Do our monuments tell our story?

(AFRO Photo by Paul Greene)

By Frederick Nastvogel,
Special to the AFRO

A society's public monuments are images that mirror the past and sketch the future.

These sages summarize our hopes, ideals, values. Image is the farthest milestone of just how far a person might carry an opportunity.

That Baltimore is nicknamed the Monumental City makes sense. It has so many of them. But what do they say?

Well. There's our de rigueur George Washington. Every city has one and ours is noteable for its placement and architecture, at the middle of perhaps the best preened patches of grass in the city.

The fountain at St. Paul and Fayette is well kept, and its rewatering each spring is kind of an event to rely upon as your years tick by. Whether it lends meaning to life is another matter.

Meaning such as the newly rededicated courtbuilding across the street. A man worked his whole adult life for American ideals and now his name is chisled into the corner of a houe of justice: "Clarence M. Mitchell, Sr."

The statue of the boy and the girl outside the housing project on Druid Hill provides an interesting message. Boys play while girls study. That message is somewhat sobering when we consider the overwhelming proportion of black women in higher education as opposed to black men.

Outside the Garmatz Building, the monument or sculpture (you know, that big assembly of gayly colored flat metal) telegraphs a different kind of message, something about an amalgam of little depth and no shades or subleties. It's so like many of the interactions we bump through in the course of a day in the big city. It's interesting, but does it inspire?

Behind the building is another controversial monument, the statue of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. What does the fact that he is hidden behind the building say about Baltimore's respect for its black leaders?

Of course, most public monuments are representational, leaving no question about who is thought to be important. The one for the wives of confederate soldiers at University and Charles (just a few miles south of Baltimore City's own Robert E. Lee Park) is like that. They are bigger than life and seeming quite brave, as they mut have been, abetting an enemy force.

But not nearly so brave as the "Black Soldier" on Calvert. He doesn't have a weapon and his back is to the action. Even after de-segregation, there were those in City Council who fought against the very idea of such a monument.

But the lost, and the soldier is forever a sentry against the 'old ways.'

Billy Holliday does get to face the right way, though the potent message at the base was deleted by a bureaucrat, acting perhaps out of jealousy, perhaps out of long range commercial ambitions for Pennsylvania Avenue.

What image do our monuments reveal of Baltimore? It's variously errant, accidental, or uplifting- but not whole. Monuments are, in the scheme of the municipal, small things. But they are not so small that we can afford to be less than perfectin them. They can help children to have wonderful ideas about themselves.

(AFRO Photo by Paul Greene)

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Black Heroes and Heroines Quiz

Test your knowledge of Black History. Your correct answers could win a special prize for you from the Market Center Association. Ten lucky names from among those with all the correct answers will be drawn at 12 noon, Friday, February 26, at the Lexington Market Metro station.

1. What NAACP leader also wrote the highly acclaimed anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing"?
2. Who was the early Black poetess who communicated with George Washington?
3. What is the name of the extraordinary Black freeman and Marylander who wrote an almanac and helped to design Washington, D.C.?
4. Who was the first Black Congressman from Maryland's 7th Congressional District?
5. Who was Jack "Jackie" Robinson?
6. Who was the runaway slave from Maryland who purchased his own freedom and achieved world-wide recognition as an orator, newspaper publisher, educator and abolitionist?
7. Who was the first Black citizen to be named to the U.S. Supreme Court?
8. Who was the remarkable musician who popularized "Blues" and wrote "The St. Louis Blues"?
9. Who was the fearless leader of the "Underground Railroad" in Maryland who led over 300 persons to freedom?
10. Who was the well-known Black heavyweight champion respected and applauded for his skills and "float like a butterfly" lyrics?

RULES

1. Clip out this entire quiz form.
2. Remember, one quiz form per person.
3. Look for the quiz answers in all MTA Metro trains beginning Monday, February 1.
4. Complete this entire quiz form and mail in by *Monday, February 22*, to:
   MTA
   300 W. Lexington Street
   Baltimore, Maryland 21201-3415
   Attention: Public Affairs Dept.
5. Join us at the live drawing at the Lexington Market Metro station at 12 noon, Friday, February 26.

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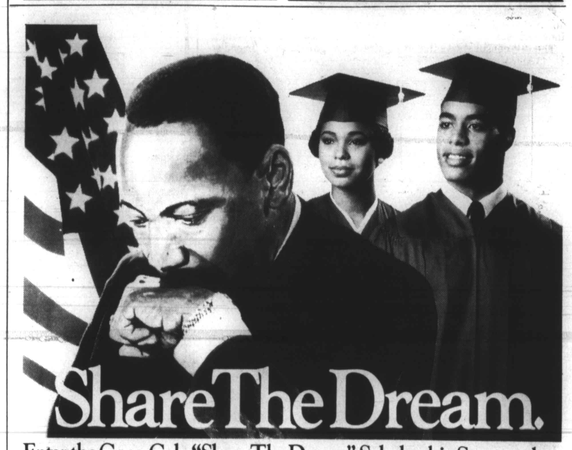

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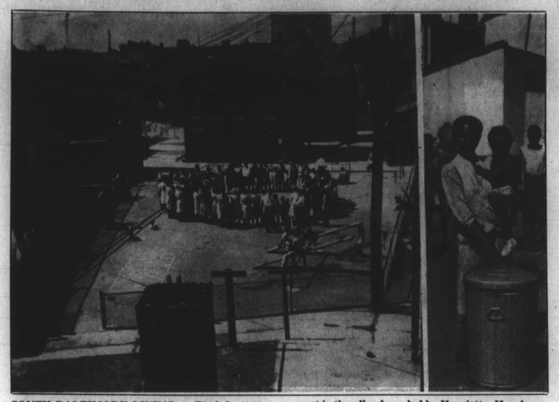
SOUTH BALTIMORE LIVING — Back in 1948, School #126 principal Elizabeth Henderson organized the residents of the black South Baltimore community in a massive clean-up drive which the AFRO covered. On the left, residents meet in the alley bounded by Henrietta, Hamburg, Bevans and Leadenhall Sts. to begin cleaning. On the right, Elizabeth Bevans and a young child display a new trash can donated as part of the clean-up effort.

