whites in predominantly whites areas, according the latest census. Blacks and whites still hold separate debutante balls in many cities. Black and white woman also belong to largely segregated service organisations — only two of the 585 members of the junior league of Charlotte are black, none of the 40 members of the Charlotte chapter of the Links Inc. are white. In the Fairnwood neighbourhood, a white family hasn't spoken to its black neighbours since the blacks moved next door 12 years ago.

No matter how prominent, no matter how educated, wealthy or otherwise qualified, no black has ever been admitted to the four old line clubs and many members say they doubt the doors will open any time soon. Most members at all white clubs are reluctant to talk about the clubs — specially when the topic turns to race.

Rolf Neill, publisher of **The Observer** and a member of Charlotte Country Club says that one of the blots on Charlotte and one of the barriers to achieving more than we have as a community is the fact that we have little, if any, after 5 O'clock social life with people with whom we expect to work in harmony before 5 O'clock.

Several black Charlotte leaders say they have no interest in joining the all white clubs. Some say they can't afford to. Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt, who attracted national attention in 1963 as the first black at Clamson University, told me that some blacks, too, choose to exclude whites socially. "I don't want to be a pioneer breaking down the country club", Gantt says. "If they are comfortable having the same race, the same values...

It's not for me to say, look I want to break the racial barrier... that's different from breaking into Clemson or a tax-supported institution.... the bad thing in any of those situations is that one makes a choice to be in a circle based on the accident of birth."

VOTING right laws opened polling booths wide to blacks in the 1960s, but the doors to political office barely cracked.

No black has been elected governor of a southern state. In the Carolinas, only four blacks have won statewide elections this century — all low-profile judicial races. None has served in Congress since 1901.

The reason is race. Most whites still won't vote for a black. "It remains one of the saddest commentaries of our political and social life", says Steve Suitts, director of the non-profit Southern Regional Council. "Usually the only way black people get elected is if black-voters carry the day. Whites don't vote for blacks. There are a few exceptions, but they are so rare that they ought to be put into the Smithsonian", says Suitts.

The Joint Centre for Political Studies in Washington reports that almost 6,700 of 4,91,000 elected officials nationwide are black, up from about 500 before the Voting Rights Act became law in 1965. But whereas blacks make 12 per cent of the US population, they hold 1.5 per cent of elective offices. In the Carolinas, legislators with one Charlotte, three resi of 11 Cou of seven black.

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"People like to vote in general for people who are like them, and race is simply too important in our society", says Ted Arrington, a UNC-Charlotte political scientist.

The exceptions-blacks elected by predominantly white constituencies — include Lt-Governor Douglas Wilder in Virginia, Mayor Harvey Gantt in Charlotte and Commissioner Herman Little in Anson County.

The American Civil Liberties Union have sued on behalf of blacks, claiming that voting districts in the past were deliberately drawn so that white voters outnumbered blacks, assuring the election of white candidates.

"Things seem to be going backward," says Elizabeth Bolton, 46, a records clerk with the department of social services. "Somebody has to look out for our black people."

Blacks say a generation of educational, employment and political progress is under assault. They blame the republican administration, which had cut student aid and anti-poverty programmes and made it tougher to prove discrimination. Although there has been significant progress in race relations since the civil rights movement, blacks and whites still live mostly aparts. The people who have broken down racial barriers have come to know each other as equals without regard to skin colour. Such changes must begin within each person, says Observer Editor David Ennis.

"There is a tendency to say, 'Well. We've done it. The laws are in place. We have made progress,' Ennis says. "But it doesn't work, really, until it works in the lives of us all. If we are going to pull this thing off, there is no one who does not have a role to play. Each individual has to do it."

THERE are signs of hope too. One can see it at the Morgan and Beard Shop on South Tryon Street in Charlotte, where Glenn Morgan and Chuncie Vance work side by side. Morgan is white and Vance is black. They are barbers, both of them nearing the end of their careers, both of them veterans of uptown Charlotte. They have worked together now for more than three years. The shop is open for six days a week, with customers of both races, and the two men occasionally fish together on the seventh. By any measure, they say, the arrangement has worked well, characterised by a deep and gentlemanly respect.

"I don't think we've ever had a cross word", said Morgan. "If we have", replied Vance, "I don't know when it was." West Charlotte High School Seniors Michael Erwin and Stuart Jenkins have the same stylish haircut. "Stuart's is a white fade and mine's a black fade," says Erwin, 17. In a way, the haircut is a symbol.

Though Erwin lives in a black neighbourhood in west Charlotte and Stuart lives in a white neighbourhood in south Charlotte, the two are friends. "We are friends because we like doing the same things," says Jenkins, 17. "We go to parties together... we go to football games."

However, after 17 years of busing for desegregation, most students in the Charlotte-Mecklenberg school system remain separated, academically and socially, by race. "Only half the problem is solved," says Tom Dixon of the US Civil Rights Commission. "Now we are faced with the really hard part: to actually try to alter people's minds."

In Charlotte, housing in the black areas is more likely to be substandard. In business, despite gains in employment fostered by civil rights laws, the corporate offices and the big paychecks mostly go to whites. In the general work force, blacks are twice as likely as whites to be unemployed. The poverty rate for blacks is twice that for whites. For poor blacks the consequences include teen pregnancies, school failure, drug use and crime. For a black professional it may mean a failure to move into management. Black parents have charged that the school system still treats blacks unequally. They cite the system's 10 high schools where, regardless of the racial make-up of the schools, the most academically gifted classes are predominantly white, and the skills classes for slower learners predominantly black.

Nine million black Americans live below the poverty level — officially defined as $11,200 for a family of four. Though most whites are poor — 22 million — the rate of poverty among blacks is much higher, one in every three blacks, compared with one in nine whites.

"The Republican's political shifts are creating a pressure cooker", says Bob Davis, president of the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Black Political Caucus. "We were able to negotiate things a little better before 1980 because people knew we had the federal forces behind us," he says.

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