Baltimore Afro-American

OPINION

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Reaganomics

President Reagan's "program for economic recovery" has nothing in it to improve the lot of those millions of Americans, of all races of low or moderate income, who have been hardest hit by inflation and unemployment.

Felix Rohayton, the eminent economist, stated following the President's address that he could detect nothing in the new Chief Executive's budget message to Congress that concerned itself with the problems of black unemployment.

We concur.

Mr. Reagan holds that by cutting both government spending and income taxes American business will be able to generate 13 million jobs over the next three years.

Even if this were so, and we strongly doubt it, most of those re-employed would be people who already have specific job skills, citizens who had been working until the need for their skills and services had evaporated because of the sagging economy.

For those hundreds of thousands of black workers categorized as "unskilled" or "non-employable" all of that Mr. Reagan proposes has absolutely no bearing on their situation.

Worse, the arts the President proposes would decimate existing training programs which seek to change black and other unskilled workers into workers with specific and needed skills.

Nowhere mentioned in Mr. Reagan's Economic Recovery Plan is the promised and promising urban revitalization zone concept.

This Reagan notion would see businesses encouraged to open operations in central cities and through tax incentives and other inducements, begin hiring people from these areas in greatest need.

This indeed would have been a bold new step but obviously the President has reconsidered.

To reduce black unemployment would mean infusion of government money.

Mr. Reagan, it is clear, will not spend that money.

The new administration's economic recovery program, no doubt, will do much to ease the damage done to moderate and middle-income white America by inflation and job cutbacks but it in no way will ease the enormous money pain felt in our community.

Mr. Reagan's program, if implemented, will take poor and working class black people back 50 years.

We can only hope that there is enough wisdom and strength in the Congress to keep millions of Americans from being written off as expendable and unwanted and that legislation to ensure their survival will be forthcoming.

Tony Brown's Journal

The U.S. Student Association issued a report that concluded the black colleges may not survive beyond the year 1900 and cited integration as the chief threat. In a separate action, the faculty and student body of Cheyney State, the nation's oldest public Black college, filed suit against the state of Pennsylvania and the U.S. government, charging that a forced desegregation plan has weakened the school and threatens its survival.

Those two news events lay the foundation for what appears to some to be a modern-day dilemma: integration and desegregation that harms blacks. This same dilemma also started a national movement to save Black colleges.

On September 29th, a crowd of 20,000, composed of college queens, marching bands, presidents, politicians and students, gathered in the nation's capital and marched from the White House to the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building to demonstrate against the threat of desegregation and federal budget cuts to black colleges. Tony Brown's Journal taped the event for a documentary called "Black College Day."

The Cheyney State situation is typical. A state desegregation plan demanded that Cheyney increase its white enrollment by 30 percent and called for only a four percent black increase for one of the white schools.

Which brings us to a problem of semantics. About 25 years ago, "segregation" in school was a state imposed policy of separating children solely on the basis of race; "desegregation," conversely, meant the elimination of state-imposed racial distinction. "Segregation" today is a term that applies interchangeably to both discrimination against minorities and to racial concentrations of blacks and "desegregation" is commonly used to mean "racial balance."

This means that the policy adopted by the Carter administration's Department of Education in "desegregating" public Black and White colleges in 10 states implicitly held that blacks should be dispersed among the white majority and this new definition veers dangerously toward defining black institutions as inferior. In response to these developments, a spontaneous Coalition for Black Colleges galvanized the community support necessary to organize Black College Day.

EBONY magazine listed Black College Day as one of the highlights of 1980. Kalamu Salaam, editor of The Black Collegian, the country's foremost Black student publication described this historic event: "The struggle to Save Black Colleges (which is, essentially, a century-old effort of securing an education in our own self-interest as a people) raised itself to a higher level of solidarity and success on the second to the last day of September 1980."

Black College Day was instrumental in bringing about a change in the policy of the Reagan Administration toward black colleges. Counselor to the President Edwin Meese, the closest man to President Reagan, chastised the "zealous demons" at the Department of Education for their questionable and controversial desegregation plans: "We have to make sure that there is financial support for the black colleges ... and we want to make sure that the Department of Education ... doesn't get involved in trying to undo what has built up as a great tradition of black colleges over the years."

