

An editorial hint, perhaps: Brown for mayor?

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Race progress

A Man We Need

GEORGE BROWN need not feel defeated as a man or as a black leader in the loss of his seat on the Tennessee Supreme Court in Thursday's election. He could not count enough votes but he can count some victories that are important to his future and the future of his community and his state.

Given the short time he had to prove himself as a justice and a political candidate, the prejudices that his color still excite and the considerable resources of the majority party in Tennessee, Brown ran a remarkable race.

He carried three of the state's eight congressional districts and all of its biggest and most populous county. As Brown, himself, observed, "I ran the first statewide race of a black Tennessean and here it is 11:10 and we can't tell what the outcome has been. I think that makes a statement. I think that I got strong support, and I think that should be a statement to the black community." That's right, on both points.

Part of the credit for a strong campaign against long odds belongs to Gov. Lamar Alexander, who not only departed political norm in appointing the first black man to the state's highest court, but who also had the courage and conviction to go out on the hustings and fight for him.

By laying his own prestige on the line, Alexander proved that much more than political expediency was at stake here. He proved that what was most important was what was right.

BUT BROWN WON many of those

202,000 votes on his own with a personal campaign waged with reason, honesty and hard work. His concession message exemplified the tone he had set these last few weeks when he said, "I'm proud tonight because this historic campaign was waged by both major candidates with dignity and respect and integrity. Frank Drowota is a fine and honorable and fair man. He will be a credit to this court."

We share that sentiment. In winning the race, Judge Drowota may have benefited from the forces of fear and bigotry, but he did not appeal to them or embrace them. Everything in his record on the state Court of Appeals indicates he is worthy of the confidence Brown and the voters expressed.

It is questionable whether independent candidate Larry Parrish hurt Brown or Drowota. The bulk of Parrish votes came from traditional conservative white areas of Shelby County and there is reason to doubt they would have gone to Justice Brown, in any event. In fact, they may only have narrowed Drowota's margin. But there is no question that Parrish and his Moral Majority backers emerged from this election as a force in the future politics of this community, at least.

WE BELIEVE and hope that George Brown emerged with strength, too. He has proven that he is an attractive candidate and unifying political leader who has the kind of broad appeal among blacks and whites so necessary to whatever hopes Memphis has.

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