

Black publishers plead case amid change

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON - Nearly two centuries since the founding of the first Black Newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, publishers of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the Black Press of America, kicked off their 180th anniversary year hearing exhortations to continue pleading their "own cause" even though the battles have significantly changed.

"When we look at NNPA and all of the publishers, you're our number one resource for finding out the real truth in our community and you are important to us," said Thomas W. Dortch, president of the Atlanta-based 100 Black Men of America, Inc., among a string of noted speakers at the organization's annual Winter Conference

held in Phoenix, Ariz.

"Unless they're shooting somebody, stabbing somebody, cutting somebody, stealing from somebody, that's the only time the other major press wants to write something about us. At least we can come to the Black Press and we can read about good things that are happening in our community... I want to say to you, 'Thank you.' I want to also say to you, 'Good is good, but good means there's room to be better, and better means you need to be best.'"

With that, Dortch exhorted NNPA, the nation's largest membership of Black-owned newspapers with more than 200 publishers, to resist separatism among Blacks by closing ranks, fighting against ills within the community and remem-

bering the global struggle.

"We will trust everybody else who doesn't look like us, who doesn't sound like us, who doesn't have the historical perspective in life and the background that comes from the environment that we do. We will trust everybody else before we are willing to trust ourselves," said Dortch.

A die-hard civil rights and economic justice advocate, who is a recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Service Award, Dortch says social and political separatism in the Black community has become detrimental to progress.

"It is amazing how we get hung up on, 'I'm not going to deal with him or her because they're Republican or they're Democrat, or I'm not going to deal with him or her because she's a member of

Delta and I'm a member of Alpha and he's Omega and there's an AKA over here or whether they're an Alpha or a Kappa.' We let little stupid stuff separate us. In fact, the one common denominator that we all have is that we're all Black and we aren't like the rainbow. We come in different hues and all, but it's not the color of your skin, but it's what's in here and what's up here and how you use it," said Dortch, pointing to his heart and his head.

When Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm founded the *Freedom's Journal* in New York City in 1827, Black people were still in slavery. Therefore, when its inaugural article stated, "We wish to plead our own cause," the paper was declaring its own First Amendment right to free speech.

While the mission of Black newspapers is still to expose social ills that stem from the vestiges of enslavement, Dortch, former state director for then U.S. Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), warned Black publishers to avoid stories that exacerbate divisions between African-

Americans and people of Hispanic and Latino descent.

"Instead of trying to fight people who're trying to find a better life, I tell them I don't have a problem with Hispanic and Mexicans coming into this country. But, I want to make sure that... since you let the Cubans in, I want my brothers and sisters from Haiti to have an opportunity to come here," said the Toccoa, Ga.-born Dortch, who is known as a champion for small businesses, people of color and other marginalized individuals.

Regardless of how many immigrants come, Dortch says the reality is that there is a clear plan that Whites never really lose control; therefore, Black newspapers must be vigilant never to allow African-Americans to remain complacent, he said. "I say these things because it's not about hating anybody. It's about understanding the reality and the responsibility."

The 100 Black Men of America is a mentoring program aimed to improve life quality and opportunities for education and employment

for African-Americans. Dortch, recently re-elected after serving 10 years as president, says Black newspapers must also fight against self-destruction in the Black community.

Having perused the frontpages of many newspapers on display at the conference, Dortch says he was pleased to see the significant attention to the disease of AIDS, which some 1.2 million Americans are living with, half of which are African-Americans, according to the Black AIDS Institute.

"I want to commend all of the papers that I've seen and those leaders in our community who keep sounding the alarm," he said. Without Black newspapers continuing to educate on such ills within the community, more African-Americans will die, he said.

"We're going to kill ourselves. Between the violence, between the health disparities and between the neglect in our communities, we're going to just self-destruct. And so, I challenge you to deal with the issues," he said. "We (See Publishers, Page 4)

'Move'

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north of the border in Canada, where "How She Move" was filmed. The film is brilliant; its star, Rutina Wesley, a child of promise; and its writer, cast and director as cohesive as a well-choreographed step.

"It was a safe environment," Wesley said of the film shoot in Hamilton, Ontario. "We came as strangers and left as friends. 'How She Move' is a story about family and community."

"'How She Move' is a story first," said Dwain Murphy, who plays Bishop, crown prince of the local competition scene. "Dancing is part of it."

Wesley plays Raya Green, 17 years old, incredibly bright and full of promise. While her family lives in a rough-and-tumble neighborhood burdened with crime and conflict, she attends a prestigious private school outside the city. Raya is the neighborhood success story, but also bears the weight of her family's expectations.

Raya's world is turned upside down when her sister, Pam, once a promising dancer and Raya's idol, is found dead, having succumbed to drug addiction. Broken by the tragedy, Raya doesn't know what to do, but she swears to herself that she will not be trapped like her sister, no matter what.

Failure is not an option. "I am happy to be a part of a film that offers hope," said Wesley, a Las Vegas and graduate of the Las Vegas

"I am happy to be a part of a film that offers hope."

— Rutina Wesley
Former Las Vegas Academy drama student



Academy of International Studies, Performing and Visual Arts. "It's a multicultural film. Education is important. Family is important. Dreams are important. Living your dream is important."

"Life, getting there, takes work and heart," she said. "This movie has a lot of heart. I am thankful to be a part of this cast because it's sometimes hard to find good projects."

A Juilliard School graduate, Wesley's first love is dance. She acknowledges that her first dance instructor was Marcia Robinson, director of the West Las Vegas Arts Center.

"Rutina was always an attentive student and she comes from a family of show people," Robinson said. "It's in her blood to be in show business. Rutina has a world of talent and I, for one, expect more great things from her."

Wesley made her Broadway debut last November in "The Vertical Hour" with Dan Bittner, Andrew Scott, Julianne Moore and Bill Nighy. She was also part of the Broadway workshop of

"The Color Purple," directed by Gary Griffin.

For Raya, the obstacles are great — with family resources exhausted by efforts to save Pam, the Greens are no longer able to pay Raya's tuition and she is forced to return to the neighborhood she so desperately wants to escape.

On her return, Raya discovers that underground dance competitions are still the hottest thing going. She smells opportunity — to win money, to get out of the neighborhood, to help her family, to go back to her school.

Raya fights her way into the all-male Jane Street Junta crew, a team led by Bishop, the crown prince of the local competition scene. Before long, she finds herself deeply involved in the very world she has always tried to escape.

As a huge tournament unfolds, along with the team's chance to win \$50,000, Raya discovers that dance is a mirror for life and that real success only comes to those brave enough to tackle it on their own terms.

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