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Prejudice Gets A Bad Rap

Group Takes King's Message To Kids

Wisconsin State Journal :: Local/Wisconsin :: 2C

Tuesday, January 19, 1993

Natasha Kassulke Wisconsin State Journal

Kings and kids motivate them.

`` Children are our best natural resources and it's up to them to keep Dr. Martin Luther King's dream alive,`` said local rapper Johnny Winston Jr., as he sat on a turquoise throne inside the children's castle of Canterbury Bookseller, 315 W. Gorham St., Sunday afternoon.

From inside the castle, two members of local rap group Fresh Force offered a fun approach to celebrating King's vision.

`` We've taken rap and put it into a different form than children usually see on television. We use rap to teach kids that prejudice is wrong," said Winston. `` We should judge people by their characters and not by their faces." During their performance, Fresh Force members Winston, 24, and Richard Henderson, 22, performed original rap songs and read aloud from several books, including the audience's favorite, `` If You Give a Moose a Muffin." About 25 children and adults sat cross-legged on the castle floor to catch a glimpse of the muffin-eating moose (a stuffed toy) and the rapping Fresh Force team. Another 15 peered through the castle's tiny doors and windows.

Halfway through the performance, Winston took a break from rapping about unity and non-violence to listen to fifth-grader Sara Williams of Aldo Leopold School read part of a speech she delivered Saturday during Fitchburg's first Dr. Martin Luther King Day celebration.

Perched on the throne, Williams read, `` I have black and white friends. We are the same people on the inside and we should all have the same chance to get an education." According to Henderson, who prefers to be called by his stage name, beat box Daddy Rich, `` Fresh Force uses one word to describe the group's approach to teaching about Dr. King. It's edutainment."

Missing from the `` edutainment" rap and reading routine Sunday were Fresh Force members Erin Hynum, 24, and Oren Ben-ami, 24.

Winston, Hynum and Ben-ami formed Fresh Force in 1984 while students at Van Hise Middle School. Henderson joined the group in 1986 when the foursome attended West High School.

Winston, who is the son of Madison police Lt. Johnny Winston, also works for the Madison School District and the Dane County Human

Services Department. Last year, he was named one of the first recipients in the Dane County Sheriff's Department's Minority Scholarship Program.

Both Winston and Henderson also volunteer at the South Madison Neighborhood Center and share ownership, with the two other Fresh Force members, in a local nightclub, Club Underground.

“We love performing, but more than that, we like doing good things for children, in the spirit of Dr. King,” said Henderson.

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