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## **The Black voice. Volume 2, Number 5 February 25, 1972**

Madison, Wisconsin: Afro-American Center, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, February 25, 1972

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# THE BLACK VOICE

Published by the Afro-American Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison

## POETRY, the food of Black Arts Festival

The second annual Black Arts Festival in Madison sponsored by the Afro-American Center had its academic 'food' and inspiration when on February 9, poetry readings by Pulitzer prize-winning poetess Gwendolyn Brooks, Don L. Lee, editor of Third World Press, and the Black Poetic Messengers from Milwaukee lectured and entertained a full capacity audience of 500 at the A-2 Gordon Commons, Madison.

Gwendolyn Brooks' "the life of Lincoln West," and "Riot"; Don Lee's "the Primitive;" and the Poetic Messengers' "mmhmm-aaaa," each had about a seven minutes ovation from the audience.



Gwendolyn Brooks

### The Life of Lincoln West

Ugliest little boy  
that everyone ever saw.  
That is what everyone said.

Even to his mother it was apparent—  
when the blue-aproned nurse came into the  
northeast end of the maternity ward  
bearing his squeals and plump bottom  
looped up in a scant receiving blanket,  
bending, to pass the bundle carefully  
into the waiting mother-hands—that this  
was no cute little ugliness,

no sly baby waywardness  
that was going to inch away  
as would baby fat, baby curl, and  
baby spot-rash. The pendulous lip, the  
branching ears, the eyes so wide and wild,  
the vague unvibrant brown of the skin  
and, most disturbing, the great head.  
These components of That Look bespoke  
the sure fibre. The deep grain.

His father could not bear the sight of him.  
His mother high-piled her pretty dyed  
hair and  
put him among her hairpins and sweethearts,  
dance slippers, town paper roses.  
He was not less than these,  
he was not more.

As the little Lincoln grew,  
ugly upward and out, he began  
to understand that something was  
wrong. His little ways of trying  
to please his father, the bringing  
of matches, the jumping aside at  
warning sound of oh-so-large and  
rushing stride, the smile that gave  
and gave and gave—Unsuccessful!

Even Christmases and Easters were spoiled.  
He would be sitting at the  
family feasting table, really  
delighting in the displays of mashed  
potatoes  
and the rich golden  
fat-crust of the ham or the festive  
fowl, when he would look up and find  
somebody feeling indignant about him.

What a pity what a pity. No love  
for one so loving. The little Lincoln  
loved Everybody. Ants. The changing  
caterpillar. His much-missing mother.  
His kindergarten teacher

His kindergarten teacher—whose  
concern for him was composed of one  
part sympathy and two parts repulsion.  
The others ran up with their little  
drawings.  
He ran up with his.  
She  
tried to be as pleasant with him as  
with others, but it was difficult.

For she was all pretty! all daintiness,  
all tiny vanilla, with blue eyes and fluffy  
sun-hair. One afternoon she  
saw him in the hall looking bleak against  
the wall. It was strange because the  
bell had long since rung and no other  
child was in sight. Pity flooded her.  
She buttoned her gloves and suggested  
cheerfully that she walk him home. She  
started out bravely, holding him by the  
hand. But she had not walked far before  
she regretted it. The little monkey.  
Must everyone look? And clutching her  
hand like that . . . Literally pinching  
it . . .



. . . the real thing

At seven, the little Lincoln loved  
the brother and sister who  
moved next door. Handsome. Well-  
dressed. Charitable, often, to him. They  
enjoyed him because he was  
resourceful, made up  
games, told stories. But when  
their More Acceptable friends came  
they turned  
their handsome backs on him. He  
hated himself for his feeling  
of well-being when with them despite—  
Everything.

He spend much time looking at himself  
in mirrors. What could be done?  
But there was no  
shrinking his head. There was no  
binding his ears.

"Don't touch me!" cried the little  
fairy-like being in the playground.

Her name was Nerissa. The many  
children were playing tag, but when  
he caught her, she recoiled, jerked free  
and ran. It was like all the  
rainbow that ever was, going off  
forever, all, all the sparklings in  
the sunset west.

One day, while he was yet seven,  
a thing happened. In the down-town movies  
with his mother a white  
man in the seat beside him whispered  
loudly to a companion, and pointed at  
the little Linc.  
"THERE! That's the kind I've been  
wanting  
to show you! One of the best  
examples of the specie. Not like  
those diluted Negroes you see so much  
of on  
the streets these days, but the  
real thing.

Black, ugly, and odd. You

can see the savagery. The blunt  
blankness. That is the real  
thing."

His mother—her hair had never looked so  
red around the dark brown  
velvet of her face—jumped up  
shrieked "Go to ——" She did not finish.  
She yanked to his feet the little  
Lincoln, who was sitting there  
staring in fascination at his assessor.

At the author of his  
new idea.

All the way home he was happy. Of course,  
he had not liked the word  
"ugly."

But, after, should he not  
be used to that by now? What had  
struck him, among words and meanings  
he could little understand, was the phrase  
"the real thing."  
He didn't know quite why,  
but he liked that.  
He liked that very much.

