

NAACP lends aid in French civil rights fight

By Dorothy Rowley
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Race is the most common denominator for understanding disparities between minority groups.

Particularly as it relates to Black people keeping in tune with W.E.B. DuBois' issue of the color line—an issue he advised would be a problem in the 20th century.

According to the interim president of the NAACP, those sentiments are just as much a problem in the 21st century, except they carry over to countries like France, which fail to acknowledge race as a problem.

"Black French men and women see themselves as French citizens, but yet their absence in society from public positions [such as] meaningful corporate jobs is leading them to feel that they aren't respected within French society," said Dennis

C. Hayes.

"They are being criticized and even castigated because they dare raise the question. But there are some people there who are courageously daring to ask the question."

Hayes said he made those observations during a recent trip to Paris, as part of an NAACP delegation invited to assist French Black leaders and other ethnic groups organize against racial tensions and disparities that have been impeding that country.

A couple of years ago, tensions got out of hand with several days of rioting in some of Paris's poorest suburbs. The discontent was mostly highlighted among French youths, many of whom were of North African descent, according to reports.

French news sources at the time, also reported that much of the unrest centered around the issue of discrimination, stating it as a leading

source of frustration.

The country had also been experiencing high levels of unemployment among its ghetto residents, the news sources reported.

The delegation, which also included NAACP chair emeritus Myrlie Evers-Williams; NAACP interim general counsel Angela Ciccolo as well as Harvard University Law School professor Charles J. Ogletree Jr., met with the Conseil Representatif des Associations Noires (CRAN), the first national Black organization in France.

CRAN was established in 2005 as an umbrella organization of Black advocacy groups in France and is comprised of diverse African and West Indian associations.

The NAACP said the trip was part of a continuing relationship between the civil rights organization and CRAN that was launched a year ago.

"CRAN financed the trip for a few activists from the United States to come over and share with them their experiences," said Hayes.

During the delegation's weeklong stay that began March 31, the group also attended and conducted workshops for CRAN's third annual Spring Conference on Diversity and the State of Black France.

"We were asked mainly to assist crime [fighting efforts] as [CRAN] strove to build a civil rights organization such as the NAACP," Hayes told the AFRO this week.

"They wanted to learn from the NAACP with regard to its experiences in organizing a civil rights entity," Hayes said the delegation primarily detailed experiences dealing with racism in the United States and what it would take to put together an organization that can survive the tests any such organization would be subjected to

both internally and externally.

At the same time, Hayes said the NAACP was enlightened to the extent of racial tensions in France.

"We've always been involved in alliances overseas," said Hayes. "We've been very engaged," he said adding that Dubois was one of the original pan-Africanists.

"He constantly preached about the connectivity between Africans throughout the Diaspora. So we've often given counsel to our international groups," said Hayes.

"We are a nongovernmental entity at the United Nations. We have NAACP branches in Germany, Italy and Japan. At some time immediately after the war (World War II), we had branches in France, Spain and other parts of Europe."

In recalling a visit to France last year, Hayes said he toured tenements outside

of Paris that had been burned by minority populations in protest over the lack of jobs, unemployment and opportunities within companies where there were virtually no Black elected officials.

"This [kind of situation] has left the African French feeling that despite France's claim of liberty, equality and fraternity, that they are not seen as part of the country's universality and that they do not enjoy equality," said Hayes.

"So their situation is not a whole lot unlike that of Blacks in this country, except America has acknowledged its race problem," he said.

On the other hand, "France does not acknowledge a race problem," said Hayes. "France declares itself a raceless society to the extent that if there are racial differences, they attribute those differences to class."

Dorothy Rowley writes for Afro American Newspapers.

Women

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way, but institutionalized racism still exists. Is that how they still view Blacks? As rough? And Black women as 'ho's? Despite what those girls accomplished?"

Andrea Matthew, a student at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, N.Y., agrees, "People like him say those things because they are racist. He was standing next to a person that used the term jigaboo. How old is that word," Matthew said. In the wake of Imus' comments, many people blamed the popularity of hip-hop music and its usual misogynist lyrics that make up the songs for influencing Imus.

"It is nothing new," said Madelyn Mitchell, a parking enforcement official in Washington. Mitchell says hip-hop is not the only genre of music that degrades women, from country to rock.

But, Alexis Logan says, Blacks too often adopt for themselves what has been intended to be negative. "We shouldn't claim those words because that is not us," said Logan, a first year law student at Howard. "A 'ho' is a promiscuous woman, not a promiscuous Black woman or a promiscuous White woman."

Despite the fact that hip-hop videos feature Black women in scantily clad clothes in which they respond to degrading names, women must control how they allow themselves to be degraded in real

life.

"I was taught to answer to nothing other than my name," said Matthew. "I honestly think these girls did not get enough hugs while they were growing up."

