

COMMENTARY

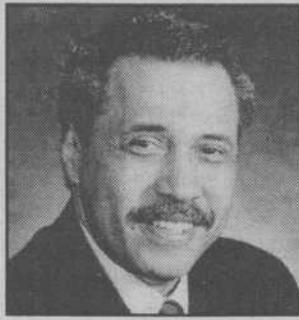
Lines of trust becoming more blurred

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, after our family escaped—I mean migrated, from Mississippi—I seem to remember a time when a person's word or handshake represented a pledge of trust by the person to honor a commitment. Nowadays, however, it is really hard to trust anyone.

Would you trust anyone who finishes a conversation with you by stating: "my word is my bond?" After "pulling the covers off this dude" you will also discover whether he is willing to reduce it to writing, (Are his words not worth the paper they are written on?) Also, today, do you really believe a person when she uses the saying: "honesty is the best policy?"

What has happened in our society between the time many of us were being raised and today, when the charac-



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ter traits of trustworthiness and honesty have been totally devalued? Could it have something to do with the type of people who now populate the societal institution of politics, religion and commerce? It seems that it is almost a daily occurrence to read or hear about an elected official, minister or businessperson being sent off to prison for violating the trust placed in the person by the masses.

Do you believe politicians when they state that if you give them money and vote for them, they will do the things needed to improve the

quality of your life? If this were the case, then President Clinton, on his way out the door, would not have experienced writer's cramp from signing pardons for politicians.

What about our religious leaders, do you think all of them are honest? Things are presently so bad in organized religion that many of the "keepers of the faith" no longer want to be called reverend, but instead, want to be called pastor.

Where are pastors Jesse Jackson, Henry Lyons and Jimmy Swaggart when you need them? The answer is: one is preparing for a court date, one is in jail and the other may still be cruising around looking for a ten-dollar trick to service him.

Here, I must try to be honest by, myself, confessing that I still like to hear Pastor Swaggart sing and play the piano. However, I am fully capable of drawing the line

between liking to hear him sing, and dying and leaving property to his church like a number of people in Louisiana are doing.

What about the captains of industry, are they trustworthy and honest? If Mr. Keating of saving and loan fame is typical, then the answer here, too, is no. He and persons like him have cost this nation more money with one scandal than all the government-sponsored minority business programs combined since the inception of that programmatic effort under the Nixon Administration.

Today, do you hear about his half-trillion dollar scandal, or do you hear minority business programs are tantamount to "reverse discrimination?" Unfortunately, the drum major in this parade of illogical foolishness is none other than "Uncle Clarence Thomas" of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Here in Las Vegas we will

soon learn if the parade of illogical foolishness will march to the same drummer, or whether the words of support for diversity uttered by the captains of the gaming industry prevail.

The Urban Chamber of Commerce is hosting—along with the World Conference of Mayors, and *Black Meetings and Tourism* magazine—a national gaming conference with the theme, "Gaming Venues II: A Report on Inclusion and Growth."

The conference will assess progress made by the gaming industry since the middle of last year, when it was revealed—to no one's surprise—that African-American businesses and professionals were not getting fair consideration from the industry.

This revelation is in stark contrast to the fact that the 2.2 million blacks who visit Las Vegas enjoy themselves

to the tune of over 2 billion dollars a year.

I am hoping against the odds that things have changed in the industry. However, I must again try to be honest by stating that the issue is still very much in doubt.

My reason for doubt is based on the fact that in a meeting with a person who has served in a director's-level purchasing position in the industry for twenty years, it was stated, "the reason it is taking so long to change things is that they want to be fair."

After picking my dentures up off the floor, I was too upset to ask a question. However, the next time we meet you can bet that I will raise the question: why should we trust you to be fair, when in twenty years on the job all you have done is be unfair?

When I get an honest answer to this question, you can trust me to tell the truth about what was said.

Black girls, women swell American prison numbers

Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A recent American Bar Association study showing that more teen girls than ever are going to jail is much cause for alarm. They account for more than one-quarter of the juvenile arrests, are committing more violent crimes, and are slapped back into detention centers after release faster than boys.

The ABA finding comes at a time when teen crime, despite the hyper-sensationalized media coverage of high profile, school murderous rampages at elementary and high schools nationally, and inner-city gang and drug violence, has drastically declined.