When he was hurt, too much  
stared at—  
too much  
left alone—he  
thought about that. He told himself  
"After all, I'm  
the real thing."

It comforted him.

—Gwendolyn Brooks

### RIOT

A riot is the language of the unheard.

—Martin Luther King

John Cabot, out of Wilma, once a Wycliffe,  
all whitebluerose below his golden hair,  
wrapped richly in right linen and right wool,  
almost forgot his Jaguar and Lake Bluff;  
almost forgot Grandtully (which is The  
Best Thing That Ever Happened To Scotch);  
almost  
forgot the sculpture at the Richard Gray  
and Distelheim; the Kidney pie at Maxim's  
the Grenadine de Boeuf at Maison Henri.

Because the Negroes were coming down  
the street.

Because the Poor were sweaty and unpretty  
(not like Two Dainty Negroes in Winnetka)  
and they were coming toward him in rough  
ranks.

In seas. In windsweep, They were black  
and loud.

And not detainable. And not discreet.

Gross. Gross. "Que tu es grossier!" John  
Cabot  
itched instantly beneath the nourished  
white  
that told his story of glory to the World.  
"Don't let It touch me! the blackness!  
Lord!" he whispered  
to any handy angel in the sky.

But, in a thrilling announcement, on  
It drove  
and breathed on him: and touched him.  
In that breath  
the fume of pig foot, chitterling and cheap  
chili,  
malign, mocked John. And, in terrific  
touch, old  
averted doubt jerked forward decently,  
cried "Cabot! John! You are a desperate  
man,  
and the desperate die expensively today."

John Cabot went down in the smoke and  
fire  
and broken glass and blood, and he cried  
"Lord!  
Forgive these niggus that know not what  
they do."

### THE PRIMITIVE

taken from the  
shores of Mother Africa  
the savages they thought  
we were—  
they being the real savages.  
to save us. (from what?)  
our happiness, our love, each other?  
their bible for  
our land. (introduced to economics)  
christianized us.  
raped our minds with:  
T.V. & straight hair,  
Reader's Digest & bleaching cream,  
tarzan & jungle jim,  
used cars & used homes,  
reefers & napalm,  
european history & promises.  
Those alien concepts  
of whiteness,  
the being of what  
is not.  
against our nature,  
this weapon call  
civilization—  
they brought us here—  
to drive us mad.  
(like them)

Don L. Lee

Photos by T. A. Sneed

Poetry reading at the Black Arts Festival gave academic food to the audience



# BATON ROUGE: the inside story

by  
Obirin African

The gory scene at Baton Rouge, La., January, 1972. Local whites and blacks had a confrontation. The crackers said it was a conspiracy of the Black Muslims, i.e., the Nation of Islam. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Prophet to the Nation of Islam, reported in *Muhammad Speaks* that it was not Muslims, and had within his statement the only story the *Speaks* carried of the incident. The American media, speaker to and reflection of white Americans (and some blacks), reported that Mr. Muhammad had the previous week warned in the *Speaks* that there was cleavage in his ranks; the media implying that these "savage, crazy brothers" were the splinter group in Baton Rouge. Actually, Elijah Muhammad wrote the previous week about the savage crazy brother who is financed by the white gangsters to kill Muslims, but this was not related to any cleavage. When asked on T.V. about a power-struggle, Mr. Muhammad did not say whether or not there was one going on. He said that if there was one going on, it wouldn't bear fruit.

We have, then, three factors to consider. First, there exists a group asserting its right to self-determination (i.e. according to the rules of self's society, rather than the rules of someone else's). Second, the local whites panic before this group which looks like the Fruit of Islam, whose appearance has been dramatic even within the black community. The panic is central, and will be explained later in this article. The third factor, or force, is the media. The newspaper, more than any other organ, not only influences people's thinking, it reflects their thinking, as well.

These three forces (factors) from a triangle for whose theorem it seems appropriate to use the dialectics provided by Grier and Cobbs. To be sure, *Black Rage* is primarily concerned with the "black norm" that developed in response to the continuity of oppression. This norm includes a growing catalyst of rage that has, indeed, the potential to rip Amerika apart when enough Rosa Parks (Montgomery bus boycott, 1955) will finally say I shall not be moved. The rage growing within the black community is the result, not only of "unearned sorrow" (M. L. King, 1963), but also (and as a counterpart) because of the inability of white Americans to care that Emmitt Tills still get killed; academic achievement is still meaningless in your skin is not white; the occupational alternatives are still too few and not the choice of the black community.

If out of the slave-culture there developed a mentality for the slave that continues, there also developed a mentality for the slave-master that continues, since the mentalities are the product of codes of behavior. (Indeed, beastialities against blacks have often been over alleged violations of a social code.) White Americans show a high skill in the art of misunderstanding black people. Whites fell victim to this misunderstanding, possibly because American slavery has been an unresolvable institution. As a result of certain, continued inner feelings towards blacks, the culture of slavery was never undone for either master or slave. The "peculiar institution," Grier & Cobbs explain in *Black Rage* continues to exert its evil influence over the nation.

