

Juvenile

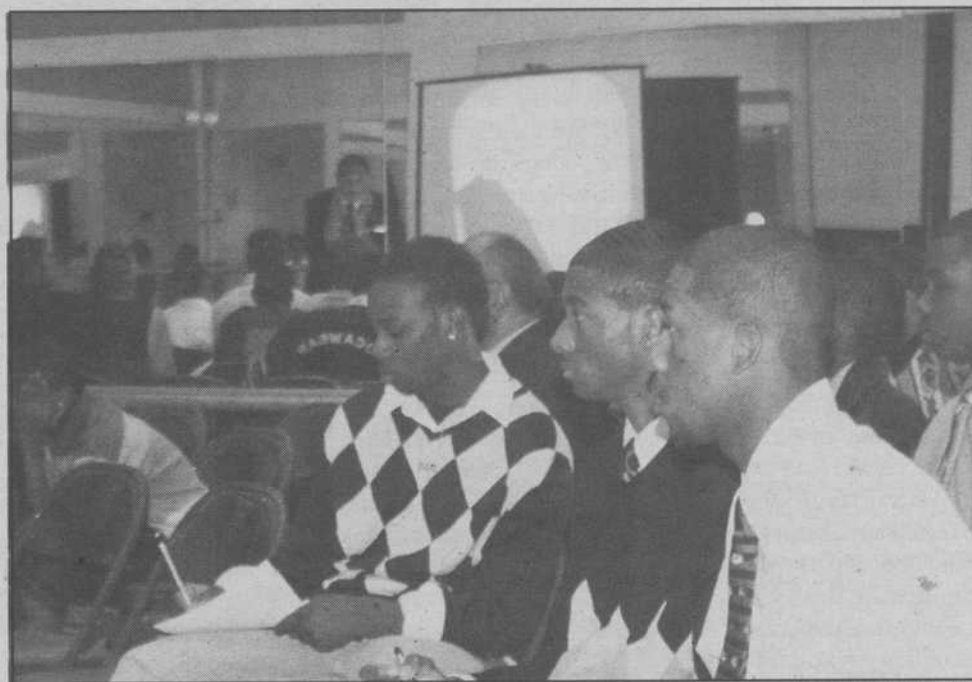
(Continued from Page 12) spirituality, knowledge of and pride in self, and exactly what it takes to be productive socially, professionally and personally.

These programs are, for the most part, based on African-American traditions and employ use of spirituality and wisdom of the community elders.

"We also teach cultural diversity," Jeppe said. "While most of our programs are Afrocentric and African-American based, we realize that our neighborhoods are changing, and if we are not involved in teaching acceptance of other cultures, we are not doing our jobs. We get people from all over the valley coming here for different reasons and everyone is accepting of everyone else. Involvement and participation in the good and positive things going on in the community is one of our main focuses. This can be directly attributed to our emphasis on looking and listening to everything spiritually and knowing oneself as much as possible," she explained.

Jeppe said there has not yet been an opportunity to discuss the recent violence with the young users of the center, mainly because the investigations are still ongoing. Since the situation is still fresh, the topic has not presented itself, but as soon as the opportunity arises for the largest audience, or some resolution has been reached, it will be discussed.

"As far as the recent violence by juveniles goes," Jeppe said, "this is one of the



Sentinel-Voice file photo

Young men listen and learn in a lecture presentation about the responsibility of manhood recently at the West Las Vegas Arts Center.

things our programs aim to avoid. It's all about choices and being responsible. I feel sorry for the young people that got themselves involved in this violence, because it's probably going to mark them for the rest of their lives, but there is no way I will condone their behavior by offering up excuses. We especially want the young people to know that whatever choices you make, especially if they are bad ones, you will pay the consequences."

Juvenile offenders in Clark County, especially hard-core, violent offenders, are taken into the Clark County Juvenile Detention Center and held there until their court appearances. Afterwards, depending on trial outcome, they can be brought back to the Center, released or transferred to a long-term facility.

