Baltimore Afro-American

Founded August 1892 by John H. Murphy Sr., 1840-1922. Published every Tuesday and Saturday by the AFRO AMERICAN CO. of Baltimore City, Inc. Carl Murphy (1889-1967) Editor-Publisher (1922-1967).

Christmas 1984

The Christmas season is a time of joy and goodwill. It is also a time of giving. Families gather together as kinship takes on a deeper meaning.

As this society goes through an economic recovery that is a phantom to many Americans, both governmental and religious leaders and average citizens should once again reflect on whether this holiday season will be a hypocritical sham or a time of real goodwill among men and women.

On the national front, there are serious deliberations going on about what cuts will be made in the national budget. The military, as usual, is being let off with very few cuts while many human services programs are slated for the budget axe once again.

Many of the human services programs have already been cut to the bone and further cuts will kill some of them. It will be difficult to celebrate the holiday season while crippling programs that mean the difference between life with hope and dignity and an existence of despair.

At least Ebenezer Scrooge at his very worst, pinched pennies and looked at the holidays with disdain, exhibiting honest cruelty.

He did not smile or pretend to care about the needy. He did not grant lip service to the needs of the suffering while lavishing the wealth of King Midas on the military.

The powers that be in Washington enjoy lush holiday fare while placing the burden of feeding the hungry onto private groups that do not have even a fraction of their resources.

Ebenezer Scrooge seems benevolent compared with the rulers of this nation, that is why it is especially important that those of us who are doing well, strive to ensure that next holiday season will be better for the less fortunate. A gift of this nature would be the greatest one any of us can give.

Christmas, the simple way

By Marian Wright Edelman

Most of us approach the holiday season with mixed emotions. On the one hand we look forward to visiting with our families and celebrating Christ's birth with music, gifts and quiet moments. But most of us—especially the many among us whose purses are slimmer this December—increasingly feel pressured by the commercialization of this sacred holiday.

There is an alternative. We don't have to mark this joyous occasion by buying out the store and emptying out our pockets (and charge accounts).

Here are some low-cost, sensible ways for us to make Christmas enjoyable for us and our families:

— Giving gifts of our time and talents. This involves making coupons that can be redeemed later, for chores or activities that family members can share. Some examples: babysitting for a neighbor or family member, washing dishes, a picnic or other favorite activity that members of your family enjoy, and so forth.

— Making rather than buying our gifts. A handmade gift is always more personal, and an excellent way to involve family members in helping each other on projects. What is more welcome than a home-baked fruitcake at Christmas!

— Spending quiet time each day to anticipate Christ's coming. Our familiar Advent traditions—a lighted candle or Advent wreath, Bible reading or Advent calendar—provide natural ways to gather the family in quiet celebration.

— Buying or adopting a live tree. A growing tree, planted nearby or adopted for the Christmas season, can be a focus of fun. Children can string popcorn, berries and nuts and hang food for the birds.

— Simplifying the Christmas dinner. The family could prepare a simple meal more in keeping with what most of the world's children will be eating, and help a community center or church serve a Christmas dinner to others.

— Discussing as a family the use of money saved. Money not spent on expensive presents, a Christmas tree, or fancy foods could be donated to a children's project or food program.

— Attending church as a family. Visits during Advent and on Christmas Eve can be especially stirring and beautiful.

— Last but not least, talking over any problems your children might have with a de-commercialized Christmas. Thanks to television and advertising, children are pressured into expecting a bonanza of costly presents every Christmas. But the time we spend with them one-on-one is still the most valuable gift.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund, a national voice for children.

Later for toys, We want the Manger Story

Job training: solution to unemployment?

There is no doubt that there is a vast unemployment problem in this country - 8.4 million Americans are looking for work. Since the 1980's in an attempt to curb this runaway unemployment, Congress has repeatedly passed jobs legislation.

Most recently, the Job Training Partnership Act (PL 97-300) was signed into law on October 13 1982 to replace the trouble - ridden Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973 which expired at the end of fiscal year 1982.

The Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 (JTPA) was designed in an effort to unite government with private industry to create job training programs for unskilled and dislocated workers.

As agreed upon by both the House and the Senate, the goal of the program is to "provide people with skills or other assistance necessary for them to move off welfare and into unsubsidized employment."

