

## OUR VIEW

## Doing Right

With Black history serving as a synonym for American history, it's incumbent on African-Americans to reverence our reverence and learn from our past. Important because we seem to take two steps back for every step we move forward. The Black middle class is growing (progress) at the same time the Black underclass is getting poorer, and Black incarceration rates are increasing (regress). Black homeownership is on the upswing (progress), but so are redlining and discriminatory lending (regress).

Changing these dual realities calls for a keen recognition of our place here in America. Our place—to remind those who think that we have overcome—is one of lower-class citizenship. Of corporate glass ceilings and segregated public schools, of economic marginalization and self-inflicted genocide, of a racist prison industry and whitened (in terms of student population) historically Black colleges and universities, of concentrated riches in the hands of a few and shocking poverty spread among the masses, of entertainers/athletes as the drivers of our culture and sage leaders whose voices are too often muted by indifference.

Black History Month could've helped change all this.

An evolution of Carter G. Woodson's Negro History Week—initially meant to celebrate the achievements of African-Americans; February was chosen because it's the birth month of abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass and President Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation ending slavery—Black History Month gained recognition in 1976. The potential for change was vast: Every February, we had the chance to tell America our story. Unfortunately, we haven't provided a great narrative.

As Akilah Monifah wrote in a 2000 Black History Month article published on [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org): "It has turned into a mundane, meaningless and commercialized farce... Black History Month has become a ready-made excuse to ignore African-American history for the other 11 months of the year."

In the article, Monifah cites a 1998 symposium conducted by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education on the month's relevance: "The introduction stated that February has become a 'marketing weapon' for advertisers and book publishers to boost sales and then abandon them for the remainder of the year. There also are special marketing efforts made during the month of February for selling other products, like liquor, nicotine and sodas, to the African-American community."

Lost in the debate about Black History Month is the need to treat each other better.

Case in point: Juwanza Kunjufu's recent speech at the West Las Vegas Arts Center. He chastised the media twice for failing to cover the event. The *Sentinel-Voice* was there. What Kunjufu meant was the mainstream, i.e., White-owned media. This slip-up recalled a similar incident last year during the 100 Black Men gala where a Cox Communications representative failed to acknowledge the *Sentinel-Voice* as media. Visitor Kunjufu's first slip-up was forgivable. The second one wasn't.

By now, we should be beyond the point of thinking that being Black means being inferior. Sadly, being "Black" has been bastardized. Some of this, we've done ourselves by reinforcing negative stereotypes. A lot of it has been inherited—the hate that hate made.

Being Black should be as open ended as being White. Being White doesn't mean you are more inclined to swindle companies out of millions, wiping out the jobs and pension funds of tens of thousands of workers (Kenneth Lay, Bernie Ebbers, etc.), therefore, being Black isn't about slick talking, gaming the system and getting over.

Being Black should mean being enlightened—not referring to women as bitches, to your boys as niggas, not wanting to settle things violently, not wearing skimpy clothes. If we refuse to do these things, then Monifah is right: "We're kidding ourselves if we think that by designating February as Black History Month we're really doing anything to honor African-Americans or to combat racial prejudice in this country."

## THE RIGHTWINGER'S GUIDE TO ACTIVIST JUDGES.



## Searching for better schools

By Dora LaGrande  
*Sentinel-Voice*

Clark County School District, like so many others across the country, is troubled. Student achievement scores have declined over the past five years. The graduation rate is the third lowest in the nation, and the African-American graduation rate is dismal at best. The school district, in an attempt to beef up its teacher shortage, has newly instituted relaxed, alternative licensing requirements to allow professionals who lack the usual prerequisite certifications to become classroom teachers. Also, there's a move afoot to deconsolidate the school district, which is one of the largest employers in the state and the recipient of the lion's share of taxpayer dollars. And now, the school district is selecting a new superintendent following a more than yearlong search. Worse yet, the near-completed journey was dealt a blow with the surprise withdrawal yesterday of the qualified semi-finalist from New York City.

The search had been narrowed down to two individuals: Eric Nadelstern, chancellor's chief academic officer for new schools in New York City, and Walt Rulffes, interim superintendent and eight-year chief financial officer for the local district.

With the selection of these two individuals, the question for the district was — and perhaps remains — a simple



one: What are you looking for? Is the district looking for a very nice, polite, pleasant guy who supports the teachers and wishes to maintain the status quo, or are they looking for someone who is daring and bold enough to implement a real paradigm shift — one who in all likelihood could take the district to the next level and change the face of the Clark County School District once and for all?

The answer to the question was pending for the school board members who may have felt they were under pressure from a lobbying group of business, gaming and community representatives to select a gentleman who some labeled a "superstar" and who others called an "outsider."

The representatives of business and gaming entities and community-minded individuals that are actively involved in the process clearly understand that the school district needs to be managed and operated like a business where people are held accountable for their performance (in this case, the education or miseducation of our children). The district, for the first time in a long time, has a real opportunity to put chil-

dren first, and it is under intense pressure to make sure it selects someone who has the ability to do that.

That someone could have been the self-eliminated Mr. Nadelstern, a man who presented to the district a real plan for change. He is a man who several individuals were and still are highly impressed with. A man who many people believed would make a real difference in the district. A man who embodies the belief that not just one person (the superintendent) but several people — principals included — should be held accountable for the education of their students, and they should be accountable for not just the high-achieving students, but for all students.

Now, with his announced withdrawal the day before the board's final selection meeting, several things still remain at issue.

The situation here still requires a leader who believes that local education can improve only if schools are given more freedom in budgeting, staffing and programming — reminiscent of a pilot project in New York City called the Autonomy Zone, of which Nadelstern is a proponent and overseer. This district could benefit from using that model as a guide for change.

The Autonomy Zone is a program designed to test whether schools when given greater autonomy can be more successful. Schools in the program must follow all laws, as well as federal, state, and union regulations. However, they no longer work under the auspices of a local regional superintendent, and they have more control over their respective school budgets.

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