

By Paul C. Smith

A CIVIL RIGHTS DEBACLE

The trial in Federal Court of eight policemen, formerly members of the Las Vegas Police Department, charged with violating the civil rights of members of two black households ended in the acquittal of the officers.

Not having attended the trial, I cannot say that the prosecution fell down on it. Job or not. What we can say however, is that just how the facts in this case were twisted or hidden makes the hopes and dreams of justice futile. The despair and loss of hope has spread over the travesty of justice.

Having covered the case back in 1971, it appeared at that time that it would be impossible for the officers not to be found guilty (in a Federal Court).

Blacks are, by experience, apprehensive of getting justice especially when they have cause to believe that their civil rights are violated by police officers. In this case the evidence was so conclusive against the officers, your writer was only one of a few blacks who predicted the final outcome. Not because of weak evidence but because very seldom are police found guilty of wrong doing where blacks are involved, regardless of circumstances and especially in Las Vegas.

It will be most difficult for us to convince blacks that the system works. We have held that the system works. We have held that the system will work. The many cases which have occurred were not strong enough to win even in the Federal Courts. The fact that the Justice Department took the case gave hopes that finally blacks had a remedy to police oppression.

It is indeed most unfortunate for the peace of the community that justice was blind.

We also are blind to the argument often presented, that it would be bad for the morale of a law enforcement agency. If some of its members were found guilty it would cause a breakdown of law and crime would become rampant.

Just how did the system evaluate why it took so many officers to try and catch one youthful black suspect?

Was the word of black witness given less weight than the word of eight white police officers? We would be naive to believe that their testimony would not support their defense.

The worm has not turned--it still eats into the core of Civil Rights, not just of blacks, but of all citizens.

Until the time comes when the word of a citizen will be given the same weight as the word of police who are supposed to protect us, then and only then can we proudly say that they system can and does work, and that before the law all men are equal.

We have no doubt that the system can work-- We only need the opportunity to tell the world that it has worked. An opportunity that we hoped against hope had finally come to our city. We share along with the community the grief that justice is still blind for black folks.

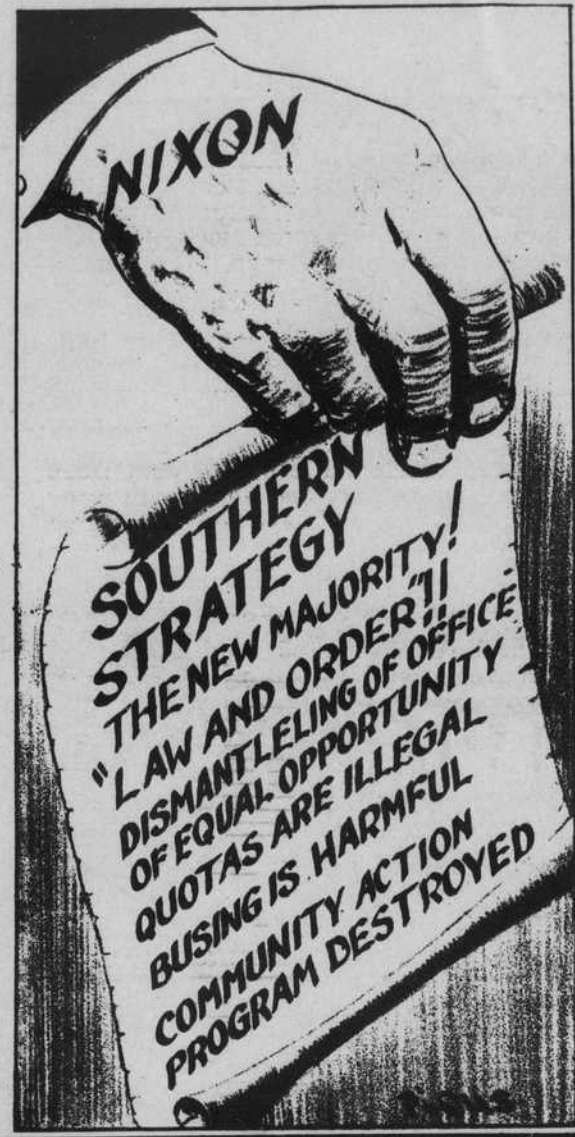
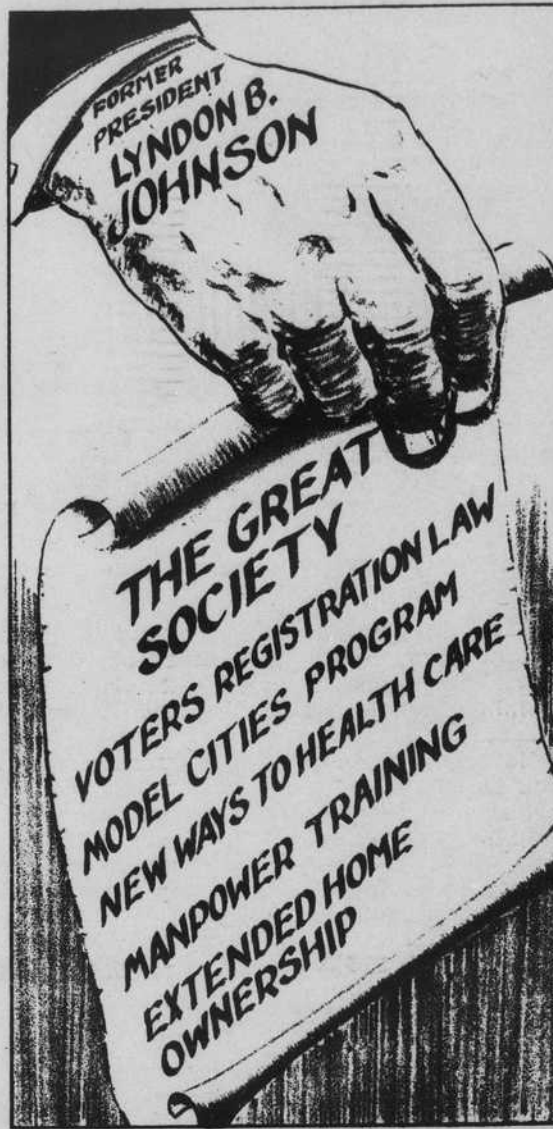
THE SLA AND ITS APOLOGIST'S