JTPA's predecessor CETA was riddled with problems, including a public image of not serving those who truly need it and being fraught with waste and abuse, particularly in its public service employment segment.

Therefore, Congress chose to conduct a major re-evaluation of Federal work and training policy, which resulted in the enactment of a completely new program.

JTPA differs from CETA in several important ways: 1) it is built upon a partnership between government and industry, rather than controlled by government alone;

2) it includes a major role of State governors;

3) it provides training only and not subsidized employment, except in very limited cases for youth;

4) the amount of funds which can be used for non-training expenses is strictly limited; and all programs will be held accountable to mandatory performance standards.

In recognition of rising unemployment among dislocated skilled workers, Congress included in the new legislation a separate program for dislocated workers.

Another difference is in funding. JTPA is funded at substantially less than CETA. For the program year of July 1984 - June 1985, JTPA is funded at $3.5 billion to serve an expected 3 million people.

Of that amount, the Baltimore metropolitan area, which includes Anne Arundel, Carroll, and Howard Counties, received approximately $10.5 million.

This included $9.5 million for Title IIA funds for the training of disadvantaged youth and adults - the central program of JTPA, $0.7 million for Title IIB funds for a summer youth program, and $.3 million for Title III funds for the training of dislocated workers.

This money is expected to serve 4,000 people under IIA, 6,255 under IIB and 210 under III.

The JTPA program is a great theoretical tool for decreasing long-term unemployment. However, there are a few major areas of concern. These lie in the state administration of the program, the welfare interplay, and the effect of the role of Private Industry Councils.

One of the primary concerns about the implementation of JTPA is the lack of consistency among state programs because of the lack of federal supervision.

Guidance for the program is passed to state and local governments, of which some have been cited as implementing the program contrary to the law.

For example, in Houston, problems erupted because the local administering agency chose not to give JTPA funds to those disadvantaged individuals who did not have a high school diploma. This is clearly discriminatory and against federal guidelines.

There is also concern about the role private industry plays in the program's implementation. Currently, each state is divided by the Governor into several service delivery areas (SDA). Each SDA has a Private Industry Council (PIC) made up primarily of representatives from private industry.

Their role is to provide policy guidance and oversee local job training programs, to establish procedures for developing a job training plan and to select a grant recipient and administrative entity to operate the program, in agreement with local elected officials.

Some speculate that because of the role of PIC's, there are times when JTPA participants are used simply as a cheap labor source. A case in point, there are allegations that a hotel in Baltimore is using JTPA funds to implement a 14 week training program in janitorial service for persons over 55 at a pay rate of $40 per week.

In essence, this hotel is using these individuals as a cheap labor under the guise of a training program. I sincerely hope these allegations prove to be false.

There was another example of the program being used to suit the needs of employers in Hillsboro County. Here, JTPA was used to complement workfare, an alternative to welfare that is essentially government subsidized employment.

At a metal salvaging plant in this county, these persons receiving workfare who were deemed to have supervisory capacity were reportedly paid bonuses out of JTPA funds under the guise that they were being trained on the job for the jobs they were already doing.

Yet another example falls close to home. In Baltimore, the administering agency for JTPA, the Neighborhood Progress Administration (NPA), approached the Community Survival Center and said there were 20 jobs available for the rehabilitation of 11 city owned houses that were federally subsidized.

They proposed to combine the money they would get from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the rehabilitation of the homes with JTPA money to pay the workers.

NPA said they would pay the workers 75 cents an hour ($30 a week for a 40 hour week) for the first six weeks under the guise of a training program - there is a provision for this within the statute if training guidelines meet established academic standards or are specified in a pre-employment contract.

In actuality, this was on the job training, there was no curriculum and there were production goals that were expected to be met.

The Community Survival Center said they would provide the workers if NPA would either pay minimum wage or have an actual classroom training program. In response, the funds were given to another source. The center has filed a grievance.

Still another concern is that JTPA is not serving those who truly need it because of the current structure of our welfare system. People can in effect lose money by qualifying for the program.

For example, in Los Angeles, California it was found that 88 per percent of those on general assistance, and therefore able to qualify for JTPA were male because women who had children preferred the better benefits of AFDC.

