

Why we celebrate Juneteenth

MELODYE MICERE STEWART

In the spirit of Ma'at



January 1, 1863. President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation "upon military necessity," proclaiming that all enslaved Africans in states in rebellion to the Union would, "henceforward shall be free."

According to celebrated historian Benjamin Quarles, "In reform circles, and especially among Negroes, the Proclamation was received with great joy and thanksgiving." Celebrations were held in Northern cities and Union-held regions in the South.

According to North Carolina historian Paul D. Escott in his book "Slavery Remembered," not all received the news of emancipation with joy. Many slave owners prolonged slavery by a variety of different methods, including deception, refusing to let former slaves leave and even attempting to physically appropriate black children for servitude until adulthood. The most common trickery was to simply withhold the news of freedom. According to more than a few slave narratives, the practice was widespread and recorded by government agents who inquired why blacks were still being held in bondage. One such response: "I hears 'bout freedom in September."

"Juneteenth" originated as a belated, celebratory response to "hearin' 'bout freedom" six months after it had been decreed by the President of the United States. Juneteenth celebrates the optimism that was born with the Emancipation: freedom to pursue "life, liberty and happiness" in the land of plenty. As a growing observance by modern day African Americans, a serious understanding of that history could help inform the freedom strategies we must put in place today.

Historian Escott writes, "Emancipation had a desolating effect on masters who could not conceive of a world in which despised bondsmen enjoyed equal status with the white race."

The sentiment expressed in 1863 continues to be expressed in all the statistics of wellness for African Americans. Fast forward to 1996. Juneteenth, a celebration of emancipation and the possibilities of freedom for African Americans, is severely muted in the wake of 30 black churches burned in 18 months. The FBI has six open cases in Tennessee, five each in Louisiana, South Carolina and Alabama, four in North Carolina, three in Mississippi and one each in Virginia and Georgia. Juneteenth. A celebration of freedom in a land where freedom for African Americans is still not free.

Foreign service officers refuse \$5.9 million settlement

By James Wright
THE WASHINGTON
AFRO-AMERICAN

WASHINGTON -- Key black members of the Foreign Services Officers Association have refused to accept a settlement offer of \$5.9 million in a 10-year-old racial discrimination case against the U.S. State Department.

In addition, they said they plan to take their own attorneys to task for offering to settle without their approval. The officers also said they have won the support of Reps. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) and Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), two outspoken black congresspeople.

"We are still fighting the same See FOREIGN on page 6A



Ra Un Nefer Amen I, leader of the Ausar Auset Society, (seated) signed copies of his books during a stop in Charlotte.

African values in with society

By Clarence Thomas Jr.
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Traditional African lifestyles are more embraced by African Americans, says the leader of a group promoting African thought.

Ra Un Nefer Amen I, leader of the Ausar Auset Society, was in Charlotte to promote his new book "Tree of Life Meditation System," and to take a first hand look at the work the Charlotte chapter of Ausar Auset is doing these days.

The scholar, lecturer and writer has about 20 books to his credit. Amen started the society in order to provide a vehicle through which African Americans could return to a traditional African lifestyle. He saw a need for a way of life that re-established the spiritual foundation which gave rise to the great African civilizations, he says. "Our main problem as black people, is a lack of spirituality," he said. "We have to uplift the people spiritually, so that we can succeed and flourish."

Ausar Auset has flourished under Amen's leadership. Since its establishment in 1973, the society has opened four K-12 schools, 35 vocational schools across America, England and the Caribbean and nine health food stores. One of those health food stores opened eight years ago in Charlotte. Kamit Natural Foods first opened its doors at the home of Meru Kheprama and her husband Aungkh Ragh, formerly known by

local residents as Ama and Amen Bey. It was not long however, before the two were forced to find a facility that could better accommodate the demand of their customers. "The community has embraced us," she said. "It was real natural for it to gravitate towards us, because we're from this community."

The store and the entire organization approach things in the same manner as its leader, Nefer Amen. All incorporate a natural and holistic approach towards healing and maintaining good mental, spiritual, physical and emotional health.

One of the persons who admits that he has benefited from Amen's guidance is Tehaas Ka Saa Ari, Kamit's general manager and a "priest in training."

"I joined during college as a way of filling a void," he confessed. "A lot of young black males feel that the deck is stacked, so we have to embrace our traditions and culture so we can counter some of our ills and level the playing field."

Nefer Amen's goal is to produce, on a grander scale, more individuals in the African American community like Kheprama, Ragh and Ari. "This way of life has been critical in altering one's consciousness," he said. "I'm here to assist black people and others, in overcoming social, personal, economic and political problems through spiritual empowerment."

Thomas' presence draws protest

Continued from page 1A

protests by some members of the county school board who said the sole black member of the Supreme Court has undermined his own people by decisions against affirmative action.

Marcy Canavan, president of the Prince George's County Board of Education, pointed out that students of both races gave Thomas a standing ovation several times.

"I think it's mostly because they learned a valuable lesson, that you don't bow to threats and disruption," she said.

About 50 protesters held an alternative program in another room of the school in Seat Pleasant where the ceremony was held. The Pullen school is in Landover.

Signs reading "No Uncle Tom in our county" and "Uncle Thomas is a traitor" were countered by "Say no to hate and bigotry, let Thomas speak."

Thomas was nominated to replace Thurgood Marshall in 1991. He has been in the court majority for decisions that struck down black-majority congressional districts and set in motion a rollback of federal affirmative action programs.

"I deeply regret having brought some unwanted attention to this wonderful ceremony of you all's," Thomas said. "However, I gave you my word

that I would be here at this most important event, and I fully intended to keep my word."

The justice seemed to refer obliquely to protesters when he told students, "Good manners will open doors that education cannot and will not. Even though you have strong feelings about something, that does not give you license to have bad manners."

Thomas was first invited by the school, then disinvited by the county school superintendent because of the planned protest, then reinvented by the county school board.

"The majority of us wanted him there," said Talia Hicks, a Pullen seventh-grader who is black.

"It was supposed to be special because of his presence, not a debate," said Susan Szerenyi, a white student at Pullen.

In his remarks, which were interrupted frequently by applause, Thomas stressed the need for his audience to study hard, be positive and obey their elders.

He also encouraged the students to think for themselves: "You can think for yourself and not be led mindlessly."

But many protesters said Thomas' presence was a slap in the face.

"I would be ashamed if my grandchildren knew I had an opportunity to protest against a

man who hates himself and hates black people, and I stayed at home," said one protester, Roscoe R. Nix, a former school board member in neighboring Montgomery County, Md., who is black.

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