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)

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Fighting fires

Baltimore usually suffers a rash of fire deaths during the winter heating season, but this Spring has seen six fatal fires in a period of about ten days.

Fire deaths always shock and sadden the community because the persons most likely to die in fires are the very young and the elderly and the disabled.

Many fire deaths can be prevented by the use of smoke detectors in the home, more than the law requires and by having a fire escape plan that all members of the family are familiar with and can follow in their sleep.

If a neighbor has a suspicion that a fire has broken out it is best to call the fire department. Persons who act suspiciously around buildings while carrying flammable liquids should be reported to the police.

It is up to all citizens of Baltimore to follow safe procedures in the home regarding flammable materials and cooking. It is up to everyone to help the fire authorities cut down the number of fatal fires in the city.

Fires are devastating to victims and their families and friends. Many of them are preventable if we all try harder.

Minority Health Commission has large mission

The creation of the Governor's Commission on Black and Minority Health will be an important first step toward improving the delivery of health care to the state's minority community.

The creation of this commission and the report that ensues could prove valuable in alerting the residents of the state of the primitive and often nonexistent health care service available to many minority citizens of The Free State.

The rapid nature of the changes that are taking place in the health care field calls for an in-depth and systematic study on how the radical changes in the health field will affect those members of society who can least afford adequate health care.

Some plans for accommodations of the people at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder must be made because diseases of poverty such as tuberculosis are reappearing among the poor when such ailments were thought to be cured for the most part.

Among the concerns that the commission will be looking into are the high rate of lead poisoning that affects black children three times as often as whites, the fact that non-white males have the highest age-adjusted deathrate of all groups in the state and cancer rates for blacks are much higher than those of whites.

Del. Larry Young (D.-39th) is the chairman of the commission and he brings to it a wealth of knowledge and a national reputation as a state government official who knows the healthfield and its impact on minority citizens.

The minority community will be looking for big things coming out of the commission in terms of concrete recommendations that the chief executive who wins November's election will have to seriously consider.

Let's debate the issues

I was deeply appalled and shocked when I read the article, which was critical of some of our black leaders who are supporting our present Mayor, William Donald Schaefer.

It is one thing to support one candidate over another, it is another matter when the black press criticizes emotionally, men who have worked with the Mayor and as is the nature of our society, will support him.

Political rhetoric is healthy and it emanates from reasoned analysis. It is counter productive and destructive if it amounts to warring camps shooting at one another.

The Kerner Report, (a national report in 1967, warning us that we are headed toward two societies, one black and one white) pointed out that "We came to believe that racism, poverty, and powerlessness have combined in one great explosive mixture."

I emphasized the word powerlessness, which we should condemn as vigorously as we do racism and poverty. Your reporter condemns what we fought so hard to achieve and still seek full participation in the highest reaches of power.

We have condemned mayors and governors for years for they have ignored us and refused to be a part of a system that encompasses all of us. Now that some have reached that goal, are we to condemn them as lackeys?

Are we to be just there standing on the sidelines condemning everything and anything, or shouldn't we cheer people such as: Sam Daniels, Henry Parks, Lennie Wilson, Allan Quille, Clarence Mitchell, Jr., who day to day work and help shape the political and economic life of this city?

They are where they belong, and if they were not we would be shouting from the roof tops that racism keeps them out of these positions of influence.

We should recognize and use them as role models for their accomplishments are rooted in the kind of personal qualities that enable one to best take advantage of the many opportunities existing in American life.

They should inspire other men to recognize that they can move into positions of influence if they desire. We must be in the board rooms, the executive suites, the cocktail circuit and everywhere decisions are made for the benefit of all citizens, black and white.

Because the system makes us feel powerless, we must find ways to open up all the institutions of this society to greater participation by the young and the poor. The sharing of powers may be painful to some, as it must have been for your reporter, but we must work for it.

I, (Watts) repeat what I said and on another occasion in your paper (March, 1972) "Human statute is not gained by ... attacks on others, but rather by people's willingness to live in respect for one another and especially one another's views.

If the issue is Mayor Schaefer's insensitivity, then let's debate that. Let's debate the issues, not in personalities!

Sincerely yours,
ROBERT B. WATTS
GEORGE L. RUSSELL, JR.