This problem was adjusted after much public complaint, however, inequities like this still exist.

Unfortunately, in any program such as this, abuses will arise. Happily because of the manner in which the legislation was drafted, the questions arise as to whether abuses will be prevalent as they were in the CETA program. Does JTPA really serve those who need it, is the emphasis on PIC's wise, is it actually working:

These are questions that must be looked at immediately if JTPA is to be deemed an effective medium for curbing the high rate of unemployment.

It should be noted that JTPA has only been fully operational for one year, however, that is long enough to begin to remedy the inequities that are already occurring.

I have nothing but contempt for those persons who would take a program like JTPA, which is ultimately going to benefit all, and blatantly and willfully abuse it.

It is obvious that the administration of the program must be more stringent and the penalties for abuse, strict.

News Flash!

News flash: We have just received a report from Chicago that Christmas has been won by Sears Roebuck and Company, in what was described as a bitter tender offer.

Fifty-one percent of the more than two thousand year old holiday has been delivered to the giant retailer, for now wiping out the entire interest in the holiday of its former trustees - the Santa Claus family.

The remaining 49 percent of Christmas is being distributed, in equal shares, to four other major retailers.

The Clauses will retain the remaining one percent of the venerable and once festive celebration and, they have been offered a three figure consulting contract to make future recommendations on colors for designer Santa Claus outfits.

When asked for a reaction to this latest move to diversify and to the retention of Christmas' former trustees the Sears spokesman said, "We are understandably very happy with this latest success and we want everyone to know that nothing about Christmas will change, with the possible exception of some toy prices".

"As for the Clauses", said the Sears spokesman, "the consulting agreement was the least we could fairly do". "Wherever", he continued, "if the Clauses don't cut it as fashion consultants they will be retired to their North Pole homestead, to tend their small red nose reindeer."

Sears may yet live to see the Christmas takeover come back to haunt them. For still to be heard from in the matter is the holiday's true owners, a spiritual yet real baby from a town called Bethlehem, his father and the millions of small children from all over the world.

Efforts to contact the baby, for comment on this latest development, have so far been unsuccessful. However, we did have an opportunity to talk with many of the small children who stand to be affected by this latest corporate coup.

To a diaper, each of the little ones vowed to seek the help of "big people" - mostly their mama -, as well as the baby Jesus himself, to reverse this latest attempt to corner the market on Christmas.

They indicate that if persuasion is not successful in convincing the mammoth retailer to return control of the holiday to the children and God its rightful owners, and with all its spiritual value in tact; they will demand the cessation of all Christmas buying.

A Sears store manager, when told of the bold threat by the babies, is reported to have commented "humbug". In fact, no one seems to have taken the feelings of the little ones seriously.

Many mothers have refused to allow their small children to participate in the protest being planned for the next few days at shopping centers all over America, saying; "We know what's best for our children and we don't want them out there fighting a retail force as large as that of Sears".

The children, for their part, are saying that if they can't get the help they need from their parents to return Christmas to its rightful owners, they will appeal to the only source left open to them - God the father.

Lawyers for both sides are frantically attempting to bring the parties together, for a pre-Christmas settlement of the dispute.

No one is yet prepared to comment on the position that Christmas' founder and chief executive officer will take in the matter.

However, if past disagreements between mankind and the founder of Christmas give any clues to how this latest usurpation of heavenly authority will be handled; right and the spirit of Christmas should win out.

For, in the past God has always sought to point friend and foe alike to the true meaning of the holiday. Where people have only wanted to get, he has reminded them that Christmas is a time to give.

In cases like this one, and there have been many attempts in the past to steal Christmas, God has consistently decided that he is pleased with his poor son, born in a condemnation complex of old barns, and has repeatedly chosen not anyone who would not believe in him through the baby Jesus.

And in every warring situation that has previously gotten to the highest throne, God has decided in favor of peace.

All that the Christ child and his worldwide gang of babies is trying to do is bring some of the spirit of the holiday for themselves and even for the more greedy adults. Tune in on December 26 for a report on who won. Merry Christmas.

There is a damper on Christmas spirit

Despite the crowded stores, the dazzling lights everywhere, and the very successful heart transplant, there is something in the air which puts a damper on the Christmas spirit.

