

# THE YEAR 2000..... (Continued from page 18.)

## How It All Began

The Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP) has come a long way along an often "stony path" since that January day in 1980 when a group of publishers associated with Black Media, Inc. (who are collectively known as *The BMI Cooperative*) became aware that approximately 44 percent of America's Black population was classified as "functionally illiterate," and thus considered unemployable. This deplorable situation, substantiated by a report from the United States Department of Education, was due to the fact that more than two-fifths of Black young and older adults could neither read nor comprehend above the fourth grade level. Since 1980, that rate of "functional illiteracy" has risen to almost 50 percent. The result: an indisputable cause for massive alarm.

Prior to AOIP, the history of Black interorganizational activity might have been termed "non-collective commitment." The seeming inability of Black organizations to work together was due to the nonexistence of an identifiable common, overarching issue around which these diverse bodies could rally and still maintain their separate identities.

Then, too, there was never any means of interorganizational communication on which such numerous and varied entities could rely fully for coordinated and continuous needs of long-term interorganizational endeavors.

The overcoming of this dual dilemma is the essence of the AOIP story which has needed to be highlighted continuously from many productive and all-inclusive points of view in the pages of the *National BLACK MONITOR*.

Despite the apparent pattern of our Black-led organizations' working in isolation, the BMI publishers decided to take concerted leadership as catalysts for supplying both of these needs. The unique plan of these determined media owners was two-fold: (1) to use every issue of their newspapers and the *National BLACK MONITOR* to raise the level of awareness of every leadership group in America to the root causes of the awesome illiteracy predicament imposed over a period of centuries on Black Americans; and (2) to devote a guaranteed amount of cost-free space to all positively-oriented organizations that would commit themselves to work interorganizationally with community-building strategies as a means of overcoming these root causes of illiteracy among Black people.

Under the leadership of Dr. Calvin W. Rolark, a relentless and continuing campaign was launched by these publishers.

They also received invaluable assistance in their appeals from Rev. Dr. Leon Sullivan. As a result of these efforts, the collective, community-building thrust, known as the Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP),

became a blessed reality.

Today, AOIP is a coalition of well over 90 national Black-led organizations and scores more of similar local groups. All

now are solidly committed to work together in various coordinated ways to achieve the inspired aim of "pulling

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