

# The Political Process

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald



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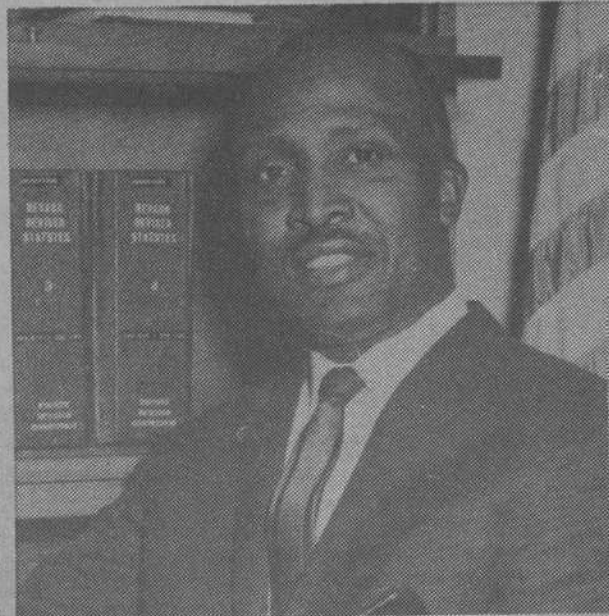
st Blacks on the Dam due to their limited num- voting for the first time. Project in July of 1932. bers. By 1934, most had Most were new arrivals During the first week of joined the Democratic from the South. Most had September, of that same Club because of been denied the right to year, Black Republican President Franklin D. vote. Poll taxes, literacy & Democratic Clubs were Roosevelt. In 1935, as a tests and Grandfather bought. It would have organized. J.P. Liddell bloc, they supported Clauses had been the been more difficult to ad- Leonard Arnett in his bid agents used. Most had to mit racism. The stigma of ming the G.O.P. Henry for Mayor. He won by a make political decisions Blacks selling votes Christian was elected margin of 374. based on the utilization of began with that charge Chairman of the Between 1940 and 1950 normal criteria and also a made by Pittman. The Democratic Club. the Black population in- criteria which only they fabrication was fanned Because both creased nearly a thousan- could and can appreciate. furiously and what was organizations existed, dfold. They had come Vail Pittman was a fable continued to fester their voting tendencies here because of Basic white man who had been in the fallowed frons of could not be assumed by Magnesium and the born in Vicksburg, the "fairminded" until a either party: one being military bases. Theirs was Mississippi in 1883. His ferreter functioning like a confident that it would get the source of the greatest parents and himself had flycatcher found the facts number of new registered benefitted from excluding and flung the fallacy, with voters in Clark County. In, Blacks from the vote. laugh, into the faces of 1944, they played an im- While a Nevada legislator the feces feeding far- portant role in a major he had voted in favor of a ceurs. election: McCarran vs. poll tax. Earlier, while The 1920s, 30s and 40s Pittman for Senator. editor of the Ely Daily were simple times. The contest between Times, he had written a People did not have much Vail Pittman and Pat Mc- editorial in which hebut, in the words of my Carran has been downgraded the darker favorite eulogiser, described as the bitterest races and maintained "What they had was pure gold." Life's pleasures were equally simple. What latter day politicians have described as a group of people who could be bought for a barbeque and a flagon of whisky were, in actuality, a people who were fighting over- whelming odds in their attempts at assisting the "Holy Experiment" of 1789 to come to fruition. They looked to the "ex- perts," those who had been voting for years, for guidance and none was forthcoming.

The Constitution extended the right to active participation in the new government to a select group of Americans. Collectively, the criteria one was required to meet was that he be: free, male, white, a property owner and at least twenty-one years old. Obviously, that criteria did not include Blacks.

When the Nevada Constitution was drafted it adhered to that same format. While it was opposed to slavery, it also restricted voting rights to white males. Blacks had cause to celebrate, in 1870, following the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. That Amendment had extended the right to vote to Blacks and there were celebrations in its President, Joe Light- several Nevada towns. foot. On one such occasion, with Bill Jones as Virginia City, Elko and Treasure City were the toastmaster, political more notable. This was aspirants were in- so, even though the Black population in the state were Senator Oddie and between the years of 1870 Congressman Arentz. It is and 1900 only averaged reported that over 300 280. were in attendance. The Black population, at the time was less than 150. Apparently, there were some white people present.

By the time Las Vegas Black population, at the time was less than 150. Black population was Apparently, there were some white people present. The second quarter of Las Vegas history is marked by the beginning of the Boulder Dam in 1931. No Blacks were hired, initially, on the project. Their efforts to gain employment, necessitated their organizing. The Colored Citizens Labor and Protective Association Even though their votes were sought after, Blacks bought."

