

OUR VIEW

Rap's Bad Rap

To borrow a phrase from hip-hop, Clark County Sheriff Bill Young is "on one." In response to a series of violent incidents appended to the local rap scene, Young has launched an all-out assault on gangsta rap, going so far as to urge casinos not to book acts like 50 Cent, arguably the most popular musician on the planet at this moment.

"To my way of thinking, it's a legitimate crime prevention strategy," he wrote in a letter to Keith Copher, enforcement chief for the Nevada Gaming Control Board. Young would say more, much more, to Copher and in other published reports:

"The entertainment industry should be ashamed of itself for promoting this gangster rap genre that espouses violence, mistreatment of women, hatred for the authority of police officers and emulates drug dealers and two-bit thugs. It's not a good message for our young people, and it's not a good message for our community."

..."50 Cent is one of the worst. His whole act is predicated on violence. He's a mentor for all of the other gangster rappers in the making."

..."A shooting at a venue that generates a lot of negative press towards our tourism corridor would seem not worth having these acts here."

Apparently, the browbeating worked. The Gaming Control Board put casinos on notice in a tersely worded memo: "Specifically, there have been numerous incidents of violence before, during and after several gangster rap concerts, not just in Las Vegas, but nationally, as well. The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department considers these events as serious threats to the community."

To be fair, this isn't one of those much-ado-about-nothing issues. The cold, hard facts of the matter are that lives have been unnecessarily lost, snuffed out by wanton violence. It just so happens that they are purveyors of a certain type of music culture—hip-hop. But to look at the violence as a by-product of hip-hop is to criminalize a culture without presenting slam-dunk evidence.

Much like rock 'n roll in the '50s and '60s, hip-hop is an easy target because of its counterculture status. It's the voice of an ever-growing mass of people, the voice of an ever-burgeoning cultural revolution, an iconic voice whose timbre resonates from the ghettos of East Baltimore to the ghettos of Paris, not a clanging symbol but rather an eloquent bullhorn that's every bit a mode of sonic deliverance as Negro spirituals were to antebellum slaves who worked for "master" by day and plotted their escape to freedom by night.

Who is 50 Cent, but the Elvis of the hip-hop generation? The King was no more the cause of the prurience of the '60s than 50 Cent or Nelly is the cause of violence in rap. Baby Boomers can recall the horror Elvis caused their parents with his pelvic thrusts, gyrations and overt sexuality. And yet the country didn't descend into entropy and moral decadence because of Elvis. No, blame the near-wholesale embrace of trippy drugs and a free love ethos. Similarly, the world of hip-hop shouldn't have blood on its fingers because of what some of its misguided denizens do. Rappers have been beefing with each other since the art form birthed in the Bronx. As a form of music that sprouted in Ghetto U.S.A. and has liberated (emotionally, spiritually and financially) a generation of ghetto dwellers, it's only logical that remnants of the 'hood surface. This doesn't absolve the thugs who turn rap venues into shooting galleries, but it should add the perspective needed on this situation, which is that there's an element that uses rap venues as avenues for violent expression.

What's most worrisome about Young's assault on gangsta rap is that it presumes a high moral standing. Are we forgetting that Las Vegas is a city the Mafia made and, in some respects—chiefly the strip club industry—still wields vice grip-like influence? And yet it's common for folks to nostalgically yearn for the days of Jimmy "The Ice Pick," mob shakedowns and when criminals were more fearful of La Cosa Nostra than the cops.

It's hard not look at Young's bromide as subversively racist: If thugs suddenly switched to loving country music, would he seek to ban Tim McGraw and Faith Hill from casinos. Yeah, right. Guess we must be on one.



Turned away from God's house?

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

Before I begin this commentary, which some may perceive as an attack on the church, and others may perceive as the truth about the church, I need to qualify my position.

I am first and foremost a blood-washed and blood-bought, child of God. I was licensed to teach and preach the word of God by Reverend A.J. Thompson in December 1996 and desire to serve God and no other man or mammon (material wealth having a debasing influence).

Because this focus will be centered on six of the largest Black churches in Las Vegas—all refusing to allow funeral services to be held for Amir Crump, the young man who killed Metro Sergeant Henry Prendes earlier this month—I must state what should be the obvious: I, like everyone else in this community, hate the fact that Sergeant Prendes left for work on the morning of February 1, 2006, to go to a job and perform his selected duties and never returned.

I realize that he went to work to serve his family, serve his community, and he was a man who served God. Unfortunately, like many of us who went to work that morning and returned home that evening, that wasn't God's plan for Sergeant Prendes. He didn't return home, because he was gunned down. These facts do not escape me.



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

The facts, however, are not reason enough for the church to turn Amir's family away. At a time when his people (family, friends, and foes) desperately needed guidance from religious leaders, there was none to be found.

The religious leaders had either sold out to the establishment or were too afraid to stand up for what they were called to do: preach the gospel to the poor (those who are poor in spirit, heart and mind); heal the sick and brokenhearted (those suffering at the loss of their child, friend, brother); preach deliverance to the captives (those who are bound by drugs, alcohol, immorality, etc.); and recovering sight to the blind (those who have lost their way and are searching for something, anything, to be a part of) and to set at liberty those who are bruised (Luke 4:18).

By allowing themselves to be bullied or hoodwinked into this oppressive atmosphere of injustice, the religious leaders allowed themselves to be used as pawns for the sake of keeping peace—a suspect perspective held by some in positions of authority and a deplorable choice of action by clergy.

More importantly, religious leaders missed an opportunity to do exactly what the church is established to do and that is to perform the "Great Commission" according to Matthew 28:18-20.

"All authority hath been given unto me in Heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Reverend Marion Bennett, Pastor Emeritus of Zion Methodist Church for more than 44 years and current Pastor of Zion Independent Methodist, eulogized

Amir on Saturday at Davis Funeral Home. Reverend Bennett indicated to me that he was shocked beyond words that so many churches, pastors whom he had known for years and new acquaintances, refused to allow the family to have the service held at their religious institution. He said that in his more than 40 odd years of being a pastor he had never personally seen anyone turned away from the church. He also stated that one of the churches contacted wanted to exploit the family in times of crisis and none of the churches put the family's needs first.

As a people, we talk about and wonder why our young people have no respect for the church. Why they have no respect for their elders. We wonder why our young people have no spiritual values. Why they can kill one another without blinking an eye. Why 40 percent of our Black males are in prison—
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