

Race talk of conference

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recently it has not been subtle. It has blossomed into a full-blown crisis...a deadly disease. This racial divisiveness is like a cancer. Here we are a healthy city with good economic momentum, but if we don't find a cure it will kill us."

The conference is part of the answer, Helms said.

"The cure will come out of this laboratory," he said. "This is like a revival meeting. We are preaching to the choir, but everybody here has a sense of urgency...a view toward bringing about positive change."

"What we are looking for out of this conference is a rededication and commitment to the value of persons. That's my hope for this conference."

Others held similar hopes.

"The dialogue has begun," said Genael Gregory, a member of the task force which organized the conference. "It is wonderful for Charlotte to step up to the plate... I knew it was successful, not Sunday, but on Monday morning when people had returned. In history, Charlotte will go down as a community that tried to deal with the problem."

"We didn't go there to solve the problem," she said. "We just went there to find out how to resolve the conflict and how we come to some form of resolution to begin to understand how to resolve conflict."

While a broad cross section of people attended the conference — business executives, housewives, laborers and professionals — the

lack of grassroots input was noted.

"One of the things discussed was being able to set up satellite areas to enable the entire community to be apart of the race summit," Gregory said. "But when you talk about satellites, you are talking about a lot of money. I am hoping those that were there will go out and share with churches and civic organizations what came out of the conference."

N.C. State Senator Charlie Dannelly identified the core of the problem for many blacks.

"Whites don't understand what we have gone through over the past 400 years," he said. "They want to fix it by saying so."

The problems linger, Dannelly said.

The retired Charlotte-Mecklenburg principal compared the plight of many poor children to slavery, where some slaves were well-fed and thrived, while others were left to get by the best way they could.

"Today we have children who because of their economic status, are coming to school hungry, tired and sleepy," he said.

While the conference cannot erase 400 years, "it's a beginning," Dannelly said.

The difficulty is making sure each side understands the other's perspective.

For example, whites complain about busing today, while blacks recall that they were bused past white schools prior to integration.

"One of my bus routes at J.H. Gunn was 54 miles long in the morning and afternoon,"

Dannelly said. "Kids came from all over the county who rode past Garinger and East Mecklenburg (high schools)."

Nation of Islam Minister Robert Muhammad said because of this week's dialogue, "a doorway to find solutions has been opened."

"We found, many of us, a lot more common threads that can bind us, than those that tear us apart," said Muhammad, who calls himself an ambassador for controversial Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

Muhammad promised to remain involved in the process.

"The black community needs to take the initiative to build infrastructure and work on the inner dynamics of our community so ideas are not only doable, but can be done without any one else," Muhammad said. "Whites must ask questions pertinent to the survival of the community...whether there is moral correctness in what is done. Does it serve not just the majority, but the so-called minority population as well?"

Attorney James Ferguson, chair of the Community Building Task Force's leadership team, said the conference was designed to spark dialogue.

"It worked," Ferguson said. "It was a success. It was clear the conference participants want to carry it further. We are developing plans for a second phase that will be much more action oriented."

He said a written report on this week's conference should be ready in 30 to 60 days.

Conference could've used more truth and less comfort

Herbert L. White



The warning came early in the recently-completed race summit. There was no way two days of dialogue could solve Charlotte's simmering ethnic and cultural strife — no matter how helpful the conversation became.

They were absolutely right. A recurring theme at Charlotte Convention Center Sunday and Monday was that somehow the meeting of community leaders would lose steam once the last participant left to go back into the real world of Us vs. Them. "Preaching to the choir" was the phrase more than one person used, perhaps to acknowledge that the racial divide is a powder keg waiting to blow up in Charlotte's collective face. Any bridge, even one that's started over two days, can only help us avoid a calamity, but there's work to be done.

The summit's goal was noble, but had a shortcoming that's typical Charlotte. Organizers did a good job of

pulling together people of different races, creeds and religions, but the overall tenor felt suspiciously middle class and comfortable. That's no way to get at the root of what's really lurking under Charlotte's can-do outer shell, especially for people who to some extent are enjoying some of America's bounty.

