

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Rogue cops, good judge, final justice

District Judge Lee Gates should be applauded for his ruling Monday to jail three former Las Vegas policeman for beating a coin thief two years ago.

Gates sentenced former officers James Campbell and Brian Nicholson to nine months in the Clark County Detention Center and former officer Robert Phelan to six months in jail for the beating of Andrew Dersch in a security room inside the Fremont Hotel. Dersch had been stealing coins from a patron when the officers were alerted. The June 1995 assault, captured on hotel videotape, showed officers punching Dersch in the chest and dragging him into a room outside the camera's view.

Gates ignored the tremendous scrutiny he was under, weighing only the facts and ruling on the side of justice, as judges are charged to do.

The jail time shocked everyone from Clark County District Attorney Stewart Bell to the attorneys to the officers.

William Terry, Campbell's attorney, called the decision "hypocritical" in light of his client's 7,000 days of public service.

Stephen Stein, Phelan's lawyer, questioned how Gates could think he is "more right than the conglomeration of lawyers that have been working on this (case)."

Hey Terry and Campbell, wake up. No amount of public service can't rectify one wrong. And to question Gates, who is a veteran judge, points to your ineptness as lawyers.

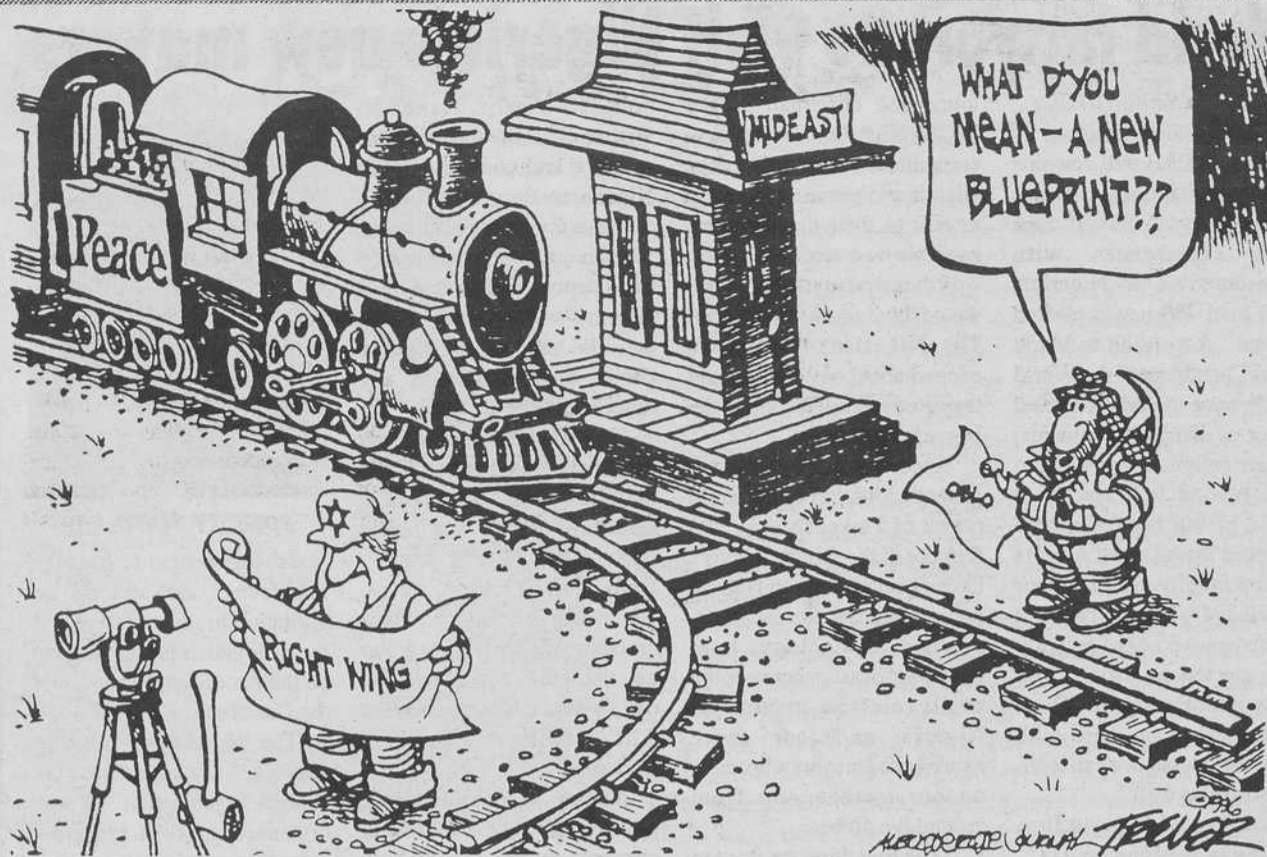
Your clients are criminals and should be treated as such.

