

Graves' plight: Saving young Black men

By Gordon Jackson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DALLAS (NNPA) - "Sheriff" Earl G. Graves, publisher emeritus of *Black Enterprise* magazine, deputized everyone at the Black Enterprise Entrepreneurs Conference recently at Dallas' Hilton Anatole Hotel.

"I'm deputizing all of you in my personal crusade," Graves told the audience during his State of the Black Business address that kicked off the conference.

Graves' mission: reverse the crisis of young Black men in the country. The 71-year-old prostate cancer survivor added, "I plan on being around a long time, and I intend to continue to make every day count. I've come to the conclusion that the best way for me to do that is to do everything in my power to restore dignity, hope and opportunity to the lives of young African-American men and boys."

Current statistics give Graves good reason for his crusade, an addition to the company's usual business

agenda. The National Urban League State of Black America reports that 72 percent of Black men coming out of high school are unemployed. A Northwestern University study found that one in four Black men age 20 to 64 did not work for 12 straight months in 2002. While one in 20 Black men are incarcerated, 75 percent are not attending college, the study said.

Graves called on his "deputies" to be more involved in the African-American community and raise the expectation level of young Black men. He repeated his orders later during the town hall meeting entitled "Crisis in Black America: What's Happening to Our Young Black Men?" The session, moderated by television and radio news anchor Ed Gordon, gravitated toward whether the hip-hop music and culture is the single biggest blame for young Black men's plight.

"Hip-hop brings a complexity with it," Gordon said. "There is a side that's abso-

lutely right, that they have played the game better than the old generation in terms of wealth across the board. Yet, there is an insidious side that has caused us to kill ourselves and continue to do so on a day-to-day basis. How do we try to marry the two and extract the good without alienating the 'niggaz,' to try and walk that fine line and save this generation?"

Sociology professor Harry Edwards, one of the panelists, addressed Gordon's question.

"On an individual level, everybody can save somebody, nobody can save everybody and there's always somebody that nobody can save," Edwards said. On a community level, he said, "We're talking about individual responses to a substantially structural problem. Structural problems require structural responses. The reality is we don't want to believe that things are as bad as they are. And the system is geared to keep us thinking like that."

Another panelist, author

and social activist Michael Eric Dyson, downplayed targeting hip-hop, stating that older generations blaming the younger generation for their problems is nothing new. He pointed out about a book written by W.E.B. Dubois and Augustus Steele in 1914 saying that young Blacks at the time were "going to hell in a hand basket and caught up in pop culture."

"We've always talked about personal responsibility and social analysis," Dyson said. "By that analysis, the people going to hell in a hand basket are your parents and grandparents. Every generation has often identified its own value and virtue against the upcoming generation."

"If we don't have families in place to be able to transmit values to able to transmit values to sustain people, we're in trouble, Dyson continued. "You have to teach them how to divorce themselves from self-destructive behavior that only replicates the pains of the past without helping them."

While stating he enjoys the music made by artists

such as Luther (Campbell), 50 Cent and Jay-Z, Edwards said that Black America idly stood by and let hip-hop take control of its young.

"While we were downing hip-hop, the hip-hop was taking our kids," Edwards said. "Let's not attack them. Let's understand how they got control of our kids. Because in it, there's a formula."

Ted Shaw, president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, both supported and criticized the culture.

"Hip-hop isn't all bad. You can't help but listen to it and the beat is going to get you. It's genius," Shaw said. "But some of the progressive stuff doesn't get played on the air and a lot of people are putting out good stuff. A lot of it is regressive. It's misogynous and full of self-hatred."

Both Shaw and Yale child psychiatry professor James Comer called hip-hop a decoy from the real issues plaguing Black men.

"I think hip-hop and getting into a dispute and the argument about whether it's good or bad is a distraction

from the underlying problem," Comer said. "That is, our children are not receiving what most of us in this audience received. That is the support of parents and teachers in our schools. If we're going to address this problem and systematically create structures that will enable us to support development or our children, the only place where we can have that is the schools."

"Prisons and the federal justice system is big business in this country, and big business is made off the backs of Black folks primarily," Shaw said.

More mentoring of Black youth was also brought up. Graves then challenged the over 1,000 in attendance.

"If 700 of you get started mentoring this week, we would start the grand scheme of fixing this thing... Go home and find six other people and start doing it while we're standing around talking about 'woe is me,'" Graves said.

"We're going to have to fix this problem ourselves."

Gordon Jackson writes for the Dallas Examiner.

High Court to hear education race case

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Supreme Court said Monday it will decide the extent to which public schools can use race in deciding school assignments, setting the stage for a landmark affirmative action ruling.

Justices will hear appeals from a Seattle parents group and a Kentucky parent, ruling for the first time on diversity plans used by a host of school districts around the country.

Race cases have been difficult for the justices.

The court's announcement that it will take up the cases this fall provides the first sign of an aggressiveness by the court under new Chief Justice John Roberts.

The court rejected a similar case in December when moderate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was still on the bench. The outcome of this case will turn on her successor, Samuel Alito.

In one of the cases, an appeals court had upheld Seattle's system, which lets students pick among high schools and then relies on tiebreakers, including race, to decide who gets into schools that have more applicants than openings.

The lower court decision was based in part on a Supreme Court ruling three years ago, written by O'Connor, which said that colleges and universities could select students based at least in part on race.

The court also will also consider a school desegregation policy in Kentucky. That case is somewhat different, because the school district had long been under a federal court decree to end segregation in its schools.

After the decree ended, the district in 2001 began using a plan that includes race guidelines.

A federal judge had said such a system did not require quotas, and that other factors were considered including geographic boundaries and special programs.

A mother, Crystal Meredith, claimed her son was denied entrance into the neighborhood school because he is White. The Jefferson County school district, which covers metropolitan Louisville, Ky., and has nearly 100,000 students, was ordered to desegregate its schools in 1974.

The court will also consider whether Seattle's so-called integration tiebreaker system, which has been discontinued, is tailored to meet a "compelling interest" by the school.

A group called Parents Involved in Community Schools sued in July 2000, arguing that it was unfair for the school district to consider race, and Seattle halted the system.

Lawyers for the Seattle school district had told justices that it was not known what the district's new school board and new superintendent would do now.

Under the district's plan, the first tiebreaker was whether an applicant has a sibling already at the school. The second tiebreaker was race: which applicant would bring the high school closer to the districtwide ratio of Whites to non-Whites, roughly 40 percent to 60 percent. The third tiebreaker was distance, with closer students getting preference. Seattle has about 46,000 public-school students. The racial tiebreaker helped some Whites get into predominantly minority schools, and vice versa.

The cases are Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District, 05-908, and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education, 05-915.

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