

Black fathers viewed as valued, powerful

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LAS VEGAS (NNPA) - Some Black fathers come home wearing a suit and tie every day. Some may arrive wearing coveralls, speckled with paint. Others come wearing a blue-collar uniform after riding the garbage truck. Still others come home after a long day of just looking for work.

No matter the circumstances, if they arrive in the spirit of love, they bring a power to the home that cannot be substituted.

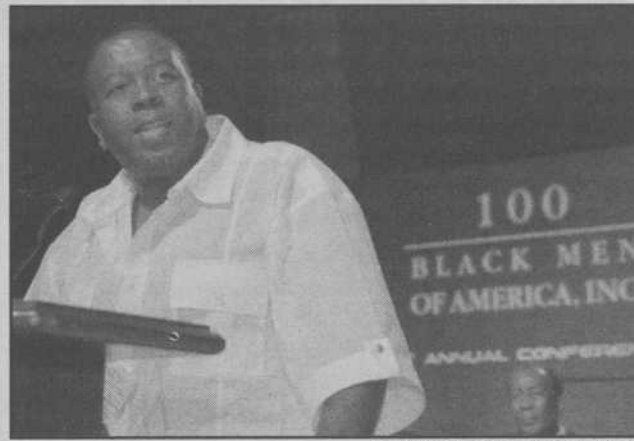
That is the sentiment of men interviewed by the NNPA News Service during the 100 Black Men of America's 21st Annual Conference in Las Vegas, last week.

With the theme, "Taking Control of Our Future" as a backdrop, they all concluded

one thing: The experiences of a Black man in America can be transformed into a mobilizing force that every child can look up to and admire.

"You look at the way that this country was built on the backs of Black men," said record producer Kashif, a former orphan who is now raising two foster children as a single father. "You look at the fact that millions of us survived the journey from Africa to here. And we survived the journey of America. So, we have the power to instill in our young people how to build a nation of resources," he said.

"The knowledge, the energy, the development, when we're there, the whole world is an unlimited universe," said the now millionaire, who, as Michael Jones grew up in at least eight foster homes in Brooklyn, N.Y.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Malcolm Ali

Music producer Kashif, national spokesman for foster care.

"But, when we're absent, obviously that takes away from the power of the Black family. Black men bring power into a family, even if it's not our family, just creating a family like I did by adopting two boys."

According to the National Urban League's State of Black America 2007 report, the future of the Black man

is critical to the "American family." Statistics on the Black man run the gambit from being six times more likely than White men to be incarcerated to nine times more likely to be killed by firearms, to nearly eight times more likely to suffer from AIDS. Of single parent Black households, only 12 percent were led by men. More than two-thirds of Black children live in one-parent households in 2005, the majority headed by women.

Notwithstanding the statistics, there are millions of Black fathers who are living at home or at least doing right by their children and fami-

lies. Here in Las Vegas, where more than 2,000 Black men registered for this conference to discuss answers to the problems, the crisis somehow appeared dwarfed.

"You can look into every community — the White community, the Asian community — and find fathers who aren't doing what they ought to do," said Thomas W. Dortch Jr. of Atlanta, president emeritus of the national organization. He and his wife have five children, including one adopted.

"The power of having a Black father or having a Black man in that home is tremendous because it gives symbolism... My father was a hero, a strong male figure who did not allow us to be tainted by what was out there or by the struggles that he went through. All we know is that we had a father who loved us and cared. We had a mother who loved us. We had parents who worked hard and sacrificed for us."

The 100 Black Men of America Inc., with 110 chapters around the country, is a mentoring organization that seeks to give a strong presence of the Black male to the

lives of children — male and female — from all walks of life. It encourages Black men to share their lives, thereby impacting the negative statistics.

"The Black man should set an example and be a role model for his children and all children in his community," said Dr. William Hayling, founding president of the organization. "I'm an obstetrician. I helped to give birth to this organization. And I'm proud to see that after 21 years, the 100 Black Men is a grown man ...and we're getting bigger and bigger and bigger and doing good things with these children."

