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Paul R. Hathaway

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An Indomitable Spirit

By Paul R. Hathaway

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It started casually like most love affairs. He can remember that at the age of 10 or 11 he watched two barefoot men in pajama-like uniforms spar feverishly in the park near his home. For him that moment was not a revelation, not even the beginning of anything. It was more like the end of something. Not even a revelation, but a commentary on man and his basest stray dog instincts, something he should avoid.

For John Holloway, karate was not a sport or physical exercise, but a new way for men to punish each other. Eventually, he knew, if you worked at it long enough, you would either get your teeth knocked out, wrench your hand or get kicked in the groin.

Last October, Holloway, a 24-year-old senior in the School of Business and Public Administration, won the world heavy-weight Tae Kwon Do championship in the Montreal (Canada) Forum and thus culminated three and half years of dedication to a martial art he once saw as a cooperative form of capital punishment.

Tae Kwon Do is a Korean martial art that developed through centuries of Eastern civilization. It emphasizes the adept use of punching and kicking techniques without actual body contact.

Holloway was captain of the 10-man United States team of which four were Howard students. In other competition, Howard Davis, a graduate student in the School of Engineering from Kingston, Jamaica, won first place in the Ball of Foot Power Test, breaking seven one-inch pine boards with his kick. He also won the championship in the broad jump side flying kick, which requires the participant to jump 20 feet over 12 four-foot high hurdles, breaking three boards with his foot as he comes down. Byron Nelson, a senior in the School of Engineering from Washington, D. C., won the jump reverse turning kick, which demands that the participant make a leaping 360 degree turn in mid-air and break a board nine feet above the ground with his heel before he comes down.

As a boy, the spidery Holloway was an earnest body on the field, filling space admirably. At St. Thomas More High School in Philadelphia, Pa., he was a dilettante as an athlete, playing guard, linebacker, flanker in football and running the high hurdles in track. When he broke his right ankle in a football game, it was almost as though he were being punished for being too much the dabbler.

In February of 1971, Holloway accompanied a roommate to a class in Tae Kwon Do conducted by the talented Dong Ja Yang, an instructor at Howard University in physical education.

"I fell in love with the course," said Holloway. Tae Kwon Do was a heady challenge to his sense of skill, grace, precision and strength.

Holloway speaks of his introduction to the martial art with an almost monastic exhilaration:

"It's a lot of hard work. You have to dedicate yourself if you want to be better than someone else. It was always fun to me. Self defense was not the primary thing. The tenets were more important. Perseverance, integrity, courtesy, self-control, an indomitable spirit. It's a mental discipline carried over to life. It gives you the courage to do whatever it is that you feel is right, no matter what obstacles are in your way."

When Holloway contemplates what his dedication to an art is worth, he responds this way:

"I would like to have some direction, some purpose in life. You can come to school. You can graduate and get a degree and get a job. But I couldn't see ending it there. Everyone can get a job and make x amount of dollars. But I was looking for something else, my own self-esteem. What is it that I can contribute my two cents worth to. It's a part of me. It's a way I can give something to someone else."

Now a second degree black belt, 6'4" and 185 pounds, Holloway practices seven days a week, six hours on weekends and three hours on weekdays. Besides his own training, Holloway also conducts several novice classes in the art of Tae Kwon Do.

Howard University does not have a Tae Kwon Do team. It has a 70-member club which is part of the University's intramural program. Yang and Holloway say they are still trying to get funds for the club.

When Holloway entered the tournament in Montreal, it was less of a tournament and more of an accounting, the summing up of an individual trying to measure how far he had come in three and a half years of training. He recalls a moment when the 180 contestants representing 29 countries lined up for the official opening and he began to size up each opponent. He could outreach this one, overpower that one, outlast this one. It would be quickness with one, endurance with another. He had a feeling that he would do well, but he was not sure how well.

There is no accurate count on how many people Holloway defeated on his way to the championship. He did not keep count himself; perhaps it was 13 or 14, his fans say. For him they were a succession of contorted faces, and falling bodies. Despite all the mental and spiritual discipline, here was a challenge that had to be punched out by his feet and fists. It was a test that his mind could only orchestrate. In the end, Holloway, his hands wrenched and ankles numbed, defeated husky Alphonso Gobannon of Canada in a tense overtime third round by knocking him down with a crackling turning kick to the head.

"I just kept pushing myself. I pushed myself as hard as I could. I just told myself I wouldn't give up. . . ." □



Black Writers Conference

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Black history know, an African named Akhenaten preached Socialism from a throne in Egypt 1300 years before the birth of Christ, Clarke said. Put another way, Black people "produced some of the best communal societies existing any where on earth not only before Karl Marx was born, but before Europe itself was born."

The intensity of the feud between Black Nationalists and Marxists Clarke attributes to panic. When a people have been out of power for almost 500 years they long desperately for power. And when they get close to it, they panic." Years ago one of his high school teachers in Harlem had made a similar point, but more colorfully, when he said then: "We (Black people) will have no difficulty getting to the door of the Promised Land. But we will get to the door of the Promised Land and then we will bunch up at the door and argue about whether to cross the threshold with our right foot or our left foot." This according to Clarke is where Blacks are in this ideological struggle.