For the past two years,

Randall Griffin has been a juvenile services assistant at the detention center, where he oversees youth operations.

"Juveniles who come into this facility are charged with all types of crimes," Griffin said. "This is a high-security facility for the hard-core offender. They have been charged with drug offenses, gang activity, rape, robbery, homicide — you name it. The majority of them have some type of violence attached to their charges, and a lot of them are out of control."

According to Griffin, they get a lot of repeat offenders.

"There are some teens that have been in and out of here for years," he said. "Unfortunately, we recognize a lot of them, because they keep coming back. Some do get rehabilitated, but some also go on to be adult offenders."

Griffin agrees that vio-

lence knows no specific race, class, neighborhood, or income level.

"These kids are poor, middle-class, and kids with money," Griffin said. "They come from all over the valley and are from all different races and ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, it is a perpetual cycle. The common thread is the amount of parental involvement. The type of kids that we see most often in here practically raise

themselves. They haven't been taught any better and don't seem to have any idea that life can be any different. They're living what they see."

The Juvenile Detention Center offers programs to attempt to counter the perpetual cycle of criminal and violent behavior.

"The detainees go through counseling sessions, psychological evaluations, drug awareness, sex education, gang awareness and numerous interventions," Griffin said. "Some are crying out for help, for some type of structure in their lives; but again, some are out of control."

Griffin said that the detention center has a job to do and they are doing it the best they can. The Clark County government is very responsive and supportive in ensuring the detention center has the resources in personnel and equipment it needs to step up to the task at hand.

"When the offenders come to us, they are treated the same. We don't treat the juvenile that has been charged with murder any differently than we treat a drug offender. We like to think we

are making a difference in their lives," he said. "The fact is, the difference needs to be made before they get to us."

The solution suggested by most entities seems to emphasize prevention and intervention prior to a juvenile making the choice to commit a violent crime. Studies have shown that juveniles are becoming violent at younger ages, and that race, ethnicity, neighborhood, or income level is no longer a determining factor in from where violent juveniles hail.

Attention must be paid to parenting skills and that includes many elements: training in those actions that lead to stable family structure; cooperative involvement by educators, government officials, policing organizations, elders and spiritual leaders; community programs, such as leisure providers; and, to no small extent, the visual and audio media.

All are elements that require attention if the tide of juvenile violence — whether hate-motivated, gang-related or random — is to be stemmed.

It is all about choices and learning what it takes to make responsible ones.

Clingman

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less rhetoric — much of which is not even factual — by brothers and sisters on the radio who obviously have no idea what they are talking about. And, as we read some of our Black newspapers, we are ensconced in a lifelong dream of hitting the number, getting psychic readings, or checking our horoscopes before we make a move.

Even in the spiritual marketplace, we are the subjects or, should I say, fodder, of hucksters who want to sell us God's blessings, as if they have cornered the market on His grace. It's fascinating that on Sunday mornings we can find a White "preacher" on BET selling us a quarter-ounce vial of miracle water that will cure sickle-cell disease, all for the low cost of \$206. Of course, if you send him more money... well, you know the deal.

Brothers and sisters, isn't it bad enough that we are being dumbed-down by White folks? Why do we accept the same thing from our own people? We must do better than that. Take politics. What do you think of the statement attributed to the ex-footballer, Lynn Swann? "I certainly believe that George W.

Bush is the most qualified and most credible candidate to fulfill the role as president of the United States." Now, I didn't hear Swann say that, I just read that he said it. But if he did say that, in light of what we have experienced over the past five years from the Bushman, why should anyone, Blacks especially, vote for Swann to be their governor?

We had better take stock of what is going on in this country, right in our own backyards. There are Black folks who control media outlets that do not operate in the best interests of Black people. Why would you support them — in any way? They do not want us to get well, nor do they care if we ever get well.

The next time you find yourself wasting your valuable time ingesting their mind-numbing potion, remember this saying: "When the ax enters the forest, the trees view the handle as one of their own."

Just because it's Black on the outside, doesn't mean it's Black on the inside.

James E. Clingman is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American Studies Department.

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