

Mary McGrory

Humble celebrity Haley center of proud uproar

At the heart of the decade's most raging black success story stands Alex Haley. He is awash in success, mobbed, guarded, spun-off, incorporated. *Roots* has made publishing and television history. He is not taking it personally.

Haley, a middle-aged man of medium height, turned out to be more phenomenal than the phenomenon he created. He is that rarest of all birds, especially for Washington, a humble celebrity.

There are some "nay" votes in the chorus of acclaim. Author William Styron called *Roots*, "crude, mass culture." Publisher William Loeb of the *Manchester Union*

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Leader saw it as a pinko plot to make white Americans feel so much guilt and shame that they would accept the Soviet takeover of Africa.

But Haley, to millions of black Americans, is, as he says in his impersonal way, "a folk hero." He is the center of a continuing celebration of discovery and pride.

"What's all this about bringing slavery out in the open?" asked a slim, sharp young black woman, who heard Haley's National Press Club speech. "It wasn't exactly a secret, was it?"

100 years later

You would almost think so from the uproar. One hundred years after the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it appears that America had been waiting for another *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one written by a black man.

Haley thinks it will help. But then he is one of those people who thinks, basically, that everything helps. He is an optimist. He almost personifies the simple maxims of the magazine which supported him during the laborious year, *Reader's Digest*.

For him, despite the drudgery and the price—two failed marriages, twelve toilsome, debt-ridden years—of his obsessive quest, the ordeal, like life itself, was full of happy coincidences and marvelous encounters.

He is a man with a "mandate", a man on a mission. He is, in a curious, exhausting way, having a wonderful time. He tells his story over and over. People do not tire. He is a born story teller, plainly in direct line to the "griot," the African oral historian who finally told him that Kunta Kinte was indeed the founding father of his family.

And he can deal with pain. He can take it out and examine the humiliations and debasements of his own people without bitterness.

Father's story

At the Press Club, he told the story of his father, the only one of eight children who was to be "wasted" in schooling. The father was failing in college because he was working too hard at outside jobs. The breakthrough came when he got a summer job as a Pullman porter. The blacks in the audience, who might have been expected to wince at that reminder of post-Emancipation bondage, instead nodded and smiled, with misty eyes.

A late-night call from a sleepless, elderly couple was the turning point. He took them warm milk. Subsequently, they sent a check for his tuition.

"And that's why I grew up in the home of a college professor," Haley wound up, his round face beaming, "full of books, aspirations, and motivations."

The audience burst into applause.

He was often at the service of others, apparently. In the Coast Guard, as a cook in the South Pacific, he told a reverent black-tie audience at the Smithsonian last week, he moonlighted as the ship's scribe, writing love letters for his shipmates. He was very good at it, history's first recorded black Cyranos.

The militancy, the anger of black contemporaries passed him by. None of the hostility and bitterness of Malcolm X, whose *Autobiography*, he wrote, rubbed off on him.

Finding ancestors

His editor, Lisa Drew of Doubleday, who is white, helped to explain why. When he went to her in 1964, at the height of the civil rights struggle, it was to offer the story of his boyhood in Henning, Tenn., where, "if you knew your place," you could be happy. It was to be called "Before This Anger." He set it aside to find his African ancestors.

He has no complaint about the liberties taken by the movie makers with his book. It was, almost everyone agreed, after they had dried their tears, strictly soap-opera sociology. Haley doesn't care any more than those millions of whites who for eight nights booed and hissed their own and cheered for Kunta's side. Haley was "ecstatic" about it all, especially the size of the audience.

Does he think he has reached those who needed it most—the hardliners of South Boston, say, and Queens? His mail encourages him to think so.

Whether he did or not, he did one thing: he broke the crutch of the racists who like to whine that their ancestors came over in the holds of ships, too, and worked hard and made a go of it. Haley has reminded them that his ancestors came in chains with black faces, the only "unwilling immigrants."

For that alone, he should be praised and thanked.

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letters

Ignorant of pride

Dan Rathke, in his letter, "Ignorant Authors", showed that he is ignorant of what is called national pride and national consciousness. He should think over his statement and re-educate himself. The question he should ask a foreigner is, "Are you happy and having a nice time in our country?" "I do hope you enjoy your stay, Good-Luck." Frequently, the question we hear from people like you is, "How long are you gonna be here?, are you planning to stay?, or do you plan to settle down?" These kinds of questions are embarrassing. I should at this point thank the International Student Office for the good reception always accorded foreign students, at least we know some people "give a damn".

Getting back to my main point, whatever people say reflects their mind, and I believe the "society" and someone like you need to bury your face in shame. We are only being patriotic and proud of our country. It is our national pride and consciousness that alerted us to stand up for our rights to defend our country.

America is great, that does not mean other countries are not great too. Nigeria is a developing country, only sixteen years old, and we are proud of our progress so far. It is a lovely place to stay and we will rather stay there.

My concluding question to you is "How patriotic are you?, can you ever stand up to defend your country and the citizens?"

