

# An Alliance Between AOIP and the U.S. Department of Education to Re-build Battered Black Images



(Left to right) Samuel L. Banks, President, Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History; Gilbert H. Francis, President, National Pan-Hellenic Council; LeGree S. Daniels, Chairman, National Black Republican Council; Ozell Sutton, Chairman, Assault On Illiteracy Council and General President, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity; Terrel H. Bell, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education; Carrie A. Haynes, Vice-chairperson, AOIP Interorganizational Liaison Committee; and Calvin W. Rolark, Chairman, THE BMI COOPERATIVE and President, United Black Fund of America and Publisher, The Washington Informer.

**R**ECENTLY, Washington, D.C. was the scene of a second, and far more significant historically, duo of meetings of representatives of national Black organizations concerned with the illiteracy predicament in the Black community. The meetings were called through the initiative of the leadership of the national Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP). Not since 1870, when the educational work and influence of the Freedmen's Bureau was terminated, has a top-level official of the federal government given such a forthright and firm endorsement of support to a program for Black education—or such clear evidence of a recognition of the special

and unique needs of Blacks for remediation to re-build their battered images.

Only five (5) persons from within the more than 80 organizations associated with AOIP had been invited to the next day's meeting...and it was clear that a major change in policy and focus of the U.S. Department of Education—or any other long established entity—was not going to be changed without an extremely strong show of support for that needed change. Thus, the first meeting, attended by representatives of a number of the Black organizations committed to AOIP, was a desperately-needed strategy session. The second meeting was to bring together only a small body of these organization representatives and U.S.

Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell.

## A Brief Recap of the Strategy Session

**O**N a scant five-day's notice, almost half of the members (or their representatives) of the national Assault On Illiteracy Council (Board of Directors) met at the Howard Inn to plan appropriate strategy for the next day's meeting at the U.S. Department of Education. Chairman Ozell Sutton opened the session with prayer. He welcomed all present and gave a special word of welcome to Dr. Gilbert Francis, the newly elected president of the Pan-Hellenic Council, which is firmly committed to AOIP and will be taking

leadership in seeing that every city is fully involved.

Benjamin H. Wright, senior volunteer consultant to AOIP and president of Black Media, Inc., gave a comprehensive overview and necessary background of the previous efforts and activities connected with establishing regular liaison between AOIP and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). He emphasized that the AOIP coalition represents the largest volunteer resource (millions of persons) for assaulting the illiteracy dilemma in America. (The largest White-oriented, illiteracy-related volunteer group numbers 37,000.) What AOIP is doing, Wright said, does not fit into any program now involved in DOE. Also, he pointed out the fact that he and Dr. Calvin W. Rolark had encountered strong resistance to AOIP by persons at DOE under Secretary Bell...and some of these were the same persons involved in arranging the meeting for us. Therefore, a special solution is necessary to meet the remedial needs of Blacks.

Efforts to get a firm commitment from DOE for regular quarterly meetings with AOIP representatives, Wright continued, had thus far proved unsuccessful. However, he praised the assistance of the National Black Republican Council's Chairman LeGree Daniels and Ron McDuffie, who represented Chairman Daniels at the strategy session, for their intercessory and facilitating roles in this regard. Wright reported that a meeting had been arranged with Secretary Bell, three members of the department staff and only four or five representatives of AOIP.

In short order the question of strategy, expressed in terms of the size of the delegation, assumed top priority and a significant part of the session revolved around this issue.

Chairman Sutton called for a full discussion of the issue and invited input from all present. A lively and spirited interchange followed. Remarks by Dr.

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