

March Held for Peace in the Hood

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Other speakers included the city's new Manager of Safety Ron Perea and Supa Nova Slom, an emcee from Brooklyn, New York who issued a reminder that organizations like the Crips and Bloods initially were started to address and remedy the oppression and discrimination faced by Blacks in America. He said those who are not living up to that goal are off of the path of what "Black Power" is about.

Lola Morris of Families Against Violent Acts (FAVA) also spoke, acknowledging that she is the mother of a son who is in the penitentiary for criminal activity. A Denver native, she later told DWN that gang violence is not necessarily increasing in the area. "It's getting more attention at this time because of the most recent shootings. It's always been there, they just get a lot of front [page] headlines now," she said, adding that the healing and unity efforts must continue whether such incidents receive much press or none at all. "We know it still exists [along with] the anger and hatred that is the root of the problem. Dealing with and loving one another is gonna be the answer to our healing."

The destructiveness of youth anger and hate

Hatred was also mentioned by Larry Webster when he addressed the crowd. He became a Crip at the age of 16 and is credited, along with now-deceased Michael Asberry, with getting that street organization established in the city during the 1980s. Without shame or embarrassment, he told the story of how his parents, in Texas, became so involved with drugs and the street life that he eventually ended up in foster care and, at the age of eight, came to live with his grandparents in Denver. Although they gave him a Christian, church-based foundation, he said he harbored much anger and hatred in his heart for his parents which led him to the "gang" life, for which he adopted a character and became an actor to live out the thug-life role. A nerdy, school-boy is what he really was but in an interview with DWN after the rally, he explained how he and others got caught up when Crips from California started moving in. "We lost focus when those dudes came out here. They brought the drugs," he said, noting that everything changed with the introduction of narcotics sales and distribution. "Drugs killed us. Not just drugs but gossip and rumors are killing the Black community."

Working to undo the damage

He has been on a different path since 2004 when he became a Christian and was greatly moved to work to undo the damage he caused as a Crip pioneer. "There's a lot of stuff I have to



Above: The family of Monte'a (pronounced mon-tee) Davis, the 17 year-old fatally shot near 28th and Eudora last month. (l-r) Parris, 15 (cousin), Tatyana, 12 (sister), Nakita Davis, 34 (mother) and Danesha, 16 (cousin). Monte'a and three others reportedly were attempting to burglarize a home July 11 when the teen was accidentally shot by one of his partners. The shooting appears to be unintentional and not part of gang activity.

Bottom right: Lola Morris of FAVA, spoke at the rally and then with DWN. One of her six sons is incarcerated for a crime he committed as a juvenile. She felt guilt and depression after his sentencing but, after much soul-searching and prayer, decided to get up and help others. "I've got to be bold to encourage somebody else's child. Let them know they have identity, value and worth."

Photos: A. Folami

correct. I faulted as a man and I tell my partners that because they're on the streets because of me," he said. "I grew up wrong, so I taught wrong. I have to go back and clean up my faults, help these kids and reteach them."

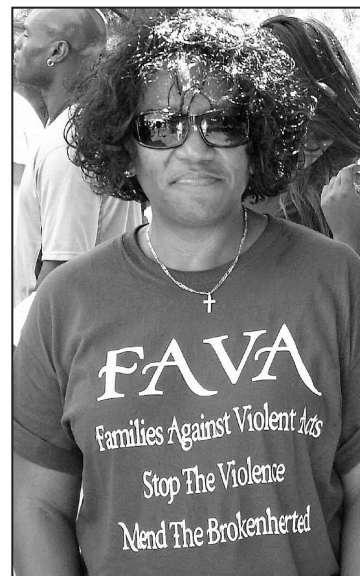
Webster answered "no" when asked if he knew the history of COINTELPRO, the government's counterintelligence program used during the civil rights era to instigate or intensify division and fighting within and between Black organizations, including "gangs." Tactics from spreading gossip, lies and rumors to outright assassinations were utilized by agents of this federally sanctioned program, specifically to "prevent the rise of a Black messiah" who could unite the masses. It was clearly part of the government's plan to prevent Black unity at any cost and to ensure that any leaders who promoted such unity never achieved success in that effort.

Opposition to Black unity

After hearing an explanation of the

program, Webster quickly recalled what appear to be COINTELPRO-type tactics used by local police 15 years ago. "I've had the police, in '95, ask me to kill Michael Asberry, a partner from my hood," he said. "They caught me with a gun and asked me to kill him and I went back and told [Asberry]. After that, I ended up with 8 years [in prison]." He added that now that he knows the system is "corrupt" he has to maneuver differently as he goes about his mission but must remain focused on "bringing my brothers to knowledge."

Relaying a like story, Brad Braxton who calls himself a "triple OG" who joined the Crips in 1983, remembers police, 15-20 years ago, intentionally pitting Bloods against Crips by spreading lies and rumors which led to feuds between the two groups. "They did a lot of instigating. Not all of them but just those that needed to keep their jobs going. The Gang Unit." The division between Crip and Blood that resulted still exists today between and within the gangs. Web-



ster says one solution is to stop listening to and spreading careless talk. "When somebody comes to you to talk about somebody else that's not there, defuse that. Tell them you don't want to hear that and to go tell that [other] person. That'll stop a lot of killings."

Pastor Jerry Demmer of The Absolute Word Church agrees that the community must get rid of division. He was scheduled to speak at Saturday's rally but, according to an event co-organizer, Phillips, the minister slated to give only an opening prayer, decided to go over time and deliver a mini-sermon. This disrupted the entire program and led to a number of other speakers, including Demmer, not being able to say a word to those gathered. In a phone interview Wednesday, Demmer told DWN he is satisfied he was allowed to participate at all, even if he did not get the opportunity to speak.

He went on to say that the march was not about gang members coming together as much as it was about reminding the community to adopt the concept of being a village and becoming responsible for the youth. He has been pastoring his own church for three years and was the key organizer of the march for peace that took place in 2008 when he, Roberts and many others walked from the church (then on East 39th Ave.) to Holly Square after the plaza there was destroyed by a fire started by Crips after the murder of Asberry. Many of the meetings with city officials at that time were held at Demmer's church which has since relocated to Montbello.

He said a number of reformed gang members are part of his congregation and that he is happily working with Webster and rally organizers who have now called "Heal the Hood" a movement and not just a one time event. Demmer plans to continue the mentorship ministry in place at Absolute Word which targets absentee fathers and educates them on the importance of playing active and positive roles in the lives of their children, regardless of the relationship they may have with the mothers of those children. He was very touched by Webster's words at the rally which only reinforced in him the need for boys to have outlets to turn to when their fathers and/or mothers have fallen short.

Braxton, who said receiving a prison sentence is what turned him away from "banging," found the rally an enjoyable experience. He said it was stupidity that led him to get started with the Crips but also recalls that things were quite different back then. "We had unity and it wasn't about killing each other, it was about protecting your territory and making a few dollars," he said, adding that the OGs he knows do not approve of the current violence which seems to be out of hand, including the recent shooting death of Katsina Roybal. "Everyone hurts when you lose a loved one, no matter if you're a Blood or Crip. That's our thing, to try to stop the killing."

Webster said he viewed Roybal like his own child since he is good friends with her parents and watched her grow up. Speaking at her funeral, he gave a message to the women and girls who choose to become involved with a Crip or Blood. "I told the women to leave my partners alone. They are not focused right now because what they know is just evil, to use and abuse people. That's all they know. That was the street life that I learned and that's what I gave them," he said. "They are bringing women into a messed up program where their foundation is not stable. Let me reteach them."