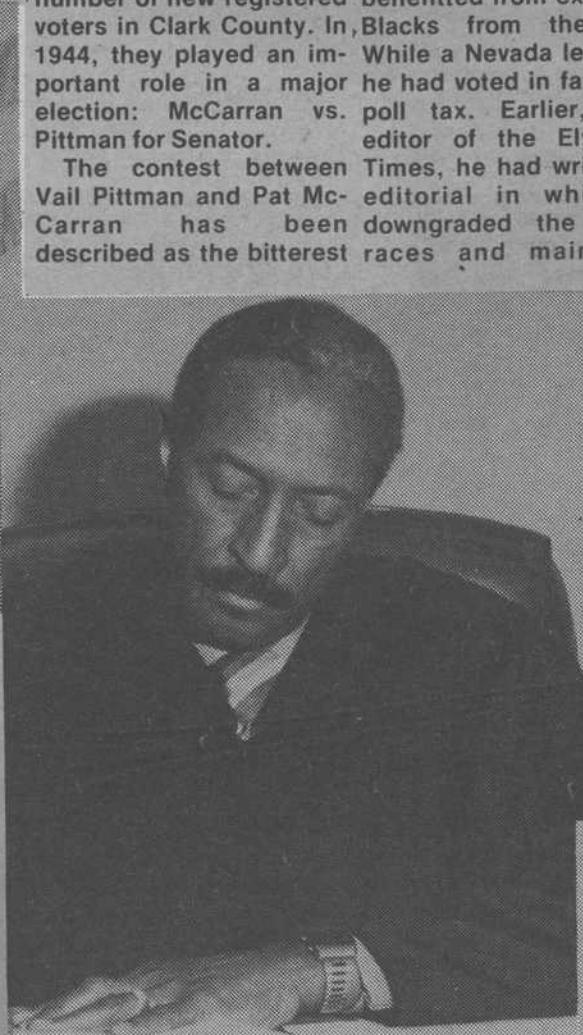
Within the next ten years, a chapter of the NAACP had been founded in Las Vegas. Many about the hiring of the fir-



Woodrow Wilson

political awareness meetings were conducted at the Mitchell Ranch by its President, Joe Light- several Nevada towns. foot. On one such occasion, with Bill Jones as Treasure City were the toastmaster, political aspirants were in- troduced. Among them were Senator Oddie and Congressman Arentz. It is reported that over 300 were in attendance. The Black population, at the time was less than 150. Apparently, there were some white people present.

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Dist. Judge Addelair Guy

all of the Black votes and in Nevada history. Both the other assuming that it counted heavily on the would get none. Both had Black vote of Clark Coun- to campaign and both ty. Pittman was certain made promises. Can- that it was "in the bag." didates visited both. They It was not. He lost by a included such notables as total of 1241 votes. He Pat McCarran, C.D. Baker wrote a friend, Mortimer and H. Harmon. The num- Moore, that "I was sup- ber of total votes in the posed to get the Negro "the Caucasian as the state and in Las Vegas vote — 1200-1500 — highest type." He went on to say that any "ad- Carran — Primarily, I am venture in eugenics would Even though their votes informed, because it was be a crime against civilization."



