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# To Be in Publishing The Story of a Publishing Institute ... and the Press Behind It

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ON THE HILL

## The Story of A Publishing Institute . . . and the Press Behind It

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By Harriet Jackson Scarupa

*Charlise Lyles, a representative of Dunbar, Hughes & Cullen, stands in front of a Howard University classroom and talks about a book her company plans to publish. Called "The Fat On My Mother's Back," the book is a psychodrama about "a gentle yet desperate confrontation between a Black mother and daughter," she explains, and is a first novel by a well-known anthologist.*

*"The book deals with such questions as who are we, who molds us, how much free will do we have?," Lyles says, her words rushing together with nervous energy. "And it is directed at that large professional female audience interested in reading about women asserting their identity—especially Black women and women involved in the feminist movement."*

*She then tells about the number of copies planned for the first print run (10,000); the price of the book (\$15.95 in hardback with paperback sales anticipated at a later date); and some marketing strategies planned to get the book into consumers' hands. After adding a few other pertinent facts about the book, she answers questions posed to her by evaluators who are sitting before her and then presents them with a packet of written materials which further support the company's decision to publish this particular book.*



Members of the 1982 class of the Howard University Press Book Publishing Institute.

**T**he evaluators were staff members of the Howard University Press and faculty members of the Book Publishing Institute.

Dunbar, Hughes & Cullen doesn't exist. Nor does "The Fat On My Mother's Back." They were hypothetical creations developed by Lyles and five other students enrolled in the publishing institute last summer.

The institute is an intensive five-week course covering all phases of book publishing, an orientation designed to prepare participants for entry-level jobs in the industry.

Book ideas developed by other student groups were "Bush Leaves," a fable for children which set out to tell how the jungle became green; "Almost Any Day Now," a novel about a Double Dutch contest aimed at 9-14-year-old girls; and "One Nation Under God," an anthology of essays about being a member of an ethnic minority and growing up in America.

"The group projects were designed to encourage students to draw upon the knowledge they gained throughout the course," explains Janell Walden, administrator of the institute and an assistant editor at the press. "Another purpose was to simulate the book publishing experience and, of course, a major part of that experience is learning to cooperate with other people in formulating a final product."

The curriculum of the institute had included practical workshops in book design and copy editing (complete with grammar reviews); lectures dealing with various aspects of editing, designing, producing and marketing books; panel discussions on how book reviewers, authors and bookstore owners fit into the publishing picture; tours of bookstores, book manufacturing plants, the Bureau of National Affairs and the Library of Congress.

Leading the sessions were some 40 top publishing professionals who shared their expertise without pay. The publish-

ing industry supported the institute in other ways as well. Thirteen companies contributed to a scholarship fund to help students meet the \$900 institute fee (covering tuition, room and board.) Ten companies participated in a recruitment day activity. And the impetus for establishing the press institute in the first place came from a 1980 award of \$61,000 in seed money from Time Inc. whose book publishing division is Time-Life Books, Inc.

Howard's publishing institute is one of four similar intensive publishing courses in the nation. The others are at Radcliffe College, the University of Denver and New York University. But Howard's is the only one completely affiliated with a university press.

"One of the reasons for having the publishing institute is to go out and sell publishing as a career opportunity to members of the minority communities," observes Charles Harris, executive director of the press and a 26-year publishing industry veteran. As it is, he says, the Black presence in publishing is miniscule, pointing out that as far as he has been able to determine there are only three Black editors in the nation currently employed at the major trade publishing houses. Indeed, week after week the "People" section of *Publishers Weekly*, which carries notices of appointments and promotions in the industry, shows no Black faces.

Of the students in the 1982 institute, 16 were Black, three white and one Asian-American. They ranged in age from 20 to about 40, came from states as diverse as Vermont, Ohio, Georgia and Pennsylvania and included an entering college senior who is now editor-in-chief of his yearbook, a retired Navy journalist, a former college English instructor and a former journal editor. What they shared, says Walden, was "a sincere interest in the printed word."

Some of the students were strongly committed to finding jobs in publishing from the start; others just wanted to find out what the field was all about. Of the 34

students in the two previous institutes, 8 are currently working directly in book publishing in such places as Time-Life Books, Crown Books, the Book-of-the-Month Club and Book Press. Another 17, says Walden, have at some point been involved in book publishing in one way or another. Douglas Stone and Candy Watson, both alumni of the 1981 institute, typify those in both groups.