Black colleges have graduated 75 percent of all black Ph.D.'s, 75 percent of all black army officers and 80 percent of all black doctors. They enroll in excess of 200,000 black students and have 800,000 living alumni. More than 80 percent of all black college graduates finished one of these institutions.

Today, 90 black colleges graduate as many blacks as 1,500 white colleges. Overall, only 30 percent of all black college students attend a predominantly black college, but more than 50 percent of the black college graduates come from them. About seven out of 10 blacks at white colleges never graduate.

Take black colleges out of the picture and we will lose 50 percent of all blacks who graduate every year from college. Afro-Americans couldn't afford it — no — America couldn't afford it.

I have visited—almost 100 colleges and the expectations of another Black College Day are enormous. Black College Day '81 will be announced shortly by The Project '81 Coalition For Black Colleges, which will probably be held in Washington, D.C. in September.

Tony Brown's Journal, the longest running national black television series, is sponsored by Pepsi-Cola Company. It can be seen in the Baltimore area every Sunday on WBAL-TV, Channel 11, at 3:00 p.m.

Show your concern, wear green ribbon

MADELINE MURPHY

A jealous mistress

To admit, after knowing that most lawyers black and white are mediocre, that all of them couldn't attend Ivy League schools, nor become members of the Order of the Coif, or Law Review, that they somehow don't really measure up, does disservice to those who can and do.

We need to stop knocking ourselves and playing broken wing ("How could you expect a bird to fly with a broken wing?") and get down to the line points of how to build a practice and keep one. Even though this may mean taking station house cases, handling divorces at cut rate, not thinking a law degree qualifies one for $85.00 per hour when in fact most blacks have a hard time paying $50 an hour.

It creates the notion on reading articles of this kind where black lawyers freely agree that they aren't making it, or aren't qualified or haven't had the lineal advantages of former generations of lawyers, that perhaps then they are not deserving of their fellow blacks' patronage. And this is not so.

And if it be so that they cannot measure up in writing, speaking or figuring as some of the prestigious white firms claim, then they should go back to school and take remedial courses in English and math.

At the same time they should evidence a determination to work in more voluntary service to not only convince blacks that they are competent to serve them but also to help blacks come out of some of the legal morass in which they find themselves with an inept, uncaring Public Defender system and an overburdened Legal Aid.

Most of all, how can people learn about them and their abilities if they remain inaccessible or unavailable with unlisted phones? That alone is an indication that they place too high a value on privacy and to low a value on making money.

After all law is a business, requiring aggressive, Patient and creative development, constantly honing the skills that make for competence and perfection.

If full time is not devoted nor energy expended constantly, no lawyer can make it. That's why it is so truly said that law is a jealous mistress.

Further, a law degree does not automatically guarantee that people will recognize that one is a lawyer. A law degree states that one is qualified, upon passing the bar examination to be an accredited lawyer.

It would be foolish to ignore the fact, however, that there is racism and classism in most of the big prestigious white law firms. That no one in these firms is going to suddenly love black lawyers, yet the black lawyer's ability will get him respected. After all one must not get the struggles mixed between the social and business world of white society. To be anxious to join their clubs, is a contradiction in regard to what kind of life must be led in a segregated society, in regard to lifting our fellow blacks up—not a top priority with large white firms.

It is sad that the frustrations heard, however, within the articles highlight the desire for assimilation at all costs, for acceptance on equal terms with whites, for excuses for poor performance.

Finally, the articles were sickening, reminiscent of before the 60's where blacks were unwilling to fight for their dignity, to stand tall, to be black and proud.

Really, it is time to stop griping and time to start doing something about the problems of developing successful practices. The Monumental City Bar Association is there to do it, now is the time to use it properly.

FOOTNOTE: And during the Reagan years in the White House, we shall need increasing competence, increasing litigation to hold on to the rights already won — for the survival of us all. Next week: the threat to the Voting Rights Act of 1964.

PARREN MITCHELL

Black history month

We are currently concluding our observance of Black History Month. February has been a time to reflect proudly on the rich legacy left by our strong African and Afro-American foreparents. It was a time to use the fundamentals of this legacy to face squarely those turbulent times which continue to confront us.

The conservative mood of the country is being well represented here in Congress. In the few short weeks since we have reconvened, there have been significant efforts to move legislation to: further reduce federal spending, constitutionally mandate a balanced federal budget, constitutionally prohibit the right to a legal abortion, eliminate mandatory minimum wage for teen-age employees, and prohibit the busing of students.

