Festival: Bonds Not Forgotten

Reston's Fourth Black Arts Festival this year encompassed its traditional dance, exhibits, and plaza activities, plus two new features, a house tour and a books and author luncheon. The plaza festivities went on for two days, a treat to the eye-and ear, as dance groups, singers, and speakers, plus artists displaying their wares, commanded the plaza over yet another Labor Day weekend.

Sponsored by Reston Black Focus, the festival has achieved a firm place as a Reston institution. Its rationale was reiterated Sunday by Elias Blake. The festival, he said, is a "celebration of our commitment to maintaining our distinctive heritage and to teach to all the children and young people and adults of the community that the talents, the achievements, of black men, blossom strongly despite the fact that they must blossom in the midst of the still unfinished business of complete human dignity for black men in America."

Because of black people's special need for faith, and close to home, faith that "Reston may become different from any other town," Blake said Black Focus was formed, knowing that "if we...did not make positive moves to be included in the consciousness of the town the common errors of omission would have made us the invisible men."

The goals, he said are simple but profound: "Not to leave to chance the images and definitions of black people portrayed to our black children and youth whether in schools, in the media or in the relationships to their peers."

"To give those black people in Reston who want to express their unity and their commitment to the larger black community a place to do so."

"To communicate that in differences there are not necessarily divisions if the differences are respected and allowed to enrich and strengthen the culture of us all."

"To make clear to our black brothers and sisters that we are here and we wish those who want to join us here."

Noting the "restrictiveness of the economic mix in Reston" Blake made it clear that blacks in Reston "have not and will not forget our bonds and our responsibilities to our heritage and to our forbears -- and tag to our forefathers -- and their dream which is still deferred."

Guest Speakers

Between the invocation and final benediction by the Rev. Embry Rucker, Vicar of the Episcopal Church at Reston and musical selections by Ray Edwards and Ernestine Bush, two major speakers addressed themselves to the harsh realities of black existence in America.

Guest Speaker Thomas Todd, currently National Executive Vice President of People United to Save Humanities (PUSH) stressed the need for black unity, as against the divisions brought about by economic and educational status. No matter what a black person's degree, he cautioned, "Nigger is the common denominator." Aware that "when you begin to believe in yourself, you'll lose a lot of your white friends," he continued to stress the need for black people working together.

One of the major objectives of PUSH in Chicago and elsewhere Todd said was voter registration. With an estimated eight million unregistered black voters in America, he said, blacks should realize the "power we have as a people."

Honored guest Arthur A. Fletcher, currently Executive Director of the United Negro College Fund, and recently Assistant Secretary of Employment Standards for the Department of Labor, expressed his "grave concern" that "black aspirations" have become "unfashionable." Taking his text from a columnist who had termed blacks the "weakest and most unpopular minority in the country," he pointed to several strong political currents which he felt were (Continued on Page 11)
(Continued from Page 1) basically anti-black -- the reaction against busing, low cost housing in the suburbs, and employment quotas.

The rejection of the use of quotas in employment was of particular concern to Fletcher from his close involvement in the Labor Department, and was mentioned by other speakers throughout the weekend.

Referring to his current leadership role in the United Negro College Fund, Fletcher stressed the importance of strengthening the "predominantly black institutions of higher learning. Down through the years," he said, these colleges have been equipping black Americans to enter the "main stream." Fifty percent of GS-14's, 55 percent of black military officers, and 40 percent of black Ph.D.'s, he said, have graduated from these institutions.

The financial assistance offered by the UNCF reaches black students who, he implied, would be almost surely denied such opportunity otherwise -- 90 percent of the students come from homes where the income is under 5,000 dollars, and 75 percent graduate from high schools which offer no college preparatory work.

Proceeds from the Black Arts Festival have always gone to benefit such an organization. Last year they were donated to the Howard University Mississippi Project (HUMP). This year they go to the United Negro College Fund, reaching, Fletcher estimated, about 40 schools and 45,000 students.