



Benjamin L. Hooks

FCC

The woman was lighskinned, nearing middle age. Her handsome face smooth but taut. Dark eyes flashed. "My family," she said emotionally, voice slightly quivering, "always asked me: Why do you want to know about your black ancestors? Now . . . Her voice broke off, white teeth dug nervously into bottom lip.

"What I'm trying to say is my family discouraged us from trying to learn anything about our African heritage. They were ashamed of it." And so she became ashamed too, without quite knowing why.

She made the statement to a group of people attending the Museum of African Art's Ethnic Heritage month affair in Washington, D.C., in the shadow of the dome on Capitol Hill. The affair was entitled "The Impact of Roots, an Inter-racial Dialogue on Alex Haley's Milestone Book." Another indication of how Haley's Roots is generating thought among and giving pause to wide spectrum of folk.

Moderator was George Haley, Alex's younger brother who is general counsel, United States Information Agency. Also on the panel was the Honorable H. W. Philip Palmer, Ambassador, Embassy, Sierra Leone, Africa, a portly gentleman with a refined Oxfordian accent.

I will not reveal the lady's name. It would be pointless and perhaps add to her embarrassment. Suffice it to say that her shame is that of many black people's in this country -- perhaps a majority who were raised to view our African heritage with disdain or shame.

Our shame took many forms, one of the most blatant was (and in some circles sadly still exists) our placing high on the socially desirable ladder folk with light skin. "If you're light, you're all right; if you're brown stick around, if you're black, get back," was the old saying spoken with mirthful rancor.

As if skin color in any race is an indication of an individual's intrinsic worth. We blacks struggle against that noxious notion in white thinking, then turn around and clutch that hideous monster to our breast.

Our shame over our African ancestry came about naturally enough. How could we be anything if Africa allowed us to be forced into slavery? The blame, thus shifted, it was easy to ignore the corollary question "Why did we cooperate in our own debasement?"

The two questions are not fair: 1. Slavery did not begin in 1619 with the arrival of Africans to this country in chains. Centuries before, there was white on white slavery, cruel and dehumanizing as black slavery later in Africa introduced by warring religious and tribal sects. As to our cooperation with slavery here in America, there are accounts too numerous to relate here of our refusal even in our powerless position to cooperate with that evil.

Our shame over our African ancestry was nurtured by Tarzan of the Apes; by Jungle Jim, by the National Geographic's explicit pictures of grinning dancing, naked, striped-with-paint blacks with bones in their noses or lips or ears and women, naked breasts shamelessly sucking their young in public.

It was reinforced by all the symbols and icons around us: in radio and TV commercials. In newspapers -- how the story was treated; in magazines -- who the ads were geared to. Until the mid-sixties, most commercial advertising ignored the fact blacks used soap, or deodorant, or coffee, or kitty litter, or bought cars or clothes or light blubs or chewing gum.

Our shame (or self hatred) yet manifests itself in debilitating black-on-black crime, that seems to be intensifying rather than abating.

Our struggle -- the black struggle -- must begin to zero in on this madness. Without discounting white racism, we must now begin to assert positive images of ourselves. The conveniently accessible and weak scapegoat brother and sister next door are merely wrenching reflections of ourselves.

Television, which did much to chronicle and thus further the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and early 1970s, may strangely point the way today for us. Although our shame seems papable, choking, a suffocating thick swirling gray mass of dust without outline, visibility is getting better and much credit must be given

