

Teenage journalists react to n-word burial

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - By the time the epitaph had been said over the n-word, symbolically buried by the NAACP last week, youth around the nation had already dug it back up thousands of times.

"Wait a minute. Did they bury 'e-r' or 'g-a'?" asked 16-year-old LaNesha Kearse, a student in the NovelTeensInk summer journalism camp, being held at

Howard University. In one of 25 written responses to the action by the NAACP, Kearse explained, "Nigga is a word used by minorities that means friend or person you have love for. 'Nigger' is a derogatory name used to degrade a certain people because of their skin color. They are both one in the same, but have multiple meanings. People don't call each other 'niggers,' they call each other 'niggas.'"

Brian Sprowl, 14, said the

NAACP did the right thing, but, he added, "To be perfectly honest, the n-word will never go away," he writes. "Racists will always use this word as a derogatory term towards Blacks, and Blacks will always use this word as a form of bonding with each other."

So stated the budding young journalists, who were given five minutes to write their thoughts and submit them to NNPA. Some of the teens not only insinuated that

the NAACP had buried the wrong word, but also questioned what else the 98-year-old civil rights organization had done during its six-day convention in Detroit.

"I am writing a story about AIDS/HIV in the Washington, D.C., area. I look around the African-American community I live in and what I see on TV. There are teens killing teens," writes 17-year-old Jasmine Berry. "If we can... just fix more of the bigger

issues, the small ones, for example, how we talk to each other, will all fall into place. You can symbolically bury the n-word. Yet that doesn't fix the real issues around us."

The organization dealt heavily with civil rights issues during the conference, including the announcement of a major housing law suit. But, the march and symbolic burial of the n-word, with the support of thousands of teen NAACP members, attracted the most attention.

An expert on teen thinking says the word is used so often among youth for reasons that many would least expect.

Wanda Gnahoui, a child psychiatrist in the District of Columbia's Department of Mental Health says she hears the n-word used among youth in correctional programs all the time. Often, it's a struggle for power, she says.

"It's how they identify with the person who's in power because you don't want to be the person not in power. The system that brought it about is still in power," said Gnahoui. She says whether the word is said out loud is not the issue to them as long as youth are made to feel less than.

"Without cleaning up the schools, without preparing adequate teachers, without taking their parents off drugs, without taking the gangs out of schools, to them, it's pretty meaningless."

Just as easily as some scoffed at the burial, a few revealed strong knowledge of the word's history.

"Our [Black] ancestors were forced into slavery, abused and broken. As they were whipped, angry [White] men spat on them, calling them niggers, as if they weren't as valuable as dirt," writes Sharanda Adams, 15. "How dare we make a mockery of such a conspiracy and turn such an ugly word into a popular, as well as accepted, part of our everyday vocabulary. In my opinion, both words mean the same thing."

But the historicity of the word is the very reason 16-year-old Catherine Ball says the word should not have been buried.

"Even though this word is a bad part of history, it's still history. It's a [word] that reminds us of what our ancestors had to do to struggle. ...So that we could not only live freely, but think free-

dom," she writes. "This word is to make sure that I would not let history repeat itself."

On the other hand, Quincy Peterson, 16, says let it stay buried.

"I feel it's a good idea to attempt doing something like that. I just hope it works," he said. I feel that the n-word shouldn't be used and that [it] is a word that should stay in the past."

James Ratcliff, 18, agrees that the n-word, among the most volatile words in the English language, has been put to rest.

"That word has plagued the Black nation for years and years," he writes. "I am so happy that they're doing this. Maybe the [B]lacks and [W]hites of the USA will stop using it."

Ironically, the only White student in the group, Molly Korad, 15, perceives that the use of the word is more of an issue among Blacks.

"Being White myself, I don't say it, I never have, and I don't know any White people who do. I have only heard about them," Korad writes. "It is a slur and massively offensive. However, it can be used in different ways within the Black community, and I think that is where the real issue and debate truly lies."

Part of the reason the symbolic burial will have little effect on masses of youth is because they don't relate to the NAACP, says Gnahoui.

"It will not have any impact whatsoever on the use of the word because they're not in tune with the NAACP," she said.

Christian Freeman, 15, agrees.

"I don't understand why the NAACP would symbolically bury the n-word, when the n-word would be kept alive by many other people in the world who support it."

The journalism camp, held for the second summer at Howard, concentrates on allowing teens to experiment with expressing themselves through journalism.

Accordingly, Joseph White, 17, indicates he is more concerned about the First Amendment than the n-word.

"I can't say I'm proud that they're doing this, because I use the word very often," he said.

