

Lewis' dream of black museum to become reality

By Hazel Trice Edney
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — The cruelties of slavery, the progress made during the Reconstruction Era, the euphoria of the Harlem Renaissance, the horrors of the Ku Klux Klan, the humiliation of Jim Crow, the violent pain of the Civil Rights Movement, the uncertainty of the new millennium: The dream of Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., — himself, living history — was to see it all told under one roof.

Now that H.R. 3491 has been passed by both the House and Senate and is expected to be signed soon by President George W. Bush, Lewis' dream will likely become reality in the form of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in the nation's capital.

"This museum, in my estimation, will have a healing and cleansing affect on the very psyche of all Americans," Lewis says of his 15-year effort. "I hope this museum will help lead to a building of a sense of reconciliation in spite of all of the progress that we've made."

"And in spite of the dis-

ance we've come — from the days of slavery to the period of rigid segregation and racial discrimination through the period of lynching and the whole sharecroppers existence, the migration from the South to the North — in spite of all of that, in this modern-day Civil Rights Movement, where we see unbelievable changes, there's still a lot of pain and hurt in America and we still need to get it out of the psyche."

Lewis should know.

As the 25-year-old chairman of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), he suffered a fractured skull from a state trooper's blows to his head on "Bloody Sunday" March 7, 1965, while trying to cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge on the first leg of the Selma to Montgomery, Ala., march. The youngest person to speak at the 1963 March on Washington, Lewis was arrested 40 times in connection with civil rights protests.

"I don't want us to focus on one segment of African-American history over or against another," he explains. "I've always felt that our history had not been told. And I wanted to be a part of an



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effort to get it done."

The bill authorizes the museum to be established as part of the Smithsonian Institution, a federal agency. The Smithsonian Board of Regents is charged with selecting a museum site on or near the National Mall within a year and completion of the project is expected to take an additional two or three years.

The bill provides \$17 million for planning and \$15 million more for educational programs, grants and scholarships related to African-American life, art, history, and culture for fiscal year 2004.

An additional \$200 million in private money will be needed to complete the project. That amount will be matched dollar-for-dollar by

the federal government.

There are many Black history museums around the nation, among them the noted Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History in Detroit. The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African-American History and Culture is scheduled to open in Baltimore next December.

But of all the museums stretching from Capitol Hill past the White House, none tell the story of the Civil Rights Movement. Even with John Lewis stature as a civil rights icon, it was not easy getting federal legislation authorizing the museum passed. He has introduced the bill every session since 1988. Usually, the bill wouldn't make it out of committee or if it did, it would fail in both

houses. In 1992, it was passed by the Senate, but not by the House. In 1994, it was passed in the House, but not in the Senate.

Working closely with former Rep. J. C. Watts (R-Okla.), Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) and Senators Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), Lewis got both chambers to pass the measure this session.

"There will be many tears shed at this museum," says Brownback, the Senate's chief sponsor of the bill. "Tears of sorrow and triumph, tears that cleanse the soul and heal the wounds, tears that transcend race, creed, and color."

Lewis' contributions to America have transcended race, creed and color.

"It has been a long, hard, and tedious journey," he said in his speech last month on the House floor before the bill finally passed 409-9. "When we began this journey, I often said that we must pace ourselves for the long haul. And we must keep the faith... And now the many supporters of the African-American Museum can and will finally see the fruits of their labor."

Voting against the bill in the House were: Todd Akin (R-Mo.), Howard Coble (R-N.C.), Jeff Flake (R-Ariz), Sam Johnson (R-Texas), Walter B. Jones (R-N.C.), Ron Paul (R-Texas), James F. Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.), Nick Smith (R-Mich.) and Charles H. Taylor (R-N.C.).

The Senate bill, S. 1157, had passed by unanimous consent last June. With Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, a member of the Smithsonian Board of Regents, supporting the bill, Bush is expected to sign it into law.

To Lewis, this is about more than building a Black museum.

