

## OUR VOICE Gets an "F"

They came, they marched and they made their point. Sadly, that's about all a group of West Las Vegas residents, activists and concerned citizens could do as it relates to halting construction on F Street, one of a handful of thoroughfares providing motor vehicle and pedestrian access between the Westside and Downtown.

If only for the aesthetics it provided, the march conveyed a sense of solidarity not seen in quite some time in West Las Vegas and among people who care about that area. The group contends that city officials and the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) failed to provide adequate notice about plans to permanently close F Street as part of a project to widen Interstate 15. They say the lack of citizen input is par for the course as it relates to the historically Black neighborhood. A lawsuit filed to stop construction. The voices of protest have been eloquent.

At a recent community meeting, Shondra Armstrong expressed her dismay over the project to the *Sentinel-Voice*: "People are upset because there wasn't any widespread notification of the process, and they didn't take into consideration any cultural impact that this decision would have on the community."

With the project well underway, local and state officials say stopping it would be cost prohibitive. It could top \$20 million. That's not an insignificant amount of money, especially given this current recession, but it's not a particularly bitter pill to swallow to be on the right side of history. If NDOT or the city halted the project, the money saved could be invested in making F Street into a vital thoroughfare.

Downtown's future has been staked on the 61-acre Union Park. For Union Park and Downtown to thrive, it will need free-spending patrons.

As such, permanently closing F Street makes little economic sense: you're making it harder for people coming from West Las Vegas (where, contrary to popular opinion, there are folks with discretionary income) to get Downtown. That's fewer people to gamble in the casinos, peruse art galleries, see performing arts shows, dine in restaurants and visit the clubs Mayor Oscar Goodman envisions in his Downtown of the future.

The City Council remained mum on the issue at Wednesday's meeting, largely because a judge is slated to hear the lawsuit on Jan. 27. In the meantime, city and NDOT officials would do well to revisit permanent closure of F Street and work to prevent it. History will grade them well or harshly based on their decision.