**On the Job**

Stone, a graduate of the University of North Carolina, is working at Crown Books in New York City. He had attended the institute, he says, "because I was interested in publishing but wanted to clarify exactly what I wanted to do." His choice was the editorial side of publishing, he observes, because "I'm interested in the dissemination of ideas, in discovering new talent." He adds that his experience in the institute well-prepared him for his job as an editorial assistant where he reads and evaluates solicited manuscripts and recently signed up a first novel about a Russian immigrant. He sees his current job as the first step towards his eventual goal: being a senior editor of serious fiction or non-fiction at a major publishing house.

Watson, a Clark University alumna, had worked on a research paper in college comparing two journals, *Freedomways* and *First World*. "In doing the project," she says, "what struck me was how uninformed Black students were about Black publications. I thought, 'Why is it that there aren't more Blacks in publishing? How can we become more visible?'" When she saw a notice about the institute on a Clark bulletin board, she thought the Howard program would be an ideal way to get her questions answered.

Watson is now working as a community services manager for Cable Atlanta, Inc., in Atlanta, a job that involves scheduling television programs, coordinating promotion and publicity and managing a quarterly publication. But she is still interested in publishing. That interest led her to

6 produce a program for her station called "House to House." "It tells the story of what's involved in moving a manuscript from the author's house to the publisher's house to the consumer's house," she explains, "and deals with publishing as a career, especially for minorities."

**T**he reason she is not actually working at a publishing house, herself, says the 37-year-old mother of two, is that she could not see how she could possibly support herself and her children on an entry-level salary in publishing. Stone, for instance, is reluctant to reveal his exact salary but does say that a typical beginning salary for an editorial assistant is between \$10,000 and \$11,000 a year. (Senior editors at major trade publishing houses earn in the \$30,000 range but it may take years for an editorial assistant to become a senior editor and many never do.)

There have been many reasons advanced to explain why there are so few Black people in publishing: its genteel, "gentlemanly," elitist—and white—image and with this its reputation as a haven for the well-educated children or spouses of the moneyed; the general ignorance across the board about what is involved in publishing; the fact that publishing houses themselves have never actively recruited minorities—or anyone—relying instead on the hoards of liberal arts graduates from the Ivy League who eagerly knock on their doors each June.

But the low salaries—especially at the entry level—may well be the greatest reason more Blacks with solid college backgrounds aren't drawn to publishing. As Harris says, "You can't work in publishing three or four years and go out and buy yourself a brand new Porsche and vacation in Martha's Vineyard. If you really want to make money, this is not the field to go into because you can't make any money—at least not initially. . . . You have to like reading and like having some aspects of what constitute a solitary life and you have to want that and be condi-

tioned to it and to get your reward from knowing that you played a major role in some outstanding publication—whether the public knows it or not."

But is that reward enough? Given the relatively low salaries in publishing, given the miniscule Black presence in the industry and all the pressures that can often make for the few Black people who are there, given the dire financial straits many publishing houses find themselves in today, given the fact that fewer and fewer people seem to be reading these days, why, oh why would any person in his or her right mind, especially a minority person with middle-class aspirations, go into publishing?

In answer, Walden steps atop her soapbox. But there's nothing bombastic about her views and she speaks not only for herself but for all the others involved in the institute:

"Publishing, because of its impact on the flow of knowledge and the flow of information, is too important an industry for people who are seriously interested in print media and in the value of books to ignore. If there are things that are undesirable about our industry—such as the salaries and sometimes the profit margin and all the other factors that figure into it, such as problems with book distribution and book pricing—then it would behoove people who are seriously interested and committed to get into the industry and make a difference.

"There are many of us in this industry who are idealists. We're called crazy and unrealistic and all other sorts of names. But for the true believers, this is the place. We need them [true believers] whether they're finance-oriented or editorially-oriented to help improve the industry. The students who attend the institute see it all. They hear what's wonderful and exciting, but they also hear about the down side of publishing. And the challenge that is always presented to them by these lecturers is: 'Come in. Let's work together and perpetuate it [the publishing indus-

try] and enliven it.'"

Many of the 1982 institute members hope to take up the challenge.