Presidential search

This is to express the hope that Mayor William Donald Schaefer will do everything within his authority to ensure the integrity of the search process for a new president for the Community College of Baltimore.

Too often a purely political decision regarding the selection of the chief executive officer has not been in the best interest of our institutions of higher education.

An appointment whose legitimacy is recognized by the various constituents of the college will go a long way toward healing the wounds of the Community College of Baltimore.

HERBERT H. LINDSEY

Coping with costs for energy

By Claude Liton
Public Service Commissioner

Over the last several years, the price of energy has gone up. Managing home heating and utility service bills has become a bothersome issue for most of us, and an acute problem for low-income residents, particularly in winter months.

The Maryland PSC is keenly concerned about the affordability of utility and home heating service. That concern is shared utilities regulated by the PSC, and other state agencies responsible for assisting eligible Marylanders with energy needs.

If monthly utility bills are placing an unmanageable strain on your family budget, payment options, programs and assistance are available through your utility company, and state and local agencies such as the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) and the Urban Services Agency.

For example, if on occasion, you must pay your utility bill later than the due date, PSC regulations provide that you may twice a year forego paying the late payment charges that would normally accrue on your bill.

If you want to use this option, simply send your gas and/or electric supplier a check or money order with your bill, noting your request for a waiver to the attention of the Late Payment Clerk. You can also make your request in person at your gas and/or electric supplier service offices.

* * *

If your budget would benefit from being able to predict your monthly utility bill, Even Monthly Payment (EMP) or Budget Billing plans may be for you.

Budget Billing averages the seasonal ups and downs of energy usage so you pay the same amount monthly, unless an adjustment is necessary due to an increase or decrease in usage or cost.

* * *

Heating customers can normally start the plan in September and receive an adjustment bill the following August. Air conditioning customers start the plan in March with a settlement bill the following February.

If the cumulative payments on Budget Billing exceed your actual usage, your gas and/or electric supplier may credit the difference with interest to your account. You can request Budget Billing by contacting your local utility.

If you are over 60 years of age, or dependent on government assistance checks such as Social Security, disability or low-income maintenance programs, PSC regulations require that utilities provide a bill extender plan to help you make timely payments.

Under this plan the due date for your utility bills will be automatically extended to insure that your assistance check is received before you incur a late payment charge. If you qualify for this plan, you must notify the utility so that proper bill adjustments can be made.

In addition, if you are over 60, you may also qualify to have any security deposit for new service waived or refunded. Utilities must provide this option in accordance with PSC regulations, but you must ask the utility for the waiver or refund and provide proof of eligibility.

As home heating costs rise in the winter months, some families find that they need more assistance with their bill payments than is provided by the programs just described.

If this is your situation, you can contact your gas and/or electric supplier and ask them to work with you in set-

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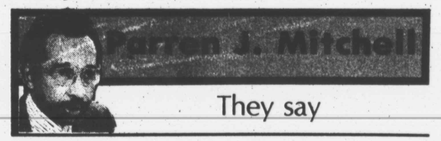


They say

They say that the black family is vanishing. That 50 percent of all black teenage women become pregnant and 60 percent of all black children are born out of wedlock.

They say that this breakdown of the disappearing. That moral character is vanishing and the absence of morals adds to the breadkown of the family.

The recently televised CBS special entitled "The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America," portrayed poor black urban youths as thoughtless, undependable teenage parents having no morals and lacking proper role models.

They say that is breakdown of the family structure perpetuates the widening gap between black America and most other groups in the American society. That the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue so long as this situation persist.

This society tells us all of this—a society prone to subjugating and destroying others. A society that has questionable morals when we look back on the clubs, cattle prods, water hoses and dogs used against a people resisting oppression.

A society that today indirectly supports others that still do the same to the oppressed in South Africa. A society where a black couple cannot move into a white neighborhood in Philadelphia without a state of emergency having to be declared. Where white youth in a passing car shout, "Get them out! We don't want them!"

This is the society that speaks to us about the importance of morals in our youth. These are the people that tell us what constitutes moral character. These are the people that say we lack positive black role models.

America has always done an excellent job of justifying the norms of the majority group as the proper way of life.

