

TRIBUTE TO MEDGAR FROM CHARLES

Along about this time my mind begins to go back over the immediate past, and I begin to wonder if it is worth it. As the Mississippi spring approaches it makes me think of plowing time. I hear the sound of the hoe slapping against the rocks in the soil. And plowing time and scarping time make me think of seed time coming first. June 12th keeps coming closer and closer, the seed time of our work in Mississippi. And I remember Medgar. I remember how he loved our music. He recognized that without it we would never have made it out this far - our music and our God brought us out, with the help of people like Medgar cultivating the seeds of freedom planted by people like Sojourner Truth, Denmark Veasey, Vernon Dahmer, Clyde Kennard, Herbert Lee, Wharlest Jackson, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

When I climb to the top of the highest hill right outside Fayette and stand looking at the Mississippi morning, I want to be free so bad. Almost like flesh and blood, the ghosts of our forefathers pass before me. I hear the sounds they made, the sound of a high wailing rising to meet the morning sun as the thin ragged line of the men, women and children swing their hoes like pistons against the weeds and grass in the cotton. As the dew dries I can hear the spirituals pass line by line among the field workers and far over in the next field I hear the beginning of synecopation as the man with the plow pushes his mule on down the furrow.

Then Fayette, Mississippi 1973 comes back into focus and the beauty of this little town and its people is with me again. Medgar is gone and the sharp pain, the brutal shock of his going has lessened a little, making it possible for me to at least accept the fact of his absence. But not the reason for it. I know there are many who have lost sons, brothers, fathers and sisters and mothers in this long time war of color against color. I know a whole race of people is crippled in the spirit if not murdered, because of what was done to us.

It is because of these tragic denials of human life that Medgar became what he was. He didn't have to do it. He could have gone to work in some other business and taken care of his own family and let the rest of the world go along the best way they could but he didn't do it. Neither could those others. If they had, none of us would have made the progress we have and I am including all the white folks in this too. If they had, I could not stand up on my hill and almost taste freedom.

There is a long blood line extending from the slave ships that left west Africa down to the kinship of today's "Soul" brothers and sisters. It is a line that extends from the slave ports of Massachusetts and Virginia down to the slave markets of Natchez and New Orleans and Savannah - everywhere one person sold another into bondage. It was that blood consciousness that made him what it was. Our racial memory caught hold of him and would not let him go.

He knew, through our music, how our folk had fought back when they had only spiritual weapons. Sometimes their song was sad. Sometimes a juicy bit of gossip or impersonation about old master spiced it up. But if the master had whipped somebody the night before, all the miseries of an exiled and helpless people rose and fell in the air of the hot Mississippi morning. The ragged line of field hands dared express their fear and hatred and resistance in the guise of music.

With their untrained ears, the slaveholding planters missed completely the revolt and conspiratorial revenge in the songs. Their self-deception only deepened as they considered the music one more evidence of childishness among their chattels.

This is how our people were able to contain their bitterness until today. From these early spirituals and work songs grew the blues and folk-rock which have spread throughout the world. As the simple monotonous and two part melodies gave way to more sophisticated compositions, the music spread its influence to all colors.

While Medgar and I only burned and talked about going back to Africa, our music did go. It went back in the form of jazz and blues and folk-rock and hard-rock. The history of these travels had been charted. Museums devoted to preserving examples of primitive art forms abound in universities as well as cities along the Mississippi. The New Orleans sound, the St. Louis school, the Chicago beat - up and down the river and across the deep south from Natchez to Mobile, from Memphis to St. Joe - all have a cult of devotees. Wherever people listen to our music they hear the story of how we have survived. On June 12th, 1973, we will observe the 10th anniversary of Medgar Evers' death. We have spread the word among our homefolk musicians. Those who have left to go on to fame and fortune and those who have stayed here to comfort and sustain us in person are asked to come to Fayette that day. There will be special guests, too. Mississippians at heart, who will help us tell the musical story from the centuries before 1963 and in the decade that has followed. You come too, and we will remember together.

Caucus Time

by Jettie B. Wilds, Jr., Chairman of the Oregon Black Caucus

In our Western strategy we must identify establishment techniques that keep Black folks and other folks divided. We should imprint the names of these techniques so deeply that one need only hear the name to be aware of what's coming. Let's review a few.

There is the old "accutate the difference" technique. It takes the form of pitting the person who has been in a city two years against the person who has been in the city two years and nine months. The basic premise is that if you've been in a city a longer time, you are able to give wiser counsel in political, economic, philosophical and other areas than the person who has been around a shorter time.

Obviously this is untrue. The reason given for the inconsistency, by those who are advocates of this technique, is that after a while (some arbitrary cut-off point) the counsel becomes unwise.

There is the old "make the scene" technique. It's used in every phase of our lives. In fact, parents use it sometimes unknowingly when praise is arbitrarily given to one child and not the other. Pretty soon the one child is alienated because he or she feels that the parents love the other best. The favored child then proceeds to maintain the difference because it makes him or her feel elevated.

Politicians use it also. The politician may grace an affair with his or her appearance, thus giving that affair approval. Other organizations then feel the need to have politicians at their affairs. The old "make the scene" technique is of no value

unless the politician is there to make a firm commitment to some action pertinent to the goals of the assembled organizations or individuals.

There is also the old "make you a star" technique. Many aspiring hollywood starlets

have found themselves duped by the agent who promised them fame and fortune. The starlets tend to forget that the relationship is a mutual arrangement with the starlet having the real skills and (Please turn to page 6, col. 6)

Black identity got its start in long-ago frustrations

by Roy Wilkins, Executive Director NAACP



Mr. Roy Wilkins

In the day-to-day effort to discover the true meaning of Black identity, much nonsense is inevitably being uttered by people who know no better and by those who do know better. White people are busy adding their thoughts, some with no motive and others with plenty of individual or group greed riding on their suggestions.

