

THE NAACP AND YOU!



Rev. Jesse D. Scott
President
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NAACP FOCUS

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ROLE OF NAACP
RECALLED IN HARLEM
RENAISSANCE EXHIBIT

by James D. Williams
and Sandra H. Adams

The deep and ongoing involvement of the NAACP in the writing of the history of black America was graphically highlighted through a series of events that took place during Black History Month. The first occurred on February 1st when a Baltimore TV station, WJZ-TV, and the Presidents' Roundtable, a group of 12 black CEOs heading companies in the Baltimore area, joined in co-sponsoring a month long art exhibit at the Baltimore Art Museum honoring the NAACP.

The exhibit concentrated on the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s, and featured two exquisite collections: an exhibition of photographs by James Van Der Zee and Aaron Siskind, and "Lights, Camera, Action: Black American Film Posters, 1920-1936."

The era covered by the exhibit was a time of an unprecedented outpouring of black literature, poetry, art, music and drama. Talented young black people flocked to Harlem as if moths drawn by an irresistible flame. There, their talent was nurtured and encouraged, and they produced works that have withstood the test of time.

One of the most important outlets for their creative works was *The Crisis* Magazine. W.E.B. DuBois was the editor and he was especially supportive of the new black writers and poets. Many of them, including Langston Hughes, had their first published work appear in the pages of *The Crisis*.

DuBois was himself, of course, a noted writer. In addition, James Weldon Johnson, the NAACP's Executive Secretary, was a renowned poet and wrote a number of books including *Book of American Negro*

Poetry, Book of American Negro Spirituals, and God's Trombones. He also wrote the lyrics to "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Walter White, who was later to become NAACP Executive Secretary, also contributed to the Harlem Renaissance by authoring *The Fire in the Flint* and *The Rope and Faggot*, and Jessie Redmond Fauset, also on the NAACP staff, was one of the most successful female novelists of the period.

It was therefore fitting that an exhibit on the Harlem Renaissance would honor the NAACP.

H.L. Mencken Linked
To DuBois, White,
Johnson & Wilkins

The NAACP also figured prominently in another special event connected with Black History Month — an exhibition, "H.L. Mencken and Black America," at the Mencken Museum in Baltimore. Mencken was one of the commanding literary figures of the 1920s and 30s, an iconoclastic journalist and acerbic social critic whose writings appeared in the *Baltimore Sun*, a number of other newspapers, and his own national magazines, *The Smart Set* and *The American Mercury*.

Mencken was a confirmed cynic, attacking prohibitionists, puritans, preachers, patriots and presidents with caustic and often brilliant language. He came down hard on almost everyone, and his satire sometimes led his critics to label him a racist.

However, as the many personal letters and articles in the exhibit demonstrated, he was an early supporter of

the NAACP and influential friend and supporter of four of the major figures in the founding and growth of the Association — W.E.B. DuBois, Walter White, James Weldon Johnson and Roy Wilkins

Mencken corresponded frequently with these men, and he also wrote on a number of occasions for *The Crisis*. In an editorial in 1929, he warned of "complacency" and a "dark bourgeoisie" of "black Babbitry." In another article, he suggested that the black artist's remedy was "to make works of art that pay off the white man in his own coin."

Wilkins was the managing editor of *The Crisis* when Mencken wrote that blacks could expect no real justice from a society mired in its own stupidity, that the harsh treatment blacks had received had probably made them stronger. Wilkins was moved to write Mencken: "What a sweet bombshell to drop among the hip-and-thigh smiting 'race campaigners.'"

Hooks Asks
Congressional Probe
Into Racial Violence

At a recent press conference in New York, Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, Executive Director, NAACP, called upon the leadership of both the House and Judiciary Committees to conduct a series of national hearings into the present wave of racial violence seeking to pinpoint its causes and develop recommendations to help prevent further occurrences.

"These acts of violence have reached such volume that they cannot be ignored without jeopardizing the social fabric of this multi-racial society. Our greatest enemy is not without, it is within and its name is racism," he said.

Telegrams calling for such hearings have been sent to Senator Joseph Biden, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

"On other occasions, when critical conditions confronted the American people, such as during the riots of the '60s, a Presidential Commission offered the best approach. However, we quite frankly do not expect to see any action from the White House and so we turn to Congress," Dr. Hooks added.

Dr. Hooks said the NAACP has been closely monitoring racial violence across the country, and while incidents such as Howard Beach and

A WRAP-UP OF THE
NAACP'S 1987 CONVENTION

Historic Moments Mark NAACP's 1987 Convention

Opening on Sunday, July 5, with a ringing denunciation of the nomination of Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court and a vow by its Executive Director, Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, to vigorously oppose his confirmation by the U.S. Senate, and closing on Thursday, July 9th, with the release of its long-range plan for the future, the NAACP experienced many historic moments during its 1987 Annual Convention in New York City.

This was the first time in 28 years that the NAACP met in the city of its birth, and by the time the last light was dimmed on the final event, the Freedom Fund Dinner/Dance, more than 20,000 persons had attended the various sessions.

The convention formally began at an opening mass meeting on Sunday night at the New York Hilton Hotel at which Dr. Hooks condemned the Bork nomination saying, "the Supreme Court is too important to our hope of equality and justice to sit idly by and watch while a whole line of civil rights liberties is threatened by the appointment of an overly ideologically oriented justice."

"Therefore, we will ask the Senate to reject Judge Bork's nomination in the

Forsyth County, Ga., have attracted most of the public's attention, many other acts of racial violence have occurred in every section of the country.

halls of Congress. We will meet him in state capitols. We will meet him in every quarter demanding that Judge Bork not be elevated to serve on the nation's highest court. We will fight it all the way — until hell freezes over, and then we'll skate across on the ice," Dr. Hooks declared.

Opposition to Judge Bork was to surface again and again throughout the convention as speaker after speaker repeated the theme first sounded by Dr. Hooks.

In his opening address, Dr. Hooks cited the progress blacks had made in a number of areas since the convention was last held in New York City, almost 30 years ago, but he added:

"Even though we have won tremendous victories in the struggle for equality, there are many of our brothers and sisters whom progress has passed by . . . The NAACP is neither blind to the plight of our less fortunate brothers and sisters nor deaf to their cries."

To illustrate this, Dr. Hooks referred to the NAACP's long-range plan, the product of several years of work by the board and staff, which addresses the "troubling concerns of crime and violence in the black community, of drug and substance abuse, of teenage pregnancy, of school dropouts and youth unemployment."

He continued: "We cannot do the job

alone. We call upon the more fortunate segment of black America to enlist in the fight — or to re-enlist. There is work enough for all, and we need every hand on deck. We know that black America must do much of this work itself, for it is our future we must save."

Mrs. King Warns
Against Bork

On Monday morning, the convention continued with an opening session that featured addresses by Mrs. Coretta Scott King and Governor Thomas Kean of New Jersey, plus a brief appearance by Rep. Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.), a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President.

Saying that while the country is ready to put the era of Ronald Reagan behind it, Gephardt stated, "make no mistake, if Robert Bork becomes a Supreme Court justice the Reagan era will live on into the next century . . . Robert Bork opposes affirmative action. I say that a man who opposes affirmative action for deserving candidates does not deserve to be a nominee to the Supreme Court."

Mrs. King, widow of Martin Luther King and President of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non violence and Social Change in Atlanta, told the audience of over 2,000 "your theme reflects the

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