

20-30

BRIEF BACKGROUND ON MAYA MILLER
VS. THE LOCAL LAW:

- April 4- The local LWV Reno-Carson decided to support the local black picket of the Federal Census bureau for failure to hire more than one black employee (out of 280).
- I joined for a day. Day ended in a fracas, built up to by police-bureaucrats- people interplay through the hours and finally in a forced opening of the back door of the locked Census Office (not by me).
- Followed: gendarmes arriving with billy-clubs and guns, kids throwing bottles and the struggle described.
- I tried to stop two policemen from harming one of the young black students (a senior pre-law at the University).
- Police Sergeant then arrested me along with two other men.
- Trial in May in Municipal Court convicted all 3 of us--for me, 20 days or \$100- (charge: "obstructing and resisting"); for others, 40 days or \$200, for "obstructing and resisting" and disturbing the peace.
- We posted bail and have appealed.
- Appeal comes up next Thursday, Sept. 24.
- Following account is our effort to put straight my ideas on issues for post-trial hand-out.

SOME NOTES ON CITY OF RENO VS. FIELDS, HARRIS, MILLER, AND WHY WE'VE APPEALED IT.--

Sept 24, 1970

I'd like to explain some of the reasoning behind my desire to appeal this case. (It would have been easy to pay the \$100, and a good deal cheaper, but it seemed important to me to correct what I consider an injustice in the lower court's decision, and also to try to make clearer on the record the value of keeping together the two elements involved: struggling Black America and comfortable White America. I do not want to see these two driven apart by fear.

I am on the National Board of the League of Women Voters, chairman of its Human Resources-Equal Opportunity portfolio. The League is an organization of women whose purpose is to increase citizen participation in government. It is largely middleclass, white, careful, studious, and suburban (although it is not exclusively any of those things). It has been working on the issues of poverty and racial injustice for many years. I have taken part in this work here in Reno through most of the established channels, the Equal Rights Commission, the County Commission, the NAACP, the Washoe County Economic Opportunity Board, Intertribal Council, Race Relations Center; etc. As President of the League of Women Voters of Nevada I have been close also to the very constructive consistent work the League in Las Vegas has done to try to achieve school integration with justice

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and harmony; and also have been involved in some of the Paiute and Washoe issues in Nevada. As national chairman I am responsible for working on many solid programs and studies for the League's objectives of combatting poverty and racial discrimination.

The friends who asked me to help on the April 4th picketing of the Census Office are citizens with whom I have been the rounds of endless government and private enterprise offices for 3 or more fruitless years. In that time, I have learned to appreciate the depth of their frustration after their 17 years of working for equal treatment from this community. They have been doing our work for us. Black Springs may be black, but the institutional racism they are combatting in seeking equality for Black Reno is a white problem.

It was important to me that when asked by these responsible black friends to support their picketing effort, that I do so - not just with good wishes, or approving dinner-table talk, or an objective study, but with myself, my time, my walking with them. Whitney Young, the conservative Urban League Director, had said at the national convention of the League of Women Voters in May, 1968, following the Kerner Commission Report on Civil Disorders, "We don't need your studies anymore, ladies; we need you on the streets of Cicero." I had never been on a picket line before. There is a great deal I am ignorant of. One labor leader has said, "You learn more with one day on the picket line than with a year of reading." I believe that. The local LWV had agreed to support the picketing effort to achieve equal opportunity in employment; and when I carried their sign, it was my small contribution to my black friends, to my local League, and to the cause we share.

In the trial before municipal court, the city's attorney accused me of "wanting to be arrested." I have thought about that a good deal since, because there is some piece of truth in it since the whole day had an unusual sense of sharing about it, a tenor which said, "whatever happens to one of us today should happen to all." Sharing was the characteristic of the day of April 4: shared work, shared food, shared responsibilities, shared weariness. All day the group made it clear to the police who visited and to others that it wished to be dealt with as a whole. It acknowledged no spokesman. "When we identify leaders or spokesman," they said, "you kill them or put them in jail." In the morning when one polite policeman identified the parking lot area we could not picket on, the group was one in obeying. The group was careful to police itself in the matter of litter, and courtesy to passers-by, and in its effort to explain the importance of the issue, - and it was one in its resentment of Mr. Reynolds' overt racist remarks. The group's attitude was very much one of wanting to share consequences, too. Many have testified to the numbers of hands - as many as 10 or 12 - that went up when Sgt. Barrett asked who had broken in the back door. All joined in assuming that responsibility.

All the more, therefore, the singling out for "disturbing the peace" of the two young men here on trial seemed like another example of white America's determination to immobilize young black leadership with selective enforcement of our law.

Oddie Fields and James Harris are well known in this community as civil rights leaders, young men who care enough for their people to make real solid efforts.

On April 4, when the police-people hassle broke out which ended the day, and Oddie Fields turned up beside me on the sidewalk with one police billy club on his throat and another headed for his gut, it seemed clear to me that if I was to follow through on the responsibilities of that shared day, I must stay close and watch. And when the police action became indisputably brutal, it was clear that I must protest.

This was a young man being hurt, and the policemen were two young men hurting. As a mother, I have separated angry youngsters before. It did not seem out of order to try to deter those two policemen who were obviously carried away with their fury, and try to release Oddie Fields who was being pressed against the street.

A word in general about the police. Like most Americans, in the past, my attitude has combined respect for their position of authority and grateful assurance that they were on call if there was danger. By and large, I have been relieved to delegate the safety of our streets to them. Over the past several years, however, there has increased for me, as for many others, a real concern that we- society- have delegated too big and weighty a portion of responsibility to the police, and that it is too much for them to handle. We have asked them to cope with the ultimate consequences of our racism. In this instance, we were asking the police to deal with the end product of a long tiresome line of Nevada's failures to bring equal justice to its black citizens. Officer Kirkland and others like him were not emotionally capable of handling the resentments of that April 4th day- Oddie Field's or mine. Officer Kirkland responded by throttling Oddie Fields and slamming his police -car door on my foot.

Now, I think it is very important that we not be frightened away by these consequences. I talked last year with a beautiful elderly League woman in Cleveland who said, when asked about danger in the streets, "We old Clevelanders have to make a point of using the streets the way we used to. The streets belong to all of us, white Clevelanders and black Clevelanders. They are only dangerous if we desert them." I think this is true for America. If we desert the streets, then we leave the focal point of our society's racism to work itself out in the mutual retaliation of young men- young policemen and young black leaders. And there will be more blood.

Maya Miller