This non-knowledge of the black bondsmen is an explanation for the continuity of oppression and the racial mentality of whites, whether they are racists, or just without understanding. No substantial work has been done examining the psychic of white Americans, possibly because it is a "white norm" and the whites rule. So we laugh (hurt too much to cry) and say it is a flaw in their character, realizing that the most well-meaning white cannot understand being hated because he is white, and thus the embodiment of this racist society.

Grier & Cobbs (and John Hope Franklin, *Militant South*) provide respectively, a synthesis and an historical analysis of this white norm. The norm is at least as old as the Euro-Am society. Winthrop Jordan in *White over Black*, extends the perversion even further back, and, being religious, Elijah Muhammad goes back to the scriptural beginning of man. An analysis of this norm requires psychological, historical and moral considerations. There are historians who point to the Victorian racism as though it is a thing of the past. In fact the denial is product of the existence, for the denial is misunderstanding. The bondage of the African was a mistake from the start and the Peculiar Institution was correctly named. It does not cease to be just because we sing "no more auction block for me." Its continuity is a fact. The economic need for the American black has been changed from that of slave-producer to that of colonized, urban-consumer, in a more degenerate mental exploitation.

As slavery changed, so did the Victorian response to it. The Peculiar Institution has moved from one of chattel slavery to institutionalized racism. Racism, as America knows it—is peculiar. As a system it existed even before 1863, and its dating is difficult because of its subtle development.

The word racism is used, and yet the situation goes beyond belief in superiority. Blacks and whites confront, judge, and react to each other based on a color prism. This is absurd, but nevertheless exists. The whole country is victim of this norm; this system of interaction. This is a color-conscious society whose dimensions loom over the superficial racism. But because of the racism, the consciousness takes on racial forms as well. Probe any black deeply enough and you'll find that he has a deep resentment for whites. Scratch a white and underneath his acceptance of your humanity is his unwillingness, or inability, to see it from your perspective. Martin Luther King bitterly acknowledged this in his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail."

Something profound affects this nation of slave and free. You have whites either not wanting us in the melting pot, or else believing we are already in it, but just oppressed. In fact, we are *not* in it and, despite Shirley Chisholms, history shows that we move further away from participation. This is not to suggest that we should desire being in such a decadent order, but we are victimized by it and its racist nature prevents an orderly change through black protest. Thus, our rage is not only over being victimized, but also because we are 30+ million strong, virtually powerless within this society, and without control of our primary-need institutions. The Nation of Islam is a useful example here. The Nation demonstrates the ability of blacks to accomplish what they will, given the right frame of mind. The most powerful element to enter the black community has been that of Delany-Garvey-Nation of Islam. Whites condemn this assertion of independence on the part of blacks. Yet most blacks, through the deep call of their humanity, would vision beyond the need for a "Black" Nation. In their bitterness, however, for the powerlessness blacks have been accorded, they must conceive of themselves as a nation in their own right. How else to account for 30+ million and *nothing* of their own?! Whites fail to see the issue.

A potent example of misunderstanding is that whites (and some blacks) are unable to understand an Elijah Muhammad, calling the Nation an "empire," obviously thinking of Howard Hughes', not realizing that the Nation will last long after the destruction of estates such as Hughes has. Nor do they understand Baton Rouge, to say nothing of the past summer riots—the language of the unheard, as King so adequately defined them. The non-limited police power gets challenged, and few understand this, either.

The factors of misunderstanding and anger, or the white and black norm, respectively, are the tensions of this

society. The situation of color gets played upon by whites with the most ignorance. A city official said what was happening in Baton Rouge and northern newspapers picked up and printed this item as though it were gospel truth, and then collected their dimes. The statement by the official was given bold-face type, or existed, in the case of the Wisconsin *State Journal* and the *Daily Cardinal*, as the whole story. One's acceptance, of course, depended on one's frame of reference. Newspapers are about what people want to read, since people support the enterprise. The simple-minded farmer of Wisconsin and his children at this school have no more understanding, i.e., knowledge, of blacks than does that southerner. That is our experience in this madhouse.

Not only have white Americans developed a profound misunderstanding of blacks, but in their "willful blindness to the abuse of blacks," (Grier & Cobbs) they also fear blacks. The fear whites have for blacks is *not* the same fear blacks have for whites. Both fears are culturally learned and are not dissimilar from fears all animals learn in response to their environment. A porcupine, for example, has a different fear from a dog's fear of him. One fears something larger than himself, the other fears the quills that get discharged from that small thing. Blacks, on the western philosophy pole, do have a fear of their enemy. This fear, though is based on *knowledge* of his ways. We learn very early about the enemy who lurks outside our door. Perhaps one reason whites misunderstand and, hence, fear blacks so, is because first, whites must have some awareness of their own behavior, albeit their irrational explanation for their acts. Secondly, that blacks *do* survive must make whites think that our situation must not be as bad as we claim it is. Whites, then, cannot comprehend the strength they see in blacks. Paul L. Dunbar realized that those who wear the mask also understand why the caged bird sings. Langston Hughes wrote, i'm *still* here, even though the ways of white folks have been against my laughin', lovin', and livin'. And more recently Carl Stokes explained that you *had* to be optimistic if you were black in America.

