

Speeches statewide honor King's legacy

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENSBORO - Thirty-five years after Martin Luther King Jr. urged Americans to live up to the country's ideals and truly create a nation of equals, speakers noting his birthday questioned how much closer we have come to achieving that goal.

"If Martin were walking the streets of Greensboro...he would be saddened to see that the dream has not come to full fruition," said the Rev. William Wright, 50, a black pastor and president of the Pulpit Forum, a predominantly black association of more than 80 Greensboro ministers that speaks out on behalf of minorities and poor people.

Wright cited the number of minorities who are still without job skills and jobs.

"Everyone who wants to work should have the opportunity to work," he said.

Industries bear a big part of the blame, Wright said, since they "put profits over people." Wages have been lowered, jobs cut, simply because of greed, he said.

At Duke University in Durham, national NAACP chairman Julian Bond recalled how many of the gains African-Americans made during Reconstruction after the Civil War were rolled

back during the era of Jim Crow that began in the late 1800s.

Thirty years after the civil rights movement began, he said the same kind of rollback of rights is happening again.

"Like the first reconstruction, the second one ended when the national resolve began to waver," Bond said. "Today, nonwhites face problems more difficult to attack than before."

Bond was the keynote speaker at Duke University's annual service celebrating the life of the slain civil rights leader.

Surveying the current landscape of race relations, Bond noted the attacks on affirmative action and a growing tolerance of white supremacist groups.

He aimed plenty of barbs aimed at those he sees as the enemies of social justice.

Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is the "poster boy for affirmative action." President Ronald Reagan was an "amiable incompetent." The Republican takeover of the U.S. Congress in 1994 was when the "right-wing locusts descended on the Capitol."

"Affirmative action really isn't about preferential treatment for blacks," Bond said. "It's about removing preferential treatment whites have received throughout



Photo by The Associated Press
Dawn Howell, left, and Jasmine Womack carry Martin Luther King Jr. posters as they make their way down Martin Luther King Drive in Greensboro Monday during the city's annual King Day parade.

history." In Winston-Salem, ministers came together to honor King and encourage the black community to pursue a common bond.

The Rev. William S. Fails said that King's dreams of equality could not be achieved if blacks cannot focus on a shared vision of racial unity.

"God did not plan for us to live separate from one another," Fails, a High Point minister, said during an ecumenical service held last night.

Fails spoke at a service at Winston-Salem State University.

In a sermon rich with historical reference, Fails said that the black community has been divided since times of slavery, when house slaves betrayed field slaves to gain favor with their masters.

That mentality continues today, he said, with groups within the black community each looking out for themselves.

"It has caused us to turn our back on folks who were poor, needy or downtrodden," he said.

"The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King never turned his back on any man, irrespective of his color or his station in life."

Group hopes to open dialogue between young and old

By T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

Pearline Wesley remembers marching with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during a turbulent time in Birmingham, Ala.

She vividly recalls the instructions that organizers gave the marchers just before they began to walk. They were to "bow down" on top of each other with their heads tucked safely away.

The instructions were put into practice on the day of Wesley's march.

"They came with the water hoses, and the water was so strong it just swept us up," Wesley said.

Now, some 30 years later, the 59-year-old often shares her tale with other residents at Sunrise Towers - a public housing highrise for the elderly and disabled.

But Wesley isn't the only resident who has intriguing tales. Sunrise Towers is a place steeped in nostalgia.

"There is a lot of history right here," said Rasheed Bey, a community leader who is heading an effort to spotlight the oldest and the wisest at Sunrise and other public housing communities in the city.

The idea is an offspring of the Awakening Giants organization, an African American culture and heritage group that was founded by Bey more than ten years ago.

About that same time, a proclamation issued by then Mayor Martha Wood, expressed the city's commitment to support the organization in its effort to make the celebration of African American culture a year-round event. The proclamation has been reissued each year since.

Sunrise Towers will be the first public housing community where the organization will initiate its Lost Legacy Series, a string of programs dedicated to breathing life into Winston-Salem's rich black history.

With cooperation from the

city's housing authority, Awakening Giants wants to bring young people to the highrise for lively, profound discussions with the Council of Elders, a group of Sunrise Tower residents who are the keepers of much of the local history.

"Our people are culturally bankrupt," Bey said, explaining the need for the series. "We have already wasted one century not addressing our culture."

Council of Elders member Rayford Thompson has a lot to share. So much so that Thompson often puts his perspectives in thought-provoking essays.

Recently, Thompson has written about the retirement of Michael Jordan - who he thinks is a great example of perseverance - the possible retrial of Darryl Hunt - who he thinks was wrongfully convicted of a 1985 murder - and the birthday of Dr. King - who he met once in Greensboro.

The 72-year-old says blacks have gained a great deal since the days of King and his monumental struggle for equal rights. But he adds that the gains have come with a heavy price.

"We've lost a lot...We lost our black businesses," Thompson said. "I remember when we couldn't get into Woolworth."

Bey is enlisting the help of several local businesses to sponsor the Lost Legacy Series. Hooper Funeral Home has already purchased an art display dedicating black luminaries from the past two centuries.

Granthem Johnson, Hooper's director and manager, says he was even unfamiliar with a few people



Photo by T. Kevin Walker
Awakening Giants hopes to encourage seniors, like Louise Davis, to share their life stories with others. The African American heritage group, will put together a Council of Elders who will provide an oral history of America.

depicted in the display, which is located at Sunrise Towers. He is hoping that the display will help the next generation become better acquainted with many unsung black leaders.

"I didn't have bonafide black history tutelage in school...I don't think I learned about Carter Woodson until college," Johnson said.

Ninety-year-old Louise Davis heads Sunrise Towers' resident sascociation. Davis says America, as we know it today would not exist if not for the contributions of blacks.

"We (blacks) built America. It was built on our hard work and tears...It was a tough time, but we are a praying people," Davis said.

Bey says he hopes the program will be up and running at other public housing communities in the very near future.

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