

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Patronage aside, blacks left out of casino industry

The headline reads: "High Rollers and Low Rollers: Are we getting our share of the real casino action?"

The article, in the January edition of *Ebony* magazine, probes whether or not African-Americans, who spend billions annually in the booming \$30 billion-a-year industry, have any casino clout to show for it.

The answer: a resounding no. Blacks, especially those in Las Vegas, already knew this.

Casino-hop one weekend. Our faces occasionally dot the spectrum: a baccarat dealer here, a chef there, a maid upstairs, a stocker in the warehouse, a valet outside.

But trek into the casino's hallowed halls where multi-billion dollar decisions are made and our voices are nowhere to be heard. There are no seats at the table for us. The casino's corporate in-crowd, like the boardrooms at most Fortune 500 companies, is lily white despite the fact that Blacks are spendthrifts of sorts when it comes to casinos, shelling out \$2 billion a year in Las Vegas alone, according to *Ebony* writer Kevin Chappell.

Chappell raps about how the Moulin Rouge and other all-black casinos catered to Blacks in the 1960s before glitzy, White-owned casinos, created a playground for the rich, sapped their business.

In essence, the Las Vegas dilemma for Blacks stiffed out of casino clout epitomizes the plight of blacks in the casino industry in general: they don't want to share the wealth.

Chappell writes that Norbert Simmons, owner of the Bally's Lakeshore Resort in New Orleans, faced threats and changing legal loops, in his bid to open a riverboat casino.

"The gaming industry didn't want me to succeed because if I succeeded, I would encourage others like me," Chappell quoted Simmons as saying.

Simmons represents only a smattering of black casino owners — three — high-profile industry attorneys — two — and top-notch legal counsels — one.

If BET's Robert Johnson is successful in opening the BET SoundStage Casino, a proposed \$250 million 800-room entertainment-oriented casino — replete with a television studio — in early 2000, you will probably still be able to count the number of black casino proprietors on two hands.



CIA report fans more conspiracy theories

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

There will always be two problems with the recent CIA report absolving itself of the charge that it pumped massive amounts of cocaine into Los Angeles' black neighborhoods during the 1980s to finance its Contra war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

The first problem is that its findings again underscore the silliness and danger of having a government agency investigate itself. When this happens, the agency will always do everything it can to put the happiest face on even the most blatantly wrong acts it may have committed.

Ex-CIA operatives that plotted the CIA-Contra war blasted the report as shoddy and superficial. They claimed that CIA investigators did not ask them the right questions or asked no questions at all and that the sole intent of the investigation was to wipe any taint of scandal off the agency.

The irony is that the CIA probably did not have to soft-peddle its investigation.

Gary Webb, the former San Jose Mercury News reporter who broke the story in August 1996, did not explicitly charge that CIA officials directly conspired to, or approved any plan, to deliberately heap drugs into LA's black neighborhoods.

Webb made compelling cases that following a congressional funding cut-off to the Contras in the early 1980s, key operatives within the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, one of several Contra factions organized and bankrolled by the CIA and with the Reagan administration approval, for a brief time

supplied cocaine to black drug dealer Ricky Ross in Los Angeles, to raise money for equipment and weapons to keep their illegal war against the Sandinista government going.

Webb did not say, nor should have implied as he unfortunately did in his series, that the CIA was directly involved in dope sales in the ghetto.

If Webb's allegations had been confirmed, and there is strong inferential evidence that they were close to accurate, it meant at least some CIA-connected operatives turned a blind eye to the dirty deals. It was not smoking-gun proof of a direct government conspiracy to dope-up black communities.

Still, it was enough to justify outrage from all Americans. The drug plague has slammed many families hard, created chaos in many lives and allowed vote-pandering public officials to turn public hysteria over drugs into public approval for harshly punitive drug laws that target minorities and the poor.

But by sprinting to judgment and not instantly distancing themselves from the conspiracy theorists, some very well-intentioned black activists and elected officials gave much of the media the excuse it eagerly wanted to attack their credibility.

California Congresswoman Maxine Waters pressed for a federal investigation.



MAXINE WATERS

distancing themselves from the conspiracy theorists, some very well-intentioned black activists and elected officials gave much of the media the excuse it eagerly wanted to attack their credibility, downplay the drug issue as a black problem or ridicule it as yet another case of "black paranoia."

It allowed the Clinton administration to ignore the charges, the Justice Department to dodge them and CIA officials to deny them. It prevented Blacks from gaining broad support from elected officials and from some non-Blacks who wanted the

appointment of a special counsel to fully investigate the charges.

Ultimately, it prevented the full prosecution of any public official or private citizen involved in drug trafficking.

The issue was left to wither on the vine within and without the black community with no official action ever taken against any of the culprits.

The second problem with the CIA report is that leaving loose ends dangling will only feed the suspicions of those conspiracy theorists that government agencies always lie and cover-up to protect themselves, and that there is a plot to wipe out Blacks.

Since the 1960s, the conspiracy theorists have talked of a secret plan to wipe out Blacks, beginning with the flooding of ghettos with drugs, alcohol, guns and gangs. They believe AIDS was imported into the black community in the 1980s.

While the CIA did itself a favor by clearing itself of any involvement with drug dealers, it almost certainly guaranteed that the ranks of those who still believe it was involved will swell even more.

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