Every man is able to bring something to the table, says Vaughn Evans of Sacramento, honored as this year's "mentor of the year."

Evans, who has three children of his own, but has mentored thousands, says regardless of a father's occupation, "if you're in the home, that's leadership. That's the role of a man. So, he is providing, he is loving, he is nurturing, he is teaching. Without that, then it falls to a woman. A woman can-

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Biden

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group to raise the organization's profile. The small session was held in the press room at the event.

Biden says that children often won't do well in life "until they realize something else is out there. They realize it just by seeing it. They figure it out," he said. He said among the keys to better quality education is good teachers and longer school hours. He says his health care plan would have a \$22 billion price tag, but would ensure that "every single, solitary child in America" has insurance.

Biden's statement about his colleagues' lack of knowledge about 'decent' Black business men and women was clearly his way of explaining their inability

to understand the need for certain legislation. But, it harkened back to his comment about his colleague, Sen. Barack Obama, earlier this year. Black leaders roundly criticized Biden for describing Obama as "articulate" and "clean."

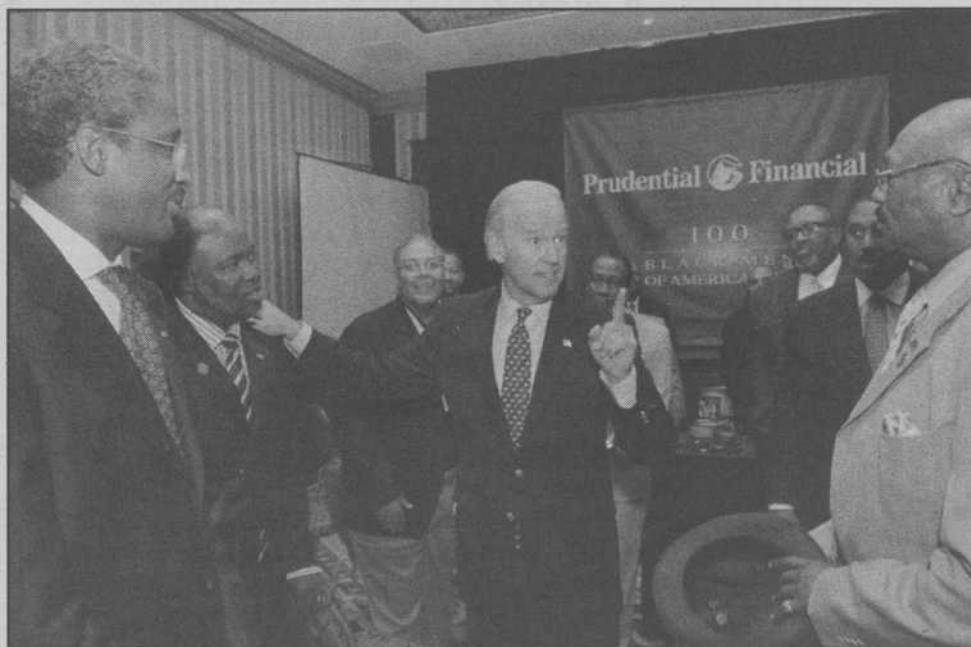
Leading Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama had also been invited among other candidates, but did not attend. The 100 is a non-profit tax exempt organization with 106 chapters throughout the U.S. Chairman Albert E. Dotson Jr. and former chairman Thomas Dortch were careful to state that there would be no endorsement of any political candidates. IRS regulations prohibit 501c3 tax exempt organizations from making political endorsements. But

they are allowed to hold educational forums, such as they did with Biden.

Presidential candidates are being strongly criticized by Black political pundits for focusing so much on the war that they appear to be neglecting urban issues and issues that disparately affect Black people.

U.S. Rep. John Conyers, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, who attended the organization's convention the day after Biden was to receive the coveted "Man of the Year" award.

He shook his head when asked if he agreed with Biden's assessment about the members of Congress. "There he goes again," Conyers said. "He just doesn't get it."



Sentinel-Voice photo by Malcolm Ali

U.S. Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.), presidential candidate, speaks to executive committee and other members of the 100 Black Men of America in a small group session at Bally's.

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