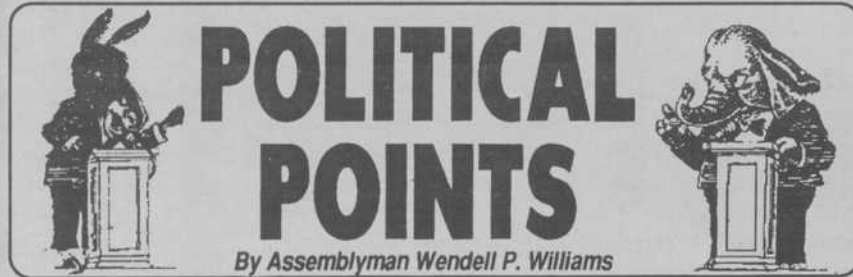


Point of View

The views on these editorial pages are those of the artists and authors indicated. Only the one depicted as the Sentinel-Voice editorial represent this publication.



POLITICAL POINTS

By Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams

UNLV'S GHETTO BOYZ

One would have to wonder what the next turn will be for higher education, considering the latest cloud to linger over the UNLV campus. Currently, University Board of Regents Chairperson Carolyn Sparks has gotten into an uncomfortable situation that has caused her photograph to end up on the butts of UNLV basketball players.

On January 16th, Sparks allegedly said that she is "tired of Jerry Tarkanian bringing in ghetto kids to the university." This remark was reportedly said by Sparks during a telephone conversation with Les Meilke, an advocate for a support group that is pushing to retain the embattled hoop coach.

On Wednesday, I talked to Carolyn Sparks about this and she claims it was not said as a racist remark. But rather it was a set-up to discredit her as part of a move to retain Tark. She also questioned the timing of the release of the information to the press, and Channel 13 airing it four days after it was said, "ironically on the Martin Luther King Holiday, creating more of a race factor," Sparks said. Misconceptions and stereotypes about African-American males have assumed a life of their own and have been elevated to the status of revealed truth.

What might be called "the five D's" have commonly been used to describe young African-American men - Deviant, Disturbed, Disadvantaged, and views of many that young African-American males are somehow less human, providing educators, policymakers, and business executives with a justification to ignore their problems, dismiss their needs, and blame them for a host of afflicting ills in American society.

The conditions that many

of us grow up in are statistical realities, but they have been exaggerated to create a misleading portrait of all African-American males. "We can't educate them" is one of the most damaging misconceptions and stereotypes of all.

Anyway, during my conversation with Sparks her remarks were as follow:

Williams: A few days ago it was alleged that you said that you were "sick and tired of Jerry Tarkanian bringing in ghetto kids to the university." Did you make that comment?

Sparks: No, the comment is untrue, what I said to Les Meilke was that you can't bring in kids from the ghetto who have grade-school educations or barely gotten through high school and expect them to function at the university level. My whole point was to point out to Mr. Meilke that I didn't think it was fair to the student to be brought in under circumstances where he was more than likely not to succeed.

Williams: What does it take for you to term a student a "ghetto kid," and do you believe that there is some relationship between geographic residency and academic potential?

Sparks: First allow me to make it very clear that if I did anything at all wrong, it was a poor choice of words selection, in choosing the term "ghetto." I should not have used that word, however the statement itself, I did not make. And anyone who knows me, knows that I don't talk or think that way.

Williams: How did this conversation between you and Les Meilke take place, did you call him or did he call you?

Sparks: He called me with this, and I took the bait, but still I would hope that my seven years as an advocate for the university and the students would be considered, and not one incident of an ill chosen word.

Williams: When coach Tar-

karian talked about the graduation rate of his players and the other students at UNLV, he talked as if the two were separate entities. Do you think that the basketball program has a problem being governed by the board of regents?

Sparks: Yes he did seem to view them as different students, and they sure seem to dislike the fact that they are not governing themselves.

Williams: Do you feel that the basketball program is doing enough to help its players succeed and graduate?

Sparks: That's one of the things I did during that conversation, I talked about how Lois Tarkanian had done great things for the promotion of the graduation rate of the players. In the last several years UNLV has been leaders in the nation from that standpoint.

