

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Happy birthday?

The more things change... you know the rest (for those of who don't, the remainder of the adage is completed as such "the more things stay the same).

Case in point: the state of African-American affairs in Las Vegas.

Before you prejudice this editorial as a cynical diatribe filled memory-lane musings about the good-ole days, consider this: the same problems the Sentinel-Voice complained about in its first-year editorials in 1979 — racism, corporate glass ceilings and the like — still exist today.

Why, on the eve of the Sentinel-Voice's 22nd birthday, are old-hat issues still pertinent?

Take West Las Vegas for instance. Community activists have long complained about the area's lack of enterprise, recreational outlets and affordable housing. Sure, the succeeding two decades have seen politicians throw a scant few crumbs to the community in hopes of silencing ever-deafening pleas for help. But nothing's been done to address the core reasons for the area's flounder.

City fathers have known for years that business people avoid locating operations in West Las Vegas, theorizing that the area's demographics portend failure. Little has come in the way of solutions.

Those charged with redevelopment are too content to let redevelopment slog along. They should take cues from forward-thinking city officials and entrepreneurs who are actively rebuilding inner cities such as Harlem and Detroit. These folks are partnering with civic groups, churches and philanthropist on revenue-generating business, in addition to funding programs that change the mindset of the poor and underprivileged. Such innovative thinking is helping erase that niggling mantra about taking the boy out of the ghetto but being unable to take the ghetto out of the boy.

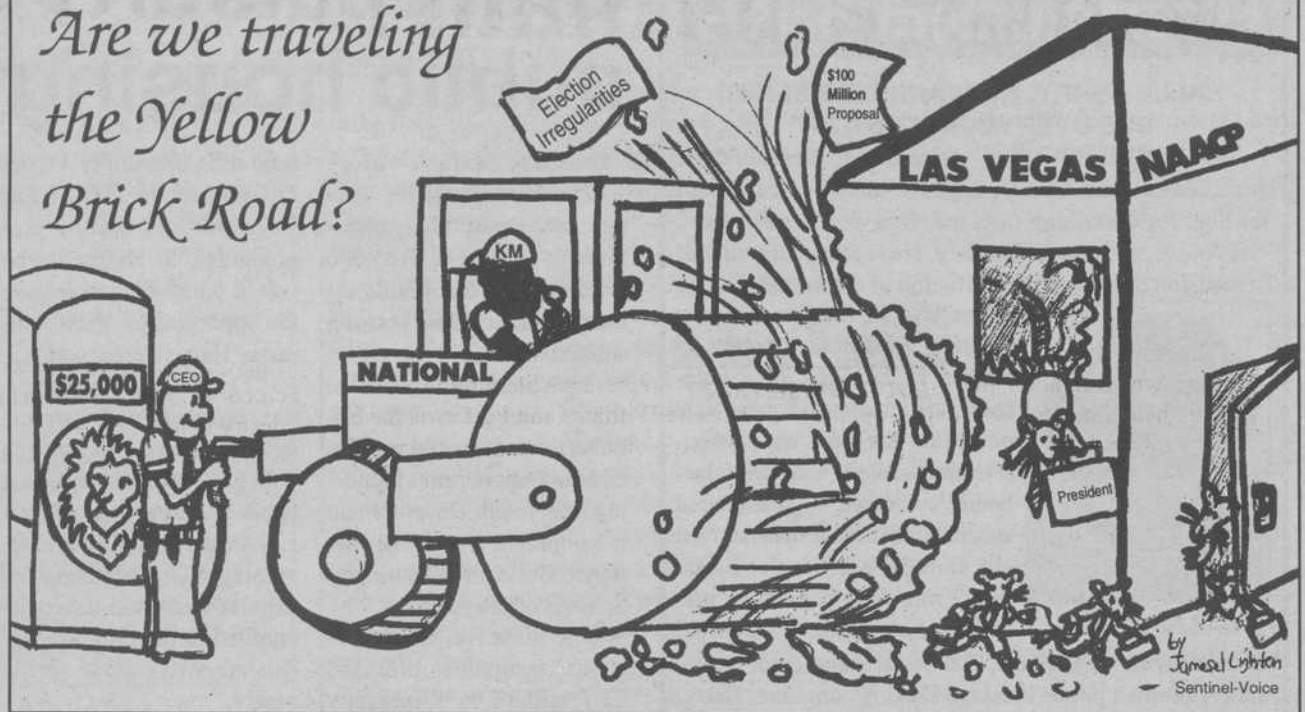
Now let's jump to casinos, that privileged and protected class of Nevada business that can do no wrong.

