Vereen defends Uncle Tom act

By Major Robinson
Special to the AFRO

NEW YORK — "Why should I be ashamed of my heritage," said talented performer Ben Vereen in answer to the untold thousands protesting what they regarded as his "Uncle Tom" performance at the "All Star Inaugural Gala" in Washington, D.C. before President Ronald Reagan and the First Lady.

Vereen's impersonation of the celebrated black comedian Bert Williams, a bigtime vaudeville star of the 1920s, in black face and white lips struck a sour note with TV viewers from coast-to-coast — including as many whites as blacks.

The heaviest criticism of Vereen appeared in the black press — including the N.Y. Amsterdam News and the AFRO — which ran harsh page one stories and editorials attacking what was considered a demeaning, unecessary bootlicking performance.

But in an exclusive interview, the multi-talented Vereen insisted in no uncertain terms that he was not about to apologize to anyone.

"I felt it fitting to do the Bert Williams routine for the new administration," he said. "I only regret that the final part of the act was cut out of the version that people saw on TV, although the president and 19,000 in the audience saw it and got the full significance of what I was saying to them."

Vereen sought to justify his shuffling act by saying that Bert Williams deserved recognition of his work in show business during the 20s when black entertainers, because of harsh racism, were forced to put on black faces and white lips in order to make a living from white audiences." Said Vereen:

"After all, Williams paid his dues. And because of him, I and other black performers are able to walk on the stage today.

"I regret my Brothers and Sisters are mad. But they must never forget that Williams and the late opera singer Black Patti bled for us during their day. After all she had to leave the country to become famous in Europe because of America's hatred against black performers.

Then Vereen elaborated on the part of his act which the big TV audience missed — the important part which, he says, made a point for black justice.

"In my Williams act at the end, which the audience didn't see, I tell the bartender to give everybody a drink. But he refuses, saying he can't because I'm a black man.

"Then I sit down and sing the song, 'Nobody,' in which I lament the fact that I ain't done nothing to nobody. I'm saying to whites that why should I be treated like that or, in other words, I'm a black man who still has to suffer the hate and prejudice in a nation that I call home."

Vereen said he thinks the President got the point, if the TV audience didn't.

"I think Reagan got the message. I want him to know that black people in this country are still the victims of injustice and we don't expect that from his administration."

Vereen continued: "I felt my performance in the inaugural show made a great impact before the live audience. Though I'm not a Vernon Jordan or Ben Hooks, I can, as a performer, fight for civil rights in my own way through song."

Disgusting to blacks, but not as much as Vereen, was black country and western singer Charley Pride, also on the bill, who remarked, grinning: "Thank you, Miss Nancy (the president's wife) for inviting me."

Joining in the blast at Ben Vereen was widely read New York Daily News theatre critic, Rex Reed, who said that "blacks of this great nation should be in a rage over Vereen's yard nigger routine with white lips and the mannerisms of an old porter on the B&O Railroad doing an impersonation of Stephin Fetchit."

Springing into fame a few years ago from the TV sensation "Roots" and the Broadway show, "Pipping," Vereen has assumed the rating of a super-star.

Fayetteville woman sought in banker's death

L. Bradford Morton Jr.

By Bill Worrell
Staff Writer

RICHMOND

A Fayetteville, N.C. woman who disappeared about the same time former Richmonder L. Bradford Morton Jr. was shot to death last November in the Fayetteville bank he ran faces a murder charge if she's found.

Fayetteville police issued a second-degree murder warrant shortly before Christmas for the arrest of Alice Harris, the second-ranking officer at the black-owned United National Bank, a police spokesperson said in a telephone interview.

Sgt. Jimmy Cook refused to discuss the particulars of the case, but assured an AFRO reporter that it was more than Mrs. Harris' disappearance that led to the issuing of the murder warrant.

He said the Fayetteville police were "still checking up" on the possibility of embezzlement as well as "any angle that might prove useful.

However, Mrs. Faye Humphrey, assistant vice president of the bank and the officer currently in charge of the office, said a "complete" audit had found "no indication of embezzlement" at the bank which has assets of about $6 million.

