

Rivers: I was wrong: Apology to Cape Verdeans

by Tom Mashberg
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Civil rights leader the Rev. Eugene F. Rivers 3d will publicly apologize to Boston's Cape Verdean community this week for "my indelicate comments on the very delicate subjects of race, crime and nationality," the minister said yesterday.

"To remove myself as a distraction," said Rivers, pastor of Dorchester's Azusa Christian Community and a Ten Point Coalition founder, "it is imperative I publicly apologize to all within the Cape Verdean community and beyond."

Rivers' apology stems from his remarks May 14 on the WGBH-TV program "Greater Boston," when the high-profile activist called Hub Cape Verdeans "leaderless in terms of male leadership."

"Where are the men?" he said. "You got all those bars up and down Dudley Street where these guys hang out." Later in the program, he spoke of Haitian teens as engaging in acts that risked having their "monkey butt" incarcerated.

Rivers' remarks inflamed Cape Verdeans and irritated other ethnic leaders who have often taken umbrage at his caustic style.

He initially refused to apologize, insisting his remarks were "necessary" and "overdue." But Cape Verdean leaders made clear they would rebuff him until he did so.

Told of Rivers' planned apology, Flavio daVeiga, youth services coordinator with Boston's Cape Verdean Task Force, said: "That's what we've been looking for - a public apology to the community."

DaVeiga, 25, said Rivers was "totally wrong" about Cape Verdeans, adding: "We have a lot of male leadership figures in our community, role models, coaches, mentors, counselors. I just don't understand how he could make such remarks."

Rivers' mea culpa is to appear as a 700-word "statement on Cape Verdean youth" titled "An Apology for the Children." He said he would issue it publicly and seek to deliver it on "Greater Boston" too.

Rivers writes "it is neither fair or wise of me to permit myself to function as a political distraction."

After saying "there are no excuses" for his remarks, he delivers "a partial explanation," stating his efforts to deal with "high risk Cape Verdean youth" were greeted with "a certain air of complacency" and "denial" in that community.

"The resulting attitude was wrong," Rivers says of himself.

He goes on to salute recent work by the Cape Verdean Task Force and Hub Cape Verdeans from St. Mary's Episcopal Church, and said in an interview he would welcome troubled Cape Verdeans at his Ella J. Baker House in Dorchester.