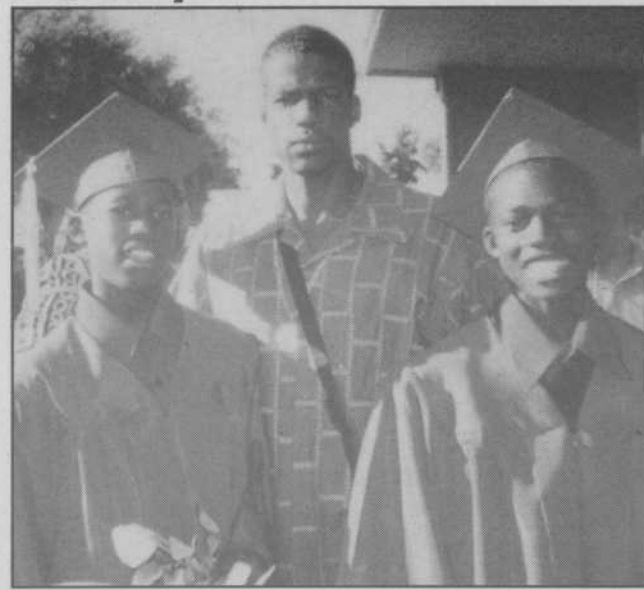


Policy



Rodney Mason is optimistic, but the economy has taken its toll on Blacks. He has twin sons, Roderick and Derrick, 14, pictured, and a 12-year-old daughter, Adreanna.

(Continued from Page 1) including the continuing discrimination and racism is not a national priority," says Karl Gregory, distinguished professor emeritus from the Oakland University department of economics and finance, one of the signers of the letter. "The groups that count are the higher income groups and the wealthy who got the disproportionate benefit of the tax cuts and not the lower income groups who did not share in the tax cuts and whose social programs are being cut."

African-Americans across the country are feeling the pressure. Black economist Bill Spriggs, another signer on the open letter, "The last three years have been harder on African-Americans," Spriggs says. "Even with a college education, it's hard, so once you're out of a job, it's hard to get back in. So, people are saying, 'I thought I knew what the path was. Now you tell me that that's not it. That's what gives people the sense of, 'I don't know a way out.'"

This level of hopelessness has become pervasive among millions of African-Americans, according to a recent survey by the 80-year-old Washington, D.C.-based National League of Cities, which

Congress, last year, passed a \$350 billion tax cut over five years, less than half of the \$726 billion that Bush had proposed. But, Democrats, including presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry, complain the tax breaks will mostly benefit the rich rather than pay for universal health care, homeland security, and investments in job creation.

In 2005, 70 percent of the Bush tax law benefits will go to the top fifth of households while only 9 percent of the benefits will go to the middle fifth of households, according to Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

"They say to us that the status of low income groups and of African-Americans,

promotes opportunity, leadership and governance for some 18,000 cities, villages and towns throughout the United States. The survey consisted of a random sample of 1,002 people throughout the U. S.

"Fewer than half the nation's African-Americans (47 percent) believe the 'American Dream' is achievable," states the NLC research report. "African-Americans are the only group in which less than half the population held this view," the NLC research report said of the survey, which had a margin of error of 3.7 percent.

Those surveyed defined the American Dream as being financially stable, secure enough to meet the needs of their families.

The struggle is even greater for the approximately 3.9 million convicted felons, including 1.4 million Black males, who are released from prisons and are currently seeking work to support their families and are often asked to disclose their criminal histories on job applications.

Many employers are hesitant to hire applicants with conviction histories and most states allow arrest or conviction record questions on job applications, according to the U. S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration.

"You have to have patience. Patience is very important when you come from a lifestyle of, 'I want it now'" says Rodney Mason, a 40-year-old carpenter, former inmate and recovering drug addict who is rearing 14-year-old twin boys and a 12-year-old daughter. "This is my dream: I want my children not to have to struggle as hard as me, as hard as my Mom, as hard as my Dad, as hard as my ancestors did. That's the biggest thing for me."

Mason was imprisoned for nearly two years for car burglaries before being released

in 2001. A carpenter, he uses his life's experiences to give motivational speeches to adult and teen students at the Palo Alto OICW after serving time. Amidst the poor economy and persistent double-digit unemployment

rates for African-Americans, training centers are options for millions looking for options for economic health.

Kerry has promised to expand the Minority Enterprise Development program and ensured that federal regu-

lations are fair for small businesses, and to allow small business a voice at the World Trade Organization. He has also promised to end the Bush tax cuts, raise minimum wages, proposals that the economists applaud.

Epperson

(Continued from Page 2) elry.

Epperson has left all logistics of the Trunk Show to Justice who said the experience, her first, has revealed how "business" she is and that negotiating is a strong suit for her. For the three-hour event beginning at 1 p.m., she has reserved a band, arranged food and planned an atmosphere of ideal ambience for her guests.

Trunk Shows are not a new trend nor are they are new to Las Vegas. High-end retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus are experienced in the area. Justice spent six months planning her end-of-the-month event. So far she has had more than 40 people RSVP for the Sunday affair and expects to exceed capacity set at 75 guests, she said.

There was no science to how she derived her guest lists she said. A long time resident of the city, she has built many relationships and she simple "looked for people who love to shop," she said.



Photo special to Sentinel-Voice compliments of Essence magazine
Fashion designer Epperson (seated) crafts clothing that is eccentric. Two women model his vibrant wares.

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