Lyles, a recent Smith College graduate, eventually hopes to edit a magazine directed at Black teenage girls between 15-21, an age when she feels "kids are really lost." She also writes poetry and hopes to one day be involved in publishing her own works and those of other Black writers. "It seems that a lot of times for a Black writer to be published in this country, he has to present Black folks in an acceptable light," she says. "Even if it isn't a blatant stereotype, there are always underlying innuendos that we are what they [whites] think we are. And I think the best way to overcome that is to publish our own books."

Lateifa-Ramona Hyman, a former Howard University graduate student and former English instructor at the University of the District of Columbia, is interested in eventually becoming a children's book editor. Why? "Children's books are just fun," she answers, "but more than that: if you get children to read, then as adults they will always read. And I have found just from teaching that Black children are not reading as they should be reading and I think part of the problem is that as babies they are not read to."

Both Hyman and Lyles give the institute high marks for introducing them to the ins and outs of book publishing and acquainting them with the range of jobs available in the industry. [Next year's institute will run from May 31-July 1. For information, write: Program Administrator, Book Publishing Institute, Howard University Press, 2900 Van Ness Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20008.]

### Some Larger Issues

What emerges from conversations with many participants in the institute, and with others as well, is the hope that if more Black people become involved in publishing, more books by Black writers will be published.

"Editors do books that interest them for one reason or another," says Erroll McDonald, an editor at Random House and one of the three Black editors at major trade publishing houses cited by Harris. "Presumably, the more editors with diverse backgrounds there are in publishing, the more diverse the books that are published will be. If there are more Black editors, presumably, then those editors will be publishing more Black books."

As it is, says novelist John Oliver Killens, "it's ten times more difficult for a Black writer to be published today than it was in the '60s." And he is blunt about why he thinks this is so:

"Most of what the Black writer has to say is anti-establishment. He was allowed to say these things during the '60s when there was activity on the campus and on the streets. When the action on the streets subsided, I feel we went back to business as usual and this was reflected not only in publishing but on the university campus, on Broadway and in the movies as well.

"I have a writers' workshop at Medgar Evers College [in New York City] and it's very difficult to encourage people to aspire to be writers and tell them at the same time that they should use writing as a weapon for their people's liberation when publishers want you to rationalize the status quo. That, I feel, is the big contradiction between the Black writer and the publishing establishment."

Killens' views have been shaped by his own personal experience. His novels "Youngblood" (1954), "And Then We Heard the Thunder" (1963) and "The Cotillion" (1971), for instance, were well-regarded and well-read when they were released but he has not published a book since "A Man Ain't Nothing But A Man" came out in 1972.

About a year ago, Killens finished a major novel based on the life and times of Alexander Pushkin, the great Russian writer who expressed pride in the African part of his ancestry. [For a closer look at

this see Killens' essay "The Resurrection of Alexander Pushkin" in the January 1978 issue of *New Directions*.] He has yet to find a publisher for the book. "I get letters from publishers saying that the writing is good," he remarks, "but that Pushkin is not viable commercially."

Closely related to the "Black books are not commercially viable" rationale for not publishing more books relating to the Black experience and/or written by Black authors, are the arguments that "Black people don't buy books" and even that "Black people don't read." Whether these arguments amount to total stereotype or whether they are colored by a tinge of truth is a matter of debate.

Killens agrees that he has gone into some homes of middle-class Black families and not seen one book and he says he knows "a lot of people with Ph.D's and master's who haven't opened a book since they left school." Not surprisingly, that disturbs him. "The most revolutionary act we can do is to read a book, any book," he says passionately. "That's why they didn't want the slaves to learn to read. When [Frederick] Douglass read, it unfitted him to be a slave. We have to wage a struggle with our people to read books. It also puts us in good stead when we face the publishers."

He is careful to add, though, that "not reading is a disease that afflicts most of America. A publisher once told me that more people read books in Denmark than they do in the entire U.S. and think of the difference in population between the two countries."

Similarly, McDonald says, "very few people [Black or white] read these days. If you think about a big blockbuster, it's like 500,000 copies, which is nothing compared to the millions of people who watch 'The Jeffersons' every week. It's a very thorny situation."

All of this is little solace to the writer who feels he has something important to say but can't find a way to get it before the public.

Looking at the problem through the lens of the industry, McDonald observes, "What's going on politically and culturally in general is reflected by the books that are published. If you look at the New York Times best-seller lists, you will see books about getting your body together, books of sex and books on money. Those three things seem to be what most people are concerned about for one reason or another. A lot of books that were published 15 or even 10 years ago could never be published today. There isn't the market that was determined by political and cultural events back there. Certain trends are not in vogue any more. And this affects not only Black writers but others as well."

