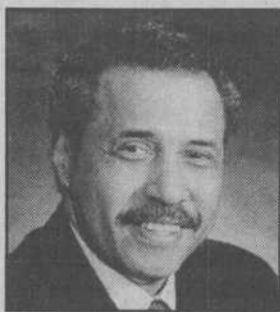


COMMENTARY

NAACP aftermath?

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Given that the charter of the NAACP Las Vegas Branch has been suspended by a vote of the national board of directors of the NAACP, the question becomes what now?



LOUIE OVERSTREET

I am sure the dozens of persons who attended the hearing held here in Las Vegas on the evening of April 3, 2001, will be debating whether or not a sufficient case was built during the hearing to warrant the highly punitive action of suspending the local branch. A weakly worded press release sent out by the national headquarters of the NAACP did not provide a nexus between any casual actions and the resulting suspension. In fact, by raising more questions than it answered, the press release has only served to complicate matters.

The release stated, in part, that a person's membership in the branch would not be affected. How could this possibly be the case? If you are a member of the NAACP and there is no local branch to provide services to the members, then how could it be alleged by President Mfume that there will be no impact to members who paid their dues in good faith? Maybe a brain surgeon and rocket scientist working together could explain the logic of the president's statement.

Back to the question at hand, what now?

If the answers are that it will remove the primary antagonists in this "soap opera" - i.e., the "odd couple" up in Salt Lake City, Utah, national board member Jeanette Williams and Tri-State President Ed Lewis - and would force our communities to come together, then the suspension could come to represent a blessing.

Jeanette Williams and Ed Lewis have, at various points over the past several years: opposed local branch president Gene Collins in 1999, supported him in 2000 and opposed him in 2001. The only constant in their behavior has been the goal of using the local branch as the vehicle for their getaway from Salt Lake City and respite in Las Vegas.

Whether you are numbered among the one in five African-Americans who live in Clark County and reside in historic West Las Vegas, or the four out of five who live elsewhere in the Las Vegas Valley, there is no doubt that five out of five of us can agree that the current need for an effective local branch is greater than at anytime since the 1960s.

Those of us who are relative newcomers, based on living here less than five years, are well aware of the role the local branch played in championing the fight for public accommodations, in developing opportunities for securing entry level and

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Many Blacks backed the Confederate flag

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The instant Mississippi voters overwhelmingly rejected a measure to wipe the Confederate emblem from their state flag, NAACP officials threatened to call a boycott of the state's tourism industry in May.

The minute they made their boycott threat I thought of the remark a good friend made to me a few years back during my visit to Atlanta.

She was a well-educated, politically involved professional. While driving down one of the city's thoroughfares, I noted Georgia's state flag fluttering on street polls. The Confederate emblem was embedded in the flag. I asked whether Blacks were enraged by it. She laughed and casually said, "That's their thing, let them have it, we've got bigger problems than a flag to deal with."

During my stay in Atlanta, I asked several other Blacks whether they found the flag offensive. The answers were the same. To them, the Con-

federate flag was an empty symbol of a dead past. They felt that were bigger problems for Blacks to be concerned about.

Their sentiment seemed wildly at odds with the official stance of the NAACP and other civil rights leaders. They have turned the flag fight into a virtual holy crusade.

They, and much of the press, swore that the Mississippi flag vote was a referendum on slavery and White supremacy. It was far from that. In March, an Associated Press poll found that nearly half of the state's Blacks supported the flag or were undecided about changing it.

The final vote confirmed that. In six majority Black counties, Blacks voted by the barest of margins to dump the old flag. But in three Mississippi Delta counties, with a heavy Black majority, the vote was to retain the flag.

There are three compelling reasons why many Blacks back the Confederate flag or are indifferent to it.

Antique Symbol. The Con-

federate flag was a non-issue for decades for most Southern Blacks until the 1950s, when Southern segregationists defiantly hoisted it on statehouses as a symbol of resistance to the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., NAACP officials, and other civil rights groups aimed their protests and legal campaigns at segregation, political disfranchisement, and murderous racial violence, not the Confederate flag. The 1964, and 1968 Civil Rights Acts, the 1965 Voting Rights Act broke the back of legal segregation, and enfranchised Blacks. The wave of federal and state racial hate crime laws in the 1970s gave state and federal authorities the legal weapons to crack down on racial hate terrorists. In Mississippi prosecutors began exorcising the state's murderous past by convicting and slapping a life sentence on White supremacist, Byron De La Beckwith in 1994 for the 1963 murder of civil rights

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Legacy of slavery affecting fabric of U.S. race relations

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In a country whose economic growth and territorial expansion required appropriating the land of one non-White group (Native Americans), exploiting the labor of another (enslaved Africans), and annexing much of a nation defined as non-White (Mexico), it was inevitable that nationhood would acquire a powerful racial dimension.

