

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

By **Lawrence Albert**

Guest Editorial by Otis Harris

This article is in response to the editorial written last week by the editor concerning my association with the Black Athletes Hall of Fame Awards recently held at Caesars Palace Hotel. I appreciate being given the opportunity to explain my position with the organization and what transpired to bring such a group to our town.

I have been looking for a long time to bring a prestigious group of black people to Las Vegas. As I am not a Convention salesman, I can only officially work with groups who are available to make the trip here as tourists. But my main purpose was to bring a group here who are in the decision making end of the business and the production end rather than consumer. I felt that this type of people would enable the local residents to make some top flight business connections.

Last year I was invited to the First Annual Black Athletes Hall of Fame Awards, which were held in the Americana Hotel in New York City, at one hundred dollars a plate. I was very impressed with the assembly and caliber of those people present. I came back to Las Vegas and invited the organization to hold the next awards in Las Vegas, that we had a sports minded community, who would support their efforts. They came and eventually chose Caesars Palace as the hotel to host their event. They were expecting 3000 people from across the nation and from Las Vegas. There are few places in Las Vegas, that can hold that type of crowd, serve food and entertainment too.

The Black community was never ignored because the business people were the first people contacted to form a coalition in support of the event and sponsor something in the Black community. This never happened.

All and all after many difficulties the event did take place. It was a success and this community due to lack of Las Vegas support won't see the Black Athletes Hall of Fame here. Dallas, Texas sent a contingent of fifteen top flight executives including the Mayor Pro-tem to induce the corporation executives to locate the BAHF in Dallas. It is timely and one day will be the major Black event of the year as evidenced by the words of the likes of O. J. Simpson, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Gayle Sayers and others.

I really thank those people in Las Vegas who had the foresight to try to help me establish Las Vegas as the home base for this event. Some of those who worked their hearts out were: Sylvia Harris, Al Brown, Vertia Truner, Arlene Smith, Kathryn Joseph and the Delmonicos, Geane Danise, Bonnie Junell and Jerri Bilberry. There were others too and I thank them also.

I hope one day Las Vegas Blacks will wake up and look around. Then start doing something to elevate this shameful condition we're in. The only way we are going to do that is by getting involved in the main industry in the state, and that is bringing people to Las Vegas to have fun!

Otis Harris



BAYARD RUSTIN

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ELDRIDGE CLEAVER

It was not so long ago that Eldridge Cleaver was hailed as an articulate prophet of black revolution. His principal work, "Soul on Ice," was widely praised, and there is no question that Cleaver's prose was compelling, even moving as it conveyed the bitterness and rage of the black dispossessed. When we remember that Cleaver was an uneducated man who had spent much of his life behind



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prison bars, his accomplishments as a writer become even more impressive.

But Cleaver's imposing style camouflaged the shallowness of his political thought. It was clear that behind the articulations of anger and frustration was a conception of society which had little relation to the concrete situation of the majority of black people. He shared a sense of rage with many black people, but he did not understand their aspirations. Indeed, he could not have, since his was a voice of hopelessness: the fulfillment of his political vision required the collapse of race relations. Thus Cleaver asked blacks to support him for the presidency in 1968 as a protest against what he proclaimed to be a corrupted and racist political system, blacks ignored him to support Hubert Humphrey. Many suspect that Cleaver received more support from guilty whites than from blacks.

This leads to an interesting point. And that is that it was white liberals, and not blacks, who were most outspoken in their praise of Cleaver. Cleaver found himself in the ironical position of on the one hand railing against the injustices of white society and on the other hand finding his most receptive even worshipful audience among affluent white socialites, influential white academic journalists, and the children of the white middle and upper classes.

Cleaver the revolutionary would never have existed had it not been for the masochistic orgy of white guilt which absorbed many well-known liberals. The most irresponsible social critics created his image accepting unquestioningly Cleaver's most bizarre ideas--such as the proposition that the act of raping a white woman represented a positive gesture of insurrection. (a notion which Cleaver himself rejected as dehumanizing).

Six years ago Cleaver fled the United States fearful of being returned to prison for parole violation. Little was heard from him until, in a recent Newsweek interview, he expressed a number of political judgements which do not simply revise his previous doctrine, but altogether contradict the very ideas which secured his fame and notoriety.

Instead of his once unbridled contempt for American society, Cleaver now asserts that the impulse of the American people is "anti-colonialist." The man who once declared that a "dead pig is the best pig of all" now favors "closely controlled police forces to guarantee public safety," according to Newsweek. The stridency of his anti-Israeli rhetoric had been moderated: Cleaver now says that the Middle East conflict is "more complicated that we thought it was." While he is still convinced that the police acted illegally in its suppression of the Black Panthers, he personally re-

jects the use of political violence.

A principal reason for the transformation of Cleaver's thought seems to be his experience in Communist and Third World countries. He had traveled in the Soviet Union, China, and several East European countries, and it is apparent that he has lost all illusions about Communism's potential as a revolutionizing agent. Even more striking are his views of the Third World.

A "cultural chasm" separated him from the people of Algeria, where he lived for several years, and he appears to have given up on the possibilities of Pan-Africanism.

To those of us who rejected the proposition that black liberation could be won through the barrel of a gun, who failed to see a foaming racist behind every policeman's shield, and who believed that underneath the appearances of dislocation racial progress was in fact being made, Cleaver's transformation is hardly surprising. For it was predestined that Cleaver, like all others whose philosophies were rooted in extremism and hatred, would either alter his views to conform with socio-political realities, embrace an opposite or equally as extremist doctrine, or, refusing to change, suffer that worst of fates--to be ignored. It is to Cleaver's credit that he is open-minded and honest enough to have learned from his experiences in exile.

One cannot be as generous to those whites responsible for molding the mystique of the black revolutionary. They really never believed in the potentiality of the type of revolution Cleaver preached; he represented, for them, a distorted image of black America through which they could enjoy a perverse, second-hand participation in social rebellion.

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