

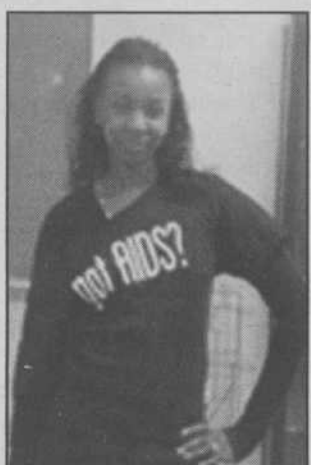
New student entity to fight HIV/AIDS at universities

By Makebra M. Anderson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Two questions, printed boldly on a simple Black T-shirt, has college students everywhere talking. They have students questioning their lifestyle, their friends as well as their past behavior. The inscription reads: got AIDS? How do you know?

"The message we want to convey pertains to the myths surrounding HIV/AIDS and the need for students to understand their risk for infection, get tested and know their results. We want them to either stay negative, or if they do find out they are positive, get treatment because it can mean the difference between a long healthy life and a long life of not really living," says Jonathan Perry, the student who spearheaded the T-shirt campaign through the group L.I.F.E. AIDS.

L.I.F.E. AIDS, an organization formed by the Black AIDS Institute and the Magic Johnson Foundation, is aimed



Maxine Moffett is wearing the black T-shirt with the inscription "got AIDS"

at educating and mobilizing Black college students in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The organization was conceived last year at a Black AIDS Institute-sponsored national AIDS Town Hall meeting at Morehouse College in Atlanta, where professional and student journalists met to discuss how they can keep AIDS in the forefront of the Black community.

"The Town Hall meeting and teach-in were a result of

my commitment to mobilize Black college students around HIV/AIDS. What came out of the teach-in was the foundation of what I believe will be the most awesome movement to fight HIV/AIDS Black college students have ever seen," says Perry, a student human rights activist at Johnson C. Smith University in North Carolina.

Perry, an openly gay man who is also HIV-positive, has dedicated his life to educating students about the disease. He feels his mission is more important now than ever.

"L.I.F.E. AIDS is important because it says to the world that college students, especially Black college students, are not going to sit by and let the disease be the Ice Age that wipes out an entire race of people. It says tomorrow will not die because the bearers thereof will not allow it," he says.

HIV/AIDS is a health crisis among African-Americans. According to the U.S.

Census, African-Americans represent an astounding number of new HIV/AIDS cases. Only 12 percent of the population, Blacks account for 54 percent of all new AIDS cases.

In 2001, HIV/AIDS was among the top three causes of death for African-American men between 25 and 54 years old and among the top four causes of death for African-American women between the ages 20 and 54. It was the number one cause of death for African-American women between 25 and 34, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

As long as people engage in unprotected sex, the risk of getting HIV is high. For teenagers, the risk can be higher because of their feeling of invincibility and risk-taking behavior.

It is estimated that almost half of new HIV infections occur among teenagers and almost 65 percent of them Black. Of the 59 children younger than 13 who had a new AIDS diagnosis, 40 were African-American.

For Perry, these numbers were enough reason to start the organization.

"The purpose of L.I.F.E. is to go above and beyond in the effort to unify our campuses and communities, to take ownership and become leaders in the fight, to create self and collective accountability, and to inspire people to take responsibility for their own actions and behaviors," he said.

"A lot of people I talk to say they are afraid to get tested because they are afraid of the results. So, if you have 25 percent of people living with HIV and having sex without protection, each one infects another person. The increase only makes sense."

Not only are Black youth disproportionately represented among HIV/AIDS cases, they also show higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) compared to Whites.

The CDC reports that in 2003, the rate of chlamydia among Black females was more than seven times higher than the rate among White females (1633.1 and 217.9 per 100,000, respectively). Among Black males, the rate was 11 times higher than White males (584.2 and 52.9 per 100,000 respectively).

