

Bring back summer jobs programming

By Mark H. Morial
Special to Sentinel-Voice

With the end of the school year a few months away, the prospects of putting America's youth to work to keep them off the streets this summer are pretty meager, especially for those living in urban areas, given the lack of federal support and competition for these jobs from other sectors of society.

In 1974, near the end of his administration, President Richard M. Nixon injected nearly \$400 million into Uncle Sam's so-called Summer Jobs Program, which has been around in some form or another since the 1960s.

In 1999, the program was funded at \$871 million and served 500,000 at-risk youth. Since then, the federal government has pretty much taken itself out of the summer youth employment business. In 1998, the U.S. Congress took steps to replace the Job Training Partnership Act, which had funded the Summer Jobs Program in the past, with the Workforce Investment Act. WIA, which went into full effect in 2000, brought systematic change to workforce development in our nation and essentially ended the program as it was known for decades.

It went from a standalone program — with its own budget — to one of 10 youth services required under WIA. In order to participate during the summer, disadvantaged

youth now must be involved throughout the year, a requirement that has increased the cost considerably and severely limited the number of participants. Also, the act made the program optional, giving cities and municipalities the power to spend the WIA money allocated for them wherever they want to spend it.

That was back in 2000 when the U.S. economy was still going strong, the housing market hadn't collapsed and crime was at an all-time low. Since then, the nation has gone to war, the economy has lost some steam and unemployment among youth — especially those who are Black — is higher than that of Whites. According to the National Urban League's 2007 Equality Index, which was officially released on April 17, unemployment among Blacks from the ages of 16 to 19 is 29 percent, compared to 13.2 percent for Whites.

What happens when too many youths have nothing to do all summer long? They get into trouble.

They join gangs, they take drugs, and they get pregnant. Even if they manage to stay out of trouble, they miss out on opportunities to gain desperately needed skills to lift themselves out of the projects, through col-



MARC H. MORIAL

lege, and into a promising future.

Why does the federal government need to play a role in putting low-income disadvantaged youth into summer jobs? Because the likelihood of them securing employment without outside help is not very likely: In 2006, only 17 percent of young Blacks from families with household incomes under

\$20,000 managed to find summer jobs, according to a 2006 study by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies.

The higher the income the better their prospects for teenage Blacks: 38 percent of youth from families with incomes over \$75,000 a year were employed during the summer. But, even Blacks from the most affluent households were less likely to get jobs than Whites from the least-affluent households: 45 percent of Whites from families with incomes under \$20,000 landed summer jobs for 2006.

Affluent Whites outperformed their Black counterparts by 17 percentage points. So, it's not only economic standing but also race that dictates to some extent the success of Black summer job seekers.

That said, it has still been difficult for teenagers of all races and income backgrounds

to find summer employment. From 2000 to 2006, the seasonally adjusted employment rate of youths 16-19 fell from 45 percent to 37.1 percent, despite strong national wage and salary job growth, which usually boosts teen worker demand, according to the Northeastern University study.

This overall reduction, the report surmises, is a result of increased competition from newer immigrants, older workers, older college students home for the summer, and young college graduates unable to obtain jobs in their chosen field of study. It doesn't help that the federal government's commitment to helping keep American youth employed in the summer is a mere shadow of its former self.

This trend is likely to limit opportunities available for youths, especially those from disadvantaged economic backgrounds, which will, in turn, hurt their income earning ability in adulthood.

"For teens, work experience begets more work experience, and cumulative work experience has a high payoff in determining the wages and annual earnings of young adults in their early to mid-20s," the Northeastern University study noted.

In 2000, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, which I led in the early part of the decade, urged U.S. lawmakers, to no avail, to reconsider phasing out the old Summer Jobs Pro-

(See Morial, Page 12)

Life after the I-Mess: Lessons from marketplace

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I often discuss the meaning of power in my classes because it is vital that we understand what real power is and how it is wielded. The Imus situation provided a glaring example of what power is all about. The power of consumerism, the power of ownership and the power of collective outrage were all on display during the latest episode of negative characterizations of Black folks: in this case, Black women. It was also intriguing to see the power that one White man has over so many people, Black and White.

