

Baggy-pants debate lags on

ATLANTA (AP) - Striped underpants peeked out of 19-year-old Jae Cripe's outfit as she took a stand Tuesday at an Atlanta City Council meeting next to a sign that proclaimed: "Clothes are not a crime."

Across the crowded room, 76-year-old James Allen was making his own statement, talking about the start of a "belt brigade" that could one day patrol the streets to urge kids to pull up their baggy pants.

It was a snapshot of the brewing debate in Atlanta over a measure that would outlaw baggy pants that show boxer shorts or thongs. Offenders would risk a civil penalty — likely a fine — but no jail time, said the proposal's sponsor, councilman C.T. Martin.

"We cannot continue to allow our community standards to go astray, and not stand up," he said.

Critics have claimed the measure is a new form of racial profiling that would allow police to target young Black males who wear their pants far below the beltline.

"These are the hope of the future of young Black men. They look at you as role models," resident Kim Bryant told the panel. "Yet you'd be willing to put them in jail because they didn't wear a belt."

But if Tuesday's hearing was any indication, the divide appears to center on age, not race. The bill's sponsors are Black council members, and most of the supporters who spoke were aging residents who peppered their speeches with anecdotes of the Civil Rights Movement.

"I don't think we're doing our ancestors due justice for some of the things we are doing today. It's time for us to push back," said Lonnie King, an Atlanta resident. "We cannot afford to let young people decide what's best for our community. Young people have a lot of good ideas, but we cannot allow them to denigrate our society."

The critics, including Cripe, a White woman who stood silently in the back of the room with her striped underwear on display, tended to be younger.

"It should be my personal choice what to wear," said Jimmy Person, 34. "Maybe young people should be more

tasteful. But let young people decide for themselves."

R.E. Williams, a veteran Atlanta police officer, said he views the saggy pants trend as a measure of sorts because "the lower the pants are, the lower the self-esteem."

"It's a downright disgrace to walk into a classroom with your pants around your ankles," he said. "We need to let them know they are somebody — that they can rise above the occasion."

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T-shirts banned in Jena 6 case

JENA, La. (AP) - Officials at a central Louisiana high school have banned tee-shirts supporting six Black students accused of beating of a White schoolmate, saying the shirts are too disruptive.

About nine students at Jena High School wore the "Free the Jena 6" tee-shirts Tuesday, and the slogan caused too much of a stir on campus, said LaSalle Parish Schools Superintendent Roy Breithaupt.

John Jenkins said his three daughters wore the shirts to make a statement, not to cause trouble.

"They weren't doing anything other than wearing the shirts," Jenkins said. "The school doesn't have a dress code. They were covered. They're trying to tell them what they can and can't wear."

His son, Carwin Jones, is one of the six students charged with attempted murder in the December 2006 beating of 18-year-old Justin Barker. Barker was treated for a swollen and cut face and released the same day, and his mother in a news interview acknowledged that he went to a social function that night.

The attempted murder charges sparked outrage in the Black community and drew attention from the American Civil Liberties Union, which is now monitoring the cases. Rev. Al Sharpton has also spoken up for the six students, saying the attempted-murder charges indicate a different standard of justice for Blacks and Whites.

One of the students, Mychal Bell, 17, was convicted on a reduced charge of aggravated second-degree battery and faces up to 22 years in prison. He had initially faced attempted murder charges. The other five teens are awaiting trial on attempted murder and conspiracy charges, though some of the charges have recently been reduced in some of the cases.

Racial tensions surfaced in Jena — a town of 2,900 with about 350 Black residents — last fall, when students at the high school found three nooses hanging from a tree, considered traditionally a meeting place for "Whites only." It was reported that some Black students had recently chosen to sit on the site. Three White students were suspended, but no criminal charges were filed.

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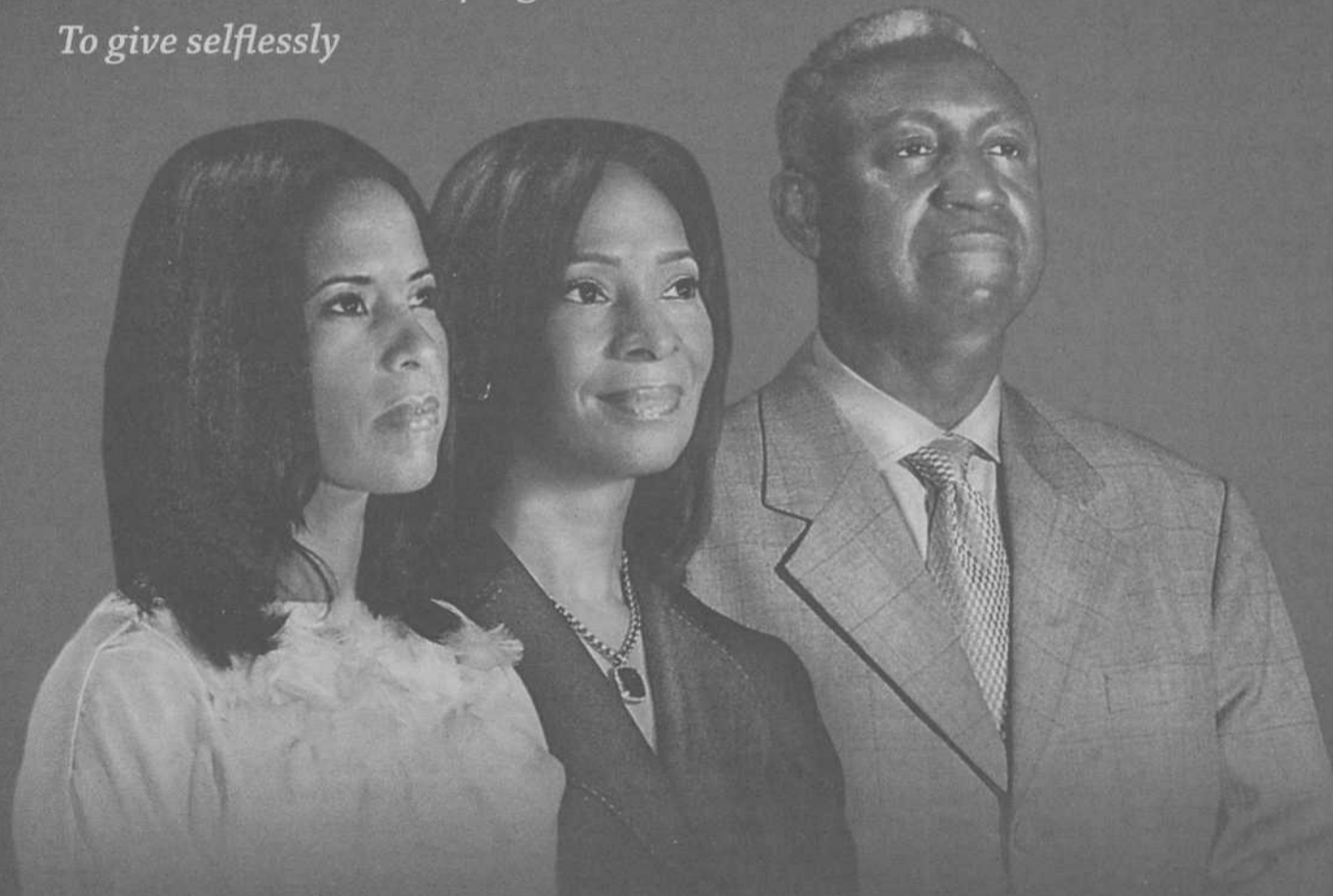
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