There once was a time when almost everyone in the black community literally knew one another. Friendships made in grade school and college would last for years.. Plumbers, lawyers, teachers, bartenders and even the local numbers runner were all on a first-name basis.

No, this state of affairs did not go on because people were friendlier. Blacks were forced and squeezed into certain neighborhoods, and out of necessity developed inwardly as a community.

Moving to the Village of Purnell or Ashburton was out of the question. An unspoken housing code and Baltimore tradition doomed blacks to highly congested black allyes and broken streets.

Blacks were pushed and shoved into isolated sectors of the city. By the 1940's those areas of settlement included the near East Side, the Druid Hill and Pennsylvania Avenue corridors, and a small pocket south of the Inner Harbor.

The 1940 census shows that only 43,000 of the city's 165,800 blacks lived outside those three areas. It was possible to tell a person's race merely by reading their address in the newspaper.

Baltimore, with its southern roots, is still one of the most segregated cities in the nation. But back when the white population in the city was much larger, the problem was even worse.

The city was the first in the nation to codify housing discrimination when in 1911, a residential segregation law was passed.

The law was later struck down, but a genteel policy of racial segregation remained in force. In West Baltimore blacks were barred from moving west of Fulton St. In East Baltimore Broadway was the driving line. Black South Baltimoreans seldom lived north of the harbor.

Segregation, however, was not without its benefits. Because the black communities were so compact, social, educational and professional activities often took place in the same neighborhood instead of downtown.

On Saturday night a couple could amble up to the Carver on Pennsylvania Ave. to see a movie or travel further up the Avenue to the Royal to catch a live stage show.

One could go skating at the Coliseum on Monroe Street, or catch an excursion down to Carr's Beach for a picnic.

On Sundays a black family, after church at Union Baptist, Grace Presbyterian, Bethel or Pennsylvania Avenue AME, could stroll down the street to Sess restaurant on Division street, or gather at a friend's house for an early afternoon buffet. A whole business community sprang up to service blacks in their communities.

Black social organizations, such as the Philomathians, the Arch St. Social Club, took root.

The Madison Avenue YWCA restaurant was a popular family gathering place for meals and social intercourse, while the Druid Hill YMCA featured a wide range of family activities.

The colored school system offered teachers and administrators a built-in network, which they strengthened by forming various social and cultural clubs such as the Continentals and the Pierians.

The MeDeSoi club, open to doctors and other professionals, sponsored debutante balls and cotillions which were almost carbon copies of white affairs. As in any other society, these rites of passage helped define and perpetuate a cadre of the black community's leaders.

Another powerful force in the black community were the fraternal orders and Greek societies. Men such as Samuel Daniels, Grandmaster of the Prince Hall Masons, the late Dr. Bernard Harris of the Elks, and women like Juanita Jackson Mitchell and Dr. Lillie Carroll Jackson of the NAACP used the

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Photo courtesy of Enoch Pratt Free Library
OLD STOMPING GROUNDS — Druid Hill Avenue in the 1940s.

Photo courtesy of Enoch Pratt Free Library
CITY SCENE — Pennsylvania Avenue near Biddle Street was a major area of black settlement. This 1875 photo is an indication of how much the street has changed in 111 years.

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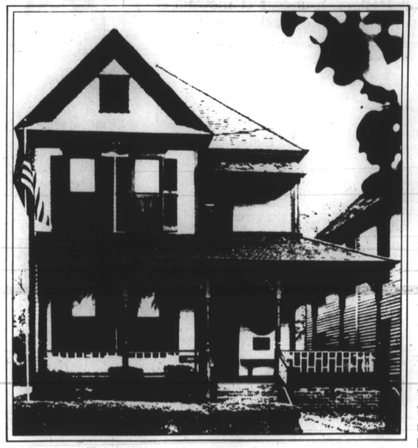

A home fit for a King.

Alberta Williams King gave birth to three children in this house—Christine, Alfred Daniel and Martin. One of them became a national hero. Dr. King was born here on January 15, 1929 and grew up in the surrounding "Sweet Auburn" neighborhood of Atlanta.

Today, this house is more than just a home. It's recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. At one time, however, the home had almost slipped into obscurity. The Sweet Auburn neighborhood had begun to decline. And the birthhome was just another building badly in need of repair.

In 1974, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority helped the King Center purchase the home. Two other sororities—Sigma Gamma Rho and Delta Sigma Theta—donated funds to help restore many of the home's original furnishings.

That left only the building itself to be renovated. A $30,000 grant from The Johnson's Wax Fund helped make the renovation possible.

Upon the dedication of the home in October 1983, Samuel C. Johnson, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Johnson Wax, said, "This building stands as a living memorial to Dr. King as a defender of the human family and the beloved community. King understood better than anyone the community of man and was dedicated to the concept of improving the quality of life. This is a responsibility that business must accept—to put more into each community than it takes out."

A landmark of black family heritage has been preserved for future generations to see. The King Birthhome is part of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. So, if you're ever in the neighborhood, drop by 501 Auburn Avenue, N.E.—where the dreamer first opened his eyes.

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