

FORUM

The real joys of Atlantic City



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

"The secret to a rich life is to have more beginnings than endings."
- Dave Weinbaum

I was 4 or 5 years old at the time. I usually traveled with my grandparents during the summer, visiting relatives up North. This particular summer included a trip to Atlantic City.

I remember the water. The big blue Atlantic Ocean. I vividly remember running in the sand and leaving footprints to be washed away by the waves and building sand castles.

My grandmother took me out to the beach one morning - just beyond the boardwalk. We had on our swim suits. Our towels were draped casually over our arms. And of course there was plenty of sand - the perfect combination for a day at the beach.

I could only go far enough in the water to get my legs wet, but that was enough for me.

But my good time didn't last long. I slipped in the wet sand as the waves roared in and out. My grandmother panicked and pulled me out of the water.

She thought I was being sucked into the sea. She refused to let me be a casualty.

We laugh about that story from time to time. There were more casualties than laughter this time.

It looked like we lost the Super Bowl as we boarded the bus home from our annual Memorial Day holiday trip to Atlantic City.

The trip began on a positive note. My wife and I had a perfect strategy planned. Walk the boardwalk, spend \$25 to \$50 on the slot machines and catch a few performances.

We had a limited budget. In other words, we are petrified about losing money.

We found the perfect seat for people watching.

It is much cheaper than pulling the arm on a slot machine. And it's fun too. People come in all shapes, sizes and colors.

And they wear anything! Pierced body parts and tattoos are definitely in vogue.

We watched some interesting people ride bikes, walk, jog and roller blade up and down the six-mile stretch of the boardwalk.

We saw the Rev. Al Green at his best - singing and testifying. Comedian and actor Eddie Griffin, of "Malcolm and Eddie" fame, had us laughing and crying at his street humor.

One person in the group had it figured out.

"You build a foundation first," he said, "and then move up."

Start small, quarters first. He won so much the first night, he could hardly carry them back to the hotel room. His plan was working. He felt rushed by his gambling partner later and moved up to the dollar machine sooner than he wanted to.

"I need one more day," he said later.

He didn't have enough time to implement his plan fully.

According to some, one hotel is better than another. Machines on one side of the room pay off.

Others really "show you the money" at night.

"I want to know a guaranteed way to win," one person said.

He has heard the advice too.

If you play at night, you win big money. Watch as a person leaves a machine - he or she has been feeding it money - and then play it.

That seems to always work for other people, not me.

And it all adds up to the same thing. Luck.

How else can you explain it? You load a machine with nickels, dimes and quarters. For the high rollers - \$1 and \$5 coins. Nothing.

Try walking away. Someone steps up, puts in a coin or two and wins. Bells and whistles

sound off while you try to figure it out.

Why didn't I put one more coin in that machine?

Sometimes people stand on either side of you and win oodles of money.

All the while, you continue to feed your machine with one coin after another. You win a couple of quarters here and there, and then feed them back into that one-armed bandit and leave empty handed.

That's why there was not much laughter on the return trip home. A few people hit - a senior citizen played all night and won more than \$800. The organizer of the trip (he or his wife always win) brought home about \$3,000.

The rest of us are searching for answers.

But all is not lost.

The winning strategy is being developed now for next year.

But strategy just isn't enough for me. I think I'll stick to what works for me: Watch people, enjoy the entertainment and walk up and down the boardwalk.

Just maybe, if I'm feeling really lucky, I'll stick my feet in the sand.

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Debunking the black anti-police myth



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

Many criminal justice experts and community activists said they were surprised at the recent Justice Department survey that found that blacks in a dozen cities generally applaud the police.

There are good reasons for their surprise.

Following the Rodney King beating and for a good part of the O.J. Simpson trial, much of the press relentlessly played up the police/African American conflict.

This planted the dangerous myth that the police and black communities are perpetually at war.

But African Americans have never been anti-police. They are anti-racist and against abusive officers. They protest the actions of cops such as New York police officer Justin Volpe, who recently pleaded guilty to the beating and torture of Haitian immigrant Abner Louima.

They denounce the conduct of officers who engage in racial profiling of young black motorists. They condemn those police officers who apply street corner justice in black communities and

officials who whitewash their actions through the code of silence.

The handful of rogue cops who disgracefully misuse their authority make a mockery of the laws they are sworn to uphold. Most police officers and beat officers are shamed and embarrassed by their repulsive conduct.

They realize that this only deepens the misperception among many African Americans that all cops are brutal.

There's another reason why blacks have never been anti-police.

Despite the mounds of news features and stories that depict young blacks as thugs, gangsters and a perpetual menace to whites, most whites aren't at risk from black criminals. Other blacks are.

Blacks are more likely to be victims of violent crime or to have friends or relatives who have been crime victims than whites. According to the Justice Department survey, blacks in many cities are nearly twice as likely to be victims of violence than whites.

The leading cause of death among young black males and increasingly black females under age 24 is still homicide.

In nearly all cases they will be killed by other blacks, not the police.

The call by many blacks for

more and better police service, increased moral crusades against crime and violence, greater personal and family responsibility, more gang sweeps, injunctions, drug arrests and evictions of law-breakers from public housing reflect their fervent desire to rid their neighborhoods of drug dealers and violent criminals. This far outweighs any supposed racial loyalties.

A defense attorney with whom I am acquainted found this out the hard way.

He told me that he would do anything to get as many blacks as possible on the jury in a murder case involving his black client. He reasoned that they were more likely to vote for acquittal. He partly got his wish when a predominantly black jury was seated.

He did not get the other half of his wish. The jury convicted his client and recommended the death penalty.

The biggest reason, however, why many still cling to the erroneous belief that African Americans are anti-police is that they think that most blacks are poor, downtrodden and therefore reflexively resentful of established authority.

This is another myth. While the wealth and income of blacks still pale in comparison to whites, the reality is that more African Americans

than ever feel they are coming closer to realizing the American dream.

In a 1998 poll the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, the nation's leading black think tank, found that for the first time ever more blacks than whites claimed they were better off financially than the year before.

This new found sense of prosperity and comfort hardly makes blacks prone to be cop-hating rebels, but rather conservative law abiding citizens every bit as anxious as whites to safeguard their property and hard earned valuables.

The sad thing is that the false notion that African Americans dislike the police hardens the "us vs. them" attitude among many police officers, perpetuates the dangerous cycle of fear, and distrust about the police, and heightens the risk of more destructive confrontations between the police and black communities.

This is far too steep a price to pay for perpetuating a myth.

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THE CHRONICLE

The Choice for African American News
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617 N. Liberty Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

The Chronicle was established by Ernest Pitt and Ndujisi Egemonye in 1974, and is published every Thursday by The Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc.

The Chronicle is a proud member of National Newspapers Publishers Association • North Carolina Press Association • North Carolina Black Publishers Association • Inland Press Association

National Advertising Representative:
Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., 45 West 45th Street,
New York, NY 10036 212 / 869-5220

Postmaster: send address changes to:
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Winston-Salem, NC 27102

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