

A Part of the Action

The progress of American blacks³ in elective politics is now being measured by the outcome of a handful of key campaigns. Black politics suffered a setback when Tom Bradley barely lost his race last year for California governor, it was said. That loss was forgotten with Harold Washington's narrow victory for mayor of Chicago. Next in this spotlight will be the mayor's race in Philadelphia. Then, perhaps, Baltimore.

But while all the attention is being focused on these glamour races, there are other developments taking place that say much more about the fortunes of black politicians: They are finally beginning to weave themselves into the fabric of state and local governments. The Maryland General Assembly is a prime example.

For the first time, blacks played key roles in shaping the 90-day session just concluded. Especially in the House, a strong corps of black legislators wielded considerable power. Delegate Larry Young became the first black chairman of a major committee, Environmental Matters, where he proved a superb leader. Delegate Howard Rawlings headed a key budget subcommittee. Delegate Wendell Phillips continued his ascent as the House conscience on ethics and social issues, as did Delegate John Douglass as a finance expert.

But it was more than individual contributions. The black caucus set early goals and fought for

them. It provided the only organized opposition to the budget when it hit the House floor. Its questions were pointed; its amendments were designed to preserve worthy social programs under attack.

In the past, black legislative representation has not shown such quality. There were few blacks in Annapolis capable of real leadership. Appointments of blacks to posts were token gestures. That is still the case in the Senate, to an extent. But in the House, blacks have become a true part of the top echelon.

And for the first time, the Assembly has a conservative black delegate who has disavowed any links with the black caucus. Delegate Richard Dixon of Carroll county voted with the conservatives on the House Appropriations Committee and often was at odds with blacks in the chamber. That dulls the old saw about a monolithic "black vote."

The future is bright for blacks in the General Assembly. There is a promising crop of freshmen delegates, headed by **Elijah Cummings** of Baltimore and Albert Wynn of Prince Georges county. The size of the black delegation also is likely to grow in future elections. So while attention remains on the black-white political races of the big cities, matters should be kept in perspective. Blacks became influential in the General Assembly this session. Their voices will be even more potent next year.