The list is endless, as efforts continue to erode the power of such bodies as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Justice Department's Office of Civil Rights, and the Department of Education. Such groups as the Right to Lifers, the National Rifle Association, and the American Tax Reduction Movement feel quite comfortable in stalking the grounds of Washington, knowing that once and for all, their views now have stronger representation within the halls of Congress.

Hopefully, we will not be frightened by such movements. We will not let history repeat itself and stand for such occurrences as: the drastic reduction in the number of black elected officals, the sanctioning of violent acts against community activists and children, and the massive displacement of low income residents from urban areas.

Let me remind you that there are those of us who are rallying around legislative initiatives to negate the aforementioned movements and activities. For example, I want to share a few of the more positive Congressional efforts which I support and or co-sponsor, and which have been just as prevalent as the negative efforts during the past few weeks.

1. The Elementary School Guidance and Counseling Incentive Act, which would authorize a new federal program to provide comprehensive guidance and counseling services to elementary school children.

2. An initiative to eliminate the marriage tax (which penalizes working married couples). This bill would allow two - earner couples the option of being taxed as if they were single.

3. The Economic Adjustment Act, which would authorize a program that would assist the defense industry and defense related labor unions to convert from defense-oriented production to no defense activities.

4. The Obstetric Care Information Act, which would insure that women would be able to make more informed decisions about the use of drugs and procedures during pregnancy and delivery.

5. A house resolution which expresses the House of Representatives opposition to President Reagan's decision granting immediate decontrol of domestic petroleum.

6. The Surplus School Conversion Act, which would permit the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide funds for local educational agencies (LEA), based on declining enrollment priorities, to renovate underutilized school buildings and provide technical assistance for planning the best use of surplus school buildings.

7. An initiative to eliminate the practice of taxing the outside earning of Social Security recipients (H.R.501).

8. An initiative to repeal the "Family Rental Tax." This effort (H.R.1177) will make it easier for residents to rent to relatives but eliminating the burdensome taxation involved in such transactions.

9. The Omnibus Industry Assistance and Tax Reduction Act of 1981, an alternative to the dangerous Reagan-Kemp-Roth proposed individual tax reduction plan. This alternative is aimed at incentives for industry, which will

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LETTERS

Swisher on '12 minute' decision

Dear AFRO:

On Sept. 11, 1976, James McClain took the 10-month old baby boy of his girlfriend and threw him down an 11-story trash chute, crushing his skull.

Mr. McClain gave a confession to the police admitting that he had killed the baby because he was jealous that his girlfriend, the baby's mother, was going out with other men.

In October of 1977, my office convicted Mr. McClain of first degree murder and he was sentenced to life in prison by Judge Joseph Howard.

Today, Mr. McClain is free to roam the streets of the City of Baltimore because of a ruling of our Court of Appeals.

That decision held that because his confession was given just 12 minutes after a judicially imposed deadline for presentation of a defendant before a magistrate it could not be used at trial.

My office was therefore forced to dismiss all charges against Mr. McClain.

Enclosed please find a letter which I have sent to every member of the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate urging their support for two bills that will insure that this type of injustice to the law abiding public will never occur again.

The bills would forbid the reversal of a criminal case merely because some artificially imposed time restriction had not been complied with by the State unless the defendant could demonstrate that his constitutional rights had been violated in the process.

I believe these measures are necessary to begin what the Chief Justice of the United States has identified as a need to bring the criminal justice system back into balance.

It is for this reason, we suggest that these two bills deserve your editorial support.

We are urging all citizens to write their State delegates and senators in support of these measures. I hope you will join us in this effort.

WILLIAM A. SWISHER
States Attorney of Baltimore City

February 19, 1981

Dear Delegate ... Senator:

As you may know, my office was recently forced to dismiss charges against the convicted murderer of a ten month old baby boy. On September 11, 1976, James McClain took the infant son of his girlfriend and threw it down an eleven story trash chute for the stated purpose of getting back at his girlfriend who was going out with other men.

Twenty - four hours and twelve minutes after he was arrested, McClain confessed to the crime. His subsequent conviction and life sentence were reversed by the Court of Appeals on the grounds that his confession was obtained twelve minutes after a judicially imposed deadline.

To make matters worse, this rule was established by a case decided almost two years after this killing took place.