Grier & Cobbs illustrate this strength that carries a burden so heavy, the carrier must laugh, in order to persevere. These authors outline further the two-fold situation. On the one hand whites display an inability to comprehend the sorrow and resultant anger, having developed such misunderstanding. On the other hand blacks react with anger and general hatred for whites, having developed a high skill in survival against defeating odds, yet being subjected to the same ole, same ole.

## Commentary

In a previous issue of the *Black Voice* a letter was written by one Brother Leon Irby appeared making an open appeal to his brothers and sisters to support him in his quest for freedom and justice. He explained his predicament in very honest and simplistic terms: he feared a just and fair trial in the Dane County courts was an impossibility. His case is a criminal one, a murder case and consequently, cannot be perceived as a light matter. His life is at stake and he is presently struggling for his very survival, not as you and I struggle each day in this fascist, animalistic, rat race, but literally struggling for his life.

It is important to note that thousands of our brothers and sisters are in similar predicaments, and have been throughout our painful existence in racist Amerika. We, as Black people have a responsibility to see that not one more Black person gets destroyed by a system which is bent on bringing about the total destruction and possible annihilation of us—Black people.

This trial is not simply a question of whether or not Leon Irby receives a fair trial, but whether any Black person can receive a fair trial not only here in Wis-

consin, our immediate colony, but in Amerika, our ultimate enslaver. We must never again sit by passively while the fascist court systems send one brother after another to the de-humanizing prisons of this police-state country. If they are bent on annihilating us as a people, we must be equally bent on surviving, refusing to allow their acts of violence, their racist tactics of confinement to continue.

Let us synthesize these black-white norms. First, we are aware of their historical roots. Second, we see evidence for the continuity. The war that takes place between whites and blacks is natural enough, given the situation. It appears that this society cannot be resolved through Martin Luther Kings, because it fears Malcolm Xs, George Jacksons, and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. In Baton Rouge we can see the fear that causes and is perpetuated by racism, and the resulting reaction to blacks by whites. From the fear spoken of here it is quite possible that it was whites who did all the shooting that left 2 whites and 2 blacks dead. Crossfire, the investigation suggested. Got so carried away in their fear that they just fired, not realizing what might happen in such a case, even though their target was in the middle. Then the witch-hunt started and a lot of brothers got rounded up for the act. Quiet as it's kept, this is another typical response. Many a lynching, many a jail and chain gang sentence has been of whomever the police found to pin the act on. The charging of the crime and the trial are a farce, but the jail sentence will be for real. Some of the racism within the judicial system is being exposed through Atticas and Angela Davis', but too many people (Mostly white, but some blacks as well) fail to accept the *de jure* separation of black and white society and the beastiality that continues against the black community.

Rhodesia is a parallel to Baton Rouge. In Rhodesia, i.e., Zimbabwe, are to be found "the happiest Africans in the world," similar to the "we treat *our* niggers good" of Baton Rouge. Obviously the rage exhibited, when the outside world looked in, was not the result of being happy. If a system cannot accommodate, with respect, all sizable elements, it will not long survive, after those excluded become aware of that permanent exclusion. The existence of rage, the changing tempo of the times, is indicative of this growing awareness.

The reaction by the crackers of Baton Rouge demonstrate the misunderstanding and fear. The play-up by the newspapers spread the fear to minds prepared to accept the recorded images, due to the national traits spoken of. Whites will continue to be surprised and afraid as blacks continue to stand up in anger. Either the forces are irreversible, or else white America will have to shed its skin. White America does not appear to be learning, for it persists in its foolishness. Anger is turning into creative thought to crush this monstrosity, if the monster doesn't first blow himself away in a crossfire.

What is being discussed is not whether or not Leon Irby is guilty, for the facts will ultimately prove that, but whether or not a Blackman can even begin to have a chance to prove his innocence when it has already been decided that he is guilty; when Black people in this country are automatically considered guilty of any crime they are accused of committing.

We must keep close track of the proceedings of Brother Irby's trial for the outcome might very well have a direct effect on the Madison Black community.

Victoria Meek  
Black Voice Cartoonist

# Sweetback Fails in Reality

by Femi Taylor  
Black Voice writer

(Editor's note: this is a critique on an article published in our last issue, the continuation of that article is on Col. 4 of this page.)

Throughout the reading of "The Significance of Sweetback" in the last issue of the *Black Voice*, I was left with the feeling of never really grasping the essence of the beliefs put forward by the article on the subject of Van Peebles' "Sweetback". The author of this article begins by giving play to a whole spectrum of comments on Van Peebles' film, and these views is (1) the concept of artist as having an "independent, personal, individual artist's conception", and Van Peebles' film as an attempt to "raise culture to the level of art," and (2) the psychological, mythological significance of Sweetback, in which "Van Peebles places his character nihilistically at odds with the dominant culture," and which must be treated as a "reflection of black reality rather than as a reflection of the consciousness of that reality." If we can take these two propositions as basic keys to your outlook, we can see how, granted the depth and length of the author's analysis, it still manages to conflict with the functional purpose of black culture, and overlooks the critical significance of Van Peebles' film.