Indeed, these are also hard times for many white writers of serious intent. Writes Thomas Whiteside in his book, "The Blockbuster Complex:" "They say 'you can't sell it'—that is why whole classes of books that may not be really unsalable at all but only unsalable in large numbers are consigned to oblivion in the high-volume, high-turnover system to which so much of the publishing business is now geared."

Whiteside's book examines the changes that have overtaken publishing in recent years, among them: the acquisition of publishing houses by large conglomerates; the emphasis on creating blockbusters, "big books" with big advances, big paperback sales, big movie tie-in deals, big promotional budgets, books whose salability often seems to outweigh their literary merit; the transfer of power in publishing houses from the hands of editors to those on the business and promotion side; the recasting of the entire image of the industry from one of genteel intellectualism to show business hype.

Some view conglomerate ownership positively, pointing out that it has given publishing houses needed additional working capital and improved their management. What's more, they say, more



Authors who spoke at the press institute, from left to right, **David Bradley**, **Paula Giddings** and **Doris Grumbach**.

books are being published now than ever before (between 40,000 and 50,000 titles a year.)

Others take a far dimmer view as did Alexander Cockburn, the *Village Voice* columnist, at a session of the American Writers Congress last October: "What we see today is a characteristic American phenomenon in the form of oligopoly, where a few firms control the bulk of the business in major sectors of the culture industry. We do not have cultural fascism in this country. What we do have are tendencies: the perfection of a rationalized culture and knowledge industry which does presage an ominous level of control and restricted access."

### Role of the University Press

University presses were specifically established to provide access to publishing to those whose works constitute important additions to knowledge and culture but are not considered commercially viable as measured by the yardsticks of trade publishing houses.

The oldest continuously operating university press in the U. S. was established at The Johns Hopkins University in 1878. Today there are about 100 regularly publishing university presses in the nation, ranging from such large enterprises as the University of California and University of Chicago Presses to smaller houses such as the Howard University Press. What they share is their non-profit status, their dedication to scholarly publishing and their role as an outreach activity of their parent universities, notes Richard Koffler, executive director of the Association of American University Presses.

But the changes in the larger world of publishing (the blockbuster complex, et al) are having an impact on university presses. "University presses are one of the places where certain important kinds of work will get a fairer hearing than they are likely to get at a commercial press these days," Koffler says.

"An increasing phenomenon happening across the board is that university

presses are producing books that have a crossover audience. They are reaching a broadening public, appealing both to the scholarly community and the general public. They are taking up some books commercial publishers might have published 10 years ago but are not now."

The University of Georgia Press, for instance, last spring reissued Killen's "Youngblood." The Howard University Press will reissue his "And Then We Heard the Thunder" as part of its new Library of Contemporary Literature. The library will republish books that received significant critical acclaim when originally published but have since gone out of print. The five other books slated to inaugurate the series are: "Coming Home" by George Davis; "GI Diary" by David Parks; "Runner Mack" by Barry Beckham; "Dancers on the Shore" by William Melvin Kelley; and "If We Must Die" by Junius Edwards.

All the books in the series aim to reach not just scholars (professors of literature, for example) but people in all sorts of occupations who like a good read.

This idea seems as appropriate as any to use as a bridge to the story of the Howard University Press, the first and only university press owned and operated by a predominantly Black university. For, in a very real sense, both the press and its institute are about access: access to the publishing process; access to the creations of that process; access to publishing as a career.

### The Howard University Press

It is now 10 years since the university's Board of Trustees established the Howard University Press and that milestone makes for another good reason to take a closer look at the role, operations and outlook of this pioneering institution.

For some time, many Howard faculty members agreed that the university should have its own publishing house. "But Dr. James E. Cheek, when he became president [1969], implemented the concept and established the press as a

freestanding unit of the university," observes Lorraine Williams, vice president for academic affairs and chairman of the press' Commission on Management and Operations.

Why should Howard University have a press? "The press functions in a way that provides an opportunity for faculty and other scholars to publish and to present points of view which may not be published in other publishing houses," she answers. "Its publications represent a chronicle of events and creative expression by many outstanding Black intellectuals. And, of course, it is important for our institution to provide opportunities for such creative expressions."