She said the bank's board of directors expects to name a new president, chairman and chief executive officer in about a week. The 34-year-old Morton had held all three positions at the bank. Charles Fuller of Fayetteville is acting chairman.

Mrs. Humphrey said Mrs. Harris, a 41-year-old black woman, had been hired a few months after the bank opened 4½ years ago. She had worked for another Fayetteville bank before joining United National, Mrs. Humphrey said.

She said she believed Mrs. Harris was separated from her husband who lived in Raleigh.

Morton's body was found in his office about 8 a.m. Monday, Nov. 3, by firefighters who had been called by a janitor who found the bank filled with smoke. Morton had been shot several times in the chest and head, according to police.

A file cabinet in his office had been overturned, the contents soaked with a flammable liquid and set afire, police said. The fire apparently smoldered but did not catch.

Morton's wife, now living in Montpelier, told police at the time her husband had gone to the office the night before to catch up on paper work.

Mrs. Humphrey told the AFRO that the bizaare crime had "not had an adverse effect" on the bank's business.

Police found Morton's car at the Fayetteville airport the day after the murder. Mrs. Harris' car was found in a post office parking lot about three blocks from the bank.

Morton had worked for United Virginia Bank in Richmond for 10 years when he took over the running of the Fayetteville bank in February 1979. When he left Richmond, he was a branch manager for the white-controlled bank.

Diana, Michael EWF win awards

(Continued from Page 1

Stewart moving the show smoothly and for once the camera work and sets didn't interfere with the music and the awards.

Michael Jackson was presented favorite soul male vochalist award by his pretty sister LaToya Jackson and Bonnie Pointer. Michael took a minute to thank Quincy Jones for his "Rock With Me" hit.

Other presentors were Charley Pride, who lost out to Kenny Rogers; Larry Graham, Peaches and Herb, B.B. King, Lou Rawls, Chaka Khan.

Stephanie Mills was a sexy little bundle singing "I Never Knew Love Like This Before" preceding the winning presentation to Diana Ross. What a difference a few years make when she wasn't considered for the role of Dorothy in the movie version of "The wiz".

Chuck Berry who remembered getting $50. a night with Dick Clark back on Aug. 15, 1955 was awarded the distinguished award of merit by American Music Awards for his outstanding musical contributions over a long period of time. The first award was won by Bing Crosby and last year, Count Basie.

Berry said "It's better late than never" and told the audience he's seen a lot of people go and a lot come, mentioning Elvis, Hendricks and Joplin.

Chuck Berry has been a star of the golden years of rock and roll and his hit songs include "Roll Over Beethoven", "Sweet Little Sixteen", "Merry Christmas, Baby", "Nadine".

His real name is Charles Edward Anderson Berry and he was born Oct. 18, 1926 in Wentzville, Miss. His parents were members of the Abtioch Baptist Church Choir in St. Louis and while he attended Summer High School he started singing bass in high school.

He started playing a six string Spanish guitar encouraged by his teacher, Julia Davis. In 1952, he started his own group the Chuck Berry combo and started playing in small clubs in St. Louis.

On a vacation trip to Chicago in 1955 he met blues singer Muddy Waters who took him to the owners of Chess Records. He auditioned a song he had written "Ida Red" but they didn't like the title. Remembering a cow from a third grade story, he renamed the tune "Maybellene." The song was recorded, a contract was signed and Chuck Berry, the legend, was launched in July, 1955.

Many of his songs were written out of his personal experience and include "School Days", "Sweet Little Sixteen" and "Johnny B. Goode."

PARK HONORS ARTIST — A new park in Altadena, Calif. has been named in honor of Charles White (inset), the late artist who won international recognition. White, who was born in Chicago, died in 1979. He lived in Altadena where members of his family are shown admiring park plaque with County Supervisor Baxter Ward (R). Members of the family are (from L): Mrs. Charles White, son Charles Ian and daughter Jessica. White's name for the park was proposed by businessman Eric Reed. The name proposal drew overwhelming support from the community.

Spaulding withdraws from anti-gambling move

Ward 5 Councilmember William Spaulding has disassociated himself from the effort to ask the U.S. Congress to overturn the gambling initiative citizens overwhelmingly passed last November.

