Great moments in black journalism First in a series

How the AFRO seized Route 40

We are able to stay in motels, eat at Howard Johnson's and enjoy amenities of travel because the AFRO fought to open the doors and the highways and won!

(AFRO File Photo)

AFRO NEWSMEN TURN AFRICAN DIPLOMATS — The year 1961, Rufus Wells, left, Herb Mangrum, center, and George Collins, right, donned diplomatic pin stripped suits and African garb posing as Africans to gain entry to several previously segregated restaurants on Maryland's Route 40, which runs along the Eastern corridog to New York.

By George W. Collins

A few days ago, this man was driving north on the John F. Kennedy superhighway, en route to New York. Of course, there is nothing unusual about that since thousands of motorists do this same thing every hour of the day.

It was a routine drive for this man, too, until . . . that is until the car cruised past the Maryland House Restaurant, where people of every hue of the rainbow were entering and leaving.

Still nothing unusual. That's what restaurants are for, for people to eat and continue their coming and going.

Then the voice on FM radio reminded the man this is February, Black History Month.

Black History Month. Ah, what memories that phrase conjures up in the restless mind of a man en route to the Big Apple.

Most vivid of those memories are the countless trials and some triumphs Black Americans must endure while parading through life under the umbrella of the Black Experience.

Once you have been there, as this man and millions of others have, you are left with an indelible imprint on your psychic that skin pigmentation is paramount in a racist society such as ours.

But I digress.

Anyhow, the drive along the superhighway — which was dedicated by one of this nation's most glamorous Presidents just a week before he was cut down by an assassin's bullet in Dallas, Texas — sent that man's mind racing back across the years.

For those who are on this side of 21, perhaps it is difficult to conceive the JFX has not always been there.

It has not. And therein lies a tale.

Before the coming of what was to be known as the Northeastern Expressway, only to be changed in honor of the dead President, Route 40 was the main drag between New York and Washington.

Naturally then, Route 40 was dotted with a network of restaurants, ranging from greasy spoons to fairly decent. None could be accused of oppulence, you see.

There was, however, one slight problem: The owners of these eating establishments operated under a racist gentlemen's — I'm not sure that's the right term, agreement.

That agreement declared for all the world to hear, "We don't serve colored!"

Now since many diplomatsi from emerging nations — especially Africa — used the highway for quick runs from the United Nations to Washington, you can readily see how "We don't serve" slogan affeeted brothers and sisters from the Mother land.

They, to put it mildly, save frequently and unceremoniously tossed out of those restaurants on their diplomatic fannies.

Enter another problem. A problem of the image emerging African and other Third World nations rapidly were getting of the mighty, but inherently racist, United States.

Thus in the collective wisdom of then Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and his Presidential Brother, J. F. K., this will never do.

So, in short order, and 'n no uncertain terms, the word from the White House went out to Route 40 restaurant owners to cease and desist sooner than immediately. It was done.

As far as black Marylanders specifically, and black Americans generally, were concerned this was just and proper action on the part of the Brothers Kennedy. But it did not go far enough.

Americans of color still were getting the heave ho from the, by now, angry restaurant owners.

Enter three AFRO "Homegrown diplomats!"

In league with such brilliant journalistic minds as Jimmy Williams, Moses Newson, Bob Matthews, Rufus Wells, Herb Mangrum, and yours truly, it was decided we would test the treatment some homegrown diplomats would receive at the hands of the Route 40 restaurants owners, who by now, firmly had earned the title of race haters.

So one bright morning in August of 1961, three AFRO 'diplomats,' decked out in diplomatic splendor, took off on what became known as the "Route 40 Diplomatic Expedition."

The entourage included:

Herb Mangrum, who was gowned in a flowing maroon robe and sparkling headpiece, and answering to the name of Finance Minister Orfa Ordebwa, of Gobon;

Rufus Wells, decked out in morning diplomatic attire and answering to the non - existing name of Dula Okoro, press attache to the Finance minister; and yours truly, better known as Luau Aklulu, spokesman for the 'diplomatic party.'

