

Lecture series features civil rights legend

BY TODD WICES
STAFF WRITER

A legend of the civil rights movement visited Oakland University in Rochester Hills Tuesday.

Myrtle Evers-Williams, chairwoman of the NAACP Board of Directors and widow of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, spoke at the college's third installment of its Student Life Lecture Series at Meadow Brook Theatre. The occasion marked the release of the recent Rob Reiner film "The Ghosts of Mississippi," which depicts the decades-long struggle to bring her husband's murderer to justice.

"I am delighted to be on this campus," Evers-Williams told the large crowd. "I hope you are here because you want to be, not because it is required."

Evers-Williams was greeted with a standing ovation, and held a crowd full of high-schoolers, college students and faculty members rapt for nearly 45 minutes. Much of her address focused on the past, on the indignities blacks suffered and both the popular and lesser-known pioneers of the civil rights movement. She also urged unity in fighting the ghosts of racism and intolerance still alive across the country.

"There is still the need to know history," she said, "still the need to know what made the people who gave their lives do what they did."

One of the people she was referring to was her husband Medgar and Myrtle Evers were pioneers of the civil rights movement, and worked to better the social and political standing of



Myrtle Evers-Williams blacks in the Mississippi Delta of the 1950s and '60s. They opened and managed the state's first NAACP office.

However, being so prominent, they received threats constantly. In June 1963, Medgar was fatally shot while standing in his driveway. Self-proclaimed racist Byron De La Beckwith was charged with the crime, but two trials both ended in hung juries, and he went free.

Evers-Williams' book, "The Ghosts of Mississippi," chronicles the third trial of De La Beckwith, which took place in 1994. He was found guilty of murder, and is now serving a life sentence in prison.

The film of the same name focuses on the adversarial relationship between Bobby De Laughter, the assistant district attorney in the 1994 case (played by Alec Baldwin) and De La Beckwith, the role of which earned James Woods an Academy Award nomination for best supporting actor. The role of

Myrtle is played by Whoopi Goldberg.

Evers-Williams confessed her mixed feelings toward the film at a small press conference prior to her address.

"On a positive note, the movie is a good movie," she said. "It has certainly made any number of people throughout the country, especially younger people, curious about (Medgar's) life. That I'm very pleased (about)."

"However, a friend of mine described the roles of Medgar and Myrtle as bookends. Certainly the role I played in getting the case to trial was not explored."

In her speech, she paid homage to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., saying that "there is no one who deserves more credit than that man and what he did for us." She also offered tributes to Medgar and her other late husband, Walter Williams, who urged her to run for the NAACP post, and died two days after she won the election.

Those in attendance found Evers-Williams riveting.

"I thought it was a really great speech," said Crystal Davenport of Southfield. "I like how she focused on the high-school group that was visiting, because they really are the future."

"I agreed with everything she said. We have ghosts right here at OU, and in Michigan," agreed Carrie L. Owens, an instructor in the OU Special Education Department who brought her class. "It's the young people here on this campus, all together, who should be doing something about it."



Civil Rights: Myrtle Evers-Williams, chairwoman of the NAACP Board of Directors and widow of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, signs a copy of her book, "The Ghosts of the Mississippi," for Oakland University student Kim Craig (left) and other students and admirers.

Diversity is apparent at OU campus

BY AILEEN WINGBLAD
SPECIAL WRITER

A stroll through Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus offers a snapshot version of the burgeoning multiculturalism that engages Oakland County.

Students whose homelands list from A to Z — namely Albania to Zimbabwe — and dozens more in between, comprise a growing portion of the campus population, and it's no wonder, according to Polly Bachrouche, co-chairperson of the college's Diversity Committee and International Center director. The Orchard Ridge campus, located in Farmington Hills, is renowned for its commitment to international education and its reputation for valuing and respecting differences of all kinds in all people, said Bachrouche. And much of this is clearly evidenced by the various programs the Diversity Committee sponsors each semester to promote the value of diversity in students, faculty and members of the community.

"We include all aspects of diversity, be it age, generation, ethnicity, cultural identity, political affiliation, gender, marital status, religion — just about anything," Bachrouche said.

"Our mission is to expose, enlighten and provide opportunity for the understanding and appreciation of our differences. When we take the time to learn and understand, we diminish



Old Friends: Farmington resident Dr. Robert Colon, a longtime friend of Myrtle Evers-Williams' son, gets reunited with the author.

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