

Massive Gathering at Mt. Zion Baptist Church Talks Race Relations

▲ 350 were at the East Winston meeting, fewer than 50 were black

By MARK R. MOSS
Chronicle Staff Writer

About 350 people jammed into the fellowship hall at Mt. Zion Baptist Church on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard last Tuesday for a discussion on race relations. Surprisingly enough, less than 50 people who attended were black.

A young black man who identified himself only as Dijon, pointed out the obvious. "Blacks should be overrunning this place," he said.

Sponsored by several religious and community groups, the "The

Crossing 52 Initiative: A Public Dialogue on Race Relations," attracted the young and the old, and those who wanted to speak their minds.

"I hope what we are about to do will go down in local history," said William H. Turner, the moderator. He characterized the crowd as "good people who have come for a good reason."

Tables were assigned to discuss different questions, such as how local media should respond to race problems. There were about 10 people at each table. More than 30 people went to the microphones to express their feelings about race

relations.

"To succeed," said Ted James, a Clemmons resident, "we must sacrifice those things we have learned."

He said that during his lifetime, black people have been called colored, Negro, black and now African American. "I want to be known as a human being."

Raymond Oliver, a local dentist, "stopping the violence" and "improving the relationship with police" would be the "pragmatic approach" to dealing with race relations in the city.

"The police would have to be stupid to overtly abuse persons of color," Oliver said. He said people should go into the black community and get them to "understand" the police.

"We need . . . to start rebelling against those who stand for evil," said the Rev. Otto Gaither. "We have to change the reality for people, by telling them they're doing wrong. (It's) in our hands to change the child of deviant behavior."

The Rev. Carlton Eversley, pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church, lambasted the city/county school system for allowing "people to teach who have no cultural sensitivity; no appreciation of who we are."

A woman who introduced herself as Sister Rhonda, and wore Muslim garb, said in a stentorian voice that although she hasn't been in Winston-Salem all her life, she knew that the black community was once a thriving community, and that

at one time blacks didn't need to deal with whites for anything.

"This black community was ours. . . ." she said. "Now we don't know who we are. We need to come together and teach ourselves. Forget all this we need to be friends stuff. Until we get ourselves together, we can't mingle with anyone."

During the second part of the program, when people at the tables turned their attention to the questions that had been assigned, John D. Gates, the editorial page editor of the *Winston-Salem Journal*, was asked why the newspaper published such mean-spirited letters.

"Whether or not I like the letters has nothing to do with whether they get published," he said. "They are a legitimate reflection of what

the community is thinking."

The remarks of two youths who attended also struck a chord.

Rita Davis, a 12-year-old who is in the academically gifted program at Wiley Middle School, said she hates being asked if she is black or white or mixed. She said a person's skin color shouldn't make any difference.

"Everybody should have equal rights to everything," she said.

Dana Robinson, 9, said that people "ask too many questions about my race. . . . If Martin Luther King were here, he would be proud."

The next meeting is scheduled for July 27.

Local Soldier Honored for Achievement

By MARK R. MOSS
Chronicle Staff Writer

How cold was it for Hayward Oubre when he was in Alaska in 1942, helping an all-black U.S. Army regiment build the Alcan Highway?

It was so cold it took two days for a dead man's body to thaw.

It was so cold the bugle boy who came out to blow reveille one morning lost a good portion of his lips because he forgot to warm up his trumpet.

It was so cold that when Oubre woke up one morning to find his tent mate's mouth encircled in frost, he was scared to awaken him for fear that he might be dead.

It was so cold . . . Well, you get the picture.

"Prison? It was worst than prison," Oubre said from the comfort of his living room in Skyland Park, thousands of miles and 50 years away from a wilderness he said he has no desire to see again.

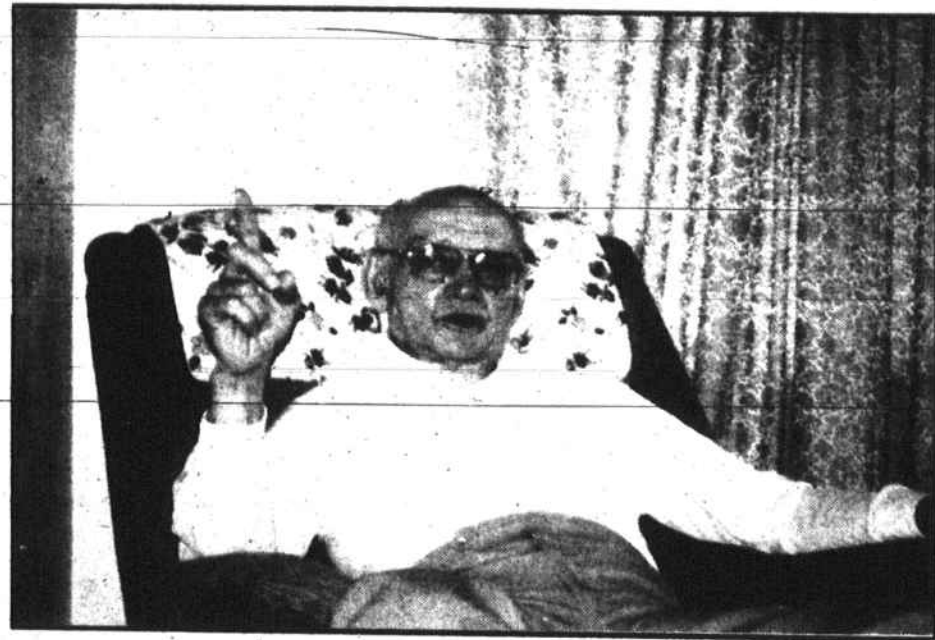
"You can break out of prison; wasn't no way in the world you could have broken out up there."

