

OUR VIEW

Sticks, stones obscure issue

"From my perspective, there is one last plantation in America, and it's called the Democratic Party."

From the mouth of a rightwing, racially opportunistic ideologue like Alan Keyes or an inveterate Republican propagandist like Armstrong Williams you might expect such incendiary vitriol, but not from a Republican Clark County Commissioner Lynette Boggs McDonald who has garnered a bipartisan support during her years of public service and who has generally avoided partisan bickering. The statement created the expected mini, media-stoked brouhaha, splitting an already fractious Black community and (re)igniting political fissures—Black Democrats calling for her head; Republicans amen-ing their GOP sister.

But as smart as she is, you have to question what Boggs McDonald—who usually displays an uncanny sense of reason for a politician—was thinking by choosing the word "plantation." She must have known about its racial connotation. Perhaps more than any remnant of the U.S. slavery era, plantations reprise the most disconcerting memories. Of brutal beatings. Of forced rape. Of back-breaking field work. Of racial separatism (house vs. field slaves). In trying to make the point that Democrats have long taken the Black vote for granted—which is true—Boggs McDonald instead stirred a partisan hornets' nest. Yes, Democrats may assume Black support as a birth-right, but GOP blatantly treats it as an afterthought. Credit Boggs McDonald for being courageous enough to highlight a political truth, but discredit her for 1) failing to leave her comments by lowlighting her party's abysmal treatment of Black America 2) failing to choose her words more wisely (she told the *Review-Journal* she was unaware that Keyes has also used the plantation analogy) and 3) airing discord in the media and doing so now.

Though controversial at any time, her words are infinitely more so in this racially charged political climate, a climate in which Democrats allege a vast GOP conspiracy to suppress the Black vote, fears stoked by the disenfranchisement of scores of Black ex-felons throughout the country during the 2000 presidential election (one estimate tabbed the figure at 1.9 million Blacks). As the clock ticks toward election day out comes new evidence that the GOP wants a repeat of 2000.

For instance: Last year in Pennsylvania, men with clipboards bearing official-looking insignias of the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms and the Drug Enforcement Administration were dispatched to Black neighborhoods and asked prospective voters for identification; in 2002, fliers were distributed in Black communities in Louisiana that read, "Vote!!! Bad Weather? No problem!!! If the weather is uncomfortable on election day (Saturday, December 7) remember you can wait and cast your ballot on Tuesday, December 10;" the Louisiana Republican Party admitted in a separate incident to paying Black youth \$75 to hold signs in Black neighborhoods that appeared to discourage folks in the African-American community from voting.

"The Long Shadow of Jim Crow: Voter Intimidation and Suppression in America Today," a joint report from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the People for the American Way Foundation, cites more examples of allegedly GOP-inspired vote suppression: armed private guards, off-duty cops, creditors and fake election workers threatening minority voters; signs at the polling places warning of penalties for "voter fraud," "non-citizen" voting, or illegally urging support for a candidate; poll workers "helping" voters fill out their ballots, and instructing them on how to vote; criminal tampering with voter registration rolls and records; fliers and radio ads containing false information about where, when and how to vote; internal memos expressing an explicit goal to suppress Black voter turnout.

Boggs McDonald has to know that her party has treated Blacks infinitely worse. If the Dems represent the last plantation, then what's that make the GOP?

POINT OF VIEW



Talking about politics, Iraq, schools

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Isn't it amazing how often the acts of certain individuals, politicians or organizations defy rational thought?

While not heading the list, ranking near the top are the persons who stand outside reporting on the weather during hurricanes. What gives with these fools?

What gives with persons who are actually being oppressed who feel it helps their cause to kill children?

What's the story on leaders of our country having the belief that the enemy of my enemy is my friend? You couldn't count on both hands the wars and conflicts we have engaged in due to this mistaken belief. Case in point, remember when we befriended Iraq at the time Iran was holding Americans hostage in the late 1970s?

Now much of the world is mad at the United States for invading Iraq. What gives with us being bent on making a 1,400-year-old country that has been ruled by a series of religious zealots and/or assorted despots into a democratic society? We are so blind in this pursuit that we are even willing to admit on television that we are killing innocent women and children in an attempt to bomb-out alleged havens for terrorists in the slums of a number of cities in Iraq — our former friend of the early 1980s.

Talking about former friends, what gives with us



LOUIE OVERSTREET

imprisoning our former friend General Noriega who, as long as he was doing our bidding, was allowed to remain in power in Panama? After we no longer had any use for him, we removed him from power based on his drug-running activities. For the record, our country was aware of this for years.

What gives with voters who do not take the time to inform themselves on the issues? Our state politicians would have us to believe that using Yucca Mountain as a permanent repository for spent nuclear fuel is the biggest public policy issue in the state of Nevada's history? If this is the case, then why is President Bush, who signed the law authorizing such storage, leading in state polls which could result in his receiving the state's five electoral votes?

While on the subject of people not informing themselves on issues and persons seeking office, we here in Nevada have to rank near the top of the uniformed voters list. In a number of races,

people with sordid backgrounds — some signed up to run but did not campaign in the primary election — received up to a third of the votes cast.

What gives with the charade the Clark County School District is trying to put over on the public? The school district is holding a series of town hall meetings under the guise of seeking the public's input on how to improve the operation of the district. In reality, they are trying to build public support for more funding to do a poorer job. By this I mean, annually the school budget increases by a greater percentage than the increase in the number of students.

What the district really wants to do is build public support so that we will not demand that our elected officials place caps on property taxes. Without caps, homeowners will be taxed an additional amount based on

the 53 percent increase in property values this past year. With no cap, the school district will realize a windfall of nearly one half billion dollars of unanticipated revenue with no oversight by the public on the manner in which this money will be spent.

If past performance is the best predictor of future outcomes, then I can say without fear of contradiction that more money for the school district will not result in improved student performance or a decrease in the nation's highest dropout rate.

Now with you having an idea of what gives, are you willing to do what's necessary to hold individuals, politicians and organizations that are supposed to be representing the interest of the public accountable? If so, an improved quality of life may become a right of all people and not merely the province of the privileged few.

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