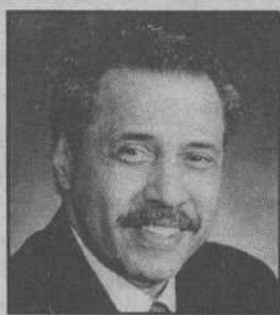


COMMENTARY

School trustees betray public

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice



LOUIE OVERSTREET

How many of you read the comments by superintendent of schools in the newspapers last weekend? Quoting, "Our goal was never to save money." The comment was in reference to his reorganization plan announced in February of this year. For the record, at the time the plan was announced, he stated the plan would save the school district a half-million dollars. Now it has come to light that the plan will cost the taxpayers over five million dollars to implement. What is more amazing than the superintendent's unbridled spending is that five of the seven members of the board of trustees constantly go along with what amounts to the abuse of taxpayers and/or parents.

The taxpayers of Clark County make a substantial contribution to the Clark County School District's two plus billion dollars annual operating budget. What we are getting for this obscene amount of spending is a system that produces below average national results on standardized tests, the highest dropout rate in the country and the lowest percentage of students that graduate and enroll in four year colleges.

If these measures of academic performance were not bad enough, the District compounds the problem by engaging in the most wasteful spending of voter approved

capital funding this side of Washington DC.

In 1998, Clark County voters approved a revenue proposition to fund the construction and rehab of schools based on a projected expenditure of \$3,500,000,000. This level of spending was supposed to solve the issues of the impact of growth, overcrowding, and eliminating the need for double shifting or year round schools. The latter problem is particularly acute for parents that have several children in the system at the same time.

A review of the information used to gain voter support in 1998 will reveal at best a benign ruse and a gross misrepresentation at its worst. To justify a \$3,500,000,000 request, the voters were told a 5% annual escalation factor was used to account for projected increases in the cost of construction over a period of ten years (1999-2008).

The District's own numbers do not support such a representation. The District listed an elementary school as costing \$9,000,000 to construct in 1998 and projected the same prototypical school as costing \$17,855,000 in the year 2007. Using any standard financial table, escalating \$9,000,000 over ten years (1998-2007) at 5% produces a figure of \$14,661,000 or a difference of \$3,234,000 per school. Just
(See Trust, Page 15)

Three strikes law really flawed

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The moment The Sentencing Project released its recent report that flatly says "three strikes" laws do nothing to reduce violent crime, California State Secretary Bill Jones screamed foul. Jones, who co-wrote and helped push a three strikes bill through the California Assembly in 1994 that became the model for similar three strikes laws in 25 other states, vigorously defended the law. He said the crime rate in California has plunged faster and more drastically than the rates in other states, and that the law is the major reason for the big drop.

Jones is dead wrong. In New York, which has no three strikes law, the crime rate has plunged just as sharply as California's rate. In Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C., which also have no three strikes law, crime rates have plunged almost as steeply as California's rate.

In the 25 other states that have three strikes laws, none of whom use them anywhere near as extensively as Cali-

fornia, crime rates have also dropped. Even in California, the odds are that most of the 50,000 felons jailed under the law probably would have wound up behind bars anyway. In the three years following passage of the law, the crime rate in the state steadily fell.

It dropped because of an aging population, the state's improved job and business climate, the expansion of community policing programs, and more effective youth and adult drug counseling and treatment programs.

Still, if the present lock-'em-up forever trend continues, thousands of three strike offenders will continue to be herded into bulging jail cells. The majority of them will be Latinos and African-Americans, and they will be jailed mostly for non-violent crimes such as drug offenses or petty theft.

And taxpayers will be forced to spend billions more to feed, house and provide medical care for them as they wile away decades in prison. But neither the terrifying cost or the gaping racial warp in

the law will do much to push the public to vote out three strikes, or politicians to modify the law.

Every attempt to dump or change the law in California and other states has failed miserably. And there are two reasons why. The first is that much of the public is scared stiff of crime. They are not reassured by the cheerful reports, studies and government statistics that show crime in California and the nation has dropped. Crime-any crime-causes shivers of rage and trauma in most people. Nearly everyone can tell a story of someone whose house was broken into, whose purse was snatched, car stolen, or was assaulted. If they don't have a personal story to tell about crime, the nightly newscasts gladly hand them one by spoon-feeding the public a steady diet of carjackings, rapes, murders and fast and slow car chases.

