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NCCU Kicks Off Its Centennial With Charter Day

North Carolina Central University inaugurated its Centennial Year with a bell-ringing ceremony followed by an observance at B.N. Duke Auditorium in honor of Charter Day, the 100th anniversary of the day the school was officially incorporated.

Timothy McIntosh drove down from Maryland to call the assembly to order by ringing the same bell he sounded five times a day as a student from 1958 to 1962.

"If it were not for NCCU, I wouldn't be in the position I am today," said McIntosh. "And I hope the university continues to keep its closeness and concern for the students."

NCCU Chancellor Charlie Nelms spoke of the symbolic significance of the bell in the African-American community and the special place the campus bell holds in the hearts of alumni and former faculty and staff.

"This bell signaled opportunity, but also certainty, as it tolled like clockwork, letting the students know they were drawing nearer to a better life every hour of every day," said Nelms.

In a filled B.N. Duke Auditorium, guest speaker and alumnus, Dr. Dudley E. Flood offered a humorous look at life on campus in the 1950s and particularly, the "Spirit of NCC." He said the "Spirit" was about the students relying on one other to get through and learning how to comport themselves to succeed in the wider world. He said they were also instilled with the sense that "life would be about service to humanity."

Intermingled with the speeches and the proclamations of Charter Day from Bill Bell, mayor of Durham, and Rev. Michael Page, chair of the Durham County Commission, were wonderful solos performed by NCCU music major Jasmyn Cooper and Richard Banks, assistant professor in the music department.

In a dramatic moment, descendants and family members of the original signatories of the Charter of Incorporation of the National Religious Training School and Chautauqua for the Colored Race, the precursor of North Carolina Central University, rose and signed a replica of the document on stage.

The original incorporators included Dr. James E. Shepard, founder; Professor William G. Pearson, principal of Hillside Park High School; physicians Charles H. Shepard and Aaron M. Moore; and John Merrick president, and Charles C. Spaulding, general manager and secretary, of the North Carolina Mutual & Provident Association.

The descendants and family members on stage included Mr. Isaac Hughes Green, Sr., great grandson of James E. Shepard; Charles Watts, Jr., and Joseph M. Sansom, great grandsons of Dr. Aaron Moore and John Merrick; Aaron L. Spaulding, namesake and relative of Dr. Aaron Moore and Mr. C.C. Spaulding; Clinton A. Shearin, Sr., grandson of Charles C. Spaulding; Samuel A. Shepard, Jr., a relative of Dr. Charles H. Shepard; and Eugene Turner, grandnephew of William G. Pearson.

Erskine Bowles, president of The University of North Carolina said "I think today's re-enactment is a fitting kickoff to what will be a yearlong celebration of the Centennial."



During the Bell-Ringing Ceremony, NCCU Chancellor Charlie Nelms rang the bell in honor of the founder Dr. James E. Shepard.

Colin Powell attacks critics of Sotomayor

WASHINGTON (AP) - Colin Powell, one of the nation's most prominent African-Americans, is going after people who attacked Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor because of her stand in favor of affirmative action.

Powell, who's from the same Bronx neighborhood in New York as Sotomayor, said she should face "a spirited set of hearings" in the Senate. But he said the federal appeals court judge, who would be the first Hispanic justice, shouldn't be condemned for ruling against white firefighters who contended they suffered reverse discrimination.

"What we can't continue to have is to have somebody like a Judge Sotomayor ... called a racist, a reverse racist and she ought to withdraw her nomination because we're mad at her," Powell said in an interview broadcast July 5 on "State of the Union" on CNN.

Powell made it clear that he was referring to critics outside the Senate.

"Fortunately, the senators who will sit on this hearing in the Judiciary Committee, after a few days of this kind of nonsense, said, 'Let's slow down, let's examine her qualifications in the way we're supposed to at a confirmation hearing.'" The committee begins hearings July 13.

Powell said Sotomayor has "an open and liberal bent of mind, but that's not disqualifying. But she seems to have a judicial record that seems to be balanced and tries to follow the law."

Powell, a Republican who supported Obama, said his party still is not sensitive enough toward minorities.

He noted that Obama had a significant advantage with Hispanics and African-Americans in the November elections. He criticized Republicans who are not elected to office and "immediately shout racism" against Sotomayor, while accusing Powell of supporting Obama because both men are black.

"We still have a problem," he said.

Radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh has called Powell "just another liberal," said he should become a Democrat and charged that Powell endorsed Obama based on race. Powell said July 5 that Limbaugh "doesn't decide who I am or what I am no more than I decide who he is or what he is."

The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 last June 29 that white firefighters in Connecticut were unfairly denied promotion because of their race. The justices threw out a decision that Sotomayor had endorsed as an appeals court judge.

Long Live the King - Michael Jackson Memorial Leaves Lasting Impression of World's 'Greatest Entertainer'

By Kenneth Miller

NNPA Special Correspondent LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - Proclaimed "the greatest entertainer that ever lived", Michael Jackson made a final jaw-dropping and tear-drawing appearance Tuesday as the Andrae Crouch singers ushered his gold-plated coffin into the Staples Center to the melody of "Soon and very soon, we are going to see the king".

It was an emotional memorial July 7, televised to billions around the world. But for the estimated 20,000 on hand inside the same arena where Jackson rehearsed for the final time just days before his death, his celebration of life brought home the harsh reality that the most generous entertainer the world has ever known is gone.

