

NEWS BRIEFS

COSBY URGES DETROIT PARENTS TO FIGHT CRIME

DETROIT (AP) - Entertainer Bill Cosby urged members of a primarily Black audience to protect their children from rampant crime in urban neighborhoods. Cosby spoke to about 1,800 people Thursday night in downtown Detroit in an event billed as a town meeting. "Detroit, you're 87 percent (Black)! Get up, do something," Cosby shouted. "Get up, remove this reputation. You've got a reputation, and it stinks." Cosby told parents they should pay attention to their children's friends and habits and set rules and stick by them. He pleaded with absent fathers to establish a presence in their children's lives and challenged the community not to tolerate drug use and crime. The forum was designed to bring together residents and community organizations to address problems involving education, crime and drug abuse.

BELAFONTE MARKS MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

LAUDERHILL, Fla. (AP) — When Harry Belafonte met the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1950s, he promised to always assist in his mission. Thirty-seven years after King's death, the actor, singer and activist is still keeping his pledge. Belafonte on Saturday met with a group of about 60 people, many of them children, during a celebration of King's life at a Boys and Girls Club. He said the 13 years he worked side-by-side with the civil rights leader were "the most important of my life." "Each and every one of you has the power, the will and the capacity to make a difference in the world in which you live in," Belafonte said. "You should go through life knowing, 'I am somebody.'" Freedom was the theme of many questions posed by the kids, and one query left the 77-year-old Belafonte particularly reflective. "How does it feel to be free?" asked 10-year-old Shawn Gordon. Answered Belafonte: "When I get it, I will tell you." Belafonte — famous for his blend of rhythm and calypso-inspired music — is well known for his role as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador and as a leader in the civil rights movement.

WYCLEF JEAN: HAITI TOO DIVIDED

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Concluding a visit to his native Haiti, hip-hop star Wyclef Jean said the Caribbean country is too divided and violent to hold credible elections. General elections are planned later this year. Government and United Nations peacekeeping officials insist they will do all they can to ensure the vote takes place. Haiti's Parliament became powerless last year when a failure to hold elections because of instability left legislative seats empty. "Unless there is some form of heavy national dialogue where there is security and people feel safe, it's going to be hard to go through with a really positive election," the 32-year-old singer told The Associated Press on Thursday. Jean said a dialogue including businessmen, gang leaders and politicians is essential in addressing recent violence that has been plaguing Haiti's capital, forcing him to postpone a "concert for peace" planned for last month. The singer said he's trying to find a safe place to hold a concert in the summer. Jean visited Haiti this week to launch Yele Haiti — a development foundation for education, the environment, entrepreneurship and health.

SERENA WILLIAMS UNVEILS NEW TENNIS APPAREL

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Just days after being ranked No. 6 on Mr. Blackwell's annual worst-dressed list, Serena Williams unveiled her new line of lime green-and-white Nike tennis apparel. She co-designed a three-in-one dress and knee-high boots. Williams, No. 7 in the world tennis rankings, modeled the outfit Thursday, stepping out of the dress to reveal what she'll be wearing at the Australian Open next week: a top and shorts that are just "ideal" for practice. Unconventional? "You bet!" she said. Like the Black knee-high warm-up boots that made headlines at the U.S. Open in August, the new boots can be unzipped and removed between the warm-up and a match. "My legs take a little longer to warm up than the next opponent, so it's perfect for me, they'll keep me warm and then I'll be able to blast off," she said.

Jackson wants Wall Street fairness

By Jennifer H. Cunningham

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK (NNPA) — Waging the fight for racial economic reform, the "final stage of the civil rights struggle," Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, along with a host of prominent politicians, business leaders and community activists, kicked off the 8th Annual Rainbow/PUSH Wall Street Conference this week in Midtown Manhattan.

Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, Philadelphia Mayor John Street, and Bruce Gordon, the retired president of Verizon, were among the long list of high-profile speakers to address the conference attendees.

"When Jackie Robinson came to play baseball in 1947 the issue was playing," said Jackson, who has said that African-Americans must gain access to capital. "Now the issue is development."

Bonita Parker, national director of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition agreed. "We can sing, we can dance, we can wear the baggy pants, but now we need to step up to more management roles," she said.

The time, they argue, is

now. With the development of major urban areas across America, Jackson said that contracts and loans should be extended to Blacks to develop minority-owned enterprises.

Of the four goals of the civil rights movement, which Jackson says included ending legal slavery, ending legal segregation, and securing the right to vote, the 63-year-old civil rights leader said that the fourth—teaching financial literacy and eliminating predatory lending—is the most important.