Perhaps it is the headlines in the newspapers and the radio and television newscasts which give reminder of the nearness of war—nuclear and otherwise—or the equally destructive and annihilating nature of the industrial empires that are a part of "progress".

The very rush of people to the stores and their spending, spending, spending may be a kin to the death from prisoner on the eve of his electrocution, who orders all kinds of fastidious, expensive and unusual foods for his last meal.

These musings are no attempt at being funeral, no invitation to a sackcloth and ashes; nevertheless, it is impossible to behave as if there is no reason to be frightened as the New Year rounds the corner.

The recent highjacking of a Kuwaiti airplane and the holding of many nationals as hostages (including four Americans) furnish an example of the temper of our nation, at least of its leaders.

Although the plane was not American, was captained by a Britisher, and landed on Iranian soil, the fact that two Americans were killed by the highjackers, and two others tortured, has put U.S. officialdom in a fighting mood.

This act of wanton terrorism, carried out with many threats and much theatrics, brought forth equal threats and demands that the U.S. meet terrorism with military strikes — even, before terrorists have acted and even if such preemptive strikes bring death to innocent civilians.

None of the voices calling for such deserved anti-terrorist vengeance has stopped to measure the implications of such preemptive action—perhaps even the triggering of World War III.

Admittedly, the U.S. cannot sit like a lame duck in the face of organized international terrorism, at home and abroad. We cannot react as if our embassies are not being bombed; we cannot remain silent while over 200 of our sleeping Marines are sent to their deaths, in a below - the - belt attack.

But is meeting terrorism with terrorism (called "surgery" by some) the answer, especially when military action may compel the U.S. to cross boundaries of friendly or unfriendly countries?

Although all sane men and women must applaud the new attempts at Soviet-American negotiations for arms control, somehow, again there is a feeling that nothing much will come of the Shultz-Gromyko meetings. There is still too much continuity of Cold War mentality, of pointing fingers, of "picking on", on each side.

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It is not only in the area of international conflict that there is cause for uneasiness and fear on the part of the unofficial masses.

The poison-laden explosions in the Indian province of Bhopal, leaving over 2,000 dead, is another reminder of the possibilities of the present-day world. Today, 2,000 dead; tomorrow it can be two million, or 10 times two million—even without resort to full-scale nuclear warfare; even without utilization of the poisonous gases which are a part of the arsenal of every major power, and some not so major.

No wonder there is marked increase in cases of stress and depression everywhere; no wonder there is a jump in suicides, notably among minors.

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A the sake of children, it is good that there are are tags, and lights, and Christmas trees, and wonder as Christmas approaches.

And, there must be the hope and a prayer that these, and those that follow them, will in time—enjoy "Peace on Earth with Goodwill to All Men and Women and among Nations."

—AFRO SURVEY—

What would you give the world for Christmas?

Kurt Wall

Beverly Green

Roderick Detsen

Elroy Williams

This week the question to the man and woman in the street was, "If you were to give a gift to the world this holiday season, what would it be?"

Kurt Wall, 21, salesman, "More love. There is too much hatred in the world. Brothers hate brothers. You can look at people who are desperate for money hurting others to obtain it. If there were more love, everybody would be helping everybody."

Beverly Green, 30, housewife, "Peace and harmony. The world is in an uproar. It would be nice to have peace. That would be so good. No fighting or family quarrels and year-long, bad grudges."

Roderick Detsen, 29, public relations, "A prayer. We are always in need of prayer. It is the communication to the Father. In return, he blesses us. We cannot survive without it."

Elroy Williams, 47, maintenance, "If I had enough money, I'd make sure nobody went hungry. A lot of people do not have anything. We just take for granted what we have."

Barbara Butler, 24, unemployed, "Peace, Happiness and Joy. Instead of gifts, a little bit of happiness shed on someone would be great. Gifts do not bring out happiness. Christmas should be everyday and those gifts of peace, happiness and joy should be everlasting daily."

Dorothy Rusk, 29, salesperson, "I'd build a hotel and give it to the homeless. I think they need some place to be. I'd let them stay and perhaps pay only a quarter a night. Everybody should have some place to sleep."

