

# “JUSTICE IS SLOW BUT SURE”: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE WEST: 1950-1970

Quintard Taylor\*

Americans remain fascinated by the African American-led Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s that transformed this nation. Our fascination for the era encompasses a search for its proper place in the nation's history. In the early 1970s, the first Civil Rights Movement historians portrayed the period as one dominated by a national political coalition, inspired by heroic figures such as Martin Luther King and Fannie Lou Hamer, which secured major new national legislation such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. By the 1980s and 1990s other historians argued that the movement could best be explained in terms of local initiatives from “grass-roots” organizations in the South. For them, it was the role of indigenous Southern black leaders throughout the region and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers who assisted their efforts.<sup>1</sup>

Civil rights campaigns in the American west suggest a third alternative. This movement was a national transformation, an energizing of small and large African American communities in the North and West as well as the South, which was certainly inspired by national goals and leadership, but which also pursued a distinct local agenda. For African American westerners, the Movement was not simply a television report of police dogs set on demonstrators in distant Birmingham or Alabama State Troopers confronting voting rights marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge outside Selma. It was instead the campaign of ordinary people to end job bias or school segregation in local communities as diverse as Berkeley, Omaha, San Antonio, Phoenix, Wichita, Seattle and Las Vegas.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of the civil rights movement in the American West offers opportunities for analyzing the third alternative and possibly refashioning our views on that era. Direct action protests, though often inspired by Southern campaigns in Birmingham or Selma, had different goals in the West. Western African Americans confronted job discrimination, housing bias, and *de facto* school segregation. Thus the civil rights movement was national in scope, its

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\* Scott and Dorothy Bullitt Professor of American History, University of Washington.

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the various approaches of historians to the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s see Steven F. Lawson, *Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement*, AM. HISTORICAL REV., 456, 456-59 (1991), and CHARLES M. PAYNE, I'VE GOT THE LIGHT OF FREEDOM: THE ORGANIZING TRADITION AND THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM STRUGGLE 413-441 (1995) (discussing the various approaches of historians to the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s).

<sup>2</sup> On the civil rights movement in the West see Quintard Taylor, IN SEARCH OF THE RACIAL FRONTIER: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE AMERICAN WEST 1528-1990 Chap. 10 (1998).

western version integral to the effort to achieve a full, final democratization of the United States.

Western civil rights activity began long before World War II. One of the first challenges came in post-Civil War Nevada. In 1865, less than one year after statehood, African American residents from Virginia City formed the Nevada Executive Committee to fight for "equal rights" including the right to vote. Led by Dr. W.H.C. Stephenson, a recent arrival from Rhode Island, and the only practicing physician in the Far West, they fought for African American male suffrage, the right to testify in court and the end of the exclusion of African American children from the public schools. During the January 1, 1866 anniversary celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation, Stephenson told a predominately white Virginia City audience, "It is for colored men [to] . . . fearlessly meet the opponents of justice . . . . Let colored men contend for 'Equality before the Law.' [We want] nothing short of civil and political rights."<sup>3</sup>

As in Nevada, the right to vote epitomized complete African American political emancipation throughout the West. In 1866, a convention of black men meeting in Lawrence, Kansas challenged the widely-held idea that black voting was a privilege which the white male electorate could confer or deny at its pleasure. Then the convention issued this warning to the EuroAmerican majority in the state: "Since we are going to remain among you, we believe it unwise to . . . take from us as a class, our natural rights . . . . We must be a constant trouble in the state until it extends to us equal and exact justice."<sup>4</sup>

Between 1864 and 1867, Colorado Territory's 150 African Americans led by William Jefferson Hardin waged a relentless campaign to press Congress to delay statehood for the territory until their suffrage rights were guaranteed. Their campaign prompted the United States Congress to pass the Territorial Suffrage Act of 1867 which gave black men the right to vote in all territories before their counterparts in the former southern Confederate states or most northern states could exercise the franchise.<sup>5</sup>