To help people really understand how insidious racial intolerance is means getting them to walk a mile in your shoes, not praying they'll understand. There was some — but not enough — hard-nosed, honest dialogue to open the conversational floodgates about what really bugs us. Most of us feel free of prejudice of any kind. But that's not true, because there's a lot of hurt, anger and suspicion out here. It's the rare human being who hasn't felt wronged by The Other Guy, whether it's a white cop shooting an unarmed African American, a Latino taking a job through an affirmative action program or a white who's afraid to walk downtown after dark because "colored" people are crime-prone. But to become OK with the greater human community, we need to become more honest with who we are, especially when it

comes to dealing with the artificial boundaries set up by society.

I met many wonderful people — white, Hispanic, Asian and black — during the summit, but there was a feeling that perhaps more people should've been present. What about the economically disadvantaged who can barely afford bus fare downtown? Or the student who is steered away from a potentially bright future because he or she doesn't test well and is somehow labeled learning disabled? Or the elderly, who can school us on Racism 101, the kind that should make people under 50 glad they hadn't been born during the bad old days? They deserve a chance to be heard as well.

The summit's ultimate success, if there's any to be had, can't be measured by rehashing the highlights. The real proof will come when everyone in attendance makes up his or her mind that one can gain strength as an individual by fighting through the labels that literally color the way we see each other. And convince their friends, relatives and acquaintances to do the same.

When that happens, we won't need more race summits.

Astronaut finally gets an honor

By Marcia Dunn
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Thirty years to the day after his death in an Air Force plane crash, Maj. Robert Lawrence Jr. was recognized as a full-fledged astronaut, the first black astronaut, in fact.

His sister refuses to dwell on the long bureaucratic struggle to get her brother's name carved into the four-story granite monument that honors astronauts killed in the line of duty.

"The recognition is appropriate whenever it comes," said Barbara Lawrence, a university administrator in New York.

Lawrence's son is less charitable.

While gratified that his father's name finally is on the Astronauts Memorial Foundation's Space Mirror, Tracey Lawrence had no intention of attending Monday's dedication ceremony because of "the antagonism, or what might appear to be antagonism, on the part of the board of directors."

"They refused to recognize him. What do they call it? It was really unanimous refusal to recognize him for a period of years," Tracey Lawrence said last week from Chicago, where he runs a philosophical organization. "The folks in the family have suffered a lot through the years because of this ongoing circle of non-recognition."

Lawrence, a Chicago native, was killed in the crash of an F-104 fighter during a training exercise on Dec. 8, 1967, six months after he was named to the Air Force's manned orbiting laboratory program. The other pilot on board survived.

Had he lived, Lawrence likely would have moved to NASA, as did many of his colleagues when the Air Force canceled the short-lived and unsuccessful orbiting laboratory program in 1969.

By National Aeronautics and Space Administration standards, anyone selected for astronaut training is an astronaut, plain and simple. Teacher Christa McAuliffe's name, for example, is on the Space Mirror even though she died without ever reaching space when the shuttle Challenger exploded.

But by Air Force standards of the 1960s, the 32-year-old Lawrence, a test pilot with a Ph.D. in chemistry, never earned his astronaut wings since he never flew as high as the required 50 miles.

"A forgotten figure," says his son. And because he did not meet that Air Force criteria, the Astronauts Memorial Foundation refused repeatedly to etch Lawrence's name onto the Space Mirror at Kennedy Space Center.

"We wanted to make sure he had the same full honor the other 16 had," explained Jim De Santis, foundation president. "We never wanted a situation where people came to see the Space Mirror and said, 'There were 16 astronauts and there was Maj. Lawrence who was never declared an astronaut.'"

Everything changed last year when U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Chicago, persuaded the Air Force to verify Lawrence's astronaut status. Rush saw it as "a classic case of institutional racism."

