

Point of View



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Democracy On Trial

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Ambushes do not always take place in box canyons. Sometimes they occur right in the middle of a valley and in plain sight of everyone. It is often reminiscent of the old adage that "if you want to keep something secret, do it right out in public and no one will notice."

In 1909, Walter Bracken introduced the idea of restricting Black people to Block 17 of the Las Vegas Townsite. Blacks did not protest because their numbers were so small and because there had been no one to protest to. No law was being violated, unless one considers the Laws of God to be important — the one concerning the universal brotherhood of man. It was the authorities who created the condition and Black people did not expect them to do anything about rectifying it.

Similar conditions existed throughout the U.S. and, quite often, they occurred in places where Black people comprised a sizable portion of the population. The NAACP, which had been organized in 1910, witnessed a period of almost continuous growth. Just ten years after its founding, there were chapters in dozens of cities around the U.S. In each and every instance, the organization brought pressure to bear on those elements of society which sanctioned discriminatory practices. One of the first had to do with housing. As a result of their tireless efforts, the Supreme Court ruled, in the case of Buchanan vs. Warley (1917), that it

was unconstitutional to restrict the place of habitat of Black people to certain sections of towns or cities.

Las Vegas chose to ignore that ruling. No one was breathing down its neck to make certain that the laws were being adhered to and, in its own conscienceless way, it violated the law each and every day from 1917 until the passage of an open housing law of 1971.

In so many ways, the introduction of Assembly Bill 5, in 1947, served as a signal for Black Las Vegas. They became cognizant of the contradictions of democracy which existed and, more than that, they were sensitized to the fact that not every white person, in the U.S. or Las Vegas, looked upon them as inferiors. They were convinced, however, that they had to garner more support. There were also those who did not feel that Black people were really American citizens.

Through their organizations, they began to develop even more unity. The NAACP served as a focal point for all activities. Its membership was comprised of people of all different religious persuasions. It must be remembered that during that time, the major sources of community interaction was through the several different churches. While their services were conducted within different edifices and led by different ministers, their needs were all the same, both spiritually and temporarily. The sameness of their aspirations were put in focus through the

efforts of the NAACP.

The officers and membership of the NAACP represented all of the different congregations, and through their meetings — even though they were not always well attended — the general needs of the Black community was carried back to the individual membership of the individual churches. Because phone service was limited, most communications were by word of mouth and on a person to person basis — television had not yet taken away the facility of self expression and people still talked with each other.

There was not a lot to do in Las Vegas, especially for Black people, so it was not unusual to find people discussing matters of interest following Sunday services or mid-week prayer meetings. They realized, apparently, that no help would be forthcoming from the city and that it was imminently clear that something had to be done. The major problem was yet that of housing. By November of 1947, a decision had been made to erect 223 new homes on the Clem and Francis Malone property. Those homes would sell for something on the order of \$7,500 each.

Early the following year, Black people organized the Westside Chamber of Commerce. One of the City Commissioners, Robert Moore, said that "it was a good idea since there were no funds available for westside municipal improvements." Black people had discovered that fact already. It was because of that very reason that the Chamber was organized. Citizens take matters into their own hands, usually, only when the authorities fail to do the job. They set about establishing their own businesses, and they helped each other. They conducted neighborhood cleanup drives because the city did not provide those kinds of ordinary services to the westside which were available to other areas of the city.

1948 witnessed yet another introduction of

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DEBATE SAYS MX SAID TO BE MIGHTY EXPENSIVE

By Andrew Young

NEW YORK — The most important debate here was centered just where it should have been — on the economy:

It boiled down to one question: Should we develop a plan for real economic growth with wage and price stability and a policy for full employment, or should we continue the pursuit of military "superiority" while the economy descends into the abyss of inflation and recession?

Meanwhile, there was a serious but little-noticed discussion of economic priorities and military spending policy, as symbolized by the proposed MX missile system. The MX would be a kind of moon-shot spectacular, featuring nuclear-armed rockets surrurying around on railroad tracks in the deserts of Utah and Nevada.

This scheme supposedly would bolster our confidence in our ability to destroy the world better than the Russians can. It would also siphon billions of additional dollars for the defense establishment — dollars that most Democrats agree are badly needed for jobs and human services. Delegates on the convention floor waved



YOUNG

signs inscribed "MX" — Mighty Expensive."

Given the choice between \$12 billion targeted to create new jobs and productivity, and a similar ap-

propriation for new bombers and missiles, there is no doubt where the nation's mayors, the black delegates or the schoolteachers' convention bloc would have lined up.

To get an idea of the kind of economy we need, we might look at some of the European countries. While we allocate additional billions of dollars to our arsenals around the world, the Europeans are directing their attention to economic revitalization.

New hardware projects like the MX missile do nothing for U.S. economic security. Neither can we countenance new military ventures. The bombs of Vietnam, we should remember, caused an explosion of inflation and unemployment in our cities here at home.

There was a healthy dialogue on the economy during the Democratic convention.

OPEN SEASON ON CIVIL RIGHTS?

By Vernon E. Jordan

The lame-duck Congress passed an amendment to an appropriations bill banning Justice Department participation in busing suits, signaling an open hunting season on civil rights laws.

Not that this particular amendment is so novel; other restrictions have made it through the Congress in the past. But this one would effectively take the executive branch out of the business of remedying unconstitutional school segregation.

It would even bar the Justice Department from enforcing court busing orders, something the courts will probably find unconstitutional. Congress' attempt to handcuff busing is a direct interference with the executive branch's sworn duty to enforce the laws of the land.

Ironically, it came at a time that yet another study was published documenting busing's beneficial effects. Researchers at Catholic University's Center for National Policy Review

found that busing programs in metropolitan areas encouraged housing desegregation.

They noticed a decline in residential segregation patterns in cities with area-wide desegregation, and concluded that further integration of housing would ultimately mean busing could be discontinued since the schools would be integrated without it.

The researchers found that when only the center city was subjected to busing orders, "white flight" to the suburbs was encouraged. But when the entire metro area was subject to desegregation, reluctant whites could not flee and the pattern was reversed.

The lesson has been clear all along that busing and other, more often used means of desegregating schools, work when local authorities and citizens groups pitch in to make it work. The long-term meaning of Congress' action is that communities resisting

desegregation can expect to be rewarded, while those who comply with the law will have to struggle through on their own.

But busing is only one of the civil rights measures threatened.



JORDAN

Pressure is building in Congress to undercut federal affirmative action enforcement. Senator Strom Thurmond, the 1948 Dixiecrat candidate for President and now slated to be the new Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has said he wants to scuttle the Voting Rights Act.

Legal aid for the poor is high on the Congressional hit list,

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