

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

# Reinvestment plan start for MGM

Nothing like bad press to get things done. Faced with heightened scrutiny over its pitiful business relationship with black businesses, the MGM Grand, Inc., has preliminarily committed to ramping up efforts to increase its contacts with black businesses.

MGM Grand officials are scurrying into damage-control mode after an Associated Press story highlighting its commitment to black-owned Detroit businesses. The company has spent \$40 million with such businesses. Those businesses are helped by a city ordinance requiring casinos to grant 30 percent of contracts to women- and minority-owned businesses.

No such safeguards are in place in Las Vegas. And the local MGM Grand property has spent a pittance with black-owned Las Vegas businesses — the Las Vegas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People estimated its "gift" at just under \$900,000, while MGM Grand officials claim the figure is around \$1.6 million. The MGM's thrift has drawn the ire of the civil rights groups, which contends the company should devote more than twice as much money to local black businesses because of the MGM's explosive presence (and profits).

MGM Grand spokesman Alan Feldman, in a Monday story in *The Detroit News*, admitted the company has been stingy with its contracts: "It was clear and obvious to us that the record in purchasing and letting out contracts wasn't anywhere near where it should have been."

The Las Vegas NAACP is promoting a 10-point \$100 million reinvestment plan that calls to rectify the situation. The plan calls for the MGM Grand to:

- Make a venture capital commitment of \$20 million annually for five years to a developing entity to be governed by a mutually agreeable seven-person board that will manage the affairs of the entity and staff (work also includes developing a housing master plan, assisting area small businesses, an infrastructure and beautification plan and a major shopping mall);
- Finance a business center in the Enterprise Park to house neighborhood services (and staff a community outreach office in the business center to recruit workers and executives in the gaming industry);
- Finance a local manufacturing company in West Las Vegas that will employ welfare-to-work employees to supply goods to the hotel and gaming industry on a contract basis;
- Finance a historic Old West Las Vegas museum and cultural center to serve as a tourist destination (to include music, collectibles, food court, artwork and historical memorabilia);
- Commit to advertising in the *Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice* newspaper and on KCEP 88.1 FM and to sponsor internship programs with the newspaper and radio station;
- Make annual \$25,000 contributions to at least four community-based organizations designated by the NAACP;
- Appoint an African-American to serve on the MGM's board of directors;
- Hire an African-American within the administrative cabinet — that person would serve as director of community business development — and establish an executive training program to promote existing MGM employees to vice presidential and pit boss positions.
- Supply a regular list of contract opportunities outsourced for all MGM properties (in the areas of construction/cleanup, consultants, goods/services, hospitality services, rehab/modernization, legal services, temporary employees, South Africa opportunities, telephone, vendor and A/E services).
- Meet quarterly with the Las Vegas NAACP to monitor and update the reinvestment plan (the NAACP is to serve as the sole point of contact for implementation of the plan — this could be contentious, if only the NAACP, which doesn't possess an established local economic component, is the only voice at the table).

All in all, the plan is a good start.

THE PETULANT REVOLUTIONARY



# Recalling a tragic Sunday in Birmingham

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In a recent column, Hugh B. Price, president of the National Urban League, wrote that the recent indictment of two elderly white men, long suspected of taking part in the notorious Birmingham Church Bombing of 1963, "shows a determined refusal on the part of ... [a significant cohort of black and white Southerners] to let the great crimes of the region's past go unpunished." He also wrote that this determination "demands a reconsideration of what white Southerners actually felt about the segregation and racial discrimination that barred their black fellow citizens from participating fully in American life."

I agree. But I also think the flurry of comment and recollection about that era of Birmingham's, and the nation's, history has another important significance.

It is that the malevolent act, which the killers committed as an act of defiance, was really an act of surrender.

For all their bravado and posturing among the morally-benighted racial extremists in and around Birmingham at the time; for all of George Wallace's pledge of "Segregation Now! Segregation Tomorrow! Segregation Forever!" I'm convinced that

these men knew — perhaps consciously, but certainly subconsciously — that the days of state-sanctioned White Supremacy were numbered, and not in decades, but in months.

That is why they, deliberately, struck at the black children of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which had been the staging ground for the great civil rights demonstrations earlier that year.

Four young girls — Denise McNair, 11, Addie Mae Collins, 14, Carole Robertson, 14, and Cynthia Wesley, 14 — died in the rubble that Sunday morning.

The ferocity with which Birmingham Police Chief Eugene "Bull" Connor tried to suppress the demonstrations exposed the moral blindness and physical brutality of the South's edifice of legal segregation for all, around the nation and the world, to see.

And it was the participation of the thousands of children in those demonstrations that brought the Movement its victory.

So, the Birmingham Church bombers struck back at the black children of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church out of revenge against the Birmingham black community in general, and against the black children of Birmingham in particular.

They struck at them because they could see the future in those children. They could see their promise, their determination to strive — and

their probability of success, not just in dismantling the legal barriers of segregation, but in achieving their full human capacity as well.

And, of course, it was not just in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, or in the rest of Birmingham's black community that children like this were to be found that day. That sense of possibility for the children existed in every church in every black community in America.

I realized with fresh eyes, so to speak, that this was one of the lessons of the Birmingham Church Bombing when, in the wake of recent indictments, I read the comments of two black women who grew up in Birmingham during those years.

One is Sheryl McCarthy, a columnist for *Newsday*. The other is Condoleezza Rice, a former provost of Stanford University who is Texas Governor George W. Bush's foreign policy adviser during his run for the presidency.

I read their recollections

of life in Birmingham at that time — both knew at least one of the girls who were killed; and I thought of the lives and careers they themselves went on to fashion.

They were not the only ones of the black children of Birmingham to succeed.

"Most of us thrived," Sheryl McCarthy wrote in a recent column. "We became judges, doctors, university presidents, television producers, journalists, financiers; one of us may soon be secretary of state, depending on who is elected president."

We'll never know for certain what the world lost that morning when those four girls were killed. But it is clear that what some of their friends and acquaintances have achieved is what their future could have been.

It was apparent even then to some on both sides of the color line — and both sides of the moral line, too — that these were the possibilities the Civil Rights Movement's (See *Birmingham*, Page 14)



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