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Resignation letter from Shirley Lee (March 6, 1962)

Shirley Lee

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Reverend DeWitt C. Clemens, General Chairman  
Citizens United for a Fair Housing Law in Rhode Island  
13½ Mathewson Street  
Providence, R. I.

March 6, 1962

Dear Reverend Clemens,

I have come regretfully to the conclusion that my usefulness as a member of Citizens United has come to an end.

Your recent communications, two to members and one to former supporting organizations, have stressed unity and harmony without actually disclosing present C. U. policy. As a member of the Advisory Council, I cannot agree with present methods or policy, and feel that I should in good faith resign, both from the Council and from the organization as a whole.

I believe it to be most unfortunate that Citizens United could not this year have played the role, let us say, of "Public Conscience", examining publicly and honestly the merits of the two bills that were this year presented to the legislature, and then coming up with a final decision that was arrived at in a democratic and open fashion.

It still does not seem to be clearly understood by those who should know better that open occupancy in housing is essential to all of us, not just to the Negro members of the community who are admittedly the hardest-hit by our presently segregated housing market. Eugene C. Lee, assistant director of the Bureau of Public Administration of the University of California, said in a speech in October, 1960 that this decade will be the moment of truth for this nation in the areas of race relations and land use or, as he put it, in "the problems of race and space". He then said: "Either we move ahead -- rapidly and radically -- on both fronts, or we will leave our children a heritage of strife and chaos from which it will take generations to recover.

"Yes, the Sixties will be the period when Americans decide whether the centers of our largest cities, the fountainhead of culture and creativeness, are to continue to become substandard segregated islands, or whether our suburbs will increasingly be opened up to people of all colors and creeds. Sometime during this decade, demographers will note the fact that less than half of all Negroes live in the South. Will they also be able to report that in the Sixties the Negro began to be offered a free choice of housing on the basis of his social and economic status? An affirmative answer seems no less important to the health of our democratic society, generally, than it does to the Negro individually." *

It will be regrettable if Rhode Island cannot face up to the moment of truth.

* Trends in Housing, Nov.-Dec. 1960

Yours sincerely,

S/ Shirley Lee

Copy to James Doyle, Prov. Journal