

Young members pledge to make impact

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Evers-Williams, and the future. This after a 1995 convention that saw youth almost resort to protest to gain a voice in running of the organization.

"Last year we were angry," said national board of directors member, Robert Franklin. "There was no one in there, in the national office to lead us. We know certain things had to be done, but it really hurt us."

After Bryant's speech, which called for a youth "Independence Day," some youth were cautiously optimistic.

Many of the estimated 600 youth attending the conference agree that a change must be made, that the future of the organization is at stake. But they are also realistic, knowing Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither can the NAACP be resurrected after one convention.

Clarence Small, 31, of Salinas, Calif., among the youngest NAACP branch presidents agrees with Bryant and Mfume.

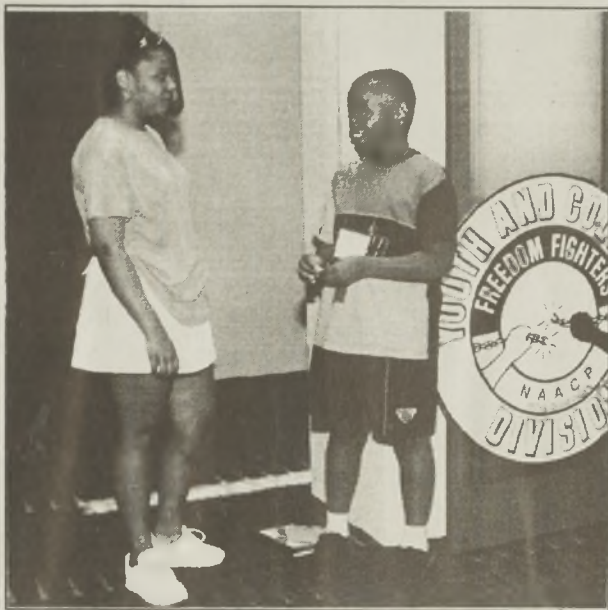
"I admire Brother Bryant. It takes a lot to fill that position," said Small. "One of the goals should be to rejuvenate the youth. Our youth were lacking direction. We need to fight for what is right."

Youth delegate Alia Muhammad said, "All of us are optimistic, President Mfume, Rev. Bryant and Chair Evers will be true to their word."

"But they cannot do it alone, there are some on the board who do not want change," said Muhammad, 23.

"It takes nine months to make a baby, so to turn an organization around to make it good, we have to take our time," she added.

"I always wanted to join the NAACP," said Muhammad, who joined in 1989 while a student at Bowie State University in



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Maria Bordenave, 14, of Columbia, Md. and Isaiah Wilson, 9, of Stafford, Va., were among the young people gathered for the NAACP national convention. Activists within the organization say the NAACP's future depends on recruiting young members.

Maryland. "I really admired Thurgood Marshall."

Bryant said her college chapter was successful because they actively sought the aid of the adult chapter. Many youth felt left alone after joining the NAACP. Local branches often ignored the role college chapters play both financially and philosophically.

"The new mentoring program should really help out," said Muhammad. "This way young chapters will benefit from the wisdom and experience of older chapters...Create a good dialogue."

The mentorship program, the brain child of Bryant and Mfume, would bring together young adult and youth chapters in an effort to show support and

work on important issues such as voting rights and political and social awareness.

The youth also expressed their displeasure over the actions of local NAACP leaders at the convention, particularly the call for the reinstatement of Charlotte's beleaguered Kelly Alexander Jr. and the protest by member of the midwestern delegation during opening remarks by Evers-Williams.

"I totally disagree with it," said Small. "There are channels that you use internally. If that doesn't work then you debate it."

Now was not the time or place."

Muhammad agreed. "These things are better solved behind closed doors. They should be done at board meetings. If we don't stop the infighting and backbiting we as black people will be in trouble."

The youth are bothered by the negatives, but still believe that the NAACP is the "place to be."

"I am bothered by the scandals" said Deizune Mosby, 16, president of the West Virginia youth chapter. "It makes us look bad, but we have to overlook the negative and continue to struggle against the negative connotations."

"Rather than complain, we need to join," added Mosby.

"You bring about, what you think about," said Muhammad. "Right now Rev. Bryant is the only one at the national office for us. He does everything. The

National Youth Works Council needs to step up efforts in each region to come up with things for youth to do."

"President Mfume is an outsider," said Bryant. "He brings fresh ideas. He sees the organization as a politician. He definitely understands the way congress ticks. We are changing."

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FROM STAFF REPORTS

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- The Parade Permit Committee has one unexpired term opening that will be filled immediately. The term ends in January 1998. Members approve applications for parades; insure safety of participants, pedestrians, vehicular traffic and safe movement of emergency vehicles.

- The Parole Accountability Committee also has an immediate opening for an unexpired term that ends in 1998. Members work to oppose the parole of offenders in violent crimes, cases where the defendant committed the crime while on parole or cases where the offender has an extensive criminal record.

- The Taxicab Review Board has an appointment to fill a term that expires in September 1997. The successful applicant will represent the operating permit holder classification. The committee is responsible for hearing appeals from denials, revocations or suspensions of operating permits or driver's permits.

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