

LAW & JUSTICE

A Civil Rights Leader in her Own Right

Medgar Evers' widow works to preserve his legacy

(AP) -- Myrlie Evers-Williams acknowledges it would be easy to remain mired in bitterness and anger, 50 years after a sniper's bullet made her a widow.

Instead, she's determined to celebrate the legacy of her first husband, Medgar Evers — a civil rights figure often overshadowed by peers such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.

Events including a black-tie gala were held this month to remember Evers, the first Mississippi field secretary of the NAACP. He was 37 when he was assassinated on June 12, 1963.

"We are cursed as human beings with this element that's called hatred, prejudice and racism," said Evers-Williams, now 80. "But it is my belief that, as it was Medgar's, that there is something good and decent in each and every one of us, and we have to call on that, and we have to find a way to work together."

Evers-Williams, who lived in Bend, Ore., for several years before moving back to Mississippi in 2012, is treated with reverence by strangers who recognize her these days.



Former President Bill Clinton sits next to Myrlie Evers-Williams, the widow of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, during the 50th anniversary remembrance of his death at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va.

She recently went to downtown Jackson's King Edward Hotel to meet reporters for an interview — a hotel, she notes, that was off limits to black people decades ago. As she waited for her coffee, a white man approached to shake her hand and ask if she'd pose for a photo.

"I've always wanted to meet

you," said Ron Walker, former mayor of the tiny town of Taylorsville.

Evers-Williams smiled cautiously, then beamed, as Walker said he believes she and Medgar Evers had made Mississippi a better, more open society.

Evers-Williams gave the invocation at President Barack Obama's

inauguration in January, and met with the president June 5 at the White House. A ceremony of remembrance was held June 6 at Evers' gravesite in Arlington National Cemetery, attended by former President Bill Clinton and Attorney General Eric Holder.

Myrlie Beasley and Medgar

Evers met as students in 1950 at Alcorn College, a historically black school in rural southwest Mississippi.

He was from Decatur, Miss., and served in the Army during World War II before becoming a star football player for the school. Nearly eight years his junior, she was a talented pianist raised by a protective grandmother in Vicksburg. The couple married in 1951.

In 1954, Evers applied to the all-white University of Mississippi Law School. After he was rejected, he sought the NAACP's help to file a lawsuit. Instead, the organization hired him to coordinate its work in stubbornly segregationist Mississippi.

Evers spent years investigating violence against black people, including the 1955 killing of 14-year-old Emmett Till. He helped James Meredith gain admission as the first black student at the University of Mississippi in 1962. Evers pushed for black voter registration, drew young people into the civil rights movement and, in the final months of his life, led a boycott of white-owned businesses in downtown Jackson.

Two weeks before his death, Evers helped coordinate a sit-in at an all-white lunch counter. That night, someone tossed a firebomb at his house. It was extinguished, but the warning clear.

Minority Business Growth Honored

Skanska Construction Company of the Year

The Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs recently presented the Oregon office of Skanska USA with the Construction Industry Award at its 25th annual conference and trade show luncheon.

The award is a yearly honor given to the agency that best exemplified OAME's mission to promote and develop entrepreneurship and economic development for ethnic minorities thereby reducing racism and discrimination.

"It is an honor to be recog-



Mel Jones (center) and Jorge Guerra (left) of Skanska USA, accept a construction industry award from the Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs and the group's longtime leader Sam Brooks.

nized for something that is major part of our approach to business," said Skanska's Northwest diversity manager Mel Jones. "We believe partnerships with minority-owned, woman-owned, disadvantaged and emerging small businesses help make our state stronger and help lead to a truly sustainable Oregon economy."

The OAME tradeshow hosted more than 128 small and large businesses, state, county and federal government agencies, and business development resources to help minority, women and emerging small businesses grow.

The event is designed for purchasers and buyers from public and private agencies and business development resources to help minority, women and emerging small businesses grow.