After voting, the most important question for African American westerners was access to public education. In Portland, Oregon; Sacramento, California, and Helena, Montana, for example, African American students were denied entry into the public schools despite the taxpayer status of their parents. Not surprisingly, racial segregation in public schools was extensive in Oklahoma and Texas. However, it was also widespread in the 19th Century cities of Kansas. In 1878, Topeka *Colored Citizen* editor William Eagleson wrote the following critique of school segregation: "We hear of no Irish schools, no German schools, no Swedish schools. No, not one. All the children in the city are at liberty to attend the school nearest them, except the poor child, that God . . . chose to create with a black face instead of a white one." Then he added, "We say to every colored man and woman . . . to come together and resolve that you will no longer submit to unjust discrimination on account

<sup>3</sup> ELMER RUSCO, *GOOD TIME COMING? BLACK NEVADANS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*, 75 (1975) (quoting Stephenson); See also Elmer Rusco, *A Black Doctor on the Comstock* 1-2, GREASEWOOD TABLETTES (1998).

<sup>4</sup> *Address to the Citizens of Kansas*, DAILY TRIBUNE, Oct. 28, 1866, at 2.

<sup>5</sup> See Taylor *supra* note 2, at 123-125.

of your color. This thing has gone on long enough, and now if it can be stopped, let's stop it."<sup>6</sup>

Black westerners did fight to stop school segregation. African American students gained entry to the schools in Portland in 1872, Sacramento in 1875, and Helena in 1882 after concerted effort by black parents and their white supporters. African American parents in Kansas parents fought longer. The first lawsuit challenging segregation in that state was filed in 1881, seventy three years before the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case was finally decided in 1954.<sup>7</sup>

Yet by the 1950s, an urgency grew, born of the World War II promise of democracy, a rapidly growing African American population, and the flowering of post-war liberalism when western white politicians such as Oregon's Mark Hatfield and Arizona's Stewart Udall, embraced civil rights issues for the first time.<sup>8</sup> The 1950s, in fact, marked an optimism about the region's racial future. William Mahoney, a white Phoenix civil rights activist, said as much in 1951: "The die is . . . cast in the South or in an old city like New York or Chicago, but we here [in Phoenix] are present for creation. We're making a society where the die isn't cast. It can be for good or ill."<sup>9</sup>

Civil rights activity in the West took two distinct forms. The legal campaign used the courts to desegregate public schools, which many black westerners came to view as central to economic and political advancement. But black westerners also engaged in "direct action" protests, for example – demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts, and other civil disobedience activities to eliminate discrimination. This paper will focus on the direct action protests and the unique nature of the civil rights campaign in the West.

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<sup>6</sup> See Editorial, *Have They a Right to Do It?*, TOPEKA COLORED CITIZEN, Sept. 20, 1878, at 4.

<sup>7</sup> See Taylor, *supra* note 2, at 215-219; HELEN MARIE CASEY, PORTLAND'S COMPROMISE: THE COLORED SCHOOL, 1867-1872, 1-11 (1980); Susan Bragg, *Anxious Foot Soldiers: Sacramento's Black Women and Education in Nineteenth-Century California*, in AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN CONFRONT THE WEST, 1600-2000 97-111 (Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore eds.) (2003); J.W. Smurr, *Jim Crow Out West*, HISTORICAL ESSAYS ON MONTANA AND THE NORTHWEST: IN HONOR OF PAUL G. PHILLIPS, 166-183 (J.W. Smuit and K. Ross Toole eds.) (1957); Jean Van Delinder, *Early Civil Rights Activism in Topeka, Kansas, Prior to the 1954 Brown Case*, 47 GREAT PLAINS QUARTERLY (2001) (discussing the various 19th and early 20th century legal challenges to segregated schools in Kansas, Portland, Sacramento, and Helena).

<sup>8</sup> In 1953 while in the Oregon state legislature, Mark Hatfield sponsored a public accommodations measure, which was enacted into law. Hatfield continued his support for civil rights measures as Governor of Oregon and as U.S. Senator.

Stewart Udall's commitment to civil rights began before he was elected to public office. In the early 1950s Udall participated in the successful legal campaign to desegregate Phoenix's public schools before he was elected to Congress from Arizona in 1954. The identification of these politicians with civil rights activities appeared not to have affected their popularity with post-World War II voters in their states.

On Hatfield see ROBERT EELLS AND BARTELL NYBERG, LONELY WALK: THE LIFE OF SENATOR MARK HATFIELD, 32-33 (1979). Udall's activities are described in Hayzel Burton Daniels, *A Black Magistrate's Struggles*, ARIZONA MEMORIES 336-38 (1984).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Mary Melcher, *Blacks and Whites Together: Interracial Leadership in the Phoenix Civil Rights Movement*, J. OF ARIZ. HISTORY 198 (1991).

