

# Educators debate renaming schools after Confederates

HAMPTON, Va. (AP) - At Jefferson Davis Middle School, a civil war of words is being waged over a petition drive to erase the name of the slave-owning Confederate president from the school. Opinion is mixed, and it's not necessarily along racial lines.

"If it had been up to Robert E. Lee, these kids wouldn't be going to school as they are today," said civil rights leader Julian Bond, now a history professor at the University of Virginia. "They can't help but wonder about honoring a man who wanted to keep them in servitude."

That argument isn't accepted universally among Southern Black educators, including the school superintendent in Petersburg, where about 80 percent of the 36,000 residents are Black. Three schools carry the names of

Confederates. "It's not the name on the outside of the building that negatively affects the attitudes of the students inside," Superintendent Lloyd Hamlin said. "If the attitudes outside of the building are acceptable, then the name is immaterial."

It is difficult to say how many public schools in the 11 former Confederate states are named for Civil War leaders from the South. Among the more notable names, the National Center for Education Statistics lists 19 Robert E. Lees, nine Stonewall Jacksons and five Davises. J.E.B. Stuart, Turner Ashby, George Edward Pickett each have at least one school bearing their name.

For some, these men who defended a system that allowed slavery should not be memorialized on public

schools where thousands of Black children are educated.

The symbols and the names of the Confederacy remain powerful reminders of the South's history of slavery and the war to end it. States, communities and institutions continue to debate what is a proper display of that heritage.

Students in South Carolina have been punished for wearing Confederate flag T-shirts to school. The town of Clarksdale, Miss., permanently lowered the state flag - which has a Confederate emblem in one corner - to recognize "the pain and suffering it has symbolized for many years." And the Richmond-area Boy Scouts dropped Lee's name from its council this year.

In the most sweeping change, the Orleans Parish School Board in Louisiana

gave new names to schools once named for historical figures who owned slaves. George Washington Elementary School was renamed for Dr. Charles Richard Drew, a Black surgeon who organized blood banks during World War II.

In Gadsden, Ala., however, officials have resisted efforts to rename a middle school named for Nathan Bedford Forrest, an early backer of the Ku Klux Klan. And a school board in Kentucky adopted a new dress code that eliminates bans on provocative symbols including the Confederate flag.

The naming of schools after Confederate figures is particularly rich with symbolism because of the South's slow move to integrate. Many schools were named after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconsti-

tutional in 1954 but before the departure of whites left many inner city schools majority Black.

"Now whites are complaining that they are changing the name of Stonewall Jackson High School," says Fitzhugh Brundage, a University of North Carolina history professor who is writing a book on "Black and White memory from the Civil War."

While far from always the case, the naming of some public schools after Confederate generals was a parting shot to Blacks emerging from segregated schools.

"It was an attempt to blend the past with the present but holding onto a romanticized past," Jennings Wagoner, a U.Va. scholar on the history of education, said of the practice of naming schools after Lee, Jackson and others. "It was also a time of extreme

racism." Erenestine Harrison, who launched the petition drive to rename Jefferson Davis Middle School, attended Hampton's segregated public schools. She moved north in 1967 and was struck by the school names upon her return seven years ago to Hampton, a city at the mouth of Chesapeake Bay. Educated as a psychologist, she has worked in the city schools as a substitute teacher.

"If I were a kid, especially a teenager, I would be ashamed to tell a friend that I went to Jefferson Davis," said Harrison, 55. "Basically, those guys fought for slavery." But Henry Kidd, former Virginia commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, sees efforts by Harrison and others as a "chipping away, piece by piece, at our history."

## Tuskegee Experiment haunting flu season

By Hazel Trice Edney

WASHINGTON (NNPA)

- As the nation experiences a flu outbreak, some Black adults are refusing to get vaccines or to take their children for shots because of misconceptions about the vaccines, a top health official says.

"What we know from our focus group work is that a lot of the misconceptions about the influenza vaccine are seen in the African-American community," says Dr. Walt Orenstein, director of the national immunization program at the Atlanta-based Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Tuskegee comes up and the trust of governmental recommendations."

The fear of being injected to fight influenza (flu), a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus, may come from memories of the 1932 Tuskegee, Ala. syphilis study. In that experiment, the U. S. government used 600 Black men as human guinea pigs over a 40-year period. As part of the study, African-Americans were not treated for the disease after it had been diagnosed.