About a week ago, Spaulding participated in a joint-press conference with At-large Councilmember Jerry Moore, where they both announced that they believe gambling is immoral, hurts poor people, and claimed they sent letters to members of Congress asking them to use their congressional oversight powers to overturn the initiative.

All legislation passed by the District is subjected to a 30-legislative-day congressional review period. If, within that time-period, Congress deems the legislation a threat to "federal interests" then it can nullify the legislation.

Spaulding said he still believes gambling is morally wrong, but "nearly 13,000 good citizens of Ward 5 made it clear that they wanted legalized gambling."

He claimed, "While I remain personally opposed to gambling, I cannot in good conscience allow my personal code to over-rule the will of the majority of the electorate.

Ward 5 citizens passed the measure in November in a 12,865 to 7,564 vote.

Moore and Spaulding received heated criticism from their colleagues for their efforts because the city council views such congressional oversight as a shackle on self government. No other jurisdiction in the country is subjected to such oversight. The action by Moore and Spaulding merely reinforced the idea of Congressional oversight since two elected government members were asking that it be used to overturn the legislation.

The legislation would set up a city-run lottery and numbers game. It also would legalize bingo and raffles for charitable purposes.

ANC head believes Crawford is receptive

WASHINGTON

By Vincent Taylor

Ward 7 Councilmember H.R. Crawford last week addressed attendees of an Advisory Neighborhood Commission election in his ward and pledged to work closely with community residents to improve their city services.

According to H.J. Amons Sr., the newly elected chairperson of ANC 7C, Crawford, who was sworn in Jan. 2, took an evidently receptive stance to community concerns.

That stance has been consistent with his claims that he would seek out the voices of the community before moving forward with any specific action.

Amons said his ANC, which is in the far eastern corner of the city, is plagued with deteriorating housing, poor city services, and high crime.

Those are the very problem areas which Crawford called "gut issues" during his campaign. During his campaign, he said the ward needed a person to "lead and direct" the community to address those problems. He campaigned as being that person.

Amons said that the nine Single-Member Districts that make up his ANC will listen to the concerns of community residents then compile a package to present to Crawford spelling out specifically what the ANC needs.

Amons believes that Crawford will do more good for the community than Willie Hardy, who decided this past year not to seek reelection.

Amons said in his area there are both public and private-owned lots filled with garbage. Abandoned houses — are numerous in that vicinity, he claimed, and drug traffic is rampant.

"I think that Crawford understands the problems... He will do as much as he possibly can to improve Ward 7," he said.

The prevention of drug traffic, however, is one area which Amons believes cannot be changed.

"Drugs has always been a big problem in this ANC," Amons said. "We have a drug supermarket."

Amons contends the problem continues because police cannot catch pushers with the drugs on their person and therefore cannot carry out any type of legal action against the pushers.

"The police have said point-blank, 'We cannot catch the people with it'," Amons said.

"There's nothing the community can do," he continued. "They can slow it down, but they're not going to stomp it out."

He claimed that it is that area—drug traffic—which Crawford will be powerless to address.

Workshop offered on homeownership

The Sandtown Winchester Improvement Association is holding a Homeownership Workshop to provide information and to assist persons interested in buying homes. The workshop will be held Wednesday, Feb. 4, at St. Gregory's Catholic Church, 1542 N. Gilmor Street, at 7:30 p.m.

Information will be presented on the benefits of homeownership. Bob Bartolini, of the City's Homeownership Office, will discuss the City's proposed low income mortgage loan program which promises that a buyer can purchase a house for as little as $300 down. Ted Brown, of Advanced Federal Savings and Loan Association will explain how lenders analyze and evaluate potential borrowers. Willie Byrd, of St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center, will inform participants of how to inspect a house in which they are interested. A presentation will be made on "How AReal Estate Agent Can Help You."

The Sandtown Winchester Improvement Association provides counseling for persons interested in buying homes. The Homeownership Counseling Program operates out of the Sandtown Association office, at 1101 N. Fulton Avenue. Persons interested in counseling may call 462-1933 for an appointment between 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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Cancer tied to robbery

EL CENTRO, Calif. — A cancer stricken black man was held without bail over the weekend for allegedly robbing banks in a "death wish" to escape the pain of his terminal disease.

