



News Sports Business Entertainment Multimedia Marketplace NY Newsday.com
Movies | Pop Music | Calendar | Dining | Theater | Television | Fanfare | Impulse! |
Books | Comics | Crossword | Faith | Food | Home & Gardens | Horoscopes | LI Life | Travel

Entertainment Tuesday, July 13, 2004

Cos and effect: Comedian's remarks spark debate

BY MARTIN C. EVANS STAFF WRITER

July 12, 2004

When former New York City schools chancellor Rudy Crew was tapped to take over the city system in 1995, he soon began talking with a former doctoral student he knew from graduate school two decades earlier.

His old colleague was dedicated and passionate, generous with time and money, and influential enough to be a rainmaker even in seen-it-all New York City.

Crew knew that comedian Bill Cosby was someone who could help inspire young people in New York's 1.1 million- pupil school system.

"He wants people to know there is an appropriateness in how we carry ourselves, how we dress, how we talk, how we treat other people and ourselves," Crew said of the man often referred to as "America's Dad." "He's challenging parents to take back that parenting role."

But since May 17, Cosby has been at the center of a controversy stirred by his chiding the black community for failing to take full advantage of the 1954 Supreme Court ban on school segregation and other civil rights gains.

While being honored in Washington by the NAACP, he blamed parental failures for high dropout rates, teen pregnancy, foul-mouthed behavior and a lack of respect within the black community. He made similar remarks July 1 at a Rainbow/PUSH Coalition convention in Chicago.

"I'm talking about these people who cry when their son is standing there in an orange suit," Cosby, who turns 67 today, said in Washington. "Where were you when he was 2? Where were you when he was 12? Where were you when he was 18 and how come you don't know he had a pistol?"

"I can't even talk the way these people talk -- 'why you ain't,' 'where you is?' I don't know who these people are. And I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk, and then I heard the father talk ... Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads."

"What the hell good is Brown versus the Board of Education if no one wants it?"

Conversations with Cosby and with two people who have known him more than 20 years paint a picture of a man who has earned a fortune making people laugh while steadily challenging the way people think of black families and children.

"The mistake I made was in not clarifying that it is some people, not all people," Cosby said during a telephone interview after his May 17 speech.

"But is no one going to do anything about the truth? We're talking about 50 percent of our youth dropping out of school. I'm asking people to recognize this as an epidemic, because it's not getting better. And this is not time to blame white people, or the person who rang the bell. After you blame me and decide that Bill Cosby is an elitist, do nothing and watch the dropout rate go up to 60 percent."

Critics said Cosby's comments unfairly single out poor blacks and overlook significant

Email this story
Printer friendly format

Top Stories
Lindsay Lohan Signs Record Deal

Broadway deal averts a strike

Isabel Sanford — Weezie on 'The Jeffersons' — dead at 86

COMPLETE CLASSIFIEDS PLACE AN AD
real estate apartments.com
careerbuilder Find Post a Job Resume a Job
cars.com Drive it home today!
MARKETPLACE Free Grocery Coupons

Site Search
Go

- HOMEPAGE
LONG ISLAND
NEW YORK CITY
NATION | STATE
WORLD
HEALTH / SCIENCE
SPORTS
BUSINESS
OPINION
ENTERTAINMENT
FEATURES
OBITUARIES
PHOTOS

Multimedia
SUMMER GUIDE Events in NYC

- More Photos
NYC Photos
FeedRoom Videos
Find It Fast
EVENTS
MOVIES
KIDZ
FOOD
AP TOP NEWS
LOTTERY RESULTS
TRAVEL
SPORTS SCORES
TRAFFIC
5-DAY FORECAST

LOCAL SEARCH
Subscribe

Site Search
Go
Quick Picks
Photos of the Day
Calendar Movies
Cartoon Comics
Columns Stocks
Schools Scores

LOCAL SEARCH
Restaurants
Legal
Travel
Wedding Services
Caterers
Home & Gardens
Health & Wellness
Enter a Category
View List

Specials from Newsday's Advertisers
Carpet Time
All Island Mason Supply
Grover Home Headquarters
Woodbury Country Club
Poseidon Pool and Spa
CATS

FOTA friends of the arts

impulse!
Photos | Impulse!

