

Alleviating Opposition to Black Culture

anxiety and dread among many whites. It is a fear that dates back at least to Theodore Bilbo's preachments on the floor of the U.S. Senate about the threat of mass miscegenation. If there must be integration, many whites feel more comfortable when the "integration" is on their side of the color line where they can police the social intercourse and better prevent the sexual.

Perhaps what is so disturbing to the likes of John Pope and Jim Gardner with regard to the free-standing center for black culture is that blacks are "drawing the line" and bidding the "other" come. The issue of African Americans daring to "draw the line" has something to do with those in control not wanting to relinquish power, but it is also very frightening to blacks to be "drawing the line."

The frightening component derives from the suspicion that

on the black side of the color-line black folk will go "wilding," that a fight with knives or a rape is much more likely to occur.

Journalist J.A. Rogers addressed this fear around the time that it was an acknowledged issue among whites. He did so in an article titled, "The French Harlem," published in the April 4, 1928 issue of *The New York Amsterdam News*.

The setting is the Bal Negre in Paris, which Rogers visited on one of his trips abroad, but it is very much the "American dilemma" that he has on his mind: *Paris now has a miniature Harlem and all within the space of three months. It is the Bal Negre on the Rue Blomet.*

Prior to this, the ballroom had a rather small clientele. One could see what is rare in Paris, a dance hall where nearly all the couples on the floor were Negroes. A mixed couple, white

man dancing with colored woman or the opposite, was rare. Then two of the leading newspapers suddenly discovered the place and carried long articles about it, with the result that the white clientele has grown to such proportions that the place is overcrowded now.

Just such a thing happened some years ago in Chicago. A few white people had been in the habit of visiting the cabarets on the South Side. Then one day a paper...in its vice crusade, announced that white people were attending Negro cabarets and that there was no color line. The result was that white people simply poured into these places, making a fortune for their owners. Harlem and other Negro neighborhoods in the North and parts of the South have all had a similar experience.

The simple fact is that in spite of what our American sociologists and legislators may say, the Negro will have, in no matter what part of the world, no easy task preserving his isolation...once the white people got on his track.

The American Negro was brought from over 3,000 miles away, and were he taken "back" to Africa, it is safe to say that an equal number of boats would have to be provided for the white people who would want to go along. Excerpting an account of the Bal Negre appearing in one of the local dailies, we learn that whites attending the cabaret began to

feel at home.

One said, "The contagion works. We allow ourselves to be converted, to chat and to enjoy ourselves at this strange carnival."

And later: "Little by little we learn that we have been deceived in our preconceptions, and finish by not regretting not having seen a fight with knives or a rape."

The simple fact is that in spite of what the likes of John Pope, Jim Gardner, Dinesh D'Souza, and Shelby Steele may say, African Americans will have in no matter what part of the world, no easy task of preserving our isolation; no possibility of separatism or neo-segregationism once whites get on our track; for our culture has infiltrated their lives and gotten under their skin.

The real problem is that centers for black culture at white universities across the country are places of conversion where, once the contagion takes hold, whites enjoy themselves and thereby affirm what is a significant part of what is culturally American.

To help them set those fearful whites at ease, perhaps we could consider a slight modification in the name we use to describe the free-standing center we want to see built. In the name "Black Cultural Center" the word "Black" is not being heard as descriptive, but possessive, (implying black ownership). This

could be remedied by naming the building the "Center for Black Culture."

This change would strategically relieve many opponents of the subconscious fear that "Black Cultural Center" implies black ownership — the fear that it will be a "black thang" that they will not understand. Secondly, "Center for Black Culture" is a more stately and elegant designation.

When in the end the "Center for Black Culture" is built, some white journalist will write an article very similar to the one who wrote the piece titled, "Collapsible Color Line" about a concert given by the black tenor Roland Hayes in 1929. The journalist will have to say that at the "Center for Black Culture" at UNC the color line dissolves and whites and blacks sit elbow to elbow.

"What is the meaning of it?" the journalist will write. "Something quite simple and very profound...This people that we have wronged has found a way to conquer us; not by violence, but by melody. In the face of a cultural triumph in this magnitude by the African American, the pretense of white superiority will become more difficult to maintain." *Dr. Spencer is a professor of African American Studies who occasionally writes for the Ink.*

BCC Not Original

achievement carried over to America as well.

Yet the role that blacks have played in helping to make this country what it is today has been casually written out of the textbooks. Going to school as a child, I remember seeing vivid pictures of our great-grandparents picking cotton. As Malcolm X stated, "Cotton picking don't move me." I share his belief that as long as you can be convinced that you've never done anything, you can never do anything. These factors, which cause a low sense of self-esteem in our community, need to be abolished just as slavery had been.

However, when individuals speak up for themselves, they are labeled "egoist" or "separatist." Are BCC advocates really

"egoist" because they support a center, which would fill in what "His-Story" leaves out?

Are advocates really "egoist" because they seek to remember the humanity, glory and sufferings of their ancestors? Do supporters believe that a BCC would alleviate having to deal with other members of the community? Of course not. Living together in this country, our destinies are tied.

If we ignore that past and just "wish" our problems away, then history is doomed to repeat itself. Communication needs to be enhanced. That is the only way that things can get accomplished.

But how can groups communicate if they don't

know where the other group is coming from. That's why instead of a meaningful dialogue taking place about the BCC, we hear the basic stereotypes, which originate from fear and ignorance.

Through proper education, we can gain proper understanding of each other. Only in a state of understanding, does peace and harmony prosper.

Support a move in the right direction. Support the BCC.

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For those of you Who Didn't March in the '60s...



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to the Cause**

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