What economic empowerment lesson did we see in the Imus-Rutgers debacle? We saw the power of consumerism when major companies started withdrawing their money from the stations that carried the Imus show. That was a major lesson for Black folks, and I hope we caught it. If corporations use the power of their dollars to exact punishment on transgressors, shouldn't we use the same tactic against them when we are abused?

What those corporations really did was boycott. They understand the power of the dollar, and they voted with their dollars, not because they were afraid of Jesse and Al, not because they loved the Rutgers ladies so

much, and not because they revere righteousness.

They did it because they knew their bottom line might be negatively affected by consumers who were indignant about what had been said. They knew they were in the line of fire and could be economically punished as a result of those words.

We also saw the power of media ownership in this case. Viacom is at the center of much of the negative characterization of Black people via its television outlets, namely BET, MTV, Comedy Central and VH1. The owners of the record companies that approve all the words we hate to hear are also involved in this debate, but they always seem to hide their hands, and we always seem to give them a free pass.

These companies have allowed the same words, and much worse, to go out over the airwaves and under their record labels for years with impunity. Why has it taken so long for our outrage to surface? Imus has been doing his thing for years.

Many of the folks who protested his words had never even heard of this guy prior to his



JAMES CLINGMAN

comments about Rutgers. But those who did know about his show and listened to him regularly knew his shtick and have heard him go off on many other people. Where have they been hiding?

Collective power brought the I-Man down. The thought of collective consumer power being turned against the advertisers made major companies

shake in their boots and withdraw their dollars. The lesson of collective power should not be lost on Black people as we deal with economic apartheid and discrimination.

The way we recoiled at those negative words from Imus is the same way we should be reacting to those words — and many others — coming from our own brothers and sisters; words that are financed and promoted by media moguls who couldn't care less about how we feel, that is, until we start withdrawing our money from them and turning off their channels.

The Rutgers ladies — young, gifted and Black — will land on their feet; Imus, a millionaire, I am sure, will land on his feet. But what will Black folks gain from this situation? Will we begin to work collectively to get what we say we need? Will we finally call for an end to the mindless and endless insults being thrown at our women in videos and movies? Will we put as much energy into stopping these same words and phrases emanating from our own as we put into getting Imus fired?

Will we use the lessons of the marketplace to implement a collective and cooperative strategy to move from protests to economic progress? All we have to do is follow the examples of those major corporations.

What will life be like after the I-Mess?

Well, if we do nothing, it will be the same as it has been for years, for Black people. Back to status quo in a week or two; back to watching and listening to the insulting lyrics; back to buying all the products being hustled to us by the sponsors of the television and radio shows; and back to business as usual, right?

The name-calling is not the real issue here. Rather, what we have seen is an exercise in economic power.

They can try to dress it up any way they want, apologies all around. But what we saw from the media outlets and the corporations was not a manifestation of the love, regard and respect for Black women; it was all about the love of the dollars spent by Black women, who are the primary decision-makers for expenditures in households across the U.S.

If their concern was for the emotional trauma to Black women, they would have pulled their ads and fired a few other folks a long time ago. As for us, Black people, we had better ratchet-up the policing of our own. We can never have real communities if we do not have a code of conduct. Even criminals in prison have a code of conduct. There are some lines we must not allow ourselves to cross, especially when it comes to respecting our children, our elders and our women.

Let's use this lesson to build an economic foundation and to clean the trash out of our own collective house. Turn off those channels that insult Black people. Don't purchase, don't listen to and don't support the degrading lyrics. Stop giving music awards to those who characterize Black women in a manner far worse than Imus did.

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Curry

(Continued from Page 10)

Edwards by calling him the "Breck Girl." Rather than addressing these issues, supporters of Don Imus have resorted to attacking Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton.

We should not be confused by clever effort to switch the focus of this debate. Pat Buchanan calls the firing, "The Imus Lynch Party," and Rush Limbaugh proclaims that "minorities never do anything for which they have to apologize."

Buchanan forgets who the real lynching victims were in America, and I could write a separate column chronicling the numerous instances of African-Americans making public apologies.

Let's stick to the point: Talk radio is dominated by right-wingers who enjoy hurling racist and sexist barbs. They should follow Imus out of the door.

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