The direct action campaign began with World War II. By the early 1940s small interracial groups of westerners initiated direct action efforts. The Chicago-based Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), soon to be one of the largest civil rights organizations in the country, formed two of its first chapters in Denver and Colorado Springs in 1942. By 1947, CORE had chapters in Lawrence, Kansas City and Wichita, Kansas; Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska and Los Angeles, Berkeley and San Francisco, California. CORE sponsored demonstrations throughout the West, the first, a 1943 protest of a segregated Denver movie theater.<sup>10</sup>

CORE was not, however, involved in the decade's most successful direct action campaign, the desegregation of restaurants near the University of New Mexico. In September 1947, the campus newspaper, *The New Mexico Lobo* published an article describing how George Long, an African American university student was denied service at a nearby cafe, Oklahoma Joe's. In response the Associated Students of the University enacted a resolution: "If any student of the University is discriminated against in a business establishment on the basis of race, color or creed, I will support a student boycott of that establishment."<sup>11</sup>

The boycott measure passed a university-wide student referendum on October 22, 1947, by a three to one margin where approximately 75% of the students cast ballots. Shortly afterward, students initiated the boycott of Oklahoma Joe's, forcing the management to end its policy of discrimination. Building on the boycott momentum George Long, now a University of New Mexico law student, drafted the first version of what became the Albuquerque Civil Rights Ordinance, enacted in October 1950. In 1955, the New Mexico state legislature enacted a similar statute, nine years before the national Civil Rights Act was passed by the U.S. Congress. George Long had formed a remarkable coalition of students and sympathetic off-campus organizations including the NAACP, several churches and Latino organizations to achieve the first significant civil rights legislation in the intermountain West.<sup>12</sup>

In 1958, a group of black Kansas high school and college students challenged segregation through direct action. On Saturday, July 19, 1958, Ron Walters, a Wichita State college freshman and head of the city's NAACP Youth Council, led ten students in a four-week sit-in at the Dockum drugstore lunch counter. The students won their battle when the regional vice president of the Dockum chain arrived and ordered, "Serve them, I'm losing too much money." The students quickly targeted other Wichita lunch counters over the remainder of the summer, desegregating most of them. Wichita's students were inspired by national developments such as the Brown decision, the Montgom-

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<sup>10</sup> See August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*, 15, 27, 59-60 (1973).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in George Long, *How Albuquerque Got Its Civil Rights Ordinance*, *Crisis* 522 (1953).

<sup>12</sup> See MARC SIMMONS, *ALBUQUERQUE: A NARRATIVE HISTORY*, 371 (1982); Long, *supra* note 11 at 521-24.

ery Bus Boycott, and the Little Rock school desegregation effort. But they also inspired the Greensboro sit-ins of the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

Oklahoma City followed. On August, 19, 1958, Clara M. Luper, the advisor to the local NAACP Youth Council, led thirteen black teenagers into Katz's Drugstore. The protesters occupied virtually every soda fountain seat for two days until they were served. By September 1, the NAACP Youth Council had desegregated four of the five targeted downtown Oklahoma City businesses.

The first victories were also the easiest. Most Oklahoma City restaurants and public facilities remained segregated, prompting a six year campaign involving thousands of demonstrators and expanding from sit-ins to protest marches and a boycott of all downtown stores. The Oklahoma City campaign attracted Hollywood celebrities such as Charlton Heston who walked a picket line in May 1961. Finally, on June 2, 1964, the Oklahoma City Council passed a public accommodations ordinance which forbade operators of public establishments from refusing anyone because of "race, religion, or color."<sup>14</sup>

The Oklahoma City desegregation campaign was one of the longest in the West. But civil disobedience demonstrations against exclusion from public accommodations, job discrimination, housing bias or school segregation occurred in dozens of other western cities. Merchants who refused to hire African American sales personnel drew protests in Seattle, Denver and San Diego. Houston and San Antonio African Americans concentrated on restaurant exclusion. Salt Lake City, Phoenix and Portland protests addressed housing discrimination. In 1963, demonstrators sat-in at the California state capitol building and the Colorado governor's mansion as civil rights protests escalated throughout the region.<sup>15</sup>

