

Black Politics Under Pressure

BY VERNON E. JORDAN, JR.



Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

Black votes elected a President in 1976, but you would never know that from the neglect shown black interests by the current crop of candidates.

Some just write off the black vote as beyond their reach; others take it for granted, assuming that come November the black vote will be in their pocket.

Both are wrong. In 1980, it looks like the black voter will not be enthusiastically FOR any of the candidates, but chances are strong that the black vote will go AGAINST a candidate perceived as hostile to black interests.

Perhaps an even greater possibility is that black voters will just stay at home come Election Day. That would be

damaging to the country, since massive abstentions among its largest minority damages the democratic process.

But it would be even more harmful to black interests. The limited clout wielded by blacks on the national level is partially a result of traditionally low

voter turnouts. Even in 1976, half of eligible blacks didn't register to vote. That just invites neglect by both parties.

LOW TURNOUT DISASTROUS

And low black voter turnout would be disastrous on the local level. We're not only electing a President this November, but also governors, congressmen, local officials and the state legislators that will redraw Congressional district lines next year.

The already low black vote declines in non-presidential election years and is one cause of the drastic underrepresentation of blacks in local offices. The visibility of competent, articulate black mayors of some large cities leads many to underestimate the degree of black underrepresentation.

Although blacks are about twelve percent of the population, they account for less than one percent of all elected officials. Further, according to research by the Joint Center for Political Studies, the rate of increase in the number of black elected officials has been declining steadily since 1975.

One factor is low black voter turnout. But a more insidious one is the way many communities structure local governments to dilute the black vote. One common practice is to elect city commissioners, council members and other local officials through at-large elections, instead of by districts. The result is to exclude candidates from positions of power, since the white majority's votes swamp those of even large numbers of minorities.

A case in point is

Mobile, Alabama, which is governed by a three member commission elected at-large. Although blacks comprise over a third of Mobile's population, no black was ever elected to the commission.

SYSTEM DISCRIMINATED

A federal district court said Mobile's at-large election system unconstitutionally discriminated against the city's blacks. It ordered Mobile to adopt a mayor-city council form of government in which voting by district would assure blacks of council representation.

But last month the U.S. Supreme Court threw that ruling out. The Court said that in the absence of proof of intent to discriminate there was no violation of constitutional rights.

Here again, the Court has taken refuge in the difficult to prove doctrine of intent and the result is to sanction discriminatory effects. The ruling increases the pressure on the limited gains blacks have made in the political arena.

Those pressures will intensify. An expected outcome of the Census is a population decline in traditional black neighborhoods, which raises the danger that some "safe" districts now represented by blacks will be up for grabs after district lines are redrawn.

The first line of defense against present and future dilution of black representation is massive black voter registration and turnout. For blacks, far more is at stake this November than simply choosing among the presidential hopefuls.

One Vote Is Important!

One vote is important. One person or one family or just one group of voters can swing the outcome of any election. All of us have a lot to gain - and a lot to lose in elections. Make your vote count.

Politics thrive on the ignorance of the masses falling in line. Aligning with little knowledge of the absolute results of what unity can do if "the vote gets out."

Poor disenfranchised individuals have the power to stop being discouraged from participating in the political system.

I believe that registering - reading the issues - aligning yourself with those who have the power to change the structure and following thru by voting intelligently can save our children and assure our community's destiny.

Voting begins the extensive important movement to no longer be ignorant, to begin to synchronize logistically to be mobile enough to organize a political balance that will monitor our own capabilities and needs.

RIVER'S LAW



A black community newspaper published every Friday by the Galaxy Publishing Company.

Betty Brown
Editor In Chief

Bernie Rivers
Advertising Director

Bernie Rivers
Circulation Manager

Betty Brown
General Manager

Sports Editor Lonnie Wright
Lay-Out Editor Quin Leggett
Fashion Editor Lei Strougther
Copy Editor Betty Brown

Letters To The Editor

Dear Editor:

I just want to say that we are proud of the work by our NAACP. They certainly have the interest of the black community at heart. Dr. James McMillan is doing a fine job of providing efficient, dedicated leadership to the agency. By the way, does Dr. McMillan have any ambitions to replace County Commissioner Ronzone?

Paul Gardner

Dear Editor:

I'm enjoying your series on the part of Las Vegas blacks participating in the development of this community and area. History speaks for itself. Much sweat and sacrifice was generated by a number of blacks, particularly in those early days. Blacks were here 75 years ago when it all started. We are very much a part of the "valley."

Arlene Harris

Sentinel Offers Opportunities

Las Vegas abounds with black talent in every field of endeavor.

There are any number of skilled athletes, entertainers, businessmen, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, salesclerks, secretaries, nurses, doctors and lawyers. We could go on and on.

We also believe there are many men and women in our community who are skilled in those areas that are vital to the publication of a newspaper.

The Sentinel desperately needs black

writers and reporters, photographers, copy editors, graphic artists, advertising salespersons, typists, paste up artists, delivery persons, researchers, off-set proof readers, correspondents, columnists, artists and many others.

There are so many interesting positions to fill - and you don't have to have a college degree to become a newspaper person. We can train you.

We have a limited budget and can't pay everyone for every task. But there are some

salaried part-time jobs that can be worked into fulltime jobs and some salaried fulltime positions available.

Yet, for those who already have a means of livelihood, but are looking for something exciting and challenging to get into in their spare time on a volunteer basis, the Sentinel has much to offer.

There's no business like "News Biz."

Why not drop by or give us a call to find out what we have for you!