

Bush: Immigration unfazed by Cuba

By Hansen Sinclair
Special to Sentinel-Voice
FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (NNPA) - Last week, the Bush administration revealed its new immigration policy toward Cuba: speeding up backlogged family visas, giving Cuban doctors — those who defect — easier access to the United States and denying visas to those who violate human rights. Bush also said he would notify families of the status of relatives should they be stopped at sea. Oftentimes, family members do not hear word from or about relatives if they are picked up at sea and held by the Coast Guard.

These measures, issued in statements by the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, are the first steps the United States has taken towards Cuba since Fidel Castro released power to his brother, Raul Castro, July 31.

They are also the first significant changes in how the U.S.-Cuba migration pacts are administered since the arrangement was negotiated in 1994 as a means by which to end a major exodus from Cuba via raft. According to

the agreements, Cuba will restrict illegal departures in exchange for 20,000 annual visas for Cubans who want to come to the United States.

"It's a big step for the U.S. and Cuba," said Marisela Hernandez. "I think it could be a great opportunity for hundreds of Cubans who want a new life." Hernandez has an aunt in Cuba who has always wanted to come to Miami. Hernandez is hoping that with the new measures her aunt will soon be able to obtain residency with her and her family.

U.S. officials say that the timely changes have nothing to do with the sudden change of power in Cuba, but are the results of extensive talks between both parties. However, some are concerned about the possibility of a mass flooding of Cubans to the United States.

Homeland Security Deputy Secretary Michael P. Jackson said in a written statement: "We urge the Cuban people to stay on the island, so that they may work for their freedom and a democratic society. We discourage anyone from risking their life in the open seas in order to travel to the United

States."

One main cause for illegal arrivals is build-up of paperwork over the years. To obtain citizenship legally takes a while because of the massive backlog.

"Either way it goes, it's a bumpy ride," said defector Jose Menendez. "I am just getting full citizenship after being in this country almost 15 years. It's not an easy process, trust me."

Under the new guidelines, green card holders who claim close relatives in Cuba will be eligible to get a visa in the same year they file the application.

The United States will allot almost 8,000 fewer visas to the annual visa pool on the island and reassign those to family petitions. The total annual number of visas will remain anywhere from 20,000 to 21,000. The Bush administration said they would not abandon migration agreements, no matter what changes take place in Cuba.

But the Bush announcement also makes a distinction between those who apply for a visa and those who try to elude the Coast Guard. According to the new rules, those who are apprehended

and sent back will be eligible for the visa pool but not for the new family petitions. Nothing in the new rules denies entry to Cubans who make it to shore, even if they happen to get by the Coast Guard. However, smugglers of immigrants may be denied admission.

Castro doing better?

Although the Bush administration insists that Castro's well being and the situation in Cuba have nothing to do directly with the immigration policies, Cuban-Americans are still keeping abreast of the situation in their native land.

According to recent reports, Castro is doing much better — sitting up, walking and even working a little.

The *Gamma*, the Communist Party newspaper in Cuba, said that Castro's recovery was the most optimistic news they have received since July 31, when he handed down power temporarily to his younger brother — and second in command — Raul. The front page read "Firm Like a Caguarian," a strong tropical tree native to Cuba. According to the paper and a source, "...after receiving a little physical

therapy, [Fidel Castro] took some steps in his room and then, seated in a chair, conversed animatedly." Castro also was "briefly dispatching some business."

"This is not good news for us," said Anna Marie Rodriguez, Cuban-American. "We were so close to getting him out of power. It was such a happy day for us when we heard he turned over power. I hope it remains that way."

Many Cubans and Cuban-Americans are anticipating the day Castro is no longer in power, no matter how it happens.

"He has oppressed our people for too long," said Cuban activist Jorge Delgado. "My mother's family lives in poverty over there. I am desperately seeking a way to bring them here with me. My mother was lucky she fled when she did." Delgado has never visited Cuba, but dreams of doing so one day.

Although not in tip-top condition, Castro did live to see his 80th birthday this past weekend. Celebrations that were to take place have been postponed until December. Surprisingly enough, there

are many Castro supporters among the Cubans.

"When are Cubans going to stop complaining? First we complain about our own country, then we come over here and complain about their government. Cubans are never satisfied," said Marisol Jimenez. "Americans support their country no matter what and 9/11 proved that. We are wishing — in front of the world — our leader was dead; that is not unity. I may not agree with Castro completely, but I support my country."

Castro underwent intestinal surgery and handed over power to his brother, Raul, 75. Fidel Castro has been in power since 1959. Raul Castro is vice president and the designated successor of his brother.

It is split almost directly down the middle in the Cuban community as to what they want to see happen. However, both sides have two things in common: one, they want a change in Cuba for the better and two, they will have to wait and see what happens, much like everyone else.