Oubre, an artist and retired chairman of the Art department at Winston-Salem State University, was one of the over 3,000 African-American men who, in the midst of World War II, were sent to Alaska to construct the first highway that connected the United States with Alaska.

Somewhat belatedly, the federal government last month recognized the achievements of those men with a ceremony in the Pentagon to mark the opening of the "Miles To Miles" exhibit, which features memorabilia from the soldiers who worked on the road. Oubre was the representative and keynote speaker for the four black engineering outfits that laid the Alcan Highway, which is still in use.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which included the 97th, Oubre's regiment, completed the 1,500-mile road in just over eight months. A third of the 10,607 men who built the highway were black.

According to information provided by the University of Alaska, two previous attempts to build the highway were aborted because of the sub-zero weather and the rugged terrain. But the third attempt



Hayward Oubre discusses his Alaskan tour of duty.

brought in the 97th, whose motto, was "The Difficult We Do Immediately, the Impossible Takes a Little Longer." With that kind of determination, there was no question that the project would not get done, Oubre said.

Oubre had a desk job during his stint in Alaska. He was a technical sergeant in Headquarters and Services, and one of his responsibilities was making sure that equipment got repaired. He also served as a water sergeant and had to convince one commanding officer that the water the soldiers had been drinking was polluted by decaying fish. He said he was responsible for the chlorinated water soldiers drank from then on.

Oubre said that besides the hostile environment, one of the major obstacles the soldiers had to overcome in constructing the road was muskeg - a quicksand-like marsh that couldn't support the materials needed for road construction. When you're out in the wilderness and there are all kinds of life-threatening hazards, people tend to work well together, Oubre explained. "We thought together to solve problems. . . ." he said. "There was a lot of trial and error."

He couldn't say if the black soldiers, or the white commanding officers, were responsible for coming up with the idea to layer saplings - three rows, criss-crossed - on top of the muskeg to support the heavy road materials.

Oubre said he and some of the others had problems sleeping

because being that close to the North Pole the sun is always shining during certain times of the year. To kill time, some of the soldiers gambled while others tried to sleep. Oubre, who said he doesn't drink, smoke or gamble, said sometimes the games would get out of hand and the profanity that erupted would disturb those who wanted peace. The gamblers were reported to ranking officers. The compromise that was reached allowed the gambling to continue, but only if the gamblers cursed quietly.

"They didn't get boisterous like blacks think they have to. It was something else to see them get mad and never shout," he said, laughing. Oubre said that as far as he could recall, loss of life was rare.

His time in Alaska, and in the Army, "seemed like an eternity. I thought I would never get out."

"If I'm going to hell, I know what it's like because I've already gone," he said.

He called the fact that it has taken 50 years for the black soldiers who worked on the Alaska highway to get recognition "unreal."

"There's a tendency for us to get written out of history. . . . This (the recognition) is important not because of me but because of the men I served with."

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Man on Life Support After Arrest by Police

By Richard L. Williams
Chronicle Managing Editor

A black Winston-Salem man was in critical condition on life support last night at Forsyth Memorial Hospital after he was arrested by Winston-Salem police early Wednesday morning.

Lawrence Francisco Cannon, whose address was not immediately known, was arrested about 4 a.m. in the 1000 block of East 15th Street, police said. According to police, a man flagged down Officer L.L. Sims and told him that a man was lying in the front seat of his 1978 Ford. The man told police that he did not know the man and wanted him arrested.

Moments later, police said, Officer R.G. Crater arrived and the two officers tried to handcuff

Cannon. Police said that Cannon resisted arrest, and the officers used pepper spray. Cannon was taken to the City Clerk's office and charged with tampering with a motor vehicle and delaying an officer. His bond was set at \$800. The two officers then took Cannon to the Forsyth County Jail. While walking toward the jail, police said, Cannon tripped and fell on the steps. They said that there was no apparent injury to Cannon. The jailer refused to admit Cannon until he had received medical attention.

When the officers arrived at the hospital, Cannon was unconscious. Medical personnel tried to revive Cannon in the parking lot and in the emergency room. The State Bureau of Investigation is investigating the incident.

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