

Fatalism in Fillmore

'Anyone Helping Blacks Will Die'

By RUSH GREENLEE

The blues which alternately hang like a pall or a shield over the Fillmore Sistrict seem to cry out now, "What'd I tell you, you cain't never win."

The assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy has brought forth a dumbfounded, headshaking fatalism that anyone who helps black people will die.

On April 4, the area had reeled from the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis.

Many had just come out of the shells into which they had retreated that April day and begun to take an interest in the current political campaigns. They had heard Kennedy's voice.

PRO-KENNEDY

And they had voted for him in great numbers on Tuesday. They saw in Kennedy an alliance between the rich and the poor which might lead to basic changes in the country.

Last Friday Kennedy had come to a huge housing project at Eddy and Laguna Streets to speak. He had been a big hit.

They had helped him win the California primary and now he was dead.

"But I knew they were going to rip him off," said Ronald, 20, who wanted himself referred to as a black youth from the Western Addition, but declined to state his last name.

"I told a whole lot of dudes that the white power structure is going to eip off anybody who's going to do anything for black people," said Ronald.

DEDICATED

His partner Bill, also 20, said that he felt Kennedy

was really dedicated to his work.

"You don't usually see a honky come out here and talk to us, you understand what I'm saying?" he asked, adding emphasis with a no nonsense glare.

Sam Kelly, 62, is a retired carpenter living at 1061 Laguna St. He walks with a cane. Kennedy's death was a personal loss to him.

"Horrible, horrible. He should be living now. He was important to me and to all us black people. I don't know where we'll turn now," he said.

The rundown flats, the empty and boarded up store fronts, the slow, shrugging walks of people seemed all part of the feeling of abandonment voiced so intensely over Kennedy's death.

PROGRESS

"We just don't know, thought we were making some progress but . . ." Percy Pinkney's voice trailed off.

One of the original members of Youth for Service, he

is now director of street work for the organization.

"They say we're violent, but how many black people have been at the firing end of these assassination guns? In only one case — the killing of Malcolm X," said Pinkney, 28.

"It's whites who are turning to guns, not us. I don't know what's going to happen. People keep asking me and I don't know what to tell them. I'm lost like everybody else," said Pinkney.

WHITE CHALLENGE

Many youngsters said that Kennedy's assassination was the latest challenge by whites to black people. One said, his voice flat and hard:

"The honky is challenging

the black man to a duel and we are accepting. We are accepting. We are accepting. We are accepting."

Older people talked of conspiracy, noting that all the people who have been assassinated starting with Medgar Evers in Mississippi "have been progressive people."

"Why is it none of these conservatives ever gets hit?" asked Leonard Jones, 73, a retired house painter. "It's a conspiracy, that's why, to get anybody who comes out for the black man."

CIVIL WAR

Unemployed men gathered at street corners spoke also of conspiracy, some adding it was plain for anyone to see that the country was heading for another civil war.

Lionel McGarry, 28, a United Parcel Service driver, said he thought there might be a link between the many recent assassinations.

"I voted for Kennedy. He wanted to better conditions. He seemed sincere, more for real than anybody else. Now why is it every time the black man has something going for him it gets destroyed?" he said with knowing scorn.

But Mrs. Maydelle Crisp, 31, a clerk at Wesley Johnson's Pharmacy, 1960 Sutter St., sees all the recent events as part of biblical prophecy.

PROPHECY

"It makes me real sad, but the Bible has prophesied all these things. I don't know why people act like they don't believe these things will happen," she said.

"Don't get me wrong," she cautioned, "I'm sorry about what happened to that man. It makes my heart ache and my stomach bubble, but I believe in my Baptist faith and it's about time for this universe to disintegrate. I'm ready for the paradise my Saviour has provided."

The listless atmosphere of the debris-strewn ghetto streets is in sharp contrast to the quiet efficient hum at Fidelity Savings & Loan Association, a black institution lo-

cated at Divisadero and Suter Streets.

SUSPICION

But a deep suspicion about the country has crept in there too. The affable Assistant Vice President Leonard Jones said:

"I think what is happening with these assassinations is a reaction to efforts to change this country in a basic way. Something is basically wrong with the system.

"I really don't know if things will get worse, but I know that you can only carry conservatism so far, then all hell is going to break loose.

"A lot of people need jobs and under capitalism there is no such thing as full employment. We're going to have to move closer to socialism. The needs of the country are upsetting a lot of people who don't want change."

NO SURPRISE

There is no amazement around the Fillmore that violence is striking high up. They only snort that such "ignorant amazement" comes from studying "fixed" history books in school.

Nonetheless, behind the tough talk, a deep fear shows. What will be next? Is repression at hand? The heartbreaking cry of the old blues shouters is alive:

"When I got up this morning, blues was walkin' round my bed . . . when I go to eat my breakfast, blues was all in my bread . . ."