

Keepers of the Future
By DENISE SNAER
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On Oct. 24, at the Los Angeles Friendship Center, LA Bridges hosted a conference and workshop on “Parenting Techniques in the Next Millennium” by noted parenting experts Dr. Cornel West and Dr. Sylvia Ann Hewlett. They shared their views with the parents of more than 200 middle-school children. Dr. West called today’s parents “the great American heroes, most respectable, and the only remaining sector in society not driven by monetary reward.” He inspired those in attendance to utilize any and all opportunities to unite parents across America — in the midst of a society that chooses not to reward them. Dr. West challenged parents to solidify their voice, to send a strong, compassionate message to the country’s leaders.

In his new book, *The War Against Parents*, co-authored with Dr. Hewlett, founder of the National Parenting Foundation, Dr. West identifies how political, social and economic decisions impact parents in our communities. He addresses the plight of contemporary parents and their battle against a slew of negative imagery produced by sensationalist television and — even more daunting — the set-up of our corporate structure, which undermines support of today’s parents.

Dr. West points out that in the late 1990s, the mass media has bombarded us with negative stereotypes of parents with dismissive put-downs of the parental role and function. In best-selling books such as *Toxic Parents* and *Spoiling Childhood*, parents are portrayed as dysfunctional and incompetent. “No other country in the world has our alarming statistics on child violence, delinquency and death,” he writes. “Why has America visited such treachery on its children?”

Parenting has become a dying art. Dr. West cites some particularly suspect movies. In *Home Alone*, a pair of well-meaning but totally inept parents depart for Paris, leaving their 8-year-old son behind. The mother flies back to Chicago to rescue the stranded child, only to find that he is doing far better without his parents than he did when they were monitoring his every move. In their absence he courageously defends his home from burglars and helps an old man reconnect with his children and grandchildren.

Conversely, in the movie *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, an ordinary mother stands firm as the future comes hunting to kill her son. The premise is this: Machines now rule a devastated world, but a single man/woman can still make a difference. Hope arrives in the form of a machine, Arnold Schwarzenegger, sent from the future to change the outcome of disaster. This machine is a metaphor for the courage of all parents who take the challenge to protect their children from all threats against their future. The mother is relentless in her determination to save her child’s life, thereby ensuring the future for all other children as well.

How is this quest different from ours today?

Dr. Hewlett remembers the courage of her own parents. “The steadfast, sustained love of our parents gave us the wherewithal both to develop our skills and to ‘grow our souls,’” she writes. “The key to the future is the creation of a new political and cultural environment that supports the work of parents. The main thrust of any new initiative should be to affirm and enhance the heroic energies of moms and dads.”

As parents, we are in the business of growing souls. We are spiritual caretakers of valuable and trusting baby and child lives. A study on the Internet shows that the only element a child needs to withstand gangs and other negative influences is the voice of an adult. That voice stays within children even when they are on their own — they carry our voices with

them.

Let's embrace our hurting children and look at life through their eyes.

LA Bridges, a city-wide comprehensive program serving youth between ages 10 and 14 is designed for parents in urban areas to improve their skills in helping their children turn their lives around. This conference was headed up by City Councilman Ridley Thomas, who was also at the recent opening of the Friendship Center. Mr. Ridley-Thomas expressed great satisfaction at the success of the event, as well as at witnessing the center's immediate action to carry out its stated mission to envelop and support programs by and for people of the community. The lively atmosphere of dialogue between parents and speakers there cemented a vow of hope and action to safeguard our children — to safeguard the future.

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