Beginning with the first proposition, the author states that V.P.'s film is significant in that it attempts to "raise culture to the level of art." Historical analysis of the two systems, culture and art, shows that the author has mistaken the order of their importance.

Culture is the expression of a people's life styles, as performed or portrayed by an artist. As the physician did not come before the medical needs of a people, or the engineer before the need to build a bridge crossing a stream, the artist could never have come before the social need for cultural expression. Culture is the science of social expression practiced by the artist, who can never be "independent, personal, or individual" in his conception of the people's reality, which is his reality as well. The mistake made by idealists is placing the word before the object it describes, communication before the need to communicate, the artist, before the people, with whom in the act of communicating he maintains his identity as an artist.

Culture is identical to the degree in which free expression of any kind (political, economic, social) is lacking from a people, and reflects the desires, needs, intended future (or idealized past) of a people. It is defined, by a mass of people, of which the artist is one. His art reaches the level of culture, only when it is embraced by the people as an effective tool against their oppression. To say the reverse is true, that the artist "raises culture to the level of art" is inverted reasoning, idealism, the essence of oppression and fear, which runs counter to the *intent* of the film of the article. TO DESTROY THE "DOMINANT CULTURE"

Just as our political and economic situation has been subjected to centuries of oppression, against which we wage increasingly effective struggles, so has our cultural history been a struggle to overcome the distortions of the "dominant culture." Since World War II, this cultural struggle has gone through two stages, first of which we identified as "equal to the oppressor", a culture of civil rights, followed by a rejection of the Portier model, in which we identified as anti-oppressor, as anti-white, anti-western. In each case the dominant culture has effected our total outlook, first as a white-wash, then a black-wash. And in both stages, the functional mistake was the attempt to "raise culture to the level of art; to isolate culture, rather than use it toward effective struggle. Twice the artist made the tactical error of not establishing cultural values to interact with specific political and economic weapons to free us, but sought instead to idealize his art. The

question between us is did V.P. make a similar mistake.

Your sweetback review stated that "Van Peebles places his character nihilistically at odds with the dominant culture." But in a black context, nihilism brings about a detached anti-western, anti-white, negative outlook, rather than a human outlook.

You further suggest, that for this reason, "not only was it insufficient merely to deny the legitimacy of white stereotypes of blacks, it was mandatory that the symbols which were once shunned as derisions be honed as weapons." Our cultural liberation demands that we not concern ourselves with a denial of these symbols, but in the act of obtaining control over our lives, these symbols be ignored as so many ghost stories; that instead of honing these symbols as weapons, as you suggest, we focus our energies on destroying the projection crew, the ruling circle of image makers, the economic manipulators of our oppression.

Further on, you state that Sweetback must be examined on the "level of a psychological projection of the mythological confrontation with the dominant culture," and that if this is done, we see that Sweetback is not a reflection of black reality, but a "reflection of the consciousness of black reality." If as you suggest, Van Peebles was trying to types be "honed as weapons," that violent break sours outside the theatre if Sweetback is merely a "psychological projection of the mythological confrontation with the dominant culture." It is another cultural mistake because it sacrifices black humanity to disprove a white myth. It hinges our identity on a denial of their image of black reality, of their "psychological projection."

If instead of being a reflection of black reality, it is a "reflection of the consciousness of black reality", it is functionally the same thing. Only human beings can reflect

on reality, and that reflection, interpretation of objective reality is consciousness. You are saying that V.P. takes a picture of a picture. It is unfortunate that if indeed Van Peebles' purpose behind the film was in "reflecting the consciousness of black reality" you would find merit in such a wasteful division of the black mind from the battlefield. This division manifests itself in the separation of black college students from people in the black community, and is a dangerous deterrent to freedom.

In Sweetback, V.P. sought to make war real for black people, but he falls short of identifying revolutionary war. Instead we see Sweetback, the war-hero, fighting with a stacked-deck, just like the way John Wayne fought the Indians. The setting is so "black" it excludes. It is as you suggest a "collage", static and limited. But it is significant as a step forward.

Van Peebles himself admits to the static value of the film. His solitary mistakes are our total victory; because his artistic outlook is cultural, it works for black people, not in spite of them, or "amorally" detached from them. Because you slavishly sought to find the positive needle in the haystack, to prove the film's artistic, psychological value, rather than view it from its effectiveness toward black liberation, your analysis of the film is not as honest as V.P.'s cultural outlook, and in effect you do more harm to its positive effects than any of V.P.'s mistakes in making it.