"I think that it doesn't really matter if the 'n' word is buried or not. It's a free country. So people can say whatever they want to."

Rollins to lead N.O. Urban League

By Ernest Alexander
Special to Sentinel-Voice

BALTIMORE (NNPA) - Nolan V. Rollins, senior vice president of the Greater Baltimore Urban League, has been named new president/CEO of the Urban League of Greater New Orleans.

Rollins, 35, was selected after a 10-month national search and interview process to fill the seat left vacant by the retirement of Edith Gee Jones in August last year. Excited about the vast opportunities for change in New Orleans, Rollins credits his extensive work over the past few years in Baltimore as the beacon that caught the attention of the National Urban

League.

"My profile came across someone's desk and they reached out to me and said, 'Listen, we see that you are doing some different things in Baltimore that would be very useful here in New Orleans, especially as we rebuild and try to make one of the more forward thinking Urban Leagues. Your type of skill set is something we need,'" said Rollins.

While serving the 87-year-old civil rights organization, Rollins has successfully directed, planned and implemented all of the economic and community development strategies including housing and commercial re-

ality; worked with corporations and foundations to support financial empowerment programs; helped coordinate and create business partnerships to increase local minority business participation in the Urban League and community; and drafted bond bills for capital build-outs and rehabilitation as well as overseeing \$2.5 billion for economic and inclusion opportunities.

"Because we haven't suffered a Katrina-like catastrophe and because we were on the movement upward as far as economic empowerment goes, for regular citizens those things can be taken directly with me.

"Those things that we put in place here, can be used in New Orleans now to make sure that they move quicker than they may have moved without it going down," said Rollins.

Although Rollins doesn't officially start until Aug. 1, he has already met with the supporters and members of New Orleans Urban League at the Urban League's Annual Golden Gala on June 16, and is currently transitioning between Baltimore and New Orleans as he makes accommodation on business and personal levels.

Ernest Alexander writes for the Afro-American Newspapers.

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(Continued from Page 4) impact people of color in general and African-Americans in particular," said Moore.

"It's a pleasure to work with such a diverse team of smart and committed people."

When asked to identify those African-Americans in Southern California who have signed on under the Clinton column, Senator Clinton named legendary entertainer Quincy Jones, music mogul Clarence Avant and his wife, Jackie, and

well-known businesswoman Alice Huffman.

Although it's still early in this heated race, it's clear the battle for Black votes is on. Democratic Party officials believe this will be one of the most competitive scrambles for Black supporters since the Voting Rights Act was passed four decades ago. And what's also clear is the Black vote is not a guarantee for a Black candidate.

When Illinois Senator Barack Obama threw his hat into the political ring, many African Americans — some

longtime Clinton supporters — were excited about the man who could become the country's first Black president, yet they found themselves in a political quagmire.

How do you abandon a team that's been there for Black America?

"Bill and Hillary Clinton have been in the trenches — side by side with us for decades," said Avant. "They're like family and you have to respect that."

In the one-on-one interview, Clinton, who could be-

come the first female president of the U.S., said she understands the "difficult decision" facing African Americans who see Obama as standing on the brink of history, too.

"It will be a difficult choice, but I'm hoping I can earn their vote," said Clinton. However, she doesn't believe the Black community "owes her."

"I've been blessed. I've been able to participate in many of the good things and stand against some of the bad ones in the last decade. But I don't think in politics you can ever assume that anybody owes you anything. We're all free people and we have a right to make our minds about who we vote for based on any factor whatsoever," Clinton said.

She is hoping, however, that African-Americans remember the Clinton record on civil rights.

"But what I hope is that people will see in me someone who has been in these struggles for a long time. ..."

Stephanie Frederic writes for the Los Angeles Sentinel.

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(Continued from Page 9) home foreclosures and other indications of a crisis in the availability of housing for either sale or rent for low-income residents.

But as positive as this suit may be, there is critical pressure on public housing residents as witnessed by protests that have broken out in the last few months.

A national protest on the Mall in Washington, D.C., was sponsored by tenants from Philadelphia and other cities which drew more than 500 residents and the homeless — many others not having the funds or housing to make the trip.

Other protests were conducted in Atlanta

and New York City against their Housing Authorities.

If our civil rights organizations have a soft underbelly, it is that too often they advocate on behalf of the middle class rather than dipping down where people are not only discriminated against and are in pain, but have few or no options.

In any case, it is heartening to see the NAACP still on the battlefield, growing stronger, planning to keep up the struggle in the midst of such public questioning about whether they are needed in the 21st century.

Ron Walters is a Director of the African American Leadership Institute.