VOICE EDITORIALS

The Hughes

Report

By Thomas F. Hughes



The N.A.A.C.P. election on February 27th was a sorry spectacle. Of the reported 40,000 to 45,000 blacks in the area only 134 voted, 75 for Dr. James McMillan, 51 for Thomas F. Hughes and 8 for Eugene Collins. When I and my wife came to vote even my name and my wife's name was on the so-called list of eligible members to vote. The lack of voters showed a lack of interest in the N.A.A.C.P. and gives credence to the statement that "THE N.A.A.C.P. IS DEAD." Why is there such a lack of interest in the N.A.A.C.P.? Although the Reynolds Engineering Company was paying the branch over \$500 a month to send applicants for employment to their office, so few were sent that they cut the payment to some \$300 plus per month and the last time I heard it discussed applicants to justify our payments? CETA provides funds for a full time secretary and so the office should have her at least versed enough to forward applicants to Reynolds. Why are there practically no teachers in the branch? Why don't we have at least one lawyer in the branch? Why don't we have a legal defense fund and a lawyer on a retainer? Why have we so few members (around 500) of which only 30 to 40 attend meetings? Why haven't we had a membership drive? What this branch needs is a management workshop attended by district officers to set it on the right track, give it the goals of the national office, determine the needs of this community and set it on course to accomplish those needs. A good strong membership drive is a must before people will get interested or believe that this NAACP is going to do anything. The employment program needs to be revitalized and made more active, religious involvement by the preachers must be sought. A general workshop of the community people to find their desires branch? Why don't we have at least one lawyer in the branch? Why don't we have a legal defense fund and a lawyer on a retainer? Why have we so few members (around 500) of which only 30 to 40 attend meetings? Why haven't we had a membership drive? What this branch needs is a management workshop attended by district officers to set it on the right track, give it the goals of the national office, determine the needs of this community and set it on course to accomplish those needs. A good strong membership drive is a must before people will get interested or believe that this NAACP is going to do anything. The employment program needs to be revitalized and made more active, religious involvement by the preachers must be sought. A general workshop of the community people to find their desires & needs would show an interest in the people. Economic development should be a prime goal to help our local business people. Dr. McMillan has a big job to change the present status of our local office. It has become more a sorority than an association. Maybe we should call it "Sorry Sisters Society" because that is an apt definition of what it is now. The sad part of it all is that the branch is in such low repute that practically no one even wanted to run for its of-

mass education and -- television. Look what it did with one dramatic showing of the program Roots!

For one thing, I simply can't seem to stop writing about it.

Next week: Roots and the Black Church

Education Is Power

By Thomas E. Wilson, Ph.D.



Test scores reveal that Black children are not reading as well as might be expected in our school systems. Answers to questions as to why this is so varies from lack of intellectual stimulation to lack of intellectual ability to lack of experiences. The true answer must lie somewhere in between these extremes.

A frequently used definition of reading is that it is "getting meaning from the printed page or symbols". Then, in order to read, a child must learn first how to pronounce the printed symbols and then how to interpret them. This process calls for use of several tools.

We do not understand exactly how children learn to read, but we do know that reading consists of two very important facets. One is word recognition and the other is comprehension. Without the ability to do both, person is not really reading. He only has some, but not all necessary sophistication in reading.

What can we as Black parents do to help our children in the total reading process? For one thing, we can provide an atmosphere at home in which learning can take place. Books, newspapers, comic books, periodicals, etc., in the home where the child may "read" them will be a great asset in stimulating the child to want to read.

Having the child observe the parents reading will also act as a motivator for reading. Setting aside an hour in the evening where everyone in the home engages in some sort of reading activity will go a long way toward providing the child an incentive to read.

Reading to children have also been proven as useful in stimulating them to want to read on their own. It also provides models of expressions in their future reading.

In order to read well in school, children should have a background of well planned experiences that are meaningful to him. Traveling with children seems to be a rich rewarding experience for the children. It appears that when children have travelled, they seem to be more observant. Being observant seems to enhance the reading process. Field trips also serve to provide meaningful background. These trips may be to the corner grocer, or just on a guided tour around the backyard, but they will serve to provide meaningful backgrounds for adaptations to the reading process.

Children who have been allowed to express themselves at home also seem to become better readers. We are not fully aware why this is so, but we may assume that this is because of the freedom to use language that has been accorded to the child.

From time to time, we will be bringing actual techniques for teaching reading in order that parents may assist the child in learning to read.

How can a branch have a standing in the community? How can it have a standing in the community if it does not have the support a branch that does nothing for them this paper and let them know it instead of always running to the white press, because many blacks read only this paper and we should show respect for our black press. Remember BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL if it is properly viewed. Are we ashamed of being black?