The Black Press

By Frances M. Drape

- Needed now more than ever

February is the time when many black Americans focus on those events and personalities that contributed to our rich legacy. Black History Month activities are planned in our schools and churches. Television and radio stations highlight significant achievements by black Americans. Corporate advertisers salute those accomplishments through paid advertisements in black-owned media.

Each of these efforts is necessary and commendable. Black History Month follows, by a few weeks, the January celebrations of the 1863 signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the birthdate of civil rights great, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Now, more than ever, we are challenged to preserve our legacy. The baby-boomers, who were so active in the civil rights movement of the Sixties, have reached the threshold of middle-age. Many of us benefitted from affirmative action legislation and are now 'comfortable' in our positions. But how have our experiences and/or successes helped the next generation?

This question really hit hard, during a recent speaking engagement at a predominantly-black East Coast university. The topic was Marketing Challenges Facing Black-Owned Media. Preparatory remarks included the following exchange between this writer and the 20-30 junior and senior-level attendees:

ME: "How many of you live in cities that publish a black newspaper?"

RESPONSE: 10-15 raised hands.

ME: "Keep your hands up . . . How many of you know the name of that black paper?" RESPONSE: All, but four of the raised hands slipped down quietly.

ME (to the four): "Where are you from and what's the name of the paper in your hometown?"

Student #1: "Baltimore, The Afro-American."

ME: "No fair, you heard my introduction
..." (student protests that he knew this information before hand, as the other
students express amusement).

Student #2: "St. Louis, The St. Louis American."

Student #3: "Detroit, The Michigan Chronicle."

ME: "How many of you have actually read the papers that you've just named?"
RESPONSE: 30 seconds of awkward silence.

Student #4: "I'm too far away from home,

BPHP BLACK PRESS HALL OF FAME

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CRITERIA FOR NOMINATION
more of these criteria may qualify a candidate

One or more of these criteria may qualify a candidate for induction into the Black Press Hall of Fame.

PROFESSINALISM: Consistent demonstration of sound reasoning, competence, intelligence, courage and/or excellent skills.

INFLUENCE: Exhibition of power to impact favorably upon public opinion.

COMMITMENT: Evidence of faithful and unselfish dedication to enhancing the quality of life for the Black community.

MORALITY: Adherence to a high standard of journalistic ethics.

OUTSTANDING BLACK NEWSPAPER PER-SON: To qualify, one must have at least ten (10) years media experience; three of the ten years must include Black newspaper experience.

OUTSTANDING BLACK NEWSPAPER AD-VOCATES: To qualify for non-newspaper personnel categories, individuals or organizations must demonstrate that they have consistently advocated for, supported and/or enhanced the development of Black Newspapers for at least five years.

For a 1988 Nomination Form, Call or Write CASSIE SMITH · DIRECTOR, BLACK PRESS HALL OF FAME AFRO-CHARITIES, INC. 628 N. Eutaw Street · Baltimore, Maryland 21201 (301) 728-8200

but my mother gets the paper."

Student #2: "I get my news from the daily paper or from the television. News is news. A black paper may have been needed when we were fighting for our equal rights, but that need is no longer the same."

The discussion continues in that vein for a few moments and then I attempt to determine if the feelings are limited to black newspapers or whether or not other black issues would be treated as vaguely. So, I decided to ask a few questions to test the waters:

ME: "Who was Martin Luther King, and what was he known for?"

RESPONSE: "A famous civil rights leader known for his non-violent crusades."

(Good, I thought . . . all is not lost)

ME: "Who was Ed Brooke?"

Response #1: "A ball player?"
Response #2: "A musician?"

Response #3: "I know! A black newspaper

Four or five incorrect responses follow before a Nigerian student timidly raises his hand and queries, "Wasn't he an American

I was saddened to think that some of the cherished events in contemporary black history were not readily recalled by these

politician; a member of Congress?"

young men and women. Then I recalled my own tumultuous college days in the early to mid-sixties and how we touted our Afro-American heritage in everything from hairdos to handshakes. One had to be "up" on black history in order to be a part of most conversations on campus. Was this just a fad? What have we really accomplished? Do we think that we've made it, and that we no longer have to champion our rights?

Recent events at Howard Beach, the Citadel, Cleveland and the on-going attacks against black elected officials should remind us that racism is very much alive and well in the United States of America. More importantly one needs to read a black newspaper to ascertain how these occurrences really affect us. Black newspapers do more than tell the what and where. They often are the only source of the who and why.

For these and other reasons, it is imperative that the black press stay strong. Thus, Afro Charities, Inc. (the non-profit arm of the Afro-American Newspapers) established the Black Press Hall of Fame (BPHF) in 1987.

The opening article in the 1987 BPHF souvenir journal contends that the BPHF was established to "recognize the stalwarts of the past and to emphasize why the black press is needed now more than ever." The article also commends the National Newspaper Publishers Association for "its creation several years ago of the Black Press Gallery of Distinguished Newspaper Publishers which is housed at Howard University. The Black Press Hall of Fame is simply another effort to tell our own story in our own way."

While the Black Press Gallery of Distinguished Newspaper Publishers has enshrined only publishers to date, the BPHF will recognize individuals, as well as organizations; publishers, as well as editors, composing room personnel, printers, graphic artists, photographers and any others who have contributed directly or indirectly to the success of a black newspaper.

The first Black Press Hall of Fame celebration was an overwhelming success. Supporters came from around the country to pay tribute to the ten honorees (a brief synopsis of each of their accomplishments may be found elsewhere in this edition of DAWN).

Most of the proceeds from the Black Press Hall of Fame were used to establish a rotating journalism scholarship at an historically black college or university.

Nominations are now being solicited for 1988 inductees. The celebration, scheduled for mid-October, will be held in Baltimore. May 1 is the nomination deadline.