The second reason three strikes is, for the moment, safe is that politicians obsessively check the opinion polls. They know that there is no detectable swing in public opinion.
(See Ofari, Page 14)

Autobiography of an ex-mixed man

By C.D. Ellison
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Recent conversations allowed me to reflect carefully on the ancient pain of sitting on a cultural fence and being tugged between two factions. However, it was once just as difficult identifying the pain because society treats it as fairly too taboo to even address.

Such a subject deserves more candid discussion, I agree, to prove that those children of "bi-racial" descent are not confused individuals descending into emotional oblivion. Society "treats" the bi-racial question as one of absurd simplicity; it is perceived as the easy solution to the "application" and whether you have a right to select one or the "Other."

One can attest to its being more complicated than many can imagine however, one made decisions long ago to resolve it. I would warn you, though, not to think of it as cut and dried as most would like to make it. Albeit one could be of mixed descent, one could see the world only through what the world wants that person to see...and be. Arguably, this is not by

choice, but dictated by the most stringent social realities.

It is safe to assume that it is probably the most bizarre and wrenching question in the intellectual and emotional pursuit of answers to the "race question." One should try to offer some more insight with much more candor and intelligence.

Yet my occasional attempts at offering a clearer picture of the "interracial" spectrum and the complicated issues set before it are only mirrored projections of my own impressions, as I have completed my crossing of obsolete paths of my separated cultural and "racially divided" backdrops. Ultimately, I was able to reveal to myself indiscernible truths.

And sometimes I wondered if there was a basic assumption that I was Black like those I had grown so used to. I'm still a standout unshielded from the mysterious color complexities. Hence, I have to climb along the fence between two uneasy worlds and ways of thinking. Sometimes I'm more Black than White... sometimes vice-versa. Some-

times, I am mistaken as a Latino. Other times, my thick, slightly broader nose will give it away-hence there are moments when I just have to live with the savage indignities of being a Black man. On occasion, I have also dealt with the humiliating ill treatment of confused authorities, who never bothered to guess I was half a White man...

Thus, I was aware, very early in my life, that society will do what society wants it to do, ignorant of whatever choices I make and therefore I'm forced to simply see the world through the eyes of "a Black man."

And then I learned one day to just be myself and let the color of rage pass me by. Changes will gradually occur as I begin the difficult task of wishing racial attitudes to hell and considering myself a human being. Indeed, this is as unfortunate as it is unique. I recall once reading a poorly done article regarding the "interracial" experience. Instead of intelligently looking into the complexities of cultural two-ness and multiplicity, the author wove it into an ethnic side-sometimes vice-versa. Some-
(See Mixed Man, Page 14)

White House confab on race needed

By Dr. Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Now that the United States has pulled out of the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, because the conference documents had some negative things to say about Israel, George Bush should be reminded that he is not President of Israel but, at least, the pretender to the presidency of the United States of America.

As such, with racism still determining winners among Whites and losers among Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans, we should not let this administration or any administration forget that it has a continuing responsibility to those of us in this country to fight to eliminate racism, whether it is the subject of an international conference or not.

The question, then, is if Bush did not want to participate in the Durban conference, what will he do at home? I would suggest that he call a White House Conference on Racism. Since Secretary of State Colin Powell did not want to participate in the Durban conference, let him, as the highest elected official in the country of African extraction, be the chairman. Let him even invite some his friends from the NATO countries who either also pulled out, or sent low-level delegations, like Canada. It should be international in scope for some of the worst perpetrators of slavery, colonialism and modern racism may discuss how Africa might be truly rehabilitated.

Should reparations be on the agenda?
No!

The courts will ultimately decide this. Let this reparations agenda take the form of seeing whether and to what degree this administration is serious about devising public policy to close the racial gaps in so many areas of American life.

This would present a golden opportunity for the Bush administration to answer the question of what would it take to please the Black community, causing them to forget what happened in Florida.

Here are some ideas:
Tackling Poverty. The discussions are coming up about reauthorizing welfare reform at the time that hundreds of thousands of people, disproportionately Black, will be exhausting their five years of eligibility for government assistance. Given the downturn in the national economy and the fact that many states are running out of their "rainy day funds," why not take this opportunity to have a serious program to eliminate poverty, instead maintain the working poor?

Documenting Racial Profiling. As one of the most discussed and proven forms of racism that has affected Blacks and some Hispanics as well, Bush should take this opportunity to do what he promised in the campaign and instruct his Attorney General to deal with it. Attorney General Ashcroft could use his considerable power to research the issue for each state (since there are federal highways there) then use the power of the purse to influence states to stop it.

Making Public Education Work. Since
(See Conference, Page 14)