

# Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1968

“Some people believe that all Negroes carry switchblade knives. Well, it’s not true.”

Thus Detroit’s local TV commentator Lou Gordon ‘continues his technique of cute rumour managing. He’s pretty smooth. He states the rumour first making sure that everyone hears it clearly then, after it has sunk in deeply among his gun-toting white viewers, he makes a mild renunciation of the rumour.

Another Gordon-encouraged rumour was that Black extremists were going to invade the white suburbs and kill a white child in each one. Even though Gordon allegedly denied the rumour, he still kept on repeating it—as if there could possibly be some validity to it.

So vicious have been Gordon’s ‘personal attacks on Rev. Albert B. Cleage that his employer, Channel 50, has had to grant “equal time” twice this year (with this writer doing the legal work for Rev. Cleage.)

Apparently, as a check on the continuous irresponsible ranting of Gordon, Channel 50 will not let him appear “live” any more and only will let him be on the air if he is “video-taped” first thus making it possible to edit out unusually obnoxious remarks:

But Gordon still hasn’t given up. While he can’t make “personal attacks” any more, he has now accelerated his “group attacks”—primarily, against the “Black extremists,” as he calls outspoken people, and generally against all Blacks.

So, on a recent Sunday program when he made the aforementioned “switchblade” remark, he used the occasion of a panel discussion on integrated neighborhoods to launch into further elaboration of his bigoted stereotypes.

While this writer pursues legal and quasi-legal remedies against Gordon with the Federal Communications Commission and the National Association of Broadcasters, members of Detroit’s “liberal” community should follow the lead of Rev. Cleage in boycotting the show. It is almost impossible to get any sort of liberal point of view expressed within a Gordon-controlled format, and, even if one succeeds in getting a few minor points across, he actually helps perpetuate the illusion that Gordon is fair-minded and creates a legitimate base for his racist utterings.

Anyway, one of Gordon’s guests, Mrs. Arthur Hock, a very nice liberal white lady from Community Action Neighbors Northwest (CANN), was constantly being badgered by him for daring to move out of the suburbs into Detroit.

“You mean you have six school-age children, Gordon pressed her, “and you’re willing to risk their safety by living in the city? You are indeed courageous and noble.”

“No, I’m not courageous and noble,” Mrs. Hock tried to reply. “The city is where the action is, where the challenges are. There’s no escape in the suburbs—they have serious problems also, and a pretty high level of crime.”

But Gordon kept on insisting about the “high Negro crime rate” and appeared ready to give Mrs. Hock a moving van so that she could move out into some place like Huntington Woods, where the Gordon family (he thinks) is safely embedded.

Dr. Jessie Goodwin, a Black professor at W.S.U. Med School, also appeared on the same panel and didn’t fare much better with Gordon. When he tried to explain the massive exodus to the suburbs in terms of “white racism”,

Gordon immediately countered with the myth of “Black racism” (which doesn’t really exist yet, but is being encouraged to develop by guys like Gordon who spend a substantial portion of their lives putting down any flickering of true independent Black identity.)

The great tragedy of Lou Gordon is that he both reflects the thinking of many, many whites in the Detroit area—and that he also nurtures their confused thinking and helps sharpen the conflicts that have made our city a tension-filled, jittery armed camp.

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