

December 22, 2005
Dr. William "Billy" Roberts

"Hush, hush, Somebody's callin' my name."

On December 18, 2005, twenty-one men of African descent, two of whom not yet Bahá'ís, responded to the call and came from South Carolina, Georgia, the Florida panhandle, south Florida, Gainesville, the Tampa Bay area, and they joined the brothers of the greater Orlando area. They descended on the pristine environs of the Franciscan San Pedro Retreat, located in Orlando, Florida. The sixth annual Florida Black Men's Gathering had begun.

At seven p.m. the drums called the brothers to convene. There were over 20 drums and numerous percussion accessories. The Gathering was blessed with several powerful and mellifluous voices. They sang and the drums responded. Each drum had its own special voice. Then, without any apparent signal, the drums ceased and prayers began.

Dr. Billy Roberts was in attendance. He had come straight from the Social and Economic Development Conference. Dr. Roberts was undoubtedly exhausted from his attendance at the Conference and may have expected to get a respite at the Gathering, but this was not to be. While the program committee of the Gathering had mapped out its format for the three days, it was flexible enough to invite and allow Dr. Roberts to expound at length on the Five-Year Plan. Each brother was given a crash course on the Plan and time to ask questions about any aspect of it.

Misconceptions about clusters were cleared up, insights about the Ruhi series given, and the role of African-American Bahá'ís in this Glorious Faith emphasized. Much praise must be given to Dr. Roberts for his time and efforts. Many of the brothers, revitalized by the intensity of the devotions and the consultation, took the occasion to renew or make new commitments regarding the work they would do in their communities upon return. Some found new resources and support for their efforts.

The planning committee had allotted time at this Gathering for the brothers to wander the spacious grounds of the San Pedro Retreat for meditation, but so engrossed were they with the aforementioned topics, this was dropped for lack of time.

Tuesday, December 20, the mama kubwa drum, (big mama), called the brothers to prayer. After prayers, reflections, and a little lunch, the brothers departed for various compass points. One of the last songs sung was still resounding on the Retreat grounds:

"I know I been changed,
I know I been changed,
I know I been changed,
Bahá'u'lláh has changed my name."

The Men of the 6th Annual BMG Florida