

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Spirituality gaining foothold on youth

A spiritual renaissance seems to be taking place in Las Vegas and it's not among traditional, hard-line religious observers, but among another set of people: Youth.

More and more, it seems religious institutions are taking a vested interest in their youth. The results, so far, include a growing number of young people more attune to themselves and their spirituality, more willing to extend a hand to help others and more willing to share their divinely-imbued talents with others.

The recent City-Wide Youth Music Workshop was evidence of this. There were singers, dancers, poets, step teams, young actors and actresses. The ninth annual affair put on by Victory Baptist Church drew dozens of churches and more than 200 youth for a week-long affair that focused on bringing together church and state.

A return to spirituality, among all Americans, but especially among youth is a good sign. Often, spirituality is stained by the misdeeds of a few.

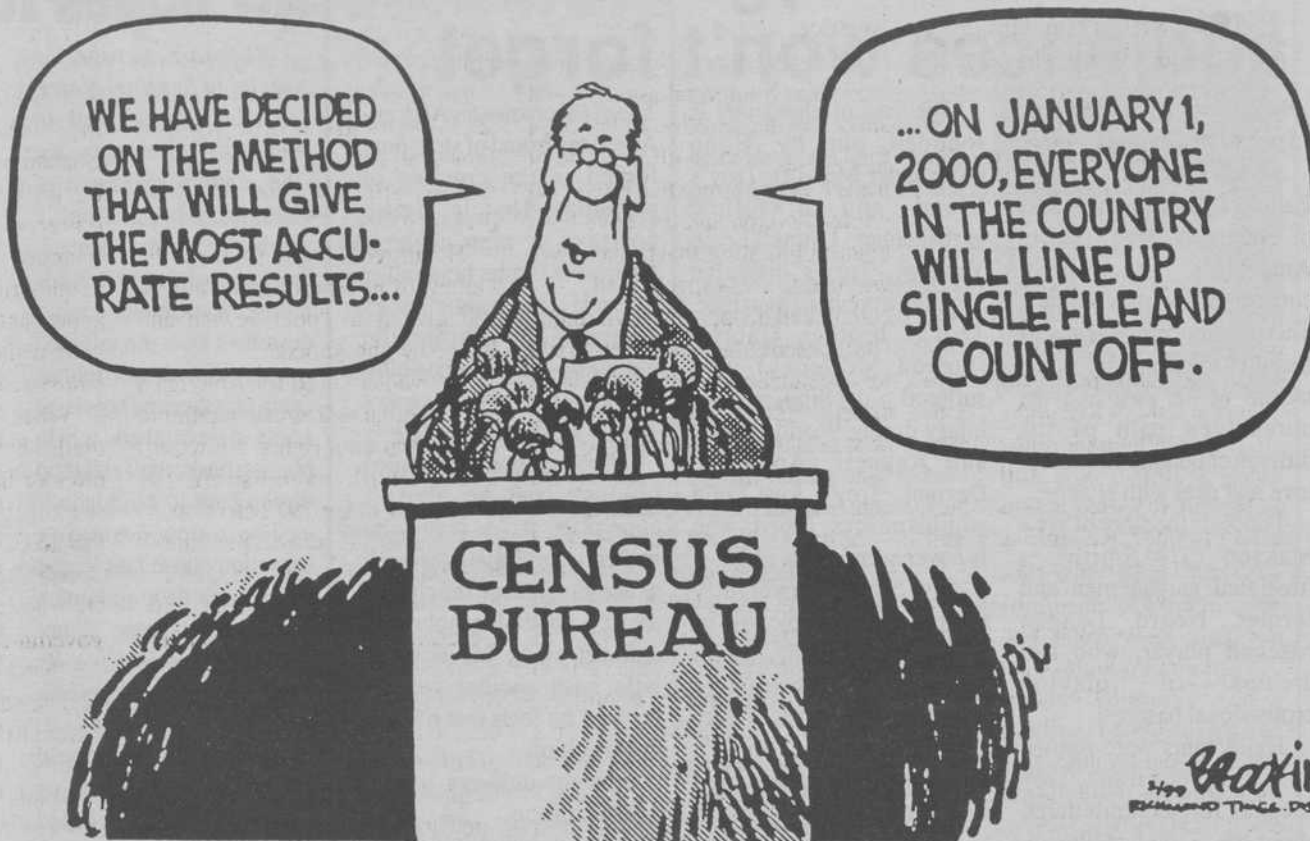
The Rev. Henry Lyons, former president of the National Baptist USA Convention, could face up to eight years in prison for various legal missteps. Lyons deserves scorn, but he is not alone in the quagmire of spiritual bankruptcy.