Veteran AFRO photographer, I. Henry Phillips Sr. and the son of the late mortician, Arlington Phillips, also were in the party as official photographer and limousine chauffeur, respectively. The limousine was supplied by the Phillips Funeral Home.

The expedition visited restaurants from North East on Route 40 East to the Double T Diner on Route 40 West, in addition to staging a grand entrance into the old Miller's Restaurant, then located downtown on Fayette Street near Liberty.

Time will not permit details of the numerous and hilarious incidents which occurred during the bold expedition, a smashing success, but the following two are illustrative:

So convinced the AFRO "homegrown diplomats" were the real McCoy, one waitress in a North East restaurant gave the phony diplomats the royal treatment and asked for the finance minister's autograph.

This, despite the fact she had been told by Aklulu in English "learned at your Harvard, you see," the minister could not speak a word of English.

But you know what? The minister gave her an autograph, written in perfect English, and she never noticed any contradiction. She immediately stuffed it in her bosom, while beaming as if she had just received a gift from the hands of royalty.

Member of the party kept their kool while dining on a lunch of lamb and, all the trimmings. But once they were safely back in the limousine, and en route to the next stop, they cracked up with laughter.

At stop No. 2, The Redwood Inn, it also was difficult to suppress laughter when the owner loudly proclaimed, "I don't believe a word you say, but I can't afford not to serve you."

By the time we reached Miller's, whose owner stubbornly had insisted previously she would not "serve y'all in here," our beltlines were bulging.

After all, it is not easy to constantly eat 'lunch' at every restaurant you visit in the course of nine - hour day.

But the magic worked there too, and the only fly in the ointment occurred when an Evening Sun reporter arrived at the restaurant and wanted to know what country the "Prime Minister was representing."

Although yours truly was, at that time, covering the same beat with the inquiring reporter, who had become a friendly colleague, the party escaped with the secret of the hoax still intact.

It remained a secret until the Friday's edition of the AFRO proclaimed in words and pictures, for all the world to see, the Route 40 restaurant owners had been had.

The aforementioned Bobby Kennedy described it as a "neat trick."

It was that and more. It also showed the world how stupid and embarrassing racism can be.

Shortly thereafter, both state and Federal action in the area of public accommodations abolished such non - sense.

More profoundly, it would seem, is the lesson this bit of history would teach those of color, who are too young to remember.

That is that the right for Black Americans to be treated as other human beings by places of public accommodation was not always a fact of life and did not, by any means come easy.

Of course, countless other Americans of all colors made tremendous contributions in the struggle to achieve what many of us take for granted today. Many gave all they had — their lives.

Still, for this man, the "Route 40 Diplomatic Expedition" will be the source of warm memories as we observe Black History Month in 1982.

(Editor's Note: George W. Collins, who now is a television executive and on - air personality, is a former award winning AFRO reporter, columnist, and editor.)

Poet, novelist, AFRO war correspondent

Langston Lives: A two-city celebration of the great black writer

The first of February marked the beginning of Afro-American History Month around the nation, but it is also the 80th anniversary of the birth of Langston Hughes, author, poet, playwright, AFRO - AMERICAN Newspapers foreign correspondent and chronicler of black American life.

That this week was his birthday would have remained an obscure fact, had it not been for the New York-Washington, D.C. celebration "Langston Lives!", a series of events focusing on different aspects of his work.

The choice of his work, 15 years after his death, must have been difficult to make from a collection including ten volumes of poetry, over 20 Plays (dramas, operas, musicals, and a new artform —gospel song play), 11 books on black life and history, two novels and two autobiographies.

Such a literary legacy would hardly imply that Langston is "dead," but appeared on a vist to Baltimore shortly before his death.

"Langston Lives!", the brainchild of Rod Rodgers Dance Studios in New York, is a cultural commemoration he hopes will be done every two years to create a national black cultural festival around the theme of an outstanding black American.

A series of activities were scheduled and then scotched last month, when inclement weather in Washington, D.C., minimized transportation.

