



A LONG TRAIN RUNNING TOWARDS EXCELLENCE™

THE SPIRITHOUSE PROJECT
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Dear Friend,

A Long Train Running Towards Excellence™ is a landmark gathering that will be held June 10th and 11th, 2010 at St. James AME Church in Columbus, Georgia. This gathering celebrates retired teachers, principals and administrators from Alabama and Georgia who worked during segregation, as well as convenes a community institute on the public schooling of Black youth in the South. Dr. Henry Ponder, former president of Fisk, Benedict and Talladega colleges; Dr. Julia Purnell, the 16th President of AKA sorority and former president of The Links, Inc.; academicians Vanessa Siddle Walker from Emory University and Linda Tillman from the University of North Carolina; and Vincent Harding, noted author and theologian, join with community members to explore "how the Black community not only survived but thrived during segregation to produce excellent students, compassionate leaders, high performing artists, responsible parents and active community builders. We hope you will join us for this historic discussion by sponsoring at least a *Semi-Circle* of four (4) retired teachers and members! For more information contact SpiritHouse at 706-323-0246.

A Long Train Running Towards Excellence™ provides compelling evidence that disputes the pervasive negative notion of Black students and our community's history of education. Today, far too many school officials, policy makers, teachers, government officials and even members of the Black community root their approaches to public schooling in the false assumption that Black southern youth fail in school because they are inheritors of a long history and culture where their community devalued education which leads today to disproportionate drop out rates, high expulsions, low performance and high placement out of regular schools into alternative schools.

A Long Train Running Towards Excellence™ breaks with this viewpoint and reading of history. It provides the stories, testimonies, scholarship and reflections that offer verifiable evidence that the Black community in the South has a long and vibrant history of valuing education and seeing it as a stronghold for youth and community development.

For the Black community, this event replenishes and strengthens our hope and resolve. It documents our history of advancing our youth while simultaneously advancing our community despite injustice and poverty. It underscores for young people their capacity to excel despite bad press and unequal circumstances. It reaffirms the sacrifices and hard work of parents who struggled to make sure that each generation was better educated and equipped to move forward than the previous one. Furthermore, it enlarges the capacity of educators to do their work with an understanding that it will bear fruit.

Ultimately, it gives all of us the community spirit and will to say Rah! Rah! Let's do it!

A Long Train Running Towards Excellence™ begins Thursday afternoon with registration, exhibits, and a showing of the movie *Intolerable Burden*. A School Day Dinner, from 4:30pm to 6pm, precedes the evening activities. The *Grand Processional*, which consists of retired teachers, principals and administrators who served in segregated schools as well as speakers for this event, provides the official opening activities at 6:00pm Thursday evening.

Activities continue throughout the day on Friday, starting with a continental breakfast at 8:00am to the closing activities at 5:00pm. During the day, Dr. Purnell and later Dr. Ponder will reflect on their experiences as educators and members of the long train running towards excellence. Retired teachers and other invited guests will help us to explore this topic throughout the day.

Costs for the 2 days are as shown below. All costs include the Friday breakfast and afternoon snack.

- * Retired Educator Registration - \$25.00, includes Thursday dinner. Add \$6.50 for Friday Lunch.
- * Individual Registration - \$55.00. Add \$15.00 for Thursday dinner and \$6.50 Friday lunch.
- * Semi-Circle of Four - \$220.00. Add \$15.00 each for Thursday dinners. Friday lunches included.
- * Full Circle of Eight - \$400.00 (at \$50/person). Thursday dinners and Friday lunches included.

If you are unable to attend, please consider sponsoring others to have this opportunity. Community members, churches, sororities and fraternities are encouraged to register a *Semi-Circle* or *Circle of Achievement* for the best cost savings. Please name the *Circle* for a local Black Educator of significance to your group.

The SpiritHouse Project is a national nonprofit 501 (c) 3 organization that uses the arts, research, education, action, and spirituality to bring diverse peoples together to work for racial, economic, and social justice, as well as for spiritual maturity. It was founded by and is co-directed by Ruby Sales, history maker, educator, community builder and public folk theologian. Cheryl Blankenship serves as the Co-Director. Cheryl comes to this position as a former college Dean, Bursar, and Senior Program Officer of AmeriCorps who managed a budget of more than \$200 million dollars. Both Ruby and Cheryl rode on The Long Train Running Towards Excellence as students. We treasure our ride and the many ways that it shaped our lives and gave us a head start in life.

For these and many other reasons, we salute retired Black teachers who built a high performing counterculture of education. We are their heirs who stand ready to honor and recognize their outstanding contributions to educating Black youth. We believe that their work provides a sturdy foundation for improving the public schooling of Black youth today. Cheryl Blankenship and I are proud to be on the front porch of a growing body of knowledge that recognizes them as legitimate experts whose voices are essential to changing the current outcomes of Black public school students. Our children and community depend on it, so does America, if it is to rise up to its fullest potential in a 21st century global world.

Perhaps you have a retired teacher in your family or you have a current interest in our youth! Come help us celebrate them! This is as important for the students today as it is for adults. We hope you will join us!

Sincerely Yours,

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