Jerome Fair, 23, instructor, "New economic direction. That means I would put an end to Reaganomics. We have many people in this country in the middle class. Poverty people are not sharing the total piece of the American dream as well as the middle class. We need a new direction."

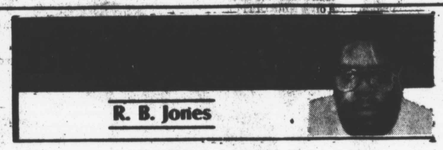
Jean Cox, 26, supervisor assistant, "Lots and lots of food. The hungry need to be fed, especially those in Ethiopia. People just shouldn't be hungry."

Barbara Butler

Dorothy Rusk

Jerome Fair

Jean Cox



R. B. Jones

Messiah?

During the present holiday season when talk about Christmas fills the air, the unsettling thought keeps resurfacing in my mind. The talk of the coming of a Messiah troubles me because according to the Christians he has already come and in the opinion of many Jews he is yet to come. Some members of the Islamic faith are looking for the Mahdi, another name for Messiah.

Messiahs are very comforting figures in the realm of religion because they give people hope whether it is justified or not. Unfortunately, many black people in this society when faced with the twin monsters of capitalist exploitation and racial oppression, look to the coming of some messianic figure to lead us to the promised land.

It does not matter where they stand on the political spectrum Messiah watchers all see the salvation of the race in the emergence of a great leader who will by force of personality or the grace of God turn the tide of history.

It is the messianic notion that inhibits the flexibility of the black movement. We as a people must have one leader. It must be either Frederick Douglass or Martin Delany; it must be W.E.B. DuBois or Booker T. Washington; it must be DuBois or Garvey; more recently it was either Martin Luther King.

When a group of people is fighting a battle as complex and as protracted as the one black people have been waging in America, it is imperative to utilize all the minds and resources it has instead of placing total confidence in one person or strategy.

As great as the leaders named above were, they all had limitations of vision, training, education and personality that kept them from being all the things the struggle needed. As much as religionists assert to the contrary, there is more than one source of truth and wisdom in the world.

Our desire for a messiah blinds us to the fact that the wisdom of Martin Luther King's profound sense of the need for reconciliation between the races and Malcolm X's uncompromising assertion of self-pride and self-defense can both be utilized.

The desire for a messiah also creates among black people in this country an acute dependence on charismatic personalities instead of a dependence on organizations with clearly defined goals.

Leaders can be assassinated, compromised and misguided. They can go insane and they can misinterpret historical trends. Organizations however, if they are democratic and allow dissent are much less vulnerable to the pitfalls that frequently entrap charismatic leaders.

Amilcar Cabral, Eduardo Mondlane and Patrice Lumumba, African liberation leaders, are dead but the movements they lead live on. The movement lead by Sandino in Nicaragua survived his death.

In contrast the Garvey Movement floundered after he was deported from this country. Booker T. Washington's organization survives to this day, but with greatly diminished influence. SCLC without Martin Luther King struggles on with truncated influence. Malcolm X's OAAU did not survive him for long.

What we as a people must realize is that the only messiah that will save black people from our present ills is our collective effort. No personality, be it Jesse Jackson or some leader yet to emerge will save us. The salvation of black America will come through perseverance and hard work and a willingness to take the ultimate risk.

Messiahs belong in the realm of religion not black liberation.

PLAIN TALK

by Derrick K. Matthews, M.D.

Allergies, asthma and pollution

Certain environmental factors play a significant role in worsening one's allergies or asthma. These include not only the pollen of trees, grasses, and weeds in the air, but also chemical, atmospheric pollution may severely affect the respiratory tract of one who suffers from allergy or asthma.

Air pollution can be defined simply as air contamination with waste products of our civilization. In addition to endangering one's health, these waste products may damage clothes, rust metals, discolor paint, denature our soil, spoil vegetation, and limit visibility.

Air pollutants are derived from many industrial and nonindustrial sources. One of the most common pollutants is carbon monoxide.

It is derived primarily from the burning of hydrocarbons, as in the automobile engine, and burning of coal in industry. Burning of coal and oil also produces another pollutant called sulfur dioxide gas.

This gas is highly irritating to lung tissue. Air pollution also contains other hydrocarbons which result from incomplete combustion, nitrates, and nitrous oxide.