She speaks not only as a Howard administrator and a noted historian but as the editor of "Africa and the Afro-American Experience," a collection of eight essays by outstanding Black historians. As a result of a contract signed between the Howard University Press, publisher of the book, and the State Department, the book is now available in a French edition aimed for distribution in Francophone Africa and France.

As of this writing, the press has published 47 books, either hardbacks or original paperbacks; 18 of the hardbacks are now also available in paper. Its new fall/spring list, the most ambitious ever, will add an additional 26 titles plus six paperback reprints.

The primary market for these books, like those of most university presses, is composed of colleges and universities—their libraries, bookstores and individual professors. But, as previously noted, many of the press' books are of interest to the general reader so they are also sold in some general bookstores (and can be special-ordered in all.)

The authors of these books—both those previously published and in production—include scholars in a wide range of fields, including close to 30 who are or have been affiliated with Howard University.



Although the press has published fiction, poetry and drama, most of its works are non-fiction, with special emphasis on literature (e.g. "The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer"); education (e.g. "The Black School Superintendent: Messiah or Scapegoat?") history (e.g. "Pillars of Ethiopian History"); sociology (e.g. the upcoming "Mental Health and People of Color"); and contemporary affairs (e.g. "The Meanness Mania: The Changed Mood.")

A further note of diversity is provided by its publication of a series of books for the National Archives; hence, such titles as "Versatile Guardian: Research in Naval History;" "Clio was a Woman: Studies in the History of American Women;" and "Indian-White Relations: A Persistent Paradox." In addition, the press publishes two journals which originated during the 1940s: *The Journal of Religious Thought* and *The Journal of Negro Education*.

Of its books, its three best-sellers are "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" by Walter Rodney, the Guyanese scholar and activist (re: 16,000 copies); "A Poetic Equation: Conversations Between Nikki Giovanni and Margaret Walker" (re: 6,000 copies); and "James Baldwin: A Critical Evaluation," edited by Therman B. O'Daniel (re: 5,000 copies). The impact of these sales figures hits hard when you learn that the average press run for a university press, according to Koffler, is 1,200-1,500 copies.

Though the sales figures for the Rodney book seem especially startling, staffers at the press don't find its popularity hard to understand. The book is a study of the complex interrelationship between Europe and Africa from the 15th to the mid-20th century written from what the author described as "a revolutionary, socialist and people-centered perspective."

"I knew it was a gem when I first read it," remarks Harris, who acquired the book for the press from its London publisher, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

"The book is extremely well-written and it has a very penetrating analytical perspective. It shows the man as a great thinker able to be innovative and bring a fresh outlook to economics and political science and economic development."

Renée Mayfield, managing editor of the press, also attributes the book's popularity to the fact that Rodney was "an activist as well as a scholar." Even after his tragic death in Guyana in June 1980, his book has continued to sell. In fact, sales increased.

Mayfield also offers some speculations about the reasons for the popularity of the press' other two top sellers: "Students especially seem to like 'A Poetic Equation.' It's two women they've heard about over the years and the dialogue is quite engaging. It shows the mother/daughter type square-off, I guess. The Baldwin book was the first volume of critical essays about Baldwin so its popularity has a lot to do with Baldwin's stature and the fact the book is such a good reference."

Staffers at the press also think they have another best-seller on their hands on its new list. It is "The Daemonic Genius of Richard Wright" by Margaret Walker, author of the best-selling novel "Jubilee" and the award-winning poetry collection, "For My People." As described in a press brochure, the book "probes Richard Wright's psyche, as well as places Wright squarely in the streams of southern literature, modern American literature and world literature."

Also of special interest are three upcoming books by Nigerian scholars that were originally published in Nigeria by Fourth Dimension Publishers: "Imperialism and Dependency," "Toward the Decolonization of African Literature" and "Pan-Africanism." The press now holds the North, South and Central American rights to these books. "We hope this arrangement will open the doors for many other similar arrangements," observes William Mayo, the press' business manager. "Hopefully, Fourth Dimension will come

back to us and want to buy something we have."

When you look at the type of books the press has published and plans to publish, it's not hard to jump to the conclusion that the Howard University Press is "a Black press" or "a Black publishing house." That, indeed, seems to be the main import of most of the articles that have been written about it. This constant and repeated emphasis on race is something that often rankles Harris. "You don't look at some publisher's catalogue and say, 'Most of your authors here are white, does that mean you're a white publishing house?'"

