

OUR VIEW

Good Grades

Long before No Child Left Behind legislation increased the academic stakes for state and local educational systems, Nevada educators faced pressure to help their students produce in the classroom and on the all-important standardized test scores. The Nevada Education Reform Act was, in many ways, a precursor in that it mandated higher scholastic performance.

By now, the argument over the intent each law isn't in question. In fact, the idea of bringing all children up to grade-level aptitude in core subjects is noble. Mainstreaming children with academic or behavioral problems has benefits beyond the classrooms—these students learn early on how to function in society as a whole. When English language learners gain a functional handle on America's pre-eminent idiom, they not only empower themselves but their families. Given the proper resources and care, low-income and rural youth can compete with their peers from more affluent areas and serve as role models for other "at-risk" youth.

What No Child Left Behind has done, however, is create a climate of fear. Schools that don't make adequate yearly progress (AYP) are placed on "watch" and "needs improvement" lists. In Nevada, schools that fail to meet AYP repeatedly can be taken over by the state Department of Education, their staffs purged and the curricula totally revamped. Consider this an all-your-eggs-in-one-basket scenario: A single set of tests determines whether a school passes or fails. Subjectivity is removed from the equation. As is a total, top-to-bottom review of what's going on in that school.

Important as they are, test scores aren't—and shouldn't—be the be-all to end all. They don't tell you if a student is learning or if a student is growing. They don't measure overall aptitude with or grasp of a subject. They don't truly reflect whether a school is failing, needs improvement or is exemplary; this is true with because the tests rely as much on student scores as they do student participation: if a certain percentage (as defined by No Child Left Behind) of a subset of students isn't to take the standardized test that day, an entire school's reputation can be jeopardized.

So what are we saying? We're saying that benchmarks are good, but that a defined set of judgment criteria is better. We're saying don't penalize progress, especially in those failing and needs-improvement schools. They've got more work to do on the academic front in the first place; if they're making measurable progress toward academic goals, give them the time and resources to continue on that path. Finally, we're saying that education is about more than just good grades. Education is about life learning; it's about nurturing the ability to learn, rewarding inquisitiveness and growing. If good grades are a byproduct of this, then all the better.

Mo' money mo'

Let's get this out from the start: public servants deserve to be paid for their service. No office holder should be expected to do his or her job for free. They sit in an endless string of meetings and make decisions that affect millions of people. Everybody wants something from them: access, favors, votes. Politics is indeed a bloodsport, with no winners or losers, just survivors.

No matter how it's presented, lawmakers' giving themselves raises never goes over well, even if they're compensation is inversely proportional to their responsibility. During the legislative session, a bill passed giving trustees raises to \$750 per month, effective Jan. 1, 2009. Previously, trustees could earn no more than \$510 (\$85 a meeting with a maximum of six meetings per month.)

Looking at the situation through the eyes of a trustee: they're earning between \$3,000 and \$5,000 a year for overseeing the nation's fifth largest school district. County commissioners and city council officials annually earn a minimum of \$68,000 and \$40,000-plus, respectively. However, if you look through the eyes of students in a district that's woefully underfunded, the raises can be seen as cash grab and slightly arrogant, a quest for mo' money.

NBA REFEREE UNIFORMS THROUGH THE YEARS



1949



1992



2007

Divided, we have fallen so far

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Divide and conquer tactics and strategies have been used to control Black people in America since the very beginning. From "freed" versus enslaved, to Black versus mulatto, to house versus field, to pulpit versus pew, to affluent versus poor: Black people have been played like a cheap harmonica in a successful effort to keep us apart from one another.

In many cases we have been willing subjects because of the programming that caused us to believe that we are not quite "good enough," that we don't quite "measure up." Thus, we continue to run away from our brothers and sisters rather than rally together to obtain the rightful position and status that we have earned and certainly deserve in this country.

The game of divide and conquer, as it is played on Blacks, is analogous to the game of tennis, especially when there is a shutout in progress.

I always wondered why they call zero points "love." So, I looked it up and found that it comes from the French word, "l'oeuf," which means egg or zero. It's strange to me that the person who has no points is saddled with the term "love," but it also reminds me of Black people in



JAMES CLINGMAN

this country.

Collectively, in many cases, we have not scored. We have "love," and our opponents have won the game, as well as the set, and they are sending aces in our direction everyday trying desperately to win the entire match.

Our defense is not a good offense; it's a small racket with broken strings. Our end of the court is muddy and sloppy, while the other end of the court is lush, green and freshly manicured to assure firm footing for our opponents.

How can Black people have nothing, zero, no score at all, and still be in "love" with those who are slamming serves and returns in our faces everyday? How can we be in "love" and content just to be on the court with them as they stand at the net hitting the ball from side to side, keeping us hopelessly but eagerly running after it?

They are serving all the time; we never get a turn at that. They even get to play

doubles against us as individuals, and they hit the ball harder than Venus and Serena combined! We are too busy trying to get out of the way, trying to avoid being hit by their onslaught, to think about winning the match; we just want to survive.

Meanwhile, other Black people are standing on the sidelines, watching their brothers and sisters get hammered on the court, and they are not about to pick up their rackets and get into the game. Thus, we have been divided again: the fearful versus the fearless. At least those on the court are taking the hits and making an effort, feeble as it may be, to fend off the assault.

The tennis analogy speaks to our score, our fight, our plight, and the futility of individuality over collectivity. We are in "love" with those who are beating us down.

They are way ahead in the game, and we are in "love."

We get the emotional reward of feeling good, while they get the substantive economic rewards of writing all the rules and controlling the game. Did I mention they also own the court?

Ownership and control of the wealth of this country are paramount to the progress of any group that lives here.

Black people have resided here since the country started, and we own very little of the wealth and resources, much less make any of the rules that control the game. Why are we content to stay in "love?" Why do we continue to fall for the divide and conquer ploy?

Black people should revert to the economic practices of our parents and grandparents prior to integration. They aggregated their (See Clingman, Page 9)



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Telephone (702) 380-8100
Email: lvsentinelvoice@yahoo.com

Contributing Writers:
Frank Albano
Debbie Hall
Lés Pierres Streater
Kanika Vann

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief
Parker Philpot, Copy Editor
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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