As noted in Marie F. Peters' Socialization in Black Families, "When Blacks are studied, so-called problem populations are often the focus of research—single parents, parents of emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, or academically nonachieving or delinquent children and youths; or low-income families...

The research design used to study an all-black population often differs from that used to study whites. When a white population is used, an investigation may be concerned with process, examining how various influences affect the subjects in the study.

The central concern shifts subtly to one of the intervention when a black population is involved. The focus of research becomes changing the target subject to conform to the abilities and behavior of white parents and children...."

They don't say how much they have done to contribute to the present state of affairs and how little they have done to change it. They don't talk of the moves to dismantle the programs designed to address the black male having the highest unemployment rate and highest dropout rate, yet they spoke of the strong correlation between the unemployment of black men and the number of welfare dependent children. They don't speak of the lack of jobs that is creating this situation.

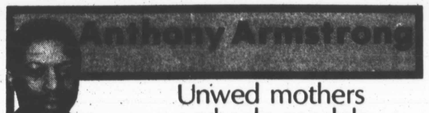
They don't speak of the social policies which cause unemployed men to leave their households so that their families may receive welfare to compensate for their unemployment.

They don't speak of the economic policies that must be developed to create the kind of full employment economy that is necessary to change this state of affairs.

The core of this problem is not rooted in the changing family structure. The core of what will perpetuate the cycle of poverty lies in deprivation of opportunity. In order to break the cycle of poverty America must be willing to make the necessary investment.

America must be willing to invest in an economic system in this American society that includes more fully the black population.

They say that time is running out. This I can definitely agree with. But it is for them that time is running out. The problems that they—not we—have perpetuated are a threat to THEIR society.



Unwed mothers and role models

Can an organization, public or private, fire a single woman from a job because that woman gets pregnant out of wedlock? If so what does such a right portend for the millions of single working women of child bearing age.

If not what measures are available to organizations to affect a solution to a problem, that many feel has reached alarming and very costly proportions?

The issue is now before the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, after a Federal District Judge in Omaha ruled that an employer, the Omaha Girls Club, was within its right to fire one of its employees, a single woman wh did become pregnant.

The woman, now 27, was said to be an excellent employee, who but for her pregnancy would probably still be working for the Omaha Girls Club. The woman is black and, in her suit she contended that she had been discriminated against.

The Omaha Girls Club, on the other hand, said that case was not one of racial or sexual discrimination but, instead, one of a question of propriety.

They indicated that "their mission was the fostering of growth and maturity of young girls and; to keep the employees on would be tantamount to condoning her pregnancy at a time when the club was trying to send an opposite message to teen-age girls."

The merits of this particular case will, of course, effect the parties in a very direct way. However, cases of this type tend to have an impact far beyond individual plaintiff and defendant, because such cases become the basis for action by organizations and individuals all over the country.

For instance, suppose the Court of Appeals (and ultimately the Supreme court) upholds the lower court decision? Given this can a school district, for one, fire an unwed teacher who becomes pregnant?

Is not the role of school districts, at least in part, to foster the growth and maturity of young girls (and boys)?

Could a company— say Commercial Credit —institute a policy to fire single women who become pregnant, based on a contention that such women, and their actions, run counter to what the company feel is right for it?

As important as these questions are, aren't there even more far reaching questions and issues just waiting to jump out of this Pandora's Box?

In a nation that is becoming increasingly troubled by the phenomenon of children having children, of an explosion of unwed mothers and, of the cost to the public of caring for the vast majority of these dependent children, are we witnessing the first of many salvos to stop this situation cold?

Many people are fond of saying "you can't legislate morality", however; are we on the verge of attempts to further adjudicate morality? If we are, is to do so even the business of the courts?

Courts in America are but a mirror of the thinking and the attitudes of the American people. The Miranda decisions of the 60's and Rowe vs. Wade, in the 70's, are prime example of this.

One thing is for sure; across this country people are simply fed-up with the seeming in ability of our moral institutions to stem the flood of irresponsible sex now drowning America in single parents, unwanted children, and spiraling cost.

The feeling is growing that if the family can't or won't do it, the schools haven't done it, or the church is ineffective at doing it maybe the courts should.

People in America are coming to the point where they will no longer "reward" negative behavior with the welfare check, the government funded children care center, the medical assistance card and the excuse.