One of the most inaccurate items about the Blackness cult is the assertion of what is racial patriotism, judged by apply a 1973 situation to a 1920 setting. A Black actor (who had not emerged 50 years ago), discussing an episode in "Sounder", the sharecropper film laid in the '30's, said he would never play a part in which a Black man was shown as submissive. He was critical of Paul Winfield, arrested by a sheriff and two deputies, all armed. The critic felt that the arrestee should not have "submitted" to arrest.

But Winfield had a wise answer: "We owe it to our parents and grandparents to make accurate movies of their lives and struggles. The fight for civil rights did not begin in the late '50s with the Montgomery bus boycott or in the '60s with the freedom riders. It began with our parents and grandparents. From their frustrations the civil rights movement grew."

No truer words have been spoken. Black Americans need a knowledge of their history. The civil rights movement did not just jump up in 1956. It did not spring from a personality, no matter how great, but got its inexorable drive from thousands of ordinary Black people who "took low" so that their sons and grandsons could later go higher.

White people, as a mass, need to be instructed that Negroes worked and sacrificed, like every other race, to win the sparse dividends in citizenship rights that they enjoy - precariously today. Of such a history is respect fashioned.

We should be the teachers to America about Negroes; but first we need to know about ourselves. Not about Black tribes having wrought iron utensils in Africa before they were used in Europe; but about Benjamin Banneker, who helped lay out

Washington, D.C.; about the scores of thousands of Black soldiers in the Civil War; about David Walker, author in 1829 of the explosive pamphlet against slavery.

The rebels against slavery and the insurrectionist heroes are cause for pride. Or the later ones, including Richard Allen, Martin R. Delany, Frederick Douglass, Henry O. Tanner and Harry T. Burleigh. All these and thousands more, some nameless, shaped the march of Negro Americans.

It is important, indeed, for Blacks to dig up the pre-1619 years; but it is more important to record what happened during slavery and since emancipation. Only by this history can the present-day struggles with organized labor, the educative power among white citizens of the greatly increased Black voter registration, and the resultant election of Blacks to office be understood.

There is no logic, as Winfield cogently declares, in thinking that the civil rights movement started a few years back. It started generations ago with our forefathers. No estimate of their actions can be made by those who judge

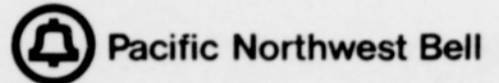
them by what a beneficiary of their conduct would do in today's climate.

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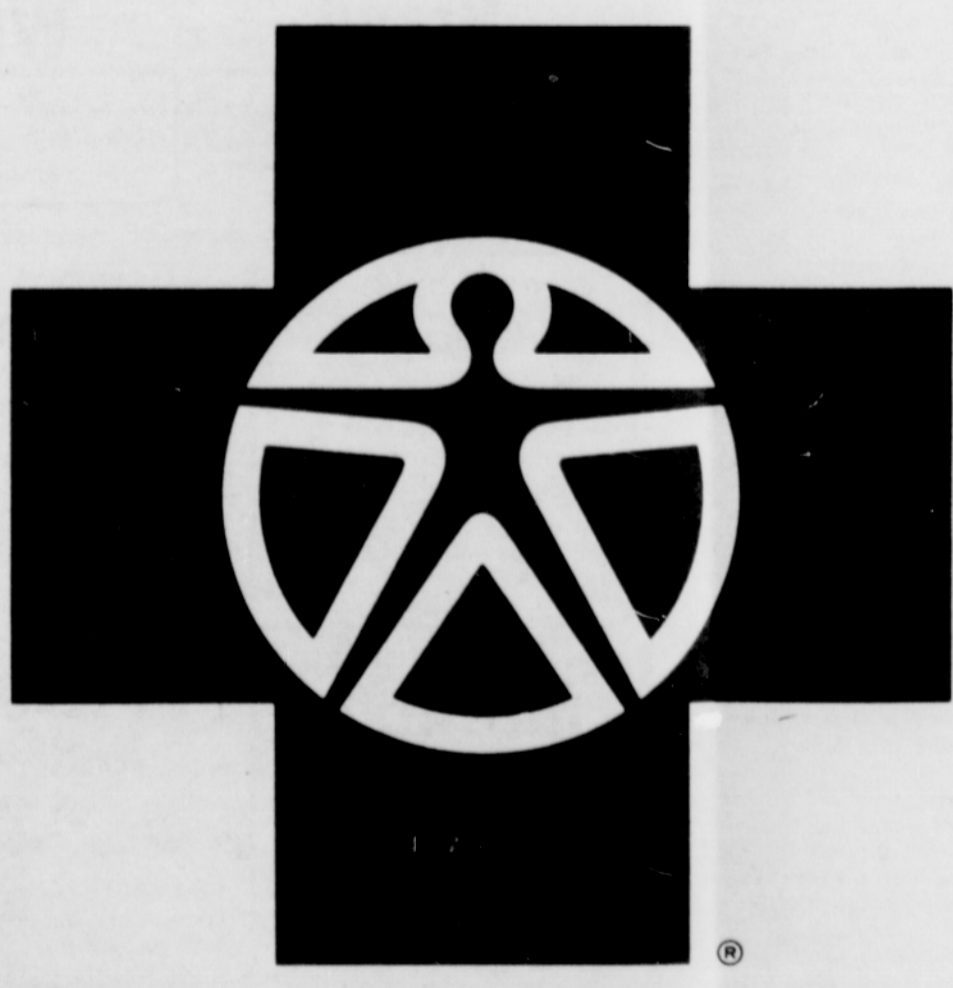
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