In addition to these, particulate matter found in our atmosphere may also adversely affect the lung. These include lead, derived from gasoline combustion, flourides, asbestos, and many others.

The automobile obviously plays a major role in producing many pollutants.

It is estimated that in this country motor vehicles discharge each year about 65 million tons of carbon monoxide, 1 million tons of sulfur dioxide, 12 million tons of hydrocarbons, 3 million tons of nitrogen oxide, and 1 million tons of particulate matter.

Obviously in metropolitan areas, automobile congestion exposes the population to a wide variety of pollutants. These pollutants impair the function of the respiratory tract and individuals with underlying problems such as allergies or asthma are at an added risk.

More specifically, pollutants tend to dry the nasal and bronchial mocous membranes and lead to infections.

The tiny hairs that line the respiratory tract and eliminate microorganisms that may cause infection tend to be impaired by pollutants. The lungs are not able to ventilate and oxygenate blood in a normal fashion.

These adverse changes that are caused by air pollution are worsened by tobacco smoke, occupational exposure, and infections.

The effects of pollution which results from the sum of individual pollutants in addition to climatic factors results in increased episodes of respiratory symptoms.

Air pollution represents a serious challenge to the lung of the asthmatic patient. In several studies in this country and abroad increased symptoms have been noted in patients with bronchial asthma in correlation with rises in air pollution levels.

The patient with asthma and allergies is advised to remain indoors when pollution levels are high and to avoid as much as possible environments where indoor irritants are present.

Preserving democracy

The Nazi government of South Africa is getting a surprising lesson in democracy—probably a fatal one.

The racist mentality of the Pretoria regime convinced the rulers that America as democracy was a partner in racism that winked conveniently with a policy of "constructive engagement." And it did, in effect, add up to an international version of liberal Sen. Daniel Moynihan's "benign neglect."

The entrenched belief that God created white people as superior humans and the reinforcement of this racist doctrine by the economic and political interloping of Ronald Reagan-vis-a-vis Nikkies has created a dismaying for racism in South Africa and for any country that offers it friendship or support.

The Reagan Administration has learned that lesson because it previously accepted the conclusion that a minority can—through force and oppression—permanently enslave a majority. But in the end, oppression strengthens the victim in ways inexplicable to the oppressor and the societal perpetrators embarrass their allies with their brutality.

Whether you accept my explanation for the radical turn of events in America's foreign policy towards the world's worst totalitarian police state where 73 percent of the population is forbidden to live on 87 percent of the land ("white areas"), you must agree that South African apartheid is doomed.

President Ronald Reagan knows it. He has driven, as South Africa's most dependable ally, the racist regime into further diplomatic isolation. Apartheid points the way to certain and eventual disaster and America cannot go any further, be explained as he bowed to political reality and dumped "constructive engagement."

Preceding the President's new policy was a letter written by Rep. Bob Walker (R-Pa.) and signed by 35 conservative members of Congress. It warned Pieter Botha and his racist cabal that their alleged anti-Communism would no longer be acceptable as a cover for racism. And, they warned, equating conservatism in America with apartheid in South Africa could be a fatal error.

Signed by such New Right Turks as Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga), the letter said that these conservatives view South Africa's racial violence with "alarm" and are prepared to change America's foreign policy to stop it. While recognizing the "strategic value" of South Africa, "we cannot condone policies of apartheid...."

And "if constructive engagement,' " they said, "becomes in your view an excuse for maintaining the unacceptable status quo," it will signal the beginning of the end of American support. "We are looking for an immediate end to the violences in South Africa accompanied by a demonstrated sense of urgency ending apartheid."

If there is no progress toward racial justice, the conservatives promised to "curtail new American investment" and "organize international diplomatic and economic sanctions against South Africa." Effectively, these conservatives dispelled the belief that all conservatives are racists and laid out the welcome mat for Blacks in the Republican Party.

But party politics notwithstanding, Randall Robinson, leader of TransAfrica, has forced President Reagan, the 35 conservatives, Senators Nancy Kassenbaum (R.-Kans.) and Richard Lugar (R.-Ind.), loyal Reagan supporters and Senate foreign affairs leaders, to look at and revise the ambiguities in U.S. policy towards this racist, totalitarian state.