In this most vital sense of functional knowledge, your analysis proves that V.P.'s film has failed to bring us to a higher level of unity. While its symbols conveyed a different message, one that was thick with the urge for freedom that is basic to black people, for you he did not correctly define the cultural and "psychological" tools of liberation, social not individual, identity with revolutionary change.

## Sweetback's Significance

Cont'd from last issue  
by Burnelle Powell

(editor's note: this is the second and last part of "The Significance of Sweetback," a review of the movie by Burnelle Powell, published in the last issue of the *Black Voice*.)

As a product generated in response to the newly discovered black theater-going public, the film ran the risk of not being of the black political mood. From the earlier days of Portier to the present, the major studios have had it as an unspoken rule that they should stay in the wake of black political consciousness so as to make money and avoid waves. "Imitation of Life," "Raisin in the Sun," "Nothing But a Man," "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner," "The Spilt," "Cotton Comes To Harlem," and, most recently, "Shaft" are illustrative of the trend. The Post-War II Afro-American psychological condition might well be chronicled in the mythological conception of these films. What they share, besides their black stars, however, is their unanimous assertion that black people are, after all, just white people unfortunate enough to have black skins. Nowhere is it even intimated that here are a people who are operating from different premises. Nowhere is there an attempt to examine the black as a rebel. Not just a rebel in terms of a momentary conflict with the neighbors, but as a rebel in the existential sense of the outlaw who is totally and unalterably at odds with his situation.

"Sweet Sweetback's Baad asssss Song" is an attempt to deny this concept. Van Peebles places his character nihilistically at odds with the dominant culture. In order to do this the most violent break with white America had to be accomplished. The most elementary of its precepts had to be brought into question. Not only was it insufficient merely to deny the legitimacy of white stereotypes of blacks, it was mandatory that the symbols which were once shunned as derisions be honed as weapons.

It is, then, the critics' inability to examine "Sweet Sweetback" on the level of a psychological projection of the mythological confrontation with the dominant culture that has been the primary reason for the film's rejection. Both black and white critics have sought to view the film as a documentary or travelogue on Afro-Americana rather than to attempt to deal with the source of the film's tension. That source is not the idea that Sweetback, as the personification of the black experience in America, is an admission of the validity of past black stereotypes (an interpretation suggested by Lerone Bennett, who should know better, in *Ebony Magazine*, September 1971). Nor is Van Peebles' work an attempt to exploit injustice, as argued by Conley. Both of these interpretations would require that "Sweet Sweetback" be treated as a reflection of black reality. As myth, however, it is not the daily process of being black which is focused on, but rather, the psychological objections to the real and imaged state of oppression which is a part of that condition.

Peebles is probing in that yet unexplored portion of the subconscious, which has heretofore been either glossed-over or ignored by Hollywood. He is not attempting to film merely what most blacks (and some whites) understand to be the facts of black ghetto life. The attempt is at going beyond to the mythological premises which underlies that reality. It is a filmatic attempt at assessing the love/hate relationship with that supermasculine thing whose aggressiveness we admire even though we don't want to.

The film is significant, then, in a similar manner as was *Native Son* for its own era. Van Peebles, as did Wright, understands the necessity for black people to become conscious of themselves at the symbolic level of cultural myths. When Wright said of *Native Son* that he "wanted to write a book over which banker's daughters would not weep," the terror which he strove for in *Bigger* must certainly have been necessitated by a similar *Baad asssss Song*

## JAZZ REVIEW

by  
Ted Johnson  
Black Voice photographer

During the week of January 14, Madison was visited by one of the jazz world's greatest musicians, the one and only Elvin Jones. This last performance was Mr. Jones' second concert here in Madison and by far the best he has done in our city so far!! Featuring several cuts from his latest album "Genesis II" the final tune of the evening was entitled "March of the Children" which was written and composed by Mrs. Keiko (Kay-Ko) Jones Elvin's wife and the group's manager. Assisting Jones on his last excursion to Madison were Jan Hammer (tenor/soprano), Gene Perla (bass) and Dave Liebman (Tenor/soprano, flute) and there was a brother on the congo, but his name was not given. Of the many jazz

drummers on the circuit, Roy Haynes, Grady Tate, Idris Muhammad, Lenny White, etc. Jones comes off in the image of the "Old Master." He is very professional and pleasant to talk with. Many times artists cannot find the time or patience to talk with their fans . . . Elvin Jones is an exception and we wish him well on his forthcoming European trip.

One thing that the concert was lacking was more Black faces to enjoy and support Jones and his promoter, Joe Jackson of Madison. If jazz is going to succeed as an art form or in any form, we the Black people who claim to have initiated jazz should support it and keep it growing.

Photos by Ted Johnson.



Elvin glares into space as he prepares for solo



They finally "gave the drummer some" and he definitely got away...



Putting it all together, the man gets into a cut from Genesis II



Keiko Jones (left) and Black Voice Staff member, Julia Hugu (right) chat and have tea while checking out the show

# AFRO-CENTER STOPS

## "Birth of a Nation"

A strongly worded objection from the Afro-American Center stopped the showing of "Birth of a Nation", sponsored by the UW-Madison Music Department, scheduled for St. Valentine's day February 14, 1972 at Mills Hall. This film which was to raise money was to be accompanied by a UW 100-member orchestra and chorus trumpeting the glories of racism. . .

