

Honor student vindicated, delivers speech

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

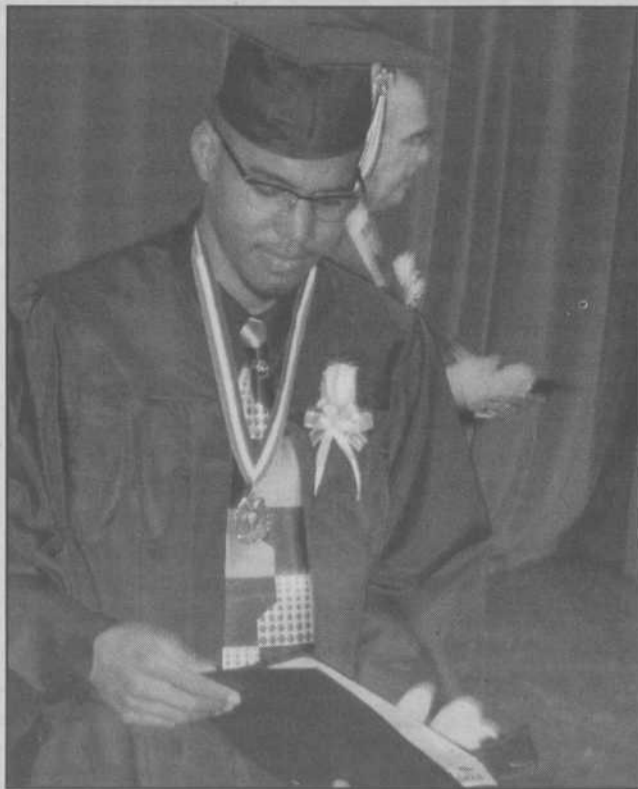
WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Carl Noldon had a dream to give a speech he had written for Black History month last February. In it, he accused America's public schools of denying Black children in-depth teachings of their own history.

Though the officials at the Bronx High School for the Visual Arts in New York denied him that opportunity amidst controversy over the strong contents of his speech, Noldon never gave up hope. Now, before throngs of well-wishers, the honor student has realized his dream. Having excelled as valedictorian of his graduating class, Noldon stood before an audience of school officials, families and his classmates late last month and finally delivered the message for which he had fought.

"Often we hear of the degrading statistics that cause a day like today to be bitter-sweet," Noldon began.

"According to the book, 'Solutions For Black America,' by educational consultant Jawanza Kunjufu, only two years ago, in 2004, 63 percent of Black fourth-grade students were below grade level in reading, 61 percent of eighth-grade Black students were below grade level in math," he continued.

"Finally, last year, according to Dr. Kunjufu, 13 percent of all Black youth between the ages of 16 and 24 had not earned a high school diploma or a G.E.D. This is a day of celebration. Graduation is a beautiful thing. It is, indeed, a day for us to realize how fortunate we are and to move ahead with the fulfillment of our highest dreams — and that we will



Carl Noldon takes a proud look at his high school diploma after giving the valedictory speech.

do. But hearing these statistics, if I were to stand before you and say that everything is great just because we are graduating, then that would lack integrity. Please listen, and learn from my story."

The 17-year-old, who has been reared by his mother, Anna Noldon, and grandmother, Dorothy Noldon, told how he turned his life around in a nation that often denigrates Black males his age and dooms them to failure. Before an audience that responded with two standing ovations, he spoke what many Black males in America have yet to learn.

"You see, the truth is that, once upon a time, I might have become one of those statistics. Caught in a web of ignorance of my roots and the greatness of my ancestry, I, too, suffered and nearly perished at the systems that would keep from each one of us the total truth of the magnificence and genius of the

people of Africa from whence my ancestors came," he said.

"My Uncle Vincent played a big role in my change because of his introduction of what is called 'the truth' to me... Before that, I thought that being Black meant being stupid and inferior. In fact, the teachers that I had before I came to Visual Arts added to this inferiority complex, because they didn't teach me about the great Black civilizations and the achievements of them. The curriculum had a western basis, a Euro-American basis, so I merely studied and did work on that basis, but not a basis that connects to my ancestral values. I came to realize that I had to care about my own life, and I had to care about my own health and education. But on a deeper level, I had to love being who and what I am, because if I didn't, that would dishonor my African ancestors."

tors."

Since his story was first publicized by NNPA in May, Noldon's sentiments about the impact of Black History on Black students have been reaffirmed by educational experts around the country.

"Those schools that offer an Afrocentric curriculum saw a 30 percent increase in their test scores," said educator and author Jawanza Kunjufu in an emailed response to Noldon's story.

"Second, students no longer associate being smart with 'acting White.' Last, it reduces disciplinary problems."

Also, editors at Fisk University's *Urban Education Journal*, having read the NNPA story, offered to consider the speech for publication.