BY BAYARD RUSTIN

One speaks of the Symbionese Liberation Army with hesitation, not wanting to further legitimate something which has already been overanalyzed and overexalted. The name Symbionese Liberation Army is itself an absurdity. For the white, middle-class girls and black ex-convicts who played at revolution were certainly no army. And the only thing they succeeded in liberating was their own disturbed psyches.

More troubling that the SLA itself is the reaction it has stirred in the press and among otherwise thoughtful, intelligent people. Between the reality of the SLA and its perception by supposedly responsible journalists and intellectuals has arisen a wide chasm filled with romantic speculation and thoroughly confused

AFTER 20 YEARS, WON MUCH, BUT MUCH HAS BEEN UNDONE



thinking.

The SLA was composed of spoiled girls, many of whom came from quite comfortable backgrounds, and a black escaped convict with a history of emotional problems. Nono had a history of serious political involvement. During the space of a few months, they managed to commit murder, kidnap several people, wound two bystanders during a bank robbery, and terrorize countless other individuals, including the residents of the black neighborhood in Los Angeles, where six of the SLA met their deaths.

The response by man has not been to condemn these acts as barbaric and anti-human, but to debate, and in many instances condone, the SLA's ideals, motives, and moral consciousness. A clergyman has drawn a parallel between the principles of one of the slain girls and Jesus Christ. A Columbia University professor has compared Patricia Hearst with Pocahontas on the editorial pages of The New York Times. There have been numerous reflections on the importance of the SLA as a revolutionary entity. And again and again there are accounts which, while decrying individual acts of violence committed by the SLA, offer praise for the social commitment of its members.

There is a curious racial double-standard in the attitudes towards the SLA members, and particularly towards the young white girls. The SLA's first "revolutionary" gesture, we should remember, was the murder of the black Superintendent of Schools in Oakland, a man who was highly respected in the black community.

The assassination of Marcus Foster was not the expression of even a warped sense of political imperatives, but rather an act of mindless violence, committed by sick individuals. Yet his death is all but forgotten, and, to judge from some commentaries, is considered less tragic than the untimely fate of his professed slayers.

If there is a lesson to be learned from the SLA experience, it is the futility of violence as a means of effecting social change. This is a lesson of some consequence today, because society seems committed in the name of social justice.

Nor is the cult of revolutionary violence a uniquely American product. In the Middle East, in Northern-Ireland, in Southeast Asia--innocent

people are being killed, and their deaths justified on the grounds of making a more equal society.

It is easy enough to assert that there are deplorable social conditions which lead to acts of desperation (this was not, however, the case with the SLA). But the most profound, enduring, and humane social change has always been created non-violently. For history has taught us that the social vision of those who would enforce their goals through force is as narrow and ruthless as that of the dictators they sought to replace.

The response of the press and of many intellectuals to the SLA is a reflection of a society which is in danger of losing its vision and sense of priorities, a society unable to distinguish between high ideals and despair. If we are to move forward to the creation of a just world, where the dignity of all men is recognized, we must totally reject, not simply the tactics of the SLA's violence but the motives and social vision which produced that violence.

Get A Checkup Regularly

It can save your life... If you want to wipe out cancer in your lifetime

American Cancer Society

God is hope. God is now.

LAS VEGAS Voice

A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER (Published every Thursday) DEDICATED to the INTERESTS and ASPIRATIONS for a BETTER LIFE for NEGRO CITIZENS of the STATE of NEVADA

- CHARLES I. WEST, M.D. Publisher
- PAUL C. SMITH Managing Editor
- DOROTHY S. WEST Treasurer
- BEATRICE BRYANT Office Manager
- Art & Layout
- DOROTHY JOHNSON Food Forum
- LETHANIEL DILLIGARD Religious News
- Advertising

EDITORIAL, ADVERTISING & CIRCULATION OFFICES
900 West Bonanza Road, Lobby Suite (Moulin Rouge Hotel) Las Vegas, Nevada 89106 Telephone 648-2615

ADVERTISING RATES FURNISHED UPON REQUEST

Price per copy - 15¢ * One year - 7.50 * Two years - 12.50
(Application for 2nd Class Mailing Permit pending at Las Vegas, Nevada)