

COMMENTARY

Feds nailing dirty cops, forgetting about violent cops

Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Attorney General Janet Reno publicly boasts that she will do everything in her power to nail more dirty cops. She's backed up that boast. In the seven years she's run the Justice Department federal prosecutors have slapped more than 600 corrupt cops behind bars, an increase of nearly 600 percent.

And she has told prosecutors throughout the country to be even more vigilant in cracking down on police corruption.

There are plenty of signs that they are heeding their bosses' admonition. In big and small cities nationally more police are being arrested and indicted on bribery, racketeering, and drug peddling charges than ever before.

The Los Angeles Police Department continues to be rocked almost daily with fresh allegations that LAPD officers

beat, shot, planted weapons and drugs on suspects, and gave perjured testimony against them.

At last count more than 70 LAPD officers are under investigation on corruption charges and more than 75 felony convictions have been overturned because of tainted evidence. Yet despite Reno's admirable zeal to lock up corrupt cops, she has not shown the same zeal to bag rogue cops who beat and kill mostly young African-Americans and Latinos.

According to a recent report on police misconduct by Human Rights Watch, an international public watchdog group, in 1998 federal prosecutors brought excessive force charges against police officers in less than 1 percent of the cases investigated by the FBI involving allegations of police abuse.

The group also found that there was almost no differ-

ence in the skimpy number of police misconduct cases prosecuted by the Justice Department under moderate Democrat Clinton than there were under conservative Republican President George Bush.

When activists demand that the feds prosecute cops who gun down unarmed citizens such as the four New York City cops who riddled African Immigrant Amadou Diallo, their ritual response to them is that the shooting is under "review."

Meanwhile, months, sometimes years, pass with no word from the Justice Department on what if any action, it will take. In nearly all these cases no officers are prosecuted and the case is quietly closed.

The reflexive see-no-evil policy of the Feds toward police violence comes at a time when the number of police abuse complaints have soared nationally. The nearly

12,000 complaints in 1996 almost matched the total number for the entire period from 1984 and 1990. To better aid law enforcement agencies and federal prosecutors track patterns of abuse, the Violent Crime and Control Act of 1994 authorized the Justice Department to collect data on the frequency and types of police abuse complaints.

At the end of 1998 it still had not issued any report on the level of police misconduct in America. Worse, the Justice Department has long had on the books a strong arsenal of civil rights statutes to prosecute abusive police officers. However, more often than not, it has taken major press attention, large-scale protests, and even a major riot, such as the L.A. riots in 1992 following the Rodney King verdict, before it used its legal weapons.

Meanwhile federal pros-

ecutors say they can't nail more rogue cops because they are hamstrung by the lack of funds and staff, victims who aren't perceived as criminals, credible witnesses, and the public's inclination to always believe police testimony. They also claim they are pinned in by the almost impossible requirement that they prove an officer had the specific intent to kill or injure a victim in order to get a conviction. These are tough obstacles to overcome and since the Justice Department is in the business of winning cases many prosecutors are more than happy to take a hands-off attitude toward police misconduct cases.

But this is no excuse for federal prosecutors not to at least make the effort to prosecute more officers when there is substantial evidence that they used excessive force. This is the legally and morally right thing to do. And it

sends a powerful message to law enforcement agencies that the federal government will go after lawbreakers no matter whether they wear a mask, or a badge.

Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark understood the importance of prosecuting abusive officers even when there is virtually no chance of getting a conviction against them. He felt this acted as a "stabilizing force" to spur police and city officials to take stronger action to halt the use of excessive force in their departments. Clark was right.

Reno's failure to aggressively go after cops who gun down unarmed civilians will continue to feed the dangerous cycle of more shootings and more racial turmoil, and deepen the distrust and cynicism of minorities toward the criminal justice system. Reno should worry as much about this as she does about dirty cops.

Federal acts can kill or resurrect, it's up to us

Louie Overstreet
Sentinel-Voice

The Fair Credit Reporting and Community Reinvestment Acts are legal tools that can be used to bury us or facilitate our economic empowerment.

Understanding how these laws are often used against us — or more appropriately, not utilized by us — will go a long way toward explaining our collective economic plight in certain census tracts and zip code areas of Las Vegas.

Your credit information, contained in a report maintained by the Credit Bureau of Southern Nevada located on Red Rock Street, is supplied to the bureau by three national credit agencies: Equifax, Experian and Trans-Union.