Paul Jaiyesimi

Bigotry not acceptable

To the "Ninth Floor Society for Deportation of Nigerians" and Thomas Ekpenyong. When I read the "Ninth Floor" letter I hoped that the letter was intended as bitter sarcasm. It is sadly true that some people in this country still express that kind of bigotry. I believe that a majority of people wish to correct the injustices which have been perpetrated in the past and which, as so vividly displayed in the "Ninth Floor" letter, are still perpetrated by some people in this country.

As Mr. Levitov and Mr. Ekpenyong have indicated, people should be judged on their own merits, not on their race or national origin. I believe the majority of Americans believe in "justice for all" and are ashamed of what the minority have done in shameful injustice and discrimination toward some races.

I believe it is no longer socially acceptable to express bigotry. Hopefully that phenomenon will become less and less visible in this country.

Earl B. Barnawell

Paper too liberal

I cannot help chuckling when I recall reading your Third Dimension article last semester concerning the McCarthy era and how it affected education at UNL. The article gave the impression that intellectual freedom has come "a long way" at the University of Nebraska since 20 years ago. What a joke! Just look at your own newspaper.

During the 1976 Presidential election, the *Daily Nebraskan* was so blatantly pro-Carter, and in general knee-jerk liberal as shown by the size and articles it published, and obtrusive failure to print certain pertinent news stories connected with the election. This was not only shown in your editorial section, but even on pages reserved for news stories! Is this done on purpose or are you honestly unaware that you are mixing politics with news?

Unfortunately this semester's paper is as biased. The Carter honeymoon continues with your staff. For three days out of the week students read a Mary McGrory editorial apologizing for the new administration or expounding Cyrus Vance's amiable personality traits. Hardly deep stuff. McGrory is easily categorized as an Eastern establishment liberal, and surely your staff could manage to obtain some fresh viewpoints if it really desired to. If

the *Daily Nebraskan* cannot manage to rid itself of McGrory once or twice a week, it could at least reserve space for some very excellent conservative editorialists at the same time. Let me give you this list of writers for starters: M. Stanton Evans, William Safire, Patrick Buchanan, John Chamberlain, James Kilpatrick, John Lofton, Victor Riesel, George F. Will, Phyllis Schlafly and Alice Widener. If you really wanted some provocative editorials concerning Carter and his appointees, you should have looked at Patrick Buchanan's column of Feb. 12 and George F. Will's column of Feb. 10.

Don Orton

Tired of parking, porno

The letter from the "Ninth Floor Society" was written merely as a means of stirring up some really intellectual feeling and some intelligent debate on campus. We were tired of seeing students put all the energy into discussion of such important issues as campus parking and the local porno theater advertising.

As a group we had been searching for some time for a topic of controversy—We felt that the public's attitudes towards "Roots," being the most watched television show in history, seemed the perfect place, especially when Mr. Sterns wrote a guest opinion biased in just the opposite direction of our letter.

Admittedly we went overboard. However, experiences at this university have shown that generally it takes the ravings of a mad person to get people to take notice. Our hopes, as were the muckrakers of old, were that in this bleak season we could warm up some students feeling right to their hearts. The period between the writing of this letter and its printing will have told the story and you can be the judge.

We apologize for any feelings that have been hurt and realize some will be hurt deeply. We are not adverse to foreign students or blacks on any level or in any way. School is a learning experience and to be at a university without the input from other cultures would be a serious misfortune.

We especially want to express that our object was not to single out any group or individual. We merely need a place to start.

Hopefully the learning experience we undertook has made people really stop and think about their feeling and prejudices. If so, we are convinced that the negativism we created was worthwhile. If not, then we've failed miserably.

Ninth Floor Society for Advancement of Mankind

Party section disgusting

I wish to express my utter disgust at your "Party Section" of Feb. 24. Let us examine the contents of the section. Among the articles contained in the section was an article on mixing drinks, (a two-page spread), and games with alcohol, with the winner being the person who could get roaring drunk the fastest. Also contained were nine alcohol related advertisements.

Drinking in excess is physically dangerous. Lincolnites, on the whole, use cars as their basic means of transportation. Need I stress that most of the traffic fatalities in the U.S. involve alcohol. Alcohol in excess is poisonous to the body. The paper conveniently ignores these considerations.

The paper, (in theory at least), is here as an educational tool. You report world events, school affairs, and generally, items which affect students directly. Your dialogue about Nigeria raised an important area of thought which was a valuable learning experience for UNL students. What is learned by encouraging students to irresponsibly handle such a potentially dangerous thing as alcohol? The paper must recognize that young people, many of whom are on their own for the first time, are terribly influenced by peer pressure, and the desire to be accepted as a member of the college community. The paper thus encourages the spread of a potentially destructive situation.

As I see it the purpose of having a party is to share part of yourself with old friends and new acquaintances in a relaxed atmosphere. When one is encouraged to go into a drunken stupor, he cannot give of himself. It becomes an escape from the difficult task of relating to people. The newspaper should promote a philosophy of interaction among people, not a seclusion between a person and his bottle.

Paul Kelter
Mary Logan