



by
LAWRENCE ALBERT

**EDITOR'S
NOTEBOOK**

**Do Not
Back
Down**

Recently a Black man from our community took his family to one of the local quick ordering places for hamburgers. The young White waitress proceeded to treat the man like a child, telling him where to stand and what he could or could not do.

This is just one example of how Whites treat us all over Vegas.

This has always been a prejudicial city. Only a few years ago we could not eat at any of the restaurants either on the Strip or downtown. We could not expect to be employed in any other capacity than maids, porters or dishwashers.

The civil rights activists of the 1960s opened quite a few doors for us. We can eat on the Strip, attend shows, and hold reputable jobs.

Now, signs are popping up of things reverting to the days of old. Policemen have begun their brutality on us again. Whites pretend they are afraid to visit our community.

White youngsters refuse to play baseball at the Doolittle Recreation Center. They say they are afraid we will vandalize their autos and disfigure their bodies.

Our children are having more and more problems in the school system.

We are a patient people, but we cannot afford to back down from White people as we have in the past. If we do we will lose everything we gained in the 1960s.

Bayard Rustin

It is ironic that, just as America's bicentennial celebration draws near, this nation finds itself engulfed by a sea of indecision and self-doubt. Never before have Americans been less sure of their goals. Confronted with a rapidly escalating economic crisis--with over nine million unemployed--our political and intellectual leadership appears immobilized by a lack of purpose and loss of will.

The stagnation of leadership has not, fortunately, infected all of society. In a few weeks the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People will open its 65th national convention in Washington, D.C. For most of this century the NAACP has been a leading force for moral, social and political change. Other organizations, of course, have contributed to



social and racial progress. But far too many are notable today more for their mistakes and weaknesses than for the very real results they achieved. Indeed, with the single exception of the labor movement, no other organization can be said to have achieved the level of enduring and far-reaching changes as has the NAACP.

I point this out because I believe there is something in the traditions and philosophy of the NAACP from which all society can learn, particularly when that society suffers from a thoroughgoing crisis of purpose.

The most fundamental point is that the NAACP was founded by individuals who had a particular vision of the kind of society they wanted to create. They were inspired by the conviction that a racially equal society could be forged through the use of every available democratic process: the courts, the political system, and the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and assembly.

These principles, moreover, were the benchmark for NAACP activism over successive generations. The militancy of its leadership did not diminish when they were denounced as anti-American by racist and demagogues. Nor was the courage of its local activists affected by threats and murders.

By the same token, the NAACP's commitment to integration and non-violence enabled it to survive what was perhaps its most difficult period--the turbulent sixties. This was a time when Roy Wilkins was dubbed "Uncle Tom Number One" by archmilitants and separatists and when the NAACP, because of its refusal to abandon its integrationist ideals, was dismissed as irrelevant to the changing tide of black struggle.

Today, one seldom hears of the advocates of what was erroneously characterized as a movement for "black power." Few are actively engaged in the serious business of working for racial change; most dropped out of the civil rights movement altogether or drifted into any number of marginal causes, ranging from Republican business conservatism to forms of a nationalism entirely inappropriate to the American situation.

Roy Wilkins has remained as probably the most important black leader because, unlike his critics, he believed that prejudice was not an inevitable part of American life and that American society could indeed be transformed.

The cause that he and the NAACP refused to embrace--separatism, black studies programs that exclude whites, violent action--are today no longer seriously debated.

What we have experienced, in fact, is a return to the ideals on which the NAACP was founded. And that is that basic institutions must be reformed so as to serve human needs, and not profits, and that black people must be full participants in all aspects of society if they are to achieve the benefits of and exert maximum influence on that society.

Its adherence to these principles has given the NAACP a renewed significance, while their abandonment led to the demise of others. The NAACP has also adjusted its strategy: where once it sought change primarily through the courts, today it is increasing its legislative activities in recognition of the fact that economic change must be achieved politically.

There is an important lesson to be learned from the history of the NAACP, and it is our political leadership which would profit most from the experience. Social change is advanced by those who have a personal stake and philosophical commitment to its achievement. Those who in frustration would as soon bring society down, and those who resist the democratization of society are doomed to failure. The NAACP's accomplishments are an enduring part of our history: its critics and those who ignored its call for a more decent human order will soon be forgotten.



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