



John R. Thomas



C.B. Hauser



Vivian Burke

## NAACP gets support

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ident said that, barring any unforeseen roadblocks, the suit against the Board would be filed Thursday in federal court in Greensboro. "The draft of the suit is ready now," he told the gathering. "All I've got to do is sign it."

That announcement came during a community forum called by the NAACP at Goler Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church on Fourth Street Tuesday night to determine the community's support for a lawsuit against the school system.

That meeting followed a work session Monday night by the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School Board that resulted in a decision by the board to consider five different election plans that could do away with the current at-large system.

NAACP officials say none of the plans meets their demands for an election plan that ensures that African-Americans in this community can determine who represents them on the school board.

Romallus Murphy, general counsel for the state NAACP, told people attending the meeting that a suit could indeed be filed because it addresses the basic criteria the federal court would consider in reviewing the case.

He said the suit would have to demonstrate that African-Americans live in close enough proximity to each other to form a majority district. And that polarized voting still exists. That is a voting pattern where whites vote for white candidates and African-American candidates get votes from mostly African-Americans.

"This why the voting rights act was established in the first place... because of what was happening in this country, especially in the south," Murphy said. "That is why it was extended in 1982, because it was determined that the need to have it in place still existed."

Former school board member Beaufort Bailey told the group that he felt the reason the school board was dragging its feet on district elections is because they felt they could beat a lawsuit filed against the board. He asked Murphy what he felt the NAACP's chances of success were. Murphy quickly asked, "They (the school board) will lose."

But Murphy told them he could

nothing until he got the green light to proceed. He said 40 counties in North Carolina are covered under section five of the federal voting rights act. That means any proposed changes in elections would have to be approved by the Department of Justice. He said that would not be the case in Forsyth County. Here, he said, the community would have to initiate the action. He called the arguments against district elections "poppy-cock."

"Some communities have gotten together, sat down at the table, and resolved their differences. I have been hopeful that larger communities like Winston-Salem would set the tone for smaller communities on matters of this nature. But that hasn't happened," he said. "The voting rights act is there. Now its up to you to use it."

"If district representation is good for Congress, and good for the state legislature in Raleigh, why isn't it good enough for Winston-Salem, unless y'all got something here other than tobacco and beer." That comment drew a great deal of laughter.

Rev. Lee Faye Mack told the group she felt the money used to sue the board could be better spent educating African-American children.

"Why we have to sue all the time?" she asked. "What's wrong with just taking our children out of the schools, opening up our churches, and teaching our children ourselves?"

Murphy told her that certain elements in the community would just love that and that African-Americans should not play into their hands.

Walter Marshall, past president of the NAACP, told her, "You are right, Ms. Mack, but if we do that we are still going to have to pay those taxes." "This fight is about who controls the money," Murphy said, "who gets the contract, who the school board, the commissioners, aldermen, and others do business with. Just follow the dollar and you'll learn a great deal."

John R. Thomas, a food service employee with the Career Center, reminded the gathering that the business community had spoken strongly in favor of the school board

reconsidering its decision not to change the method of electing board members. He urged them not to be silent or divided on this issue.

"Nobody should leave here tonight arguing about what we should do," Thomas said, "we should be of one accord about this thing."

Alderman Vivian Burke, a school system guidance counselor at the Career Center, said, "We are here to say we need to file the suit. This school board hasn't done anything and won't do anything. We can let these people play with us if you want. But our black boys and girls are in trouble."

C.B. Hauser, a former member of the state legislature, also urged that the suit be filed. "We ought to file the suit and then see what they come with. If it meets what we want, then we withdraw it," he said.

Annette Wilson, a former school board candidate and chair of the research committee that presented the school board with several election options, said a suit provided African-Americans with their greatest leverage. "If we miss this opportunity, we have only ourselves to blame."

When Marshall posed the question to the group, "Who here feels we should file the suit?" He got a unanimous show of hands.

Nance urged people to join the NAACP and donate to the legal expenses of the pending court battle. He said people should pack NAACP meetings now more than ever.

Meetings are held every fourth Tuesday of each month starting at 6 p.m. The executive committee of the board meets then. That is not open to the public, but starting at 7 p.m. the general membership meets. For now, the meetings are being held at the Winston Lake Family YMCA.

After hearing of the NAACP's decision, school board chair Garland Grogan said, "I had hoped we all could have come to a different conclusion regarding this matter. I'm not really surprised that the NAACP is pursuing the suit, but I thought the timing might have been a little different."

Grogan said the board will continue with consideration of election plans and said she hopes a plan can be found that all can live with.

## Board still looking

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work session that she was absolutely opposed to district elections. She maintained that the integrity of the "one-man, one-vote rule" be retained and that if the African-American community wanted to make sure they had representation on the board that they get out and work for their candidates.

Nancy Wooten, a member of the board's so-called minority affairs committee, continued to push her compromise election plan calling for a combination district and at-large system for electing school board members.

School board member Thomas Voss seemed to be the most exasperated after the constant wrangling and positioning produced no tangible outcome. "I want to have a binding vote," he said, "and then let's get down to business. Let's get this thing over with."