The CDC reports that last year, only 49.4 percent of the nation's Black elderly got the shot while 68.1 percent in the White community did, a difference of almost 19 percent.

Concerned about the disparate rate of vaccines among the elderly, a group of doctors at the Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C., hope that at least 90 percent of Black elderly

people will be vaccinated against flu every year.

"Our data show that we have significant work to do to reach this objective," says Trules Ostbye, lead author of a study that found the racial disparities between Blacks and Whites reaching as high as 20 percent over the past decade. "More research is needed to understand the cultural issues that may be a barrier to vaccination in this population."

Flu symptoms include having a fever, a headache, extreme tiredness, a dry cough, a sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. More common symptoms among children are nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

The flu virus is spread when someone coughs or sneezes it into the air or by leaving it on a surface where someone else picks it up and touches it with their nose or mouth.

One of the misconceptions, Oberstein says, is that people get the flu from the vaccine.

"I can tell you that the flu shot itself cannot cause the flu," he explains. Oberstein says another misconception is that the vaccine does not work.

According to the CDC, people who get the vaccination rarely get the disease and if they do, it is usually a milder form. Other ways to protect against the flu is through prescription anti-viral medications.

Dr. Julie Gerberding, the

director of CDC, has called the spread of the flu virus a national epidemic, in part, because of the rapid number of child deaths outside the normal age group and because flu outbreaks started in October, which is earlier than usual.

The CDC reports that last year's flu season, which usually runs from November through March, was "relatively mild," although during any given year, approximately 36,000 people die from complications of the flu and 114,000 are hospitalized. The flu has shown up in all 50 states this year, but has hit particularly hard in about 36.

The elderly aren't the only people who are especially vulnerable.

Children have been particularly hard hit with 42 deaths last year. Normally, child deaths occur under the age of 5, about 92 die annually. But, this year, almost half of the deaths have been between the ages of five and 17.

It is difficult to track the extent of the illness among children or adults because state health departments are not federally mandated to report the disease, says CDC spokeswoman Rhonda Smith. Some child advocates worry about the effectiveness of any CDC effort to narrow the gap between Blacks and Whites.

"Given that we have not resolved the racial disparity problems in the standard immunization series for young

children, I'm not sure that we will so easily overcome this disparity for the flu shots even though this is obviously a pressing need," says Martha Teitelbaum, senior health analyst for the Children's Defense Fund.

Teitelbaum points to a CDC report on the rate of Black children getting standard immunization shots against diseases like measles and polio last year. The study shows the rate of Black 2-year-olds getting the shots as being 9.5 percent lower than White toddlers, 70.7 percent to 80.2 percent.

"Yes, we are concerned that the children in the Black community in particular might not be getting the immunizations they need to protect them," Teitelbaum says.

Part of the problem has been getting information directly to the Black community.

"I am very concerned that we have a way of preventing what can be a very serious illness, but we have not been able to get the message out that we have a tool, an influenza vaccine, that can reduce this very serious morbidity and even death," says Orenstein.

Meanwhile, across the country, efforts are being made to curtail the spread of flu, specifically in the Black community.

The Duke doctors say they will aim for their 90 percent goal by coordinating efforts between public health pro-



Elecia Battle, left, and her husband, Jim, are reflected in a mirror at their attorney's office in Beachwood, Ohio Wednesday. Battle, who says she lost the winning Mega Millions ticket when she dropped her purse outside a convenience store, is suing to block payment of the \$162 million lottery prize to the validated winner.

## Lottery

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said. "I knew what I possessed."

Dennis G. Kennedy, director of the Ohio Lottery, said the lottery was confident Jemison bought the ticket. She provided another lottery ticket bought at the same time and had a ticket from a previous drawing with the same numbers, Kennedy said. The Ohio Lottery says the ticket is a bearer note, which means whoever turns in a valid ticket is legally entitled to the winnings.

Jemison, who handles telephone and doctor paging duties at a suburban hospital, said she was looking forward to buying a new home, taking a vacation and sharing her prize with her tight-knit family. She and her husband, Sam, have a 12-year-old daughter. South Euclid is expecting its own windfall of about \$1.4 million in taxes from the prize. The Cleveland suburb had been expecting a \$1 million deficit for 2004, and Mayor Georgine Welo laid off 11 employees last week.

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