

Prison rates high for Black women

By Nekima Levy-Pounds
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MINNEAPOLIS (NNPA) - In spite of Minnesota's low incarceration rate, African-Americans in general and African-American women in particular, are substantially overrepresented in the state's total prison population. According to the Minnesota Department of Corrections, 25 percent of women incarcerated there are Black or African-American.

This represents a rate of five times their percentage of the population in the state.

When women are sentenced to serve time in prison in Minnesota, they are sent to the Shakopee Minnesota Women's Correctional Facility, a minimum-security prison that currently houses about 470 women.

Although the number of females incarcerated in Minnesota is considerably lower than the number of incarcerated men, women face additional systemic issues related to child rearing and chemical dependency that must be acknowledged. Most of the women serving time in Shakopee are single mothers of children under age 18. When these mothers are incarcerated, their children may be sent to live with relatives or may be placed in the child welfare system.

Many of these women also have significant histories of sexual and physical abuse that may have contributed to their propensity to use drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms. For example, 85 percent of women serving time in Shakopee are believed to have chemical abuse or dependency issues; 50 percent of the women have mental illnesses and 40 percent are taking psychotropic medications.

While many of these women were sexually abused as children, they were more likely to have experienced abusive physical relationships as adults.

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Edwards echoes King's calls

NEW YORK (AP) - Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards called on Americans to resist President Bush's planned troop escalation in Iraq, echoing a plea by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. 40 years ago to end the Vietnam War.

Edwards addressed about 1,200 parishioners Sunday at Riverside Church, a multiracial, politically active Manhattan congregation where King delivered his famous "Beyond Vietnam" speech on April 4, 1967. King was assassinated exactly one year later.

Edwards spoke from the same wooden pulpit King used and was introduced by King's son, Martin Luther King III. The younger King said his father would have admired Edwards' commitment to fighting poverty.

The former North Carolina senator and 2004 Democratic vice presidential nominee touched on

poverty issues in his speech, as well as AIDS in Africa, energy independence and a proposed boost in the minimum wage.

But he saved his strongest words for the troop increase in Iraq, invoking King's condemnation of the Vietnam War as a betrayal of American values.

"Silence is betrayal, and I believe it is a betrayal not to speak out against the escalation of the war in Iraq," Edwards said to a sustained standing ovation.

It was a high-profile appearance for Edwards on the home turf of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, the Democratic presidential front-runner who has been decidedly more cautious in speaking out against the war and the proposed troop escalation.

Several of Clinton's allies attended the Edwards speech, including fellow New York Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer, who has already endorsed Clinton's likely presidential bid.

Clinton spent the Martin

Luther King holiday weekend traveling to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Two other Democratic presidential hopefuls, Delaware Sen. Joe Biden and Connecticut Sen. Chris Dodd, attended King remembrances in South Carolina.

Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, who could join the presidential field as early as this week, was observing the holiday weekend with low-key appearances in Chicago.

Underscoring his previous calls for a troop rollback in Iraq, Dodd said Sunday at a memorial service in Greenville, S.C., "It is time now that we say we have done enough."

Edwards, who declared his candidacy in late December, said Americans must not wait for a change in presidential leadership to demand that American forces be drawn down in Iraq.

Bush announced last week that he would send an additional 21,500 troops to Iraq in an effort to stabilize the war-torn country;

Edwards has called for 40,000-50,000 to be removed.

"We need to show we are serious about leaving, and the best way to do that is to start leaving," he said to applause.

Edwards voted in 2002 to authorize military action in Iraq, as did Clinton, Biden and Dodd. All but Clinton have forcefully recanted their votes. Edwards also called on Congress to withhold funding for the troop increase, echoing a proposal announced last week by Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy.

Kennedy's plan has been embraced by some other Democrats, including Dodd, but viewed warily by others who see it as unworkable and potentially harmful to troops already serving in Iraq.

Clinton and Obama are among those who have not yet indicated they would support Kennedy's approach.

Flag

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of Secession.

