

King's Chicago campaign remembered

By Hal Lamar

Special to Sentinel-Voice

ATLANTA (NNPA) - Most people have probably forgotten that 2006 marks the 40th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s sojourn from the South to tackle similar problems of race and class bias in the teaming cities of the North.

Dr. King had chosen Chi-

cago as a launching pad for addressing the northern struggle after the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that he led was invited by a faction in the city that was seeking an end to housing discrimination and bias in public education.

Against the better judgment of many members of his executive staff (except for

James Bevel, who encouraged King to take on Chicago), King went to Chicago and even decided to move his family into a south side city apartment to dramatize the almost inhumane conditions many of Chicago's Black residents had to exist in day to day.

The Chicago movement was a revelation for King and

his staff. He found that the often talked about "political machine" of mayor Richard Daley was not a mere myth. Cracking through that "machine" was tantamount to breaking into Fort Knox (the latter may have been easier).

King also found that racial violence was not reserved for the "Deep South."

During an opening hous-

ing march one Sunday in Gage Park, a suburb just outside Chicago, King and his entourage were harassed by a White mob hurling racist epithets, bricks, rocks and Molotov cocktails. Cars were overturned and burned.

"I've been in Mississippi and Alabama and faced mobs, but this beats anything we confronted there," King told reporters just before he was hit in the back of the head by a flying brick.

Within that stormy cloud, however, was a silver lining. Marshals protecting the marchers were made up of some members of Chicago's street gangs.

King had met with several of their representatives at his Chicago flat one night during the apex of the movement and asked for their cooperation.

The gang members had been corralled by Chicago organizers and longtime SCLC staffer, James Orange.

In the minds of some, the Chicago movement was a losing effort for SCLC and the movement. Will it indeed be recorded in the books of time as another "Albany, Georgia"? (King and the

SCLC were unsuccessful in desegregating Albany during the "Albany Movement" that began in the fall of 1961 and ended in the summer of 1962.)

"No, it was not an 'Albany,'" Orange told The Atlanta Voice as he reflected on that movement 40 years ago. "But it wasn't a 'Birmingham,' either (the triumphant 1963 movement). We didn't develop the same kind of movement spirit in the North as we did in the South, but the work we did in Chicago did produce some good."

Orange continued, "It allowed Carl Stokes to be elected the mayor of Cleveland, Ohio (the first Black mayor in a major U.S. city). We made the city clean up those slums and many of the residents got to live elsewhere when we got the 'open occupancy' law passed. Eventually, the Daleys were defeated and the Willis Wagoners (superintendent of Chicago Public Schools) were run out of office. Chicago was not the same place we left compared to what we found when we came."

Hal Lamar writes for the Atlanta Voice.

Malvo

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ginia authorities, who agreed to let Malvo and his one-time mentor, John Allen Muhammad, come to Maryland for new trials. Under an interstate agreement, Maryland must return Malvo after his sentencing.

Kevin Hall, a spokesman for Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine, said Kaine's staff has not had any recent discussions with Maryland prosecutors on a plea deal for Malvo. Virginia prosecutors had expressed sharp disapproval when the idea was proposed before Muhammad and Malvo's first trials in 2003.

The two were originally sent to Virginia because of its tough death penalty laws, but Malvo, 17 at the time of the killings, doesn't qualify for

the death penalty after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down capital punishment for minors.

Charges are still pending against Malvo and Muhammad for sniper shootings in Louisiana, Alabama, Washington and Prince George's County, Md. In addition, authorities and published reports have tied the pair to shootings in Arizona, California, Georgia, Texas, and Washington state.

In all, 10 people were murdered and three wounded during the October 2002 shootings in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Brennan and Montgomery County State's Attorney Douglas Gansler would not say which shootings could be included in the larger plea

agreement.

Prince William County Commonwealth's Attorney Paul Ebert, who tried Muhammad, said he didn't think Malvo should be able to shop around for a prison.

"I feel sorry for Mr. Malvo that he doesn't like Virginia," Ebert said. "But he shouldn't have come here and committed crimes."

Other prosecutors were more receptive. John Sinquefield, first assistant district attorney in East Baton Rouge Parish, La., said he would consider letting Malvo plead guilty and go to federal prison if he had assurances he could never be let out.

Cheryll Witz, daughter of Jerry Taylor, who was killed in March 2002 while playing

golf in Tucson, Ariz., wants Malvo to be prosecuted for the murder. But she considers it far more important to hear him admit to the crime than to try him.

"We're just asking him to confess and to say how he did it," Witz said Tuesday.

Another Malvo attorney, Timothy Sullivan, said his client has accepted responsibility for his part in the shootings and wants to make amends. "Every single day this kid realizes the enormity of what he has done," Sullivan said. "Mr. Malvo is making attempts to redeem himself and move forward."

Muhammad was convicted in May by a Montgomery County jury and given six life terms.

Study

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to political knowledge, the study revealed America's youth overall barely knew questions about the government.

A little more than half of America's youth could not name the Republican Party as the more conservative party, 56 percent did not know that only citizens could vote in federal elections and only 30 percent could correctly name at least one member of the president's cabinet. Of those who could name a cabinet member, 82 percent named Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

As for African-American youth, the study said they believe there is a reason to get involved because they are "most likely to view the political system as unresponsive to the genuine needs of the public." Asians were more likely to believe the system is responsive.

For the most engaged young people, a number of factors contributed to their participation in community service and the political process including being Democrat, liberal, from an urban area, a regular church attendee, and from a family with parents who volunteer and are college educated.

Nolan Rollins, the president of the National Urban League's Young Professionals, said it is no surprise the connections between Black youth, the church and long-standing Black social organizations like the National Urban League and NAACP boosted young Black people ahead of other groups.

"It's not really surprising because I think that what you're talking about is a generation that is not far removed from the civil rights generation, and I think what we're seeing now is almost a trickle down effect," he

said.

Rollins said that youth participation in the NUL's annual convention has grown every year to the point where there is a youth track with age-based sessions specially made for teens, college students and young professionals. The Young Professional division of the NUL has a membership of 9,000, ages 21-40, representing 62 chapters across the country. The group is responsible for the National Day of Service and a number of educational programs on topics ranging from HIV/AIDS to financial responsibility.

Rollins believes this surge in social engagement comes from young people understanding they are the beneficiaries of gains made by the Civil Rights Movement and with the unprecedented opportunities they have available, young people are confident they can make a difference from places their ancestors couldn't — in the boardroom, classroom and courtroom.

"There was a whole generation of folks that fought for rights that wanted us to have the ability to attend the schools we wanted to attend and get the jobs that we wanted to actually get and you come up with a group of folks who have access to those opportunities," Rollins said.

"We no longer have to depend on our backs in order to ensure that we can be successful. If we want to do laborious things, we can. If we choose not to, we have the opportunity and the ability to find our ways to higher education, find our ways to entrepreneurship and things like that. This is a generation that realizes we have more at our fingertips than before and is taking advantage of it," Rollins concluded.

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