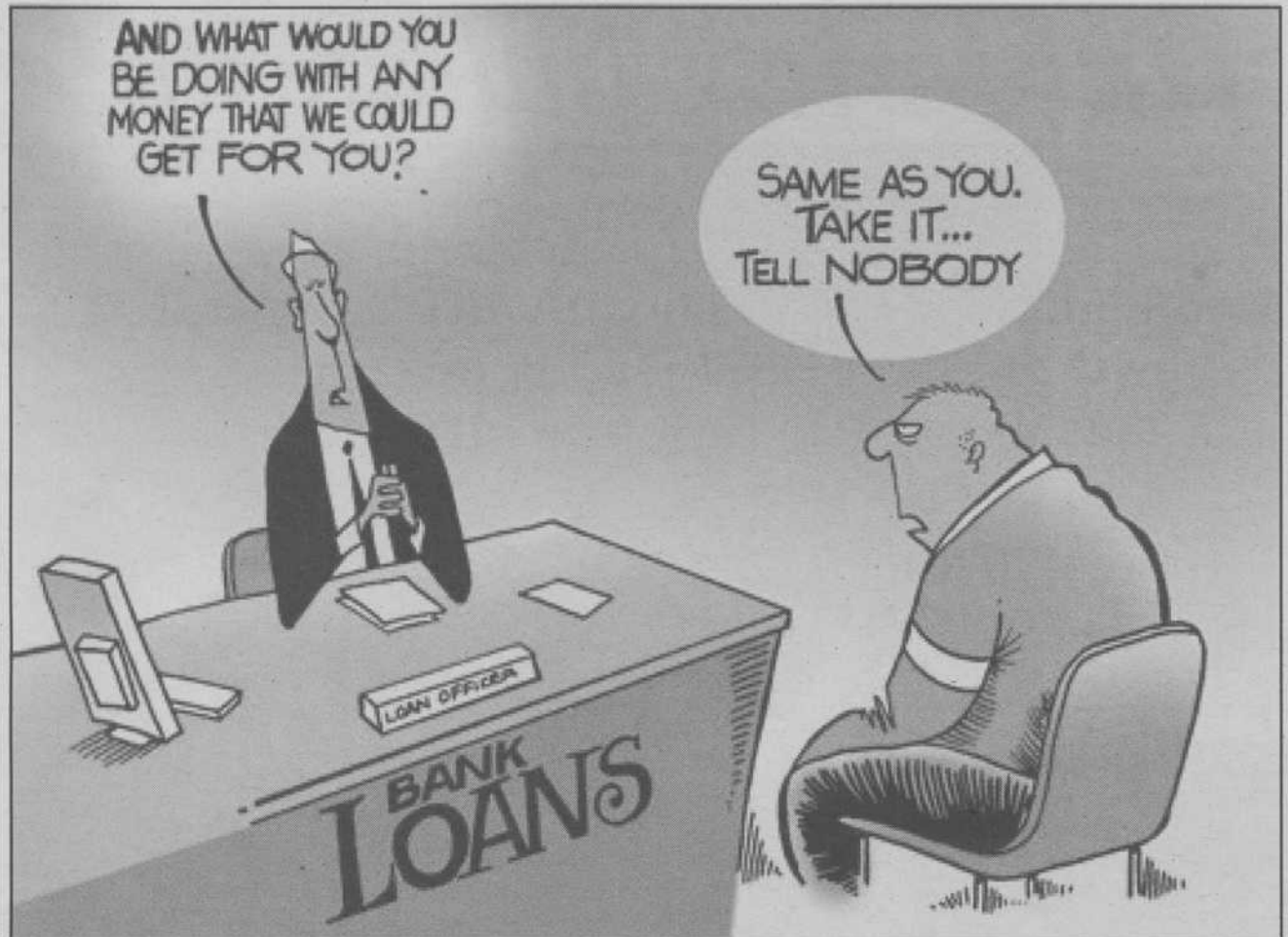
## Fateful Shot

It was the cell-phone shot seen 'round the Internet. Oakland police officer Johannes Mehserle and another colleague subdue 22-year-old Oscar Grant III at the Fruitvale BART station on New Year's Day (BART stands for Bay Area Rapid Transit). The officers arrived at the station around 2 a.m. to investigate reports of a supposed brawl. That's when they ran into Grant and his friends. According to published reports, a friend of Grant's who was with him at the time said he begged officers not to hurt him.

The disturbing video, captured by an onlookers' cell-phone, seems to show the handcuffed Grant lying prostrate with two officers over him, one with a knee in his back. From the video, it appears that Mehserle rises up, unholsters his gun and fires a single shot. The bullet entered Grant's back and ricocheted to his lungs. He died at the scene. Grant's family has filed \$25 million wrongful death lawsuit. Oakland civil rights attorney John Burris has said he plans to ask Alameda County prosecutors to file criminal charges against Mehserle, claiming the shooting was intentional.

"The officer leaned [in], was straddling over him and pointed his gun directly into the backside and shot [Grant]," Burris told NBCBayArea.com. "This was not a deadly force situation."

It must be said the Mehserle is innocent until proven guilty. However, there must be a fundamental shift in the way police deals with Black men. Too many have been victimized. Enough innocent blood has been shed.



## What appointments mean for us

By Ron Walters  
Special to *Sentinel-Voice*

I'm not sure we are covered by the current appointments. It depends on how President Barack Obama intends to govern.

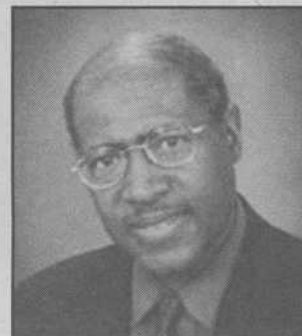
Since 1964 there have been 13 Black cabinet appointments — one third of them by Bill Clinton and another third by George Bush — and the rest spread among the other presidents.

Most of these appointments were to Housing and Urban Development, two were to Transportation, two to Secretary of State and the rest to other agencies.

Before the Obama administration, the only cabinet offices Blacks had not been appointed to were Attorney General, Treasury, Defense, and Interior and now Eric Holder has been appointed to be the next Attorney General.

But in the last Democratic administration — Bill Clinton — there were three Black cabinet appointments in his first administration (Hazel O'Leary — Energy, Mike Espy — Agriculture, Ron Brown — Commerce) and three in his second administration (Alexis Herman — Labor, Rodney Slater — Transportation, and Togo West — Veterans Affairs).

With the cabinet picks of Obama now finished, Eric Holder is the only bonafide cabinet selection, and Susan Rice's appointment of Ambassador to the United Nations does not place her in the center of the administrations foreign policy apparatus that is usually held down by the Secretary of State and/or the



RON WALTERS

National Security Adviser to the President.

In most articles, some non-traditional posts have been included in the list of Black "cabinet" appointments, such as Ron Kirk as U.S. Trade Representative and Lisa Jackson as Director of the Environmental Protection Agency. Whether these appointees have access to the President and are treated as, in effect, cabinet appointments depends upon how the president governs. However, it is certain that with respect to the size and budget of their office, they are not comparable to a traditional cabinet office, but EPA may come in for serious upgrading because of Obama's emphasis on the environment and his economic plan that focuses on this sector of the economy for employment expansion.

To this extent, Barack Obama's cabinet has fewer Blacks than Bill Clinton's Cabinet. In comparison, Hispanics have three traditional cabinet appointments (Bill Richardson — Commerce, Ken Salazar — Interior, and Hilda Solis — Labor). Asians have two of the traditional Cabinet appointments (Steven Chu — Energy, and

Eric Shinseki — Veterans).

Where Obama may have attempted to make up for the lack of Blacks in his cabinet is in the White House, naming Valarie Jarrett as Senior Adviser to the President and Melody Barnes as chair of the Domestic Policy Council. It is interesting that the Office of Urban Policy went to a Hispanic, Adolfo Carrion Jr.

This would seem to signal that more than ever before the direction on policy formulation will be coming from the White House, as also indicated by the role of Tom Daschle who will be both Secretary of Health and Human Services and Chair of a White House Committee on Health Reform, and Lawrence Summers who will coordinate the White House approach to resolving the economic crisis.

Bill Clinton did not have African-Americans in major policy positions in the White House, nor located in his inner circle. However, the presence of Valarie Jarrett and

Melody Barnes should be comforting in that respect, since Jarrett, in a recent meeting with Black journalists and in an interview with the NNPA News Service was reported to give a resounding "no" to the question of whether Obama would forget his obligation to Black people, given their strong support of his election.

So, despite the fact that there are not as many Blacks in traditional cabinet posts as in the last Democratic administration, it looks as if the essential direction on policy will come from within the White House, from those who could be trusted to do the right thing.

In this respect, the role of Adolfo Carrion Jr. should be watched, not only because the White House office on Urban Policy is a new entity, but for whether it achieves the necessary synergy with the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Labor and Education to make a real difference in the lives of those

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