It was a well-crafted and fitting testimonial for a barrier-breaking entertainer who was often scorned and openly criticized for accusations unproven. It was a testimonial that began with long moments of awkward silence before the first words were spoken.

That is when longtime friend and former Motown Records colleague Smokey Robinson read a passionate statement from cherished Jackson friend Diana Ross, then another former South African President Nelson Mandela.

It was then that Crouch's gospel group sang, "We're Going to See the King" as Jackson's platinum and gold-coated casket was carried from the tunnel and near the stage to the response of abbreviated applause and gasps of silence.

The King of Pop had finally arrived. And while many have been aware of his sudden death since June 25, this time it was carving its way into the depth of our hearts and souls.

An oversized screen behind the stage reflected a sideshow of Jackson's life through photos and videos. And above what would be the Lakers' basketball court, the scoreboard read, "Michael Jackson - 1958-2009!"

It was a homegoing ceremony befitting an African-American and world-renowned King as a galaxy of blacks from the music and sports industry paid the ultimate respect to the ultimate game changer. Former Lakers great and NBA Hall of Fame basketball star Earvin Magic Johnson and current Lakers star and world champion Kobe Bryant graced the stage as a pair to share reflections. A teary-eyed Johnson remembered the time he first met the pop icon and went to meet him at his home.

"He asked me what I wanted to eat and I ordered some grilled chicken and then Michael came out with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken," he said to a spatter of laughter and applause.

Johnson credited Jackson with influencing his career on the basketball court after touring with him and watching his performance on stage.

Just as the two hoop stars spoke for the sports community, multi-talented Queen Latifah shared of a life where she too grew up, inspired by Jackson and his brothers' songs and dance. Latifah read a poem from great black poet Maya Angelo.

"No clocks can tell our time, No oceans can rush our tides. With the abrupt absence of our treasure, though we are many each of us is achingly alone, piercingly alone. Only when we confess our confusion can we remember that he was a gift to us. And we did have him. He came to us from the creator, trailing creativity in abundance. Despite the anguish, his life was sheathed in the mother love and family love and survived - and did more than that. He thrived with passion and compassion, humor and style. We had him," Latifah read.



Singer/actress Jennifer Hudson arrives at Staples Center. (Photo by Malcolm Ali/L. A. Sentinel)

She was among many who attended who were influenced by one who is now described as the number one showman in the history of the world. Others in attendance were Chris Brown, Usher, P. Diddy, Lil Kim, Mariah Carey, Lionel Richie, Berry Gordy, the Revs. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton.

Legendary boxing promoter Don King flew from Florida to be with the Jackson family and mourn his friend.

King said after the ceremony, "The same laws that govern the nation were applicable to Michael Jackson. And he was not proven guilty of anything in a court of law and his fitting tribute should not be scarred by that. His legacy will live forever."

It was Jackson who, as Rev. Al Sharon so eloquently stated, put on one sequined glove and pulled up his pants and brought down the curtain that would open a world of opportunity for African-Americans.

While it may have begun with him being the first black artist to have his videos played on MTV, it would also challenge a nation and world who were not comfortable enough with blacks to embrace them and keep an open mind about their culture long after Jackie Robinson integrated professional baseball.

The Staples Center was packed to the rafters. His legion of fans, those who grew up with him, and those who came to know him as he established and broke his own stratospheric barriers, frequently displayed a fierce loyalty that even in his demise could not be altered.

Expectant mother Jennifer Hudson, who has experienced her own personal family tragedies, sang another of Jackson's hit tunes, "Will You Be There?" And arguably the most touching moment came when Steve Wonder told the audience, "This is a moment that I wished I didn't live to see."

It was Wonder who was also a child act with Motown before Jackson and his brothers arrived. Motown founder Berry Gordy said that calling Jackson the "King of Pop" was not high enough accolades. He received a standing ovation when he told the audience, "I think he's simply the greatest entertainer that ever lived."

Longtime Jackson childhood friend Broke Shields was choked with gripping emotion and struggled with sharing her moments with her friend. But she told the crowd that Jackson's favorite song was one by Charlie Chaplain, a tune that he never recorded called "Smile."

Afterwards, his closest sibling brother Jermaine Jackson stepped on stage to sing, "Smile". And despite his fighting back tears, he made it through the moment, touching the hearts of thousands inside the arena and the billions that watched by television.

The person who drew the most animated applause was Rev. Sharon who eulogized, "Every time he got knocked down, he got back up. Every time you counted him out, he came back in. Michael never stopped. Michael never stopped. Michael never stopped!"

The crowd roared to a standing ovation, that interrupted his speed for at least two minutes. To Jackson's children, Sharpton implored, "There was nothing strange about your daddy. It was strange what your daddy had to deal with."

Sharpton told the audience that many of the fans who grew up with Jackson ultimately voted and brought about the first black president in America's - President Barack Obama.

Moments of sustained applause were plentiful. U. S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) told the crowd, "As a member of Congress we understand the Constitution and a man is innocent until proven guilty." She received rousing applause as she referred to the defeated charges of child molestation against Jackson.

Rep. Lee and the House of Representatives will be voting on a resolution that will classify Jackson as an American Legend and Icon.

Sharpton was one of several noted clergy in attendance. The Rev. Lucious W. Smith of Friendship Baptist Church in Pasadena was the first of the pastors to speak. Noted civil rights leader and family friend Rev. Jesse Jackson was not on the program.

Rev. Smith said, "As long as we remember him he will always be there to comfort us."