The Court decided that justice required that this rule, of which the police officers could have had no knowledge, should be retroactively applied to allow a convicted murderer to go free.

This case is simply the latest chapter in what the Chief Justice of the United States has now admitted is a drift by our Courts much too far in the direction of protecting the rights of a criminal to the detriment of law abiding citizens.

I believe it is time for you, as a Legislator, to step in and help insure that some sense of balance is brought back into the criminal justice process.

This session provides your first opportunity to take such a step. Senate Bill No. 322, introduced by Senator Curran on Jan. 15, 1981, was directed towards juveniles; and House Bill No. 302, filed by Delegate Owens on Jan. 14, 1981 was directed toward both juveniles and adults. Both bills are now pending before their respective Judiciary Committees.

These bills would prohibit dismissal of juvenile and adult criminal cases simply because the State has failed to meet a technical time limitation in some step in the prosecution unless the Defendant could demonstrate that some important constitutional right had been violated in the process.

I believe these bills will help to restore some of the now shaken confidence of the people of Maryland in the ability of the criminal justice system to protect them.

I know that the vast majority of Maryland's prosecutors and your constituents would join with me in urging your support for these measures.

WILLIAM A. SWISHER

ELIZABETH M. OLIVER

City Editor

News Bits and Caucus Banquet Who's Who

THE BRAILEY'S daughter Faye, the New York school exec., was home after her journey to the USA School Administrators national meet in Atlanta.

AT HOME from Provident is Rosemont Elementary Principal Dorothy F. Bennett who is certainly doing fine.

CAUCUS DOINGS

STUNNING couple at the Legislative Caucus banquet was Morgan's Dr. and Mrs. Andrew Billingsley. His vivacious wife, Amy, now a bank manager, had as guests, the Bigwig Bankers of the firm.

THE BILLINGSLEY'S new home is a St. Paul St. mansion out in that lovely section nearby the Dr. Keiffer Mitchells.

The area is beautiful and peaceful every season of the year.

CAUCUS CHAIRMAN Frank M. Conaway is too modest to admit but the tremendous success of the dinner is due to his administration and the cooperation of all members.

IN HIS SPEECH he said how much Del. Brailey is missed and hopes for his return to Annapolis soon.

This received sustained applause: "He's a great public servant. Send him cards and best wishes."

DEL. CONAWAY, secretaries Trudy McGowen and Rachel Rebecca Abrams Gray got the souvenir book together in a flash. Expert printer Rosetta Evans of Landover in Prince Georges County did the finished product in a few days. She was recommended by Del. Nathaniel Exum and Sen. Tommie Broadwater.

BY THE WAY Rachel is Rev. Rachel Rebecca Abrams Gray, a pure delight and one of the 10 children of the late Bishop Joseph Franklin Abrams and Elizabeth Rice Abrams.

ALL THE children have Biblical names, brothers John, Joseph, Aaron, David, Alonzo all successful Port executives and the late Zacariah Abrams.

SISTER are Queen Esther Murray, Willie Isaacs, Evelyn Jones and Rachel. A nephew is Gerald Abrams, director of accountants, Board of Education and Donald Abrams, a realtor.

WE'D LIKE TO MEET all the Abrams family and descendants and hope the Rev. Rachael Rebecca Abrams Gray will write us soon the entire ROOTS story.

AMONG DELIGHTFUL persons I met at the Caucus banquet was the Rev. Wilbert Baltimore, pastor of Holy Temple Apostolic Church in Annapolis and vice principal of the Georgetown East Elementary School, Annapolis.

TRUDY tells us the choir is dynamic. Her pastor, Rev. Baltimore writes and directs the music along with Evelyn Murgen. The Roses of Sharon is the youth choir.

HOLY TEMPLE is moving to Arundel Center for services until the new church is ready. It will be built on Best Gate Rd. near Fr. Robert Powell's St. Phillips' Episcopal.

OUR RACHEL REBECCA GRAY directs one of the choirs. The church has an illustrious congregation, two buses and a van and station wagon. Rachel and Trudy are Del. Conaway's right hand.

WE MET 500000 many noted citizens at the banquet.

DR. ALAN STILLS, psychologist; Bowie President Dr. and Mrs. Rufus L. Barfield. (I'm going down there to be a visiting professor in April.)

