

Text of Alderman Larry Womble's Letter to National Civic League

March 31, 1993

I am Larry Womble, private citizen in the city of Winston-Salem, and I serve as a local elected official in the capacity of an alderman. It would be remiss if I did not voice my concerns about Winston-Salem's application to be named an All-American City. I am a staunch advocate of truth and accuracy just as the city of Winston-Salem motto says: "To be rather than to seem."

There are a few things I like to call to your attention after talking with several individuals and organizations in the City of Winston-Salem as it relates to the City of Winston-Salem being designated as an All American City for this year. Several incidents of which have been stated and is common knowledge that Winston-Salem, North Carolina would be doubtful if it would be representative of an All American City award.

(1) White citizens in the City of Winston-Salem will not vote generally for blacks who run at large elections. It had to come to the point that there had to be carved out single member districts in order for us to get an African-American representation on several boards that we have here. To name a few for example: (a) It was very difficult and almost impossible for blacks to run and be on the school board here because whites would not vote for blacks when there was an at large or common election. Therefore, we had to carve out single member districts from the state legislature so blacks would be represented on the school board and that is the only reason why we have two blacks out of nine people who serve on the school board; (b) There are seven county commissioners - out of seven county commissioners there are only two blacks that serve and the only way that we got those two African-Americans on the county commissioners, again we had to carve out special districts where

blacks live so blacks could vote for their own and have their own representative for which whites would not vote for them. (c) We only have two blacks in the State House of Representatives and again we had to use the same method carving out single districts where blacks live in order to get the blacks to try and have some representation in the State House of Representatives.

There have been numerous times where blacks ran for office and whites would not vote for them although blacks that ran were qualified, certified and very professional and met all of the requirements but they were not voted for by the whites simply because of race. To me this is not being a good example of an All American city that exist today.

(2) When it comes to economic development, African Americans do not get their fair share of economic development here in the city of Winston-Salem. For the most part economic development goes to the west side of town rather than coming to the eastern side of town. The eastern side of town is where most of the blacks live. The economic development interest and the economic development spurt for the most part has had to come from the city trying to do what it could - when I say city, I mean the Winston Board of Aldermen.

(3) There have been several racial incidents here within the last twelve to eighteen months and it has gotten worse. To cite you several examples: the "Carlos Stoner" case is where some whites murdered a black man, left him for dead and returned to the scene to stab and castrate him and left him on the strollway in downtown Winston-Salem. That has caused a lot of concerns in the community because of the way the police department and the news media handled the matter because he was simply a black man. The other case involves "Mr. Pot-

ter" and how the police handled this particular incident because he was a black man. This incident happened at an apartment complex where police officers rough-housed Mr. Potter and this has caused a great deal of concern in the community. Eventually this gentleman had to go to court and the court saw that there was some inconsistencies in the way the police department handled this gentleman's case simply because he was an African-American man.

The most recent occurrence is the outbreak of violence at Carver High School because there were whites carrying confederate flags which intimidated some blacks and a fight started at Carver High School and resources had to be called in. This just happened recently in the last three to four weeks.

Another example is the "Sheila McKellar" case wherein this lady died while in the custody of police officers. This lady's hands were tied behind her back and her feet were tied along with her mouth gagged died in a jail cell because she did not get the proper attention that she needed and that case still has not been resolved and the district attorney still has this case. A private citizen group had to call in for an outside investigation. They called the FBI and also the State Human Relations Commission to try and get an objective investigation of this case. A lot of the facts were hidden and kept from the public by the police department and also by city hall. These are just some examples that can be documented.

(4) Blacks' dealings with financial institutions are very reluctant to make loans or to venture capital to African-Americans no matter what the venture might involve. This has been documented and several blacks can attest to that. Winston-Salem is known as the second most racially segregated divided city in the

nation. Not only psychologically and mentally, but Winston-Salem is physically a divided city. It really is two cities in one. With the expressway being the old dividing line between East Winston which is mostly African-American and West Winston which is mostly whites.

(5) Just about all development goes in the western side of town rather than on the eastern side of town. There is very little development being done in East Winston. There has been vacant land in East Winston for over ten, fifteen to twenty years, but every time there is development or an economic shot-in-the-arm, it does not come to East Winston. Looking at the kind of housing in East Winston there are still people living in dilapidated houses and a lot of substandard houses still exist in the city of Winston-Salem.

The city itself is about 40-45 percent black, but this racial makeup is not reflected into the broad spectrum and the makeup of the different positions, both public and private, in managerial and professional and in directorship positions for the city of Winston-Salem itself.

I have included some newspaper articles and clippings to further point to the kind of conditions that exist in our city. I personally want Winston-Salem to win the All American City award. However, I want it to be one that is truly earned and truly means "All American City." I have included a newspaper article from Mr. Bert Grisard who happens to be white and shares the same opinion. You can see this is not just coming from some people in the African-American community but is also coming from others in the white community as well.

There are many other incidents that I can relate to and other situations that I can point to, but we have a long way to go in Winston-Salem

before we become an All American City. We have come a long way compared to the way it used to be years ago, but to some extent we have regressed back to the days of the 60's where there is more racism, prejudice and friction and a dividing line. This city is sitting on a powder keg because of the way in which African-Americans and minorities are treated and viewed upon in the city of Winston-Salem.

