For Immediate Release

NATIONAL EDUCATION LEADER ULYSSES S. BYAS HONORED WITH SYMPOSIUM, EXHIBITION

First Black Schools Superintendent in Southern States Post-Desegregation

The lifetime achievements of Ulysses S. Byas, Ph.D., an educator and leader on the national scene following the desegregation of U.S. schools in 1970, will be honored at a late October program and exhibition.

“So Much with So Little: Ulysses Byas and the Journey of Black Educators in the Segregated South” is scheduled for 4-6 p.m. Fri., Oct. 30, 2009, in the Jones Room of the Robert W. Woodruff Library Building at Emory University. Byas, who is 85, will attend the event, said Randall K. Burkett, curator of African American collections for Emory’s Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

“African American principals played a key role in promoting civil rights, though often they had to do so in an indirect and discreet way, given their vulnerability to the white-controlled education systems within which they operated,” Burkett said. “Dr. Byas’ papers constitute one of the most extensive private collections dealing with segregated schools in the South. They will yield important new material for understanding the role that black principals and teachers played in advancing the cause of quality education in the latter half of the 20th century.”

Guest speaker for the program will be James D. Anderson, head of educational policy studies and professor of history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He will address barriers confronted by black educators in the 1950s and 1960s. Responding to his commentary will be Emory Provost Earl Lewis, who has written about black education in Norfolk, Va.; and Emory assistant professor Brett Gadsden, who is writing about school desegregation in Delaware.

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The exhibition, curated by educational studies doctoral student Keisha L. Green, includes items such as handwritten notes from Byas to each of his teachers evaluating their instructional practices; photos of him meeting with other prominent political and education leaders; reports about school desegregation in the South; and notes about how to improve education for black children, as well as books from his personal library. All of these items are part of Byas’ papers, which he recently placed with the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL), internationally renowned for its collections in modern literature and African American history, as well as in the history of Georgia and the South.

“Access to the Byas papers allows educational researchers, civil rights historians and students to get a ‘behind-the-scenes’ view of how deeply black educators were involved in fighting for, maintaining and improving the quality of education for blacks in the South,” Green said. “Scholars will be able to review firsthand accounts of efforts made by educators to ensure black children had access to quality education.”

The symposium follows the May 2009 publication of a book by Vanessa Siddle Walker, professor of educational studies. Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South (University of North Carolina Press) tells Byas’ story and illustrates the importance of principals, who were respectfully addressed as “Professor” by their communities, in the growth and uplifting of black society, Walker said.

“Professors of black communities were almost unilaterally dismissed as a result of desegregation; we have often failed to recognize their contributions to the development of school communities across the south,” Walker said. “Dr. Byas’ collection vastly exceeds the materials he used to document his community role in Hello Professor; it will keep researchers busy for some time.”

Program sponsors include the Emory Libraries, the Division of Educational Studies, the African American Studies Department, the History Department, the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts, and the James Weldon Johnson Institute.

The program and exhibition are open to the public at no charge. For more information, contact Denise Funk at dmfunk@emory.edu or 404.727.6887.

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