

OUR VIEW

Ruminating on King's Legacy

This time last year, as the community readied for the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Parade, no one could have foreseen the coming furor. Of course, we're talking about what's become known as the Rob Blair Incident. The former KTNV Channel 13 weatherman made the gaffe of all gaffes during a broadcast the morning prior to the 2005 parade: "For tomorrow, 60 degrees, Martin Luther Coon King Jr. Day, gonna see some temperatures in the mid-60s." Some 20 minutes later, Blair made matters worse with a tepid apology: "Apparently, I accidentally said Martin Luther Kong Jr., which I apologize about — slip of the tongue." A stronger apology followed later that day: "On a weather report earlier this morning, I made an accidental slip of the tongue when talking about the Martin Luther King holiday, and what I said was interpreted by many viewers as highly offensive. For that I offer my deepest apology. I in no way intended to offend anyone. I'm very sorry."

Too late. Damage done.

Blair's slip of the tongue wasn't the first involving the King holiday.

Shortly after the January 1998 parade, Dan Holley, then-vice president of the Police Protective Association, was running down a list of paid holidays for police recruits when he said "Martin Luther Coon Day." Twenty-one of the 36 cadets complained to their sergeant. Holley got an oral reprimand and wrote an apology letter.

These are just two of the incidents we know about. How many more did we not hear about because they were either ignored, trivialized, tolerated or not reported? How rampant are non-verbal but still bigoted activities: cops racially profiling, speaking condescendingly ("boy") or handcuffing unnecessarily? Store clerks tailing Black shoppers. Banks jacking up interest rates on loans. Neighbors complaining to the homeowners' association about the smallest infractions.

For all its cultural progress, Las Vegas still can't shake its past as the "Mississippi of the West," when the climate was as virulently racist as the pre-desegregation South. The question now is: Who'll next blow King's dream to smithereens?

Speaking of King's dream, here's a question: If the civil rights leader were alive today, would he want to hold his parade on Fourth Street or on the thoroughfare that bears his name? This is a hunch, but we'd guess the latter.

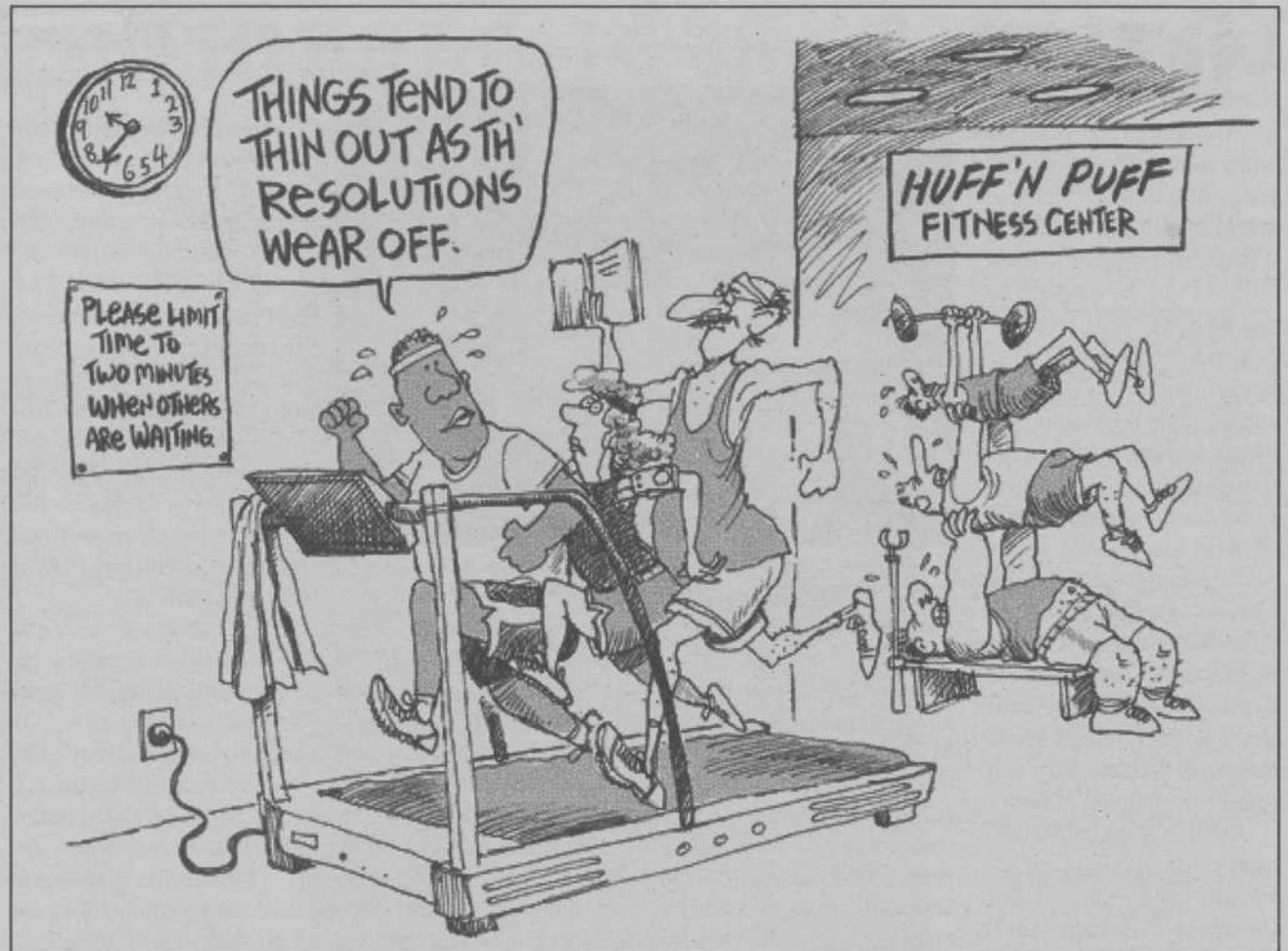
After more than two decades downtown, the time has come for the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Parade to move to Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Seriously.

