

Vegas shows support



Sentinel-Voice photos by John Broussard

(Left photo) Taking a moment to reflect on the activities while considering the joy her own son Dishawn Norton brings, Seannie Norton joined hundreds of others at the park on Saturday to remember the children. (Top photo) Co-coordinator of the justice march, Bobbie Troutman stands next to the memorial tree to share her thoughts to the crowd before releasing the 800 balloons at the park.

March

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educate the public about the facts surrounding Iverson's death.

"When the tragedy broke, the hotel did its spin control and tried to point the finger at Mr. Iverson. We believe that inadequate hotel security was the dominant factor in Sherrice Iverson's death," Crockett said.

This issue and many more will probably be addressed in the August trial of Jeremy Strohmeier, the California teen-ager charged in the slaying of Iverson.

On May 25, 1997, Iverson was found raped and strangled in a bathroom stall at the Primm Valley hotel in Primm, 43

miles south of Las Vegas.

Strohmeier was captured on hotel surveillance video following Iverson into a bathroom, and he has confessed to several friends and police in Long Beach, Calif., and Las Vegas.

According to Rogers, the NAACP will follow this case closely, because the "race card" may be played.

"We in this community have over and over again seen individuals commit hideous crimes, and when it involves Caucasians, if more than one is involved, only one is charged," Rogers said. "In this Black community, when Blacks are involved, everyone affiliated gets charged and has to go to court.

"We're concerned not only with the death of Sherrice and the trial of Jeremy Strohmeier, but of Strohmeier's friend who looked into the stall observing and then walked away," Rogers said. "To this day, he has not been charged."

The memorial event, according to Bobby Troutman, chairperson of the event, sent out a message.

"From this I hope people will understand that violence against children and children against each other is not acceptable in our society," Troutman said, "and for those who would sit idly by and not do something are just as guilty as the children who are engaged in this."

Gates

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people too much air time - unless there's been a shooting.

The word 'planning' was used by several speakers at the conference. "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail," spokesperson Rev. Jesse Scott intoned, to murmurs of assent from the audience. Scott gave a prepared speech, but along the way he sprinkled in spontaneous additions.

The speech focused on and repeatedly returned to a few key points: 1) The residents of District D voted for Gates, approve of her performance, and do not appreciate the fact that residents of other districts tried to force her out (Terry Akers, for instance, who now resides in District D but only moved there in January of this year).

2) Other local politicians have also been cited for ethics violations, but none of them have been hounded like Gates has been. Lorraine Hunt is one of those officials. Not only has she remained free of recall efforts; Gates' fellow county commissioner has been exonerated by the ethics committee and is running for lieutenant governor. Scott and others believe that the uneven treatment is racially motivated.

3) "District D is not for sale!" Rev. Scott hammered repeatedly on Sheldon Adelson, accused of bankrolling the recall effort and Akers' premature campaign, on Charles Bennion for moving into District D for the sole purpose of undermining Gates' political career, and on Terry Akers for having sold out to Adelson.

"Shame on you," Scott reiterated in regard to all three, adjuring the audience to join in. "Shame on him - let's say it," he invited several times. And after his key points, referring to the audience as "the church," he elicited group 'Amen's.

The speech was like a sermon in many ways. Referring to the failure of the recall effort, Scott declared, "Truth and righteousness prevailed, as our God will see to it that it always does. Now it is time for you to all crawl back into the den of evil from which you came...."

Pointing out that "Commissioner Gates has not been found guilty of anything," Scott said the head of the ethics commission lectured Gates about morality for a full hour, even though she herself had a year earlier been arrested in Washoe County for drunk driving.

The loosening of the press conference's structure occasioned by the video no-show gave encouragement to the voicing of a healthy and robust diversity of opinions and ideas. A young woman named Vanessa Williams took the microphone to plead a case for young people being invited to participate in political discussions and actions, saying they need constructive outlets for their passions and they want to be included.

The conference's organizer told the audience that she'd gotten word from the television stations: because the recall has been deemed invalid, they consider support for Gates to be a non-issue.

Many attendees were incensed about the

absence of television cameras. Alice Wilson, chairperson of the West Las Vegas Neighborhood Executive Board (WLVNEB), suggested that the citizens complain to the FCC about scanty coverage of the Black community and other minorities; she believes the FCC would impose sanctions, or that the stations' licenses could be challenged.

David Wallace, director of the Youth Diversion Task Force, took a brief turn at the podium to state his opinion that support for Gates is not a race issue, it's an issue of right and wrong, and "we need to send that message to the community."

Though most attendees seemed to believe otherwise, no one shouted him down or argued with his position. Privately, when the conference was over, some participants did express anger about one of Rev. Scott's impromptu declarations. Head of the Voters' League, Scott called, during his speech, for "a coalition of independent voters, Black and White, to vote for the person, not the party."

Claiming that the Democratic party has taken the Black vote for granted, Scott accompanied with a vaguely obscene inference his metaphor that "the Democrats have us in their hip pocket."

"I'm not in anybody's pocket," Theron Goynes commented privately with an edge of disgust in his voice.

"You don't know how people vote," said Geraldine Leigh, though not within Scott's earshot, adding that his judgements about Black

voters amounted to a stereotype no different from other unacceptable generalizations.

"Besides, who are we going to vote for - Ensign?" she queried. Leigh, like Wilson, a community activist on the WLVNEB, said that as head of the Voters' League, Scott's sole responsibility is to register voters. "He's not supposed to even mention politics," she said.

Leigh expressed concern about her statements appearing in the press, because she believes it might not be good for the Black community to be seen as "fighting amongst ourselves."

Yet, in this writer's eyes, it was a fine thing to witness the Black community functioning as a true democracy. Where there is only one sanctioned opinion, there is tyranny.

And amid the hubbub of individual voices there was consensus of purpose. Perhaps it was best stated by attendee Irene Battle, a constituent of District D who moved to Las Vegas from Chicago a year ago: "I think [Gates] is a role model for the Black community. From what I've seen so far, she's done a good job for her constituents." Battle feels that Gates has done nothing wrong that other politicians haven't, and that she's being treated unfairly. Battle is proud to see a Black woman in Gates' position and would like to see "more Blacks like her in office in Las Vegas."

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