

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Defanging laws

Under the guise of obtaining public input on the ramifications of a new racial profiling law, nine Nevada law enforcement entities held a Monday forum on the issue.

Most of what participants in the two-hour meeting at Clark County Commission chambers heard disturbed them.

Particularly vexing for many was news that, in addition to securing information required by the new law—date, location and time of the offense, race of the driver, number of occupants in the car, whether immigration status was questioned, etc.—cops would also record the driver's license number of motorists.

Doing so, law enforcement officials said, will aid in validating data. License numbers would be selected at random. Those selected would be matched to Department of Motor Vehicle records to attach a name, address and phone number to the driver's license number. UNLV students would then call the motorist to verify the facts of the vehicular stop.

The argument was unconvincing. It became more so once people learned there were no plans, at least not initially, to add reciprocity. While individual driver's license numbers would be recorded, excluded from the Scantron-like reports used to collect the racial data would be individual cop identifiers. So much for fairness.

Law enforcement officials offered as a reason meaningless banter about protecting officer privacy and about how the law doesn't mandate the individual cop identifiers. True.

But neither did AB500—which outlawed profiling as of July 1 and ordered Nevada law enforcement agencies, for one year, collect racial traffic stop data, the information to be packaged by the Attorney General's office for presentation to the 2003 Legislature—mandate the collection of driver's license numbers. So why not invade privacy equally?

A committee of law enforcement officials and personnel from the Attorney General's office said a UNLV professor devised the driver's license method of validation. That said, that professor should surely see the logic in adding individual cop identifiers. Privacy isn't an issue, because all the information, as required by law, is to remain proprietary.

Besides, what better way is there to weed out problematic officers? But concerns about apparently officer confidentiality overrode public safety. That is, until, Sheriff Jerry Keller got an earful from angry minorities and AB500's sponsors, Assemblyman Wendell Williams and Sen. Joe Deal, both North Las Vegas Democrats.

Williams and Neal said law enforcement officials have skirted the legislative intent of the law. They refuted Keller's claims that isolating police by units and sectors was an effective way to find bad apples.

More than a dozen people spoke of the need to have balance, that cops must know that there are penalties for racial profiling. Several in the crowd said they'd been victimized by cops, and see the individual cop identifiers as the best way to secure justice.

Keller repeatedly urged citizens to take complaints to the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Internal Affairs Bureau, an idea many people scoffed at—police can't police themselves; AB500 is proof positive of that.

Thankfully, citizens gave Keller so much grief about the individual cop identifiers that he agreed to take the issue back to the committee. It might be best to include it, as legislators have hinted that they might attempt to amend the law during the 2003 Legislature. Then police will truly have nowhere to hide.



Colin Powell misses important war

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A war on racism has been waged all week in Durban, South Africa, and Colin Powell, the Bush administration's best-equipped general, has been missing in action. Actually, it is more like missing without action.

It's not like the retired four-star general wasn't eager for international combat. It's that his commander-in-chief ordered him to stay home rather than return to his ancestral homeland. The purported reason was that the United States, a country that prides itself on its First Amendment protection of free speech, was afraid that what might be said at the gathering would "isolate" its pal, Israel. Consequently, a low-profile diplomat led the U.S. delegation to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR).

But just because the U.S. attached low-level significance to the world conference, many other countries did not. There were more than 15 heads of states representing their respective nations. Not only did this country's head of state decline to attend, but he wouldn't even let the head of the State Department participate.

Despite being Bush-whacked, the show went on in Durban.

"Each conference helps to reveal the global dimension of a problem, and thereby creates new networks—bringing new participants from many countries into a common debate, and sometimes leading to a worldwide cam-

paign," explained U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. "I believe that is happening here."

And what is happening on the world stage stands in sharp contrast to what is happening in the U.S. Increasingly, other nations are willing to face up to past sins by offering reparations-making amends for a past wrong or injury inflicted—and public apologies.

Germany has agreed to pay \$60 billion to victims of the Holocaust. Japan is compensating its "comfort women" and Austria has set up a \$380 million fund to compensate Nazi-era slave laborers. Even the U.S. has paid \$1.2 billion to Japanese-Americans placed in concentration camps during World War II. But it wanted no part in seriously discussing reparations at the international conference.

On the eve of WCAR, Pope John Paul II said that at the very least there should be an "apology or expression of regret to the victim state by the state responsible for the wrong." The official statement from the Vatican added, "It is not the church's task to propose a technical solution to so complex a problem. But the Holy See wishes to emphasize that the need for reparation reinforces the obligation of giving substantial help to developing countries, an obligation weighing chiefly on the more developed countries."

It was not the first time John Paul felt the need to speak out on the issue. In 1992, while visiting Goree Island, near Senegal, the Pope asked forgiveness for the role

Christians played in the trafficking of African slaves.

Contrast such forthrightness with Bush's insensitivity on the issue. Bush is in a state of denial. Or, to put it in the vernacular, "de Nile isn't just a river in Egypt." But most Whites are in denial, according to a Gallup Poll issued this summer. "Large differences between the views of White and Black Americans persist on key measures of the state of race relations in the U.S.," a summary of the findings noted. "One in four White Americans—and one in 10 Black Americans—believes that Blacks are treated the same as Whites in the United States." Moreover, the survey found, nearly half of all Whites and two-thirds of all African-Americans think race relations will always be a problem in this country.

Since the New Deal, dealing forthrightly with the issue of race has been a major problem for the Republican Party. That's why it would have been a smart move to dispatch Powell to Durban, a move that would have helped Bush's anemic standing

among African-Americans and would have signaled to the rest of the world that although not perfect, the U.S. is willing to place a high priority on dealing with the legacy of slavery and colonialism.

In a one-on-one interview I conducted with Powell in 1996 on BET's "Lead Story," the general acknowledged that many African-Americans were suspicious of him because he rose through the ranks with the help of conservative benefactors.

"I was elevated to the highest positions within the national security structure of America by Republican presidents," Powell said in the interview. "It was Ronald Reagan who made me the first Black deputy national security advisor. It was Ronald Reagan who made me the first Black national security advisor. It was George Bush who made me the first Black chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff."

But Powell was quick to specifically thank civil rights stalwarts Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson and

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