No, those are not my words. Nor are they the words of Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan or the late Malcolm X. That's a direct quote from Eric Foner, a highly-respected history professor at Columbia University and president of the American Historical Association.

Any serious discussion of race relations in the U. S. must begin with an examination of slavery and its enduring impact on people of African descent. Foner's 26-page synopsis of America's "peculiar institution" was filed in connection with efforts to rebuff challenges to the Uni-

versity of Michigan's affirmative action programs and can be found on the Web site, www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/foner.html.

Foner notes that of the approximately 12.5 million persons who crossed the Atlantic to live in the western hemisphere between 1500 and 1820, roughly 10 million were African slaves. Even in the colonies that later became the United States, which attracted a high percentage of free immigrants, the numbers were still staggering. Of approximately 800,000 people who arrived in the American colonies between 1607 and the American Revolution, more than a third - 300,000 - were African slaves.

"Slaves, of course, experienced the institutions of politics and the law quite differently from White Americans," he writes. "Before the law, slaves were property who had virtually not legal rights. They could be bought, sold, leased, and seized to satisfy an owner's debt, their family ties had no legal standing, and they could not leave

the plantation or hold meetings without the permission of their owner.

"Masters had almost complete discretion in inflicting punishment, and rare was the slave who went through his or her life without experiencing a whipping. The entire system of southern justice, from the state militia and courts to slave patrols in each locality, was committed to enforcing the master's control over his human property, and no aspect of their lives, no matter how intimate, was beyond the reach of his interference."

Though slavery is old as civilization itself, Foner observes, the slave system that arose in the western hemisphere was unique.

"First, it was a plantation system, in which large concentrations of slave laborers produced goods - sugar, tobacco, rice, and later cotton - for the world market. Second, it was a racial system, in which all Black persons, slave or free, bore the stigma of bondage. Rather than a peripheral institution or minor (See Curry, Page 15)

Black athletes too silent on important race issues

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The headline in The Cincinnati Enquirer read, "Larkin Hits First Career Grand Slam." Barry Larkin, the great shortstop for the Cincinnati Reds baseball team had, after more than 6,000 at-bats hit his long-awaited and prized grand slam home run. Congratulations, Barry!

The headline made me think once again about the tragedy that took place in Cincinnati nearly two weeks before Larkin's historic feat, and it once again made me ponder the lack of involvement by the Black players on the Reds, two of who are from Cincinnati. I marveled at the thought of seeing Barry Larkin and Ken Griffey, Jr., also a hometown guy, lead the charge to have all the Black players - and some of the Whites if they chose to - protest the shameful killing of Timothy Thomas by refusing to play in their first home game after the shooting and the street rebellion.

Wow! What a grand slam that would have been. Barry Larkin would have hit the home run of his life, one he would have cherished as much or more than the one he hit this week. Ken Griffey, Pokey Reese, Dimitri Young, et al, would go down in history for standing against wrong and injustice. Speaking of justice, David Justice could have done the same thing; he's from this area too.

I think back to the Elian Gonzalez stand-off in Miami. The Cuban baseball players

boycotted one game in support of little Elian, and he was not even being threatened with death, much less saving been shot down in an squalid, dark, rat-invested alley like brother Tim Thomas. Why, or should I say "how" could these millionaire Black athletes not take it upon themselves to make a statement like the Cuban players did for their compatriot?

Yes, Larkin could have hit his first grand slam on the first night the Reds were back in town after the violence occurred. Instead, he and all of the other Black players chose to play in conditions so frigid they had to wear ski masks and other clothing to keep them warm. Maybe God sent the cold to remind us of how cold we are when it comes to our fellow brothers and sisters. Whatever the reason, the coldness was demonstrated by the Reds - or should I say, "the Blacks," on that abnormally cold evening in Cincinnati.

This is not an indictment of Barry Larkin and Ken Griffey, or any of the others. Rather, it is yet another call to consciousness. Our Black athletes and entertainers have a tremendous opportunity to make grand statements, to hit grand slams, with their influence and their collective actions in the public eye. A protest by the Black players on the Cincinnati Reds would have shown this country a picture it desperately needs to see. More importantly, it would have given Black America a huge lift,

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