

THE ROCKEFELLER/ALBERT SNAFU

by Jewell Handy Gresham

It is fittingly symbolic of our historical national curse that the recent appearance of an African Chief of State for the purpose of addressing a joint session of Congress should promptly be tainted by the gutter racist remarks passed between Vice President Nelson Rockefeller and Speaker of the House Carl Albert, Jr.

The utterances indulged in on the occasion of the official visit of Liberia's President, Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr., would have been out of place in a barroom or toilet. Emanating from the highest rostrum of the Congress of the United States, they are particularly revolting. They are also particularly revealing.

For they are symptomatic at the highest level of government of the deeply entrenched racism which so many white American seem bent on ignoring as the foremost manifestation of our national heritage. At its core is the ugly body of sexual mythology developed as a base for the unrestrained exploitation of millions of black men, women, and children throughout the nation's history.

Surely in the latter part of the 20th century, the extent of the genocide and the enormity of the outrage must affront even the Heavens, historically impervious to a great deal of human suffering.

There is some evidence that the Heavens may in fact be affronted. Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Albert were, after all, unaware that the microphone before them was open as they indulged in their fratricidal remarks center on two Black men; the visiting Liberian Chief of State and the single Black U.S. Senator, Massachusetts' Edward Brooke, who escorted Dr. Tolbert to the Senate chamber.

As in Watergate, it was the taped record (in this instance inadvertently piped to the Radio-Television Gallery) which made denial impossible. Fortunately, the National Black Network and National Public Radio were therefore privy to this immortal moment in history and despite the pleas of staff aides in the Gallery, proceeded to treat it as news.

Following is the excerpt of the exchange as carried in the New York Times.

"Albert: Are there many Liberians that are mulattoes? There are?

Rockefeller: Most are strictly Blacks.

Albert: Real Black, huh?

Rockefeller: But they've got a class system -- the Blacks that went back to Liberia and took on all the characteristics of the Southern whites. And they treated the local Black . . .

Albert: They never let the local Blacks get in on anything?

Rockefeller: oh, no. They've slightly changed their speech, but only slightly.

Albert: But only slightly.

Rockefeller: Ed Brooke is a one-man receiving committee.

Albert: Yeah, he'd be a slave if he were over there. (laughter)."

SEXISM-RACISM

At this point, I must confess that as a Black female, I would be a particularly poor columnist if I failed to move swiftly to point out the sexism and racism in these incredible remarks.

First of all, why, at the sight of a Black man coming before the Congress -- from the top-most level of state -- did the mind of Albert move instantaneous to the thought (image) of "Mulatto?"

The term is both a historical and mythological one used by whites to indicate an inherent "tragic" state of the person who descends from Black-White parentage. When convenient, it is

also used to suggest that a strain of white blood makes a Black person smarter than those without it (on the current American university scene and in some scientific circles, this is the racist theory with which Shockley and others play around).

A WHITE CREATION

I must point out that the term is entirely a white creation. I have never in all my life heard a Black person refer in conversation to a sister or brother, whatever the line of decent, as a mulatto. The extent of the insult shocks the imagination. Are Blacks aware that the word comes from the Spanish for "mule!"

SEX ANGLE

What Mr. Albert and Mr. Rockefeller have succeeded in doing is to direct our attention to the very heart of the traditional secret sex practices of whites, their imposed sexual taboos, and the unconscionable sexual and moral offenses which they have committed against Blacks throughout our history as they exploited Black bodies otherwise in extracting the fruits of their labor. There is titillation implicit in Albert's remarks and it arises from excitement, conscious or subconscious, at the thought of Black-White sex.

Unfortunately, the larger context of such excitement reflects a systematic rape of Black women. The blood of our men falsely accused of rape in violation of the taboo cries aloud from the very soil of this land; their shadows and their ghosts remain with us and will not disappear until it is no longer possible for our very highest officials to betray before our faces the shape of their racist conditioning.

An interesting observation on the Albert-Rockefeller exchange is to be seen in the absurdity of racial classifications as they have been engineered to fit Western variations: If Black Americans were in South Africa, for instance, they would not be Black, but "colored."

WE KNOW THE ANSWER

Now how did Afro-Americans, almost in their entirety, become colored! In the fact of the obscenity of the existing mythology, it would be stupid of us not to remind the nation that we -- Black men and women -- know the answer and that we do not propose to live with the propensity of White Americans to construct mythology to fit their guilt.

Heavens knows that white fancies continue to run rampant. Does anyone recall that on the Nixon "Enemy List," the names of a Black Congressman was included with the distinguishing notation that he had a penchant for White women! Or that Mr. Rockefeller had the misfortune to preside over the massacre at Attica, following which the inflammatory charge was made by a high official -- never punished for the act -- that Black prisoners had castrated and slain white guards?