Reno and Las Vegas African Americans challenged the state's gambling and hotel industry which excluded blacks as casino patrons and hotel guests. Even celebrity performers such as Sammy Davis, Jr., Nat King Cole, and Lena Horne, could not stay in the hotels where they performed. That campaign is well known. Less familiar is the remarkable effort of African Americans in Hawthorne, Nevada, to challenge local racial discrimination. In an unusual break with the pattern of western civil rights activity, the Hawthorne NAACP led by Barbara Harnage, Oliver Wert and Otis Gray, waged its campaign with minimal support from the national or regional offices or from local white supporters. Yet it benefited from the direct personal intervention on significant occasions of Nevada Governors Grant Sawyer and Mike O'Callahan in its attempt to end discrimination in this small Nevada community. As in the

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<sup>13</sup> See Ronald Walters, *Standing Up in America's Heartland: Sitting-In Before Greensboro*, AMERICAN VISIONS 20-23 (1993); Ronald Walters, *The Great Plains Sit-In Movement, 1958-60*, GREAT PLAINS QUARTERLY 85-94 (1996); GRETCHEN CASSEL EICK, *DISSSENT IN WICHITA: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE MIDWEST, 1954-72* Ch. 1 (2001).

<sup>14</sup> The Oklahoma City ordinance was passed on the same day the 1964 Civil Rights Act went into effect so it is difficult to measure the level of compliance to the local as opposed to the national legislation. Nonetheless the Oklahoma City civil rights supporters claimed victory and some personal satisfaction when the city finally acted. For a detailed discussion of the Oklahoma City campaign see CLARA LUPER, *BEHOLD THE WALLS* 134-36 (1979); and Carl R. Graves, *The Right to be Served: Oklahoma City's Lunch Counter Sit-ins, 1958-1964*, 59 CHRONICLES OF OKLA. 152 (1981).

<sup>15</sup> See Taylor, *supra* note 2, at 289.

Oklahoma City campaign, overt discrimination, however, came to an end in Hawthorne only with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>16</sup>

The San Francisco Bay area and Los Angeles became the focal points of civil large scale disobedience campaigns in 1963. In May, James Baldwin addressed a San Francisco civil rights protest march and rally which drew over 30,000 supporters. The march was ostensibly to support the Birmingham Campaign led by Martin Luther King, Jr. However marchers followed a banner which read: "We March in Unity for Freedom in Birmingham and Equality in San Francisco." Both the rally and Baldwin's remarks indicated that local and national civil rights goals had merged. Baldwin pursued that theme in his speech: "We are not trying to achieve . . . more token integration [or] teach the South how to discriminate Northern style" he told the supportive audience. "We are attempting to end the racial nightmare, and this means immediately confronting and changing the racial situation in San Francisco."<sup>17</sup>

In the same month, Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed an audience of 35,000 in Los Angeles. Like Baldwin, the civil rights leader extended the campaign for racial justice to the West Coast when he told the audience to fight for freedom, "whether you're in Birmingham or Los Angeles." When Marnesba Tackett, a Los Angeles NAACP activist asked King what blacks in Los Angeles could do for blacks in Birmingham, he answered, "The most important thing that you can do is set Los Angeles free."<sup>18</sup>

In February 1964, eighteen-year-old Tracy Simms, a Berkeley High School student, took up the challenge issued by Baldwin and King and organized the largest civil rights protest in the Far West. Her target was one of the largest hotels in San Francisco, the Sheraton Palace, for its refusal to hire African Americans. Picketing began on a small scale but escalated when 123 demonstrators were arrested. Within a week approximately 1,500 demonstrations ranging from working class youth to university professors joined the outside picket lines while hundreds of other demonstrators filled the hotel lobby. Eventually 167 demonstrators went to jail including Mario Savio, a future leader of Berkeley's Free Speech Movement. Their lawyer was a young San Francisco black attorney named Willie Brown. But six hundred demonstrators remained in the hotel until later that afternoon when Tracy Simms announced that San Francisco's mayor had negotiated an agreement with the Sheraton Palace and all of the city's other major hotels. That agreement generated nearly 2,000 jobs for people of color.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of strategy, tactics, and objectives, most western protests paralleled those waged east of the Mississippi River. However many western protests occurred in a milieu where African Americans were one of a number of groups of color. Indeed the Civil Rights Movement in the West moved far beyond the black-white dichotomy which dominated racial dynamics in the East and South. This divergence complicates the master civil rights narrative.

