

Sacramentan stands up against video by Nelly

By Fahizah Alim
DEB. STAFF WRITER

When she graduated from Christian Brothers High School in 2000, Asha Jennings told her parents that she wanted to attend a college where she would feel empowered as a black woman.

Earlier this month, the 21-year-old Sacramentan hit upon a fitting opportunity to flex her muscles when she organized a demonstration at Spelman College against music videos that she says exploit African American women by portraying them as oversexed and unintelligent.

The video for Nelly's new song "Tip Drill" brought the issue of negative portrayals of black women to a head and sent Jennings' head spinning.

"It was the straw that broke the camel's back," says Jennings, student body president at Spelman, a historically black, all-female college in Atlanta.

"I was outraged and in moral conflict because at Spelman we are taught about empowering black women and holding the media accountable for gender exploitation," Jennings says on the phone.

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Atlanta Journal-Constitution/Jean Shirin

Asha Jennings, right, is shown with Harold Hardee, left, co-producer of Nelly's "Tip Drill" video, and Moya Bailey of Spelman's Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance.

Jennings: She calls Spelman experience 'a liberation'

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on her campus office.

For months, Jennings had been working with Nelly's foundation, Sho4Kids, to hold a bone marrow drive on Spelman's campus in April. Nelly started the foundation to increase awareness of the need for more

ack donors after his sister was diagnosed with leukemia. He had held marrow drives in Los Angeles and St. Louis. Atlanta was next on his list. But that was before Jennings saw an

ing of the rapper's video on "Unit," BET's late-night show. "Tip Drill" refers to a woman who is

n attractive and only good for crude sexual relations, says Jennings. Disturbed by the video, Jennings

tought up the subject in one of her classes. Other women were equally outraged, but opinions varied. In the music video, dozens of

Nelly swiping a credit card through a woman's buttocks.

"Nelly wants us to help his sister, but he's degrading hundreds of us," Jennings says. "And we were bringing him on our campus. We can hold a bone marrow drive another day."

Calls by The Bee to the 4Sho4Kids offices were not returned.

Jennings called her parents. Cassandra Jennings is deputy director of the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency. Rick Jennings is a member of the Sacramento City Unified School District board.

She told them she was thinking of canceling the bone marrow drive because of the video.

"My mom is a very fair and diplomatic person," Jennings says. "And she asked me if I really had to go that far."

"I said, 'Mom, let's save this conversation till after you see the video.'"

So one night at 12:30 a.m. Sacra-

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mento time, Rick and Cassandra Jennings were watching TV while on the phone with Asha, waiting to see "Tip Drill."

"Our disgust at what we were seeing was evident by the gasps in our voices," Rick Jennings says. He says they told their daughter: "Cancel it!"

"Our children have been in the church since they were born, and their strong spiritual values cover every-

thing that they do in their lives," he says. "This video just went too far. With Asha, it's her way of saying that your values need to be consistent in all that you do."

Rick Jennings said his daughter, an A student, chose Spelman hoping to build on the activist legacy of African American women before her.

"She has been a leader at every single level of her academic life," Jennings says. "She turned down prestigious universities like UC Berkeley, UCLA and Georgetown in favor of Spelman."

Asha Jennings says she chose Spelman because she wanted to further the progress of African American women in society.

Lisa Materson, an associate professor of women's history at the University of California, Davis, says, "Asha is drawing on a long tradition of Spelman women who have fought for positive images of black womanhood that counter the negative representation of

black women in white society and sexism in the black community."

Since her stand, Jennings has gained national attention in newspapers, radio and television. Her actions received a barrage of negative comments on MTV.com.

"I never thought it would come to all of this," she says. "But I'm glad, because the issue has been muted for too long. I'm glad people are talking about it loud and clear. The exploitation of women in the hip-hop industry has national and global implications."

"My experience at Spelman has been a liberation. It affirms who I am, the impact that I want to make and the impact that is needed. We have gotten complacent as black people, and we have to reignite that fire."

Jennings will attend New York University Law School in the fall.

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The Bee's Fahizah Alim can be reached at (916) 321-1068 or fahim@eebnet.com.

Nelly controversy

Thank you for Fahizah Alim's article about Asha Jennings ("Sacramentan stands up against video by Nelly," Tuesday Scene). As a parent of a student at Christian Brothers, I am proud that Asha's upbringing and her experience at Christian Brothers High School and Spelman College have helped her become a young woman who takes a stand for what she believes.

I believe that the education that is provided at CB and colleges like Spelman not only provide the academics but, more importantly, help our children develop good morals, to be discerning citizens with good judgement, and to stand by their convictions and help lead others to do likewise.

I admire Asha's vocal stand on this important issue and the fact that so much of the so-called popular music our teens listen to and the musicians who are looked up to is nothing more than violence and degradation put to music. I also appreciate you bringing this to light and demonstrating that there are solid young adults in our society who are going to be our leaders of tomorrow.

- Allison Cagley