Too often in police departments nationwide, rogue cops are given carte blanche to pillage and plunder and are protected by a fraternal code of silence. Until a few decades ago, the same cops could count on judges and attorneys to bail them out of trouble, should they get caught.

The tide is turning. The 1992 videotaped beating of black motorist Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers has unearthed a police subculture which encourages rogue activities. More and more, America is seeing how the people we pay to serve and protect us are the ones we need protection from.

Gates stood firm in the face of scrutiny and expectation. Before the sentencing Chief Deputy District Attorney William Koot's plea for sentencing even more lenient than that suggested by the Department of Parole and Probation.

Gates did not listen to the plea. His only concern: rendering justice. And justice was served.



Signs of hope in this nation

Special to Sentinel-Voice

I keep reminding myself of the importance of finding good stories amidst the bad stories of people working to eliminate racism in their lives and the life of their community, stories of opportunities for communities to come together and tell the truth about the past, to learn about the rich histories of people of color in this nation. Here are two such stories.

Wilmington, NC

It was nearly 27 years ago that Wilmington, North Carolina came into our national consciousness, when black high school students began to protest the racism they saw in their school. Organized by Rev. Ben Chavis, the students boycotted the school and came to Gregory Congregational Church for a meeting. The reaction of some whites in the community was immediate and violent, beginning with threats from the Klan and leading to drive-by shootings into the church, where the students remained. Before it was over a white-owned grocery store was burned, one police officer was wounded and two people died.

And the case of the Wilmington 10, America's first internationally acknowledged political prisoners' case, was born. The Wilmington 10 included Rev. Chavis, eight high schools students and one other adult, who were tried and convicted of conspiracy to burn the grocery store and of firing on emergency personnel. All were sentenced to 23 or 24 years in prison, based on circumstantial evidence. It took nearly 10 years for a federal appeals court to overturn the convictions.

For years afterward relationships between the black and white community were soured. So it is a sign of hope to

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



see a new relationship between the Gregory Congregational Church, an African American congregation and the predominantly white Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Led by their pastors, Rev. Suzanne Graves of Gregory and Rev. Lone Jensen of the Unitarian church, these congregations are holding joint worship services and picnics and beginning to reach across the difficult and shared past.

Importantly, part of the reaching out has included a recognition of what happened in 1971. Indeed, when the Unitarian members first visited Gregory, they were shown the bullet holes which are still in the walls from that troubled time. Their new relationship is being built on the acknowledgment of their shared history, but is looking toward a new future.

Kansas City, MO

Eighteenth and Vine is a legendary address in the African American community.

Anyone who has heard it knows that it's in Kansas City and it was the heart of that city's African American community in the early years of this century. It was also the heart of jazz for a number of years, as well-known jazz musicians were nurtured and performed there.

In recent years though, the 18th and Vine district had declined, as the African

American community dispersed. Businesses closed, the clubs were no more and even housing had suffered. All that has changed as the city of Kansas City has sought to rebuild that legendary community and to re-develop it in a number of ways.

Just opened are the new Kansas City Jazz Museum and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, which share a bright new building. Music fills the air in the Jazz Museum, as the stories of some of jazz's greatest performers are told. It includes interactive exhibits, a sound library and a mixing studio. It even includes a jazz club, as well as the old signs from the heyday of that street.

The new Negro Leagues Baseball Museum covers the entire history of the Negro Leagues from after the Civil

War through their end in the 1960's. It tells the stories of the heroes of that League, through photographs, video and sports memorabilia. It is the story not only of black athletes, but of black entrepreneurs who created the league.

Across the street from the new museum is the refurbished Gem Theater.

Originally a movie theater, it quickly became a center of social and cultural activity for the 18th and Vine community.

Great performers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker once stood on this stage and once again this cultural and performing arts center will be filled with musical performances, theater productions and multimedia events.

And, if you walk just around the corner, you'll find the set of the movie Kansas City, which starred Harry Belafonte and many jazz greats and told the story of the heyday of this community. In addition, new restaurants and businesses are scheduled to open in this re-developed legendary community.

There are signs of hope across this nation. We only have to look for them.

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