- Today's Newsday
NYC summer guide
Special Report: Sports in Prison
Quiz: Constitutional Amendments
Interactive: Cholesterol



Extras

WB11

DSA Community Publishing

HOY News in Spanish

improvements in academic achievement and sharp reductions in violence.

Mike Males, a sociology professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, said many indicators show that among blacks, rates of violent crime, domestic abuse of women and unwed teen mothers are declining, and rates of high school graduation and college enrollment are rising.

Males said Cosby's complaints are little different from those of older whites who say relaxed attitudes among their children toward explicit language, sex, religion and the work ethic threaten to unravel American culture.

"He is hectoring a sector of the community he clearly does not love," said Glen Ford, co-publisher of The Black Commentator, a Web-based publication. "If this is tough love, George Wallace loved us."

But Cosby and others say progress among blacks toward addressing social problems has come too slowly. They point to statistics that show black women remain three times as likely to give birth out of wedlock as white women, and that incarceration rates among black men vastly exceed those for the general population.

"There is a reluctance that black people don't want to air dirty laundry," Princeton professor Cornel West said during a radio interview. "We don't want to speak painful truths to each other."

Cosby, who was raised mostly by his mother in a Philadelphia housing project, did not take a straight path from school to family to success. Cosby, who has been married since 1964, once admitted to having an affair in the early 1970s, for instance.

In 1956, after twice failing the 10th grade, he dropped out to join the Navy. After completing high school in the Navy and enrolling at Temple University, he dropped out again, this time to pursue his budding career as a stand-up comic. Still, Cosby returned to complete his undergraduate degree, then earned a master's in education in 1972 and a PhD in 1977 from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

By this time, he already had begun using his influence as an entertainer to preach a gospel of black success based on determination and self-respect.

In the 1960s, while winning a string of Grammy awards for comedy, he avoided the bawdy language and racial humor that helped propel Redd Foxx, Richard Pryor and others to fame.

For his most successful television series, "The Cosby Show," he hired Harvard psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint to read over the scripts to ensure they projected a positive image of black family life. Cosby played the part of Heathcliff Huxtable, a physician who talked out problems with his children, lovingly supported his lawyer wife, and often was seen wearing sweatshirts with the logos of historically black colleges.

"He was very focused on trying to help black people and model the show around active black parents, particularly the father, who is often left out in the development of children," said Poussaint, co-author of "Raising Black Children."

He also has devoted time and money to education, including a \$20 million donation to Spelman College in 1989. A foundation he established in 1997 to honor his murdered son, Ennis, awards 20 graduate scholarships each year for New York City teachers who teach reading to children with learning disabilities.

"Cosby did an enormous amount of work for the system, always on the quiet," Crew said.

Poussaint said he is not surprised that Cosby has not backed down from the uproar over his comments. "I think the black community is hurting itself by embracing the N-word and all this violent talk -- not only glamorizing it but thinking it is hip to do," Poussaint said. "And Cosby is asking where is this taking us? He feels there has to be a renewed emphasis on doing the right thing."

Copyright © 2004, Newsday, Inc. | Article licensing and reprint options

News Sports Business Entertainment Multimedia Marketplace NY Newsday.com
Movies | Pop Music | Calendar | Dining | Theater | Television | Fanfare | Impulse! |
Books | Comics | Crossword | Faith | Food | Home & Gardens | Horoscopes | LI Life | Travel

BUY NEWSDAY PHOTOS ☺

NEWSDAY PERSONALS ☺
powered by match.com

Doing business with
Newsday

- Home Delivery just **\$2.50 per week** & receive premium web content free!
- Now in Brooklyn & in the Bronx!
- How to Advertise
- Career Opportunities
- Contact Us

By visiting this site you agree to the terms of the Newsday.com [User Agreement](#). Read our [Privacy Policy](#).

Copyright © Newsday, Inc. Produced by Newsday Electronic Publishing.

[About Us](#) | [E-mail directory](#) | [How to Advertise](#)