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From the Editors Notebook

Editorial Staff

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2 The Image of Black Folk

In Playwright Ossie Davis' words, "Whoever controls the image, controls the power . . . controls the man." These words bear a deeper meaning to all those who are concerned with the image of Black folk in American literature and the mass media.

The image of Blacks in this country is replete with fallacies and distortions that focus on negative aspects of the culture and lifestyle of Black people, as seen through the narrow perspectives of those who control the means of communications. Witness how the masses in this country—Blacks included—have been systematically conditioned to associate the following universal but negative conditions as being exclusive only to the Black lifestyle: Pimping, prostitution, dope and criminality. Hence the uncomplimentary treatment of the Black experience in literature and the media, particularly in certain television programs and in films that glorify the "Tom" or "Superfly" image. Ironically, some Blacks have indeed become willing partners in this poisonous assault on Black culture.

The remedy—as viewed by several Black writers who came to the first Afro-American Writers Conference which was convened at Howard University from November 8 to 10—would be for Black writers to utilize their literary creativity and undo the damage, first on a national scale, and ultimately world-wide.

Writer John O. Killens brought the message home when he said: "Distortion of the Black image by the white media" won't cease unless "Black writers create a new reality." How is this to be done? Through unity of purpose, and through control of the means of communications.

A reassessment of the role of the writer and the power of the pen and the spoken word is in order—not to destroy but "to seek the truth," in Killens' words, "in order to change and revolutionize the image Blacks have of themselves." Indeed, the gathering was a historic event that enhanced the work of Blacks in their collective effort to correct the damage done to the image of Black folk. The names of the participants read like an entry in the Who's Who of Black writers. The list included:

Maya Angelou, Sterling A. Brown, Joyce Ladner Carrington, Alice Childress, John Henrik Clarke, Lucille Clifton, George Davis, Ossie Davis, Lonne Elder, III, Mari Evans, J. E. Franklin, Clay Goss, Lorenz Graham, Stephen E. Henderson, June Jordan, John Oliver Killens, Kristen Hunter Lattany, Haki Madhubuti (don I. lee), Paule Marshall, Sharon Bell Mathis, Jeanne-Marie Miller, Ron Milner, Eugene Perkins, Ishmael Reed, Charlie Russell, John Steptoe, Piri Thomas, Askia Muhammad Toure, Quincy Troupe, Richard Wesley, John A. Williams, Kalamu Ya Salaam (Val Ferdinand), Sam F. Yette.

For the Record

The number of schools and colleges at Howard University is now 17, and growing. The new additions are: The School of Human Ecology (formerly the Department of Home Economics), and the College of Allied Health Sciences (formerly the Department of Allied Health Professions in the College of Medicine).

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Letters

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This space is reserved for you to share your views and comments with the other readers of this magazine.

Let's hear from you.

The Editor

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