

www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/baltimore_city/bal-cosby0731,0,2950581.story

baltimoresun.com

From Friday's Sun

Bill Cosby preaches education in Park Heights

He urges attendees to empower themselves by attending community college

By Brent Jones

Sun reporter

10:20 PM EDT, July 31, 2008

Ebony Paige wasn't sure what Bill Cosby would talk about Thursday in Park Heights, but she figured the speech would be poignant and funny, something worth bringing her two daughters and goddaughter to hear.

What Cosby delivered to the hundreds who gathered in the 4500 block of Park Heights Ave. was a 40-minute plea for attendees to empower themselves by attending community college. Cosby also told the audience to encourage their children and other relatives to do the same.

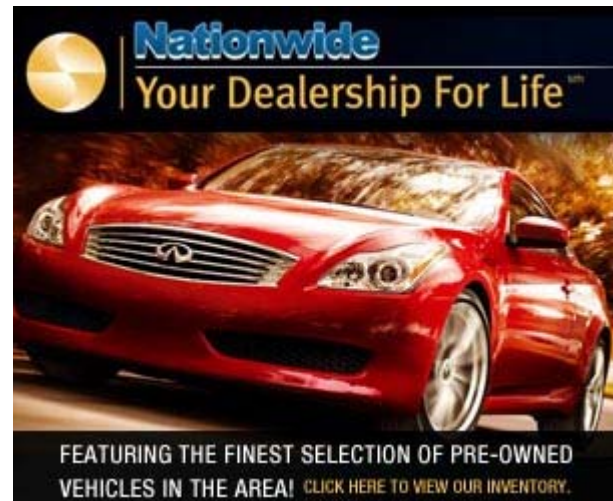
Cosby, using Baltimore City Community College President Carolane Williams as his sidekick, told the crowd, "You may have dropped out of school for whatever reason, but you now realize that's not going to do it. We got something for you. We got community college for you. You may feel so broke, so poor and think, 'I can't become a doctor, I can't become ...' But we got something for you: community college."

Members of Mayor Sheila Dixon's office had asked Cosby to take part in next year's Black History Month celebration, but Cosby said he wanted to speak in Baltimore this summer while school was out. His talk Thursday was the highlight of a city-sponsored block party as part of Operation PROTECT, a collaborative effort among government, police and the community to improve neighborhoods and reduce crime.

Thursday's talk was without the anecdotes, controversial remarks some view as elitist and challenges to the black community that Cosby has become known for.

Jokes from the five-time Grammy-winning comedian were kept to a minimum. Instead, Cosby spent the majority of his speech highlighting the opportunities community college can provide, including certificates in construction, fiber optics and cable installation.

The talk was punctuated throughout with the first few bars of Sly and the Family Stone's "You Can



Make It If You Try" blasting over the loud speakers.

"It wasn't what I expected, but I thought it was wonderful," said Paige, 32, who lives in Baltimore. "It makes me want to go out and do more than I'm doing now. And it's what Park Heights needed to hear. I've been putting school off a while because of my kids and my job. But I'm going to do it now."

Cosby's last address in the city came two years ago when he spoke at several schools and finished his evening with a fatherhood workshop at a Northwest Baltimore church.

In May 2004, at a Washington gala, Cosby ignited a dispute by criticizing low-income blacks who give their children expensive sneakers instead of books, saying at the time, "I can't even talk the way these people talk. 'Why you ain't? Where you is?' And I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk. And then I heard the father talk."

Cosby remained focused on education Thursday and at times took a back seat to Williams, to whom he fired questions about the community college process.

He and Williams encouraged the audience to get others interested in higher education.

"It's people in your house just sitting around, and you want them to get up," Cosby said. "We're going to suggest community college to them, and they're going to say, 'Well, where it is?' They're going to run through a whole bunch of excuses. Don't get mad. Because the person you're talking to is depressed. And depressed people tend to find excuses to just lay there, wearing out your furniture and burning out your TV. I know you're tired of them, but we're going to get you ready to take them down to community college."

He used a fictional character named Walter to illuminate his point.

"Here is the saddest thing about community college; they won't come and get you," Cosby said. "So you're going to have to say to Walter, 'Get up.'"

Best known for his role as Cliff Huxtable on TV's *Cosby Show*, Cosby has written books for children and adults and holds a doctorate in education.

Cecilia Little, who would only say she's in her 80s, came to hear Cosby speak. Little said she met Cosby a few years ago during one of his visits and appreciates his upfront style. "I like the way he talks. The man speaks the truth. And that's why people don't like him," Little said.

Leitha Ayers brought her 15-year-old son, Ryan, to hear Cosby. She said Cosby's talk was something her family has preached to the boy for years.

"Now [Ryan] needs to take that message, get his education and move on," Ayers said. "It's the way it is in my household."

Cosby did go off on a couple of tangents, encouraging parents to love their children and taking one dig at men who do not take care of their kids.

"Your children have no business going to the street for love," Cosby said. "There is no love there. The only thing out there is how to write your entrance exam to jail. That's all that's there, lost young men looking for love."

brent.jones@baltsun.com

Copyright © 2008, [The Baltimore Sun](#)