I, as a private citizen, am trying to inform you of my perception and my feelings about Winston-Salem being named an All-American city. If it is going to be an All-American city, then I want it to be truly an All-American city rather than one that is on paper, hollow and shallow with no meaning and no substance to it. I do not believe that these are the kind of things you all take lightly and I am hoping that you take my concerns that I have mentioned and have them checked out and do some research yourself to see if it is true or not about the information that I am passing along to you.

As I said before I truly wish that Winston-Salem could win, but I want it to be an honor that is earned and one that is true and one that is accurate as opposed to being purely cosmetic and one that has no substance.

I can cite many more incidents in this letter to you and along with the paper clippings, but because of time and brevity I think you will get an idea of the kind of perception that exist here in Winston-Salem. It would do you wise and good to come and see and meet and talk with some people rather than to the hand-picked and hand-chosen people who are not really representative of the ordinary hard working salt of the earth kind of people that serve on these committees.

Thank you for allowing me to voice my concerns and forward this information to you. If I can be of assistance in any way, please let me know.

Sincerely,
Larry W. Womble
Alderman
Southeast Ward

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City Undaunted

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(the civic leagues' decision) could be confined to two letters. The committee saw objectively what the city failed to see."

Womble and CUJ's letter talked about the racial tensions resulting from the castration murder of Carlos Stoner and the death of Sheila Ann McKellar, who died in police custody. Both victims were black.

Mendez believes there is "a developing underclass" of both blacks and whites.

"We have not done enough to warrant such an award at this time," he said. "We have not responded concretely to the problems that this city faces. This would have been an award that would have gone to the rich and the well-to-do, and in essence say to the poor and underprivileged that you don't count.

"If we're going to prepare ourselves for such awards in the future... then we have to take racism and poverty seriously. They must become No. 1 items on the agenda of both concern and response."

Mayor Martha S. Wood said, the issues raised in Womble's letter weighed heavily on the judges questions and their subsequent decision not to award Winston-Salem All-America City status.

"Dr. (Lennea) Henderson, (one of the judges) told me that the issues raised in Womble's letter

were disturbing to some of the judges," Wood said. "The issues raised in the letter were also raised by the judges during the question and answer period."

Womble could not be reached for comment. In his three-page letter, he mentioned several areas where blacks are adversely affected in the city.

He noted that blacks are underrepresented on elected boards and committees; that blacks are left out of the city's economic development; that racial violence is widespread; that blacks are denied loans by financial institutions at a high rate; and that few businesses are developed in the predominantly black eastern part of town.

"There is very little development being done in East Winston," he stated in the letter. "There has been vacant land in East Winston for over 10, 15, 20 years. But every-time there is development or economic shot-in-the-arm, it does not come to East Winston."

Wood has said the city is making progress in dealing with racial animosity and she believes the community is working together more closely.

"There are people who put their heart and soul in to trying to build this community," Wood said. "It would have shown recognition of their work and effort."

Mayor pro tempore Vivian

Burke said Womble and the Citizens United for Justice are being unfairly blamed for the rejection.

"No one individual or small group could stop a city," Burke said. "I don't think they can put all the blame on them for being the cause of Winston-Salem not being named an All-American City. As an elected official, (Womble) has the right to voice the opinions of the people he represents."

Burke felt that the city should concentrate on issues of unemployment and underemployment among blacks and other racial minorities.

"I feel there are citizens working to make a difference and we have made a few gains but not many economic gains for minorities. Even though the Board of Aldermen is working to bring businesses into the community, the kinds of jobs that blacks in a city this size have don't make a great impact on the minds of people."

Wood didn't dwell on Womble's letter, but said they would have to wait six weeks for the critique to come back so they can adequately access the reasons why Winston-Salem was not chosen.

"Our community has had a number of significant triumphs, so it's a disappointment but not a devastation," Wood said.

Winston-Salem was named an All-America City in 1959 and 1964.

Holdout Juror Calls

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tion was overturned. He was convicted again in 1990.

Everhart, who is white, refused to comment when contacted at his home on Thomasville Road.

"I have no comment," he said.

Other jurors said they felt as though Everhart enjoyed the "control" he held over them.

"I felt like he knew that he was in control," said juror Toni Dalton. "And at one point he told us how we could talk to him if we wanted him to change his mind. And if we didn't

talk to him that way he would not change his mind."

Gordon said she was angered over Everhart's sarcasm and his ability to make the others cater to him.

Meanwhile some jurors are keeping newspaper clippings surrounding the case. They will present them along with letters to lawmakers and the state Parole Commission to prevent Knight from being released from prison when he becomes eligible in 20 years.

"I'm hellbent and determined

that this man will not get out of jail," Gordon said. "I've got my heels dug in as deep as (Everhart) was in his verdict."

Last May, Stoner was taken by four men to a greenway at Washington Square Park where he was stabbed at least 27 times. He had a gaping hole cut into his chest and his penis was cut off and stuffed in his mouth.

"This man had a family; he was somebody, and we should not allow Carlos Stoner to be forgotten," Gordon said.

