

OUR VIEW

Media Blackout

The stigma that's dogged Black media for nearly two centuries reared its ugly head on Saturday at the Paris Hotel-Casino's convention center: The stigma is that the Black press, by sheer virtue of its blackness, is somehow inferior to the mainstream press, the information contained in its pages, carried through its airwaves and transmitted via its newscasts somehow less reliable, less vetted, less important and, therefore, doesn't so much qualify as news as its does something else. The effect is a devaluation of the Black press in general.

Gone unchecked, a stigma can become a myth and a myth a ritually perpetrated falsehood that's taken as gospel. Fact is, since the founding of the first newspaper by and for African-Americans—"Freedom's Journal," created in 1827 by noted abolitionist and Presbyterian minister Samuel E. Cornish—the Black press has been relegated to second-tier status, the prevailing, and untrue, sentiment becoming, "If it doesn't appear in the White newspaper, it ain't important."

At a Saturday night speech at an event held by 100 Black Men of Las Vegas, the stigma surfaced. Steve Schorr, vice president of public/government affairs for Cox Communications, blasted the media for missing an event that offered great chance to show the city's dominant cable provider in a benevolent light. "It is with great disappointment that I am here tonight without seeing the media of Las Vegas here. I will tell you that this community should be ashamed of itself."

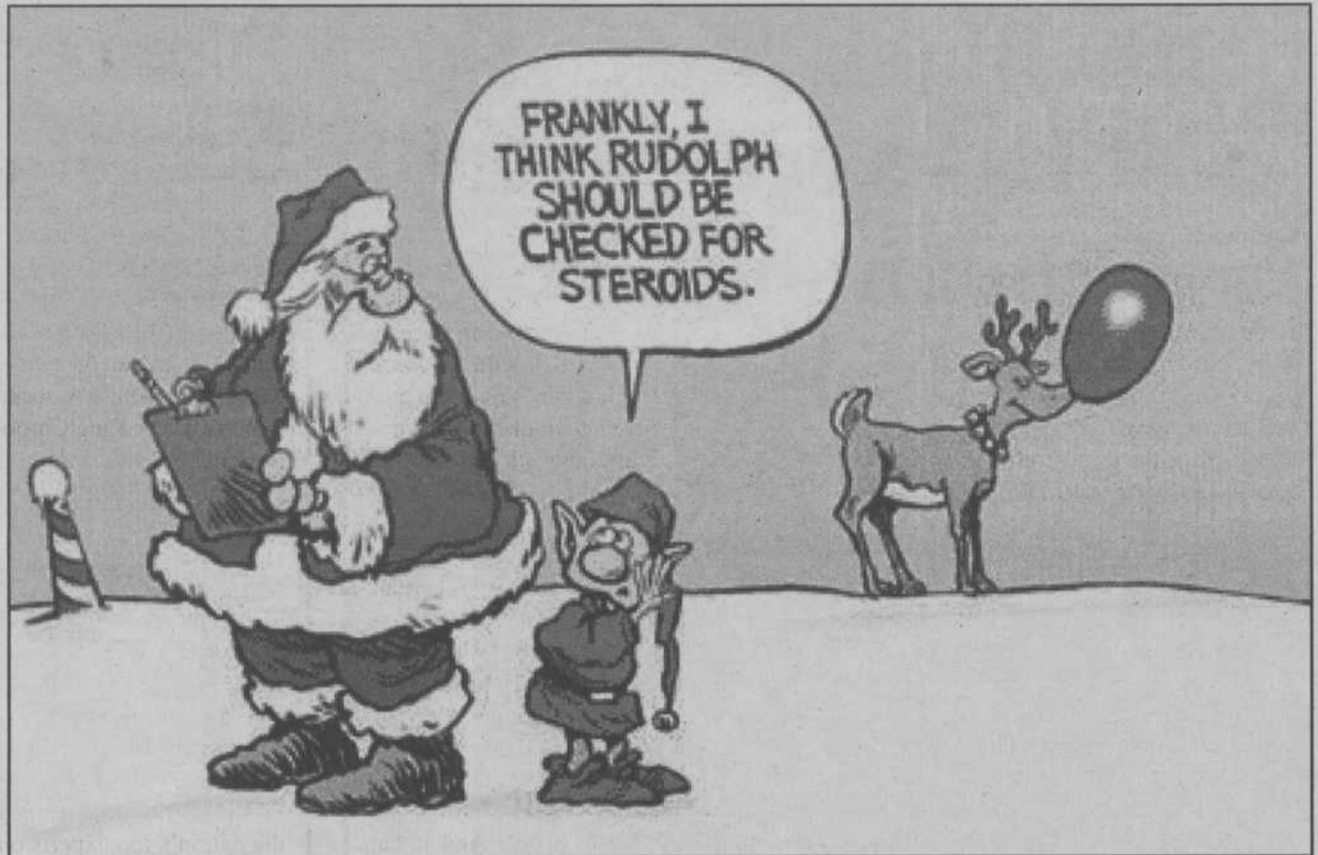
Just so happens the Sentinel-Voice was there, represented by four staffers. Maybe Schorr didn't see the two Black photographers snapping pictures of him. Maybe he didn't know the Sentinel-Voice's editorial staff was in the rear. Give him the benefit of the doubt? OK. Give him absolution? No. A better tack would've been to ask if any media was present, something speakers do, if only as a precautionary measure. Instead, Schorr effectively reduced the state's largest African-American newspaper to a non-entity. In hearing his words, you could read meaning into them: disappointment that neither the Las Vegas Review-Journal nor the Las Vegas Sun were present; frustration that none of the major television stations bothered to send a news crew to cover the event. The Sentinel-Voice, and other Black press in the audience, deserved to be upset.