"Howard University Press, a Black publisher—that's sort of ridiculous," he says. "If you know the history of Howard University you ought to know the university press is a reflection of the university—all university presses are. So the fact that most of the authors are Black may attest to the fact that most of the people who attend Howard University and who teach at Howard University are Black. It's a logical progression. I don't think anything BIG has to be made of it."

Instead of dwelling excessively on the race of most of the people who work at the press and of most of its books' authors, Harris wishes journalists and others would begin to dwell on some other things. For instance: "What Howard has done is to start something at a dismal time in publishing, a dismal period in university press publishing. It has started something, gone through trials and tribulations, maintained it, gotten exceptional stature for it nationally and internationally . . . I think that's the kind of remark that ought to be made."

He quickly reviews some of the highlights of the past 10 years. Publishing those first books. Building a staff that works cohesively together. [There are now 12 full-time permanent employees.] Receiving the crucial support for the growth and development of the press as an institution from Howard's president.



From left to right, **Gregory Kearse**, **Renée Mayfield**, **Janell Walden**, **Charles Harris**, **Wanda Lofton**, **William Mayo** and **Catherine Cauman**.

12 Having Arthur P. Davis' book, "From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers 1900-1960," named as one of the most outstanding books of 1974-75 by *Choice*, the influential book review magazine. Being singled out as one of two university presses featured in *The New York Times Book Review*. Having "The Wayward and the Seeking" reviewed on the front page of *The Washington Post's Book World*. Winning the National Archives contract through competitive bidding. Launching and maintaining the institute. Obtaining a \$300,000 five-year loan from the Ford Foundation, the only such loan awarded to a university press. . . .

### **Publishing Problems**

And the problems? Most can be summed up in one word: money. "The university had made a commitment to us for one sum to allow us to have a continuous publication schedule and then all of a sudden you had the energy crisis and it drove up the cost of manufacturing books," Harris explains.

"The average size book, say 3,000 copies, now costs about \$11,000," Mayo points out, "and that's only the manufacturing cost. In 1974, it probably cost \$6,000 to manufacture that same book."

Given such spiraling costs, the press was forced to reduce the number of books it could publish, and given the impact of inflation on the university as a whole, the university was unable to increase its commitment to funding the press. The result was that there was no way possible for the press to reach its original goal of publishing 20 books a year. Harris seems philosophical about such setbacks. "Finances are always a problem in any publishing organization," he says, "so I wouldn't want to say that that's peculiar to Howard."

Today, things certainly seem to be looking up for the press—financially and otherwise. With more books in production than ever before, the press' average sales—now at \$90,000 a year—are expected to double, says Mayo.

## **From Unsolicited Manuscript to Contract**

About 15-20 unsolicited manuscripts arrive at the Howard University Press each month.

Each is read by an editor who writes a preliminary report describing its contents and quality and making a recommendation as to whether the press should further consider it. If the recommendation is yes, the manuscript is sent to two outside readers who are influential scholars in the pertinent field. These scholars (for a \$100 honorarium each) write a report answering such questions as: "What is the importance of the thesis of the manuscript in your particular field?"

If the two outside readers believe the book should be published, the editor who originally read the manuscript sits down at a meeting with other editors and they come to some consensus about whether the book fits into the press' publishing objectives. If the answer is yes, they meet with the press' executive director, business manager and marketing manager and formally propose that the manuscript be published.

If they all agree it should, the decision must then meet the approval of the executive committee of the Commission on Management and Operations, the body established by Howard President James E. Cheek to oversee the press.

Once approved, a contract is drawn up giving the author a deadline and spelling out such matters as the advance he or she is to receive and the royalties to be earned once the book is published and begins selling. ("Advances have ranged from nothing to \$10,000, depending on the type of book," says William Mayo, the press'

business manager. "Royalties run between 5 and 15 percent of the list price of each book.")

"We don't have a formula for selecting the books we publish," explains Executive Director Charles Harris, "where all of a sudden we see a manuscript that meets this formula and we accept it. We attempt to look at each manuscript with a fresh view. I think all successful publishers are looking for the books that they think there's a public out there interested in and that are serious and that are making some kind of contribution to thought, to humankind." □

## **From Manuscript to Book**

The following publishing process is for a book that has a single thesis, focus and author. The process would be somewhat different for a book that is a collection of essays by diverse writers, and more so if the book is a reprint.

