

New Directions

Volume 3
Issue 3 *Bicentennial Edition*

Article 1

7-1-1976

Editors Notes

Editorial Staff

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Recommended Citation

Staff, Editorial (1976) "Editors Notes," *New Directions*: Vol. 3: Iss. 3, Article 1.
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From the Editors Notebook

The Bicentennial Issue

In 1976 America celebrates the 200th anniversary of the 1776 revolution.

Black people in the United States hold opposing views of the Bicentennial celebration. Some say it is correct for Blacks to observe the national birthday because their presence in America predates 1776. Others say Blacks as a people have not been treated right by the American system, therefore, they should refrain from partaking in the festivities. Both sides present valid arguments that cannot be dismissed lightly.

When America was struggling to free itself from Britain's colonial rule, a number of Blacks fought and died for promised liberties. But the basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution were denied to them following America's liberation, and well into the 20th century. Two hundred years later Blacks are still struggling.

This country's Black population, despite the inherent contradictions of the American political-social system, has managed to make immense contributions to the making of America. This is a fact of history that no one should ignore. Imagine what America would be today without the sweat and blood of the Africans who were forcibly transplanted here to provide the labor that America needed to become a viable nation. Again, imagine the impracticality of large cotton acreage without the free labor of those held under the bondage of slavery. Indeed America's Black population did have a hand in the building of America. Black Americans were among the first victims of the Revolutionary War; they fought gallantly and died with honor in all of the other wars in which America participated.

The Black contribution to America—in spite of legalized racism—in the areas of education, medicine, science, music, drama and sports is a matter of public knowledge. George Washington Carver, a Black scientist, was the man who discovered the myriad values of the peanut and through experimentation proved the financial possibilities of products derived from the peanut, sweet potato, pecan and soybean. The contributions of Howard University Professor of Surgery Charles Drew in medicine are well known. Let us also not forget the genius of Ira Aldridge in theater and Duke Ellington in music. Also, Richard Allen, who founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church; Benjamin Banneker, who took part in surveying the capital city of the United States; Matthew Henson, who reached to the top of the world; Paul Lawrence Dunbar, whose literary works have enriched the lives of many; Mary McLeod Bethune, who carried a life-long drive for the advancement of the education of Black youth; Harriet Tubman, who spearheaded a risky drive to free hundreds of slaves from bondage; Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist; Martin Luther King, the apostle of peace; Malcolm X, the martyr; and many more men and women of the past and present eras. The unsung Black heroes and heroines are many.

Because of the wrongs that must be righted, it is perhaps justified for some people to elect not to celebrate the Bicentennial. Celebration in the form of a big party is one issue, commemoration is another. Therefore, if one sees the hypocrisies in the American system as a national burden to justify the *uncelebration* of the Bicentennial, perhaps it would be appropriate to commemorate the contributions of Black men and women to the building of America.

This Special Bicentennial edition of *New Directions* was conceived and developed along these lines. As we have done in the past on issues of national and international scope, our purpose is to view the Bicentennial issue from a Black perspective. Most of the articles in this edition are of the Bicentennial flavor. The authors deal with critical social and political questions that the reader must approach with an open mind and bold objectivity.

As communicators, it is our duty and responsibility not to bury our heads in the sand when confronted with sensitive issues that need educated examination. This, as a

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