

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Gates supporters deserving congratulations

A caveat to those who will misconstrue this editorial as an endorsement for bandit politics: Get real.

With that said, the Las Vegans uniting to support beleaguered Clark County Commission Chairwoman Yvonne Atkinson Gates deserve kudos, not for aiding Gates — whom the Ethics Commission wants to find out whether she lied about her involvement in a daiquiri business venture during testimony given in September — but for making sure the chairwoman, whether vindicated or implicated, is not railroaded by a system they think is prone to skullduggery.

Doubtless, there are many who see blacks sprinting en masse to Gates defense as evidence of at least tacit support for someone whose transgressions they say are glaring or at least circumstantial — Atkinson Gates skipped several meetings with ethics officials and remained close-mouthed to media, on the advice of her lawyers.

Again, get real. Many of the citizens backing Gates see her villification unfair, in lieu of the ethics violations four other county commissioners are facing. Shouldn't their alleged sins be probed with equal intensity?

These citizens, like some in the Ethics Commission, also question why two years worth of personal records were subpoenaed. Is this a witch hunt or hearing? And what about privacy issues? And shouldn't records which are germane to the case be the only ones sought? And why are Atkinson Gates' troubles continually used for editorial fodder?

These people simply want to make sure she has a chance to rebut the month-long news stories about her.

They also link Atkinson Gates' fate to theirs. She is the lone African American on the seven-member council, and with no other African American positioned to succeed her anytime soon, they want to at least ensure she gets a fair shake and doesn't ride the crest negative press out of politics like former Las Vegas City Councilman Frank Hawkins, whose squabbles with city officials and alleged ethics indiscretions horded media attention.



The legacy of Levittown: storied but sad

Special to Sentinel-Voice

It was a visionary's dream — mass-produced, single-family tract housing that, at a cost of \$7,000, or \$60 a month, ordinary working people could afford.

And when in 1947 the visionary, William J. Levitt, buoyed by substantial federal monies, opened the first Levittown on a vast expanse of flat Long Island farmland twenty miles from Manhattan, he helped intensify not just the deluge of suburbanization which was to re-shape America's residential housing pattern, but the huge expansion of the American middle class that is one of America's greatest post-war achievements.

Last month, when Levittown marked its 50th anniversary, I couldn't help but place it aside two other significant 50th-anniversary events now within our vision.

One was the breaking of baseball's color barrier by Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby in the summer of 1947. The other was President Truman's executive order of 1948 desegregating the military.

In that comparison, Levittown's anniversary is a bittersweet one, to say the least.

The reason: from the beginning Levitt's vision and achievement were besmirched.

Levittown, built just outside the country's most racially diverse city, was for Whites only.

So, too, would be the Levittowns he subsequently built near Philadelphia and in New Jersey.

There were no "Whites only" signs on the properties.

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



But the exclusion of Blacks from what was for many white families the opening of the door to the American Dream was ironclad.

That point was clearly made in a recent article about Levittown in the New York Times, as it was in David Halberstam's recent book, *The Fifties*.

Yes, Levittown has changed.

Blacks have lived there since the late 1950s, and all evidence suggests they find it a welcoming place — though it is worth noting that even today Levittown is more than 97 percent white.

Blacks make up just one-quarter of one percent of its nearly 53,000 residents.

But, recalling Levittown's discriminatory beginnings isn't merely a matter of a particular historical interest.

In fact, its past brings into focus the devastating and continuing impact discrimination has had on the ability of African-Americans and others to pursue the American dream.

In that way, recalling Levittown's past is vitally important to the current "conversation" we're having about affirmative action and whether preferential treatment

which seeks to expand opportunity is worth pursuing.

Levittown's history underscores how much many white families benefited in material, traceable ways over the past two and three generations from the most exclusionary kind of preferential treatment in jobs, housing and schooling.

It is not a matter of conjecture or mere assertion. It is evident in a substantial number of demographic facts that stretch far beyond Levittown.

It is starkly apparent in the different housing profiles of Blacks and Whites, as economist Wilhelmina Leigh, of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, wrote

in the 1996 issue of *The State of Black America*. Her comparing of the sharp differences in home ownership and home equity for Blacks and Whites, and the barriers to home ownership Blacks and Hispanics face, underscore the enormous continuing impact of many practices — good and bad — of the past.

"Today's entrenched patterns of racial segregation and the associated lessened access to opportunities for schooling and employment by Black Americans are the continued legacy of 'separate but unequal' treatment," she wrote.

Despite significant gains in home ownership among blacks — now at 45 percent of black households, the highest ever (72 percent of white households own their home) — the disparities in the housing fortunes of Blacks and Whites remain striking.

And, as sociologists Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro wrote in their brilliant 1995 book, *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, the discrimination Blacks have

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