

Publication: Battle Creek Enquirer

Tuesday, May 3, 2011

## **'Titans' coach Herman Boone urges discussion on race**

Dozens of mud-splattered football players stood on a battlefield called Gettysburg and their coach told them 50,000 men had died there fighting over race, "the same fight we're fighting today amongst ourselves."

That was 1971.

And on Monday, Herman Boone, the man who inspired that and every scene in the 2000 Disney film "Remember the Titans," told about 200 people at the Harper Creek High School auditorium the fight was still going on.

Today, Boone said, the fight happens not with guns and bayonets on a smoky battlefield or with segregating policies in patronizing statehouses, but with fear and discomfort in company and school cafeterias, with misunderstanding in the pews of churches.

"If we are going to grow as a community, we must be challenged as a community," Boone told the audience. "We must take every opportunity to invite people who don't look like us, people who don't talk like us, people who don't think like us, into our realm of comfort ... Talk to each other. Just talk to each other."

Boone's speech was part of a week-long series of Battle Creek events discussing race in America and locally, "developed, planned and implemented by a collection of individuals and organizations committed to making our community a better place," according to the program for Monday's event.

In addition to Boone's talk, the Art Center of Battle Creek is featuring "Hateful Things," a collection from Ferris State University's Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia. That exhibit is open various times through Thursday.

From 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at the Family Health Center, community advocacy group Project 20/20 will host a forum on race and diversity.

Conversations such as the one planned for Wednesday are important, Boone said, because people rarely have a firm grasp on diversity.

"Today, I believe diversity remains just a topic of presentation, but I'm afraid that's not the way it works, young people," Boone told the audience as part of an impassioned, hour-long talk. "You might like to know diversity comes on the growing pains and suffering of the great freedom movements of our time."

Among them, Boone said, were the Titans.

The 2000 film starring Denzel Washington tells the story of Boone's 1971 football team in Alexandria, Va., at the recently desegregated T.C. Williams High School. In a matter of weeks, 106 black and white players, former rivals, were forced onto the same scrimmage line, and their efforts to understand each other and get along "caught the eyes of the world," said Boone, who was the head coach of that team.

Boone said he helped foster that unity by sternly requiring the new teammates to talk to one another, learn about each other and to understand each other. He urged those in attendance at Harper Creek to do the same, but said sometimes it takes more.

"You can't be silent in your community," Boone told the crowd. "You have to speak out loudly and speak out every day, if necessary ... And having the guts to act on your thinking, that's when you'll make a difference."

*Justin A. Hinkley can be reached at 966-0698 or [jhinkley](mailto:jhinkley)*

*@battlecreekenquirer.com.*