

# The Smoky Mountain Times

ESTABLISHED 1887

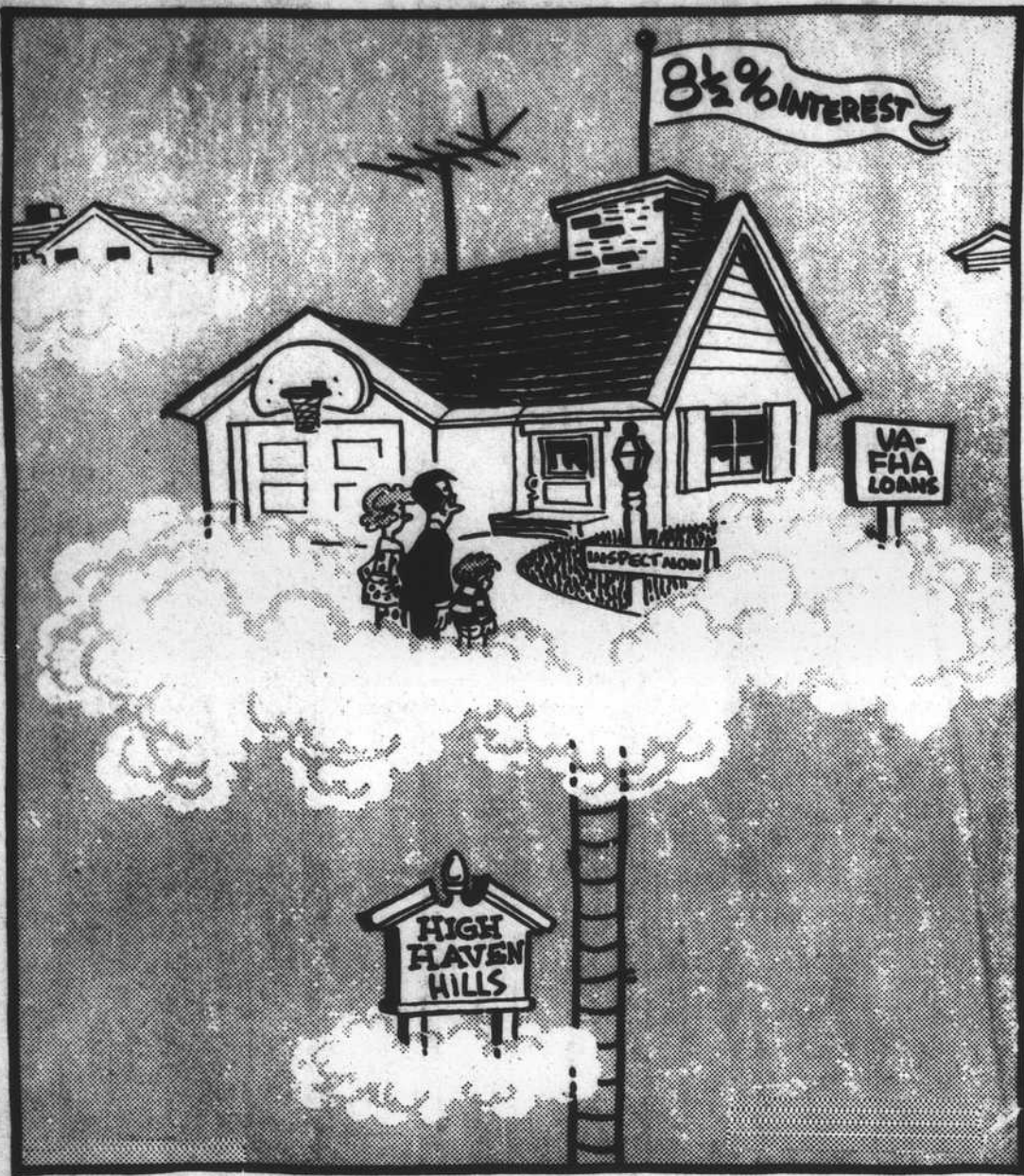
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## OUR OPINIONS

### Many Don't Want It Told As It Is

Vice President Spiro Agnew has challenged the reliability of the news media, and in doing so he has aroused the considerable hostility toward reporters and commentators that has been prevalent for years. But much of the hostility toward the news media, ironically, is concentrated among Americans who don't want reporters and commentators to "tell it like it is."

The experience of The Smithfield Herald supports this conclusion.

Some critics tell us: Don't publish news stories about racial disturbances. Don't publish the grievances of blacks. Don't publicize political controversies. Things would be peaceful in the community if the press didn't stir up trouble.

Critics of the newspaper who express this view give voice to America's folk belief that the troubles engulfing this country are caused by the news media. By some strange logic, many Americans seem to conclude that racial problems would vanish if the news media kept quiet on racial matters, that it's the press or television that causes all the bad things associated with the Vietnam war, that political controversies are not caused by the politicians who engage in them, but by the news media.

For generations, practitioners of American journalism have held that a newspaper, as public servant, should be a mirror reflecting life in the community it serves and in the wider world. And life is a mixture of the sweet and the bitter, the soothing and the irritating.

