

# Men Are Men, not 'Dawgs'

Some entertainers have tried to make art-of their coarseness, but in their public crudeness they have merely revealed their own vast senses of personal inferiority. When they heap mud upon themselves and allow their tongues to wag with vulgarity, they expose their belief that they are not worth loving and are in fact unlovable. When we as audience indulge them in that profanity, we are not unlike Romans at a coliseum battle between unarmed Christians and raging lions. We not only participate in the humiliation of the entertainers, but are brought low by sharing in the obscenity.

We need to have the courage to say obesity is not funny, vulgarity is not amusing, insolent children and submissive parents are not the characters we want to admire and emulate. Flippancy and sarcasm are not the only ways in which conversation can be concluded.

If the emperor is standing in my living room stripped to the buff, nothing should prevent me from saying that since he has no clothes on, he is not ready for public congress. At any rate, not lounging on my sofa and munching on my trail mix.

My mothers and grandmothers, aunts, nieces and sisters are not what some of the so-called comedians have named them. My brothers and fathers and husbands and nephews are not "dawgs." They are men.

I know the name for the female of the dog. I will refuse to have that name describe any human being.

Adults, preachers, teachers, organizational executives, we had better be about the business of reclaiming our children and our language or we will forfeit our place in history. After our people struggled so hard during evil times to live with some dignity, it would be shocking if we let our history, our people, our children and ourselves down in degradation.



By Dr. Maya Angelou



File Photos

Dr. Angelou speaks at Winston-Salem State University in the fall of 2005.

# Maya Angelou no fan of the 'n' word

Her way with words has garnered her fame and prestige around the globe. But Maya Angelou says that there are some words that not even she, or anyone else, can make sound graceful and dignified.

The world-renowned poet and longtime city resident told more than 1,000 Winston-Salem State University freshmen Sept. 25, 2005, that the "n-word" is toxic, regardless of how it is used or who uses it.

"It is poison," she said, her words resonating through a packed K.R. Williams Auditorium. For the second straight year, Angelou was the keynote speaker for WSSU's New Student Convocation.

She walked onto the stage to a standing ovation and began her remarks singing a song in several different languages. The song foreshadowed her later statements on the importance of words and language.

Angelou, known for books like "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" and poems like "Phenomenal Woman," has long expressed her disdain with the "n-

word" and its prevalence in the world of hip-hop. She told the students to remember the word's history.

"It was created to denigrate an entire people," she said. "Don't use the word. I beg you."

Angelou went even further, telling the students to make themselves scarce around people who use the "n-word" or other racial slurs.

"I will not stay in a room where racial pejoratives are used," she said.

There are words that Angelou encouraged the students to use and memorize, mainly those of noted poets like Paul Lawrence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson and Countee Cullen. She threw in bits of her poetry and works of others during her remarks and encouraged the students to visit the library the next day to become acquainted with great black poets and writers. Through their words, Angelou said, the students will see that the black experience is vast and far-reaching.

"You need to know that somebody was there before you," she said.

Angelou is most often linked with Wake Forest University, where she holds the lifetime appointment of Reynolds Professor of American

Studies. Despite the fact she has been employed at Wake for more than two decades, Angelou says she loves WSSU and Wake Forest equally.

"This is my school ... Wake Forest is my school," she said during a news conference before her convocation remarks.

Young people hold a special place in Angelou's heart. It is the reason, she said, that she enjoys speaking at schools and student convocations. She told the freshmen that not enough adults tell young people how talented and special they are, so Angelou reminded them of that several times. Looking over the sea of students - who, upon school orders, dressed in their Sunday best for the convocation - Angelou said she saw the person who could one day develop a cure for AIDS and the man or woman who could one day devise a way to rid the world of racism.

"She may be in the third row. He may be in the sixth row," she said. "Why shouldn't I think he or she is here at Winston-Salem State University. I believe in you."

## A LOOK BACK