As we come together this year, seeking participation in America's economic engine, we must be ever more vigilant in protecting the rights we have gained, even the right to vote," said Jackson. "At the same time, we must extend the gains we have made to include economic parity and equity in the boardroom, in the managers' offices and in the owners' boxes," he added.

The conference, titled "Beyond Diversity, Equity and Parity: A New Covenant," hosted several hundred people, most of who were minorities businesspeople with pledges to work with Jackson's organization to address the wealth

disparity between Blacks and their White counterparts.

Jackson said that African-Americans and other minorities have been economically disenfranchised, crippling their pathway to success.

"The wealth gap leads to an opportunity gap," said Jackson, who broke barriers when he ran in 1984 and 1988 for president of the United States. "Excellence and effort cannot compete with inheritance and access."

This economic stagnation, said Jackson, has occurred through unscrupulous mortgage lending, automotive finance mark-ups for minorities, and pension defrauding. He called for an end to these predatory lending practices, or charging high interest rates and fees that are not beneficial to the borrower.

Predatory lending companies are five times more likely to be in Black communities than White, and African-Americans are 4.1 times more likely to be victimized by predatory lending.

In a breakfast discussion between Jackson and Elliot Spitzer, the New York attorney general, Spitzer, who is a candidate for governor in 2006, said that the fight for racial economic parity is an

uphill battle.

"Capital flows influence decisions," said Spitzer. "Everyone fights to maintain the status quo. They have a overwhelming constituency," he added.

But Spitzer, who has experience in mutual fund fraud, pledged to track down predatory lending companies and said that his office would prosecute those involve in such schemes.

In addition to halting the economic misuse in the Black community, Jackson wants to see more commercial ventures between Black businesses and mainstream companies. "Allowing minority-owned businesses to compete in the marketplace will increase dividends for all," said Jackson.

Philadelphia Mayor John Street spoke about his success in using minority contractors to build two new stadiums in the City of Brotherly Love. Street said he used 19 minority contractors to construct the sprawling \$1.2 billion arenas.

"I represent a city with a tremendous amount of minority and poor people," said Street. "We need to level the economic playing field."

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Freed Louisiana convict savors new life

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) - A quietly jubilant Wilbert Rideau savored his first weekend as a free man since John F. Kennedy was president.

"This is all new to me. I'm writing a new chapter," he said.

Rideau was a janitor and high school dropout when he held up a bank in 1961 just days after his 19th birthday, and killed a White woman. "I don't even know him anymore," he told The Associated Press on Sunday.

Rideau, a Black man convicted three times in the case by all-White juries, became an award-winning journalist during more than four decades in the nation's bloodiest prison — the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola. He was released Saturday when a racially mixed jury found him guilty of a lesser charge of manslaughter.

Since he spent nearly 44 years in prison, Rideau was immediately released. He had served more than double the 21-year maximum for manslaughter when the crime occurred.

Jurors effectively decided

Rideau had been punished enough for Julia Ferguson's slaying, a crime that still divides his native Lake Charles along racial lines. Rideau left for Baton Rouge on Sunday morning, and his supporters said they were worried for his safety because of sentiments surrounding the case.

Staying at a friend's home, Rideau said he had no firm plans yet.

"I'm still trying to wrap my mind around it," Rideau told the AP in one of his first interviews since the verdict. "Jail is so far distant. It's distant."

Asked about how freedom felt, he replied: "I don't know yet. I haven't lived out here. I'm just starting my life when people my age are ready to retire."

Rideau, 62, never denied that he killed Ferguson on Feb. 16, 1961, after kidnapping three employees from the Gulf National Bank. Having shot his captives as they tried to get away, he stabbed Ferguson when she struggled to stand. Testifying for the first time in this trial, he said it was an act of panic.

The defense presented a

picture of 1960s-era racism in Lake Charles, tying it to sensational details in the case — some which later came into question. In 2000, a federal appeals court said his original 1961 indictment was flawed because Blacks were excluded from the grand jury.

Rideau served more time in prison than any other convicted murderer in the history of Calcasieu Parish, including murderers convicted of more than one murder. He was called "the most rehabilitated prisoner in America" by *Life* magazine in 1993.

The NAACP came to his defense.

Prosecutors, however, dismissed Rideau's contention that although he killed Ferguson, he did not intend to murder her. But after deliberating for nearly six hours, the jury of eight Whites and four Blacks agreed with him that the crime was not planned or premeditated.

Rideau nodded slightly to the jury after his verdict was read, a gesture of thanks. "That was a humbling experience," he said. "I love the

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