James Johnson Jr., 52, was arraigned Friday before a U.S. magistrate on bank robbery charges.

Johnson was arrested by FBI agents in Calexico last Thursday on a charge of robbing a Los Angeles bank of $35,000 two days earlier.

Although the arrest warrant named only one robbery, Johnson is suspected of holding up three branches of the Western Federal Savings and Loan Association last week and taking a total of $46,000 — all because of what his friends and family said was a "death wish."

Johnson, a previously convicted bank robbery, allegedly shouted during one of the robberies: "Give me all your money! I'll kill all of you — I got nothing to lose."

Monumental

(Continued from Page 1)

director of the U.S. Office of Health Maintenance Organizations, who has given officials of the plan until Feb. 19 to submit documentation that the plan is not in financial trouble.

Members of the group say they want to discuss with the director the need for Monumental to continue in the black community and to determine the basis for his charges against the plan, which they feel is being threatened because it's

Several possibilities of fundraising discussed which would have to be handled by the Monumental Medical Foundation, a component of Monumental Health Plan.

In addition, the coalition plans a massive coalition "word of mouth" effort by getting members of the to tell friends and co-workers to join Monumental

The group plans to submit an outline of the action plan to officials at Monumental this week so that they reviewed for certain legalities.

Commentin Commenting last on last week's meeting, Dr. H. Garland Chissell, president of Monumental, stated, "The meeting was very constructive. There were a lot of questions answered. And our support is growing.

Among those groups supporting the plan are Welfare Rights Organization, Baptist Ministers Conference, and members of the business community.

The group has scheduled another meeting Friday, Feb. 7 at 7 p.m. at the Garrison Boulevard United Methodist Church, Garrison Blvd. and Alto Road.

Vereen took the cake

PHILADELPHIA

I thought Sammy Davis Jr. was sickening enough with his public displays of his love for conservatives during the Nixon administration — but Ben Vereen took the cake with his white-lipped, black-faced Uncle Tom act before President and Mrs. Reagan.

Charley Pride wasn't far behind Vereen when bowed and grinned to "Miss Nancy," as he called Mrs. Reagan.

This once again proves the old adage that more things change, the more they stay the same.

Ben Vereen is a disgrace. I'm outraged. As far as I am concerned, Vereen is a modern-day combination of Uncle Tom and Chicken George with no justification to be such.

ALEXANDER PETERSON

...make it easy....
TO SAVE ON FOOD BILLS
SHELVES & SHELVES & SHELVES OF
SPECIAL FOOD SAVINGS
ON BARGAIN DAYS

Nation in worse 'mess' since Depression—Reagan

President plans tough tax, budget cuts, pledges he will protect those in need

See page 20

Black History Month Calendar

See pages 6, 9

Baltimore Afro-American
WE ARE NOW IN OUR 89TH YEAR
89th Year No. 52
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BALTIMORE, MD. FEBRUARY, 7, 1981 LATE CITY EDITION 35 CENTS

The Klan goes after school kids

Teen girl's body found on campus

A 16-year-old girl who was found dead in a wooded area on Morgan State University campus Feb. 2, had been reported missing by relatives since November 1979.

According to police, Miss Cynthia Fisher, of the 400 block Pitman Place was stabbed and beaten with a blunt instrument.

A medical examiner stated the victim had been stabbed in the chest and neck and her body was frozen at the time she was found. An autopsy indicated the teenager had been dead for more than two days.

The teenager formerly attended Samuel Gompers Junior High School on North Avenue. The family will receive friends Feb. 9, 12:00 at William C. March Funeral Home, 1101 North Ave., and last rites will be held at 12:00.

THE AUTO ASSEMBLY LINES STOPPED right where they were when GM layoffs were announced. When production is resumed at the Broening Highway plant for one week in February, these autos will at least be worked on, but when the week is up, what is unfinished . . . will remain that way.

