

OUR VIEW

Our History is U.S. Story

As is typically the case when February rolls around, Black history leaps to the forefront of the U.S. psyche. The country is inundated with television specials, documentaries, biopics, movies, reruns of seminal projects ("Roots") as well as blaxploitation flicks.

You can count on Black celebrities being interviewed, veteran Black activists being asked to reminisce about the not-so-good old days (as well as pontificate on the only slightly-better present). Black athletes will be prompted to talk about their favorite civil rights leader. Black intellectuals will be courted by the media and think tanks to posit their two cents on what the nation needs to do to improve. Black politicians will both lament the state of African-American affairs (Democrats) and jabber about the great strides the race has made over the past 50 years (Republicans) — quietly intimating that corrective measures, such as affirmative action, are no longer needed.

It's an exercise we indulge without the slightest affront, as if to say: "Gee, we have one month to celebrate our heritage, so let's not press our luck by trying to convince America that Black history is American history; that for every day on the calendar, you can find a notable accomplishment by a Black American. No, no, no, let's just be content with commemorating our history during the shortest, most ignored month of the year. Yes, let's."

Such pessimism certainly doesn't jibe with the immeasurable impact African-Americans have had on this continent. Sadder still is that Black leaders and Black intelligentsia haven't been the mouthpieces they should be in relaying the message of the omnipresence of the Black experience in America. If not the best of us to create a giant Post-It note for our non-Black brothers and sisters, detailing our contributions in every field of human endeavor, then who?

Thankfully, some entities are helping fill the void. One heartening development is news that the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (a unit of the New York Public Library) has created an education project focusing on Black migration over the past 400 years.

The project includes a website that will offer public access to articles, photographs, maps and historic documents, among them a letter from President Lincoln in which he talks about plans to send Blacks to Haiti. Multi-talented entertainer Harry Belafonte, who got his start in a basement theater at the original Schomburg center in Harlem, told the Associated Press that "In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience" will educate the masses on the "profound impact the African-American has had in shaping the culture and history" of the United States... "It will help us get on with the business of understanding who we are, make us become more prideful and, for the rest of the world, to understand what they have done to us, for us and with us."

What's exciting is the breadth and depth of the project: 17,000 pages of text from books and manuscripts; 8,000 photographs and 65 maps, giving visitors to the website the ability to trace international and domestic migration patterns of approximately 35 million Blacks and their ancestors. It also contains 100 lesson plans for teachers to use in classrooms. At the macro level, this is exactly the kind of project that's needed. But on the micro level, the community level, the local level, similar efforts would do wonders toward enlightening not only non-Blacks but the generations of African-Americans with little or no connection or knowledge of our triumph and struggle.

The West Las Vegas Library/Theater is doing its part. While February's slate is chock full of activities focusing on the Black experience, the library/theater serves as a year-round beacon, presenting forums and events that offer a fuller-picture view of what it means to be Black. Our history isn't something to be honored for one month. It should be a year-round celebration.

POINT OF VIEW



Are Democrats serving us?

By Dora La Grande
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Often, we allow other people and entities, such as the media, our TV and radio personalities, our pastors, our parents, etc., to influence our thought processes which, consequently, influences our actions. While some of these people are well intentioned, sometimes they are passing on information that has been passed on to them. We continue the cycle and run with it without any regard for whether the information is factual or not.

What immediately comes to mind is the majority of Blacks who vote Democrat. Do we really know why we vote Democrat? Can we identify why this party is the chosen party of most Blacks? What have Democrats done for us that has prompted us to so overwhelmingly give them our undying loyalty, regardless of who they are?

All they have to do is be Democrat, and they get our vote? Or, do we vote Democrat because that's what our grandparents and parents have done for generation after generation? That's crazy. Remember that George Wallace was a Democrat, and he was an example of White supremacy in all of its most vicious brutality.

Am I trying to review all of those bad memories in a different, but fundamentally unchanged, context in the new millennium? Absolutely not. My goal is not to urge you to avoid voting for Democrats; but rather, it is to get you to know why you vote for whomever you vote for and to take more seriously your "voting rights" — which thousands of people died for you to have. And hopefully,



ON THE RECORD

By Dora La Grande

this propels you to be more politically astute.

Bible verse 2 Timothy, 2:15, implores us, "Study to show thyself approved before God." That means to be diligent in your search for the truth; to labor; to not just take what anyone tells you at face value, but to find out for yourself. To that end, I am going to set the record straight regarding the civil rights movement.

The civil rights movement was not based in politics, nor was it about which politicians did what or what political party should take the most credit. America's politicians merely saw the handwriting on the wall and wrote legislation to make into federal law the historical changes that had already been taking place.

The movement of Blacks to the North, as well as the contributions of Blacks as fighting men in the World Wars, plus the hard work of millions of Blacks and their families and churches, along with the efforts of many private groups and individuals made the civil rights movement succeed. The climate of public opinion had changed between World War II and 1964.

The National Opinion Research Center discovered that, by 1963, the number of Americans who approved of neighborhood racial integration had risen 30 percent in 20 years to 72 percent; more impressively, Americans supporting school integration

had risen to 75 percent.

Various efforts led by Protestant and Catholic clergy, advances of the Urban League, NAACP Congress of Racial Equality and, of course, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., his followers, along with other subsets of his non-violent movement and other activists are what forced civil rights to be crafted into federal law.

Yet, a falsehood has been perpetrated by the political left, and accepted as gospel by Blacks, who Democrats have the audacity to believe "owe" them. Owe them? Owe them, for what? The truth of the matter is that neither party has embraced the ideologies and needs of Black America, but since 1933 Republicans have had a more positive record on civil rights than Democrats.

In the 26 major civil rights votes after 1933, a majority of Democrats opposed civil

rights legislation in over 80 percent of the votes. In contrast, the Republican majority favored civil rights in over 96 percent of the votes and had tried to have a Civil Rights Bill passed in 1957 and 1963.

Think about who those Southern Democrats were: Sam Ervin, later of Watergate fame, who opposed all civil rights legislation; Albert Gore Sr. and Robert Byrd, a former Klansman who Democrats still call "the conscience of the Senate." They filibustered against the bill for fourteen straight hours before the final vote.

The June 1964 issue of Congressional Quarterly reported that in the House of Representatives, only 61 percent of Democrats (152-for, 96-against) favored the Civil Rights Act, as opposed to 80 percent of Republicans (138-for, 38-against). In the Senate, only 69 percent of Democrats (46-for, 21-against) supported the Act, while 82 percent of Republicans (27 for, 6 against) helped enact it. This 82 percent Republican vote, even though they were the minority party, was significant. (See La Grande, Page 11)

NEVADA'S ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER
LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice
GRIOT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.
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