That sentiment was echoed by board member Grace Efrid who said, "We've been fooling with this thing since November. We need to get back to the business of doing what's best for the children of this county."

School system attorney Douglas Pungler, painstakingly walked the board through an exhaustive process to get the board to reach some kind of consensus on the plans it would consider. Whenever the board members seemed to deviate from the process or did not seem responsive, he nudged the process along until a consensus was

finally reached.

Though none of the plans is binding on the board, the following is what they will consider Monday:

- A non-partisan, at-large election for all nine members of the board.

- A non-partisan residency plan requiring two members to live in one or more African-American districts, with the other seven living in one or more mostly white districts. All board members would be nominated and elected at-large.

- Either a partisan or non-partisan election with three board members nominated in a predominately African-American district but elected at-large. Three members would be nominated from a white district and elected at-large, while three others would be elected at-large.

- Option of either a partisan or non-partisan plan that would have two members of the board elected from a predominately African-American district, four from a mostly white district, and three others elected at-large, and finally

- A partisan or non-partisan plan where two members would be elected from an African-American district, the other seven elected from a white district.

The board could decide on a totally different plan or retain its earlier position to keep the current at-large system. Attempts by Wooten to get the board to give some indication of which way the board was inclined to vote were adamantly opposed by

Voss and Gerald Hewitt.

"I think people are expecting us to accomplish something here tonight," Wooten said. "But I don't want to take another straw vote on any of these proposals," Hewitt countered.

Hewitt said the last straw vote, which was 7-2 to keep the current election system and later reversed, had not served the board well then and would not serve the board well now.

"Let's vote on this thing Monday, one way or another and let the chips fall where they may," Hewitt said.

"Even if it means a lawsuit, and divisiveness in this community?" Wooten asked.

"You're speculating. That's your opinion," Voss shot back.

After the work session, several members of the African-American community left shaking their heads in disgust.

"It was a waste of time," said Naomi Jones, president of the Black Political Action League. "They are not taking us seriously. Ms. Wooten is trying to tell them how serious this is, but they just aren't hearing her."

Rev. J.T. McMillan, spokesman for the local NAACP, called the three-hour ordeal "foolishness."

"They wasted our time and theirs with this little exercise," he said, "I don't think they are going to change a thing."

