

# "RASTI D"

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green, with gold around his mouth, and he wears a three-piece kinte cloth outfit with the daishiki top, pants and kinte fez hat. He leaves his audiences with a strong feeling of self-esteem and an increased knowledge of Black history, AIDS awareness, the importance of donating blood, and ethnic awareness through better race relations.

Joseph "Joe" Joiner Jr. got his start two years ago after opening a gift shop in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He told the SENTINEL-VOICE in a recent interview, while on a three-day stint in Las Vegas, that "Rasti D" The Black History Clown Mon was born while responding to the lack of availability of Black clowns.

"While working in my gift shop one day I got the idea to do children's birthday parties and I began to pass business cards. We had African American History balloons and other black gift novelties and I thought it would be a good idea to teach children their history while they were having a good time. I found out that there was no Black clowns. I felt that it was my calling to do it. So, here I am, he said.

"The idea caught on and I began to perform at schools throughout Pennsylvania and I became a guest on a popular television show in Pittsburgh and, the rest was history, he recollected.

While in Las Vegas, "Rasti D" received rave reviews from

the students and faculty alike at O.K. Adcock, Myrtle Tate, Lois Craig and Cynthia Cunningham Elementary Schools, respectively. The students loved his dramatic skits and left his performances with heightened awareness.

According to Joiner, the Principal of Cunningham Elementary School, Dr. Bass, commented that if he could hold the students' attention for fifteen minutes in an assembly, that he would be doing good. Joiner said that he held the students attention for forty-five minutes, and still they were not ready to return to their classes.

Some of the characters that Joiner portrays are "RASTI D" who carries a "double-edged sword"... On one edge of the sword are the contributions that Blacks have made in the building of America and the world, and the other edge of the sword is to raise the respect that all peoples of the earth hold for African American people. The sword does not cut the flesh but it frees the mind of ignorance," he said.

Another character that Joiner portrays is "HIVEN," who is infected with the HIV virus. "HIVEN" gives a light-hearted and sensitive subject an air of humor, as he enlightens the students and faculty with the three ways to contract the virus. "MAMA RASTI" appears often to tell the story about how proud she is about the work of her son, "Rasti D."

"CORY PUCELL" is another

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character, which is a play on the "blood corpuscle," who educates the children about the need to donate their blood. "Show you love, donate your blood," he exclaims, while speaking with a French accent.

There are other personalities that Joiner portrays as he brings his characters to life while speaking in several languages - five in all-including Hausa, Arabic, and Spanish. By being bilingual, Joiner is able to open up new horizons to educate his multi-ethnic audiences. "I have always been interested in learn-

ing new languages because it helps you to expand your reality and broaden your outlook on the world. I started learning other languages as a hobby and I intend to learn many more," he said.

Joiner recalled some of the many heart-felt stories of experiences that stood out in his mind of the numerous children and parents that have been touched by his novel brand of "entertainment education."

"I can recall this one second grader who approached me one day as I was leaving a super-

market in Pittsburgh. The odd thing is that I did not have on my costume and make-up. She was with her mother and she looked up at me and said, "Mama! Mama! that's Rasti!" I was surprised that she recognized me. Then she began to sing one of the raps that I performed." I am somebody, I am somebody Mon, cause God didn't make no junk." I mean, it was so moving to see the effect that this had on her self-esteem. It's those moments that are so moving and you say to yourself, I am having a positive effect on these children," he

said. "Another incident that comes to mind happened here in Las Vegas. You can see and feel how these children, many of them, are reaching out and they say things like; "Rasti," stay her with us. Please, don't leave." There was a young man who came to one of my performances. I can look at people and tell how they are feeling inside. Well, this young man had been constantly in trouble. I could see that he was withdrawn. He had been caught on the desert with sev-

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## MOULIN ROUGE

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public areas of the hotels. Most, including such stars as Sammy Davis, Jr. and Pearl Bailey had to seek lodging on the predominantly Black Westside.

The hotel remained open for only five months, but during that period it pointed the way toward the integration of resorts that was to come five years later. It was in fact a 1960 meeting in the Moulin Rouge coffee shop among local civil rights leaders and state and county officials which overnight lowered the barrier to open accommodations at major Las Vegas hotels. Reasons offered for the hotels sudden closure in October 1955 emphasize mismanagement and under-capitalization on the part of the New York and California owners, but some point to the resort's very success which drew active opposition from other local resort owners.

The new exhibition will feature many one-of-a-kind photographs, now on display at the Museum, which were taken during the opening weeks of the resort by long-time Las Vegas photographer Jay Florian Mitchell. It will also include original furnishings, artifacts and decorations. The exhibit is funded in part by the Nevada Humanities Committee. For more information, call the Museum at 486-5205.

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