

OUR VIEW

It's About Time

For months now, the future of Booker Elementary school's new campus has been in limbo. The half-century old school on Martin Luther King Boulevard, between Carey Avenue and Lake Make Boulevard, was demolished to make way for a new facility with all the bells and whistles and design quirks and accoutrements of the new campuses ringing the Valley's suburbs.

The news was certainly welcome, as most of the fruits of 1998's \$3.5 billion taxpayer-approved school construction and modernization bond were apparent in the shiny new campuses in Summerlin, Green Valley, the northwest and southwest Valley. Inner-city schools such as Booker left to make due with scraps—a new computer lab or an expanded library.

But something happened on the way to Booker getting its new digs: the "B" word. Bureaucracy. First, no contractors showed up for a pre-bidding conference in November. Then Clark County School District officials decided against hosting a conference in December, saying holiday season is a tough time of year to find contractors. Months later, the school district's Bond Oversight Committee, a surrogate for the school board that reviews project expenditures and makes recommendations, didn't have a quorum among its 13 members, prompting school board trustees in May to decline taking action on a request to release funds for Booker's construction. Just like that, there went the plans to open the new Booker campus in January 2007.

Meantime, Booker's students piled into cubicles at Wendell Williams Elementary, turning the school's playground into their campuses. Kudos go out to the principals at each school for putting a positive face on a tense situation. However, their smiles aside, no amount of game-planning for sharing a campus, no amount of engineering to mitigate cross traffic, no amount of anything can change the fact that having your own school, on your own campus is the best thing for everyone.

Rebuilding Booker should've been of the highest priority, particularly since inner-city schools have gotten such short shrift when it comes to bond funds. Prior to Charles I. West Middle School, every elementary and middle school in West Las Vegas and on the immediate border of North Las Vegas should've been replaced with a new campus. It shouldn't have taken yeoman's work to find funds to build Williams Elementary and to expand Matt Kelly. Why is it fair for inner-city kids to learn in drab, windowless institutions while their suburban counterparts matriculate in snazzy digs? It isn't. There's more to modernizing a campus than adding computers.

While it's good news that dirt will soon be turned on Booker's new campus—which will include unique safety features to protect everyone from the occasional violence that flares up nearby—we won't be happy until students are in class learning. It's certainly way past due.

Jefferson's Issues

The first page of Democratic Louisiana Rep. William Jefferson's home page reads as thus: "Dear Friends: The past few months have been devastating for South Louisiana; our citizens are displaced; families are separated; hundreds of thousands of homes are destroyed. Hope is not lost. While the transition period for the City of New Orleans and surrounding areas will be challenging, I am committed to working in Congress to ensure that our local needs are met and that our city is rebuilt bigger, better and for all our citizens to return."

Oh, how the forked-tongue fall. The same William Jefferson who wrote this is also the same man accused of taking several hundred thousands in bribes from a Kentucky businessman, \$90,000 which he allegedly hid in a freezer. This story is sad on multiple fronts. Jefferson's actions, if true, are embarrassing for an eight-term congressman and a member of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee. Jefferson is also an embarrassment to Black politicians who, for the most part, have generally stayed free of bribery scandal. Lastly, he's an embarrassment to the Democrats. For his sake, let's hope he's innocent. New Orleans needs heroes, not goats.



Black men slowly vanishing

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

I have been saying for years that as a people, Blacks are in a world of trouble. And I say this for a myriad of reasons: ignorance, invisible Black men, class discrimination, self-centeredness, jealousy, crabs-in-the-barrel syndrome, paralyzing fear of "the master," etc. Usually people say that I am just being pessimistic, or they give me that deer in the headlights stare.

Now, based on a study by experts at Columbia, Princeton and Harvard, the chicken is coming home to roost. If you lose your Black man, who — whether we as women choose to accept it or not — is God's ordained head of the household and the family, the very viability of the Black community is threatened, and there will be ominous implications for the nation at large.

Black men in the United States face a direr situation than is revealed by employment and educational disparity statistics. Welfare overhaul has created better economics for some groups but not for Black men. Black women assuming male roles and Black women being better educated has served to bring them gains; however, Black men are becoming more disconnected from mainstream society than any other group, far outpacing White and Hispanic men in this disparity.

John F. Kennedy said, "In



ON THE RECORD
By Dora LaGrande

an ideal world, the rising tide of economic recovery would lift everyone's boat."

Unfortunately, we live in the real world, where the economic boom that began a decade ago has left Black men stuck on the bottom of the economic lake. The percentage of young jobless Black males has climbed over the past two decades. By including those who were jailed or otherwise not actively seeking work, two groups normally left out of the federal unemployment statistics, researchers have found that the real jobless rate for Black male high school dropouts in their 20s soared to 65 percent in 2000 and 72 percent just a few years later in 2004. And of those who had graduated high school, more than half were out of work. Compare that with a 34 percent dropout rate for young White males and 19 percent for young Hispanic males and you can see why Jewelle Taylor Gibbs penned the book "Young, Black and Male in America: An Endangered Species" in 1988.

Incarceration rates for poorly educated Black males also climbed to historic highs in the 1990s, filling the nation's boom in newly con-

structed prisons despite the decades decline in crime rates. By their mid 30s, of the Black men who had dropped out of high school, 60 percent had served time in jail. And of those who had less than a high school education, 30 percent had served time in jail. And I don't think we need to mention the ever-increasing Black-on-Black crime rate that claims the lives of so many of our young men.

Now, we know that the problems facing young Black men have been in existence for decades and the confluence of ills has long served to marginalize them and track them into a trajectory of failure. There are many reasons cited for this deterioration. Primary

among them are bad schools, absent parents, racism, structural changes in the economy and a subculture that glorifies thug life or gangsterism. Let me stop here and say that while there appears to be a minority of Black men who are affected by the latter, their image casts a shadow on all Black men because people tend to stereotype.

In reading the study, one thing became clear to me. While the experts had all of the standard explanations, they still failed to answer the important questions. First, why are young Black males doing so poorly in school that they lack basic literacy and math skills? Surely, they must know that many educational experts going back to 1966 have found that poor schools, per se, do not explain why after 10 years of education a young man remains illiterate.

Nor did they explain why, if someone can't get a job, he turns to crime and drug deterioration. Primary

(See LaGrande, Page 11)

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