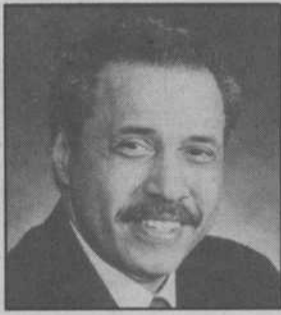


## COMMENTARY

## Climate in local education: Forecast extremely cloudy

By Louie Overstreet  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Last Saturday, the reconstituted Las Vegas Branch of the NAACP sponsored a "Nevada Educational Hearing" to celebrate the victory of Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka. The landmark decision in 1954 by the U.S. Supreme Court



LOUIE OVERSTREET

ruled it was unconstitutional to separate children in public schools for no other reason than their race. Brown vs. the Board of Education helped change America forever. The event was a part of a national outreach by the NAACP to assess the current state of educational opportunities for persons of color 49 years after the historic ruling by our nation's highest court.

Approximately 50 people attended the hearing that was conducted in a mock court setting. Spencer Barrett, branch president, presided over the hearing. Panelists included educators Dr. Marion Bell, Dr. Tracy Cotton, Dr. Tom Washington — and your boy. A dozen parents, students and a school trustee provided testimony.

The testimony ranged from the undue influence members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have on school district affairs to the apparent due process violations students of color face after confrontations with white students. Attention

was also given to issues of low academic achievement, the high percentage of African-Americans students placed in learning disabled tracks and the inequitable distribution of human and capital resources among schools with large white student populations and those that have large percentages of African-

American and Hispanic students. Based on testimony provided, one could reasonably conclude in the Clark County School District, the educational climate "ain't" better today than it was in 1954 or 1972, when the district was placed under court-ordered desegregation.

As you know me by now, the lack of empirical data to support my opinion certainly doesn't prevent me from offering one — informed or otherwise. In the case of the school district, I share the opinions of those who provided testimonies during the hearing that the school district is not better off now than it was 49 or 31 years ago. There is a threefold basis for the opinion I hold:

- There is a total disconnect between the board of trustees and the changing student population it is supposed to represent and serve.

- With the notable exception of one or

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## Thousands of Black youths threatened by Florida test

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Black community activists have threatened a boycott of tourism, sugar and the citrus industries in Florida because state education officials could keep thousands of students, disproportionately Black and Hispanic high school seniors, from graduating. Students have been taking the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and failing, but this is the first year that failure to pass the test means that students will not be able to advance.

For example, officials have announced that 13,000 high school seniors statewide will not graduate because they failed the test.

About 6,000 (46 percent) of the students who have failed are in the heavily Black and Hispanic counties of Miami-Dade and Broward, and the leaders of these communities have begun to mobilize. Bishop Victor T. Curry, members of the Florida Black Legislative Caucus, civil rights groups

and others have met to plan the boycott. The urgency is created by more than just the graduating seniors. About 43,000 third-grade students also have failed the test, 12,000 of them from Miami-Dade and Broward; their advancement to fourth grade is likewise threatened.

One wonders, however, where was the Black community in 1998 when Jeb Bush set up his "A-plus" plan, which he said was geared to testing in order to drastically improve the quality of education in a state widely known to have one of the worst school systems in the country? They should have known that achieving "excellence" in a short time would come at the expense of Black children. They didn't, however, because they have perceived academic excellence to be an objective goal that their students could achieve. They do not understand that it is largely a subjective cultural standard and that Black culture is different from the White standard to which these examinations are geared. So,

to ask their children to make up the cultural difference is noble and in some cases even achievable, however, in most cases, it is not only impossible, but downright ridiculous to expect.

Similarly, Prince George's County, Md., has just acquired a new school superintendent. The community threw out the old one out in exasperation, partly because of the politics engendered by the superintendent's conflicts with the county board of education, and partly because of parents' frustration with students not making more progress in improving test scores. When Iris Metts took over the Prince George's school system in 1999, it was home to the most affluent Blacks in the country. She promised to tie her salary to the increases in test scores and shortly afterward promised that test scores would rise by 200 points in five years. This was not only unachievable because there is still substantial poverty in the county, but because you

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## Contrasting Lincoln, Brown-time to examine racial perceptions

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It is a bit strange to call attention to a book published three years ago. That said, I just completed Lerone Bennett Jr.'s "Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream," one of the most intriguing and intellectually fascinating books I have read recently.

