



by Dennis Schatzman

Top Black Political Developments In 1987

When my editor asked me to write an opinion piece assessing the key Black political developments of 1987, I asked myself, "why me? I just moved here in June. Who am I to offer my opinion on the politics of Black Winston-Salem?"

I reminded him of the old adage, "opinions are like navels, everyone has one." So what, I asked, makes my opinion worthwhile?

"Well, he starts" since you're new to the area no one will legitimately accuse you of selfishly advancing any particular agenda. Second, you were an elected official in your native city of Pittsburgh and, therefore, know the political game. Third, you have some 15 years experience observing and covering local and national politics as a reporter and editor for several Black newspapers and magazines." "And finally", he adds, "it is I who hands you your paycheck."

Hey, I can take a hint. So here goes.

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Winston-Salem, unlike Greensboro, Durham, High Point, Charlotte and other areas throughout the state, did not have mayoral or aldermanic races in 1987 that would normally generate high Black political interest. That is not to say, however, the Winston-Salem was devoid of political activity, be it mild political activity at best. Aside from the city/county Bond Referendum vote in November, Black political participation in 1987 involved and/or benefitted the few and not the many.

Among the significant highlights:

- Newly elected District Attorney Warren Sparrow with a larger percentage of the Black vote appointed two Black assistant district attorneys, one who is the scion of a prominent Black political family.

- James Beatty and Loretta Biggs are appointed to Superior and District Court judgeships. Both will be seeking election to full terms in 1988.

- Black and other minority businesses, led by Thelma and Theldora Small, successfully drum up support that pressures the Board of Aldermen to reconsider erecting a proposed transit center at Fifth and Liberty, the site of their businesses

- A bill sponsored by State Rep. Annie Brown Kennedy that requires the City of Winston-Salem to set aside a percentage of contracts for goods and services for minority-owned businesses, passes both legislative chambers in Raleigh.

- After months of searching, interviewing and denying, the city hires Emery Rann, III to head the Human Relations Commission. Rann's appointment shocks many local pols. Reason: Rann, son of a prominent Charlotte physician, is a lifelong Republican who recently headed Governor Martin's Office of Minority Affairs. What they didn't realize, however, is that Rann is well trained in the rough and tumble, give and take of Civil Rights. A Howard-educated lawyer, Rann has long

been active in Greensboro's NAACP Chapter.

- The East Winston Development Plan is approved, paving the way for possible much needed business and affordable housing expansion in East Winston.

Although each of these events are very important, none that I have mentioned have more present and future impact on the Black political culture than the following three events:

- *Carl Russell dies*

"If it appears that I have seen more than others in my life, it is because I have stood upon the shoulders of giants."

Sir Issac Newton said that. But when it comes to Carl Russell it could have easily been echoed by C.C. Ross, Richard Davis, C.B. Hauser, Richard Ervin, Larry Little, Annie Brown Kennedy, Logan and Vivian Burke, Patrick Hairston, Larry Womble or any other Black politician or civil rights leader who has set up shop in the last 40 years.



Carl Russell 1910 - 1987

Black people loved Carl Russell. There is no doubt about that. They loved him as a leader, an alderman and candidate for mayor. And they miss him now.

Failing health limited his effectiveness as a leader throughout the 80's. But before that, Russell easily qualified as the greatest Black political leader Winston-Salem has ever known.

There are several reasons for this. One, Russell was a Black businessman whose livelihood was solely dependant upon Blacks, not whites. This reduced his chances to be co-opted by people who traditionally pressure adversaries by boycotting their businesses. Also, because he was a businessman, he was easily assessible; people could come to the funeral home and see him. Conversely, he could leave the funeral home anytime he wanted and see them. Few Black politicians have that flexibility.

Still fewer politicians had the wherewithal to sponsor and host their own radio show (which has aired every Sunday morning on WAAA since 1951) where Russell railed at injustice and racism with great clarity and regularity. His strength is sorely missed by both the existing Black political leadership and the rank and file alike.

- *Urban League Controversy*

Everyone's a loser in this one. Thomas Elijah, president of the Urban League for the past 11 years, was suspended amid allegations of "fiscal mismanagement" and "abuse of power". The charges were brought by several board members, many with poor attendance records and a penchant for leaking unsubstantiated rumors about Elijah to the news media. Charges are hurled back and forth and the whole mess ends up in court and the media. The board loses virtually all credibility with the League's dominant constituency, the Black underclass. And the League is rendered vulnerable to the city's charitable giving power structure who, in these days of fiscal austerity, could see a way to reduce its annual donations to this vitally needed agency.

- *Black Vote Assures Bond Referendum*

Black voters city wide, voted over 75 percent in favor of all nine issues of the November 3rd Bond Referendum while the rest of the population were roughly split on the issues. This certifies again that the Black vote in Winston-Salem continues to act, in the words of political scientist, C. Van Woodward, as an "arbiter between white factions." In other words, the Black vote exercised considerable political leverage in a hotly contested political issue. Whether or not Blacks will benefit from this political clout by gaining a respectable share of contracts and services remains to be seen.

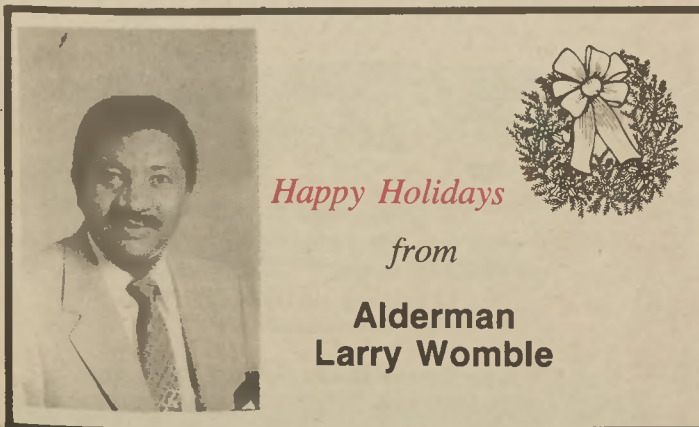
One lesson to be learned from this is that Blacks can be influenced to vote a certain way if motivated by people whom they know, trust and respect. Among those who fit those descriptions were Lee Faye Mack, Mazie Woodruff, Walt Marshall, Larry Womble and Vivian Burke.

What does the future hold for Black political achievements? The hot issue will again be the Black vote (or the withholding thereof).

Three County Commissioners are up for re-election; so is the Register of Deeds. I already mentioned Judges Beatty and Biggs.

But the big race (aside from the presidency) is the Governor's race. It looks like it will be Lt. Gov. Bob Jordon against the incumbent Jim Martin. A heavy Black turnout in the Triad will favor Mr. Jordan; a less than heavy turnout would thrill Mr. Martin.

And that's the way I see it. The check, please.



Merry Christmas
and
A Prosperous New Year

Alderman
Frank Frye