Matthew cites Karrine Steffans, the self-proclaimed 'video vixen' who was raped and abused as a child: "When things like this happen to people, they feel sub-human and that's why they respond to a name equivalent to a female dog."

Still the record industry makes billions a year on recordings and videos because people are buying them.

"The girls in the videos degrade themselves for fast money," said Wanda Henderson, owner of a combined hair studio and barber-shop. "When I was growing up, I never thought of stripping or anything that was disrespectful, so I got into doing hair. These girls need to learn a trade and go to school. There is a way to make good money without degrading yourself." Not all Black women agree with the furor over Imus.

One mother, 69, thinks the situation is being blown out of proportion and that it is time to move on. "We must forgive Imus," said Georgia Weekes of New York City.

Weekes said that Rev. Jesse Jackson, one of the front men behind the firing of Imus, made a mistake and was forgiven. "When he had

a child outside of his marriage, didn't his wife forgive him?"

Weekes' daughter, Sandra Wilkins, a mother of two daughters, and a listener of Imus for about five years agrees. "We must look at the totality of the man. He is not a racist, he just says insensitive things. When Hurricane Katrina happened, Imus was

Nicotine

(Continued from Page 1) says. Finally, an intern, seeing his frustration, gave him a cat scan.

"She found it. She found a tumor on my lung," said Greer. "It's still there."

That was three years ago. Greer has been fighting for his life ever since.

"They gave me two to seven months to live," he recalls. Through chemotherapy, natural herbs, prayer, and love and care from his wife, Bobbie, he is now in his third year since the prognosis.

"I couldn't believe it. All the time I quit and that stuff still comes back on me," said Greer, who quit 15 years ago after smoking for 42 years. But, even then, he saw the signs.

Ever since he started smoking at 12 years old, enticed by the suave, macho images of Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne in the movies, Greer had been in love with the drag.

"It was a cool thing," he

on his show collecting money and asked politicians what were they doing," Wilkins recalls.

The Imus Cattle Ranch for Kids with Cancer in Ribera, New Mexico, reportedly has a 10 percent African-American population. Last week, his annual telethon raised more than \$1 million for his ranch and four other

children's charities.

An array of questions will remain in the aftermath of the "Imus incident." Now that he is off the radio, what will happen? Will free speech suffer? Will women be respected more in pop culture? Will rappers change their language? Will rappers be held to the same standard? Or in a month — will America have

forgotten that this even happened?

"It's time to take a stand," said Henderson. "We don't need to support them any longer. These guys have more talent and they need to re-write the lyrics as if they were speaking to their mothers."

Shari Logan writes for the Capstone News Network.

recalls almost euphorically. "Everybody smoked. All my friends smoked. It was the thing... Then one day [about 15 years ago] I was driving — me and a friend of mine coming home from the job — and I was just coughing and I told him, I said, 'Man, I've got to be a fool. I'm setting up here and these cigarettes are making me cough.' I'm just coughing away," recalls the now 71-year-old.

"I just threw the whole pack out the window, just like that. And I never smoked again."

By then, it was too late. Among his favorite pastimes now is insisting that his family and friends quit smoking and get cancer screenings of all kinds.

The CDC reports that smoking-related diseases cause 45,000 deaths a year in the Black community.

"I talk to them all the time, I say, 'Y'all don't want to be like me.' This is really, really a heck of a thing. People really don't know

what the stuff will do to you. And they don't know what chemo and radiation will do to your body. It tears you apart," he said.

"I like talking to people about it because I don't want to see anybody go through what I went through. It's really a bad thing. You really suffer a lot."

Even as he tries to convince his friends, Greer and other advocates for quitting smoking have enemies who are just as determined.

"Tobacco companies sell billions of cigarettes and cigars in Black communities. One reason is because of target marketing. That's when a company picks out certain groups and uses ads to get their attention, says a chapter in the CDC report titled, "Tobacco Products: They Sell, We Buy."

It continues, "No community should ever be targeted with a product that kills. Tobacco companies reach the Black community with glitzy ads that give the wrong mes-

sage — especially to children. Tobacco ads show only beautiful people. They never show people who become sick and die because they smoked."

Greer, through faith and good humor, speaks freely of his plight even as he prepares for yet another bout with cancer.

On Feb. 14, he was leaving a restaurant after lunch with his daughter when he reached for his seatbelt and his arm snapped.

"It went, 'pow!' Just like that," he described.

The lung cancer had spread. He was diagnosed with bone cancer and is preparing to start new rounds of chemotherapy this week.

Whether the 15 to 25 cents he once paid for a pack of cigarettes or the five and six dollars that some people pay today, "I look at these people... They've got to be out of their minds," he said. "I'm going to tell you something. I hate to see anybody smoke."