

## OUR VIEW

## Revisit 2007

In five days, it will be a new year. We'll say goodbye to 2007, a year that's been, by turns, amazing and sad. What follows is a quick recap of the major events, along with commentary about what each meant:

**The Virginia Tech massacre:** This massacre on April 16 was the deadliest in U.S. history. A student shot and killed 32 people before killing himself. Not that we needed it, but this tragedy further proved that we're living in unstable times and that no place, no matter how hallowed or fortified, is safe.

**Bridge failure:** A span of bridge connecting Minneapolis and St. Paul collapsed on Aug. 1, killing 13 and injuring more than 100. In the aftermath, we learned that many of the nation's bridges are old, structurally deficient and possibly unsafe. And yet federal officials downplayed the danger. Let's hope they're right.

**Death in a coal mine:** Also in August, six coal miners died after a thunderous cave-in at a mine in Huntington, Utah. Investigators still haven't found the miners' bodies and aren't sure what caused the calamity. How many more mine disasters must we endure — 12 people were wrapped in a Virginia mine for 36 hours last year — before safety measures are improved?

**Racism alive and well:** In April radio shock jock *Don Imus* created a firestorm by referring to the Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hoes." He was fired, but returned to the air this month, promising civility. We'll see how long that lasts. Thousands converged on the small Louisiana town of *Jena* in September to protest disparate sentences handed out to White and Black students involved in racial incidents. Six African-American youth were charged with beating a White student. The beating was preceded by racial incidents, including one in which three White students hung nooses from a tree. Racism, many argue, was an underlying undercurrent in the coverage of the July conviction of former Atlanta Falcons quarterback *Michael Vick* on federal dogfighting charges; in the public castigation of former Olympic sprinting champion *Marion Jones* following her October plea to charges of lying about using performance-enhancing drugs; and in coverage of homerun king *Barry Bond's* November indictment on perjury and obstruction of justice charges involving his alleged use of steroids. *O.J. Simpson* was back in the news, too, for allegedly masterminding an armed heist at the Palace Station in September; he allegedly stormed a hotel room to recover football memorabilia he claims was stolen from him (his trial is upcoming.) While Black athletes accused of crimes received harsh treatment, White athletes in similar predicaments fared better. In April, all charges against *Duke lacrosse players* charged with kidnapping, battery and sexual assault on a Black stripper, were dropped.

**Barack finds groove:** This was also the year that Illinois Senator Barack Obama found his groove and proved that the race for the Democratic presidential nomination is anything but a coronation. He nearly matched frontrunner Hillary Clinton in raising money and certainly outpaced her in terms of engaging average, everyday citizens, the very people who could propel him into becoming America's first Black president.

**Black politicians find trouble:** Accused of accepting about \$400,000 in bribe money from companies that hoped to do business in Africa, Democratic Louisiana Rep. William Jefferson is indicted on 16 corruption-related counts, including racketeering and money laundering.

We learned so much this year. That the purported "whitewashing" of New Orleans is real. That possession of crack and powder cocaine deserve to be equal offenses. That Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas will never champion affirmative action even though he's a product of it. That Africa remains a continent world powers prefer to pimp than help prosper. That Colin Powell is truly sorry for carrying the president's water about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction. That hybrid and transnational gangs are the new terrorists. That No Child Left Behind unfairly harms minority children. That until everyone in Las Vegas feels empowered to make positive change in this city, then we can't truly call ourselves world class.



## Will Blacks control big cities?

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Every time I think of what should be the norm in cities like Atlanta, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Detroit and several others that have majority Black populations or nearly so, I am grieved. You may think "grieved" is too strong a word, but it is appropriate in this case because of the importance of economic empowerment and control of urban assets by Black people — for a change.

Look back at the late 1800s and early 1900s; you will see what I mean. Do you think we will ever return to the days of Black ownership, Black economic and political oversight, and collective Black prosperity in our cities?

Of all of the cities that fall into the above category, Detroit stands out the most. Why? Do you remember the proposed development of a Black-owned economic enclave headed by Dr. Claud Anderson? Some called it Africa Town, although Anderson never officially named it that.

Looking back, that name was probably assigned to it by those who wished to strike fear in the hearts of other groups — including some Black Detroiters. What is it that is so threatening about Black ownership and control?

In light of the fact that there are all sorts of other "towns" in Detroit, and never



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a problem with their names, trepidation always arises at the thought of an "Africa Town" or a "Black Town."

Nevertheless, of all the places in this country, Detroit should have been the one city that could and should have built a Black economic enclave, complete with manufacturing, distribution, lodging, restaurants, commercial space and entertainment.

Mind you, there is no problem with Black folks having entertainment, but it must be entertainment only; it cannot include production and other infrastructure necessary for real economic empowerment. As long as Black folks are kept singing, dancing and telling jokes, no one has a problem. Nothing against entertainment per se, but give me a break! Is that the best we can do for ourselves?

To highlight the sadness of the absence of a Black economic engine in Detroit, read the following quote from one of Detroit's icons, Albert Cleage:

"What is now happening in Detroit, I think, is typical,

in at least one way, of Black communities throughout America: it represents the determination of the Black people to control their own community. This marks a new day for Black people... The Black community is growing increasingly determined that it must control its own destiny. In the simplest terms this means political control of all areas in which Black people are a majority — control of community services, police services and all the things that go to make up a community.

Politics is only one aspect, however. It is also necessary for Blacks to have economic control of their community. In Detroit, we are trying to invent strategies for this, such as the development of co-op retail stores, co-op buying clubs, co-op light manufacturing, co-op education and similar undertakings that can become possible when large numbers of

people with a sense of unity and a sense of cause can put together small individual amounts of money to create enough total capital to establish businesses with some degree of security and possibility of success. These ventures will give Black people a sense of their economic possibilities and a realization of their need for economic training.

This is where Black people are today in Detroit. Black people throughout the country are concerned about whether we will be able to do it in Detroit. We have the organizational structure, we have the leadership, we have all of the things that should make it possible.

Those words were spoken in 1968 and still Detroit, held up by Cleage as the city that would lead the way for the rest of us, the city that now has an 85 percent Black population, and the city that

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900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104  
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Email: lvsentinelvoice@yahoo.com

Contributing Writers:  
Shirley Savage  
Lés Pierres Streater  
Kanika Vann

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

Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association  
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