Biden noted Delaware was "a slave state that fought beside the North. That's only because we couldn't figure out how to get to the South — there were a couple of other states in the way."

Biden expects legislators here will eventually move the flag. Pointing to his heart, he said, "as



people become more and more aware of what it means to African-Americans here, this is only a matter of time."

On Sunday, Dodd told The Associated Press at a King remembrance service in Greenville that the Confederate flag belongs in a museum.

"I don't think it belongs on the Capitol grounds," Dodd said.

FCC

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tions, eight radio stations, the cable television system, the daily newspaper and the largest Internet provider in a single community.

The public was outraged, with more than 3 million registering their disapproval with the FCC and its chairman, Michael Powell. A suit was filed; consequently, a federal appeals court rescinded those proposed regulations.

"The Third Circuit sent those misguided rules back to us with instructions to try again and get it right this time," recalled Copps, who voted against the proposed change. "And it is interesting that one of the principal shortfalls the court focused on like a laser was the way those proposed rules sidelined and shortchanged minority ownership."

Copps said media ownership has a direct bearing on how people of color are portrayed in the media.

"And we wonder why the depictions of minorities in our media are so often distorted? We wonder why issues of importance to our many diverse communities don't get the attention they need if they are ever to be resolved? Let's be frank: ownership matters. Truth be told, ownership rules. Unless and until we do something to increase minority ownership, our communications sectors will continue to under serve the great Promise of America."

Another panelist, communications attorney Thomas Hart of Washington, D.C., recommended that the media be more broadly defined and not be limited to traditional TV and radio stations. "I am more concerned about the level of ownership in new media that's coming online now," he said.

Whether it is old or new media, citizens need to understand that the public is poorly served by media consolidation, Copps said.

"This is going to be a heavy lift, let's face up to that right now," Copps warned. "Lots of money, lots of influence are on the consolidators' side. But we have the people. This is not red state against blue, not Democrat versus Republican, not liberal against conservative, not section versus section."

"This is grassroots, All-American, where people live. And it is, in an important way, the latest chapter in the long and often painful struggle to create equal opportunity. This issue is really a new civil rights battleground for America, and we all know that civil rights have to be fought for by every generation."

Counselors

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"I think the going rate is \$75-\$80 per hour," she said. "But even with a co-pay of \$25 per hour each week, sometimes you haven't budgeted an extra \$100 a month for counseling."

Coker said, "Counseling is a White, middle-class activity."

Because of the communal nature of relationships within the African-American community, Coker said, "It's almost unnatural to go to someone other than a family member or a friend."

Coker said African-Americans often present their concerns in secondary forms like hospital emergency room visits and negative attention from law en-

forcement.

"A White person with a briefcase coming up to the front door in the Black community is not good news unless they're holding a big check and a bouquet of flowers," said Joseph Worth, associate professor of counseling at St. Louis Community College-Florissant Valley, a guest lecturer.

Worth said the often punitive or remedial character of mental health services in the Black community is a deterrent to Blacks actively seeking help.

Worth's lecture on the effects of trauma illuminated circumstances that could influence the lives of Black urban students, according to Scott Deppong, a White so-

cial studies and psychology teacher at Beaumont High School. In the future, he said, he would be "slower to react to some of the behavior."

"Now I'll think, 'He may be behaving this way because he has experienced something beyond the scope of a 16-year-old,'" Deppong said.

"It probably has nothing to do with school and class. It's the 16 hours they spend outside of the classroom, and then they have to come in here and survive and not appear weak to their peers," he adds.

"I think it helped me open my eyes."

Pope, the department chair at UMSL, said, "We're pleased with the class because our whole program is

structured around social justice and cultural diversity."

UMSL's Family Therapy program is one of only two nationally accredited programs in counseling in Missouri and the only Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational program in St. Louis. The program, according to Pope, is "very selective" and only admits about 50 percent of all applicants.

"It is critical for our students to have this kind of preparation as they go out to deal with people in St. Louis," Pope said. "And I'm happy that we have someone like Coker on staff to do it."

Meliqueica Meadows writes for the St. Louis American.