Looking back at time, an important historical event occurred in Madison in 1915. William H. Miller, black leader in the struggle for the rights of his people protested the showing of the racist documentary, Birth of a Nation. Just completed that same year, D. W. Griffin's "monument to slavery" was shown at the Wis. Union in spite of strong disapproval from 200 black people, barely .6% of the total Madison population.

The racist inference was clear. The film applauded the existing economic and political state of racial debauchery, and soothed the weary conscience of its 1915 exploiters. Five years later, these struggling 200 buried Mr. William Miller. One of the facts he took to his death was the racist backwardness of Madison's economy, and political ideology.

The struggle of the black community has since crossed through 57 years, nearly three generations. But in Madison, 1972, the technical "judas" to progress, the racist ignorance of 1915 was preserved intact, and the announcement by 100 music students at UW to show the film, threatened to hurl Madison's black and white community back a thousand eons

into vicious stereotypes, and the bitter oppression of Mr. Miller's time. Had it not been for the enlightened outlooks of seven white members of the sponsoring committee, who spent long hours in fruitful discussion with Mr. Kwame Salter director of Afro-Center, the NAACP, and other representatives from the Black community, the mistake would have been repeated.

However, the other members of Madison's white community are not so sure they want to be exonerated. "The aesthetic value of the film is more important," many say: "It is reversed racism," others say, while the fact of the film's oppressive decadence has been a danger our incentive to violent racial outburst since 1915, when the forbears of Madison white population marred forever their historical pride, and left behind the legacy of welcoming the "Birth of a Nation" on the slandered bodies of black victims.

This was a partial victory for our people. What is most unfortunate is that racism and its economic aspects still survive in Madison as deadly and blind as the shallow "aesthetic values and frightened accusations of too many of its white citizens.

## Pa. House of Correction

by Ato Kwame

(Editor's note)

The author, Ato Kwame is an international graduate student UW-Madison who worked as a research assistant in dermatology in a Philadelphia, Pa., house of correction (prison) 1969-71. This is the first of a two-part story in which Ato recounts the experiences of in-mates.

The name it bears is massive, but it is a misnomer of the first degree—They call it "The House of Correction," but it has no merits of a house nor do they practice any correctional measures in there.

Its population numbers over a thousand of which about 85-90% are young blackmen and women ranging in age from about thirteen to sixty years.

They are all here for alleged or suspected offenses. They stay in here because they could not raise the bail money; and what do they do during this waiting period?—nothing, absolutely nothing. They hang around and endure the lethargy and boredom of the interminable days.

These men crave for something to do, something to occupy them but very few of them get the opportunity to be assigned to jobs; and these are jobs which have no financial remuneration, the only reward being an opportunity to move about in a wider perimeter. For example working in the laundry, cafeteria, grounds, collection of trash, etc. The majority spend their 24 hours in the routine of going to the cafeteria to eat and returning to their narrow confines.

One may readily suspect that any atmosphere as dull and unstimulating as depicted will be reflected in the moods of its inhabitants. Yes it does in a good number of them. As mentioned earlier the majority of the inhabitants are Black and The Blackman resident has kept his spirit up somehow. He carried his amiable and vivacious characteristics from the streets with him to his confinement. The vigorous hand shaking and spirited laughter remain unchanged—an observation which on my first encounter gave me food for thought.

I debated with myself the question "Is the Blackman after frequent incarceration adapting to the prison environment?"

I stayed with this population for months; I chattered with them (which is against regulations), at the same food or fodder

with the, in short I did everything with them save spending my night there, but I was unable to resolve the last question. However, my secret suspicion is that he is not gradually adapting to the prison environment but he is simply shouldering the skies and enduring an otherwise unendurable condition.

This is a situation in which a need has been created either by design or circumstances. There is a dire need for everything humanly desirable, a need ranging from basic social stimulation to the inexorable question of money. The background is thus set for any ignoble manipulation of the inhabitants and it is in this set-up that the exploiter comes in.

## Black Communicators Meet in Washington D.C.

The National Black Communications Society, in joint sponsorship with Howard University School of Communications, and Howard University Graduate Placement Center, is holding a National Conference in Washington, D.C., March 3-5, 1972. To be held in large part on the campus of Howard University, the conference will be attended by approximately twelve representatives from the Afro-American Center's Communications section and black students from the UW School of Journalism.

The results of the precedent setting conference will coordinate with Congressional Black Caucus hearings on Blacks in Communications, March 6-7, in Washington. Five hundred or more black professional communicators are expected to attend the hearings, which will review problems of racial discrimination in the communications field. Included in the hearings will probably be the firing of Mr. Samuel Yette from Newsweek magazine. Mr. Yette, a recent lecturer at the Afro-Center series, "What's Wrong With America: Problems, Causes, and Cures," has since been named to head the journalism department in the new School of Communications at Howard University.

