

## St. Louis American

### HBCU holds N-word conference

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With a debate swirling nationwide over the n-word, a historically black college in Alabama has set aside four days to discuss the racial slur.

Participants at the conference, which began Thursday and ends Sunday, discussed topics ranging from the origins of the epithet to whether juggling a few letters makes it socially acceptable at the "N" Surrection Conference at Stillman College.

Organizers said the goal of the event is to challenge the use of the n-word "through the use of intelligent dialogue and a thorough examination of black history."

Debate over the use of the word has escalated in recent months, with comedian Michael Richards' racial rant prompting black leaders such as the Rev. Jesse Jackson and California Congresswoman Maxine Waters to urge the public and the entertainment industry to stop using it.

Clarence Sutton Sr., president of the Tuscaloosa chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said he's taken deep offense to the slur since a 1960 incident when a knife-wielding white youth slapped him and used the term when referring to him.

"From that time on in my life, the word was personal. I associated it with the hate and the very deep disdain that this gentleman had perpetrated on me at the time," he said.

These days, Sutton said, it's mostly other blacks he finds using the word.

"I'm fighting now because we have lost a generation of young people who don't know the history associated with that word," Sutton said.

Kovan Flowers, co-founder of AbolishTheNWord.com, said striking the word from use would help set an example for other races.

"We can't say anything to Hispanics, or whites or whoever unless we stop using it ourselves," he said. "It's the root of the mind-set that's affecting why people are low, from housing to jobs to education."

Stillman senior Maurice Williams said he organized the conference hoping to educate his peers about the history of the word. The event includes a community fair, charity basketball game, unity march and discussions ranging from the word's origin to its use among various ethnic groups.

"I had to understand that a lot of the images that we portray in television, in the media, in the hip-hop environment -- all of those things have the same connotations as the n-word itself, so therefore it's the n-word personified," Williams said. "Where do you see another culture portraying some of these same images?"

Rapper Tupac Shakur was credited with legitimizing the term when he came out with the song "N.I.G.G.A.," which he said stood for "Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished."

Stillman English professor Alisea McLeod said she doesn't buy it.

"It's hogwash. What this is really indicative of is a heart problem," she said. "What is coming out of mouths is what is coming out of souls. These are not words that are uplifting and I think (they) point to a bigger problem -- a lack of self-love."