

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Change the game

As June segues into July and into August, the mercury (at least in Las Vegas) continues to rise. And the casino companies reporting their results for the second quarter can only hope their stock has experienced a similar upward hike.

Yep, it's that time of the year again—when small and large casino operators hold conference calls with analysts and investors, either reveling in the afterglow of exceeded expectations or groveling about lower-than-expected revenues and cash flow. (Accompanying this is usually a warning to investors that the company could also fail to reach earnings benchmarks).

Whether these companies generated record revenue over the year-ago quarter or felt the effects of the deadly triumvirate—slumping economy, high gas and utility prices, and weakened consumer confidence—one thing is certain: they still have lots of money.

How at least one company, MGM/Mirage, spent portions of its bounty, became a lightning rod for controversy last year. The Las Vegas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (now under the auspices of a regional coordinator after losing its charter, more on that later) challenged a large casino on its record of minority business procurement and managerial diversity.

The NAACP demanded a \$100 million investment over five years in West Las Vegas, basing the figure, in part, on the \$50 million Detroit's three casinos promised to funnel to minority and women-owned businesses as a condition for receiving the three highly coveted land-based casino licenses. MGM/Mirage, which owns the MGM Grand in Detroit and abided by rules there, rejected the NAACP's demands, instead promising to increase managerial diversity and minority business procurement.

Also targeted in the Las Vegas NAACP's diversity push was Station Casinos, the dominant player in the locals gambling market. Its officials refused to release minority employment figures, but did promise to increase managerial diversity and minority business procurement.

Amid of the controversy, the Urban Chamber of Commerce held its first gaming summit, a meeting of the minds-type gathering meant to facilitate talks between black business interests and Big Gaming. Though not a panacea, the conference opened eyes—and some doors, as several casino operators including Park Place Entertainment, the world's largest casino operator, appointed blacks to boards and other high-ranking positions. And MGM/Mirage held several minority business conferences in which several black entrepreneurs scored new business. Though incremental, the steps are at least positive.

Thus, the Urban Chamber hopes to open the door even more with its second annual gaming industry summit. Heavy hitters such as the World Conference of Mayors, have been added to the roster to lend support. Their support could be the extra push needed to knock down more doors.

Unfortunately, the Chamber must battle for diversity without the aid of the Las Vegas NAACP, not the NAACP as we know it. National officials revoked the chapter's charter in April, saying it's been a maverick by flouting rules, ineffective and trouble-plagued, claims NAACP officials deny. Removed officers cite record amounts of fundraising money sent to Baltimore headquarters in the past few years and an award as one of the most improved chapters.

Deposed president Gene Collins said national scrutiny—and the subsequent charter revocation—were caused by one thing: the casino diversity push. As expected, regional and national officials deny the charge.

Which leads to the hope that casino companies have the sense and compassion to heed minority interests without their feet being held to the fire.

Now that's a gamble.



Black America needs tuning

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Secretary of State of the United States of America is an African-American, a "first."

The national security adviser to the President of the United States is an African-American, a "first."

The Secretary of Education in the President's Cabinet is an African-American, a "first."

These and other "firsts" of the Bush Administration, along with the Cabinet- and sub-Cabinet level "firsts" of the administration of President Clinton, and the job and economic gains of the 1990s for blacks at most economic levels support the assertion that there's never been a better time to be black in America.

But even now, with professions of a commitment to tolerance and diversity being socially as well as legally required, the difficulties, tensions and problems that are rooted in America's racial past—and present—remain sharp, even if unseen, or, as is often the case, ignored.

No one should be surprised by this complexity, this juxtaposition of significant progress and persisting problems. America is still trying to live up to that splendid ideal written into the nation's founding document: *We hold these truths to be self evident...*

For more than a quarter-century the National Urban League's policy journal, *The State of Black America*, has been keeping tabs on how that journey toward the ideal has been progressing.

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



And every year the need for the scrutiny of scholars, public-policy experts, legislators, and activists it brings together to examine some crucial issues seems to intensify.

The reason is simple: As more progress is achieved, the comparison with the problems that remain, and the new problems that appear, grows sharper, too.

So it is with our current issue, which has just been released. It examines some of the issues, which the rising generation of African-Americans, those under 35, has to grapple with.

Many in this black cohort are fulfilling the promise of the civil rights victories of the 1960s. They've been able to take advantage of the significant equalizing of opportunity across the color line. But even they face problems that are still rooted in race, as the national survey of black Americans, which forms the volume's centerpiece shows in dramatic fashion.

And some of the broader problems affecting black Americans are still severe.

For one thing, consider the public schools, which 95 percent of black schools pupils attend, and which, taken as a whole, are more racially seg-

regated now than at the time of the Supreme Court's landmark rejection of segregation in the *Brown* decision.

Yes, of course, as I've said numerous times before, we can't wait for or depend on the mere fact of racial integration to attack—and solve—the problem of inspiring black children to do well in school.

But anyone who thinks the problem of under-performing schools in black neighborhoods is not connected to the larger issues of school and housing integration is just whistling "Dixie." Indeed, the entire public discussion about educational vouchers and charter schools is grounded in spoken and unspoken assumptions and presumptions about race.

A second example of the "other side" of all the fine examples of racial progress is the black unemployment rate. In the late 1990s it fell to the single digits, levels not seen since the end of World War II. It took that long for the positive effects of the decade's unprecedented economic recovery to reach the low-wage levels of the workplace ladder and open up millions of new jobs.

When it did, masses of unskilled, poorly-educated blacks were among the millions rushing to fill them—in the process, showing that three decades' worth of glib theorizing about the black poor's "cultural deficiencies" was just so much bunk.

But now the economy is souring, and layoffs of white-collar and blue-collar workers are rising, and those jobs at the bottom are shrinking sharply. It doesn't require genius to predict what will happen to the black unemployment rate.

Or, to consider a third issue, juxtapose all the good news against the racial divide between many, many

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