

Young African-Americans targeted in Election 2000

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For the last 24 years the National Coalition of Black Voter Participation has worked to develop coalitions nationwide that will mobilize African-Americans to realize the value of their vote and use it.

But the year 2000 symbolized a year of change — a time when they would change their name and initiate a new vision of civic involvement in the African-American community especially among young African-Americans.

As of March the coalition became the National Coalition of Black Civic Participation.

"Part of the reason we changed our name, is that we don't want people to think we were just focusing on voting. We want to focus on the entire voting and democratic process," said Donna Frisby-Greenwood, co-chair of the group's Black Youth Vote advisory board.

Black Youth Vote was created to respond to the low turnout of young African-Americans on Election Day.

"Our voting electorate is getting younger and younger.

The need of young people to vote is great and we need to engage them," said Melanie Campbell, NCBCP's executive director.

Campbell is concerned that young people need to realize the value of their vote and be given the opportunity to debate issues affecting them.

But she gives them credit by adding that young people are not apathetic to the political process and that once they are educated they do get involved.

However the U.S. Census Bureau ran a Current Population Survey where black youth ages 18-24 among others were asked why they didn't vote. 25.8 percent said they were too busy or didn't get time off, whereas 16.5 percent said they were not interested.

But Black Youth Vote boasts reaching a half million youth each year through outreach activities in the community and college campuses nationwide.

"This year we want to implement a strong grassroots campaign around the country to register people young and old and educate them on the political process," Frisby-

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Greenwood said.

The campaign includes pledge cards, which will hold African-Americans to their written promise to register and vote, radio public service announcements, and telephone banking. Frisby-Greenwood also wants to include local radio personalities in helping young people realize how the political process affects them. However NCBCP has their work cut out for them, trying to reach the many youth who have yet to know what they do or go out and register to vote.

"I've never heard of Black Youth Vote and I don't see the point, all these politicians are the same. We have a presidential candidate running a death machine in Texas, and another candidate who wants to keep little Elian in the U.S. because he doesn't like Castro," said Wayne

Miller, a pharmacy major at Hampton University.

Statements like that bother Cornell Belcher director of special projects for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the African-American Voter Project who is concerned with the dismal turnout of young African-Americans to vote.

"The 18 to 25 age group is increasing in proportion with the population but they have the least turnout. We need to communicate with them through vehicles that can reach them," Belcher said.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic and Statistics Administration voter turnout for the 1996 election was at an all time low with only 54.2 percent of the voting age population voting in the 1996 presidential election. But based on data compiled by the Joint Center for Political

and Economic Studies, only 32.4 percent of Black youth reported voting. The U.S. Census Bureau doesn't think that is such a bad thing since Black voter participation only dropped by 3 percent unlike that of Whites, which dropped by 8 percent.

But Belcher still thinks there is a problem which he attributes to what he perceives as a disconnect that young people have between politics and what they believe can improve their community.

"They think volunteerism is a better way to improve the community than politics," Belcher added.

But he believes that politics is the way to go and a concentration on congressional races, which he believes are the key races.

"It is in congress that laws on issues like racial profiling and tax laws are made," Belcher continued.

It is also in Congress where legislation affecting the rights of ex-convicts to vote is set. According to an April 3 National Review article, 32 states currently forbid parolees or those on probation from voting — an increasingly large number of whom are Black youth. And

in 14 states ex-convicts are stripped of their right to vote. This means that 4 million African-Americans who have gone through the criminal justice system won't be able to vote.

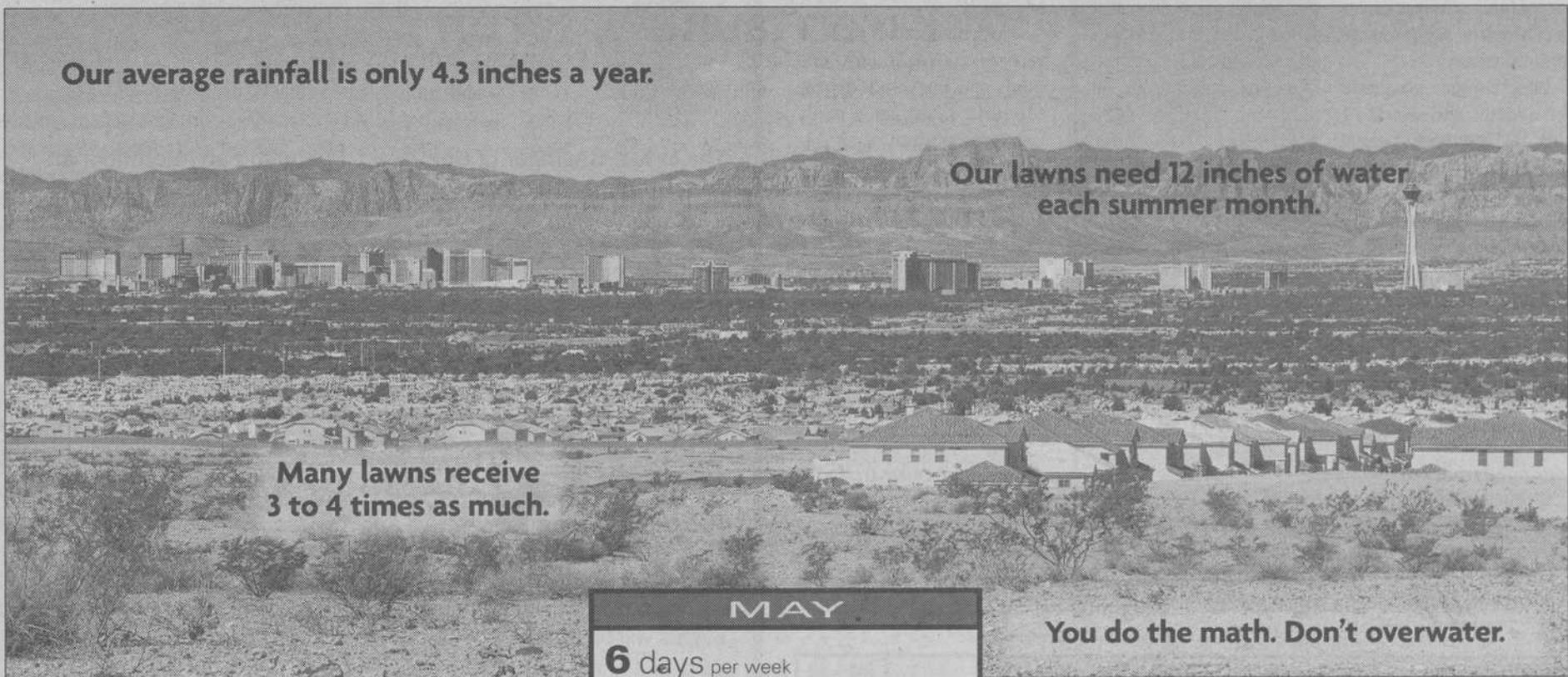
"These people lose their voting rights some of them before they even reach 18," Campbell said.

However, some young people are motivated to vote.

"We have to make use of the right given to us in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Our ancestors shed blood and tears for us to vote. So I am voting this year," said Tricia Wilson, English major at Alabama A&M University.

According to NCBCP the largest voting block is ages 25-35 with most African Americans not voting till they reach age 45. The NCBCP has other outreach programs including Operation Big Vote, which holds the aim of education, voter registration, and getting out the vote. Campbell also speaks of the Black Women's Roundtable, which mobilizes Black Women to become involved in the political process.

"We also have an information resource center (See Election, Page 6)



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5 minutes each watering

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