George York, principal of the high school, praised Noldon in an interview in May, calling him "one of the brightest and best." But York

declined to say specifically why he had initially refused to allow Noldon to give the speech.

This week, Noldon's mother, Anna, responded, "It was terrific. Words can't explain it. I'm just proud of him," she said.

Noldon vows he has only begun his campaign for more inclusive and diverse curricula in America's public schools. As he heads to City College in Manhattan, N.Y., this fall, he has yet another dream.

"I want to reveal how racism, Eurocentrism, White supremacy and colonialism, how these elements affect the education of the Black people of the world and other non-Whites," he said in an interview.

"Because I believe that Black children across this nation are being miseducated in the way that I was. I have a goal of mixing Black studies with physics, film, psy-

chology, science, mathematics, as well as other disciplines."

And, he says he will push to diversify Eurocentric education wherever he goes.

"It will be a challenging mission. But, I will not let college put fear into me," he said in his speech. "The Eurocentric professors and teachers love to teach about how wonderful the Greeks were and their minds, as well as other Europeans. But do they teach that the Greeks got a lot of their knowledge from the African Egyptians?... I will not fear them! I encourage you, just as well, to change the world by seeking truth and taking stands... What will you do? Who are your heroes? What will you take a stand for that will impact the lives of others? I encourage you to also choose your mission and stick to it... My goal, my dream, is to now give back to others what has been given to me."

No sanctions levied in school's race project

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) - School leaders in a southern New Mexico district will not face federal sanctions for allowing a high school project on racism in which students posted signs reading "Whites Only" and "People of Color" above water faucets, officials said.

But the Truth or Consequences school district will have to implement procedures for addressing racial harassment claims and offer lessons about racial harassment to students and staff, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights said.

Students at Hot Springs High School launched the project last year for an English class focusing on social justice. The students hoped to monitor the reactions of people secretly when they viewed the signs.

Other students tore down the signs within minutes.

Student Gabriel Reynolds, who is Black, said the signs shocked and angered him. He complained that he was humiliated, and his family filed complaints with both the federal and state education departments.

The boy's mother, Susan Reynolds, released a letter from the federal agency, which determined the school district "failed to adequately respond to a known racially hostile environment at the high school."

School officials described the project as an attempt to explore the nation's history of racism. The school, about 150 miles south of Albuquerque, had 426 students at the time, only seven of them Black.

The district and the Office of Civil Rights signed a reso-

lution agreement this month that requires the district to develop and implement the new rules. The federal office found no violations of law, however, and said the educators would not be sanctioned.

Truth or Consequences Superintendent James Nesbitt said the district agreed with the federal agency that it needs a clear procedure for reporting problems.

Nesbitt and other educators reached a settlement with state officials in March. The state settlement said the student-initiated project created at least the appearance of discrimination and should not have been approved.

Nesbitt and the Hot Springs principal sent Reynolds' family an apology and publicly apologized. However, Susan Reynolds said she didn't consider the apology sincere because the educators never acknowledged the project was inappropriate. The educators agreed to take racial sensitivity training and had letters of reprimand placed in their files for 18 months.

Asian

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The images were determined to be Asian cartoon figures, but controversial images like these have reentered the American consciousness in recent years. In June 2005, a Mexican stamp featuring a popular Black comic book figure with exaggerated features similar to a monkey drew outrage from the Black community.

The manager of the restaurant, Lisa Tran, has only worked there for several months and said that the lids came from a roll sold from an unknown distributor in Chinatown. She also admit-

ted that she was not sure how long they had been selling them.

Community residents were mixed on this issue. While some wanted nothing to do with it, others were offended as it recalled an era when these images were commonplace in America.

"I think it's a racist statement," Watts resident Gregory Sims said. "I've lived in South Central all my life and it reminds me of the '50s where White people were putting on Blackface and making us look like monkeys."

Tommy Island, another

Watts resident, said that they reminded him of a time when these images were acceptable and Blacks could not leave Watts without a work permit. He admitted, however, that he had no time to worry about this situation and simply would just not buy a drink.

"It's just ignorance," Island said. "Someone just doesn't know how offensive this is."

Originally from Cambodia, Tran said that she was unaware how offensive the images were. Later in the day, an employee said that they plan on discontinuing

the lids due to their content.

Bakewell Sr. has pledged to contact the attorney general and encourage him to investigate this matter.

"We can not and should not accept this. We can not buy it and must discover who is manufacturing it and prevent it from being sold anywhere," Bakewell insisted.

Furthermore, the publisher vows to contact major civil rights organizations to call for an immediate boycott of the beverage.

Evan Barnes, Kenneth Miller and Gregory Cleghorne write for the *Los Angeles Sentinel*.

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