Hansen Sinclair writes for the Westside Gazette.

Researchers link HIV/AIDS, lyrics to Black youth

By Lorinda M. Bullock
Special to Sentinel-Voice
TORONTO (NNPA) - Researchers and radio personalities do agree with what uncool parents have been saying all along about today's hip-hop music — it does influence young people when it comes to their choices about sex.

But parents shouldn't be so quick to pat themselves on the back.

Both the researchers and experts in the hip-hop music community assembled at the 16th International AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada, last week suggest the information young people are getting about sex from music and music videos must be balanced out with information at home and in school.

"It's a social problem all of us have to share," said Wesley Crichlow, an associate professor in social science at the University of Ontario Institute for Technology. He has studied Black youth gang violence, gay and lesbian issues among other social issues facing Black youth.

Crichlow said that be-

cause the Black communities in Canada, the Caribbean and the U.S. still associate HIV/AIDS with being a homosexual disease and consider topics of sex taboo, young Blacks have a false sense of security.

"Our youth have not yet begun to understand the seriousness of HIV because our young people see themselves as immune," Crichlow explained.

Because young people under the age of 25 account for half of new HIV and AIDS infections, scientists and activists used the conference as a platform to address the epidemic, often using very frank discussion to address the impact of youth culture and music and its connection with the disease.

During a session called "Hip Hop and Reggae Dance Hall Kings and Queens: Dropping it Like it's Hot," the panel of youth health and social workers, radio personalities and a club DJ as well as scholars such as Crichlow discussed talking openly with young people about lyrics that are overt as well as subtle and making conscious

decisions at clubs and parties where alcohol and drugs often impair teens' decisions.

Most importantly, they discussed solutions.

Lisa Skeete, a Canadian radio personality and Black Cultural Heritage instructor with the Toronto District school board, said producers of Reggae and Dancehall music in Jamaica have in the past packaged condoms with their albums because of the sexually explicit lyrics and dance steps that emulate sexual acts.

"You'd have the album title and you'd have the song title on the back and there was a condom that was going out so there was that subliminal message, while you're getting your groove on in the dance hall, don't forget [about using] your condom," Skeete said.

Miranda Ward was the lone American of the panel of mostly Canadians. The co-founder of Promising Futures, a youth empowerment and health education organization, explained that in the U.S., one way to combat HIV and AIDS is to put on a large-scale campaign similar to

entertainer P. Diddy's "Vote or Die" during the 2004 presidential election.

"That particular year, more youth and young adults got registered to vote than any other year... All of that was great (but) when we talk about responsibility as an artist, it has to be more than a one time-shot because after that, we don't know if they actually went to go vote. One time is not enough," Ward said.

Blacks ages 13-19 make up 70 percent of HIV/AIDS cases in the U.S. but are only 17 percent of America's teen population. Because young Black Americans bear the brunt of the disease, Mila Gorokhovich, co-founder of the Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS, said there is a serious need for them to be represented on the activism front.

Gorokhovich was not part of the panel, but told the NNPA News Service earlier, "I don't see them enough... It was so frustrating given that Black young people are the most affected were not provided with the tools in the U.S. to deal with the problem

and I'm finding that to be a huge issue."

Gorokhovich said Black American youth are at a serious disadvantage considering the lack of quality sex education and the fact that the federal government will only fund abstinence-only programs in schools.

When discussing lyrics, panelist Rose-Ann Bailey, a youth program coordinator at the Rexdale Community Health Centre in Canada, explained that parents and other adults can't be shy. As an example, she used a popular hip-hop song played in American clubs about oral sex.

"We're not telling them don't have sex or don't put it in your mouth, but how you put it in your mouth and make sure you're doing it safely or [how to] say, 'No, I'm not putting it in my mouth,'" she said to a mix of thunderous applause and laughter.

Miguel Munoz Laboy, an associate professor in the department of Sociomedical Sciences of Columbia University, surprised a mixed audience of adults and young

people earlier in the week when he presented his study of three urban areas in Harlem during a session about the unspoken taboo of young people and sex.

"We found that youth who have experienced intercourse are most likely to enjoy listening and dancing to hip-hop," Laboy said.

But Laboy did point out that his pool of participants came from predominately Black and Latino communities, where education and socioeconomic status and other deeper community issues are at play and the music was not entirely to blame. He used questionnaires and conducted in-depth interviews with mostly young Black, and Hispanic men ages 16-21.

Many activists at the conference said they wanted to see more religious figures come to the table to discuss youth, sex and HIV/AIDS.

Akinyi Shapiro, 16, of Bethesda, Md, was present and very attentive at Laboy's presentation and at the discussion about hip-hop. She understands that she's a
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