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Hasan Davis brings "York" to S. Bend High School

By LaRayne Watts

Hasan Davis held South Bend High School students spellbound with his riveting presentation of York at an assembly held at the school last Thursday.

Davis started his presentation with the statement, "My name is York, just York." York was the slave of Captain William Clark and accompanied his master and Meriwether Lewis on their famous expedition of discovery from 1803 to 1805. He did not volunteer for the expedition; he was told to go. In fact, he could not have volunteered if he was a free man. Also, he was the only member of the expedition with a wife and children waiting for him back at home.

Davis told the students about the difficulties of the expedition, he talked about the hunger and near starvation. But he also told them how if felt for a man who had never been able to look a white man in the eyes to be treated as an equal partner among the men of the expedition. He was the first black man most of the Indians they met had ever seen. He told about how the Indians looked up to him as a man of power and even sometimes as a gift from the gods. And he said that when the leaders of the expedition told the Indians they were going to be Americans that he, York, knew they would be 'colored' Americans. He knew something about that and wished that he could warn them and send them away.

He also told about how York got none of the rewards that were given to the other men on the expedition and how it changed his attitude about life and slavery.



South Bend High School students Kaari Taylor (left) and Kyle Rogers (right) talk with Hasan Davis just before his "living History" presentation at the assembly last Thursday.

Davis, from Kentucky, is a lawyer who works with children's causes in his home state, often working directly with the governor's office. He didn't preach to the students, but mentioned briefly about how he had risen from the drug and gang culture of the slums of Atlanta through the power of education.

He said that he has been doing living history

presentations for about seven years. His other character is a Civil War Soldier. He has been doing York for about two years. He said it took him a full year to research and write the script and develop the character.

He wants to show that American history is not all about people of European descent. He wanted to show the diversity of our history. He said, "This generation your generation has challenged American history. For the first time we can see how diverse America has always been."

Davis got a standing ovation from the students at the end of his presentation and then answered questions from the audience.

One of the teachers commented after the assembly, "I've never seen our students, including some of our problem students, so quiet and so focused on a presentation."