



Ledger-Enquirer

At the annual Prayer Breakfast in August 2004, attendees sing the One Columbus song. One Columbus is a group of Columbus professionals and residents who come together to promote diversity in the city.

HYATT | Do we know each other?

From A1

together. But we still don't understand.

For seven days, we've reflected and examined how the races have gotten along for the past 100 years. We've shared memories that were sometimes painful and sometimes touching.

- We shuddered at the violence in our past and raised an eyebrow when we found out how differently such memories are viewed by blacks and whites.

- We heard high school basketball players from 1967 talk about competing on the court and we heard whisperers about things that went on in the bleachers.

- We found out how the simple cloth in an old flag touches us in ways we can't explain.

- We looked at the influence black soldiers at Fort Benning have had on our community.

- We recalled two pastors with opposing views and heard a contemporary preacher talk about his desire to see a microcosm of heaven in his pews.

These things are history, you say. What about today? What does our past have to do with our present?

Navigation

Dr. Thomas Malone answers that question.

"If we don't know our history and keep in touch with it, we don't know our legacy and why we enjoy the things we do," he says.

Malone does his part. He's here because he was invited by Dr. Delmar Edwards — the man other black physicians call "The Godfather."

From Edwards, Malone heard about Dr. Thomas Brewer. From 1921 until 1956, Brewer practiced medicine and prodded people. He was killed two blocks from the coffee shop where Malone and I were talking.

"We tell the younger fellows so we don't forget," he says. He also tells them his own story, how he was the city's first black board certified obstetrician. "When I delivered a baby the room was full of doctors wanting to see if I did it right."

Thomas Malone's Columbus is different than Thomas Brewer's — in attitude and in numbers.

We're a community of 185,271, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The community is 49.3 percent white and 46.4 percent black. It is 4.1 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Asian, though people assume the number of Hispanics is underreported.

Do the math. Non-whites make up 50.7 percent of Columbus. They own more than 30 percent of the businesses and Muscogee County schools are 65 percent non-white.

For the past decade, the school district has moved toward neighborhood schools. Since most elementary schools south of Macon Road are predominantly black, it's apparent that neighborhoods around those campuses are also.

The Rev. Allen Page of Holsey Chapel CME Church admits mixed emotions but said he still lands on the side of integration.

"It was the way for our nation to go," he says. "Segregation isn't healthy, given the way we have to navigate through society."



Champs

Eleven aging white men are wearing rings that are replicas of rings on the fingers of some young African-Americans.

Each of them is a member of a state championship basketball team. When the old fellows were at Jordan High, they won the title in 1943. The younger ones took the honor in 2007.

A warm gesture from Coach Gerald Turner put championship rings on the fingers of the 1943 team at a banquet Thursday night.

"This has brought the community together," says Turner, who before integration played on Spencer High's last championship football team.

Sixty-four years of experience have taught the older guys something the young Red Jackets have yet to learn.

"The current team doesn't understand what this'll mean to them in the future," Turner says. "That's why the 1943 team got more out of this than the 2007 team."

When Mike Stephens played basketball at Baker, the Lions didn't win major trophies.

"But we were a true oddity," he says. "Not only were we integrated but three of our four black players were starters."

Stephens, who recently retired as a teacher at Shaw High, remembers Coach Henry Gresham taking the team to a 1969 game at Auburn University. That afternoon, the Tigers were an all-white basketball team.

"Other than the late Henry Harris, who was playing for Auburn's freshman team, the four members of the Baker squad were the only non-whites in the building."

Names

Telling the story of 100 years of race relations in Columbus presents volumes of challenges.

Historians recorded little and newspapers were not much better. News of the black community was in a single column, if at all. At the same time, activities of the Ku Klux Klan were mentioned like they were church outings.

Into the 1960s, the Columbus Enquirer regularly ran a cartoon panel called "Sunflower Seed." It featured black dialect and characters that fit usual stereotypes.

Local newspapers used the n-word — even in headlines — and you can trace the progression from Negro to colored to Negro to black.

Writers weren't shy about using other terms. In a story about a Lions Club

Columbus State University students Christina DiGregorio, left, Anjelica Rosario, Deondre Bonds and Ceteria Richey hug following a recent vigil honoring the victims of the Virginia Tech shootings.

ROBIN TRIMARCHI Ledger-Enquirer

minstrel, a reporter mentioned "a chocolate-colored cast." A photo showed four local Lions in blackface.

Such things affect today's society, says Virginia Causey, a history professor at Columbus State University.

"We are shaped by what happened here 100 years ago," she says. "Nothing happens in a vacuum."

Searching for resources, I collected more than a dozen books, seeking local anecdotes. Solid information is also found at the Columbus State University Archives, especially in its collection of oral histories.

Sue Jones Burton, 70, doesn't view the lack of recorded black history from an academic point of view. She sees that in her own family.

"There's no one to tell the story. Our memories are fading and we don't really know who we are," she says. "In the past, grown-ups would whisper about things, trying to protect the kids. But if they're protected, they grow up to be the same as their parents."

From there to here

Last week, we journeyed through the past, pausing to connect it to today. More than anything, the body of work that is our history accumulates layer by layer.

Pull away the top layer, and there's our past, exposed and naked. Atop this history is the present.

