

Young

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he soon learned, was: "Preach with your bags packed because if you REALLY tell the truth, people will be offended and you'll have to move on to the next town." That, he writes, "has remained a constant in my character in the decades since."

He proves these words throughout the book, by delivering unvarnished accounts of every prominent character, not sparing even King, whom he nevertheless portrays with great compassion. Young describes his own role as not advising King about what to do, but simply summarizing the facts and analyzing the options for King. "Martin eventually made all the decisions himself," Young recalls frankly, "and as often as not they were not what I privately would have preferred that he do."

He writes of Ralph Abernathy, King's best friend and closest confidant: "Ralph wanted press coverage. When he made a speech by himself, no press showed up to cover it. If he traveled with Martin, there was at least the possibility of getting his picture taken." And on the August 1963 March on Washington: "Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young scrambled for the early slots. At first they had done everything in their power to stop the march, but once it was going to happen, they were determined to be the stars."

Young leads the reader on a personal tour through the milestones of the civil rights movement, from the 1960 student sit-ins in Greensboro, N.C. to the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C.

in summer 1968. He was with King at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on the night of King's murder, and writes poignantly: "My first gut reaction was classic anger and denial: Martin couldn't leave us with all this mess. It seemed unfair that he was 'free' from innumerable problems, while we, the living, were left to try to cope without him. We had been just getting by with him, how could we get along without him?"

As was feared, no one could replace King, and the SCLC soon fell into disarray. This led to Young's resignation from the SCLC and his first, unsuccessful race for Congress in 1970, followed by his victory two years later.

In a visit to San Francisco last month, during his book promotion tour, Young abandoned the usual tactic of relating incidents from the book, and instead delivered a speech reflecting his present-day view of the nation and world, then invited questions on a variety of subjects.

Asked about the fairness of affirmative action, he said in his soft, musical drawl: "In Atlanta, blacks who got contracts with the city could not discriminate against whites. A black-owned firm was required to have at least 25 percent white employees. A white-owned firm was required to have at least 25 percent black employees." Then, shifting to a world perspective, he added: "Without affirmative action, you get Northern Ireland, which is clearly a situation where the Protestant minority controls most of the power, most of the

education, most of the wealth, and discriminates against the Catholic majority."

Praising President Clinton for his sensitivity toward racial issues, he expressed faith that Clinton would manage to get around the negative provisions of the recently signed welfare bill. But he couldn't resist a friendly jab that brought a roar of laughter: "Clinton is nothing but poor white trash who made good."

A youthful 64, who speaks with an air of total confidence and easy informality, Young admitted that true visionaries, such as Martin Luther King Jr., are rare today. "Too many people are looking back — people who are thinking racially," he said. "Anybody who's thinking racially rather than globally is not visionary. We've got to have an economy that includes the whole world and includes the poorest of the poor at home. And I think that's the only economy that will really work."

Asked whether he considers the United Nations "impotent"

today, he replied without hesitation: "It is — only because the United States is not personally committed. It's a U.S. institution. It was founded here in San Francisco. It requires the idealism, commitment and finances of the U.S. We're not doing our part."

With such outspokenness, Young seems unlikely to be headed for a high-level appointment in the Clinton administration. Nor has he announced any plans to seek further political office. The question lingers: What next for this revered "elder statesman" of civil rights, who is still in his prime?

Young plans to resume his book tour in January, with stops in Dallas, St. Louis, New Orleans, Detroit and possibly Minneapolis. "An Easy Burden" is also available in an abridged three-hour audiotape version, read by the author (Harper Audio, \$18).

Max Millard is on the staff of the Sun-Reporter, San Francisco's weekly African-American newspaper.

Soul

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vibing and looking at velvet posters through the black lights with incense burning. We titled it "House of Music" because you're gonna hear music with all kinds of favor."

He was also quick to point out that because the group is established creatively and commercially, they now have more freedom to produce the kind of music they want to do. "We are enjoying what we do, enjoying the way we produce, enjoying and doing the music that we write." Unlike too many other groups who have to pay attention to what radio is doing and the latest flow or trend, Tony Toni Tone can focus on their own vibe, he explained.

He further suggested that new groups need to break away from the pack and focus on original quality. "It makes the difference to your longevity," he said. "You may not be the most popular, but if you're consistent with what's jumping off you've got a better chance."

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Published Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice — January 2, 1997