Lawrence — who would have



AP PHOTO
Air Force Major Robert Lawrence Jr. was honored at the Kennedy Space Center, Fla. Monday, where his name has been carved into the granite monuments that honors fallen astronaut. Lawrence was killed in a plane crash Dec. 8, 1967, and is being finally recognized as the first black astronaut.

been America's lone black astronaut until NASA chose three in 1978 — officially was confirmed as an astronaut by the Air Force last January. Two weeks later, the foundation's board of directors voted unanimously to add his name alongside 16 others on the Space Mirror.

"I don't think they're bestowing an honor on Lawrence," said James Oberg, an aerospace consultant who pushed long and hard for Lawrence's inclusion. "Having Lawrence's name on the memorial honors the memorial — not the other way around."

Omega Psi Phi revokes 22 chapters

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

One of the nation's largest black fraternities has revoked charters of 22 chapters across the U.S. and suspended more than 50 members for alleged hazing.

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity revoked charters on 22 college campuses in response to the alleged incidents, Dorsey C. Miller, the organization's Grand Basileus, or international president. Miller declared an indefinite moratorium on the intake, or induction, of undergraduate members in the fraternity. Hazing is forbidden by the fraternity and is illegal in most states, including North Carolina.

"These alleged hazing inci-

dents threaten the future of our fraternity, desecrate our legacy and severely damage the good-will the fraternity has built over the years," Miller said.

Five of the 22 revocations affect Carolina campuses: East Carolina University, Western Carolina University and Fayetteville State University in North Carolina; and Winthrop University and Clemson University in South Carolina.

The fraternity notified administrators at each college where members were expelled or suspended, as well as alerting all schools of Omega Psi Phi's moratorium, Miller said. The fraternity will also make public the names of expelled or suspended members and will take

civil or criminal action against those that violate policy.

An undergraduate conference will be convened in January to map a plan for Omega Psi Phi's campus chapters.

"The results of this meeting will help determine the future of our undergraduate activities," Miller said.

Omega Psi Phi was founded in 1911 at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and has chapters throughout the U.S., Europe, Africa, Asia, the Bahamas and the Caribbean. Its members include NBA standouts Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder and former presidential candidate Jesse Jackson.

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OPEN HOUSE special guest
Dr. Gwendolyn Goldsby Grant
author of The BEST KIND OF LOVING



Saturday, December 13

2:00 p.m.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center
600 E. 4th St.

For more information,
call 568-9760



DR. GWENDOLYN GOLDSBY GRANT
author of
THE BEST KIND OF LOVING
Published by HarperCollins
Photo credit: Dwight Carter

Dr. Gwendolyn Goldsby Grant is a psychologist, a mental health educator and certified counselor, and for the last eleven years, the advice columnist for *Essence Magazine*. Her monthly column "Between US" is read by over 5 million readers. Dr. Grant has also hosted a mental health radio talk show. She serves as a regular consultant for several fortune 500 companies and has conducted countless workshops on male-female relationships. Dr. Grant regularly lectures and facilitates seminars for business organizations, women's organizations, universities, civic and church groups and governmental and grassroots organizations.

She has appeared as expert guest on many national talk shows such as *CNN*, *OPRAH*, *Good Morning America*, *Black Entertainment TV*, *The Macneil/Leher News Hour*, *Rolonda*, *The Maury Povich Show*, *Montel Williams*, *Sally Jessy Raphael*, *Ricki Lake*, *Geraldo*, *The Jerry Springer Show*, *Jenny Jones*, and others.

Gwendolyn Grant's philosophy is: "ONE WOMAN CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE." She believes that

whatever the mind can conceive, heart believe, the hands can achieve.

In her book, *The BEST KIND OF LOVING* Dr. Grant addresses head-on the complex challenges in African-American relationships. In addition to the social dynamics affecting male-female communication.

In writing *The BEST KIND OF LOVING*, Grant has provided an invaluable resource for Black women searching to understand the choices they make, and how to make the most of their strength, intelligence and wit. Compulsively readable, this book is unique in its scope and vision; women of all races and backgrounds will laugh, sympathize, and nod their heads in recognition as they read about others unlike themselves. Finally, what we can all take from this book is the lesson that love for self is the ultimate and Best Kind of Loving.

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