

'We have to change the way that we do things'



Dr. Kimya Dennis makes a point during the Juneteenth Festival Black Family Forum on Saturday, June 18 at the Biotech Place located on North Patterson Avenue. Other panelists included Dr. Manderline Scales, Larry DeBerry, and Dr. Dorrance Kennedy.

Hundreds of residents gathered at the Biotech Place and Bailey Park last Saturday to celebrate freedom during the Juneteenth Festival. The festival included a number of vendors and forums, live entertainment, food, and other activities throughout the day. Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the ending of slavery.

Forum during annual Juneteenth Festival designed to empower African-American community

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Last Saturday, the annual Juneteenth Festival took a new twist.

To jumpstart the festival, retired Winston-Salem State University professor Dr. Manderline Scales; Kimya Dennis, Salem College assistant professor of sociology and criminal studies; Dorrance Kennedy, CEO of Harambee Unlimited; and human relations consultant for the city of Greensboro, Lacy DeBerry, sat down to discuss a number of topics, including the black family structure, education, the black church, finance and housing.

The panel also explored, mental health, and criminal justice.

The annual festival, which began locally in 2004, commemorates the day in June of 1865 when Union Soldiers marched into Galveston, Texas with news that the Civil War had ended and that the enslaved were now free.

This year's festival, held at the new Bailey Park and the Biotech Place on North Patterson Avenue, included the usual live music, food, vendors, exhibits, heritage displays, arts and crafts and kids area.

Along with bringing back old favorites from past festivals, however, this year's event also featured a number of new attractions, such as a fashion show, a cooking demo and a number of forums designed to empower the African-American community.

The topic of the black family involved several topics.

While discussing finance and home ownership in the African-American community, Lacy DeBerry said everything from voting districts to school systems is based on community. He went on to mention gentrification, a trend that involves displacing lower-income families and results in increased property values. He said when this happens in urban areas, homeowners have to liquidate their assets and rent their homes in order to financially support their families.

"Unfortunately, that impacts the greater community," he said. "Everything that we know in terms of structure is based on community, and the community is based on homeownership."

"If you live in a community that is 50-

50, renters versus homeowners, you don't have the strength that other communities have."

DeBerry noted often times in the black community, even when income increases, it still takes everything earned just to survive. He then encouraged all those in attendance to invest in stocks and bonds so they can have something to pass on to future generations.

"It takes everything we have to keep food on the table and keep the lights on," he said. "What that means is we have to change the way that we do things, our values, as well as our mindset to make sure we have a say so in our economic development."

"Moving forward we have to look at ways to maximize our financial power."

During the question and answer portions of the forum, panelists were asked about the current state of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as it relates to the black family and culture.

Dennis said, "HBCU's are developing in terms of research, grant writing and teaching but, in order to progress they must remain current and stop pretending that all blacks think and feel the same way."

"Understanding diversity among our own people is important. For HBCUs to remain current, they need to understand that diversity. If they don't, historically

black institutions will become outdated."

Kennedy, who has worked at five different HBCUs, discussed Senate Bill 873 and legislative attempts to dismantle HBCUs in the state of North Carolina. He said alumni need to do a better job of supporting their institutions.

"It's not enough to go to Homecoming, or put a bumper sticker on your car. We need to give back resources to these institutions," he said. "These institutions have always produced our movers and shakers, and we should not be naive about the movement to demolish these institutions."

"Be sure to pay each year to these black schools," said Scales, a graduate of Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia.

"You should be able to support these schools not just financially but in every type of way," said Scales. "We have to plant the seeds and water them daily."

Following the forum, James Robinson said that the addition of the forums and other new attractions made this year's festival better than ever.

"I've been attending the Juneteenth Festival since the beginning," he said. "After sitting in on this forum and looking at the other events they have planned for the day, this is by far the best one yet. It seems to get better every year."

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