(AFRO Photo by Roman Hankewycz)

KKK trying to recruit white students in 4 counties in Maryland

By Portia E. Badham
AFRO Staff Writer

In order to combat an "alarming increase in Ku Klux Klan activities" in the state, the Maryland State Teachers Association teamed up this week with the NAACP.

The teachers association and the civil rights organization came together as a result of Klan recruitment activities that have occurred in schools in St. Mary's, Harford, Prince Georges and Anne Arundel Counties.

"We believe the Ku Klux Klan has no place in our Maryland schools," said Rufus Abernethy, president of MSTA. "We will not permit schools to be disrupted and students to be intimidated."

Abernethy reported that he met with presidents of the 24 local teachers' Associations for the purpose of reiterating MSTA's policy against racist activities in schools.

He also announced a monitoring system that would be handled by his office and called on teachers and citizens to report any Klan acitivities. The incidents and any literature would be documented and forwarded to state and federal authorities.

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Local cleric urges crime prayer vigil

The Rev. William Minson Jr., founder and chairman of the Urban Domestic Affairs of the Young Council is asking all radio and television stations and all citizens to participate in a daily prayer vigil to abate crime.

Rev. Minson stated, "This will give listeners and viewers a moment to reflect on prayer for a more humane society. We must seek ways to counteract the increase in crime in our country and in my opinion, we must start by seeking God's help through our prayers."

In a letter sent to President Reagan, Rev. Minson stated, "I humbly seek your personal support on behalf of all caring people for stop the killing, we pray. Will you join me in asking broadcasters throughout our nation to insert into their scheduled programming at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. daily, the words stop the killing, we pray.

"We can no longer just use our airways to report crimes. We must now use them to address solutions to crime. Only the president of our country can bring this type of needed support."

GM lays off 1,900 workers

By Sue Williams
AFRO Staff Writer

On the eve of President Reagan's economic message to the country, in which he is expected to detail plans for cutbacks and other measures to correct the problems he feels have most attributed to the high rate of inflation, this city is in the throes of its own economic crisis which is affecting, at least for now, close to 4,000 people.

The General Motors plant at Broening Highway has laid off nearly 2,000 people, and Bethlehem Steel, which began laying off employees late last spring, still has about 1900 people out of work.

According to Nelson Lawhon, spokesman for GM, the lay-offs have become necessary as the corporation adjusts its field inventories. Lawhon explained to this newspaper that "nobody is buying the intermediate autos" the GM plant produces, and, since nobody is buying, it "makes no sense" for production to continue.

"Right now, big cars are selling better," Lawhon said. Although truck production, which the Broening Highway plant also handles, has not ceased, the mid-sized cars, including Lemans and other models, have not been selling.

Lawhon said that the lay off, originally planned for just two weeks, was thought to be necessary for a longer period of time after corporate officials took a closer look at sales. At the time that decision was made, the plant had already begun to notify employees who had been laid off for the initial two weeks to begin reporting back to work beginning on Feb. 5.

To avoid mass confusion, Lawhon said, all employees who were notified will be allowed to work for one week, after which time, the lay-off will again go into effect, "probably for two more weeks."

"The main thing we want to do is get people back to work," Lawhon said, but explained that the 1900 people are on what is called "indefinite lay-off."

"That means," he said, "that we don't know when...or even if...they will return to work."

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ANNAPOLIS NOTEBOOK:

Delegate Wendell Phillips blends pulpit and politics

By James M. Abraham
AFRO Staff Writer

In light of the recent series of revelations of sexual and financial misconduct of a host of politicians, what place does a practicing minister have in the fleshpots and dives of the Annapolis Statehouse?

Well, according to Del. Wendell Phillips, B-38, the clergy does have an active role to play in politics, a role which must be defined as rigidly as the code of morality which governs their ecclesiastical duties.

"I don't see myself as a strict moralist," he says, "but I just see certain issues which take away from the community should be voted against."

Phillips has gained the enmity of many of his colleagues because of his refusal to "make deals" or trade-offs on issues he says he is morally opposed to.

"I understand trade-offs, but I don't think that everybody should be involved in them," he explained. He cited Gov. Hughes' proposed expansion of the Maryland Lottery as an example of a bill on which he would not compromise his position.

