

OUR VIEW

NAACP litmus test

Besides the election that will determine City Council, County Commission, Statehouse, Congressional and U.S. Senate seats this fall, the reorganized Las Vegas Branch of the NAACP will elect a leadership slate, including the prized office of branch president.

Two have already announced their intentions to head slates. Dean Ishman became president after the Rev. Spencer F. Barrett was promoted by the African Methodist Episcopal Church to lead Bethel A.M.E. Church in Kansas City. The other announced candidate is Wendell P. Williams, the nine-term assemblyman.

We offer a word of caution to any attempts to use the media as a vice for disqualifying any suitable candidate. Suitability comes with backing from citizens who are always active in the community. We need not name names here because they are obvious.

Due caution is warranted here and it is our expressed purpose to extend words of wisdom that will prevent aspersions from being cast through a media that salivates reporting stories of folly. How many times in the recent past have we read or heard "embattled" as a descriptive for one of our leaders or organizations? Really, it has become a code word of sorts that frames prejudice and dubious distinction.

Allies should be made with community members who believe in the principles that have always made the National Association of Colored People a lofty organization that forges for rights and freedom. Media that flourishes in the "embattled" descriptive have their own agenda and often that agenda is not the same as our representative leaderships.

Our View is clear. We think candidacy should be predicated on the number of new members brought into the Las Vegas Branch of the NAACP. Any election is a contest of numbers. Approximately 500 members, which the local branch counts as membership, lacks the leverage which would make the powers that be stand up and take notice.

So this is the litmus test for the next slate that seeks to serve as the executive board of the local branch. The drive to bring in certifiable new members will produce obvious supporters. A local branch with fewer than 2,500 members should be considered anemic. Others, who view the glass as being half-full as opposed to half-empty, see 500 as the point of building. Indeed, it is a base from which to grow.

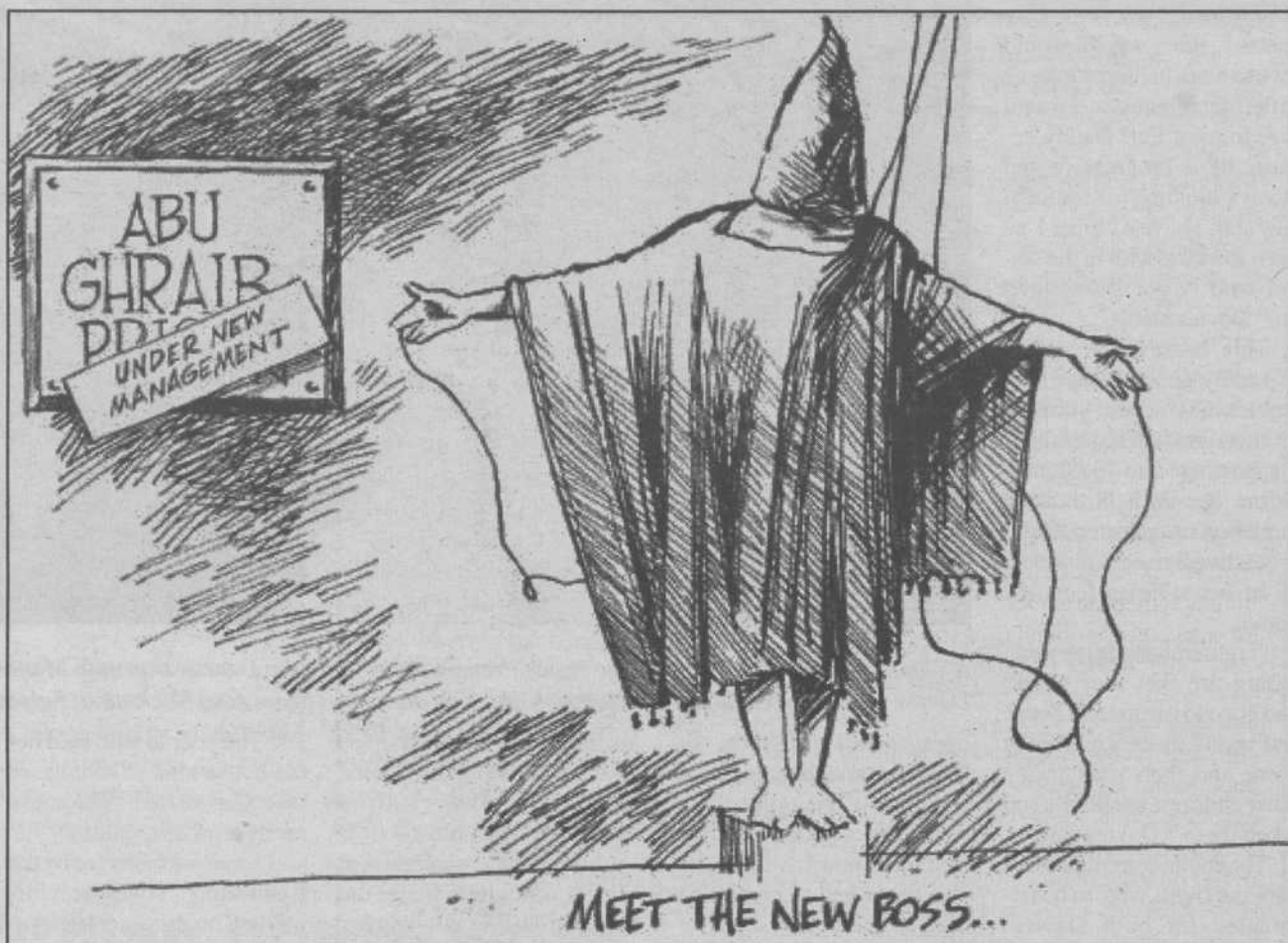
The slate that brings in the most new members would deserve the right to formulate policy and execute equal rights objectives. At this time, at any time, really, infighting and public quarreling in the media is an unthinkable approach.

