

Spelman students ridicule degrading TV

By Nisa Islam Muhammad
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"Dear Ms. Lee, when I heard about a letter writing campaign to BET, I knew I had to participate because I am disgusted with images of Black women in the media, particularly those provided by television and music videos. I can no longer tolerate the way women are portrayed and the disgusting way that BET perpetuates this behavior.

"I will never understand how a company that is supposed to be the voice for Black people, makes them

look worse than any other organization in the world. Some of the videos that are played at BET can be classified as pornographic. The lyrics to the songs, with these outrageous videos, are just as alarming. Black women are all depicted as nothing but sexual objects and their only value stemming from various parts of their bodies."

That's how the "strong letter" begins to Debra Lee, CEO of BET. Angela Boudreaux from Houston, Texas, a sophomore at Spelman College in Atlanta, Ga. started her second year

of writing letters to express her disdain of the images of Black women on TV.

"I started the first one last year at convocation; I was excited and passionate about doing something. I did it for two days, but only got eight letters," she told *The Final Call*.

What a difference a year makes. This year, convocation came in the middle of the Don Imus controversy. Imus called the Rutgers Women's basketball team, "Nappy headed 'ho's'" on his radio show.

Those remarks led to his

firing by CBS and MSNBC, and a nationwide conversation about those remarks, rap lyrics and the images of Black women in the media.

"I created an organization called WORTH — Women Offering Representation That Heals. My faculty advisor is Dr. Tasha Stanley. She's been my personal mentor, too. WORTH took over the letter writing campaign this year," Boudreaux said.

"This year it was a weeklong campaign and different organizations sponsored a day to get letters signed. We've gathered over

100 letters."

WORTH is offering students a choice of three letters to sign — strong, moderate or passive.

Majidah Muhammad, a sophomore from Silver Springs, Md., signed the moderate letter, which included the following:

"With all of the influence and power that BET has as a global network for Black entertainment, it is capable of changing how the world views Black people through new, innovative and revolutionary shows that offer a much wider range of personalities and lifestyles within the Black race.

"As Black Entertainment Television, it is your responsibility to create the most comprehensive representation of Black life and entertainment. Should you choose to ignore these suggestions, you are openly turning your back on the prospect of a better Black Entertainment Television network. I hope that you will choose to do the right thing."

Muhammad told *The Final Call*, "I was excited when I heard about the letter writing campaign and wanted to be a part of it. I signed the

letter that critiqued what they were doing, but also encouraged them to do something better."

Writing letters to BET is not the only thing the letter writing campaign is doing. They are also circulating a petition thanking TV One for their positive depiction of Black women. So far, they have over 300 signatures.

"Thank you, TV One, for airing positive, multi-dimensional representations of Black people to ourselves and the world! Thank you for being a network that educates and entertains. Thank you for being a network that inspires, motivates and uplifts Black America.

"Most importantly, thank you for not being like BET! As a sign of our thanks, please know that those listed below support your network because you are different! We do not support BET or networks like it, and recognize the need for more networks like you! We thank you again!"

The students at Spelman have distinguished themselves as opposing the negative images of Black women in the music and media.

(See *Spelman*, Page 11)

Marathon highlings rap's positives

NEW YORK (AP) - Curtis Sherrod knows there's power in numbers. So when he decided to organize more than 100 rappers and poets in a 24-hour rap marathon where no cursing is allowed, he only saw the good that could come from it.

"There's a feeling of fellowship and communal family spirit that's generated when people are talking about positive things, about peace, about creativity," said Sherrod, co-founder of the Global Artists Coalition, a New York nonprofit organization dedicated to career development for young people.

"It affects your mentality. Just in the same way if you

heard [lyrics about] bang-bang shoot-shoot, for a couple of hours, you'd leave feeling a certain way. [The positive messages] have to affect you," Sherrod said.

Rap legend Kool Herc, credited as the founder of hip-hop, is set to kick off Saturday evening's "rap-a-thon," a fundraiser for Harlem's Hip-Hop Culture Center, the city's first permanent hip-hop exhibit and the community center established by the coalition. Tickets are \$100, and organizers hope to raise \$250,000, which would enable the center to operate with daily business hours. Currently, groups can only visit the center by appointment. The event will

be streamed live on GAC's website.

The event is also an attempt to set a world record for continuous rapping. According to Sherrod, participants will rhyme freestyle in carefully staggered two-minute increments. Each MC will be partnered with another rapper who will step in if the other flubs a line. A freestyle host will also be present to pick up any additional slack, and so will the audience.

"If the host messes up, the audience is full of MCs," Sherrod explains. "And they've been instructed to chime in at any point to say 'Rock, ya don't stop/Keep on, ya don't stop ... 'It's a communal type thing, everyone's an MC."

Given the recent debates on the usage of the n-word and increasing scrutiny of violence and misogyny in rap in the wake of the Don Imus scandal, organizers hope this event shows hip-hop in a different light. "We want to demonstrate that hip-hop can do something that's positive in nature ... without cursing, without foul language," said Terry Nelson, the other founder of the coalition.

"It's all about balance," Sherrod adds. "People who want record deals will make records that will allow them to get a record deal. But you can't use the rappers who choose to go that route as a blanket statement for all rappers. For every (gangsta rapper), there's ten other rappers that are trying to do positive things."

In addition to the rap-a-thon, local politicians and business owners are set to conduct a dinner seminar on the importance of young people exploring other career interests in case their aspira-

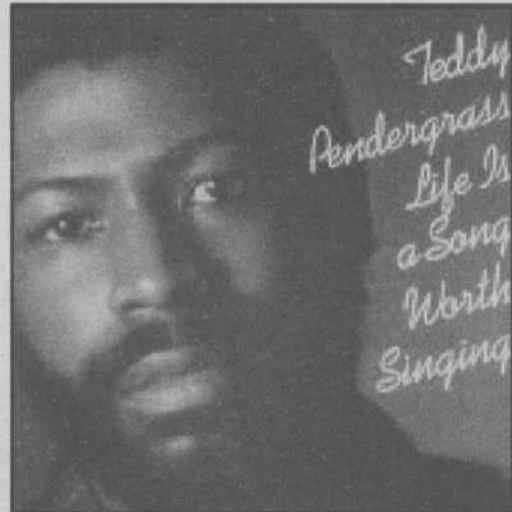
tions of becoming a rapper or DJ don't pan out.

"We're showing kids that having a plan B is necessary, that they shouldn't put all their eggs in one basket because entertainment can be an unstable industry," said Raqiyah Mays, a host on New York City hip-hop station Hot97 (WQHT-97.1), which is a sponsor of the event. "It's important that young people think bigger, dream bigger."



WE DO
Nick Cannon proposed to Victoria's Secret model Selita Ebanks on Monday in Times Square. "Selita will you marry me?" flashed on a giant TV screen. The young couple met at a Super Bowl party in Miami in February.

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