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<sup>16</sup> See Elmer R. Rusco, *The Civil Rights Movement in Hawthorne*, 43 *NEV. HISTORICAL SOC'Y QUARTERLY* 35 (2000).

<sup>17</sup> See Taylor, *supra* note 2, at 289-90.

<sup>18</sup> Both quotations appear in Josh Sides, *L.A. CITY LIMITS: AFRICAN AMERICAN LOS ANGELES FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION TO THE PRESENT* 162-63 (2003).

<sup>19</sup> See Taylor, *supra* note 2, at 291-92.

Where do Asian American, Latinos and Native Americans “fit” in this narrative? I offer one warning to historians who seek to examine these groups in the context of the civil rights campaigns. Be careful of models of African American action that are imposed on the narrative of other groups of color. Civil rights goals or strategies employed by African Americans in Los Angeles did not automatically apply to Latinos in Denver, Native Americans in Portland, or Asian Americans in San Francisco. As San Antonio dentist and civic leader Dr. Jose San Martin explained in 1962 when asked why the Civil Rights movement had not taken hold in the city’s Latino community: “Our roots are different. Our problems have been different, our solutions have been different. Therefore our philosophy is different.”<sup>20</sup>

One Native American newspaper editor sought to put greater distance between the struggles of Indian people and the civil rights campaigns then being waged by African Americans and their supporters across the nation by arguing that African American civil rights goals were completely dissimilar to those of Native people. He wrote in 1964, “Many people are equating the struggle of the American Indian with that of the American Negro. Actually their situations are almost exactly opposite. The Negroes are striving to attain assimilation with the dominant white society, while the Indians are striving to resist this forced assimilation with the rest of society.”<sup>21</sup>

Once we recognize the distinctions, the parallels become more apparent. For example, Native struggles over land throughout the region and fishing rights in the Pacific Northwest, while certainly not driven by visions of Indian-white social integration, or the denial of the ballot, should nonetheless be viewed as part of a larger social justice struggle. So should Latino campaigns to integrate schools in California and Texas and Asian American efforts to repeal alien land laws or fight restrictive covenants. All of these suggest ways in which historians in the West need to expand the definition of the Civil Rights Movement.

There is another approach – we can also examine the participation of Latinos, Native Americans and Asian Americans in the African American campaigns themselves. Two examples from San Antonio and Seattle are instructive. San Antonio’s huge Chicano population created a different racial atmosphere from Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth, the other major Texas centers of civil disobedience. In 1960, Mexican Americans comprised 40% of the population as opposed to 7% of the city’s residents who were African American. Although there had been some attempts at political alliances between the groups, African Americans and Mexican Americans lived on separate sides of San Antonio in largely separate worlds.<sup>22</sup>

One of the divisions between the communities was the level of discrimination. San Antonio public accommodations regularly excluded blacks. Yet a

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<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Goldberg, *Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965*, 49 J. S. HIST. 362 (1983).

<sup>21</sup> The editorial in *Indian Progress* was reprinted in *The Voice of Brotherhood*, the monthly newspaper for the Alaska Native Brotherhood. On file with the University of Alaska, Anchorage Library. See *Editorial*, THE VOICE OF BROTHERHOOD, Aug. 1964, at 2.

<sup>22</sup> See Taylor, *supra* note 2, at 232 (one example of a 1930s coalition of Latinos and blacks).

