

Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man



John P. & C. Buck West

BILAL

The First Muezzin and Treasurer of Islam
(A.D. 600)

"HADZRAT BILAL ibn RAHAB, a tall, gaunt, bushy-haired, black Ethiopian slave was the first High Priest and treasurer of the Mohammedan empire. After Mohamet himself, that great religion which today numbers upwards of 300,000,000 souls, may be said to have begun with Bilal. He was said to be the Prophet's first convert.

Mohamet was then only a camel-driver but in his soul flamed a great vision. His people, the Koreish, worshipped idols, and he yearned to teach them belief in the One God. But when he talked only the poor folk and the slaves would listen. From among these came his first converts.

The masters, alarmed at the spread of the new religion, began to suppress it by force. The converts were horribly tortured.

Mohamet furnished the executive ability and generalship for the new faith while Bilal provided much of the inspiration. Prayer was its great strength and Bilal could exhort more fervently than anyone else. Whenever he prayed, the crowds sobbed aloud. After listening to him the soldiers of Mohamet, whipped to frenzy, were ready to hurl themselves against any foe.

"Bilal also helped Mohamet to create his picture of paradise, which became far more alluring than the Christian one, of which it was an elaboration. Not only were there milk and honey, but also sumptuous palaces of pure gold, with great banquet tables at which thousands of attendants bore the choicest food on golden plates. Each had 300 dishes put before him at once, and he could eat of all of them without becoming sated or being subject to the usual demands of nature.

"Each morning at six Bilal would call the faithful to worship with the words: 'Great is the Lord! Great is the Lord! I bear witness that there is no God but the Lord! I bear witness that Mohamet is the Prophet of God. Come unto prayer! Come unto salvation! God is great! God is great! There is no God but the Lord! Prayer is better than sleep! Prayer is better than sleep!' This is the Azan, or Call to Prayer, and to this day it is the most impressive of Moslem rites.

"After waking Mohamet each morning with the words: 'To prayer, oh! Apostle of God!' Bilal would lead the followers in prayer. He continued to do this even after Mohamet had become the foremost figure of the world. The two were inseparable. In addition to being the high priest and treasurer, Bilal received and entertained the diplomats and the high guests.

"As he neared death, Mohamet named Bilal as his successor, but Bilal yielded in favor of the great general, Abu Bekr. The latter continued Bilal in power and so did Omar the Great, Abu Bekr's successor.

"After the capture of Jerusalem, Bilal rode through the streets on the right of Omar. Entering the Temple there he threw out the Christian images and prepared it for the worship of Islam.

"His power lasted until his death. On one occasion when Khobab, another devoted follower of Mohamet, called on Omar and showed his wounds and told of the battle in which he had fought, Omar rose from the throne, seated Khobab thereon and said: 'There is but one man in all the empire more worthy of the honor than you, Khobab, and that is Bilal.' At another time, he called Bilal, 'the third part of Islam.'

"Bilal lived to a ripe old age and amassed an immense fortune. He advanced his family

WAR ON POVERTY

DISCONTENT WITH WAR ON POVERTY
STEMS FROM LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

by Alice Key

I could not agree more with the local daily newspaper's indisputable editorial observation that "for any program to be handled capably, the public must be informed so that it will accept what is being done". But to paraphrase the late Jimmy Lunceford's musical philosophy "It Ain't What You Say, It's the Way How You Say It".

Color me defensive, if you will, but I freely admit that in the Review-Journal's recently completed "examination of the war on poverty in this area", I did interpret that portion of it devoted to programs existent on the Westside in Las Vegas as an attack on Operation Independence. That interpretation is the motivation for chronicling the factual history of Operation Independence. Because we, too, believe in an informed public, that story on Operation Independence will be detailed in this paper for the edification of the general public but, more importantly, so that Westside residents will get a true picture of the agency--its reason for being and for what it aspires.

The Operation Independence Story has been deferred until the next issue of the VOICE because recent developments on the national scene have brought the realization that indeed, the War on Poverty does need its defenders.

Last week, I made mention of the fact that the War on Poverty would be a political football in this election year. No greater evidence of this can be found than in the organization of the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty. This "Citizens Crusade" that has declared total war on Sargeant Shriver and the Office of Economic Opportunity which implements the poverty program is no sudden and spontaneous uprising of the poor against the government program. The Citizens Crusade Against Poverty is organized and financed by Walter Reuther, who as head of the United Automobile Workers Union, is a powerful figure in organized labor. I leave for you to infer the political implications in an election year with an inside note that in 1960 in Los Angeles, California at the Democratic National Convention, Reuther made the statement to LBJ that if Kennedy selected Johnson as his running mate, he, Reuther, and labor could not support Kennedy.