In a more workable language, Madhubuti put it this way: "We all in this room are individuals and therefore within that individual sphere we bring a certain amount of creativity. The poets up here are all individuals. We do not all write alike. We do not think alike on many things. But in that individuality, I believe that we are all moving toward the same direction. And that direction, on one level, as I see it, is the defeat of white supremacy ideology and those who perpetuate it and also the development and advancement of our people, the survival of our people.

"If we individuals begin to use our individuality to stop the advancement of the race, that's when it becomes individualism. That's when it becomes very harmful.

"If Askia Muhammad Toure says 'I'm a Muslim' (and Madhubuti motioned toward his poet friend) and I say 'I'm a Nationalist or a Pan-Africanist,' we must not fight as he tries to get me into Islam and I try to get

Piri Thomas



Puerto Rican author Piri Thomas once served six years in prison for armed robbery. At a writing workshop on the last day of the writers conference for aspiring writers who are inmates in the Lorton Reformatory in Virginia, an emotional Thomas recalled how as a prisoner in New York he had led his own personal rebellions. "Every time they called loud and said 'Number 18093,' I refused to acknowledge that I was a number. I was a human being. I was a man. They tried to imprison my body but I refused to let them imprison my mind.

"I started to write very seriously in Comstock (prison) because I knew that they had put a wall around me and my brothers to keep us in. So I built a wall around myself and I kept them out."

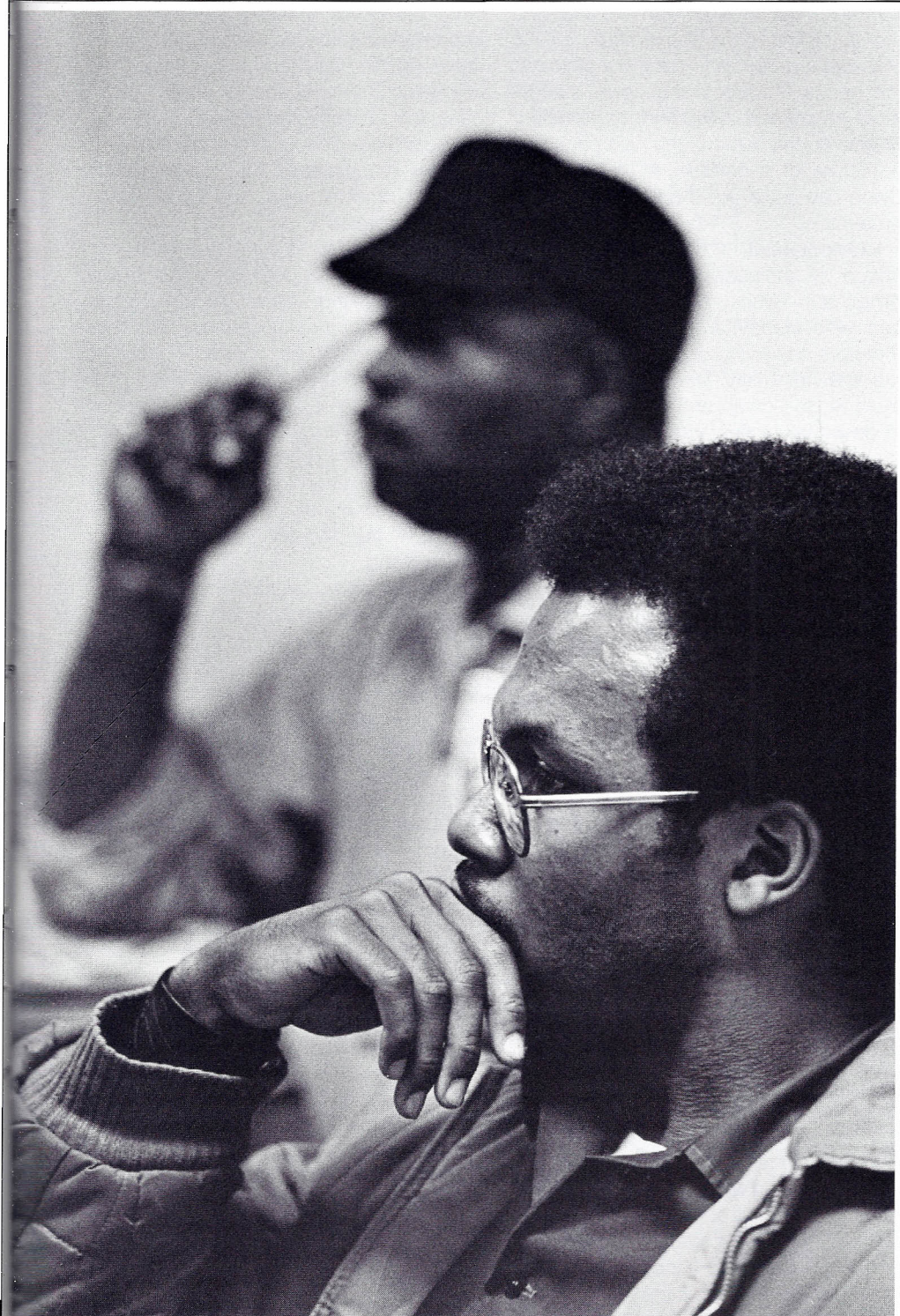
Thomas said that while in prison another inmate gave him *Youngblood*, a novel by John Killens, to read. He was so influenced and encouraged by the book that, even though he had flunked all the English courses in school, he told his friend that he felt like he too could write.