But what should cause even greater alarm is that many of these delinquent teen girls will pack America's prisons as women. And the majority of these women will be Black. Unfortunately, the skyrocketing rise in the number of Black women behind bars has received very little media or public attention.

But it's a problem that presents a potentially perilous crisis and challenge to the criminal justice system. The Sentencing Project, a Washington D.C., based public advocacy group, estimates nearly 100,000 women are

currently locked-up in federal and state prisons. It notes that Black women are seven times more likely to be imprisoned than White women, and are more likely to serve longer sentences.

The ABA study found that Black girls are far more likely to land in juvenile detention than White girls.

The reasons for the leap in the number of Black women behind bars are easy to find. They have greater poverty, school dropout, and victim of violence rates than White women. They are far more likely than White women to be sledge hammered by the racially warped federal minimum mandatory sentencing laws that punish crack cocaine more harshly than powdered cocaine use.

More Blacks and Latinos than Whites are arrested and convicted for crack use. This virtually insures that many female first time drug offenders will not be referred to treatment, counseling and education programs and will stay in prison longer than even White men convicted of drug crimes.

But poverty and discrimination are not the only reasons more Black women are winding up behind bars. They are also saddled with a heavy load of racial and gender

myths:

•Crime's A Black Male Thing: The media has drummed into the public that one out of three young Black males are in prison, probation, or parole, and that nearly one million Black men now pack America's prisons. This reinforces the negative perception that young Black males, not Whites or women, commit much of the crime, gang and drug-related violence in America.

•More Violent Women: The rash of Black-themed films and rap videos depict Black women as trash-talking, posturing, and even pistol-packing molls. The highly publicized police slayings of Tyisha Miller in Riverside 1998, Margaret Mitchell in Los Angeles 1999, and the execution of Wanda Jean Allen in Oklahoma in January fuel stereotypes that Black women are also menaces to society. But the truth is that Black women are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. A study by the Centers for the Control and Prevention of Disease in 1999 found that homicide was the top killer of Black women. In most cases their assailants were males.

•Major Drug Offenders: (See Ofari, Page 15)

Dissecting meaning of the Jeffords revolution

By Ronald Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Let me quickly say that I don't think Vermont Sen. James Jeffords' switch from Republican to Independent constitutes a revolution at all merely because it places control of the Senate in the hands of the Democrats.

When it became clear that the Senate would be 50-50, I observed then that the critical decisions in that body would most probably be made around the axis of ideology rather than party. And while my focus here is not to say that "I told you so," still, it is instructive that when the tax cut passed on May 26, it had the support of 12 Democrats.

The result of this is that instead of George Bush winning a \$1.6 trillion tax cut over 10 years, the figure was trimmed to \$1.35 trillion, but because it has to be adjusted at the end of five years, according to the rules of the Senate, it could balloon out even past that figure. Actually, Bush won bigger if you tack on the \$370 billion of interest costs that would be lost.

Now excuse me for putting this into racial terms, but what else is it when there is a significant bipartisan policy consensus in the Senate where there are no Blacks, but in the House, the Congressional Black Caucus voted against the tax cut unanimously either by voting against it outright or by not showing up to vote at all?

The racial purpose of this proposal was to continue Ronald Reagan's program of drying up the budget of funds for social programs and Republicans like Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, have been rather out front about

that goal by saying that if Republicans did not cut taxes "they'll (the government) spend every doggone dime of it."

Black interests are contrary to those of Bush supporters, who feel that spending more funds on public programs for health care, education, the environment, urban economic development, poverty, drug rehabilitation, youth employment programs and others is wasteful, even wrong. But the values of any governing system are truly reflected in its public agenda and the magnitude of resources applied to the items on it. I used to think, naively as it now seems, that this country would cure poverty if it just had the funds to do it.

The values in this tax cut, however, further oppress the poor and others strongly dependent upon public jobs and public funding, since they promote the privatizing of public funds and the impoverishment of government. Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) himself has said the tax cut could drain the budget of funds needed to address serious social problems over the next 10 years. But why is it I don't get the feeling Democrats in the Senate strongly believe that; no filibuster, nor other floor actions, no nothing!

In fact, I think that the leadership wimped out; it caved in to the Republicans and so Bush won a big victory, even at the expense of their constituency of working people, poor people, people of color and others. Tom "Mr. Nice Guy," Daschle, D-S.D., will have to really lead if the underlying purpose of the Bush tax cut is not to be realized, which means that he will have (See Jeffords, Page 15)