What happened to the woman in the Omaha case is just the beginning of what is going to happen repeatedly in this country, if men and women of child bearing age don't begin to take more responsibility and care for their sexual behavior.

And whether you agree or disagree with the decision in the Omaha case, I think all responsible people must agree that something drastic is needed to stop this unloving mess.

Black citizens have a particular stake in this issue, not because we are the only ones to plan but because we are the ones that pay such a disproportionately high cost for the problem.

The cost is in dollars, for sure, but we pay an even greater cost in lost self esteem, lost moral fiber, the destruction of our youth, and the growing hatred between black men and black women.

What was once a situation where an unwed mother paid a high moral price is now becoming a situation where all of us are paying a high total price.

Well, people are beginning to say, "if you're single and a parent stay away." In Omaha and everywhere else people are asking "is the unwed mother and positive role modelling ever compatible? It's a question well worth asking.

Samuel L. Banks

Requiem for the 'Color Purple'

Alice Walker's **The Color Purple** was funereal and merits a dirge or lament. It is demonstrably clear that Ms. Walker is an able and adroit writer, but her treatment of historical content or the spirit of the times as reflected in the ability of a rural black woman's attempt to overcome personal adversities and trauma at the turn of the twentieth century proves, even in the name of fiction, to be overblown, scatalogical and invidious to black manhood and womanhood.

The Color Purple, in fact, constitutes a fictional glorification and exaltation of one-dimension characters, the bizarre and meanspiritedness.

The attempted sanctification of Celie, the primary protagonist in **The Color Purple**, as a long-suffering wife of a brutal and heinous husband (I.e. "Mister") who does not come of age or find herself until she has a lesbian relationship with Shug, has neither believability nor elemental decency.

What follows, to an overwhelming degree, beyond the unusual Celie-Shug relationship, are episodes of "Mister's," his actual name used most infrequently, depredation against his forlorn wife who spends much of her time pining for Shug and her sister 6,000 miles away in a remote part of Africa.

As I have indicated, writers of fiction, too, have a moral and ethical obligation to reflect balance, fairness and intellectual honesty in their writing.

It is difficult to understand why **The Color Purple** does not give attention to some of the debilitating and pivotal socio-economic and political conditions that affected black-white relationships in the early 1900's.

Except for the wicked and vicuous punishment suffered by Sophie for insulting the mayor's wife, there is little evidence of the heavily oppressive and bestial system of racism that blacks had to endure during the time-frame of **The Color Purple**. The historical record is crystal clear:

(1) White supremacy was firmly in place with the end of Reconstruction in 1877; (2) the Ku Klux Klan established in Pulaski, TN in 1867 was cresting in 1901-1902 and terrifying, lynching and violating black citizens at will;

(3) The right of black citizens to vote was nullified by Southern legislature, (4) The dehumanizing partitioning of Africa; (5) The "Great Migration" of blacks to the North and West to escape terror, violence and denial of fundamental human rights.

The fact that 12 million of our forebears were able to overcome a period of unparalleled brutalization, debasement and denial of fundamental freedoms and human dignity constitutes an imperishable and inspirational saga of American and world history.

There is, regrettably and incomprehensibly, no evidence of this awesome bedrock of American history, even in fiction, in Ms. Walker's **The Color Purple.**

One, too, wonders, given the awful portrayal of black people, black men in particular, how Ms. Walker survived her childhood and adolescence in a small Georgian town without the presence and guidance of black people of vision, character and strength. I fail to see the redemptive qualities of black people in Walker's tome.

The founding of the NAACP in 1909 and the National Urban League in 1910 came in response to the widespread lynching and atrocities perpetrated against black citizens and an effort to find jobs in the North for blacks who fled the South in search of jobs and human dignity.

Throughout this gloomy and grim period of the early 1900's, black citizens, under siege, refused to surrender their collective spirit, sense of family and belief in their human worth and potential.

What, finally, emerges is a lamentable and bleak portrayal of black Americans as irresponsible, promiscuous, deviant, callous and sorely lacking in redemptive features. Moreover, Ms. Walker through her book, reinforces the negative, invidious and stereotypical portrayal of black people; especially black males.

An inescapable truth that flows from **The Color Purple** is that the director, Steve Spielberg will get richer, Alice Walker will reap handsome financial dividends and the black cast will receive, for a change, hefty pay checks.