DR. SHELDON KNORR, Dr. Joe Brandon, Lt. Gov. Sam Bogley, Dr. Percy Williams, who always supports the Caucus.

H. MEBANE TURNER of the U. of Baltimore; Judge William Sr. and son Judge Billy Murphy and Mrs. Madelene Murphy who looked very pretty.

SEN. ROSALIE ABRAMS, Bethlenem Steel's top execs Ed Snowden and Brent Snodgrass, our best friends, Bruce Bereano who bought a gang of tickets and distributed them; Atty. Gen. Steve Sacks.

DEL. LENA LEE and Del. Loyal Randolph both received plaques for longtime service.

OF COURSE, present were all the Caucus except Del. Joe Chiefers Sen. Welcome and Clarence Blount. Joe didn't feel well enough to come. Don't know what happened to Sen. Blount but I missed seeing him. He's usually always there.

THE LADIES, Dels. Lee, Murphy and Harrison wore some smart and high fashion frocks, I tell you.

MORE GUESTS I haven't seen in some time included Rev. John R. Callaway, Del. Stewart Bainum, Silver Spring, Mike Difiello Sr. who got near $1,500 in tickets for his insurance company.

BALTIMORE GAS and Elec. Co. and C and P Tel. Co. all had three or four tables. Handsome Cousin Carl Edward Smith, C and P exec. looks handsomerer every day.

SID CHALEU got a block of tickets. Dr. William P. Hytche, president, C of Md. Eastern shore was among the college chiefs.

Dr. Terry Hughes, Md. Psychology Asso., Dr. Lois Powell, Atty. Rick and Louise Johnson, looking good as usual. Dr. Bruce C. Bereano of the Maryland Society of Eye Physicians.

DR. CLEVELAND CHANDLER, Clerk of Court of Common Pleas Sandy Banks, Dr. Uthman Ray, Ray Haysbert; WEBB's Don Brooks.

WE GREATLY missed G. Leo Hunt, the Ashburton Insurance exec. who was injured in an accident Monday when his car hit a water puddle in the rain on Forest Park Ave. and wrapped around a tree or a pole or something.

CARROLL SMITH, the other Ashburton biggie was there taking photos and I'd like to have some of them to prove what a goooooood crowd was there at the banquet.

THE CAUCUS had planned for around 300 and looked like a million arrived. Thanks to the big Baltimore and Md. corporations which bought gobs of tickets.

THAT MIMI DIPETRO, the councilman, was there and did he have a romping good time.

SAM DANIELS, the Mason's chief; Del. Francis Santaniegelo of Prince Georges County; **DAVID SLOAN**, attorney, and husband of Joe Rogers Sloan the Red Cross exec. was alone since Joe is in Philadelphia arranging for her mother's funeral. Her Mom, who must have been 97, was one of the most interesting persons you could meet.

LOBBYISTS were Leo Doyle, George Heltner, Mike Delello.

MORE DELIGHTFUL folks, John Clapper, Seat Pleasnat Beverage Asso. members of the Smith and Wohlgemuth law firm, those WEBB Radio execs and B and M Liquors shots.

LESLIE and James Wilson were from Exxon: Dr. Ernest J. Colvin, the pharmacist, Dr. Larry Gray, a U. of Md. psychologist; John L. Greene, assistant secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene; Atty. Patrick Opara, Jerome Markott of the Beverage Asso.; George Manie, a Motion Picture Industry lobbyist; MSTA's Harvey, the exec., Dr. Casey Hughes, Annapolis; Dr. Daniel L. Nicolas, the architect; Jakie O'Keete of the Montgomery County Bd. of Realtors.

JAMES E. CLARK came from Arlington, Va.; Orville Wright, the C and P lobbyist; A. L. Forbes, executive director, Md. Auto Insurance Fund executive director. Otis Warren, the folks from the Potomac Elec. and Power Co. and the Maryland and Virginia Milk Producers Asso.

BETHEL AME CHURCH was a big supporter. Robert Clay trucking, Md. Auto Dealer's Joe Carroll; Black Pages Mag. Jackie Hall's new publication; Dr. Addison Pope, Wayne A. Cawley, Md. Dept. Agriculture; Towson State's Dr. Hoke Smith, president, Wilfred Watts, Md. Dept. Transportation.