The canceled January 23rd extravaganza at Washington's Kennedy Center, featuring Rosalind Cash, Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, Ntozake Shange and others, is expected to be rescheduled in April or May. Among the more successful events were a luncheon sponsored by Delegate Walter Fauntroy, Congressional Black Caucus Chairman and the proclamation by Washington's Mayor Marion Berry of "Langston Hughes Week" beginning January 19th.

"Langston Lives!" went on as planned in New York, however, with a special tribute by a coalition of United Nations organizations on his birthday. The Schomburg Center for Black Culture has a symposium scheduled for February 11, and community activities around the city are continuing.

Rodgers' bi-city concept for the celebration is largely a question of official recognition. Washington is the nation's capital, but he feels the festival must also take place in cities specifically related to that person, and Langston Hughes loved and wrote often of Harlem and New York.

Langston Hughes is dear to older AFRO readers because of his serialized autobiography, "The Big Sea," 1940, first published in AFRO-AMERICAN Newspapers and his exclusive news reports beginning in October 1937, from the front of the Spanish Civil War.

The Spanish Civil War was one of the linchpins in the Second World War. He sent back photos and exposes of the black American doctors and nurses on the front, and soldiers fighting in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade against the fascist faction which later came to power.

Langston Hughes' work exhibited a sensitivity and profound insight into the complexities of black American life. He often used the fictional character, Jess B. Simple, to illustrate the most private, carefully concealed emotions of blacks in Harlem toward whites and the "race problem."

At the age of 19, he wrote the poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," tracing from Africa, the rivers the black man has known, to the Mississippi, and asserting, "My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

His growth as a poet is usually attributed to his "discovery" by poet critic, Vachel Lindsay, in a Washington, D.C. hotel, when in fact, Hughes had published numerous poems and his first book, "The Weary Blues," 1926, was rolling off the presses.

Hughes had an uncanny knack of predicting the obvious when the rest of America seemed deaf and blind. His 'Dream Deferred' seems to aptly depict the frustrations of black America today, when he wrote in 1951 What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—and then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—like a 'syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. — Or does it explode?"

The test of time usually decides which authors will enter the realm of "the classics." Twenty to 30 years after many of his poems and articles were written, they are still relevant today. Langston himself said because, "things (racially) haven't changed."

Hughes was originally called one of the "New Poets" of the Harlem Renaissance, that short-lived era of the 1920s when all-black broadway musicals, black dancers, actors and writers were in vogue.

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LANGSTON HUGHES — once called the black poet laureate as he

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Teen, 15, held in elevator murder

Victim, 17, slain in housing project

Thirteen days after police received a tip about the Jan. 27 murder of a 17 year-old youth who was killed in an elevator of the Lexington Terrace Apartment on West Saratoga Street they have arrested a suspect in the case.

Samuel Quomony, 15, of the 700 block of Saratoga St., was arrested Feb. 9 in Henrico County, Va. He was taken into custody after the police in Virginia called city homicide detectives and said he was being held pending their arrival.

At AFRO presstime, Quomony was at City Jail without bail. He is charged as an adult with first degree murder, robbery and use of a handgun in the commission of a felony.

Quomony allegedly shot Kevin Roy, 17, of the 900 block of Pennsylvania Ave., in an elevator at the high rise apartment building. Police said Roy died of a bullet wound in the head.

Police would not confirm or deny if the case was drug related. However, police report Roy, who is known as "Sleepy" and Quomony who is called "Junior" had been arguing.

The AFRO learned the suspect was staying with relatives in Virginia and was not attending school.

Roy's body was discovered by a security guard, who was employed at th Lexington Terrace apartments after a resident of the building complained she could not get the elevator to open. Quomony's trial date is scheduled for March 5.

State's six biggest banks OK $15 million minority loan fund plan

Maryland's six largest banks have agreed to create a $15 million fund that would provide loans to help start and expand minority owned businesses, state financial officials said this week.