Of greater concern than Schorr's mishap, however, was the attempt, by Blacks, to gloss over it, ignore it, deemphasize it. Had not Sentinel-Voice Publisher Ramon Savoy approached the podium and requested a retraction, it's unlikely the slight would've been addressed. "I was asked to announce that the Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice, which is print media in our community, is represented here this evening," emcee Lillian McMorris told the crowd. A tepid response at best for someone who should have been the first to correct Schorr and defend the Black press. Lillian McMorris built a stellar reputation for her work establishing Channel 5's community affairs department, parlaying the connections, relationships and friendships made over decades of civic service into her own public relations business once she was downsized out of a job. Like it or not, Lillian is Black media.

Folks like Schorr, while their ignorance isn't tolerable, it's almost excusable. He's not as familiar with the Black press because his company isn't. Ditto for lots of businesses. Either they see no need to advertise with the Black press or don't know it exists. But inaction on the part of those like Lillian McMorris, who know about the Sentinel-Voice and recognize its journalistic importance and cultural significance, is inexcusable. "He (Schorr) was not directing the comment to you," McMorris told the Sentinel-Voice. "And, well, you heard the apology." Too little. Too late.

But to everyone else that didn't, say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud!

POINT OF VIEW



Schools still performing poorly

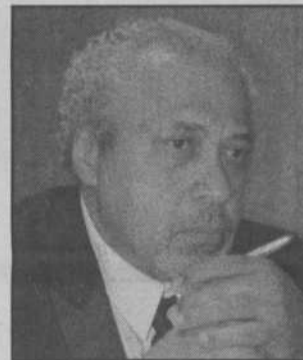
By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

On November 2 all of the Trustees standing for re-election to the Board of the Clark County School District won by landslide margins. Now, you can add school board members getting re-elected to the list of death and taxes as being sure things.

This re-election disaster was followed one month later by two more pieces of bad news concerning public education in Nevada — more particularly, in Clark County: (1) A national reporting body released a study reaffirming that public education in Nevada rank near the bottom of a number of assessment measures, and (2) Governor Guinn is committing money from a state maintained "slush fund" in order to provide more funding for poorly performing schools.

The not for profit and non-partisan Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) in its "18th Annual Development Report Card for States" characterized the condition of education in the Silver State by stating, "If Nevada were a student, it would probably have to repeat a grade."

This damning assessment is based on the drafters of the report concluding that Nevada has a weak educational system. Nevada received a grade of "F" for "Development Capacity" as reflected in the number of students who scored low in reading and math proficiency, as well as the low percentage of students graduating from high school and college. Nevada ranked 49th



LOUIE OVERSTREET among states in high school graduation rates, 43rd in college attainment, 47th in basic reading, and 43rd in math proficiency. Stated another way, while others are shouting—"We are number one. We are number one." Nevadans must be content with exclaiming that—"We are almost last. We are almost last."

On top of this bad news, in a state that raised taxes by \$854,000,000 the last legislative session, based on the state allegedly being in dire straits, Governor Guinn announced that he would be providing more money for assistance to the 137 schools on the failing list and another 120 that are the warning list.

The large annual percentage increases in school budgets, which far outstrip the percentage of increase in the student population, have not prevented the system from failing our children. Thus, one could reasonably conclude that the Governor is throwing money down a rat hole with the mistaken belief that the problems associated with public education will be solved with more millions or, make that, hundreds of millions of dollars. As I have said (for what

seems like the umpteenth time) the Clark County School District is purposely designed for failure. About now, are you saying to yourself, "Man, Overstreet has finally gone off the deep end"?

If you believe this to be the case, then let me put down my gin bottle and write again that the Clark County School District is perfectly satisfied with its current, awful state of affairs. My basic premise stems from four facts of life in Las Vegas: (1) The executives of the school district are dumber than the students they are producing. (2) The parents of students attending Clark County schools have not organized themselves into an effective political force that would be capable of demanding accountability. (3) The district is now a minority majority system so who gives a damn. (4) The state's number one industry of gaming depends on an uneducated workforce to fill tens of thousands of service level positions.

If you doubt the points I

have made, then I invite you to do just four little things: (1) Attend any school board meeting of your choosing. I will bet you that you will come away with the feeling that school board meetings are far more entertaining than any of the numerous circus acts out on the Strip. (2) Observe how few parents attend school board meetings. (3) Notice the age and appearance of schools in minority neighborhoods compared to those in high income neighborhoods. The difference is striking despite the fact state law requires the equitable distribution of capital resources on a student per capita basis. (4) The next time you are in one of the casinos, make a mental note of the complexion of people and the jobs they are performing.

Since putting down my gin bottle a short time ago, I have learned to cook.

I hope you enjoy my "proof is in the pudding" assessment of why the education system in Clark County will not change, unless parents demand such a change.



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