1941 city ordinance prohibited discrimination against "anyone . . . merely because of his racial origin from one of the [Latin American] Republics."<sup>23</sup> Despite the ordinance, Anglo San Antonians considered Latinos non-white and widely discriminated against them in the schools, housing and in political representation.<sup>24</sup>

A few Chicano activists, recognizing their commonality with African Americans, joined the black direct action protests which began in March 1960. Leonel Jabier Castillo and Perfecto Villareal, for example, organized sit-ins at San Antonio theaters which involved black, brown and white volunteers. Moreover, black civil rights groups remembered San Antonio Congressman Henry B. Gonzales, who led an unsuccessful effort to outlaw racial segregation while a state senator in the 1950s. Historians are only beginning to examine the role of Latino activists and organizations in the post-World War II movement for racial justice.<sup>25</sup>

Asian American political activity in the West likewise poses challenges to the black-white civil rights narrative. For African American Seattle, the Asian Americans were the other group of color. Asian Americans, especially Japanese Americans, had been the largest racial minority in the city, and the focus of most prejudice before World War II. The wartime incarceration of the Japanese and influx of African Americans to work in shipyards and aircraft plants made black Seattle the largest post-war population of color. However Seattle's Asians made much greater post-war economic progress than blacks, entered the city's middle class sooner and were more acceptable to many whites. One white homeowner reflected that mood in 1963 when he declared: "Well, Orientals are O.K. in some places, but no colored."<sup>26</sup>

Most Japanese American organizations and leaders were neutral, and some were hostile to African American efforts to end housing discrimination despite their appeals for black voter support to repeal the Anti-Alien Land Act, a leading symbol of anti-Japanese prejudice. As with Chicanos in San Antonio, many Asian Americans rested comfortably with the milder discrimination they faced in comparison to black Seattleites or feared white anger if they identified too closely with civil rights activism.

Individual Asian Americans however, did support local civil rights efforts. Wing Luke, the first Asian American to serve on the Seattle City Council, sponsored a controversial 1963 open housing ordinance that would have assisted African Americans in gaining access to decent housing outside the city's small, segregated black community. Philip Hayasaka, executive director of the Seattle Human Rights Commission, criticized local Japanese leaders for not supporting the black civil rights movement. Japanese American activist,

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<sup>23</sup> See Goldberg, *supra* note 20, at 370.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 352-363. On the role of Henry B. Gonzalez in the civil rights campaign in Texas see JUAN GOMEZ-QUINONEZ, *CHICANO POLITICS: REALITY AND PROMISE, 1940-1990* 57-59 (1990). On the Mexican-American civil rights movement in Texas and its relationship to the national African-American struggle see MARIO T. GARCIA, *MEXICAN AMERICANS: LEADERSHIP, IDEOLOGY & IDENTITY, 1930-1960* 46-59 (1989).

<sup>26</sup> QUINTARD TAYLOR, *THE FORGING OF A BLACK COMMUNITY: SEATTLE'S CENTRAL DISTRICT FROM 1870 THROUGH THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA* 223 (1994).



Rev. Mineo Katagiri, joined the local movement, becoming the only Asian American member of the Central Area Civil Rights Committee, an otherwise all-black organization which coordinated the direct action protests in the city through most of the 1960s. Asian American activists such as Bernie Yang and Jim Takisaki, helped coordinate sit-ins and protest marches in Seattle. They and other young Asian Americans, like many white students of the era, genuinely identified with African American demands which they believe stemmed from legitimate grievances. But they also believed the success of the civil rights campaign meant the end of anti-Asian discrimination as well. Despite the commitment of these individuals, Asian Americans and African Americans traveled different routes in seeking full-fledged citizenship in Seattle.<sup>27</sup>

Although the Civil Rights Movement in the West did achieve some significant victories such as the integration of all of the major casinos and hotels in Las Vegas in 1960, it did not, and could not stamp out every vestige of racial discrimination. Neither did the Southern Civil Rights movement. But the Movement in the West served notice to white westerners that African American concerns could no longer be ignored. Furthermore it, energized and politicized western African American communities which had long been complacent about their status. Finally, it illustrated that by the 1950s and 1960s the battle for racial justice was not simply a Southern campaign – it had to be waged in every corner of this nation including Nevada and the West.

That realization returns us to Virginia City in 1870. In that year 150 African Americans, virtually the entire black population of the town marched to nearby Gold Hill to celebrate the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. The men and women marched to “popular patriotic music” behind a “fine silk flag” made for the occasion by the black women of Virginia City. The flag was inscribed with the words: “JUSTICE IS SLOW BUT SURE.”<sup>28</sup> These five words symbolized the century-long struggle for social and racial justice in Nevada and the West, a struggle that continues to this day.

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<sup>27</sup> See Taylor, *supra* note 2, at 293-94.

<sup>28</sup> See Rusco, *supra* note 3, at 98-99.