A special $5 million state fund proposed by Governor Harry Hughes would guarantee 90 percent of the loans and also would pay interest subsidies of up to 4 percent to compensate banks making loans at below market interest rates.

The loan fund is the idea of the Greater Baltimore Committee and is being formed with money from Maryland National, The Union Trust Bank, First National Bank of Maryland, Mercantile Bank and Trust, Equitable Trust Bank and Suburban Trust Bank.

Daniel Hemenway, executive director of the GBC's minority business effort, said the fund is aimed at increasing "The absolute number of minority owned businesses, average size and average profitability and providing that financial institutions don't have to lose money in doing it."

The program would provide loans to economically and socially disadvantaged businesses and amounts to the GBC's response to a recent study criticizing the lack

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Clean Block worker 'Baltimore's Best'

HUNDREDS OF CITIZENS from all walks of life were honored by Baltimore in Best ceremonies at the Lyric Theatre Wednesday night. Above (R) Mrs. Minnie Williams, long - time AFRO Clean Block leader is honored for her work in the Lakeview Avenue area. She is shown with Mrs. Thelma Banks who nominated her.

An AFRO Clean Block worker was a recipient of a silver award in the 12th bi - annual "Baltimore is Best" Awards Ceremony this week.

On Wednesday, Feb. 10, Mrs. Minnie Williams and other "Baltimore's Best" recipients and the public were honored at the New Lyric Theatre, 140 West Mt. Royal Ave. by Mayor William Donald Schaefer.

Each of the participants in the contest received a personalized Certificate of Recognition and a rose, the City's flower, Silver - Blue and Silver winners received symbolic jewelry and a certificate presented by the mayor.

Mrs. Williams of the 2400 block Lakeview Ave., was lauded on her many neighborhood contributions that demonstrated her pride in Baltimore City. She was lauded for helping give Baltimore a clean look with flowers, new paint and clean streets through her AFRO Clean Block activities.

Hundreds of nominations are submitted every year to "Baltimore is Best," a non - budgeted all volunteer program in the Mayor's office that is directed by Mrs. Floraine Applefeld, a fulltime volunteer.

Mrs. Williams was nominated by Miss Thelma Banks of the 2400 block of Callow Ave.

Award recipients were treated to the sounds of the Ed Williams "Big Name Band" which included tunes from swing to jazz at the Lyric.

It is official! higher gas, light bills

The State's Public Service Commission granted Baltimore Gas and Electric Company about half of its record $199 million rate hike request this week.

Ronald Hawkins, the commission's executive secretary, said BG&E was authorized to hike its rates by $99.2 million.

"There's no question in my mind that the PSC is sympathetic to Baltimore Gas and Electric," State. Sen. Cornell Dypskis, D-Baltimore said.

Dypskis added, "It's like a department store sale. They were asking for $200 million, but what they really wanted was $100 million and that's what they got."

Hawkins said the total package granted to BG&E amounts to a 7.25 percent revenue increase for the company. He said it is unknown how much the increase would boost utility bills for the average customer.

"We will continue to organize and we will work together in Annapolis," said Anne Feldman of the Citizens Labor Energy Coalition, a group which vocally opposed the rate hikes at eight public hearings staged by the PSC.

Feldman added, "The BG&E would have gotten $125 million if we hadn't been there."

"This is very disappointing. If it were up to me, I would have sent them away with no increase for the reason they have come to the trough too often," said Hyman Pressman, Baltimore's City Comptroller.

Pressman estimated the city would lose about $1.9 million because of the rate hike, adding "I hope the people's counsel will appeal the decision."

Gregory Carmean, assistant people's counsel to the PSC, said his office would have to review the PSC's announcement before deciding whether to appeal the rate hike package in the courts.

The PSC allowed BG&E to raise its rate on common equity to 15.5 percent. The company had requested 17.8 percent.

In addition, BG&E had asked it be allowed to raise its reconnection fee from $3 to $15. But the commission ruled the urility company could only raise that fee to $5.