Ironically, despite its focus on Lincoln, the book is quite timely, which is why I bring it to your attention.

Bennett demolishes the myth of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator. Instead we come to meet the real Lincoln, the man who believed that the United States should be a White man's country; the person who attempted to reassure the Southern states that he would take no significant action against slavery; the gentleman who refused to enforce the 1862 Confiscation Act which should have freed captured slaves; the president who in the Emancipation Proclamation freed

slaves that the Union armies could not free and re-enslaved many Africans who were already free.

The importance of Bennett's critique is not in demonstrating that Lincoln was a racist. Rather, the importance can be found in the manner in which U.S. history has been rewritten to attribute greatness to someone who obstructed efforts at emancipation while ignoring or vilifying African-Americans and Whites who put their lives on the line to advance emancipation.

Reading Bennett's book reminded me of the ambivalence in the United States about the anti-racist struggle, and particularly about the role of Whites in that struggle. I contrast the mythologizing of Lincoln with the vilification of John Brown. U.S. history has been unable to come to a consensus on Brown. Alternatively described as a mad terrorist on one hand, a misguided though well-intentioned fanatic on the other,

Brown remains a hero for Black America, but White America would rather forget him.

Part of the striking difference between these two characters is that Lincoln, at base, attempted to be neutral on slavery and ultimately on race. Let me clarify. Lincoln seemed to oppose slavery in the long run but was against immediate emancipation. He wanted to deport Africans and make the United States the preserve of White men, all the time claiming to stand by the precepts of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

He believed that nice words and ambiguity gave him a certain level of moral authority compared with those who engaged actively, and sometimes militarily, in the abolitionist struggle.

John Brown, by contrast, recognized that White people in the United States simply cannot be neutral when it comes to race, and in his own

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## Attacks on actor Danny Glover bad, mean-spirited, misguided

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Actor and social activist Danny Glover is special. He's similar to Paul Robeson, Harry Belafonte and Dick Gregory. Like them, at the zenith of his career, when it would have been safer and more financially beneficial to keep his mouth sealed, he has not hesitated to weigh in on the important social issues of that his day, including apartheid, racism and militarism.

As a country, we say we pride ourselves on our freedom of speech, granting full protection to the expression of unpopular ideas. What we are seeing with Glover and other Hollywood stars that opposed our invasion of Iraq is that some people believe in free speech — as long as it agrees with their viewpoint.

Over the years, many Black entertainers have made buffoons of themselves. James Brown, "Soul Brother No. 1," should be called "Sold Out Brother No. 1." Even though Brown endorsed Richard M. Nixon for president in 1972, he disclosed in his autobiography, "James Brown: Godfather of Soul" [page 171] that "I don't vote. I've never voted in my life." More recently, singer Brian McKnight revealed on Tom Joyner's syndicated radio program that he doesn't vote. And that's why I'll never buy his CDs or attend his concerts.

When someone such as Danny Glover decides to vote and speak out on U.S. foreign policy, many of those who proclaim to be freedom-loving United States citizens suddenly want to limit what he can say.

In fact, some conservatives have been urging their followers to put pressure on the telephone carrier MCI to drop Glover as a pitchman. Never mind that the series of ads had just about completed their scheduled run. Never mind that the commercials have been extremely successful.

In addition to being opposed to U.S. action in Iraq, Glover has also come under fire for remarks considered sympathetic to Cuban president Fidel Castro.

Conservative organizers of www.marchonhollywood.com urge their followers to contact Glover and other anti-war celebrities to register their dismay. Their hit list includes Belafonte, Martin Sheen, Samuel L. Jackson, Alec Baldwin, Kim Basinger, Sheryl Crow, Richard Gere, Woody Harrelson, Tim Robins, Dustin Hoffman, George Clooney, Ron Howard, Spike Lee, Madonna, Sean Penn, Carl Reiner, Oliver Stone, Sharon Stone, the Dixie Chicks, Barbara Streisand, Laurence Fishburne, Robert Redford and Susan Sarandon, among others.

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