"For too long, African-Americans struggled in the shadows of America," Lewis told Congress. "... It is the story of the great individuals, such as Harriett Tubman, George Washington Carver, Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois. But, it is also the story of hundreds, thousands and millions of ordinary men, women and children struggling to survive in a land where they were denied the fundamental rights, dignity and respect that belong to all human beings. This is the story we must tell."

Harlem recently victimized by pistol-wielding robbers

By Mamadou Chinyelu
Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK (NNPA) — Harlem's world-famous commercial strip, 125th Street, has been traumatized by five robberies, dating from November 9 through December 9. Two have been armed robberies, with the bandits brandishing guns, while two others were shoplifting incidents that escalated into "knock down, drag out" fights between the robbers and security guards.

The fifth incident, which occurred at the Carver Federal Savings Bank at 116th Street and Malcolm X Boulevard, was thwarted when a teller refused to respond to a note passed to her from a would-be robber who demanded cash.

Nobody has been hurt in any of the incidents.

"This is a high number. We are concerned," said Deputy Inspector Thomas Higdon, who acknowledged there is also an increase of crimes on the street, such as picking pockets, con games, identity theft, grand larceny and commercial burglaries.

According to Higdon, a robber entered Carver Bank

on a recent Wednesday between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m., approached a teller and passed her a note that demanded she give him money. "The teller told him, 'I don't take notes,'" said Higdon, adding that the robber then took the note and hastily departed the bank.

Deborah Wright, president and chief executive officer of the bank, said, "Obviously, our biggest concern was for our employees and customers. We've trained our employees to handle these kinds of situations. It worked well and nobody was hurt. We feel good about our security measures. Because the 116th Street branch is a new facility, we installed digital cameras that produce very sharp pictures. I have no doubt we have the person on camera."

One day earlier, Homeboy of Harlem Jewelry, at 206 West 125th Street, was robbed by five men, three of whom carried guns. Qurban Hussain, manager of the store, said the robbers made off with \$300,000 worth of jewelry.

"They picked all diamonds, big chains — the expensive material. They didn't

pick cheap jewelry," said Hussain, a Pakistani who has been doing business in Harlem for nine years. He said that at the time of the robbery there were 15 people in the store, including seven employees, seven customers and a security guard.

"They pretended to be customers. And then they pulled their guns and told everybody to get on the floor. They were professional robbers," he recalled. Hussain said the robbery took place at 1:40 p.m. and the police arrived at about 2:05 p.m. According to Hussain, the store's security camera caught the images of three of the robbers.

Subway Sandwich Store, at 48 West 125th Street, was also hit at 5:54 p.m. on one recent day. According to its owner, Richelle Jones, the robbers took \$3,000 in cash.

"As owner of the store, I feel very disheartened," said Jones. "We are a Black, family-owned business and Blacks are coming in robbing us. We're trying to create jobs for our people. We only hire Blacks."

Though the owner was not in the store during the rob-

bery, her mother, Diana Upchurch, was and provided a blow-by-blow account of the incident.

"I was about to put the daily receipts in the safe, when my junior manager came back to the office and, in a calm voice but with a frantic expression on his face, said: 'Ms. Dee, a man asked me to open the register. He wants to rob the store,'" Upchurch said. "I called 911. I didn't hear anybody [on the other end of the line], but I said, 'We're being robbed.'"

According to Upchurch, the junior manager told her the man had a gun. Before long, the robber was at the office door demanding money. Though she thought about hiding the wad of money she was holding in her hand into the back of her pants, Upchurch said she instead surrendered the cash.

After more drama, the robber started to leave the store, but when he heard Upchurch calling 911 again, he returned to the office and ripped the phone out of the wall. But

Upchurch's effort to call 911 the second time was successful, nonetheless. Had it not been, the police probably would not have arrived, since the first call was dispatched as a "disturbance."

Higdon was not able to explain why there was a discrepancy in how Upchurch's first call to 911 was dispatched.

Upchurch said that one of her employees who was on lunch break and undetected by the robber was able to get

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