

# GRADUATES HOLD CEREMONY 22 YEARS AFTER INTEGRATION

By Muhammad Abdullah

More than 22 years ago, two African American students, Las Vegas Charles Bilberry and Jerry Traylor, then students from the first integrated class in rural northern Louisiana, were denied the right to a graduation ceremony because many whites did not want to mix with blacks at Marion High School.

Recently, several of the African American students of the 26 transferees from all-Black Eastside High School decided to organize the belated commencement ceremony. These 26 transferees included Bilberry and Traylor, who found themselves among 31 new white classmates at Marion High School in their senior year.

Despite the Federal court mandate for desegregated schools, Traylor, Bilberry and the other 24 graduates found that the long held attitudes towards African Americans were slow to resolve.

Bilberry, an engineering inspector for Las Vegas Valley Water District and Traylor, an electrician at McCarran International Airport, said they both have mixed feelings about donning caps and gowns for high school graduation 22 years late.

"I have mixed feelings because we were denied our dignity just because of our race," said Bilberry.

On June 7, 1992 the two Las Vegas residents finally marched in their purple caps and gowns along with 14 of the 57 members

of the senior graduating class, including two whites.

According to Bilberry, racism was at the core of the cancelled graduation ceremony. One factor he believed was that classmate Traylor was senior class Valedictorian.

"I don't believe that the school board or the parents and students were ready to accept an African-American honored as their Valedictorian, and decided to cancel the ceremony."

Traylor said that he would always regret having to leave his childhood friends from

Eastside High, where the resources and academic opportunities were superior to those at Marion. However, both Bilberry and Traylor, like most of their fellow classmates, harbor no bitterness about the incident.

Unlike Eastside High School, Marion High School had a football team, a band, and many advanced math classes.

"We actually benefited from that racist system," said Traylor.

At the ceremony, Traylor served as Valedictorian and encouraged fellow classmates to become a part of the solution

and not part of the problem. He urged them to, "accept people as they are."

George Smith, now retired, was the principal at Marion High School and also participated in the ceremony. Traylor said Smith was always a fair man. Smith claimed he had planned the ceremony and was unaware that the school board had cancelled it.

Charles Allen, then president of the Union Parish School Board in 1970, did not show up and sent a statement that the event was inflammatory and adds to

racial strife.

Although some of the classmates are still bitter, Bilberry said he harbors no ill feelings. "I have no hate or hard feelings toward anyone. It was just the Jim Crow way of life."

"If our people can learn to play together on the ball fields and die together on the battlefields, then we ought to be able to turn to each other as brothers and sisters, instead of turning against each other in racial hostilities," he said.

"It's a proud moment, a belated moment," said Bilberry,

whose 7 year old son Jared, watched his father raise his hands in glee after being handed his diploma.

"It is time we remove the cataracts of racism from the eyes of America."

Traylor left a long to be remembered theme on the hearts and minds of his former classmates, and parents and relatives of the two-hundred or so that attended the Marion High School ceremony in the school's new gymnasium. He urged them to, "receive healing through forgiveness."

## WHAT HAPPENED TO RIKKI CHEESE?

By Ray E. Willis

"Ray? Hi, it's Rikki Cheese. How are you doing? It's really nice to talk to you." So began my recent telephone conversation with the former TV-3 anchorwoman.

As most of you recall, Rikki Cheese was a principal anchorperson on Channel 3 news for several years. Then, abruptly, she was gone without explanation. What happened to Rikki Cheese? asked those who had grown accustomed to her polished, believable on-air news presence.

It was as though she mysteriously vanished without a trace. Before long word came that she had relocated to Seattle, Washington where she worked as a

news producer behind-the-scenes, at KING-TV.

Now divorced, Cheese has been living for about a year in Dallas, Texas, where she works at CBS-TV affiliate station KDFW as associate producer of the six p.m. newscast.

"Eventually I want to go back to anchoring," Cheese said "But I have really enjoyed emerging myself in producing. What I'm doing now is incredibly exciting, and rewarding."

