

New Negro In Politics Puzzles Both Parties

This is the second in a series of articles in which Amsterdam News writers seek to evaluate the New Negro as he emerged on the national scene during 1956. Other articles to follow will picture the New Negro in business, sports, the church and community activities.

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By JAMES BOOKER

Trends and political and voting activities of 1956 gave signs of a "New Negro" in politics, but it did not present a positive picture.

Unlike many other fields, it was the citizen or voter who represented the change, rather than the active clubhouse or district worker in the field.

The independence of thought and the positiveness of a civil rights vote came from the voters, rather than party politicians who in the majority continued to remain loyal to party positions which shunted Negro rights to a secondary place.

The overall signs of a "New Negro" in politics, were best shown on a national political level during the past year with margins from four to 75 per cent of the people in predominately Negro areas switching to the Republican ticket in the 1956 election because of disgust and protest at the Democratic Party's

pitiful handling of the civil rights issue. It was not a positive GOP vote.

Professionals Vote

Much of this was attributed to an awakening of political activity among the so-called "educated" Negro who had been coasting in activity in previous years. More

of the Negro professionals voted than in any previous year.

With civil rights the dominant issue in the 1956 campaign, Negro voters, already aroused over reactions to the school segregation decisions, became bitter with so-called liberals and do-gooders

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who advised of "gradualism" and cautioned against "leaving the Democrats."

A. Philip Randolph, powerful labor leader who refused to support any political party in the 1956 Presidential elections, pressed for strong civil rights pledges, pointed up the situation by saying:

"It was pressed home to Negroes during the election that more and more we will need political power to implement legislative, judicial and administrative actions in the civil rights area."

Period of Flux

Newly-elected General Sessions Court Judge Thomas Dickens said that the 1956 elections showed that Negroes, as voters, were in a period of flux, after having felt that they had been let down by Democrats and their so-called liberal friends including Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Sen. Hubert Humphrey, former President Harry Truman, and others.

While most observers agreed that no one person had the qualities or exemplified emotions of a "New Negro" political leader, Rep. Adam Powell received some high praise as having been in the leadership on the side of Negroes, rather than on party, when a basic issue of civil rights was involved.

The definite shift of the Negro vote, the first in 25 years, was credited by most Negro leaders as due to the Eastland issue; Stevenson's position of moderation and that of other so-called liberals; the weak Democratic civil rights platform; and the Powell switch.

15% Switch

On a more local level, some Harlem reaction was shown on the same issues as Harlem gave a 15 per cent switch to the Republican Party over previous years.

Yet, the election wasn't the only happening of 1956 which may have bearings on future political activity. It was a year when they attempted a smear on Boro President Hulan Jack on the Communist issue; forced Ernest Johnson and Judge Carson DeWitt Baker to "resign" political jobs; rejected Thurgood Marshall for the State Board of Regents; and tried to censure Rep. Adam Powell for supporting the Eisenhower ticket.

Brighter Side

On the brighter side of the year, George Redding was made a full inspector in the New York Police Department; the new Commission on Intergroup Relations was set up, with Dr. Frank Horne named as executive director; the Watson-Abrams Mortgage Facilities Bill was passed to ease the tight Harlem mortgage situation; and Mayor Robert Wagner promised and the Board of Estimate approved a new Harlem Hospital. All of these were accomplished after much civic and community protests for them.

Brown to Front

The year 1956 was a year when Rep. Adam Powell was accused of receiving money for his switch to the Republicans, which was denied by all sides; and the Democratic convention was highlighted by a shabby debate to kill civil rights in the eyes of millions of nationwide television viewers.

It was a year when Councilman Earl Brown organized a group of Negro Democrats to press for civil rights within the party machinery, and a year when Attorney Thomas Weaver and a group of younger Harlem Republicans began a campaign to increase interest in Harlem in their political party.

It was a year when the Democratic organization, continuing to control both the city and state, began to hear rumblings in Harlem circles that all isn't right, predicting trouble for future years unless some tragic reorganization is done soon.

An analysis of the 1956 political situations points up several interesting observations which can be of interest to politicians in the future.

New Negro Viewpoint

On looking over activities of many in the election campaigns, this reporter finds that the election brought out a tremendous number of young educated Negroes who had little political experience. A continuation of this group along political lines of their choice is sorely needed to keep alive a two-party political system

in Harlem, to provide a protest movement and watchdog against community wrongs.

Yes, a "New Negro" came alive in Harlem political circles during 1956, but it was the voter who in his own terms, told the political bosses, "Don't expect to get my vote in the future unless you stand up for my rights."

Although not exemplified in any one particular individual, this so-

called "New Negro" was of an independent nature, and much better educated than the usual clubhouse worker of the past.

He wanted and needs guidance and leadership, but unfortunately, there has been no young or old aggressive, bold leadership which has developed in the Negro political arena.

Perhaps 1857, with the many secrets it still holds, can help the still flirting Negro voter this political leadership deserving of the title, "New Negro" political leader to guide him in the best use of his ballot.