Sen. Joe Neal

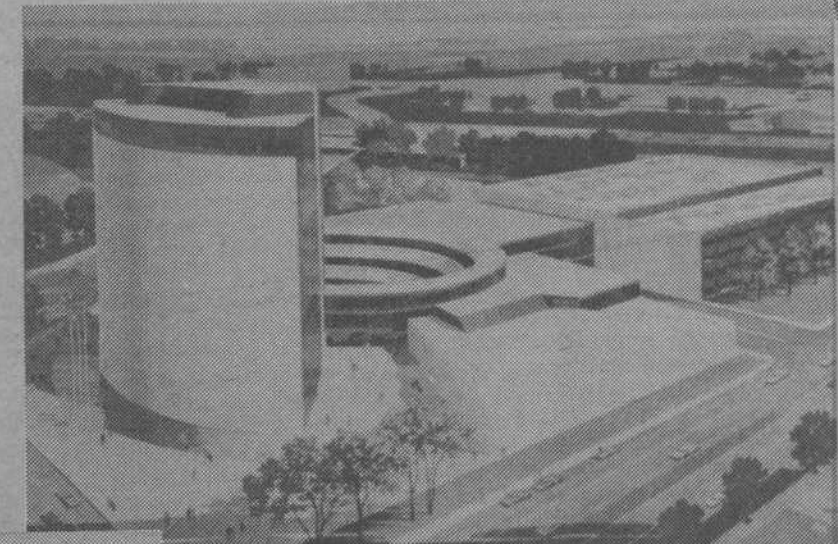


Aaron Williams

In 1950, a non-partisan

political group was The very foundation of our Democracy, the concept of equality, was made of ducted by the NAACP. politicians was apparent. Under the leader- ship of Andrew Bruner, it sand. It constantly The purpose was to look After fifty years of trust in washes away with the ebb at the record of those for white politicians, Black Black residing there. It and flow of the tides of whom Blacks had voted. It Las Vegans began their was a commendable un- racism. was found, in the words of efforts to organize the Hank Greenspun, that community in support of "Every election year, the Black candidates. The people of the Westside of NAACP spearheaded the town have to listen to the organization of the same old blah, blah, blah, Nevada Voters League. and for a week before the They supported Grant election, the city would Sawyer in his bid for send a grader to that sec- Governor in 1958. Senator tion and dispatch the dust Cannon was also sup-

Following the probe a streets were blacktopped. The need for Black sand. It constantly The purpose was to look After fifty years of trust in washes away with the ebb at the record of those for white politicians, Black whom Blacks had voted. It Las Vegans began their was found, in the words of efforts to organize the Hank Greenspun, that community in support of "Every election year, the Black candidates. The people of the Westside of NAACP spearheaded the town have to listen to the organization of the same old blah, blah, blah, Nevada Voters League. and for a week before the They supported Grant election, the city would Sawyer in his bid for send a grader to that sec- Governor in 1958. Senator tion and dispatch the dust Cannon was also sup-

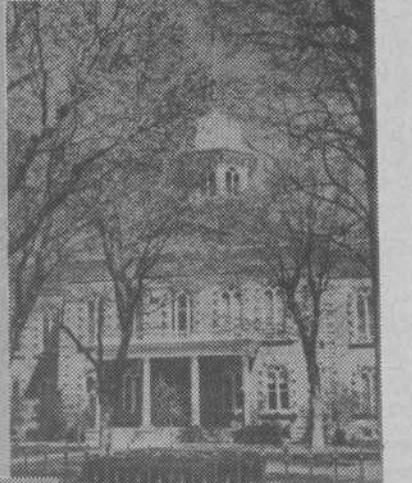


Las Vegas City Hall



North Las Vegas City Hall

same period. But, then, swirling heavenward. The black ministers are also day after the election, the fice. referred to as grader goes back to the Blacks continued their that be have responded, backlash" could not have "preachers" while white city barn." It was not until efforts. Finally, Woodrow Gerrymandering, a happened had whites ministers are "men of the 1951, during C.D. Baker's Wilson, the first Black southern strategy, has been previously term as Mayor, that a few Assemblyman, was elec- been utilized. The registered voters.



State Capitol Building, Carson City

strength of the Black community has been watered down considerably. Positions on the City Commission, such as that held by Aaron Williams, are all but out of the question for Black political aspirants. This is especially true if several Black candidates continue to insist on aiding the opposition by splitting the Black vote. Blacks must win the whole "ball of wax" during the primaries. In run-offs, the opposition invariably supports the white candidate. There has to be unity, or Blacks may as well get out of the fray.

ported. Both won. Only ted in 1966. Other Black Sawyer reciprocated. He Assemblymen have been became intensely in- elected. The high point of volved in pushing for Civil Black political in- Rights legislation. Can- volution resulted with non took a powder. the election of Senator of the fray. During city elections of Joe Neal in 1973. 1959 the League sup- ported Wendell Bunker for black elected officials Mayor, Dr. Charles I. West currently serving is ran for City Com- District Judge Adelaar D. Reciprocity Guy, Dept. 11. Very between the two was the popular and active in agreement. Bunker many community affairs, received 1100 votes from Judge Guy has been the Westside. Dr. West favored to run for the only received 289 votes Nevada State Supreme from outside the West- Court. He has told the side. Clearly, West had SENTINEL that he will not helped Bunker more than run this time for the Bunker had helped him. higher post. Both, however, lost in their bids for public of- fice. As Black successes brought about the "white have grown, the powers backlash." The "white that be have responded, backlash" could not have "preachers" while white city barn." It was not until efforts. Finally, Woodrow Gerrymandering, a happened had whites ministers are "men of the 1951, during C.D. Baker's Wilson, the first Black southern strategy, has been previously term as Mayor, that a few Assemblyman, was elec- been utilized. The registered voters.