Thanks to the integrity of the white medical examiner, it was subsequently revealed that the prisoners had neither castrated nor slain the hostages. But Black people knew instantaneously that the castration charge, at least, was untrue.

Black men fighting for very survival have neither the time nor the inclination to castrate white men. Obviously, where very survival is at stake, the area of sex is not where a true contest occurs; hence it is unnecessary for the Black male to try to erase the sexual identity of his white counterpart.

reduce those risks to a large degree.

To illustrate this point, CSAA is distributing an award-winning poster design fashioned by Stacey Schaefer, age 8, a third grade student at Chapelwood School in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The poster shows the importance of wearing

white or reflective materials after dark. Although pedestrians can visualize vehicles at night because of their headlights, the situation is entirely reversed for the motorist -- at night he or she can only see objects that are well illuminated by the auto's headlights. The

Why is the white male so threatened? Why so intrigued? What are the implications of the health of a society which stakes claims to virility on so obscure a level? Is it surprising that talk of war making -- again at high levels -- comes so readily in such a society? These questions are, of course, rhetorical. At this point, if it has not already been done, an abject apology should go from the White House to Dr. Tolbert.

The portion of the exchange in which Mr. Rockefeller engaged in derogatory comment relative to Liberian citizens -- and Mr. Albert chimed in that if Senator Brooke were in Liberia today, he would be a slave -- is an unconscionable affront to a visiting dignitary who noted in his speech that he was "the First African Head of State in this your third century to address a joint session of your honorable body."

If Senator Brooke is so contained that he cannot demand an apology for himself, he should do so on behalf of Dr. Tolbert and on behalf of Black Americans who -- by the very nature of the insult dealt -- became his constituency

CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDE

Meanwhile, it is important to point out that in effect the behavior of the Tweedledee and Tweedledum pair merely reflected in effect the attitudes of many members of the Congress. Notably absent from the chamber which Dr. Tolbert faced was a large number of Senators and Congressmen. Congressional staffs and aids had to be used to augment the audience.

When it is further considered that the proceedings were delayed for 30 minutes as the distinguished Senator from Alabama, James Allen, filibustered against a civil rights bill -- our traditions stood forth in full operation.

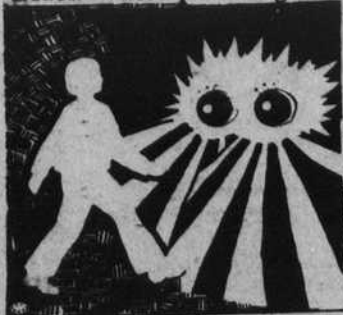
There is no way, in short, that the ugliness of the incident can be disguised. But precisely because it cannot, it is fortuitous that it happened. For perhaps it will shock Black Americans sufficiently to direct their attention which plays so large a role in the actions of American officials and thus in governmental policies -- domestic and foreign.

This realization is crucial. At this moment, we have few unflinching examples before us of strong moral and political leadership. Meanwhile, Black Africa may be facing grave potential danger in the behind-the-scenes actions and motivations of the current Secretary of State. Himself the architect of a Southern Strategy Aspect of American foreign policy, appropriately dubbed the "Tar Baby" alternative, Henry Kissinger now tells us that his "shuttle diplomacy" efforts to effect accommodations between blacks and whites in Southern Africa are directed toward achieving black majority rule.

Unfortunately, the conversion of our present Secretary of State arises from expediency, not out of demonstrable vision and commitment. We have yet to see this country give credible evidence of embarking on a new course designed to ride us, internally and externally of our historical national curse.

Thanks to Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Albert, therefore, perhaps some of us who are black -- together with those whites who cannot help but turn away from the same revulsion -- will be alerted to watch with renewed vigilance whatever events American officials contemplate staging in our names.

If we do not, we may find ourselves dropped from the Roster of those who play a meaningful role in effecting historical change, in which case the future is apt to find us either more miserable or largely ignored.



WEAR WHITE AFTER DARK

There will be times when youngsters must be out at night, reminds the California State Automobile Association (AAA) and, although there are greater risks after dark, the well-informed pedestrian can

reduce those risks to a large degree.

To illustrate this point, CSAA is distributing an award-winning poster design fashioned by Stacey Schaefer, age 8, a third grade student at Chapelwood School in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The poster shows the importance of wearing

white or reflective materials after dark. Although pedestrians can visualize vehicles at night because of their headlights, the situation is entirely reversed for the motorist -- at night he or she can only see objects that are well illuminated by the auto's headlights. The

result is that if light-colored or reflective clothing is worn, the chances of being seen by motorists are much greater.

The CSAA urges all parents to reinforce this practice with their children and to take an active concern when their youngsters must

be out after dark. This can be accomplished by familiarizing them with the possible hazards of walking or cycling at night. In addition, provide white or light clothing, flashlights, or some type of retro-reflective material for them.