

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Meyers comment never timely

Las Vegas' has a many speckled past. From its origins as a dusty pit stop for travelers heading westward from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles, to its mid-20th century role as mob playground and 80s title as the nation's sin capital, this city has run the gamut of images.

One so often forgotten among those more benign incarnations is this: Las Vegas once was known as the "Mississippi of the West." The moniker was earned for the virulent racism endured, first, by black migrants who toiled to build Hoover dam but were forced to stay in shantytowns, then by black entertainers, who were allowed to perform in Strip casinos but made to stay in ramshackle abodes across the railroad tracks in the all-black Westside.

Las Vegas' 50-year struggle to unhinge itself from its racist past took huge a step back as media reports surfaced about a high-level college official's use of a racial epithet.

Mike Meyers, interim president of the Community College of Southern Nevada, and CCSN lobbyist John Cummings were chatting when Cummings mentioned he was meeting with prospective student Zelda Williams about course work. Meyers, who also wanted to meet with Cummings, was overheard saying, "She's a nigger, and niggers are never on time."

Just so happens Williams heard the quip. Williams waited to tell her husband Assemblyman Wendell Williams, D-North Las Vegas, knowing he'd be angry. He was.

So were others. Anger coalesced to the point that Meyer resigned, calling it too burdensome to try to defend his character. Though ignored by the mainstream media, it's likely that CCSN's racial makeup—30 percent of the students are minority—contributed to Meyer's decision to hot-foot it out of dodge.

That such a high-level college administrator would have the unmitigated temerity to feel free to express such a blatantly racist viewpoint speaks to how deep-seeded bias is in this town. What's worse is that Meyer told local media the comment was better suited for barroom banter; he obviously doesn't get it.

Further exacerbating the issue were comments by Regent Steve Sisolak defending Meyer as an exemplary executive and concerned citizen who's given his time and talents to minority causes. Sisolak claims Meyer isn't racist, but merely made a verbal faux pas. Regent Tom Weisner, owner Big Dogs Hospitality Group, told the Review-Journal that "there's not a racist bone in his (Meyer's) body."

No, there's just a racist tongue. To explain away such a slip as uncommon Mr. Sisolak and Mr. Weisner is not only disingenuous but it's a smack to the faces of Zelda and Wendell Williams and all African-Americans, many of whom view higher education as a way to achieve their dreams. Blind loyalty, in this case, only highlights Sisolak's and Weisner's disconnect to the issue of race.

Meyer confessed his sin, true enough. But how can anyone, let alone two people charged with maintaining the integrity of the state's university and community college system, take Meyer's penance at face value? He says the N' word is not part of his vernacular, yet he spat it so readily.

Given Meyer's comments and the city's checkered history of race relations—the casino industry, the state's cash cow, is run by white men; minority portions of town lag behind the 'burbs; the state has begun studying racial profiling; the majority of death row inmates are poor minorities, etc.—it's foolish to think that the most educated are the most enlightened. Meyer proved that.



Preparing our children for a lifetime of success

Special to Sentinel-Voice

During the National Urban League's annual conference last month in Washington, D.C., one of my colleagues who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s facetiously "confessed" that he'd been "culturally deprived" as a child, and that it was his parents' fault.

He went on to explain that he'd read very few of the popular comic books and fairy tales of that era — because he was too busy obsessively reading and re-reading the twenty-volume set of the world book encyclopedia his parents had purchased when his brother was born eighteen months before him.


"That was my childhood 'reader'", he said, of the encyclopedia, "along with a multitude of the newspapers and magazines of the day that were always scattered about our apartment [and] told stories which were far more interesting to us than the stuff of fairy tales and comic books."

Of course, his point was his parents had used their own intellectual interests to give him and his sibling a powerful foundation for and interest in reading.

That is the same task and responsibility—that every adult who is raising children today must pledge to pursue to make certain that those in their care become good readers. Now—in this furiously-paced globalize information economy when 85 percent of all jobs are skilled or professional positions requiring significant skill in reading and understanding and evaluating what was read. If today's

To Be Equal

By *Hugh B. Price*
President
National Urban League



children don't acquire critical reading and thinking skills, there's no doubt their future will be deeply unsatisfying.

That is the dire prospect facing millions of black children in the U.S. Today. The 2000 national assessment of educational progress, whose results were released last April, found that 63 percent of black fourth-graders could barely read at their grade level.

Yes, in fact, the overall results of the test, the only one to measure student achievement nationwide, were worrisome in general: for example, two-thirds of all students tested fell below the level the federal government considers proficient, and more than one-third lacked even basic knowledge of reading.

But the finding about the continuing lagging-behind of black students foretells an educational and social disaster for individuals for individuals and for the society at large.

Unless we mobilize to change what is occurring. Unless we help youngsters become exposed to and attracted to reading.

In a recent column, I discussed the responsibility pub-

lic school officials and teachers bear in fostering that change. By way of example, I praised the vigorous community-wide commitment to excellence that has produced an extraordinary turnaround in the reading habits-and scores-of the mount Vernon, New York school system. That is to say, of the youngsters in the mount Vernon school system.

Now, I want to talk about what parents, grandparents, foster parents and other adults who have care of children can do. It's simple: help them to learn to love reading.

Keep books and newspapers around the house so that youngsters will know reading is important. Let them be exposed to and experience writing. Read to your chil-

dren when they're young, and later, have them read to you. Encourage them to enjoy the sound of language, and to use language to express their feelings and needs. Don't let them watch more than a couple of hours of television per day. Instead, encourage them to read for fun.

Above all, be certain you know whether your children are reading at grade level in school. If not, ask the teacher what's the game plan for improving the situation and what you can do to help.

There are much more practical tips from where those came from.

This summer the National Urban League teamed up with Scholastic, Inc., The world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books, to produce 250,000 copies of a parent's guide to early literacy.

The guide is called "Read & Rise," and it's chock full of practical tips on how parents can help their children become good readers.

Together, we'll distribute the guide free to parents and other caregivers through ur-

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| <p>Contributing Writers: Tracy Crittenden Tammy McMahan Nyla Pickett Dianna Saffold John T. Stephens III Nancy Watson</p> <p>Photographers: John Broussard Jonathan Olsen</p> | <p>Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief</p> <p>Al Triche, Copy Editor</p> <p>Don Snook, Graphics</p> <p>Ed & Betty Brown, Founders</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; text-align: right;">Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association and West Coast Black Publishers Association</p> |
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