The commission reduced the utility company's residential customer charge. The flat rate a customer must pay even if no energy is used.

NAACP's 'blackface' protest ends in victory

The NAACP scored what it called a "victory" when a Baltimore City policeman-entertainer, who performs an Al Jolson act in blackface, did not go on stage the last night of his three-day stint at the Downtown Baltimore Hilton Hotel, a NAACP official said.

Dr. Wallace Gatewood told the AFRO the veteran civil rights organization's demonstrations and picketing of Bobby Burger's act was "definitely a victory" because the group succeeded in halting the officer's Tuesday evening performance.

Gatewood said the NAACP first learned of Burger's act last week when an advertisement of the show appeared in a local newspaper.

Burger has performed his Al Jolson routine for several years in Baltimore-area nightclubs. Jolson is a turn-of-the-century vaudeville artist who wore cork to blacken his face and used white paint to enlarge his lips.

Demonstrations and pickets were mounted to protest the show because NAACP officials called the performance "racially demeaning" and it harkened a period when "blacks were looked at as clowns."

Burger is reported to have insisted nothing objectionable exists in his show and it has been performed without complaints for several years in the Baltimore-area and in Las Vegas.

"I've done this act for two and a half years. It's not an imitation of a black man. It has nothing to do with black people," Burger is reported as saying.

Gatewood, Adam Vanlandingham and Enolia McMillian, NAACP officials were among those who disagreed. Mrs. McMillian said their actions were mounted in an effort to protest the depiction of blacks in past years.

"We refuse to have the clock turned back on the days when blacks in the entertainment world always were the comedians and the idiots," she said.

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Thugs clip Angel's wings

A Guardian Angel was beatened this week by two elevator passengers while riding to his 14th floor apartment.

Prentice Thomas, 21, 1058 Argyle Ave., was returning to his apartment Tuesday evening wearing the green beret and T-shirt of the Guardian Angels when two elevator passengers began questioning him about his association with the Angels, police reports said.

The two passengers, described as two black males asked Thomas why he wanted to be a member of the Angels. When the elevator reached the 13th floor the two men grabbed Thomas and pulled him out of the elevator, police said.

On the 13th floor, the two men beat Thomas with their hands and feet.

Thomas was taken to University Hospital for treatment. He sustained minor injuries and was released from the hospital.

Police report there have been no arrests of the suspects. Thomas had not pressed charges at AFRO presstime.

Thomas was unavailable for comment.

Part of what's bugging tenants

ROTTING CEILING — Michael Covington, of the 2900 block of N. Calvert St., points to a gaping hole in the ceiling over his bed. A four foot chunk of plaster, heavy with moisture from a leaking roof, fell and struck him as he slept Tuesday morning. He and several of his neighbors are organizing to challenge their landlady in court over this and other hazards they claim have gone unattended for months.

AFRO Photos by Martin Evans

BATTAGLIA CRACK-DOWN WORKING

Beltway dope bust nets $2 million in heroin

By Pam Widgeon
AFRO Staff Writer

A 35-year-old Baltimore County woman and a 61-year-old man who lives in Philadelphia, were arrested early Thursday morning after they allegedly made a drug transaction on the parking lot of the Maryland House Service Center on Interstate 95 police said.

According to police, city narcotic detectives received information that heroin would be delivered in Baltimore shortly after midnight, Feb. 10.

City narcotic detectives and Baltimore County police arrested Ms. Cornelia Fryson, 35, of the 3800 block of Victoria Ave., within an hour after the alleged drug transaction was made.

Police said Ms Fryson drove South on I-95 and was arrested on I-83 and the Beltway. Police recovered from her 1981 Eldorado six "New York jumbo bags" of heroin, four pounds of cutting - equipment. The estimated street value of the heroin recovered is $2 million, according to police.

Ms. Fryson is charged with possession with intent to distribute heroin and was at Baltimore County Jail at AFRO presstime.

Clifton Wright, 61, of the 4600 block German Town Ave., in Philadelphia was seen driving his 1981 car north and was stopped at

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