MARYLAND Political Action Committee folks Joseph Harrison, Dr. William Eisner, Lutheran Hospital; Washington Gas and Light Co., Buzzy Kaiman Hetteman; George Doering of Mobile Home Dealers.

METRO DEMOS President Abner Lee; **WOMAN** Inc. president, Mary Conaway and members, Vanguard's Herb Brown had three tables. Charlie Tilghman and his pretty wife at our table and Sen. Clarence Mitchell III and friend, DuBurns, City Council VP; Geneva Puryear and Werner Jordan, teachers.

FROM PG COUNTY, a great group of citizens, Jimmy Carter, Capitol Center president and member of the Kiawanis Club; Mrs. Norma Lindsay, our only lady on the Lottery Commission, Margaret Barnes, the State Accident Fund one black lady; J. C. Moore, businessman; Joseph Gayan, president, Prince Georges State Bank, only black bank in the state.

PRINCE GEORGES COUNTY is reallllly out in front, I tell you. WITNESS Sen. Tommie Broadwater, Del. Nathaniel Exum and Del. Sylvania Wood, all from there; Jim Artis, VP Jones and Artis Construction Co., a top minority firm; Eugene Brown, businessman and on the board of the Prince Georges State Bank;

JOHN ARRAR, leading black contractor; Attorney Ronald Hill, who is due to become a member of the Maryland House of Delegates next time; Eugene LeGrande, civic leader; Ricky Thompson, board member of the PG Kiwanis Club; Everett Lallis Jr., another civic leader, Courtney Funn, Librarian, Bowie;

AND, last but not least Dr. Norman Ribus, our longtime and favorite Walbrook Junction pharmacist.

NOW YOU KNOW if you were not there at the first Caucus Banquet under Del. Conaway's administration. **YOU MISSED IT.** See you there next time.

P.S. — ON THE MENU — Pigs feet and sauer kraut, corn bread (delicious) collars, roast beef and gravy, ribs, Southern fried chicken, potato salad, candied yams, and Hors D'aeuvres, tantail shrimp, franks in bacon, stufied mushroom caps, chicken Hawaiian, crab cakes, fish bits and allllll the cocktails of every variety. SEEEE?

Living black history: The modest genius of Van Der Zee

'It was just something to do...'

By Sue Williams
AFRO Staff Writer

James Van Der Zee, at age 96, lends an imposing presence to the room in which he sits, even as he tries to spurn the notion that he is a great man, somebody who has made invaluable contributions to the black race and to the art of photography. It's no big thing, he tries to tell you, his eyes tired yet somehow managing to sparkle at the same time. The attitude seems to be that 'I took pictures and they just happened to be good . . .'

"All I can say," he says softly, waving his hand gently in front of him as if to ward off a flying insect, "is that I did it my way."

To him, it seems simple, yet to the thousands of people who have stared at his work, his pictures seem to be something beyond comment, something to behold and to study to maybe, hopefully, imitate some of the beauty within. It is all interesting to him, if not slightly amusing. But not something to get overly excited about.

What did you do, Van Der Zee? How is it that you captured so much in those early photos, when photographers, for the most part, were still trying to figure out, really, how to best manuever a camera, much less produce works of art?

He casts his eyes slightly in the direction of the interviewer, shifting slightly in his wheelchair, his hands never moving from his cane which rests directly in front of him.

"Oh, I guess it was...that I'd make what they (people) wanted... and then I'd make what I wanted." He admits, after a moment's hesitation, that "they" usually liked what he decided they would like best when it was all said and done.

Van Der Zee, the product of an artistic family in Lennox, Massachusetts, has been hailed as probably one of the greatest photographers of his time. He is most noted for his depiction of life in Harlem, especially during that period of time known as the Harlem Renaissance, and is one of the main reasons thememory of life in that era has been so well preserved to this day.

But if he has become a classicist in his own right, Van Der Zee tosses the accomplishment off, telling one readily that he was not one who was born with any notion of wanting to be a photographer. He started out as an artist, and was quite into drawing landscapes as well as faces. He was never satisfied with what he did with faces, however. No matter how hard he tried, he could never capture all of the emotion and drama in the faces he drew which he could see with his eyes.

At age 14, he saw an ad in a magazine which said that he could earn a camera if he sold a certain quantity of perfume. Curiosity getting the best of him, he decided to try his luck and in time did earn the camera.

