

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Gaming conference to examine progress

Death and taxes. Two constants in life. A quick look at the casino industry yields another constant: Revenues always go up. Whether boom time or bust, the industry has proven itself an ever-resilient beast. U.S. gamblers bet \$560 billion last year. Statewide gambling revenues topped \$9 billion last year, with more than \$7 billion generated from Clark County casinos.

It doesn't take a mathematician or a casino comptroller to deduce that \$7 billion is a lot of loot. But it did take investigative work by the now-defunct Las Vegas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to discover that little of the casino industry's largesse is spent with African-Americans, a group that drops about \$2.2 billion—in gaming and nongaming economic impact—in this city each year. What's worse is that while blacks filled the service-oriented ranks of the city's major casino companies—three of world's four largest casino operators are headquartered here—a scant few actually sit among the aristocracy, able to effect the direction of the neon-decorated cash cows.

So, last year, the NAACP agitated. Casino barons responded by promising to increase minority business procurement and managerial diversity. On the heels the NAACP attack—which coincided with MGM Grand's \$6.4 billion merger with Mirage—came the Urban Chamber's inaugural gaming summit. The event drew the industry's power brokers and concerned activists together for dialogue on the casino industry.

The Chamber's second conference began this morning, with first-day activities concluding with town hall forums on hot gaming issues and minority business and contractor relationships. The conference ends Saturday.

Part of the sequel conference's goal is to build upon the first one's inertia. Another is to assess what progress has been made since last year and how to ensure change is being made. With the NAACP out of commission—it's under the auspices of a out-of-state coordinator—the Chamber is the black community's best hope for gaining an ear to casino operators. As such, Chamber must make an honest assessment of the industry, lest it continue to grow and, as has been the custom, blacks don't grow with it.

Humanitarian recognized

If only there were more people like Aleta Davies. This 26-year-old casino worker is the legal guardian of nine of her siblings. Raising children is a Herculean enough for two people, much less one. Add the fact that at 26, Davies is in the prime of her life—a time when she should be enjoying the frills of adulthood—she dutifully tends to family business, Davies' feat is all the more remarkable.

Hers story is one of family love and true sacrifice. Attendants at the third annual benefit for the Mokae Resource Scholarship Foundation Saturday at the Treasure Island hotel-casino heard that heart-rending story. They also got a chance to meet this wunderkind and many of her siblings. For her efforts, Davies' was given money and a home computer system by the foundation, started by veteran actor Zakes Mokae and his wife Madelyn to help teenagers transition into young adulthood. The foundation focuses especially on helping youth in foster care become self-sufficient adults once they leave the system.

We should be thankful for the foundation, that it recognizes the efforts of unknown heroes. And we should all look to Davies for inspiration.



Education: Best route to economic mainstream

Special to Sentinel-Voice

There was plenty of discussion at the national urban league's just-concluded annual conference in the nation's capital. We had such guests as president bush, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, education Secretary Rod Paige, labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao, Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton, of the District of Columbia, and Representative Charles B. Rangel, of New York—and that's just a beginning of a long list—as guest speakers.

But the important point is that they were not only guests. They were partners with the scholars, politicians, community activists, policy works, undergraduate and graduate students and others in attendance in sharpening the dialogue about what African-Americans should do to take advantage of the unparalleled opportunity that is the American society of the 21st century.

In my opening address to the conference I labeled what needs to occur a "development revolution," having snatched that phrase from my colleague, T. Willard Fair, head of the Urban League of Greater Miami.

I said this new movement is the successor to African-Americans' Freedom Revolution of the 19th century, which cast aside the physical and psychological shackles of slavery, and the still-to-be-completed Equality Revolution of the 20th century, whose goal was to secure equal status under the law and eliminate government-sanctioned segregation. And I said that all of these spring from the same longstanding

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
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African-American tradition: marching toward American mainstream.

Well, it's clear to me and many others that if the economic mainstream is the ultimate destination of the development revolution, education is its staging ground. Being educated is not only required to earn a living, it's fundamental to what being an American citizen means.

Understanding that point is even more critical in today's super-competitive global economy, where there's no hiding place from its demands for skill and knowledge and the ability to keep learning new things at a moment's notice.

Thus, it's even more imperative to understand academic failure simply isn't an option in our information age economy. If it's true that, as the urban league's slogan says, our children are our destiny, we can't afford to have any of our children failing. To mix metaphors, Black America has got to have its entire people pulling on the oars if we're to continue that march into the mainstream.

Yet, we know that many black children are falling behind. The recent national assessment of education progress indicated that 63 percent of black fourth-graders could barely read. This is

intolerable—because reading is fundamental to intellectual development.

For all of the energy-sapping demands of the workplace, parents must take charge of making sure their children are achieving in school. That means parents, and the rest of the community, must have zero tolerance for failing schools. Schools that fail children—our future—are not acceptable and it's up to the community to change it.

As I describe in a recent column, that kind of educational revolution occurred in Mount Vernon, New York, whose school population is 90 plus percent black, during the last three years. In that New York city suburb, the black community and its allies literally revolted, threw out the old school board and

the superintendent, and elected a new school board, which hired a dynamic superintendent committed to achievement.

The result: a school system in which had languished near the bottom of the state-wide reading lists now soars near the top. Three years ago, only a third of its fourth graders read at grade level. Now, 77 percent do system wide, and the percentages are much higher at some individual schools.

This is what the wedding of community involvement to high educational standards and a belief that all children can perform produces. The schoolchildren of Mount Vernon, once written off as educationally deficient, have been inspired by expectation. They, and their parents, have shown what happens when individuals and a community are inspired by expectation.

That's no surprise. I've seen it time and time again throughout the communities involved in the Urban League's own campaign for African-American Achievement, our three year old effort staged with the aid of the Congress of National Black (See Education, Page 15)

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