



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1977

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[[image - black and white photograph of a group of African-American women standing near a tour bus]]
[[caption]] When choir members from Spellman College in Atlanta visited New York, Sutton arranged for their lodging at local hotel. [[/caption]]

[[image - black and white photograph of Percy Sutton speaking with a woman]]
[[caption]] Listening to confidence from constituent. [[/caption]]

In communities both black and white, crime is an eating, spreading cancer. It is even uglier in the frequency with which the blackness we hailed as beautiful is turning against blackness. It was chic, not long ago, for black leaders to scoff at black militants and marauders for "messing over their own turf." The implication, often spelled out, was "Brother, if you got to be violent, go do it somewhere where it hurts the honky." These were words which sounded daring and logical. However, it has become agonizingly clear that hunger and need and thrill-seeking and greed and dope dereliction produce crime which recognizes no boundaries of color or geography. The cold fact is that the criminal mind, regardless of how many sociological explanations of how it got to be that way, recognizes no right of racial pride to interfere with commerce.

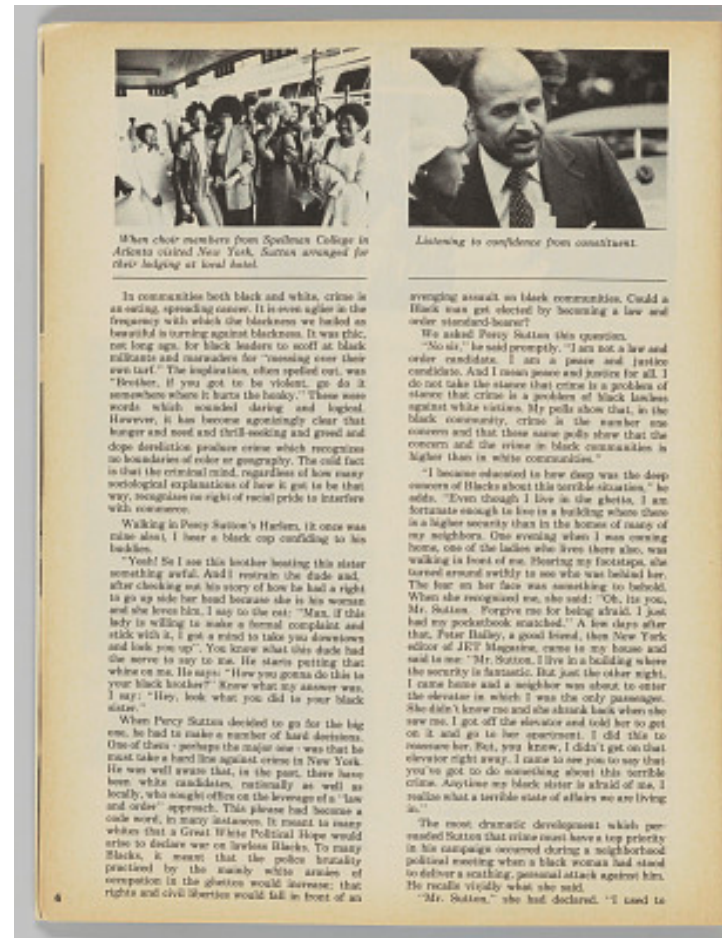
Walking in Percy Sutton's Harlem, (it once was mine also), I hear a black cop confiding to his buddies.

"Yeah! So I see this brother beating this sister something awful. And I restrain the dude and, after checking out his story of how he had a right to go up side her head because she is his woman and she loves him, I say to the cat: "Man, if this lady is willing to make a formal complaint and stick with it, I got a mind to take you downtown and lock you up". You know what this dude had the nerve to say to me. He starts putting that whine on me. He says: "How you gonna do this to your black brother?" Know what my answer was. I say: "Hey, look what you did to your black sister."

When Percy Sutton decided to go for the big one, he had to make a number of hard decisions. One of them - perhaps the major one - was that he must take a hard line against crime in New York. He was well aware that, in the past, there have been white candidates, nationally as well as locally, who sought office on the leverage of a "law and order" approach. This phrase had become a code word, in many instances. It meant to many whites that a Great White Political Hope would arise to declare war on lawless Blacks. To many Blacks, it meant that the police brutality practiced by the mainly white armies of occupation in the ghettos would increase; that rights and civil liberties would fall in front of an avenging assault on black communities. Could a Black man get elected by becoming a law and order standard-bearer?

We asked Percy Sutton this question.

"No sir," he said promptly. "I am not a law and order candidate. I am a peace and justice candidate. And I mean peace and justice for all. I do not take the stance that crime is a problem of black lawless against white victims. My polls show that, in the black community, crime is the number one concern and that these same polls show that the concern and the crime in black communities is higher than in white communities."



"I became educated to how deep was the deep concern of Blacks about this terrible situation," he adds. "Even though I live in the ghetto, I am fortunate enough to live in a building where there is a higher security than in the homes of many of my neighbors. One evening when I was coming home, one of the ladies who lives there also, was walking in front of me. Hearing my footsteps, she turned around swiftly to see who was behind her. The fear on her face was something to behold. When she recognized me, she said: "Oh, its you, Mr. Sutton. Forgive me for being afraid. I just had my pocketbook snatched." A few days after that, Peter Bailey, a good friend, then New York editor of JET Magazine, came to my house and said to me: "Mr. Sutton, I live in a building where the security is fantastic. But just the other night, I came home and a neighbor was about to enter the elevator in which I was the only passenger. She didn't know me and she shrank back when she saw me. I got off the elevator and told her to get on it and go to her apartment. I did this to reassure her. But, you know, I didn't get on that elevator right away. I came to see you to say that you've got to do something about this terrible crime. Anytime my black sister is afraid of me, I realize what a terrible state of affairs we are living in."

The most dramatic development which persuaded Sutton that crime must have a top priority in this campaign occurred during a neighborhood political meeting when a black woman had stood to deliver a scathing, personal attack against him. e recalls vividly what she said.

"Mr. Sutton," she had declared. "I used to

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