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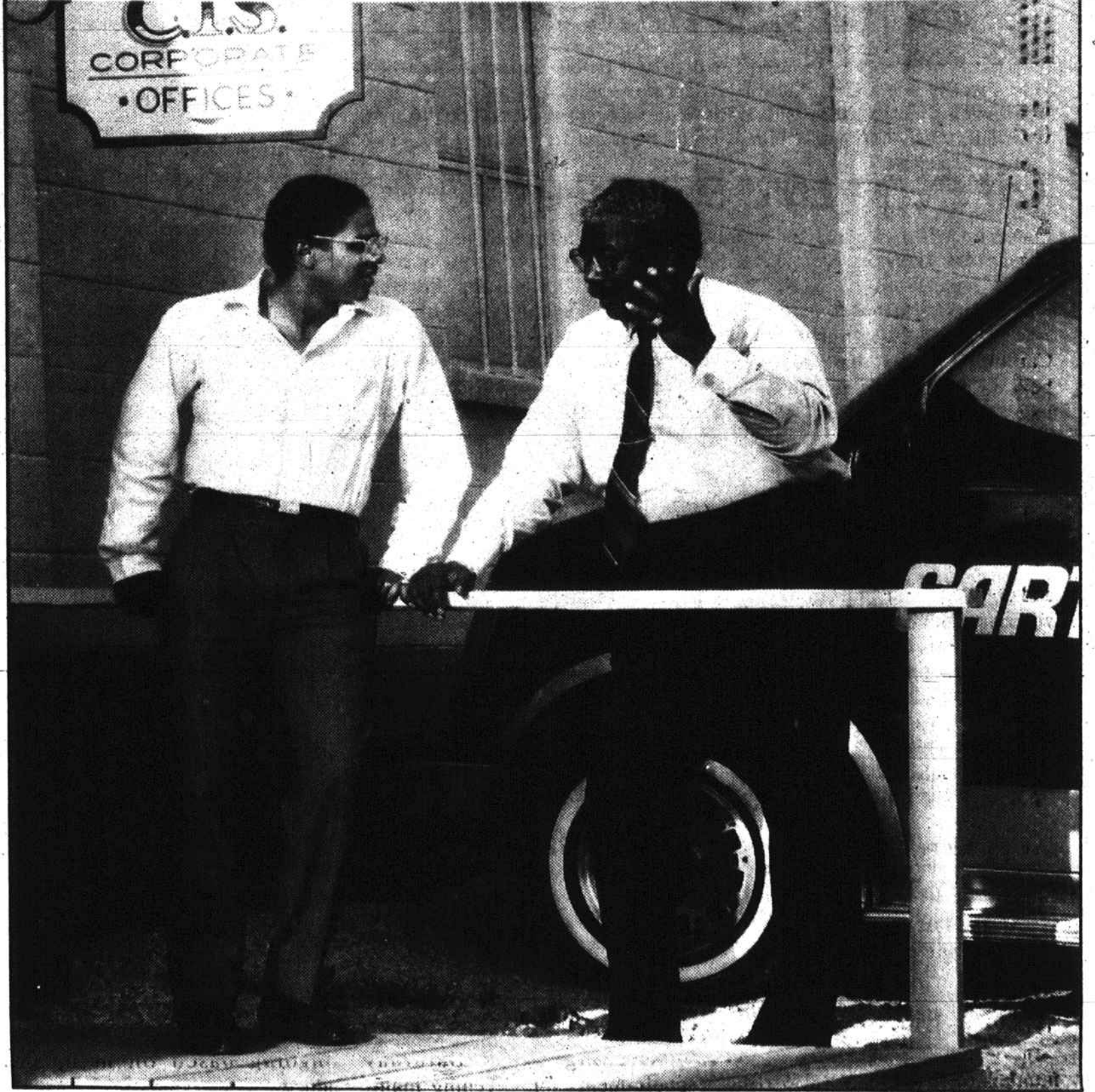
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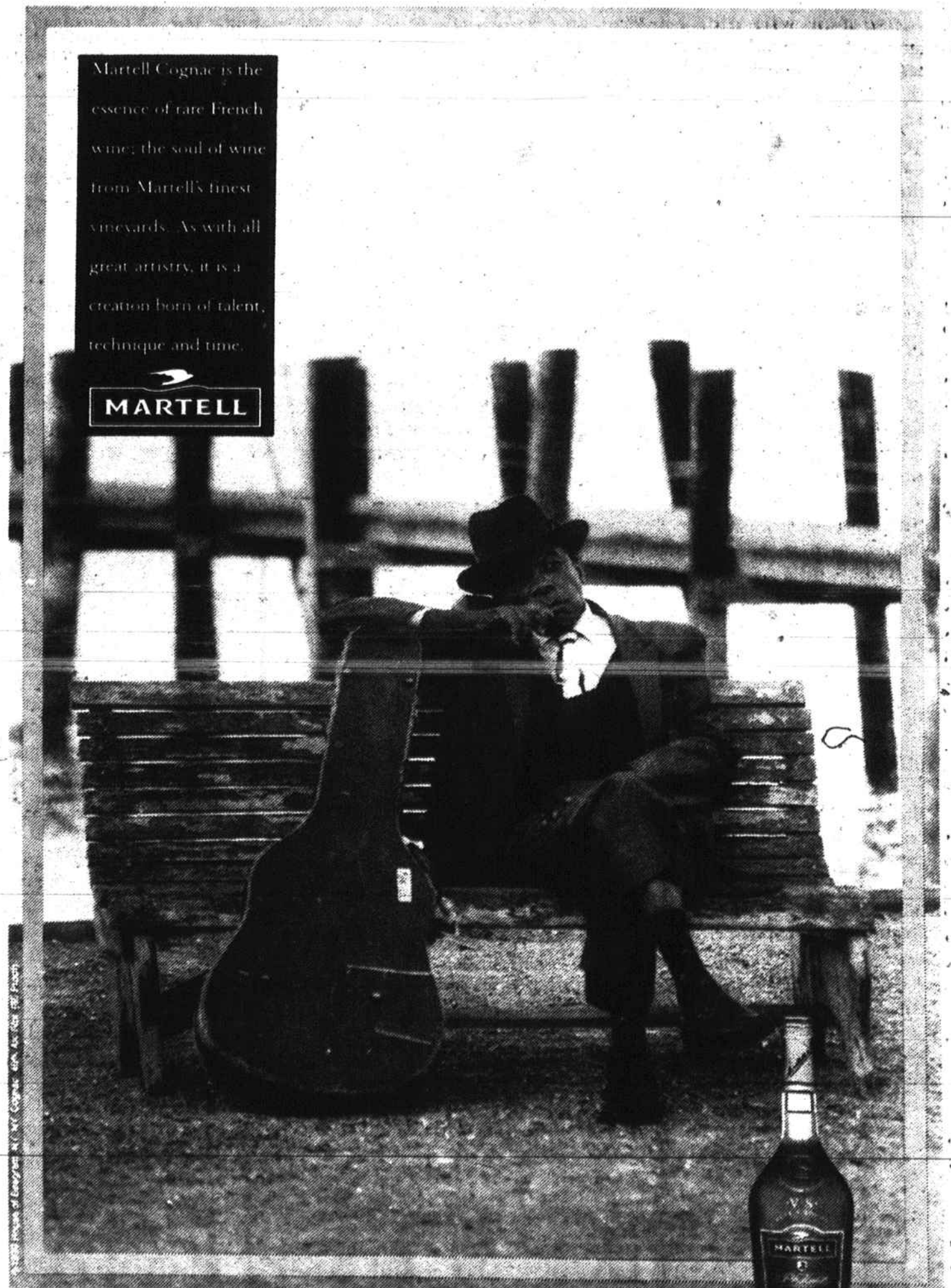
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