"I don't deal in trade-offs," he said. "Anything which would bring more gambling to Maryland — Baltimore is non-negotiable."

Phillips is actively involved in Maryland's prison system as an advocate and last year provoked controversy with his anti-slavery bill, which died in committee.

He said that the fifteenth amendment to the constitution, which was opposed by his namesake, abolitionist Wendell Phillips and U.S. Senator Charles Sumner, exempted prisoners from the ban on involuntary servitude.

"Rehabilitation means justice and compensation to victims," he stated. "We must find a way to bring together the offender and the victim. The best investment of money is in people, not bricks and mortar."

Phillips said that he was drafted by members of his community to seek office, and says that he attempts to maintain a continuing dialogue with his constitutents.

"Sometimes when we get down here, we get away from our constituency. Along the way, we seem to get away from the people and become mouthpieces of the system," he said. "But I see this as an extension of my ministry, I am a spokesman for those who have no spokesman . . ."

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Reservoir Hill residents impeach president

By James M. Abraham
AFRO Staff Writer

Tony Fulton, controversial president of the board of directors of the Reservoir Hill Community Association and state lobbyist, was impeached by an unanimous margin in absentia Wed., Feb. 4.

More than 40 community members showed up at the John Eager Howard school, located in the 2100 block Linden Ave., to make their feelings known, after having argued for almost five months with Fulton and other members of the executive board.

Their grievances and the resultant community dissension had forced the RHCA to cancel all meetings since September of 1980, and had forced the central office of the Department of Housing and Community Development to assume stewardship of most of the programs administered by the RHCA.

"Tony Fulton has disregarded the executive board and the general membership," declared

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Black Caucus meets with Reagan

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus this week met with President Reagan in a "get acquainted" session and afterwards said they soon will meet with members of the President's cabinet to discuss cuts in federal programs.

Caucus Chairperson Walter Fauntroy, from the District, said in a post-meeting press briefing that the President was reminded of the problem of black unemployment and about the need that the federal government not be balanced on the backs of the poor.

"Black people are disproportionately represented in the ranks of those hardest hit by inflation. We told the President that we are gravely concerned that policies devised to reign in inflation do not disproportionately burden the poor, the elderly and moderate income people," the Caucus maintained in a written statement.

Fauntroy said that if the President intends to reduce "waste and inefficiency" in the federal budget, then such areas as the Defense budget, also must be viewed with the same fiscally austere stance.

New York Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm said she told Reagan that "the feeling is out there . . . that perhaps they (the Reagan administration) were zeroing in on poor people (to balance the budget)."

She said the President told them that he only intends to get rid of the "abuses" in many federal programs and that the "truly needy" will not suffer.

Fauntroy, pointing out that the meeting did not discuss specifics in-depth, said, "This was not designed as a substantive meeting."

Missouri Congressman William Clay, when asked how he viewed the future budget and its affect on low-income people, said, "I certainly am concerned about it based on what I have read in the media... Until we see the figures, we can't make a judgement."

On the issue of affirmative action, Fauntroy said the Caucus does not want to see a dismantling of current affirmative action programs until better, and more efficient ones can take their places.

Reagan has gone on record as being against quotas in affirmative action programs and has indicated his desire to take the federal government's role out of the enforcement of such programs.

Fauntroy said Reagan stated he is for "equal treatment of all citizens."

Fauntroy said Reagan has agreed to meet with the Caucus after about a month when he will outline, in-depth, his plans and policies.

"In preparation for that meeting," Fauntroy said, "we have agreed to a series of meetings of individual members of the caucus with those members of his (Reagan's) cabinet whose programs fall under the jurisdiction of the committees of the House on which Congressional Black Caucus members serve.

"We expect that series of meetings to begin this week with sessions with the Office of Management and Budget Director, David Stockman, Attorney General, William French Smith and possibly Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig."

BLACK CAUCUS MEETS WITH REAGAN — D. C. Congressman Walter Fauntroy (L), Philadelphia Congressman William Gray, (2nd from R) and Illinois Congresswoman Cardiss Collins are pictured above meeting with President Reagan this week. The president met with the caucus for an hour discussing black concerns.

(Photo by Milton Williams)