

Civil rights movement hits 100-year mark

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Harpers Ferry, W. Va. - The elderly woman sat in the shade, painstakingly penning her autograph onto yet another program.

Precisely 100 hundred years ago, in almost the exact spot, her grandfather, W.E.B. Du Bois, spoke words that electrified the Civil Rights Movement at a historic meeting that many people have never heard of.

"We will not be satisfied to take one jot or tittle less than our full manhood rights," Du Bois said.

Dr. Y DuBois Irvin's grandfather told a small but influential group of African-Americans who called themselves the Niagara Movement:

"We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American... and until we get these rights, we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America."

The 1906 meeting at what is now Harpers Ferry National Historical Park inspired those in attendance to aggressively fight for equality and led to the formation a few years later of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Hundreds gathered at the park on the Potomac River last weekend for a four-day commemoration of the Niagara Movement.

Irvin and other Niagara descendants signed autographs, posed for pictures

and did their best to touch and educate and inspire a new generation.

"They got together, and they were willing to risk their homes and their money and their stature to lift up African-Americans," said William Hart, a Washington software company CEO whose great-grandfather, William Henry Harrison Hart, was one of the Niagara founders. He calls the work of his great-grandfather one of the "lost and hidden details of the Civil Rights Movement. We need to educate the community more on what these heroes did for us and for American liberty."

Du Bois planted the seed for the movement in 1905 when he asked a select group to meet him in Buffalo, N.Y., to brainstorm ways to seize civil rights for Blacks.

The 29 men, denied a place to meet in Buffalo, ended up in Ontario, from which the Niagara Movement got its name.

A year later, the group, more than doubled in size and with women this time, reconvened at Harpers Ferry, where in 1859 militant abolitionist John Brown raided a federal arsenal, hoping to arm slaves.

His plan was thwarted, and he was convicted of treason and hanged.

The 1906 meeting concluded Aug. 19 with Du Bois' fiery speech. The group broke up a few years later when many of its members

began the NAACP.

In 1906, William Wesley's grandmother, Louisa Jackson Dennis, taught at Storer College, the Harpers Ferry school for former slaves. Believing she wouldn't have missed the Niagara meeting at her doorstep, Wesley strolled through the event yesterday on something of a personal journey.

"I'm overwhelmed," the Hyattsville engineer said. "I've spent the last four days learning so much about the history of African-Americans

and my family in particular."

Deb Gantt, a nursing home director, drove from Harrisburg, Pa., to attend the commemoration.

"It's so good to see people from all ethnicities here today enjoying this historic moment," she said, explaining that she only recently heard about the Niagara Movement. "Of course, White folks weren't taught this stuff in school. ...This is just so inspiring to keep the movement going," said Gantt, who is White.

While looking back was a key part of the program, attendees also worked to address the wisdom of their ancestors to today's problems.

Author David Levering Lewis, whose books on Du Bois won two Pulitzer Prizes, told the crowd that despite the strides toward racial equality in the 100 years since the Niagara meeting, there's much work left to do.

"Obesity, diabetes, crime, AIDS," he said, rattling off troubles that disproportionately affect Blacks. "These

problems constitute the unfinished business of the Niagara agenda in the country."

Patricia Sewell, a career counselor from Martinsburg, W. Va., said that hearing the moving 100-year-old stories and meeting descendants of the people who starred in that drama brought home some important lessons.

"I now appreciate the struggles of these people whose shoulders we stand on," she said. "I am the Niagara Movement."

School begins in a few short weeks.

Are You Ready?

Notebooks

Backpack

Pencils

Lunch box

IMMUNIZATIONS

All Nevada school children must be immunized. Are yours?

An immunization clinic will be held at the Southern Nevada Health District:

Saturday, Aug. 26 • 8 a.m.-4 p.m.*
Ravenholt Public Health Center, 625 Shadow Lane

Can't make it on Saturday, Aug. 26?

Childhood immunizations are also available during normal business hours at all health district locations.

For your convenience, extended hours are available:

Monday, Aug. 21-Friday, Sept. 1 • 8 a.m.-6 p.m.*
Ravenholt Public Health Center, 625 Shadow Lane

Administrative fees for shots range from \$16-\$20. Please bring your child's shot records, and Medicaid or Nevada CheckUp card, if applicable.

For more information and additional health district locations, call 759-0850 or visit www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org



* No other health district services will be available after 4:30 p.m. or on Saturday.

Candidate rues remark on race

SARASOTA, Fla. (AP) - A candidate running for the congressional seat of Rep. Katherine Harris apologized last Thursday for comments he made about the swimming ability of Blacks.

Republican Tramm Hudson, a banker, made the comments earlier this year at a Christian Coalition political forum. The remarks appeared on blogs Thursday.

"I said something stupid," Hudson said in a statement released by his campaign. "I apologize for it and would apologize in person to anyone hurt by my comments."

Hudson made the comments as he described efforts to rescue a Black soldier who had fallen into a river while the Army Reserve company Hudson commanded was training in Panama 22 years ago.

"I grew up in Alabama and I understand and I know this from my own experiences that Blacks aren't the best swimmers or may not even know how to swim," Hudson said, according to a transcript released by his campaign. Other troops pulled the soldier out of the river and gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, Hudson continued. He then attributed the successful rescue to "divine intervention."

Hudson is one of five candidates seeking the GOP nomination to succeed Harris in Florida's 13th District. Harris is running for U.S. Senate.