Proffer legislation to raise their taxes — which are already among the nation's lowest — and wait your opponent's campaign coffers fill with loot. "We can't afford a tax increase," they cry, despite raking in record revenue each year and ignoring the fact the money would be used for noble pursuits — teacher pay raises, boosting per-pupil spending, which is already \$1,000 below the national average. Challenge big gaming on its record of minority hiring and procurement and, as the local NAACP found out, have the national office breathing down your back. (The national office snatched the branch's leadership, claiming it skirted rules). This, at a time when black leadership in the community, and on economic issues especially, is sorely lacking.

On the educational front, minority students still lag behind their white counterparts. When given the chance to advocate for minority students, legislators whiffed. To wit: Though all but one West Las Vegas elementary school looks like deplorable compared to their newer counterparts — the exception is Fitzgerald, built in 1992 — state politicians decided that only one, Matt Kelly, would get refurbished next year. Not that there wasn't enough money to revamp all of them, mind you. At the end of each legislative session, millions upon millions of dollars directed toward putrid pork-barrel projects. And now, the geniuses at the Clark County School Board are considering the imposition of fees for athletics, band and cheerleading. A book usage fee has also been floated. All would harm minority students.

And the problems go on: disproportionate sentencing, racial profiling, gang violence, poverty. Since we're in the newspaper business, it's our unfortunate duty to document it all.

Are we traveling
the Yellow
Brick Road?



Leon H. Sullivan, freedom's champion

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Reverend Leon H. Sullivan, who died at 78 this past week, lived so long in the public spotlight and accomplished such wondrous things in several different arenas that it became easy to forget just how extraordinary his achievements were. We had grown used to the idea that he could move mountains.

This was a man who rose from humble beginnings and the pervasive and persistent efforts of a society ruled by racism to restrict his aspirations to become one of the most admired figures in his adopted city, Philadelphia, in his country, and in countries around the world.

This was a pastor who, taking the reins of Philadelphia's Zion Baptist Church in 1950, gradually increased its 600-member congregation tenfold into the largest black church in the city.

This was a pastor who then used the power of that church's congregation to do good not only for its members, but also for the entire city.

He urged his congregants to tithe to a special economic development fund the church set up, and from it built a major shopping center and affordable housing in the heart of the city's black community.

In the late 1950s he organized 400 other ministers and launched a "selective patronage" program whose main purpose was to force the then-many Philadelphia-based companies that did not practice equal opportunity in em-

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



ployment to hire and promote African-Americans for mid- and upper-level positions, not just custodial ones. The boycott opened up more than 4,400 jobs.

The difference that campaign made in the lives of individuals, and the enrichment of Philadelphia civic life it produced was exemplified by the column Acel Moore, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and longtime columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, wrote last week. In the column, Moore, a native Philadelphian, said that "if not for that effort, I would not have gotten an opportunity to work at *The Inquirer* in 1962."

That experience also led Reverend Sullivan to found the Opportunities Industrialization Center in 1964, training centers that would help blacks and others mired in poverty to acquire job skills. At its high point in the late 1960s and 1970s, OIC claimed to be training a million people a year in 150 American cities and 10 foreign countries.

And, of course, Leon Sullivan was a man who used his prestigious position as a director of General Motors — in 1971 he became the first African-American ap-

pointed to its board — to launch an international campaign to "reform" apartheid in South Africa that eventually destroyed it altogether.

The roots of that campaign lay in a trip he took to the country in 1974, one in which he witnessed and himself endured some of the humiliations blacks and coloreds suffered through daily.

Unbeknownst to those men who were apartheid's enforcers, the South African regime had come up against another towering figure like Nelson Mandela: an individual whose extraordinary gifts for organizing were married to a charismatic personality — and, most important, a conscience that relentlessly pursued justice.

When the Reverend

Sullivan first proposed his seven principles for fair and equal treatment that all American companies doing business in South Africa should follow, he was greeted with derision throughout corporate America.

But in fact his proposed reform was a breakthrough of immense importance. It provided an unimpeachably pragmatic, and humanitarian, way for businesses and other centrist elements of American society to join the movement for the destruction of apartheid.

By complementing the rising anti-apartheid ferment within South Africa itself in these years, from the mid-1970s onward, the Sullivan Principles undoubtedly played a critical role in convincing South Africa's white establishment that apartheid had to go, and go quickly.

Since retiring from the pulpit of Zion Baptist, Reverend Sullivan has spent his considerable energy pursuing ways to draw African-Americans and African peoples closer together, and promoting the Global

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