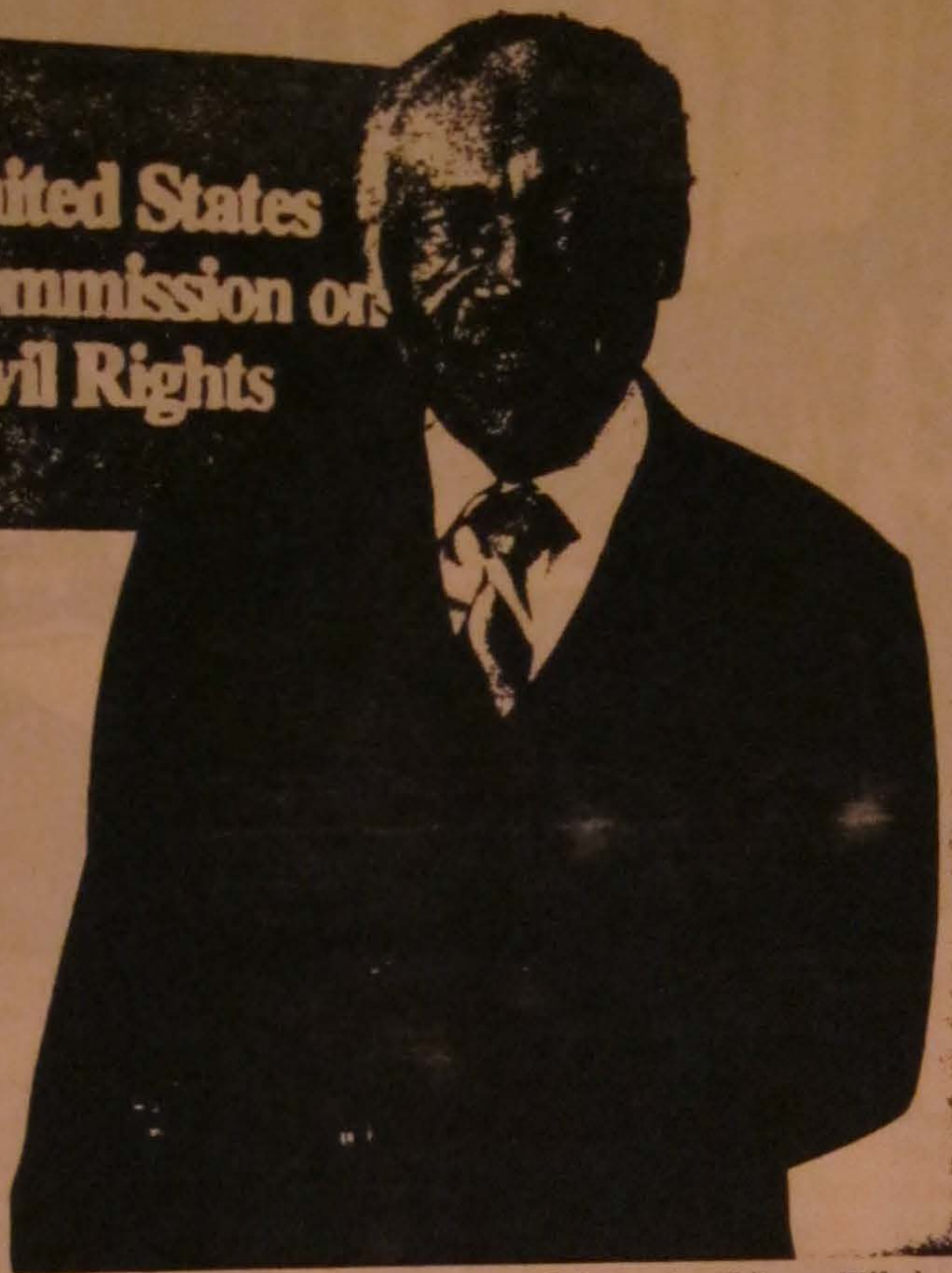


United States Commission on Civil Rights



Civil Rights Commission Chairman Arthur Fletcher (above) poses (below) with staff director Wilfredo Gonzalez (seated, r.) and commission members Charles Pei Wang (seated, l.) and (standing, l. to r.) William Allen, Mary Frances Berry, Esther Buckley and Carl Anderson. Two members of the commission, Blandina Cardenas Ramirez and Russell Redenbaugh, are not pictured.

Mary McLeod Bethune visited Fletcher's school. Though he was only in the seventh grade, he has never been the same. In fact, more than half a century later, the Phoenix-born chairman still remembers every detail of the day Bethune took the stage at Douglass Junior/Senior High School, Oklahoma City and spoke the words that foreshadowed his life's work.

"She said, 'I am as Black as the ace of spades and anything but beautiful, yet I have been summoned to the White House to advise presidents . . . I know that I am talking to someone in this auditorium who is going to grow up and advise a president of the United States, too,' recalls Fletcher. 'And I came here to tell them what to tell the president when they get there.' And what she told us was: 'Always carry a brief for Black folks. Tell him when you get there that we Negroes, individually and collectively, can be of great value to this nation.'"

Looking back now, Arthur Fletcher says, "At the time I was a D-plus/C-minus student but when she spoke, her spiritual electricity held me in the palm of her hands and I got excited and thought, wouldn't it be great if I was the person carrying that message?"