"Don't tell me. Show me," his friend said. And Thomas went on to write his autobiography, *Down These Mean Streets*, and five other books.

"If I sound emotional, I am," he said at one point. "Because there's no time for the rest of my life that I will walk into one of these concentration camps that they will not affect me."

He was both happy and unhappy to be at Lorton, he said. "Unhappy to be here to see that my people are still behind these so-called prison walls. But I am very happy to see human dignity and a push that will make us truly and totally free.

"As long as we take care of each other, as long as we don't bow down, and stop trying to rip-off our own brothers whether be it mentally, morally, spiritually, sexually; as long as we don't do this system's dirty work, we shall have victory."



him into something else. We should work and function together. Differences are healthy. But they are even much more healthier when we are all going in the same direction in terms of our ultimate goal."

Throughout the conference there was a resounding call for Black image makers to use the tool they know best and have to acquire what they need and want. Ishmael Reed, author of the novel, *Mumbo Jumbo*, speaking about image and money said, "The most powerful symbol in America today is the dollar." He called attention to the fact that a crisis now exists in the American character because dollars rule images instead of serving images. "The traditional dilemma of the American intellectuals is that they believe that they can combat dollar-supported ideas—images—with images that have no resources behind them. They believe in politics (forgetting that) ambassadorships are bought and sold.

"Another characteristic of the American intellectuals as well as other talented and gifted individuals is that they disdain material things even though they may live in Long Island [New York] or Georgetown [Washington, D. C.]. They have swallowed the myth that business and art do not mix."

Reed believes Blacks would do well to admit that "Dollars rule ideas instead of being the servants of ideas." Conversely, images need dollars to back them up. To those who are willing to admit the obvious and wish to obtain money to use for noble Black causes, he recommends the reading of Ted Nicholas' book, *Where the Money Is and How to Get It*.

Ossie Davis, actor-writer-producer, in his keynote address at Cramton Auditorium to a near capacity audience of 1,500, put the Black image in an international perspective when he said: "We live in one world, and we are bound by the decisions taken by people in one world."

A major image maker himself, Davis pointed out two contradictory images that have been thrust upon the American people and the world recently. The images

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were flashed on television screens and run in newspapers everywhere. “In the Midwest a group of farmers put pistols to the heads of calves and cows, slaughtered them and laid them in trenches. Maybe on the same or the next page was a picture of a child in Africa who was dying because he had no meat, no proteins.”

He continued: “The farmers have an image of themselves as self-sufficient Americans—white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, who made the farms and who are therefore deserving of a great profit. They are individualists. The profit system to them is God-given and they have a right to do whatever guarantees that they have a respectable American profit. So the prime consideration by which these farmers were governed was by the image they had of themselves which gave them the right to slaughter food in the presence of people who starved.”

It wasn't necessarily true the farmers personally hated the starving African child. In fact, were they near the African child, said Davis, “they might even reach their hand in their pocket and show that they belong to the NAACP and leave a dollar in the plate.”

Davis wonders what those contradictory images had done to Black Americans. Did they react? Did they question the audacity of the farmers which enabled them to waste food when others in the world were starving? He believes Black Americans should have been outraged. And for good reasons, because America represents a “system that is proven inadequate morally by Watergate, and physiologically, by its incapacity to create food and jobs for its own people.” He said America alone is responsible for the major problems facing the world today. “We consume in America 36 to 40 percent of the natural resources of the earth and we represent only six percent of the world's population. Now, unless God gave us a specific mandate to consume more than anybody else, we are committing crimes and sins.”

Against whom are these crimes and

sins being committed? “Against the poorer, the darker, the weaker peoples of the world. And they tend to be Black; they tend to be Puerto Ricans, the South Americans, the Africans, the West Indians and the poor Black people in our country.”

Davis recommends that Blacks adopt a world point of view, and make these images universal.

“What I call for is that we look at the world with even wider eyes and that we take all mankind and all human experience as our particular province. Our revolution can only be complete when it hooks up with the revolution sweeping the entire world. This doesn't mean that our revolution has to cease being Black or that our primary objective should not relate to the solution to the Black people's problems. It merely means that we are bound by the decisions taken by people in one world.

“The image is useful. We must take care to upgrade and update our images from generation to generation.” Speaking to the so-called Black middle class, he said: “And those of us who have found ease and acceptance in the mainstream or midstream—we have become stars and purveyors of great values and become economic entities which have a place in that firmament. We had better look to our natural behind because when The Day comes and the stuff hits the fan, everybody has to go . . . Everybody, including Black people who did not give a damn in the first place.” □