

Rangel urges Blacks to be ready to deal with issues in year 2000

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Harlem Week's 11th Annual Economic Development luncheon keynote speaker Rep. Charles Rangel, Wednesday, urged Harlemites to begin immediate preparation for the rapidly approaching year 2000.

Then in an interview after the luncheon he proposed that the Harlem community initiate such preparation with a conference that should take place after the Nov. 7 general election and before Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 1989.

The luncheon was preceded by a conference and business exposition on the general theme "New York - The Year 2000 - Focus on the Future." But the speakers' focus at the luncheon, also held at the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Harlem State Office Building, was on "Forecasts for New York - The Year 2000."

"The opportunities will be there in the year 2000," Rangel summed up at the interview. "But whether inner city kids can take advantage of the opportunities is the question."

In his luncheon address the Congressman held the view that on the basis of current trends, most African-American youths would not be qualified to

grasp the 21st century opportunities. "Those kids who make it leave the inner city" so the vast majority who remain don't have them as role models.

"We can't talk of the year 2000 without thinking of our forebears," he told the largely African-American luncheon audience of some 250. "Every generation prepared a better place for the next," he stated.

"What are we doing to be able to say we prepared a better climate for the next generation," he asked.

"How can we think about 2000 when we're stepping over homeless people?" Rangel asked. "Our parents didn't pass on this kind of legacy to us. Why are we leaving this for our kids?"

Rangel saw the key destabilizing factor in the African-American community as the rampage of drugs. If not curtailed, he went on, America is headed for "demise."

When people of his age were growing up, they had "second, third and fourth chances" to mend their errant lives. But when a youngster today tries crack "the first time, life is shattered."

He faulted the Black community for allowing itself to be-



Luncheon keynote speaker Charles Rangel. (Wali Muhammad Photo)

come a haven for drug abuse. The laxity, he said, is due to the deterioration of the extended family and increasing high school drop-out rate.

"There was a time when we called people aunt, uncle, brother, sister, mother, father, who weren't even kin to us," Rangel said. "What happened to that time?"

"Didn't we have fathers and if not, weren't we ashamed? If we were kicked out of school, didn't we feel we'd shamed ourselves and our parents? What happened to that time?"

That time, he said, is lost to the "gold-capped-tooth man" who "gives them poison (drugs) to ease the pain." Decrying the inadequacy of government drug treatment, he said "they give us methadone, a drug more addictive than heroin.

"Elizabeth Taylor and Kitty Dukakis were given love with their treatment for methadone addiction. We've got to give our kids love, too," Rangel said. And the Black community should not "wait for Bennett," but should move on its own initiative.

"We should be putting toge-

ther our next conference, call it survival conference," he said at the luncheon. "Don't wait until next year. Don't wait until 2000. The time is now."

Such a conference would bring together the community's resources - schools, business, ministers, police, as well as private sectors outside Harlem, jail wardens and all others who could contribute.

"Maybe we will need managerial analysis about why our schools aren't producing college quality high school students," he said. The conference would seek to determine "why it is our kids are not doing well, not simply beat up on educators and teachers."

The participants could learn how to take kids, find out their potential and see that those inner-city youths have the skills they need. "Police must make arrests, yes, but we have to have rehabilitation and skills training."

"If we're talking about passing out condoms in jail because of evil acts going on, I haven't had ministers talking about jail conditions except asking for a few dollars. But the issue is a moral question.



Luncheon audience listening to Rangel. (Wali Muhammad Photo)