Fifty-three years later, it is Fletcher.

He has counseled every Republican president in the last two decades. He was assistant secretary of labor for

A Message To Americans

Civil Rights Commission chief leads crusade for racial harmony

ARTHUR Fletcher remembers the exact moment it happened and the exact words she said. Though he doubts any of the three U.S. presidents he's advised know it, that moment—and those words—are the reason they've sought his counsel and the reason he's chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission today.

Before it happened he was a gang leader, a self-described "tough" roaming the streets of L.A. with a good hustle and a bad attitude.

And then the great Black leader





Presiding at a commission hearing, Fletcher recognizes Mary Frances Berry (l.), a veteran commission member who has consistently supported a strong civil rights posture. Fletcher, who has revitalized the commission, is reopening seven regional offices.

A MESSAGE *Continued*

President Nixon and deputy assistant for urban affairs for President Ford. And though he turned down President Reagan's offer to come on board as his special assistant when his condition of direct access wasn't guaranteed, Fletcher says he provided his counsel to the chief executive nonetheless. "I advised him; he just didn't take my advice," says the 66-year-old lifelong Republican who infuriated the party's conservative right wing when he

called Reagan "the worst president for civil rights in this century."

That directness, that call-it-like-he-sees-it candor, is a major reason right-wing stalwarts bridled when President Bush appointed him chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. Since he assumed the post in February 1990, Fletcher has proven to be a thorn in the collective side of the conservative right. Against the wishes and advice of some of the most powerful people in

Washington and the White House, Fletcher counseled the president not to veto the civil rights bill—this year's or last.

"I thought that was pulling the rug out from under a dream that I had for him—not for me—to go down in history as a great president because he solved the critical problem of the day. And whether people want to deal with it or not, in America the critical problem of the day is racism," says Fletcher, clearly stung by the administration's success last year in dismissing the legislation as a quota bill.

His sign-the-civil-rights-bill advice, however, was just the start of his campaign to force America to deal with its racial problems. Not long ago, the former pro football player who broke the color barrier on the Baltimore Colts set off a storm of controversy when he publicly called America "a racist nation" with the worst climate for civil rights in 40 years.

"Now that Whites clearly understand what we [Blacks] want—which is a piece of the economic pie—it's a whole new ball game," says Fletcher who plans to reopen seven regional offices as part of his plan to reinvigorate the beleaguered commission, which lost its stature, and much of its staff, during the Reagan years.

It's the sort of stuff that makes Fletcher profoundly unpopular with many top—and powerful—adminis-



Staff members, including staff director Gonzalez (l.) and general counsel Carol McCabe Booker (seated 4th from l.), share a light moment with Chairman Fletcher.



Married 27 years, Arthur and Bernyce Fletcher are a loving twosome on the grounds of their Washington, D.C., home. They share a quiet moment at home (right). In addition to chairing the commission, Fletcher will head the new Institute for Corporate Social Policy at the University of Denver.



Fletcher, the soul of the Civil Rights Movement has shifted. Now that Blacks can vote, live in any neighborhood they want, attend the school of their choice, and sleep/eat at any lunch counter/restaurant/hotel they desire, the *new* civil rights battle, he says, is all about one thing: Money. Cash. The all-mighty dollar.

"I read where a young White man who considers himself a right-wing conservative nailed it down," he says. "He called it 'economic racism.' He's saying what I've been saying for some time. It's down to economics now. And for reasons that defy description, the vast majority of White folks don't want Black people participating in the economy. Now *that's* the bottom line. It's down to that now."

Given the current economic climate, Fletcher acknowledges that getting White America to accept the idea it must share the economic pie with

Blacks and other minorities is not going to be easy. But it must be done, he says, not as a matter of justice but necessity, not only for Blacks but for all Americans. Nothing less, he insists, than the security and prosperity of America is at stake.

"In the next decade," he explains, "75 to 80 percent of America's workforce will be Blacks, women and other minorities. The question, then, is America going to have a work force that can compete? If that work force is denied access to education and training, the answer is obviously no. And if they don't have the education, training and skills to compete with the rest of the world, how can they keep America secure, stable and prosperous? So a secure and stable America, not justice and fair play, is the *real* reason Blacks and Whites must learn to live in harmony. The national security depends on it."

A MESSAGE *Continued*

tration officials. There was, for example, the infamous Black History Month incident in which Fletcher's name was conspicuously omitted from the list of invitees to the White House celebration. When the president heard about it, say insiders, he hit the roof and an invitation was quickly issued. "The person who told me said the president was ticked off as hell," chuckles Fletcher of the petty slight.

The fact is, says Fletcher, they can snub him until the cows come home. He won't be silenced. The way he sees it, he's chairman of the Civil Rights Commission for one reason: to force America to deal with its race problem—*now*. Which is why, despite two triple-bypass heart operations in four months, he insists on traveling the country spreading his message: "The civil rights battle must be fought on new ground."

The civil rights debate, says Fletcher, is no longer about seclusion, separation and segregation. "Those were topics that were prevalent in the '60s, '70s and '80," he explains. "The '90s are a whole new ball game."

Over the past 25 years, says

Three generations of Fletchers include (l. to r.) son Paul Fletcher, grandson Rick Harrison, father and grandfather Arthur Fletcher, grandson Tino Fletcher, and daughter Joni Fletcher.