Our concern, and it is a grave concern, is that through no like concern for the well-being of the masses, powerful forces can trade on our discontent and weariness of heart and mind to stir us up in rebellion against programs designed to free thousands of Americans, of all colors, from the scourge of poverty, per-

and for his slave-brother he secured the rare privilege of marrying a free-born Arab wife.

"Lafcadio Hearn pictures Bilal's last days thus:

"Bilal, the black Abyssinian, whose voice was the mightiest and sweetest in Islam. In those first days Bilal was persecuted as the slave of the persecuted Prophet of God. And in the 'Gulistan' it is told how he suffered. But after our Lord had departed into the chamber of Allah and the tawny horsemen of the desert had ridden from Mecca even to the gates of India, conquering and to conquer, and the young crescent of Islam, slender as a sword, had waxed into a vast moon of glory that filled the world, Bilal still lived with a wonderful health of years given unto the people of his race. But he sang only for the Caliph. And the Caliph was Omar. So one day it came to pass that the people of Damascus whither Omar had travelled on a visit begged the Caliph saying: 'O Commander of the Faithful, we pray thee that thou ask Bilal to sing the call to prayer for us even as it was taught him by our Lord Mohammed.' Now Bilal was nearly a century old, but his voice was deep and sweet as ever. And they aided him to ascend the minaret. Then into the midst of the great silence burst once more the mighty African voice of Bilal--singing the Adzan as it has still been sung for more than 1200 years from all the minarets of Islam . . . And Omar wept and all the people with him."

"Bilal was buried at Damascus, where his tomb was one of the principal sights for centuries."

manently.

THE TRAGEDY lies in the fact that it is not difficult to stir up the discontent of the poor, because unfortunately, too many of us don't understand the purpose of the War on Poverty. How many of us realize that the Poverty Program was designed for long range goals.

How many of us have said either with humor or in dead seriousness "None of the poverty money is rubbing off on me." The Poverty Program, or its administrative agency, The Office of Economic Opportunity, was not activated to provide money for the pockets of the poor, no matter how great the distress. It could not operate that way, nor should it.

But there is no gainsaying the fact that due to the Congressional budgetary allotment to the OEO, the poverty war is being successfully waged. Because of money, more Southern school Districts were integrated through the Head Start program than had been accomplished in the ten years that have passed since the Supreme Court's 1954 School Desegregation ruling. There is no argument that the Head Start Program is an incalculable weapon in the long range plans of the poverty war, and remember that, since its inception, 776,000 children have been enrolled in Head Start.

There are nearly 50,000 youngsters in the 97 Job Corps Centers scattered throughout the United States. Stop to think where these youngsters would be, and/or what the future would hold for them without the advent of such centers. There are over a half million children presently being advantaged by the neighborhood Youth Corps.

True, there are many still unemployed, and what is even sadder, unemployable, but the movement goes on. Some three-quarters of a million of the poor, are now job-holders who were not before, and educational and training opportunities are opening every day.

WE MUST CONTINUE to press, even to fight for equal opportunities, but we also must define and recognize the enemy and obstructionist who thwart us at every turn in achieving our goal.

We should be forever grateful to President Lyndon Johnson's hard-fought for War on Poverty Program, for the significant contribution it has offered, toward our challenge of "NOW", is that it has "shook-up" Big Industry, the powerful labor unions (as guilty as Management in perpetuating job segregation), and the power structure of our cities, by the knowledge that we, the poor, the deprived, the discriminated against, are no longer alone in our quest for equality of opportunity. We have a powerful ally. Deny us, and answer to the Federal Government.

There is no reason to exercise ourselves about what what shortcomings or faults exist in the national program--the enemies of the program will expose them with glee. A worthy commentary on the program is, that despite the very formidable opposition to the national program, its detractors are unable to offer substantial arguments against the intent and purpose of the war on poverty, and little against the administration of it, other than obvious problems expected of any program as broad and encompassing as is the poverty program. In view of this, for a revolutionary program, the War on Poverty has fared well, even at the hands of its opposition.

It is for this reason, it is necessary and vital that we are given a clear picture of local programs under the aegis of the Poverty Act. For the anatomy of local communities, in itself, makes it far easier to attack on the home front.

LAS VEGAS
Voice

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