This timely conference will hopefully bring together the ideas and resources of black communicators, to insure the speedy, truthful dissemination of information to black people around the country.

# FAKE HISTORY BOOKS

by Ferdinand Fiofiori  
Black Voice Editor

A University of Wisconsin-Madison Agriculture-Journalism graduate student, John Lorenz, 25, went to Philadelphia, Pa. in summer 1968 to take part in the Penn Athletic Club rowing Olympic trials. When he found that the competition was too high for him to make it to the Olympic games, he looked for something else to do, and ended up selling Black History books.

John found a want ad for a door-to-door salesman in a newspaper in Philadelphia. He called up for an interview and got the job.

It might be an historical coincidence that the boss' name was Mr. Fink which was well inscribed on his office door and otherwise.

Mr. Fink gave John Lorenz some tutoring on how to sell Black History books in Black neighborhoods, "The books are for the good of the people I am selling them to". These books happened to be five volumes of "Black History", ranging from the "Roles of the Negro in Arts and Music" to the "Role of the Negro in Madison".

While Mr. Lorenz reported for work the following day, he found that there were two Black girls from Temple University, Philadelphia, who also had been hired to help sell the books.

The boss, Mr. Fink, informed them to introduce themselves at the doors of their "victims" as: "I am a representative from the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History," and "I am here to take a survey of the teaching of Negro Life and History."

"Should a white person come to the door," continued Mr. Fink, "inform him or her that you were selling newspapers and ask if they were interested in buying a local paper."

Every morning Fink would pick up his three sales personnel in his car and drive them to the Black neighborhood where they were to do their selling.

**Black Voice:** Where was this Fink's office situated?

**Lorenz:** Downtown Philadelphia, in an old commercial-looking building with a grey front and a white door, right off 13th street—around the corner from NFL films.

**Black Voice:** How much was the cost of these sets of books?

**Lorenz:** The total cost of the books (five volumes) was \$99.95, and the

buyer was to make a down payment of \$10 and a subsequent \$5 per month payment.

**Black Voice:** How was the down payment made? In raw cash, by check, or by money order?

**Lorenz:** Mr. Fink was angry especially with me for taking checks from Blacks. He would ask me: "Who do you think honors a check from a Black?" The down payment thus was usually made by raw cash.

**Black Voice:** When you announced yourself as a representative from the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, and wanting to take a survey on the teaching of Negro History, and being a Whiteman, were the Blacks not skeptical? Did they not ask you to show proof of your identity by showing them your identification and the questionnaire?

**Lorenz:** Yes, I showed them the questionnaire, but later I would put a plastic sheet over the questionnaire, pretending to mark it, while in effect marking nothing.

**Black Voice:** What were some of the questions asked?

**Lorenz:** —Are you aware of the teaching of Negro History in schools?

—Are you in favor of teaching Black History?

—Do you have any children?

—Do you want your children to take such courses?

**Black Voice:** What were some of the answers you got?

**Lorenz:** Almost everyone I talked to was in favor of teaching Black History as either separate or integrated with other history classes. Many said they would be called Afro-American and Black history.

**Black Voice:** Did Mr. Fink tell you about some strategies to use in the facilitation of your sales?

**Lorenz:** Yeah! He asked me to tell the Blacks a few names like, "Daniel Hay Williams, who performed the first-open heart surgery was a Black". And Fink added: "If you tell them this, they will think you are talking about heart transplant." "You can also plug in," Fink said, "Alex Puskis, The Russian author was Black." "After this information, then you can clench in a sale," Fink added with emphasis.

**Black Voice:** Why have you come to this paper to give this information?

**Lorenz:** Ever since the summer of 68 when I did these sales, my conscience has been blaming me. I have come to be very friendly with Blacks; and also, when I was selling these books, I felt very guilty robbing them of \$99.95. After visiting some of the houses I went to, I felt some of them needed furniture or household equipments and not fake history books.

What finally prompted me to come here was that I went to the state capitol in Madison, Wisconsin to see a display of arts at the Capitol basement—historical things that have happened in Wisconsin.

At this display, I saw a bust of Daniel Williams who performed the open-heart surgery in Janesville, Wisconsin. To my annoyance, behind the bust of Dr. Williams was a painting of five doctors operating on a human heart. This painting was to show how Dr. Williams did the first open-heart surgery, but the painting instead showed five white faces and features.

I said to myself, "I'll be damned, school children seeing this painting would not know that Dr. Williams, which the painting was supposed to show was a Black man" This was when I decided that I had to tell a Black newspaper.

**Black Voice:** Thank you Mr. Lorenz; the country needs honest and outspoken young men like you.

Since November 1971 when John Lorenz revealed this story to the **Black Voice**, this paper has been trying to locate Mr. Fink in Philadelphia and report him to some authorities, but he has been "finky" enough to make it very difficult to be tracked down. But Mr. Finks are everywhere. If you have enough information about one of them, let us know about it.



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THE BLACK VOICE published by the Afro-American Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, since December, 1970.  
2000-11-7M20200