Now is the time for all men and women of goodwill to come forward and make the local branch of the NAACP a fulcrum that breaks down barriers that deny the rights of citizenship. It is time that our collective voice be unified. If you have energy to expend, we say emphatically that energy is expended for the upward push of all that want and need to be lifted. In our community, oddly enough, people need to be taught about the leverage that comes with being engaged in the political process. We will never tire of telling our constituency that they need to register and practice the franchise every time the polls open.

Leadership, speaking in the glorified voice of unity, is key. Such a voice will unlock doors. Articulate words that lead us to and through just causes are sorely needed. Institutional barriers that restrict must be brought down. If supported, leadership can and will do so much.

The tried and true words of Frederick Douglass still ring loud and with clarity after all these years: "Power will concede nothing without a struggle."

P O I N T O F V I E W



Black males victims of injustice

*By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Two incidents involving males of color serve to reinforce the belief held by many African-Americans that far too often to be coincidental, when it comes to the justice system in America, it means "just-us." One incident is of recent vintage; the other is a couple of years old. The one of recent occurrence is not nearly as consequential as the one that has been pending for a period of time. However, both clearly demonstrate that status or age does not make a difference when it comes to Blacks and law enforcement.

A Black adult male, who just so happens to be a bank vice president, was arrested and detained for many hours for observing and later responding to police officers roughing up a couple of young adults. The two were stopped for allegedly having truck license plates on a sedan. The incident occurred in the parking lot next to the track behind the West Las Vegas Library.

The banker was exercising on the track, while his wife and their children were attending an event at Doolittle Center. The banker's wife arrived on the scene with their children just in time to observe her husband being put in the back seat of a police cruiser after he was arrested.

About this time, the supervising officer arrived on the scene. He just happened



LOUIE OVERSTREET

to be an African-American. When she asked what was going on, she was told by "Officer Black Man" that she didn't understand how you have to treat some of the people in this neighborhood.

If you are wondering how a bank vice president out with his family could land in jail for over twelve hours, only to be released on his own recognition, I don't have an answer other than to say he must have been arrested for JWB (jogging while Black).

In some areas of town, unfortunately, it seems that citizens are more willing to run the risk of being victims of crime rather than to cooperate with a police force that repeatedly shows such disrespect by public officers who have sworn to defend the rights of all people.

Adding insult to injury, in the time that I have lived in Las Vegas, I cannot recall one instance where a law enforcement official killed an unarmed citizen and the officer was ever charged with violating the civil rights of

the dead person. The primary reason this can occur as it relates to Black folks is that the White media has done a regrettable yet outstanding job in reporting crime in "Black face."

If you doubt this assertion, start paying attention to how crime is reported in the two daily newspapers. In fact, it seems that I have called upon you in the past to do this. What you would have discovered, as I have, is that when a crime is committed by a Black person, the mugshot of the perpetrator is more likely to be printed in the papers than the photo of the victim of the crime. When a White person commits a crime, is it more likely that a photo of the victim or a member of his or her grieving family will appear in the papers.

Over time, this subliminal message serves to reinforce the perception that if a crime

is committed, a Black person committed it.

This results in two repeated occurrences. Blacks are convicted at a much higher rate than our White counterparts for the same crime and we serve longer sentences for the same crime. The criminal justice system is aware of this fact. In America, however, the system continues to lock up Black folks at the highest percentage rate of any nation in the world. One in eight adult African-American males has some type of criminal record or is in some type of penal institution.

The following example is typical of injustice in the extreme. A young man, who was at the time 16 years old, is serving a life sentence for a "trumped up charge of aggravated robbery." The public record shows that this young man was riding his

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Nevada's only African-American community newspaper. Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc. 900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104 Telephone (702) 380-8100 • Fax (702) 380-8102 Email: lvsentinelvoice@earthlink.net

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