

OUR VIEW

Keep It Moving

Call it the debate that won't die. A debate based on a play that many people in the community think deserved to die. First-year Canyon Springs High School social studies teacher Ron Turner wrote a play for Black History Month that included some scenes that unnerved many people. The work, "I've Got To Keep Moving," chronicled the historic struggles faced by Black Americans.

Controversy erupted after Turner rebuffed administrators' efforts to tone down some of the "colorful" language; this was imposed as a condition in order to allow students to perform the script. Among the controversial scenes: a part depicting the Ku Klux Klan, as well as dialogue using the word "nigger."

The ensuing fallout set off a flurry of reactionary activities. Turner was placed on suspension and later transferred to an alternative high school for troubled students on the mend. Well-meaning students held several protests in favor of Turner, expressing support for his desire to see the play acted as written, uncomfortable scenes and all. Civil rights activists also chimed in, some supporting Turner's exercise of freedom of speech, others wanting him to sanitize the play for the sake of impressionable students. The topic drew significant interest when it was discussed on Patricia Cunningham's Saturday morning radio-talk show on KCEP FM 88.1.

The Turner controversy even reached the administrative offices of Canyon Springs. Veteran Clark County School District principal Dr. Ronan Matthew was transferred from Cheyenne High to Canyon Springs — "I was asked to move (to the new school) and I agreed because of that. I'm a loyal employee of the school district I serve" — while former principal Roger Gonzalez was placed in an administrative post in human resources.

Everybody, it seems, had an opinion, but no one offered a holistic solution. To sanitize the script would've been the wrong way to go. High school students are more advanced than they're often given credit for, and their matriculation should not only serve to prepare them for post-secondary lives but, also, begin to form their world view and give them perspective on life.

This includes telling the truth about history, no matter how ugly that truth is. You disable young people by shielding them from the world's imperfections. But you empower them by leavening the news of all that's bad with examples of how humanity has triumphed in spite of disaster, loss and evil. Fact is, the Ku Klux Klan is a part of American history. As bitter a pill as it may be to swallow, this group's existence is a historical factoid we must digest. No one ever said the truth was pleasant.

Nor is it pleasant confronting the "n-word" and all it connotes. But ask yourself this: How can this word stir up such a wellspring of animosity in high school play but not on high school campuses where, if you listen closely, you could probably hear it everyday.

Nor is Turner absolved for his role in pushing this issue off the campus and into the newspapers and onto television. The more media attention he drew to himself, the more it seemed like he was the focal point and not the play. Sometimes, you have to use kid gloves to maximize the effect of a punch. It's OK to mention the Ku Klux Klan, but you should also mention folks like Frederick Douglass, Harriett Tubman, Nat Turner and the of Reconstruction-era African-Americans who held political office shortly after the 1865 Civil War. Yes, note the problems plaguing our inner cities — drugs — gangs, violence, misogyny — but also highlight the scores of success stories that have come from the ghettos. This is where the debate should've moved, to a constructive dialogue. How you keep things moving in a positive direction is by agreeing to disagree, then agreeing to compromise. How you block such inertia is easy — just retrace the sad steps that got us here.

P O I N T O F V I E W

THE BUSH "OWNERSHIP SOCIETY"



Can we build strong communities?

By Dora La Grande
Special to Sentinel-Voice

At a time when America should be doing everything it can to protect and strengthen its communities, President Bush is proposing budget cuts that are weakening them and making them more vulnerable. He has touted his proposed cuts as "Building a Better and More Compassionate America for All." I'm sure you can see from the articles, over the past couple of weeks, that he really meant "for y'all." When he cuts at the very core of the community funding that will only weaken the efforts to fight crime in the cities, allow gangs to slowly regain their ability to terrorize innocent neighborhoods, and allow crime rates to go up in cities that have benefited from the grants previously given by Congress, you have to ask yourself: "What is the President thinking?"

Local police forces have been of major help in the fight against internal terrorists, providing vital backup to the FBI, ATF and other law enforcement agencies. So what political spin control can make cutting the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program from \$499 million to \$22 million sound proper? This program was designed to put 100,000 cops on the street, address the cause of crime, improve law enforcement-community partnerships with better communication, and encourage long-term, innovative problem solving.



ON THE RECORD

By Dora La Grande

Bush is proposing to cut Juvenile Accountability Block Grants to the tune of \$54 million. This is a program that awards grants to states to address the growing problem of juvenile crime by encouraging accountability-based reform at the state and local levels.

Grants are awarded to the states that are required, in turn, to pass through a majority of the funding (at least 75 percent) to eligible units of local government. The local government can, in turn, use the money to develop, implement and administer sanctions for juvenile offenders — as opposed to initially locking them in a juvenile facility; build juvenile detention facilities; hire judges, probation officers and court appointed defenders; fund pre-trial services; reduce case load backlog and whatever else it takes to improve facility practices and programming.

Under this pot of funding, the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) will be cut by \$301 million. These funds are used to house criminals who were born outside the United States or in one of its territories and had no reported or documented claim to U.S. citizenship. SCAAP provides federal pay-

ments to states and localities that incurred correctional officer salary expenses for incarcerating undocumented criminal aliens with at least one felony or two misdemeanor convictions for violations of state or local law. To be eligible for reporting, qualifying inmates must have been convicted of a felony or second misdemeanor for violations of state or local law and housed in the applicant's state or local correctional facility for four or more consecutive days during the reporting period. Once the inmate has served all pre-trial and post-conviction time, the state may file to recoup its costs.

Even the war on drugs is not sacrosanct: the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Program is being

eliminated, a cut of \$441 million. The next programs to be cut that jeopardize our safety is the Byrne group of justice and discretionary grants which funded the creation of local anti-drug task forces across the country. This means that there will be less money and fewer policemen to prosecute the drug war at the local level and represents a \$634 million cut in the budget.

The High Density Trafficking Area (HDTA) program began as a targeted effort in small districts more than a decade ago has now expanded into a program covering most of the U.S. population. This program is being cut by more than half from \$228.4 million to \$100 million.

As methamphetamine labs are springing up in record numbers all across the nation, methamphetamine "hot spots." Programs designed to aid local law enforcement in meth lab clean up efforts is being slashed by 60 percent (See La Grande, Page 11)



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 Email: lvsentinelvoice@earthlink.net

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