The parade is held downtown in cities throughout the country. Some reasons are economic, some logistical, some practical—there's no street named after King. But in those cities with King avenues, boulevards, roads or streets—and with the ability to host major events along those thoroughfares—the parade that carries the civil rights leader's moniker should be moved to the stretch of pavement that carries it, too.

But what about safety, you ask? Yes, what about it. Of all the laments about expanding the Las Vegas Marathon into neighborhoods, it did one good thing: proving that you can stage large, problem-free events in West Las Vegas. The marathon snaked through the heart of the "hood" and into and out of areas that have seen their share of crime, drugs and violence. And nothing happened. Surely, the same police and municipal effort that has quickly quelled the outbreaks at previous parades could do the same thing if it were on MLK Boulevard.

Such a move would not only be a morale booster for the community, but it would also expose people who avoid MLK Boulevard as if their lives depended on it to a community that is very much like theirs: one where people work hard and strive for improvement, a community that's proud and courageous, a community that already has a King statue (on Carey and MLK Boulevard) and needs a parade to go along with it.



Martin Luther King Jr. then, now

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

As this posthumous celebration of what would have been the 77th birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. approaches, once again, we honor one of America's most revered legends.

I believe that we, in this existing global alliance of all humankind, representing the full tapestry of ethnic and racial origins — Blacks, Caucasians, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, Indians and a multitude of others — markedly represent and advance a portion of Dr. King's vision. But we could do more, by utilizing technical tools, networking, personal discipline, and boosting our religious and moral fiber to fight all forms of discrimination, oppression and intolerance.

Dr. King gave his life for social change and to end the disparities existing between Blacks and Whites in employment, economic opportunities, education, healthcare and every other aspect of our lives. As we reflect on his life and his mission — to bring equity and parity to individuals marginalized by race, poverty and economics — we should also appraise whether or not African-Americans today have, indeed, made real progress following his death.

Dr. King challenged America to end discrimination and embrace racial justice and to open the doors of opportunity for all. Unfortu-



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

nately, we still find that in 2006, for far too many Blacks, Dr. King's dream of economic stability and opportunity for wealth-building still has not been fulfilled. The unemployment rate for Blacks is consistently more than double that of Whites; the number of Blacks graduating from college lags dramatically behind Whites, and a large percentage of Blacks are still without even the most minimal health care.

As Black folks, there are things that Dr. King did that we are all glad about and have benefited from. I believe we're glad that even if we haven't been on one in years, we don't have to sit at the back of the bus when we choose to ride one. We're glad that we and our children can work in a good career. We're glad that we can go to the school or university of our choice. We're glad that we can eat at whatever restaurant we want to and don't have to stand in the kitchen to eat our food. We're glad that we can stay at any hotel in Las Vegas, on the Strip and off, and we don't have to enter through the back door. We're glad that we don't have to look for a "colored" sign when we need to relieve ourselves or get a drink of

water. We're glad about all of these things.

But as we prepare, once again, to honor Dr. King, we must look back and reflect on the dream — a dream that was more of a visualization of things to come. And as we reflect, we must take note of the things each of us has contributed individually and collectively in working towards the fulfillment of the visualization, or the dream. We must also ask ourselves: How diligent have we been? Are we working with every breath we take to see that his dream is turned into reality? Are we working with the ultimate goal — to close the disparities gap and ensure that Dr. King's dream of opportunity for all is realized? And last but not least, I think

the most compelling question might be: Does the dream, or the realization of the dream, even matter to you any more?

Whatever your answer to the question might be, Dr. King said to us, "...If one of us is not free, then none of us are free." And, as we can see by the number of Blacks affected by the Katrina disaster, we all have a lot of work to do and a long way to go. To that end, the uplifting of our people begins with you.

The King Holiday honors the courage of a man who endured harassment, threats, beatings, jail and even bombings. He even went to jail 29 times to achieve freedom for others — and he paid the ultimate price for his leadership — but he kept on marching, protesting and organizing. This day is not only for celebration, education and remembrance, but above all, it should be a day of service to our brothers and sisters across America.

No other day of the year
(See LaGrande, Page 11)

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