"It was just something to occupy my time," he says fondly of that period. "I don't know why, particularly, photography interested me. It just did."

What was happening, he realized, was that he was more and more able to capture the moods and drama in faces that he had never been able to get in his paintings and drawings. The pictures, slowly, took the place of what he had thought he wanted to do.

HIS WAS A DIFFERENT TIME- Photographer James Van Der Zee, in Baltimore recently, at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County for an exhibit of his work, explained with quiet dignity that photography in his day was quite a bit different than it is today ... and the fact that he became a classicist in his field in about as impressive to him as the time of day. "There were pictures to be taken," he explained.

(AFRO photo by Mark Gail)

And so he became a photographer. As he remembers it, he "seemed to be the only photographer around most of the time." He took pictures of "whatever looked artistic." And no, he didn't carry his camera around with him everywhere he went.

"No, I didn't carry my camera with me everywhere," he said. "Things were different then...the cameras were heavy, and you used those big silver plates..."

So how, Mr. Van Der Zee, did you capture all those different moods, all those faces...?

He shrugs and does not answer the question right away.

"I don't know," he says, finally, "I don't know."

That Van Der Zee is associated with the preservation of Harlem is interesting even to him. He says that "Harlem was as new to me as it was to everybody else. And so the fact that he took pictures of Marcus Garvey and Father Divine and Countee Cullen makes no difference to him. Those pictures were taken because they were there to be taken, not because they were sought out or because Van Der Zee had some premonition of greatness in their preservation. They were no more important than the countless pictures of little girls and glamorous mothers, rabbis and priests, weddings and funerals, that Van Der Zee took as a part of his everyday professional life.

"He's a bit modest," pipes in his wife, a young, pretty woman who looks to be no more than 34 or 35 years old. "He's a very kind person, a very gentle person. He still doesn't believe that people are capable of doing horrible things..."

Van Der Zee stares ahead, and then, as if he has not heard a word of what his wife has just said, picks up on a thought.

"Yes, I guess I looked for the personality in the people I took. Once, I remember, this kid was crying...he wouldn't stop...and I had to take the picture anyway."

When he got to the darkroom, he realized he couldn't stand the sad face, and he painted the mouth into a smile.

"He looked like he was singing," Van Der Zee chuckles. "The parents liked it..."

Another time, he remembers, a mother was aghast upon seeing the images of her two children with pouting faces. That was a picture that had been so long and hard in taking, he remembers, that he didn't bother to touch it up.

"When the mother saw her children," he said, throwing his head back just a little; "she said to me, 'Sir, are those my children?'"

"Well," he said, "I don't know if they are your children, Madam, but they are certainly the ones you brought in here with you anyway!"

Van Der Zee does acknowledge that he did add something to his photographs with his retouch techniques. It was the artist in him, he says, that would not allow him to let a background be drab or allow a setting to go unadorned if there was something that could be added by the paintbrush that would help tell a story or set the mood.

And so his pictures of funerals might have a painting of Christ set neatly in a corner, looking as though heaven were really that close, or a beautiful woman might have a picture of a possible lover placed conveniently on a nearby table. A picture had a responsibility, you see, to be something lasting value.

"I'm surprised to see my career to have ended so abruptly," he says quietly, although he acknowledges that he is satisfied with what he has done.

Did you have a goal, he is asked? Did you accomplish all you set out to do?

"I don't know that I had a goal to begin with," he says, softly.

He looks on present-day photography with much interest.

A VAN DER ZEE PHOTO—Took what was obvious to the camera and blended it with what was closest to the soul of the artist, making the work more a piece of art than just a portrait or picture. Van Der Zee has thousands of negatives on file, all autographed, which historians say will prove invaluable as more time passes and students of photography try to learn Van Der Zee's art through his works.

("They take so many shots!" he says incredulously.) "They're always looking for something...I don't remember that we did all that, actually . . ."

But now he's tired. His life has been long ("I've never been old before, you know. You'll find out that time solves all problems!")

"The first 100 years are the hardest," he quips.

As we rise to leave the room, his eyes glance upward, twinkling just a bit.

"You're from where? Los Angeles? heh. I was there and the mayor...gave me the keys to the city. I suppose that if I got into the city without keys, I could certainly get out without them, don't you think?"

After he takes a moment to laugh, he gets serious, and says, finally, "Yes; my dear, this has been...a good life for me."

FEB