As the financial goodies are doled out, 38 million black Americans, as in times past, will find that **The Color Purple** will be another burden, not of our making, that we shall have to endure.

As black Americans we exult in the fame and wealth which have come to Ms. Walker because of her artistic virtuosity and acumen, but we cannot rejoice in her gross trivialization of black life and history and debasement of black manhood.

At a time when 38 million black Americans, male and female, are reeling from the cumulative effects on institutional racism and exclusion, we don't need Sister Walker, even in a fictional rendering, to add to our pain, suffering and national efforts to evircerate or gut our basic manhood and womanhood.

It is ironic that it is not we as black people who are pushing **The Color Purple** to center stage, but the white controllers of the locus of power in the body politic. We have no choice, if we value our manhood-womanhood, but to go fishing on **The Color Purple** and direct our collective energies and creative talents towards the attainment of an historic quest: **survival, dignity and equality of opportunity.**

Few ethnic and racial groups in the United States have received as much negative and demeaning coverage as black citizens. Major portrayals of the pathologies afflicting the black family have been featured, in recent months, by such prominent papers as **The Washington Post, The Baltimore Evening Sun, The New York Times,** among others.

The national CBS documentary, "The Vanishing Family-Crisis in Black American," featuring a montage of Bokeem Woodward, New Jersey served to reinforce the national perspective of black people as irresponsible and lazy as the blacks featured in **The Color Purple.**

The point that is crucial for us as black people is that we must not permit propagandists, black or white, to lampoon, vilify, traduce and portray us as less than human. We must, through all of the current vicissitudes, dare to define ourselves, maintain our self-esteem and self-worth and remain, unremittingly, committed to social justice and full freedom.

—AFRO SURVEY—

Should drug tests be a condition of employment?

This week the question to the man and woman in the street is, "Should drug tests be used as a condition of employment?"

Lionel Rufus, 23, assistant manager, "No. I don't think so. I feel that it is an invasion of privacy. I also feel that it is up to the individual. Your employer should not be involved in your personal life."

Gerald Jackson, 40, welder, "My opinion is that as a black man, I am totally against it. I don't think that it will be just as a device to keep minorities or people they deem undesirable from getting jobs. The proposal has its good points, but it has more bad points because some people take prescriptions and others have medicine in their systems."

Cathy Harris, 28, salesperson, "I don't think it should be mandatory. It should be voluntary. That is something the employee should have the right to decide."

Tori Rivers, 21, word processor operator, "No. I don't really know why, except that it is an invasion of privacy. I feel that if you're working in a profession in which you are dealing with life and death, then mandatory drug testing is necessary. But, you shouldn't be tested unless your job performance is not up to standards."

Jovan Barnes, 26, retail sales, "No, because I think if it can be used as a determining factor whether you are hired or not, then drugs, as with alcohol or cigarettes, is something personal. Why should other white collar workers be tested when it seems that those who have access to drugs more readily (doctors, and nurses) aren't under any pressure for testing."

Donna Pratt, 20, waitress, "No. Because if they perform their job and do it well, then it is none of their business."

Sheree Warfield, 29, quality control inspector, 2's, "I figure it would depend on the type of job you do. I feel that it is otherwise an invasion of privacy. Now that think of it nobody should be tested. Because we all have a drug of choice, mine is coffee... caffeine."

Pamela Atkins, 25, student, "In a way, yes, in a way no, because it is an invasion of privacy. It shows a lack of trust. If it doesn't affect the job it shouldn't be any problem. But the other side of the coin is that the employer is looking out for his business which is understandable too."

Bloodnotes

R. B. Jones

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

To my surprise and mortification, I have found out that some people took exception to my column of March 21 (Schaefer's Footstools) saying that it was trash, empty rhetoric, the ravings of a very sick man and full of disrespectful personality attacks on persons exercising their democratic right to back which ever gubernatorial candidate they choose.

Whether or not my column is empty rhetoric is a question each reader should answer. My experience with empty rhetoric began when I was taught in school to say a pledge of allegiance to a flag that has never represented "Liberty and Justice for all."

I got another lesson in empty rhetoric when I was taught to sing an ugly, warlike national anthem touting "the land of the free and the home of the brave" after seeing police dogs turned loose on men and women trying to register to vote.

