



# It's Gettin' Hot In Here

By Eric L. Wesson

## What's Bouncing Around In My Head

*Week of Dec. 7-13-2002*

I recently read an editorial by Mary Sanchez, "Celebrity drop-in won't fix inner city problems" that addressed the recent controversy surrounding City Councilman Michael Brooks' decision to assist community activist Ossco Bolton in an effort to bring boxing champion Floyd Mayweather to Kansas City. Mayweather was scheduled to talk to youth that are in Bolton's group, P.O.S.S.E., which stands for Peers Organized to Support Student excellence and other youth that were interested in boxing.

Ms. Sanchez feels that bringing in celebrities to talk to youth in the urban core is not the solution to the problems that youth face. It is unclear whether or not she was speaking about Mayweather specifically or celebrities in general?

Let me begin by disclosing that the City of Kansas City, as well as Jackson County, underwrites a portion of the event and liability insurance and prints the program booklets for the Cosby/Goal program that my company puts together with comedian, actor and author, Bill Cosby, for area students periodically. Other funding from the program comes from private donations and my company. My thoughts in this matter are vested in the youth of this community not in whether or not the City funds the program if we decide to have future programs.

The program has been well received by teachers, school administrators, students and parents and elected officials who have attended the event.

When dealing with youth in the urban community, in most cases, you have to use unconventional methods if you expect to reach them. Since I have never seen or heard of Ms. Sanchez being at Central, Paseo or schools in the Hickman Mills School district, she may be unaware of what methods have to be used to reach those particular youth. With all of the things those youth face in their daily lives if someone coming from outside can offer alternatives to thought patterns and behaviors then the mission

that those in the trenches have set out to accomplish has been accomplished.

Trust me I have seen Dr. Cosby's one-on-one talks with youth that have had a tremendous impact on how they viewed their education, their lives and their future. Many of the youth that have participated in our program view Dr. Cosby as their "grandfather" image and he shares with the youth candidly, which is what many of them need.

Certainly, there are male role models in this community that can help lead the youth down a different path and there are those who do that. However, many of the youth won't identify them as being successful because they feel "they are stuck right here (in Kansas City) just like me," as several youth have stated to me in the past.

There are dozens of other agencies in this city such as Boys and Girls club, Higher MPact, DeLaSalle, just to name a few who bring in people from the outside for their fund raisers and to talk to and inspire the youth.

Was Mayweather a bad choice at this time to come and speak with youth considering his recent release from jail for domestic violence? Probably so.

But, other celebrities who can come to town and inspire our youth should not be lumped in the same boat and classified as not being able to help because they don't live here or fit into the perceived norm of who the mainstream says can inspire our children.

Someone with a squeaky clean image may be a great presenter to youth at Pembroke and maybe Lincoln College Prep, but sometimes you need to have someone who has been on the other side of the tracks who has changed and are now leading successful and productive lives.

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I had the opportunity to attend a meeting recently concerning the new Police Station and Crime Lab to be built in the area of 27th and Prospect.

It is projected that there will

only be about 120 short-term unskilled jobs that will come out of the project.

Those looking for employment are urged to consider going into the Lincoln building and get certified for Section 3 and the Full Employment Council for job training.

Section 3 is something that can be used when seeking employment through contractors for steady employment in the area of construction and home renovations in the urban core.

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The light rail system that is being negotiated is sort of flying under the radar.

One of the things that I think City Hall should explain to taxpayers is how much it is going

to cost? And why residents were not allowed to vote in the process? Some are calling it voter suppression. Others are calling it taxation without representation.

Here is the problem. About 3,600 people live in the District targeted for the vote. Only 697 requested ballots to vote in the election.

So, if those businesses do not make enough tax revenue to pay for the rail system then it will be up to the taxpayers to foot the bill in the same manner as they are footing the bill for the Power and Light district.

They often speak of transparency. Well now is the time to be transparent.

### Kansas City

# THE CALL

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**LUCILE H. BLUFORD,**  
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**DONNA F. STEWART**  
President and Publisher

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(816) 842-3804

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