Nary a day goes by that the media doesn't report about a pastor, rabbi, priest, prophet or other religious leader committing acts in spite of their religiosity. More and more, the men and women people trust to "connect" them to the creator(s) to interpret the holy text are morally bereft, money-hungry and power-seeking rather than virtuous, pious and charitable.

Given a culture in which trust in religious leaders is sketchy at best, it is refreshing to see young people still recognizing the importance of maintaining a spiritual focus. It is heartening to know that pre-teens and teen-agers — America's next generation of leaders -- are not only street-smart and Internet savvy, but grounded in their belief in a higher, greater and benevolent power.

Spirituality resounded in the performances of the workshop participants. They sang from the heart, performed spirit-filled dances and high-energy step routines. They laughed together, prayed together, praised together.

It's quite possible that Lyons and a growing number of the "convicted clergy" were once these young people: Singing, dancing and praising. Trouble is, they forgot their youth, and that might have been the biggest sin of all. (Ecclesiastes 12).



Los Angeles breeding new kind of politics

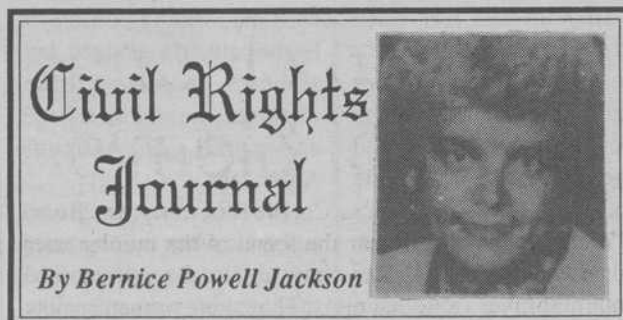
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So often in this nation's history we've seen the divide and conquer strategy used to keep people of color apart. As people of color, too often we have internalized the racism which has been fed to us and we believe misconceptions and stereotypes about other people of color, and sometimes, even about ourselves. In politics, the divide and conquer strategy has been used time and again to keep people of color out of elected office.

Now there is a group that is working from a new paradigm, a multiracial/multicultural coalition working together to elect progressive candidates in Los Angeles. Called Coalition LA, this grassroots group of citizens from the 10th City Council District has worked for more than a decade against such divisive California propositions as Proposition 187, the anti-immigrant legislation and Proposition 209, the anti-affirmative action law.

While they lost these struggles, they found new allies to work together across racial and cultural lines and in the past five years they have focused on bringing neighborhoods together, developing common political platforms, and running their own members for city council.

This community work, based on five months of going door-to-door to talk with residents about their concerns, has resulted in a



Plan of Action. Not surprisingly, they found that residents wanted jobs, better housing; a greener, more safe community, and better educational opportunities for their children.

When asked to imagine the city they could create if the people were really in charge, community residents wanted to make government accountable to the residents, to create a clean and healthy environment, to get more jobs in the community, to create affordable housing citywide, to make real changes for children and to ensure safer communities.

The 10th City Council district in Los Angeles is a diverse one, including some parts of the Crenshaw district which burned in the 1992 uprising and the fast-growing Koreatown. Coalition LA believes that it is by organized participation in neighborhoods in local government that can make a difference in the lives of people and can give them the incentive to become involved in politics and elections.

Clearly, one key to that empowerment of the people is to have leaders who truly represent the community and who refuse to play the divide

and conquer game. California, the nation's most populous state, already has achieved a status of having no racial ethnic majority in the state, which will become a demographic reality for the rest of the nation in another generation. Thus, how people of color in California work together for political power will be instrumental to the rest of the nation.

Within the 10th district, Coalition LA has chosen to support in the up-coming April election an African American candidate new to electoral politics, but not new to the district. Rev. Madison Shockley is a local church pastor in the 10th District and grew up in that neighborhood as well. A civil rights activist,

he is on the board of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Los Angeles and is also a member of the African-American/Korean-American Christian Alliance and the African-American/Jewish Leadership Connection. Rev. Shockley clearly understands the need to build multiracial/multicultural alliances in the 21st century.

It was the beating of Rodney King by L.A. police officers which resulted in the acquittal of the police by a Simi Valley jury which sparked the uprisings in 1992. Rodney King's simple question of "Why can't we just all get along?" was echoed throughout the nation. Now community activists in Los Angeles are out to prove that not only can we all get along, but we can work together to make our communities a better place for ourselves and our children.

That sounds like new politics to me. That sounds like a vision for the 21st century we all need to model.

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