

BILLIE ROWE'S NOTEBOOK

THE POWELL & THE GLORY

N'YORK CITY --- Harlem was blessed during its most dramatic growth period, it had two Powells, Adam Clayton and Chlan Bethany, who was C.B. to most people of that era. The split personality of America was apparent to each of them. In time both started to question its supposed abiding interest in human rights, individual decency and justice. They were symbols of their time, heroes whose ideals confronted the power and ideas of the system. One was a born leader, colorful and flamboyant, a maker of headlines. The other was also a standout, but not a leader in that sense of the word, but he printed and exposed the headlines.

It was glory time, a sort of carefree period. Ethel Waters found clear skies beyond "Stormy Weather," Don Redman was financially intoxicated by "Chant of the Weeds," Louis Armstrong had found joy "On the Sunny Side of the Street," Bill Bailey was better known than Pearl, Bill Robinson danced atop the Ynakee dugout, but had no way of knowing that years later a Bill Robinson would take a swing at the plate in a pin stripe uniform. Yes, those were the days of Lena Horne in a Cotton Club show-girl garb, Cab Halloway and Duke Ellington were headliners from Bombay, Lethia Hill was singing risqué songs in a Lenox Ave cellar cafe, Ed Smalls owned one of the top cabarets in the nation and Jules Bledsoe's voice and that of Marian Anderson rang the rafters of the concert halls of the world in prose sans protest.

But better yet, it was a time when thinking blacks started to question their supposed happy-go-lucky lot in America. When Paul Robeson caused concert devotees to wonder about the thunder in the backdrop as he sang "Ballad for Americans." Theatre-goers saw the flash of lightning when Canada Lee starred on B'way in "Native Son," giving life and meaning to Richard Wright's "Bigger Thomas." Josephine Baker was the toast of the continent. W.C. Handy gave class and clout to a "St. Louis Woman," and Memphis the blues before some despot snuffed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on a balcony of a black owned motel. It was a time when Joe Louis fisted his way into the headlines enroute to the pinnacle of the heavyweight division of the world.

During this incredible period Dr. C.B. Powell was making his move. While Hitler was snubbing Jesse Owens' run into Olympic history, this Powell was becoming more and more a part of a Harlem which lived and breathed hope, the mecca to which blacks, from every corner of America, turned for the fulfillment of their dreams.

I first met Dr. Powell in the mid-30's when my newspaper ambition started coming of age. The then managing editor of the Amsterdam News, whose name I have forgotten, sent me to the Doc. in my search for a job. I met him in his X-ray medical office on the then Seventh Ave. He had me come back at least ten times, and was startled every time I kept each appointment. On what was my final return, I told him that I had found a job with the Pittsburgh Courier, but would work for him if his salary offer was higher. "That's neat," he replied, "though I would love to have you on the Amsterdam, I would not like to outbid Robert Vann. Come back should you get fired or tired, and I will have a job for you." About 20-yrs later he kept that promise and contracted with me to promote the 50th anniversary of the Amsterdam News.

Inbetween those years I came to know Dr. Powell well enough to call him C.B. and have him tell me many times that his mistake was not hiring me when he had the chance. "But," said he, "if my managing editor really wanted you on the paper he would have hired you instead of sending you to me."

In my book Dr. C.B. Powell, editor-publisher of the Amsterdam News, was not a leader in the sense of today's interpretation, or usage, of that word. More - so he was a thought spreader, a catalyst for thinking. The ultimate businessman, he turned dreams into things he could touch, feel, see and enjoy. He was a person who never let down physically

or lose his appetite for the next serving. Though not a "leader," he was one of the pivots upon which the history of black America turned. He shunned personal publicity, and to those who knew him well, his first dramatic gesture was to become part owner of the Amsterdam News. A business technician by experience and indoctrination, he made the paper an instant success. He kept clear of the internal domestic quarrels of the politicians to become a true independent. The magic of his success seemingly was nourished by his inner faith and dependency upon self.

A man apart, C.B. was a friend to many, but a pal to few. His was a lonely dedication to what he wanted to become, and was seldom seen in a crowd. He belonged to an age of well practiced decorum and high class charm. About him was that fine balance of knowledge and brains. It radiated a new kind of healthiness in the body business of Harlem. To think back on the life of C.B. is to stampeed the imagination. To him the Amsterdam news became a refuge against a society which had ignored the historic achievements of blacks. Yet he was not an illusion maker, nor poet of emotion, just a publishe who locked those out who would do violence to the truth.

Like th other Powell, he leaned the survival skills of the ghetto well, and moved through the city like a will O' The Wisp to become a legend in his own time. So he coped with life when humanism and social justice were for whites only and disadents were harshly dealt with. Also like the other Powell, C.B. was out of place in this present day society in which culture has lost its battle to vulgarity. The community in which they forged history is now hounded and contaminated by the brutes of the night. It is therefore small wonder that in the solitude of the December of his years he said to life; "Don't bother me I can no longer cope." . . . STAY LOOSE.

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Food for Thought

The Clark County Library presents a four part series "Food for Thought" Thursday evenings at 7 p.m. beginning October 6th. Nutrition consultant, Helen Rose McDowell designed the series to provide the basics of nutrition education. Terms are defined, foods and food preparation are discussed and displayed and ideas for practical application of knowledge are included in each of the four sessions.

The schedule includes "Nutrition Fundamentals" on October 6th, "Nutrition in Practical Application" on October 13th, "Vitamins and Supplements" on October 20th and the final session "Degenerative Disease: The Dark Side of Nutrition Neglect" on October 27th.

"Food for Thought" is presented free to the public. Participants may attend one or all of the session for nutrition information. Programs are scheduled for the Clark County Library Auditorium, 1401 E. Flamingo Road.

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