



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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- Jobs, Bids
- Sports
- Entertainment
- Music reviews
- Bulletin board
- RSS feeds

Celebrating Our Black Fathers

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

As we approach Fathers' Day across the United States and in some other nations throughout the world, it is important to lift up those Black American fathers who are doing what is right and good for their children, families and communities. Too often when the issue of Black men is raised, it is done from a negative or pathological perspective.

The truth is that today there are millions of Black American fathers who are strong providers, nurturers, and loving fathers who are working diligently to contribute to improving the quality of life of their families. It is unfortunate that most of the media attention in America appears to be predisposed only to focus on reporting the tragic dysfunctions of Black men and fathers.

The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) offers more than just a counterbalance to the distorted and negative coverage by the so-called mainstream media in America. The NNPA's member papers and Black Press USA is the consistent and balanced voice of Black America for news and analysis.

One of the fundamental human rights for all people is the right to self-determination. Black Ameri-



EDUCATION SERVICES

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

can-owned newspapers and other media companies are dedicated to give voice and visibility to support and encourage the overall progress our communities across the nation

The CDC and the National Center for Health Statistics have now reported that Black American fathers were in many instances 'more involved with their kids on a daily basis than fathers from other racial groups'

and throughout the African diaspora.

Thank you President Barack Obama for being both an effective president of the United States and a very good father to your children and extended family. President Obama's example as a strong father is another significant antidote to the overplayed stereotype concerning the "absent" father figure in Black American family life.

It is important to remember that

earlier this year the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Center for Health Statistics issued a new national research study on the vital role that fathers play in the parenting of their children. This study rebuked the misguided notion that Black American fathers were more delinquent than other fathers in the U.S. In fact, the CDC and the National Center for Health Statistics have now reported that Black American fathers were in many

new national initiative "My Brother's Keeper" for young Black males and the call by others to correspondingly include an initiative "My Sister's Keeper" for young Black females. In each of these initiatives, the roles of fathers and mothers will be key to success.

I highly recommend that we all read essential books by a leading scholar on the subject of Black American fathers. Roberta L. Coles is a professor of sociology at Marquette University and has published the following recommended books: The Best Kept Secret: Single Black Fathers and The Myth of the Missing Black Father: The Persistence of Black Fatherhood in America.

Next year will mark the 20th anniversary of the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. For the last two decades, the trend of more responsible and accountable Black American fathers has been steadily growing. We should, therefore, salute and celebrate all fathers, but in particular, let's stand to say "Thank you" to all our fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers who have given so much toward the advancement and empowerment of Black America.

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. is president of Education Online Services Corporation and the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network

John Lewis Advocates 'Necessary Trouble'

By Marian Wright Edelman
NNPA Columnist

Not every speaker tells a crowd of young leaders that their job is to get into trouble. But that's part of the message iconic civil rights warrior and now Congressman John Lewis (D-Ga.) conveyed at last year's week-long Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools' National Training that began June 1 for nearly 2,000 college-age Freedom School servant leaders and site coordinators.

Freedom Schools seek to empower children through reading wonderful books, to engage parents, and to reweave the fabric of community support for children. John Lewis and Andrew Young spoke movingly at the opening training session celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Freedom Summer, when young White people from around the country joined local Black citizens and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) workers to open up Mississippi's closed Jim Crow society and demand the right to vote for Black citizens. Freedom Summer 1964 helped transform Mississippi and American society, but it demanded great sacrifice and courage. Three young people — James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner — gave their lives after investigating the burning of a local Black church where a Freedom School was to be held, victims of state and White supremacist violence.

As he spoke to today's young



CHILD WATCH

Marian Wright Edelman

Freedom Schools leaders, John Lewis told them that when he was their age getting into "necessary trouble" shaped his life's mission. As he explained, he grew up poor in rural Troy, Ala. where his father,

Freedom Summer 1964 helped transform Mississippi and American society, but it demanded great sacrifice and courage

a former tenant farmer, had saved enough money to buy his own land. He worked on the farm with the rest of his family but was always desperate to get an education.

A teacher encouraged him over and over to read all he could. He also listened to the radio to learn more about the news outside his small community, and eventually started hearing about new events that would change his life: "In 1955, 15 years old in the 10th grade, I heard of Rosa Parks. I heard of Martin Luther King, Jr. I heard his voice on an old radio, and it seemed like he was saying, "John Lewis, you, too, can do something . . . You can make a

contribution."

John Lewis decided then that was exactly what he would do. He started with the library: "So in 1956, 16 years old, some of my brothers and sisters and cousins, we went down to the public library in the little town of Troy, Alabama, trying to get a library card, trying to check out some books, and we were told by the librarian that the library is for Whites only and not for coloreds." A year later, as a high school senior he decided to apply to Troy State College (now Troy University), a White college close to his home—but his

boarded a Greyhound bus [and] traveled to Montgomery . . . I was so scared. I didn't know what to say or what to do, and Dr. King said, 'Are you the boy from Troy?' . . . Meeting Martin Luther King Jr., meeting Ralph Abernathy, meeting Rosa Parks, and later meeting Jim Lawson, who taught me the way of peace, the way of love, the way of nonviolence, changed my life and set me on a path. And I haven't looked back since."

John Lewis explained that his parents and community hadn't taught him to challenge segregation: "When I would ask my parents about those signs they would say, 'That's the way it is. Don't get in the way. Don't get in trouble.'" But his experience in the civil rights movement taught him a different lesson that he wanted to share with today's young leaders: "I got in trouble. I got in good trouble, necessary trouble. I say to you, you're more than lucky. You are blessed, and you have to use whatever you see to pass it on to someone else. Bless someone else. Be bold. Be brave. Be courageous. Speak up. Speak out. You must get out there and push and pull and help change things and bring about a nonviolent revolution, a revolution of values, a revolution of ideas . . . Someone must put out and say what is going on is not right, it is not fair, it is not just, and we are here to do something about it."

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund