

Editorial...

From The Editor...

The Erosion of Free Choice

The end of a year and the start of a new signals a time for reflection. Most people take out some time to ponder past actions (both good and bad) with a desire to put forth a better effort in the future. Most of this kind of reflection deals with our personal concerns. However, in 1982, when we think about our personal/individual concerns let's also make an effort to confront the issues that collectively affect all Americans.

With the present mood of ultra-conservatism clouding the judgement of those politicians who are supposed to oversee the needs of all the people, Black America faces many obstacles as we enter 1982. Unfortunately, we are finding ourselves again fighting many of the same battles that we thought we had won.

Through the lobbying zeal of 'new conservatism' advocates such as the Moral Majority, many gains made by Blacks and other minorities are systematically slipping away. Such organizations have shrewdly targeted a significant portion of their thrust on areas that Blacks and minorities have focused little attention. Maybe because many of us have been preoccupied with the present and future shock of the Reagan budget cuts we have not clearly perceived the serious erosion of personal freedom that has taken hold in America.

In the December 20, 1981 New York Times Book Review the cover story by Colin Campbell is titled "Book Banning in America". To many of us the title of this article is shocking. We have not heard of book banning since the reign of Adolph Hitler in Nazi Germany. However, when one examines more closely the kinds of books that are being banned and the rationale for such action it becomes readily apparent that our perpetual battle for freedom now has another front on which to fight.

Groups of national and localized citizen committees along with school boards have, in recent months, challenged our right to decide what we can read. A few months ago, the Supreme Court agreed to review a 1976 case involving the school board of Island

Trees, Long Island. The school board sought to remove nine books from its library which included the following: Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse Five"; "Go Ask Alice", the diary of a young girl who died from a drug overdose; "Soul On Ice" by Eldridge Cleaver; Alice Childress' "A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich" and "Best Short Stories by Negro Writers", edited by Langston Hughes.

The fact that there are people in America that honestly believe these books should be banned is alarming but when we seek the reasons for such action the answers are nothing short of appalling. Quoting from the New York Times article, "According to one of the board's press releases, the books were 'anti-American, anti-Christian anti-Semitic... and just plain filthy.'"

The New York Times article goes on to point out that such cases are on the increase with more than 100 titles being removed or threatened with removal from both school and public libraries in over 30 states. More books that have either been removed or threatened include "Manchild in the Promised Land," by Claude Brown; "Down These Mean Streets," by Piri Thomas; "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" by Ken Kesey; "1984" and "Brave New World".

Upon examination of the content of many books that have been banned or threatened one will note that most deal with very real conditions in our socie-

ty, or in the case of fictional works potential realities. The value of these books lie in their elevation of our awareness to the need to incorporate compassion and understanding into our activities as they affect others. Removal of such books only serves to further alienate people of differing backgrounds at a time when we should be exploring points of commonality and working together for the benefit of all.

America has always prided itself on freedom of expression. It is for this right above all others that we have welcomed immigrants (except the Haitians) for over two hundred years to America's shores. But with the current mood for 'book banning' it is evident that there are those among us who would desire to limit free expression. There are still areas of this nation in which Whites have no first-hand contact with Blacks because Blacks don't live or work there. However, some Whites from these isolated parts are capable of demonstrating a realistic understanding of Blacks primarily because they have read about us in a positive sense.

If we eliminate the reading matter we eliminate understanding and in turn facilitate mythological, racist-oriented concepts... especially when one is subjected to word-of-mouth interpretations at the expense of the written word.

So, in 1982 let us resolve to lobby, form citizen groups, watch the actions of our school boards and public libraries and make a concerted effort (not just among Blacks but all concerned Americans) to protect our right to freely express our ideas. Remember, freedom can never be taken for granted. It must be diligently watched over to keep its true meaning intact.

On The Cover

As we enter the new year one of America's most influential Black organizations is entering their new year with a new leader. The man is John E. Jacob who officially replaces Vernon Jordan January 1st, 1982 as the President of the National Urban League. We all know of the diligent job that Mr. Jordan turned in as head of the Urban League and with John Jacob we can expect more of the forceful, outspoken leadership that has become a tradition with this vital Black organization. Cover and inside photos by Lisa Dubois.

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