Before there was any TV or radio journalism, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, conscious of journalism's obligation in a democratic society, declared in 1923 in its Canons of Journalism that "the primary function of newspapers is to communicate to the human race what its members do, feel, and think." The Canons did not limit the responsibility of newspapers to reporting simply the good things that people do, feel, and think, nor merely the things acceptable to "respectable society."

Here is the old civics lesson that many Americans learned long ago and many Americans should have learned: American newspapers (joined today by television and radio) have responsibility to fulfill their traditional function so that the people may acquire the information they need for intelligent exercise of democratic citizenship. The people have the right, even the duty, to know what happens in government and all of society, the bad things that happen as well as the good.

This historic role of the press in democratic life, of course, places an awesome responsibility upon the news media. Reporters and commentators are people and not gods, and they are not immune to error. But any fair study of today's American journalism will show that their fulfillments of responsibility greatly outweigh their shortcomings, which sometimes are glaring and ought to be criticized.

It would be as unfair to say that the people of contemporary America caused all the troubles that irritate us as it would be to

say that modern news media caused the racial strife and all troubles associated with the Vietnam war. But it is not unfair to say that much of today's trouble persists because many Americans don't want to face the realities of conditions at home and abroad or they respond indifferently or unwisely to the mass of accurate information and interpretation that does come to them through broadcasting channels and the newspapers.

-The Smithfield Herald

### An Unfair Law Is Struck Down

That 64-year-old North Carolina law against vagrancy got what it deserved last week -- a death blow from a panel of three judges in U.S. District Court.

Through the years, the vagrancy law was used by self-acclaimed respectable society to keep idlers and "trouble-makers" in harness. Some months ago, it was invoked to harass some youths picked up by police at a "hippie house." Unable to pin a genuine crime upon the youths, authorities resorted to booking them on the vaguely defined vagrancy charge. The American Civil Liberties Union, which has a history of befriending a wide assortment of people deprived of democratic rights, went into court in behalf of the "vagrants".

What the Federal judges said in ruling the vagrancy law unconstitutional is a lesson in fair play and democracy that should be widely read and carefully studied.

Observing that under the vagrancy law a man without a job is automatically guilty of crime, the Court put the spotlight on the unfair workings of the law by drawing this contrast: "Those with property are exempt and may live idly blessed by the criminal law. Those without property must be gainfully employed and it is no excuse that there may be no jobs available."

And the Court had these sensible things to say about freedom in a democratic society:

"The freedom to conform to community behavior patterns is not liberty, but state regimentation. Toleration of non-conformity is the test of a mature, established government. A man is free to be a hippie, a Methodist, a Jew, a Black Panther, a Kiwanian, or even a communist, so long as his conduct does not imperil others or infringe upon their rights. In short, it is no crime to be a hippie."

This is basic American doctrine rooted in the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution.

-The Smithfield Herald

### "Voice Of Democracy"

(Editor's Note: Recently the Veterans of Foreign Wars post conducted a speaking contest which was entitled "Voice of Democracy". The Franklin Press has printed the fourth and third place winners. Below is the second place winner's talk by David Bryson. All speakers spoke on "Freedom's Challenge".)

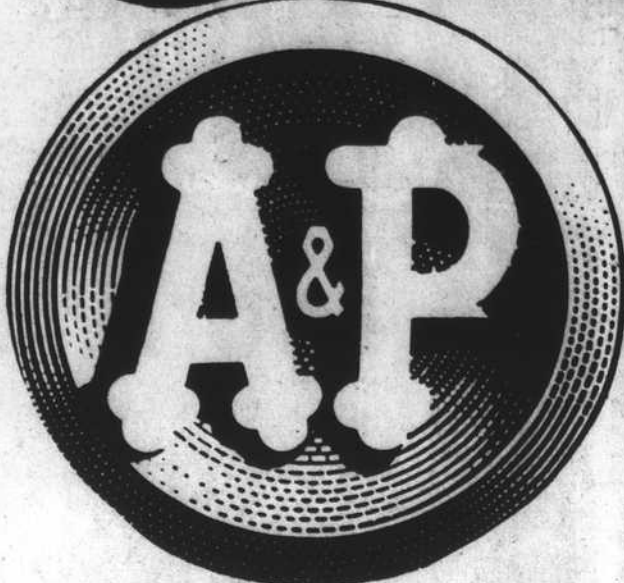
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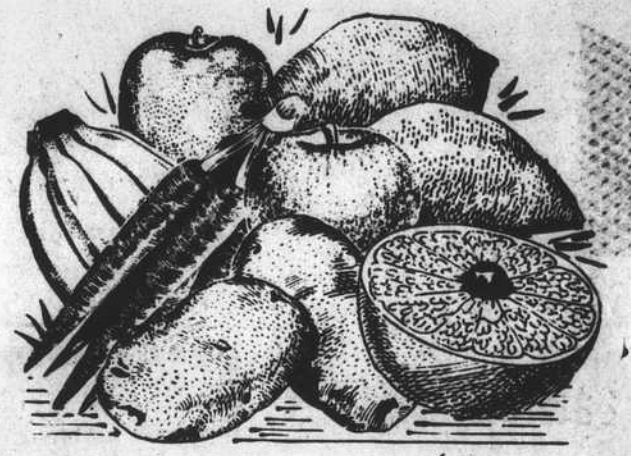
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