

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Independence Day?

The nation's birthday, celebrated on Wednesday with fireworks, hot dogs and all manner of patriotic pomp and circumstance, provided a perfect opportunity to assess the "independence" of Black America.

Undisputable is the fact that Black Americans are independent in the general sense of the word. Blacks are free to choose their lives' paths and pursuits; sufficient enough to stand and be counted as leaders, but free to fall into the morass of man's inhumanity to man.

But as free as Black Americans are—that freedom won via the blood, sweat and tears heroes and heroines who served as martyrs to loose the chains of slavery, unhinge the tethers of Jim Crow segregation, usurp voting restrictions and revolt against economic subjugation—a case can be made that the ensuing freedom still carries burdening shackles.

For instance, in many communities, police officers act like slave overseers, treating those areas as their own personal fiefdoms. They shoot first and ask questions later, certain that the internal investigative mechanisms used to "monitor" cops will absolve them of wrongdoing. It's only been recently that cops have been punished with prison time for egregious acts and that's solely due to intense media scrutiny. Failing that, it would be business as usual.

Equally troubling is racial profiling epidemic. The horses once used by overseers to patrol plantations to ensure slaves were working have been replaced by patrol cars. But the intent of oversight remains the same: to intimidate.

Blacks are stopped as much as three times more often than whites. The stops last longer and cops usually search the vehicles, with or without motorists' consent. While adult blacks have responded by filing lawsuits, young blacks are hardest hit by the police trespass. Stories in local newspapers have detailed the atmosphere of fear created by profiling. In one story, a 16-year-old was stopped, searched and handcuffed before being let go. The crime: driving a sport utility vehicle. The vehicle was a birthday gift. The cop assumed it was stolen. The kid is scared to drive the vehicle. The damage is irreparable.

Also damaging is this inane war on drugs (read, war on minorities). The sham that is the U.S. drug policy only foments this nation's drug binge. Though billions are allegedly spent battling narcotics traffickers each year, drugs still seep past American borders and into downtrodden communities where they're packaged and sold to the downtrodden. Without fail, it's the user and mid-level supplier, never the source, who gets in trouble.

Enter disparate drug sentencing laws. Crack cocaine users, who are typically minority, get stiffer prison terms than powder cocaine users, who are usually white. So the answer, say drug control advocates, is to sock it to crack purveyors, arguing that it's a more potent form of the drug. True, but crack is crack, and last time we checked, it was illegal no matter what form it came in. So long as drugs penetrate black communities, jails and prisons will be filled.

And apparently that's a good thing, at least if you're investing in privately run prisons. Several for-profit prison operators are now publicly traded companies. Makes sense. Rain, snow, sun, sleet, boom time or recession, the prison industry complex continues to grow.

Lest you think these are the only encumbrances to our freedom, think again. There's redlining, anti-affirmative action initiatives, political chicanery (read, latest presidential election), economic marginalization, predatory lending, disinvestments and even our own self-hatred. Maybe this is the price we pay for freedom.



Evaluating Garcia: Why the rush?

Al Triche
Sentinel-Voice

Just a couple of weeks ago, the Clark County School District Board of Trustees reviewed the performance of District Superintendent Carlos Garcia after a year on the job. Apparently well pleased, they offered him a bonus and voted 6-0 to extend his contract. That tally, however, is misleading, because the board has seven members.

Trustee Shirley Barber, representative for District "C", strongly disapproved of the process and staged a solitary protest—boycotting the closed-door meeting wherein Garcia's performance was scrutinized and graded. She then refused to attend the special meeting later that evening when the trustees gave Garcia their vote of confidence.

The day had been filled with meetings, and she had participated in an early morning session held by the trustees to establish "goals." Ironically, Barber had complained that goals were ignored when the board discussed how it would critique Garcia, and says for all intents and purposes, that neglect rendered their method useless as an evaluative tool.

After pleading with her colleagues to develop more thorough guidelines for the performance review, but getting no support, Barber became a conscientious objector to the process. She says her actions were not impulsive because she had become very "concerned" years ago when, as a new trustee, she had her first experience evaluating the superintendent of

schools.

Her concern then, as now, was with the process, which provided neither a formal instrument for conducting a proper assessment, nor the previous evaluation for use as a reference. Instead, the trustees used a rather subjective process that even the school board president recalls being very "informal."

Barber is the only trustee with the combination of experience as a school administrator and expertise in evaluating educators. "She has a lot of experience in that area," acknowledged board president Mary Beth Scow.

According to Scow, the board's policy on how superintendents should be evaluated "was a work-in-progress" when Garcia's performance was assessed two weeks ago, "and still is," she added. "We never really had an instrument," Scow admitted.

She called the previous method "very informal" and said it was used most recently to evaluate Garcia's predecessor, Dr. Brian Cram, superintendent for more than a decade until retiring about this time last year.

"With Dr. Cram, everybody just gave feedback," explained Scow, and they did it according to no particular schedule. She conceded that Barber's misgivings had been shared by her fellow board members.

"As we discussed it she had reservations, all the board members had some level of discomfort," Scow recalled. "Mrs. Barber did make her views known to everyone."

"There's been a lot of dis-

cussion on the board for the last couple of years, and especially in the past year," said Scow. "When we hired Mr. Garcia, we decided we needed to develop a more formalized system of evaluation."

Their model was another system, the "Carver Policy Governance" model, which the board has been trained to use by one of its creators.

To evaluate Garcia, the trustees selected nine "Executive Limitations," which defined the extent of the superintendent's authority in specific areas. But these limitations comprise just one component of the Carver model and, says Barber, are poor substitutes for "goals."

Despite her vociferous objections, the criteria used for Garcia's performance review were simply a checklist of executive limitations, and the trustees graded him according to how they felt he had complied with them.

Awarding one to three points, two for partial compliance and three for full compliance, the board's evaluation measured how well Garcia avoided doing what

he was mandated not to do. Barber said that was a ridiculous way to conduct the process, and that their scale, which awarded a point for *noncompliance*, was absurd.

Convinced that this evaluation was far too critical to be performed so haphazardly, Barber withdrew from the proceedings to emphasize her point—and she certainly has one.

Garcia had been superintendent of a comparatively tiny district in Fresno when he came here, to the sixth-largest public school system in the U.S. and among the poorest performing. He had fewer academic credentials than all but one other candidate for the job, and upon his arrival in Las Vegas demonstrated the racial sensitivity of John Rucker.

It seems obvious that evaluation of so unproven a leader, who clearly needs time to grow in the job but has been in it for so short a duration, should be conducted with great care. Because he inherited a failing system it is essential that this be so. But this assessment of
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