I learned my lesson well when I was taught in school to sing "Maryland My Maryland" a state song that associates despotism with taking away someone's slaves. Empty rhetoric abounds in this society, but I try to keep it out of this column.

It was highly amusing when someone told me I had been referred to as a very sick man. I take that as a compliment. In a society as a sick as this one, and I have insurmountable evidence of the sickness of America, if any of my revered critics are up to the challenge, to be considered sick may be a sign of wellness. Ronald Reagan is considered normal, yet his insistence on building up America's nuclear arsenal in the name of peace seems to me to be a sign of some abnormality in the reasoning faculties.

Many nonsick people are not concerned about the hunger that is widespread in a country that is the greatest food producer the world has ever known.

Many nonsick people find no contradiction in having the most well-schooled population in the world at the same time that population is increasingly functionally illiterate.

I prefer being sick because in my sickness I am able to look in my mirror without guilt or shame. I can walk the streets knowing that I have not harmed anyone or mortgaged any person's future for my own very temporary gain.

I can say without hesitation I have never inhibited the progress of the black community. Can my detractors say that?

My sickness is a fever called Black nationalism. It has run in the veins of David Walker, Martin Delany, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. DuBois and others. It runs in many other people's blood and those blacks who work against the interests of the black community don't want to catch it and they don't want other people in the community to catch it.

Once it reaches an epidemic level this city and this nation will never be the same. The crumbs and the trinkets that some people are purchased with will no longer be enough. When that fever spreads, hiding behind social prominence and hot air declarations misinterpreted from the Constitution, will not be enough.

Just like the collaborators are suffering in South Africa they will suffer the consequences for their betrayal in this society. The victims of their dealmaking, the young and the poor are not going away and they are not going to suffer quietly in the richest land the world has ever known.

The street violence which is a cry for help that the elites will not and can not recognize, will get worse. It has spread throughout society like a cancer. It has invaded the havens of the black elites too and it is a cruel kind of poetic justice that "they can run, but they can't hide from it."

It's a sad tragedy that these blacks who are appalled by my column squeal like stuck pigs. After all it is a pig's Constitutional right to squeal when stuck although pigs in the political pen should be accustomed to being stuck. What makes the squealing so shrill is the fact that it is accompanied by cries that I have been disrespectful.

As a small boy, I was taught that respect is something that is earned.

I was taught to respect people who were conscientious and fulfilled their duty. I learned to respect people who exhibited generosity of spirit and a strong sense of race pride. I learned to respect the learned but even more I learned to respect those who are wise.

I was raised to believe that I was as good as anyone else and as deserving of respect as anyone on this planet. What I was not taught to do was respect empty titles and misused offices.

Simply because some social club given me an exaggerated title does not mean one must be held in higher esteem than other men whose lives are possibly consumed by the daily struggle for survival.

Should accolades from a dying society be considered badges of respect? I don't think so. Those who want respect without earning it are asking the wrong man. If I did not offer undeserved respect, I am merely being true to the people who raised me.

Respect is a precious thing that should not be "given" lightly. That is why I treasure those people who come to me on the bus or on the street and say kind words that they enjoy my columns and they tell the truth regardless. They respect me because they feel that I am one of the people speaking from the heart, one of the uncovered and unbroken.

I take it as a sign of respect that so-called powers in the community become angered by me and find it necessary to make cast aspersions on me. No matter what they may say for me it is return tenfold from me to them.

When the swelling and powerful bring their weight to bear on a grossly underpaid journalist as indicates that some melodious note of truth has been struck.

I wish to thank them for their vote of confidence and their sign of respectability. It will inspire me to redouble my efforts in speaking truth about the events that affect my people locally, nationally and internationally.

The respect of the man and the woman in the street is 100 times more precious than any backhanded compliment from a pseudo-aristocracy. The masses of black people retain a sense of right and wrong despite the many social problems they are burdened with and many of the people who read Bloodnotes tell me to keep it up.

They are my strength and my inspiration and no amount of criticism from people skulking around the edges of respectability will deter me.

AFRO welcomes letters

THE AFRO welcomes letters from its readers.

Letters should be brief and must bear the writer's name and address. All letters will be given consideration for publication.

APR 5 1986