

# Comedian-actor stands behind comments criticizing parents

By George E. Curry  
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WASHINGTON — Comedian Bill Cosby has declined to retract remarks that were highly critical of “the lower economic” African-Americans that he claims are willing to pay \$500 for sneakers but not half that amount for educational tools.



Cosby

At ceremonies here last week commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision outlawing “separate but equal” schools, Cosby’s remarks caught many in the audience by surprise.

With NAACP President Kweisi Mfume, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund President Ted Shaw and many other black dignitaries looking on, Cosby complained that “the lower economic people are not holding up their end in this deal.”

He said, “These people are not parenting. They are buying things for their kids — \$500 sneakers for what? And won’t spend \$200 for ‘Hooked on Phonics’...They’re standing on the corner and they can’t speak English. 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...Everybody knows it’s important to speak English except these

knuckleheads...You can’t be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth.”

Cosby cited a 50 percent dropout rate for blacks. However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the dropout rate for African-Americans was 13.1 percent in 2000, the last year for which statistics are available.

Cosby’s comments about education were made in the larger context of African-Americans having to struggle to desegregate schools 50 years ago and seeing many youth today who will not take advantage of those sacrifices. He pleaded with those present to take back the Black community.

The comedian declined to acknowledge the existence of political prisoners.

“These are not political criminals,” he said. “These are people going around stealing Coca Cola. People getting shot in the back of the head over a piece of pound cake, and then we run out and we are outraged, saying ‘The cops shouldn’t have shot him.’ What the hell was he doing with the pound cake in his hand?”

Cosby claims that some of his comments were taken out of context. Excerpts of the remarks can be heard on the Washington Post’s Website, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), and it appears that Cosby was quoted accurately.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel columnist Eugene Kane wrote a column noting that like Cosby, he was born in North Philadelphia and attended Temple University.

“Given his record as a philanthropist who had donated

millions to black colleges and black causes in general, Cosby has certainly earned the right to speak his mind.” He continued, “Still, there’s a sense of uneasiness whenever somebody like Cosby uses the same language some whites use to justify their racism. ...Particularly, the idea that poor blacks and their children weigh down the rest of society, or that every black person behind bars deserves to be incarcerated. Sure, some blacks may fit that description, not all. Some white people, too.”

Kane wrote, “He’s not a poor black mother raising children in the inner city, so he has no idea how difficult that is in 2004 America. And if the TV star really wants to pass moral judgments on poor black women, ahem, Mr. Cosby, there is a little matter of you having an out-of-wedlock child yourself.”

After reading the column, Cosby telephoned Kane. The columnist said that in an hour-long discussion, Cosby explained that he did not intend to smear all poor blacks.

“I didn’t say all black people from the lower classes were to blame,” Kane said Cosby told him. “But I said that when you have a 50 percent graduation rate, and some people can’t put two sentences together, and can’t write or spell...you’ve got people who have put themselves on a track to failure.”

As for Autumn Jackson, who claims to be Cosby’s out-of-wedlock daughter, the comedian told Kane that she has repeatedly refused his offer to take a paternity test.

In the interview with Kane, Cosby deplored the glorification of a pimp mentality, placing more empha-

sis on athletics than academics and celebrating rap videos on BET, founded by Charlotte Bobcats owner Robert Johnson. It is now owned by Viacom, which also owns MTV and CBS.

“I am talking about parenting. It is time for us to turn the mirror around. We have to take back the neighborhood.”

And he reiterated his comment about the misuse of the English language.

“We can’t excuse these people,” Cosby said. “There are generations who have been born here and their English is worse than Koreans who have just been here a few years.”

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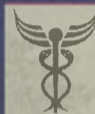
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# Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka arrested in Nigerian protest

By Herbert L. White

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Police fired tear gas to disperse an anti-government demonstration in Lagos recently and briefly arrested dozens of protesters, including Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka.

The protest was organized by a coalition of opposition groups, human rights groups and civic groups under the name of Citizens Forum. It kicked off at Campos Square on Lagos Island.

Among the 500 or more protesters were banners and placards demanding the resignation of President Olusegun Obasanjo and denouncing last year's elections that gave him a second term in office as fraudulent.

The demonstration took place against a background of rising religious tension in Nigeria, following the massacre of more than 600 Muslims in the small town of Yelwa in Plateau State on May 2 and reprisal killings a week later of at least 36 Christians in Kano, the largest town in predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria.

Heavily armed riot police blocked the route of the protesters in Lagos and shot tear gas canisters into their midst, forcing them to scatter.

The marchers included human rights lawyer Gani Fawehinmi and doctor Beko Ransome-Kuti, a leading human rights activist, as well as Soyinka, who was the first African to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

They defied the tear gas and the afternoon drizzle and re-grouped to continue the march

but were then arrested by police. All those detained were later freed without charge.

“We were protesting the increasing dictatorship in this country, which is bordering on fascism,” Soyinka told IRIN after his release. “We will continue to protest the manipulation of elections, the blatant abuse of the electoral process which has put people in power,” he added.

Soyinka accused the police of “very deliberately” using tear gas on peaceful protesters.

Opposition and civil society groups in Nigeria accuse Obasanjo's government not only of rigging general elections last year and local elections in March, but also of implementing policies that have left an ever increasing number of Nigerians impoverished, heightening ethnic and religious violence.

They are demanding Obasanjo's resignation and the replacement of his administration by a government of national unity which would organize a “sovereign national conference” to work out a new constitution for the country of 126 million people.

Police said the protest march was not allowed because the organizers failed to obtain a police permit as required by the Public Order Act. The organizers countered that the constitutional guarantee of freedom of assembly overrides the act, making a police permit unnecessary.

A critic of successive military regimes in Nigeria, Soyinka won the 1986 Nobel prize for literature. The playwright, poet and novelist was detained for two years during the 1967-70 Nigerian civil war for his criticism of the government and was forced into exile between 1994 and 1998 for his criticism of late military ruler Gen. Sani Abacha.



Soyinka

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