Time after time, we've tried to face these issues. Mayors have organized groups designed to help us get along. They come. They go. In these groups, we come together like a horde of Pollyannas, ignoring the negative and singing "We Shall Overcome."

The Rev. James Swilley of North Highland Church, refuses to attend any more sessions like this.

"I'm not willing to go to a meeting where we discuss what we *should* do," he says. "I want to talk about giving these things legs. Can't we put legs on what we talk about?"

Politically, there are signs of progress. It is one thing for black voters to elect a black Columbus Council member such as Jerry "Pops" Barnes. It is another for a white Congressional District that meanders through South Georgia's soul to elect Sanford Bishop, not once but eight times.

Bishop was a city boy, a Morehouse man and a lawyer who quoted poetry when he first ran for Congress. His father was a college president and he knew nothing about agriculture.

When he met farmers, he didn't pretend to understand. He asked them to educate him. A few years later, I saw him early on a Saturday morning in a cafe in Preston. Sanford Bishop was on his way to a bird hunt.

We've seen Dr. Robert Wright progress from an activist with an afro to a Republican councilman and a member of the Reagan administration. Now he is a millionaire businessman who makes headlines because of his generosity.

We've seen Calvin Smyre pick up

Working to move to the next level

Now the real work starts. Thank you for sticking with us through the past seven days. If it felt like a history lesson, well, it was.

Our aim was to research and present a common, collective local race history of the past 100 years. Thanks to the Herculean efforts of Richard Hyatt, I think we succeeded. Many readers have told me they agree.

Why'd we do it? To quote one of life's most well-worn maxims: Those who fail to understand history are doomed to repeat it. Why now? Why not now? We have no pending race crisis before us. No major election to divide us. The politicians have nearly finished their business in Atlanta. If not now, then when?

The final installment today is not the end of our series, but the beginning of a dialogue we hope to have with you about improving our community across a range of issues. Race is merely the first. And we need your input.

We hope you'll join us for Reflections on Race: A Town Hall Meeting from 8:30 to 11 a.m. Wednesday, May 16, at the Cunningham Center on the campus of Columbus State University.

Ben Holden
Vice President & Executive Editor

Albert Thompson's sword and become the most influential African-American in the Georgia Legislature.

Now what? "Respect our differences," Page says.

"Let's be Americans," says the Rev. James Swanson. "But you have to work at it. Real community isn't comfortable."

"Living our beliefs, that's our challenge," says Ray Lakes of the Columbus State University Alumni Association. "It's like perfection. You don't get there but you strive for it."

Sifting through old newspaper articles, I found one I did on George Ford, a funeral director who was a factor in most civil rights activities of the past 50 years. I referred to a comment Ford made in 1968.

"One thing that has hampered us in America is that the Negro and the white man, after 100 years, don't know each other. And because we don't know each other, we fear each other."

My question, 11 years later, was whether that situation had changed.

"Some of it's still true. We still don't trust each other. We pick out those who we think convey our beliefs. Because of that, we lose out on a lot of talent. That's wrong."

It is May 6, 2007. Do we know each other? Do we fear each other? Do we trust each other?

I'm asking myself those questions. You should do the same.

RECOMMENDED READING

Here are the sources Richard Hyatt used while compiling this series:

BOOKS

- "And Character Produces Hope," Myron Hamilton
- "Chained and Shackled," Parson Jack
- "Colin Powell," Howard Means
- "Defining the Peace," Jennifer E. Brooks
- "Dodd's Luck," Bobby Dodd and Jack Wilkinson
- "Dress Her in Orange and Blue," Buddy Sullivan
- "Eugene Bullard: Black Expatriate in Jazz-Age Paris," Craig Lloyd
- "God Wills Us Free," Dr. Robert McNeill
- "History of the Muscogee County School District," Mahan and Woodall
- "Home of the Infantry," Richard Hyatt and Peggy A. Stelpflug
- "Honoring Sergeant Carter," Allene Carter and Robert L. Allen
- "I Had a Hammer," Hank Aaron with Lonnie Wheeler
- "I Swear by Apollo," Dr. Andy Roddenbery
- "My American Journey," Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico
- "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," edited by Andrew Waters
- "Slave Narratives from the Federal Writer's Project"
- "Someone had to be Hated," Greg Lisby
- "The Big Eddy Club," David Rose
- "The Invisible Soldier," edited by Mary Penick Motly
- "The Last Editor," Jim Bellows
- "Who Runs Georgia?" Calvin Kytile and James A. Mackay
- "Zell: The Governor That Gave Georgia HOPE," Richard Hyatt

JOURNALS

- "Georgia Historical Quarterly"
- "Journal of Georgia History"

NEWSPAPERS

- The Atlanta Constitution
- The Atlanta Journal
- The Columbus Advocate
- Columbus Enquirer
- Columbus Ledger
- Columbus Ledger-Enquirer
- The Columbus Times
- The Georgia Tribune
- The Saber

RESOURCES

- Oral histories, student papers and other documents from the Columbus State University Archives at the Schwob Library. 706-568-2247. <http://archives.colstate.edu/index.php>
- Geneology Department, Columbus Public Library. 706-243-2669. www.thecolumbuslibrary.org



Bishop