Understanding who is gathering the "411" on you can work for you, if you exercise your rights under the FCRA.

Most of us do not bother to challenge a letter denying us credit. When this happens, we should go to the credit bureau and ask for a copy of our credit file. Staff must give it to you free of charge, if you have recently been denied credit. They must also give you one free copy each year, if requested.

Further, you have a right to challenge the things in your file. If one of the three companies supplying information can't document the accuracy of the information within 30 days, the credit bureau has to remove the information from your file.

You can also have the information you supply placed in the file as an explanation for why a debt remains unpaid — for example, when a company didn't honor a warranty on a consumer product that you purchased.

It is important that you know your rights. The Community Reinvestment Act came

resulted from bad banking practices which disproportionately affected minority communities and the poor.

These practices take two primary forms, predatory consumer lending and the denial of business loans to minorities.

With an understanding of these practices, it's not hard to guess the color of the 5,490 persons living in census tract 4037, which comprises a portion of zip code 89106?

Banks, as a condition for getting their charters which are renewed yearly and needed in order to merge with other banks, must annually report on the type of loans issued, the amounts, interest rates charged, the number of mortgage and business loans made by census tract and zip code.

There is a group that is looking out for you. The National Community Reinvestment Coalition maintains complete records on all banks in Las Vegas and nationwide.

Only three banks that seem to be doing a reasonable job in meeting the intent of the CRA. They are Pioneer-Citizens, BankWest and Wells-Fargo. First Security and Wells-Fargo are seeking to merge. The good news is that hearings are held to allow the public to question officials from those banks on their commitment to CRA provisions. The bad news is that the hearings are likely to be held in San Francisco.

If you want to oppose or support the merger, without traveling to San Francisco, write the National Community Reinvestment Coalition in care of Gail Burks at Nevada Fair Housing, 2725 Desert Inn Road.

Let them know of your personal experiences in attempting to get reasonable rates on a consumer or mortgage loan, much less a loan to start a business in West Las Vegas (the 89106 zip code).

Don't buy the 'unity' thing

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The political theme of the week is "party unity." It's a deceptive term, and an even more deceptive goal.

The New York Democratic Party held its state convention last week where it nominated — actually coronated —

Hillary Rodham Clinton as its candidate for the U.S. Senate. A crush of Democratic elected officials, bureaucrats and patronage pals cheered the First Lady who was unopposed for her party's nomination. Only 15 delegates signatures would have allowed someone else's name to be placed before the convention, even in a symbolic nod to democracy. But the party was gloriously and happily "unified" behind Mrs. Clinton.

To underscore the unity point, President Bill Clinton was there, dutifully playing the part of the First Husband. The party and the family were unified — an image, no doubt intended to subliminally contrast with Rudy Giuliani's family, which is headed for splitsville.

But no sooner had Mrs. Clinton been anointed by the "unified" party faithful, than a fierce and vitriolic power struggle broke out between the state's two most influential Democrats — Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Majority Leader Michael Bragman. Mr. Bragman announced he was going to challenge Mr. Silver for the Speaker's position in a "sudden death" vote in the Assembly this week. Silver promptly stripped Bragman of his position and the \$50,000 in additional salary and expenses that goes along with it, while Democratic members of the Assembly scurried to figure out which side to

This Way
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Empowerment



By Dr. Lenora Fulani

support.

The New York Republicans — usually ebullient over Democratic Party internal splits (that's how they got Rudy Giuliani elected mayor in the first place in a city where Democrats outnumber Republicans 5 to 1) — were a bit more circumspect, as they spent the week sitting on the edge of a precipice waiting to see if Giuliani would withdraw from the Senate race. One Friday, Giuliani made his announcement that his prostate cancer condition and the treatment required made it impossible to continue his campaign.

No sooner had the decision been leaked, than the Republicans anointed Congressman Rick Lazio (Governor George Pataki gave the official nod) and the party "unified" behind him. Congressman Peter King, who had made known his interest in running in the weeks before Giuliani's decision but who had broken ranks with the Republican hierarchy when he endorsed John McCain and voted against the impeachment of the President, became an instant "also ran." For the Republicans and the Democrats "unity" trumps democracy every time.

Of course, on their best days, they will argue that their "unity" is a product of consensus. To the extent that it is true, it is only consensus "at the top." There is less

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