

THE COMMUNITY TRIBUNAL SEGMENTS AND THEIR POWER

EDITORS NOTE: This is the second in a series of articles prepared on the **COMMUNITY TRIBUNAL SEGMENTS AND THEIR POWER**. This week the series deals with the political aspects. Part III will continue next week.

By Bob Palm

POLITICS

For years political alliances of groups of people in the black community from the same Southern areas gave them disproportionate power over the rest of the community, but now some political strategists believe that influence is almost nonexistent.

Those alliances consisted primarily of rural blacks from Louisiana, specifically, Tallulah, and some areas of Arkansas. Lesser alliances between people from different areas of Mississippi helped to catapult such people as former Clark County Commissioner Woodrow Wilson and North Las Vegas Councilman Bill Robinson into political prominence.

But for years the men who could deliver a large bloc of votes to the candidates of their choice were former Assemblyman Lonie Chaney and his brother, Jim.

On any given day they could field more than 50 campaign workers, and deliver about 1,600 votes.

Their power came primarily from people from Tallulah. Political analysts said longtime State Sen. Joe Neal used that Louisiana alliance to get elected to office and to stay in office almost longer than any other state politician.

That alliance was very evident when Neal defeated former Assemblyman Woodrow Wilson for the Senate seat from the black community.

Neal was the first and only black to be elected to the state Senate. He defeated Wilson although Wilson had fought to have a district carved out so that a black could be elected to the Senate.

Wilson was the first black to be elected to the State Assembly.

Former Assemblyman Marion Bennett said at one time that the Tallulah faction could elect anyone they pleased because they stuck together.

"You were lucky to be from Tallulah, and a political candidate in the black community," Bennett said,

but, of course, there were a couple of glaring exceptions to that rule.

One such exception was former Assemblyman Cranford Crawford, who is from Texas, defeated Virginia Brewster, who is from Louisiana, for the assembly seat. However, Brewster came back later and was elected to the Clark County Board of School Trustees.

Her election came after another faction from Arkansas had flexed its muscles and elected Bernice Moten Jenkins as the first black to sit on the school board.

Bennett himself was an exception to that rule when he got elected in the early 1970s to the Assembly, replacing Wilson. Bennett, who has lived in Las Vegas since 1960, is from South Carolina.

The black Southerners who combined their votes to create that power base live in several pockets in the black community.

Regal Estates is a mixture

of people from Louisiana and Arkansas. Another group of people from Arkansas live in Del Monico at Highland Drive and Carey.

A lot of people from Louisiana live near C.V.T. Gilbert School, and round Madison Sixth Grade Center. However, Bennett said people from Louisiana are pretty much stratified, and live all over the black community.

Those blocs of votes helped to give certain individuals in the black community influence in the white community because they could always promise a certain number of votes to certain white candidates, sources said.

Other sources said an indication that those alliances are falling apart was the defeat of Chaney in 1984 in his bid for the Clark County Commission. He was defeated by Commissioner William Pearson who is from Alabama. Pearson defeated Chaney by more than 9,000 votes to 2,000 votes, the largest margin of votes any black candidate had ever received in Nevada. Another indication of that dwindling

strength was when Neal, with 12 years seniority in the Senate, beat political newcomer David Phillips in 1984 by only 500 votes, the sources said.

The sources said further that there also is an emergence of conservative faction in the black community consisting of business people, ministers, portions of Nevada Black Chamber of Commerce and stalwart black Republicans.

That emergence shows there is no longer a bloc of votes in West Las Vegas, the sources said.

Sources said those political alliances were only able to develop because the "folks" were from the rural South, and were treated with a plantation mentality but those same folks have now matured politically and vote their conscience with some of them even vying for political offices themselves.

Some persons with whom we talked said that in the past, Chaney could deliver about 1,600 votes to candidates of his choice, which gave him a great deal of influence in the white and black communities, but Chaney's political back was broken with his disastrous defeat by Pearson. Neal, who never had a political machine, always piggybacked into office on the strength of Chaney and political activists such as Ruby Duncan. Neal almost lost his bid for reelection because Chaney's political back was broken, some believe. Sources said the new black voters is a professional, better educated and in many cases from the Northern cities. They also have a higher degree of employment.

Then there are the blacks who live outside the black community, and have incomes, between the wife

and the husband, of more than \$40,000 a year.

Sources believe they are "quite conservative," and are concerned about "taxes, not welfare, as well as the national deficit and interest rates. They are not concerned with black issues. They have to be reached from a political cultural position by going after their roots. They have to be appealed to as a black brother.

Some sources indicate that the falling apart of the political alliances means "less opportunity for manipulation of black voters, greater opportunity for more people to participate in the political process, and the elimination of whites being able to say they can't help us because we are not together. Whites now have to go after the individual black vote and treat blacks like the rest of the population."


(To be continued next week)

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