

**Guest Editorial**

**BLACKS AND THE CONVENTION**

By Bayard Rustin

Miami Beach--should anyone have doubted it, the Democratic Party National Convention convincingly demonstrated that Black Americans have come of age politically.

There were more black delegates than at any previous national political gathering and the influence they exerted was both highly visible and profound. They helped assemble a socially and politically progressive platform and played significant leadership roles in the convention's administration.

In cataloguing black accomplishment at Miami Beach, I do not mean to infer that we "proved" anything. There is no need for blacks to prove anything of a political nature to ourselves, to the Democratic or Republican parties, or to the nation. We have more than earned our niche in the political scheme of things through vigorous, effective and, in contrast to elements of both right and left, responsible activism and organization.

Yet the integral, constructive role we played carries important implications during a year when, we are often told, a fundamental transformation of black political behavior is taking place.

I do not argue that we are somehow experiencing a political revolution. What we are undergoing is the continuation of the growth of our influence and a normalization of our participation in the electoral process, a trend which has been going on for a decade. The magnitude of our convention role is a reflection of that progress.

One of the accomplishments of the convention, however, was to puncture two unwarranted and potentially damaging myths about black politics. The first is that blacks need a system of guaranteed quotas to ensure that they will be fairly represented within the major political parties. The second is that our political outlook is shaped primarily and overwhelmingly by race; that the mere fact of our being black overrides differences in ideology, economic background, and the political traditions in which each individual was nurtured.

Our role in the Democratic Party went much deeper than the election of delegates. It includes the appointment of many blacks to key convention committees and the selection of Patricia Harris as credentials chairman, Yvonne Braithwaite as co-chairman of the convention and Kenneth Gibson as chairman of the platform committee.

As for the idea of unity based on race, I think the convention clearly showed that Negro political activists are motivated by factors other than blackness. There were blacks committed to the labor movement and its objectives; there were those who come from the civil rights movement; there were those who have risen through the ranks of urban political organizations.

Each represented their particular constituency, be they sharecroppers or ghetto dwellers, as well as the candidate to whom they were committed.

As black people, we are unified by past discrimination, by institutional bias that remains, by a shared history of deprivation and by the present day consequences of all of these. Only in this sense was there a black unity at the convention. It exerted itself by insisting that the party's presidential nominee would be running on a platform uncompromisingly and openly dedicated to racial fairness. There unity ended.



**LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

SUPREME COURT OF NEVADA  
DAVID ZENOFF, CHIEF JUSTICE  
CARSON CITY, NEVADA 89701

COPY

July 21, 1972

President  
The Elks Club  
B. P. O. E.  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Dear Sir:

I note recently that the National Elks organization refused to remove the restriction on Negro membership. Frankly, until the recent publicity, I was unaware that such a restriction existed.

Despite my long-term membership in the Elks and affection for my many friends who are members in the Las Vegas Elks Club such a restraint on membership is incompatible with my ideals. I therefore resign.

Very truly yours,

David Zenoff

DZ:img  
Copy to: Dr. Charles I. West

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