Additionally, the number of Black youth with gonorrhea supercedes that of White youth. In 2003, 70.7 percent of the total number of gonorrhea cases was among African-Americans. Blacks represented 655.8 cases per 100,000, Hispanics, 71.7 cases and Whites, 32.7 cases.

To address the other health disparities among Americas Black youth, the work of L.I.F.E. AIDS is augmented by *Ledge*, a student-run magazine. According to its editor, Freddie Allen, *Ledge* gives students an outlet to write about HIV/AIDS and other health issues that endanger the Black community.

"Young Black people and young Black women are be-

ing affected by the AIDS epidemic disproportionately. We want to try to raise the level of awareness and help our peers stay informed," states Allen, a student at Howard University in Washington, D.C. "With the next issue of *Ledge*, we want to start looking at HIV/AIDS as part of a comprehensive health model. We really want to increase the coverage of all health issues affecting Black youth."

More than 100 students meet at the Atlanta HIV/AIDS Black Media Roundtable, which was hosted by the Balm in Gilead, an organization that mobilizes churches in the U.S. and Africa around HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment; the Black AIDS Institute, the Magic Johnson Foundation, the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS and Outreach Inc., an Atlanta group. It was at this gathering they discussed HIV/AIDS on their campuses.

"Very little of what Black college students know and don't know surprises me," says Perry, organizer of the T-shirt campaign. "Johnson C. Smith University is taking some amazing steps in requiring incoming freshmen to take a HIV 101 class that educates them about the myths of HIV/AIDS as well as how to protect themselves."

Perry adds, "To me, it's about accountability. I understand that I must not rely on anyone but me to define (See AIDS, Page 15)

Nonviolence encouraged in seeking L.A. police reforms

By Kevin Herrera
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) — Black clergy and community activists are calling on African-Americans to channel their rage into economic boycotts and other forms of nonviolent protest, in an effort to force Chief William J. Bratton and the Police Commission to immediately make reforms and punish the officers involved in the videotaped beating of Stanley Miller and the shocking shooting death of 13-year-old Devin Brown.

At a highly-emotional community empowerment summit held last week at Bethel AME Church, religious leaders from various faiths came together to urge infuriated members of the community not to riot following the death of Brown, who was shot multiple times by police early after leading officers on a brief car chase that ended near 83rd Street and Western Avenue when Brown, an eighth-grader at Audubon Middle School, backed the car he was driving into a police cruiser, prompting officers to shoot.

That incident, along with District Attorney Steve Cooley's decision not to prosecute the officer who beat Miller with a flashlight during an arrest, and last month's \$1.6 million jury award to former Inglewood officer Jeremy Morse, have triggered disgust in the Black community for law enforcement, which some say surpasses the level of frustration and despair felt after the Rodney King verdict that led to the 1992 civil unrest.

The sense of hopelessness and anger led many Black leaders to fear that a riot could break out in South Los Angeles at

any moment, even as Bratton moved quickly to release a new policy on officers shooting into moving vehicles, which he plans to present to the Police Commission.

"We have been sent a message that we cannot get justice," said Minister Tony Muhammad, western representative for the Nation of Islam. "It is a messed up message to young people who are going to start taking justice into their own hands. We are now going to have a problem between the Black community and the police, where there is already tension. We could have an all out war."

Muhammad added, "I say they shouldn't do that... What we need to do, is rally and come together to show the world that here is a democratic society that prides itself on giving others human rights, but not here at home. We go and beat up dictators all around the world, but we can't get justice here in America."

Los Angeles Urban League President John Mack, who served on Mayor James K. Hahn's committee on the Miller arrest, said he knows there are a lot of "mad people out there who are hurt," but violence is not the answer.

"I know it's hard, but in this business of justice, we have to be marathon runners," he said. "I am cautiously optimistic that we have an enlightened leader in Bratton, and while it's tough, considering the struggle historically with the LAPD and its history of racism and brutality, we are beginning to see some progress, in particular the new flashlight policy that was a direct result of our work around the Miller incident."

Charles Steele Jr., president of the South- (See Reform, Page 14)

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