"I'm really learning a lot in terms of what it takes to make an overall newscast effective. How each element works. What is crucial to the overall cast," she said. "Yes I do want to eventually go back to anchoring the news. But for now I'm really

content to develop my skills in producing the news."

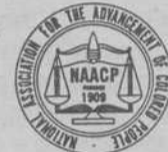
While the circumstances that led to her leaving Channel 3 remain somewhat shrouded in mystery, there's no mistaking that Rikki Cheese is on the move. Her future remains bright, despite any setback she may have encountered in the past.

Only time will tell whether she will eventually return to the Las Vegas television market and to her adoring public.

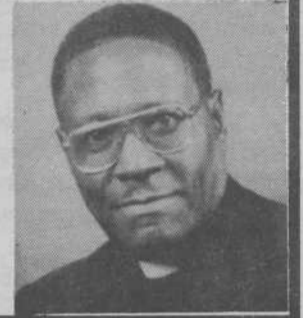
"I would really like to come back to Las Vegas," Cheese said, indicating she is in negotiations with her old station, Channel 3, and another local station which she wouldn't name.

What happened to Rikki Cheese? Well, now you know.

### THE NAACP AND YOU!



Rev. Jesse D. Scott  
President  
Las Vegas, NAACP



### NEVADA VOTER'S LEAGUE

State Senator Joe Neal was elected President of Nevada Voter's League at its September 7, 1992 meeting. Ms. Debra Scott was elected Treasurer and Rev. Chester Richardson was elected Secretary.

The League has now changed its Candidates Night from Monday the 26th of October to Monday the 19th of October, 1992 at Club Moulin Rouge, 900 West Bonanza, at 7:00 p.m. Come out and meet the candidates. Admission is free. Come One-Come All!

The League is inviting all candidates who made it to the general election on November 3, 1992 to be present on Candidates Night.

A panel will ask each of them questions about what they propose to do in their District to help their constituents and particularly what they propose doing to help Afro-Americans in North West Las Vegas.

The time has now come when Afro-American must band together and stay together if they are going to demand a real part of the Social, Political and Economic Pie in Nevada. It's obvious to the League that Afro-Americans living in North West Las Vegas have been neglected and deserted by most elected officials for a long time.

High rates of unemployment and unaffordable housing statistics of Afro-Americans living in the above mentioned area have been used by the politicians to qualify for Block Grant funds, and instead of using them for the needy, they are given to the greedy - three million to Valley Foods on Bonanza and "D" Street, and seventeen-plus million was given to Main Street Station on Main Street.

Now election time has come around once again and here they come shaking hands, grinning and lying about what they are going to do, which is nothing, zero, unless you stand up and demand it.

The League wants all Afro-Americans to become politically sophisticated and to realize how important their one vote is. Don't stay at home on election day, listen to the losers talk about how your vote does not count. It is one of the few things that you have that really counts.

All candidates who have been endorsed by the League will be announced at the NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet Saturday, October 24, 1992 at Bally's Hotel & Casino.

#### PLAN AHEAD FOR THIS YEAR'S NAACP FREEDOM FUND BANQUET

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to pay \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per  
month or in \_\_\_\_\_ installments. In \_\_\_\_\_ check  
\_\_\_\_\_ cash or until \$100.00 is paid.  
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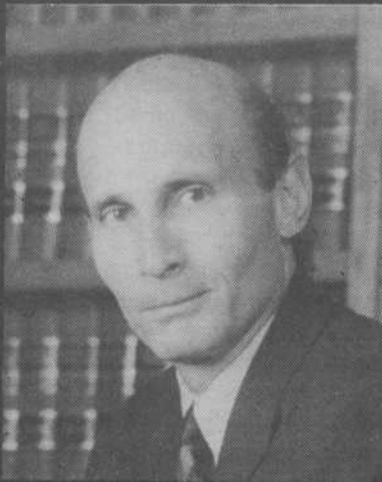
All those who qualify to attend the NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet on or before October 2, 1992 will receive a surprise gift.

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