

OUR VIEW

Vocabulary Malfunction

By now you've either seen, heard or read about the unfortunate incident at KTNV Channel 13, in which weekend weather anchor Rob Blair referred to Martin Luther King Jr. as "Martin Luther Coon King," then heaped insult upon indignity by calling the venerable civil rights leader "Martin Luther Kong" in an on-air apology. KTNV was purportedly inundated with calls and e-mails from outraged viewers. Inside sources say there was an attempt to whitewash the mishap and give Blair a pass and only when concerned employees agitated did station management take the matter seriously.

Jim Prather, vice president and general manager of the station, apologized for Blair's "stumbling," then announced that the weatherman was no longer employed with KTNV. According to published reports, Blair claims he learned of his termination via the newspaper. (Blair, whose faux pas occurred during the morning newscast, made another apology later during the 6 p.m. telecast: "On a weather report earlier this morning, I made an accidental slip of the tongue when talking about the Martin Luther King holiday, and what I said was interpreted by many viewers as highly offensive. For that, I offer my deepest apology. I in no way meant to offend anyone. I'm very sorry.")

News of the incident has made it all the way up to the Associated Press and the New York Times, shining a none-too-pretty racial spotlight on the former "Mississippi of the West." Talk among local Black activists now is how to go about exacting a pound of flesh from KTNV to ensure that (1) such an incident never occurs again, and (2) the incident can be leveraged into action.

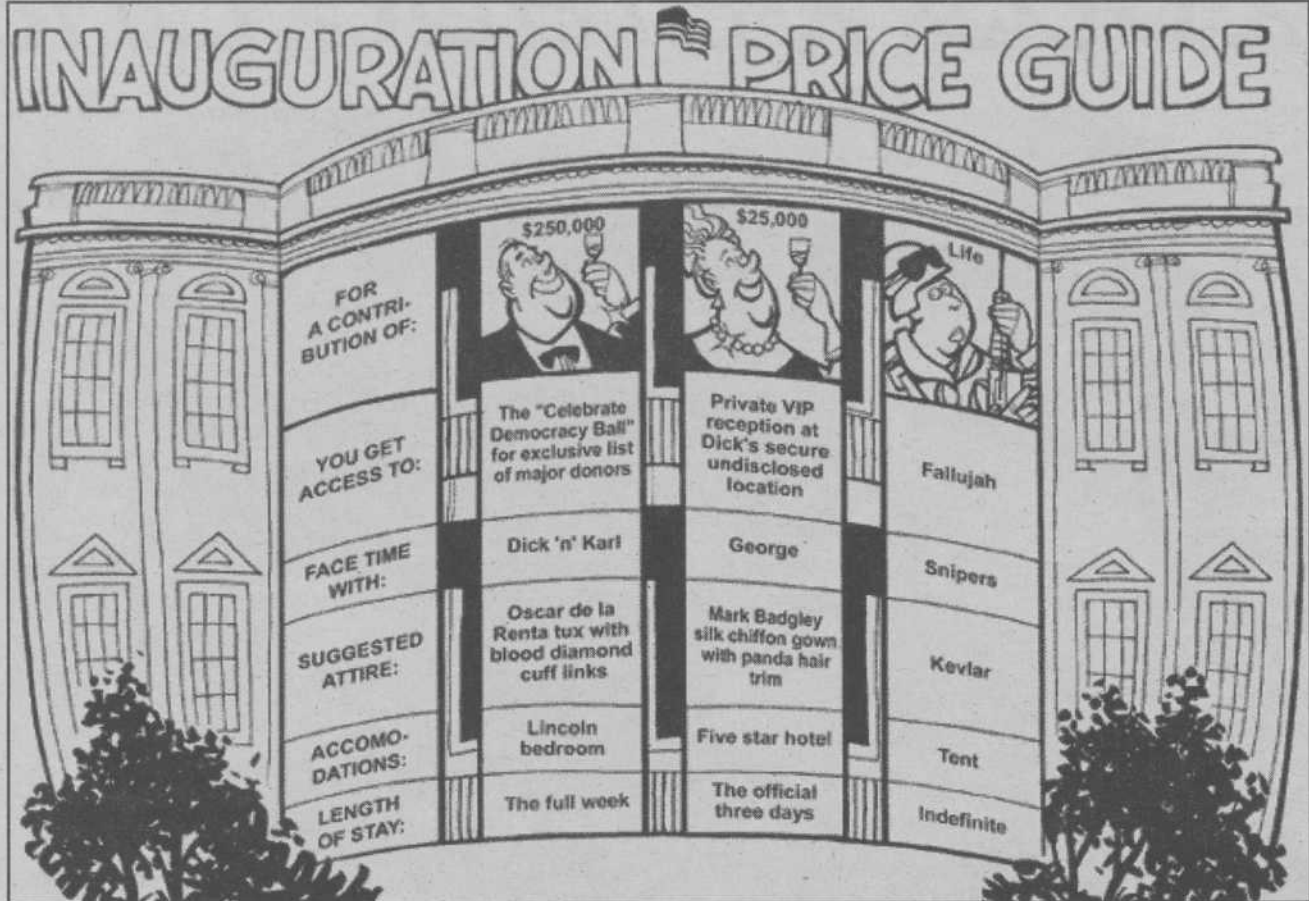
Almost as embarrassing as Blair's brain lapses is the fact that the entire debacle could have been prevented. Insiders say at least six people were there when Blair taped the weather forecast for the 7:55 a.m. Saturday segment (a director, technical director, producer, audio person, a person rolling tape and someone who types in the text that appears on TV screens.) This means there was ample opportunity to more thoroughly vet the tape and catch the mistake.