Williams: What should the university be doing to show clearly that all students are welcome.

Sparks: Long before this thing happened I started a new "Minority affairs" committee chaired by regent June Whitley to build on our commitment to all students.

Williams: So in essence you feel that this whole thing is politically motivated and you meant no harm.

Sparks: Exactly, my mistake is a poor choice of words in using the term "ghetto." I did not intend to cause hurt or harm to anyone or their families. I regret it but I was doing what I thought was a paraphrase of frequent comments of coach Tarkanian. Not a put-down on any race, creed or color. I would like to try to explain my position to the players, I have offered to meet with them as a group or individually, but not with the coaches. I would also extend that invitation to any persons in the community as well. We have students that come from all walks of life, some



Assemblyman
Wendell P. Williams

that do well and some that do not. The word "ghetto" did not mean any particular group of people. However I still feel that it is wrong to allow any students to be brought into a university setting if they are not ready educationally and that was my only point.

Williams: Thank-you.

Whether Mrs. Sparks meant to say what she said or not, it is necessary to challenge those types of stereotypes. A more balanced view of young African-American males is needed, because public perceptions of this group significantly affect the public policies and programs that touch their lives.

The university and all of society must be aware that perpetuating false stereotypes does not come without costs. No society can afford to throw away one-fifth of its youth by denying them opportunities, warehousing them in prisons, or dooming them to permanent dependency as a quasi-caste of surplus labor. Such reactionary solutions will inevitably result in more urban decay, increased racial polarization, and unendurable levels of community violence.

Actually, the national high school dropout rate for young African-American males has steadily decreased since 1960, and high school completion rates have improved greatly. In 1970, only 54.8 percent of this group between the ages of 18-24 had completed high school, but in 1989 over 72 percent had achieved this goal. Our kids cannot be victims of anybody's political games of warfare. Ghetto kids or not, they sure have brought plenty of "ghetto heaven" to the university's pocketbook. Carolyn Sparks can be contacted at 871-7014.

THE PROPHETIC VISION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

January 15th has now become an important national observance not just for reflections on the past but on how the nation views the future of race relations. The birthday of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. increasingly is becoming a time that more persons throughout the world are affirming the wisdom and truth of Dr. King's vision.

The life, ministry and dream of Martin Luther King, Jr. exemplifies the courage and compassion necessary to challenge effectively the twin evils of racism and economic exploitation. Dr. King's vision provided for the coming together of all persons, without race being a barrier to the struggle for justice and freedom. Unfortunately today in 1992, as we celebrate the 63rd anniversary of Dr. King's birthday, there is a growing racial hostility in nearly every section of the nation.

There are some who maintain that race relations are facing new tensions in the 1990's primarily because of the bad domestic economic situation. In other words, the improvement in race relations in the United States is in direct proportion to the economic state. Of course, we do not believe this narrow view is correct. Whether in good or bad economic times, the critical difference that determined significant progress in racial justice in the United States was the presence of a visible and viable social justice movement that addressed all the myriad of socioeconomic and political issues.

The vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. helped to solidify a mass movement that successfully changed the course of American history. King's vision was inclusive, not exclusive. At a time when the racial demographics of the nation continue to change dramatically, the civil rights and human rights movements of today must become more multiracial and multicultural, if these movements are to be viable.

We agree with the current edition of **Ebony Magazine** which emphasizes King's visionary remarks aimed at African American and other youth of the nation. Looking at today's difficulties confronting the youth of many of our communities, the words of Dr. King back in 1961 ring true today, as reported then by the **Atlanta Inquirer**: "If there are lagging standards among the Negro people, it is not because they are inherently backward. The causes are economic and environmental, not racial. At the same time, our standards do lag in many instances. At the risk of being misquoted by the enemy, I say that we must improve our personal standards even within the limitations the ... system of segregation. Our crime rate is too high. We must not allow ourselves to become cynical and disillusioned."

Dr. King was aware of dangers of race-bating and racial stereotyping. Today in many "people of color" communities, there has been a resurgence of racial slurs and epitaphs appearing on the walls of buildings in urban America. The increasing crime rate among the youth of many communities is symptomatic of a deeper problem. Reaction to racial oppression does at times cause a

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