

INSIDE REPORT

New LBJ Strategy On Civil Rights

By ROWLAND EVANS and ROBERT NOVAK

WASHINGTON—When President Johnson summoned civil rights leaders to the White House on Feb. 13 for a private preview of his 1967 civil rights message, the unpublished roster of those present showed startling omissions.



EVANS

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The heads of two major civil rights groups—Stokeley Carmichael of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and Floyd McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality—were not even invited. Nor was Bayard Rustin, who planned the march on Washington, or Joseph Rauh, civil rights spokesman for the Americans for Democratic Action. Dr. Martin Luther King of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was invited but didn't come.

What's more, there were unfamiliar faces present—for instance, Texas State Sen. Barbara Jordan. A Houston lawyer who is the only Negro in the Texas Senate, Miss Jordan lacks the national notoriety of Stokeley Carmichael and Floyd McKissick. But also unlike them, she is a practical politician who understands reality.

The omissions and inclusions on that invitation list reveal how far President Johnson's sophistication in the politics of civil rights has progressed the last two years.

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WHEN JOHNSON signed the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the White House was naive enough to give honored places at the ceremony to SNICK functionaries who had tried to sabotage the bill. Invited to planning sessions for last year's White House Conference on Civil Rights were SNICK and CORE officials who, predictably, later attacked the whole idea.

At long last, however, the White House has learned that of the "big five" civil rights leaders, only two—Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the Urban League—can be counted on to actively back any Johnson civil rights bill. The others—King, Carmichael and McKissick—immensely prefer agitation over legislature.

Beyond this, the White House realizes that many civil rights activists want to believe the worst of Lyndon Johnson. Consider Professor Kenneth Clark of City College of New York, a Negro militant who in the past had cooperated with the Johnson administration. When Johnson's 1967 State of the Union address contained only 44 words on civil rights, Clark issued a bitter denunciation of the President. He was not invited Feb. 13.

To replace the disaffected militants, the White House has been working with Louis Martin, deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee and a Negro, to bring the growing list of state and local Negro office holders into national civil rights activity.

Had President Johnson not scheduled the Feb. 13 briefing at the last moment, many Negro state legislators besides Miss Jordan would have been present. As it is, the White House was far more impressed with her than the usual run of civil rights leaders.

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ANOTHER NEWCOMER at the White House on Feb. 13, Catholic Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington, D.C. pointed up another new trend in Johnson's civil rights strategy. The White House wants high-ranking church leaders such as Archbishop O'Boyle, more conservative than the idealistic young priests who marched at Selma, to sell the President's beleaguered fair housing plan to their congregations.

With hot-headed Negro militants not present, the Feb. 13 session had none of the criticism of the President that used to characterize such meetings. The NAACP's Roy Wilkins set the tone by expressing his appreciation for the strong civil rights position taken by Johnson in public and in private.

For his part, President Johnson pledged he would continue to send the fair housing bill to Congress, year after year, until it passed. Vice President Humphrey followed with a give-'em-hell speech condemning liberal senators who constantly talk about Viet Nam but have forgotten about civil rights legislation.

Almost surely, none of this will be enough to pass the fair housing scheme in the 90th Congress, but the Feb. 13 meeting typifies the low-keyed, common sense approach that dominates the White House of late. For Lyndon Johnson finally has discovered the identity of his friends and his enemies in the civil rights movement.

*21 Perhaps Johnson
thinks the Mexican Americans are
his friends.*