"There were six to seven pairs of ears that should've heard what happened, and no one said anything, no one stopped and said 'maybe we ought to redo that one'," an anonymity-seeking source told the Las Vegas Review-Journal. That the mistakes managed to avoid detection signals a lack of professionalism at best and willful racism at worst.

The postmortem spin-doctoring surrounding Blair attempted to paint him in a good light—a dolt, but certainly not a racist. Problem is, his errors were egregious to the point of being sad. Diss him once—Martin Luther Coon King Jr.—shame on me. Diss him twice—Martin Luther Kong—and shame on you for thinking you can get away with it. With issues of race always bubbling beneath the surface in Las Vegas, Blair unwittingly ignited a cauldron of repressed anger.

What might've been dismissed as so much paranoia or racial venting at any other time now is seen as a legitimate gripe: Is racism the reason Black media professionals haven't advanced as fast as their counterparts? Slip-ups like Blair's give credence to racial conspiracy theories. No how matter much furor is raised over this incident, no matter how much ink is spilled, no matter how it's talked about on the radio, all this unleashed anger will be for naught if Blacks don't seize on this opportunity to champion change in the newsrooms in the form of more employment diversity, equal opportunity, minority-specific internships, along with other programs that show the local media is making demonstrable commitment to diversity.

POINT OF VIEW



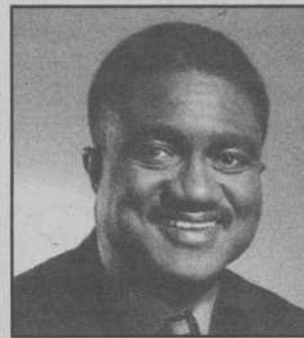
Jim Forman: A real-life legend

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When I learned about the death of Jim Forman, the former executive secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), it brought back many memories. I spent the summer of 1966 working for SNCC in Atlanta. At the time, I was 19 years old and stood in awe of the young warriors who were on the cutting edge of the Civil Rights Movement.

To this day, I can't think of better examples of bravery. In no way do I mean to minimize or denigrate the contributions of soldiers that go off to war. Of course, they are brave. But they are trained for war and know about the impending danger. Unlike professional soldiers, unarmed civil rights warriors put their lives on the line without being backed up by heavy weapons, troops, planes and ships. SNCC workers went to war armed only with hope, determination and a burning sense of justice.

Jim Forman, always dressed in overalls and often puffing on a pipe, was the resident sage of SNCC. He remained dedicated to human rights until cancer got the best of him at the age of 76. A shrewd tactician, in 1969 Forman dramatically interrupted a communion service at Riverside Church in New York to demand \$500 million in reparations from White churches and synagogues as



GEORGE CURRY

part of a "Black Manifesto."

Forman was more comfortable serving in the background of an organization brimming with youthful talent: John Lewis, the future Congressman; Julian Bond, now Board Chair of the NAACP; Stokely Carmichael, later known as Kwame Ture; Charlie Cobb, Willie Ricks, Bill Mahoney, William Porter and so many others that I got a chance to meet and study. I remember being captivated by the stories they would tell upon returning from the field to SNCC's headquarters in Atlanta.

One of Forman's books, "The Making of Black Revolutionaries," first published in 1972, captures both the danger and excitement of the 1960s. The lives of activists were threatened on a daily basis because they threatened the status quo in the Deep South.

Forman writes, "In Dallas County, only 130 Black people were registered to vote out of an eligible 15,115, according to a 1961 Civil Rights Commission Report. Adjoin-

ing Wilcox County had never had a Black voter, although its population was 78 percent Black. Lowndes County, which also borders Dallas and also had a huge Black majority, had never had a registered Black person either. That was the way things had been for almost seventy years and that was the way Whites intended them to stay."

But SNCC had other ideas. And though Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), received most of the credit and news coverage, SNCC had been working in many rural communities long before King showed up on the scene.

And that wasn't easy. "Sam Block [a SNCC organizer in Mississippi] would eventually receive a severe beating from three Whites, which fractured his ribs and put him in bed for a week," Forman writes. "Yet, in some

ways the physical danger and violence seemed no worse to the SNCC workers than the loneliness and other psychological strains.

"People would just get afraid of me," Sam reported. "They said, 'He's a Freedom Rider.' Women told their daughters, don't have anything to do with me, that I couldn't carry [take] them out because I was a Freedom Rider. I was there to stir up trouble, that's all. So when I walked down the street, people would say, 'There's the Freedom Rider. Look at him.' They'd say, 'Ain't that the Freedom Rider?' 'Yeah, that's him.'..."

Being ostracized by African-Americans paled when compared to the violence of that era.

"...Herbert Lee was killed," writes Forman. "Herbert Lee of Liberty [Miss.], Black, age fifty-two, father of ten children, active

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Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.
900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
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Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association
and West Coast Black Publishers Association