Once the author is under contract, he or she has the joyous and agonizing task of completing and/or polishing the manuscript while the editor assigned to the book stands ready with support, encouragement and advice.

The editor's most intensive responsibility begins once the author has turned in the completed manuscript. He or she reads the manuscript several times and by the third time has begun doing substantive editing (mainly cutting and rearranging.) He or she then works up a blueprint of suggested changes that are further necessary to improve the manuscript.

After the author looks at the blueprint and agrees with the editor's analysis of what needs to be done, the author undertakes the suggested

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## FROM MANUSCRIPT

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revisions. Sometimes the author will disagree with an editor's suggestions and refuse to make them. At that point, delicate negotiation is called for but if that fails the editor goes along with the author's wishes. "It is the writer's book," says Renée Mayfield, managing editor of the press, "and ultimately the weight of criticism will fall upon the writer. Editors can only suggest and let the author know that they are the author's liaison between him or her and the reader."

The revised manuscript is then returned and further editing begins, such as cutting, reorganizing, insuring consistency of narration and style. It is then sent outside to be copyedited for grammar, spelling and style, returned to the editor who goes through it again, and returned to the author who answers any further queries posed either by the editor or the copy editor. The editor incorporates any answers to the queries into the manuscript, goes through it one more time and it is ready for typesetting.

But the editor's role doesn't end there. He or she makes suggestions for markets for the book, reads galleys (long sheets of typeset copy), writes jacket copy, writes a factsheet, suggests reviewers who should receive the book and generally serves as the author's ally within the publishing house for as long as the book is in print.

The production process that will transform the copyedited manuscript into a book involves designing, typesetting, proofreading, printing and binding, explains Catherine Cauman, the press' production manager.

Usually one designer is contracted for the jacket, another for the inside of the book. The book gets three bids

each for typesetting, printing and binding. Suppliers are selected and production gets underway. First come galleys, then page proofs, then camera-ready copy—all of which must be proofread—and finally the blue line (a duplication of how the book will actually appear) which must be checked for errors.

Once the blue line is approved, the book is printed and is then ready to be bound. Boards wrapped in cloth and stamped on the spine with a title are fashioned around the pages, the jacket printed, end papers put on, and the jacket folded in place.

The book is now finished, ready to be shipped.

Marketing the book goes on before, during and after the production process. A marketing strategy starts taking shape as soon as the book is considered for publication. Typical components of that strategy: sending mailings about the book to wholesalers, libraries, bookstores and scholars who seem likely to be interested; sending bound galleys to book reviewers and to others who might provide quotes that can be used on the jacket and in ads; running ads in such publications as *Publishers Weekly*, the *Library Journal* and the journal of the College Language Association; attending conventions of the American Booksellers Association, the American Library Association and conferences of such groups as the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History to inform people about the book and take orders for it; having one of the three sales reps who work on a commission basis visit bookstores to get owners interested in stocking the

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Laudatory reviews for some of its books are beginning to put the press on the publishing map. (From a column in the *New York Times Book Review*: "... the Howard University Press subjects and authors show that there is ferment in black universities that can spill over into conventional trade book publishing.")

The press is steadily building up a "backlist," those previously published books with steady sales year after year. And its new Library of Contemporary Literature should further strengthen that list.

The possibility of additional publishing arrangements with foreign publishers lurks on the horizon. . . .

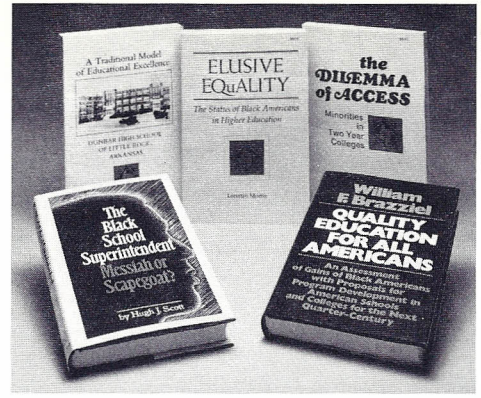
Ironically, at a time when publishing in general is facing hard times, the Howard University Press seems to be going full speed ahead. "I think this is a good time to expand," says Mayo, "because everyone else is indeed cutting back so there's more room in the marketplace for us right now. So I think that we do have an edge by expanding right now. We have an edge because we are indeed unique."

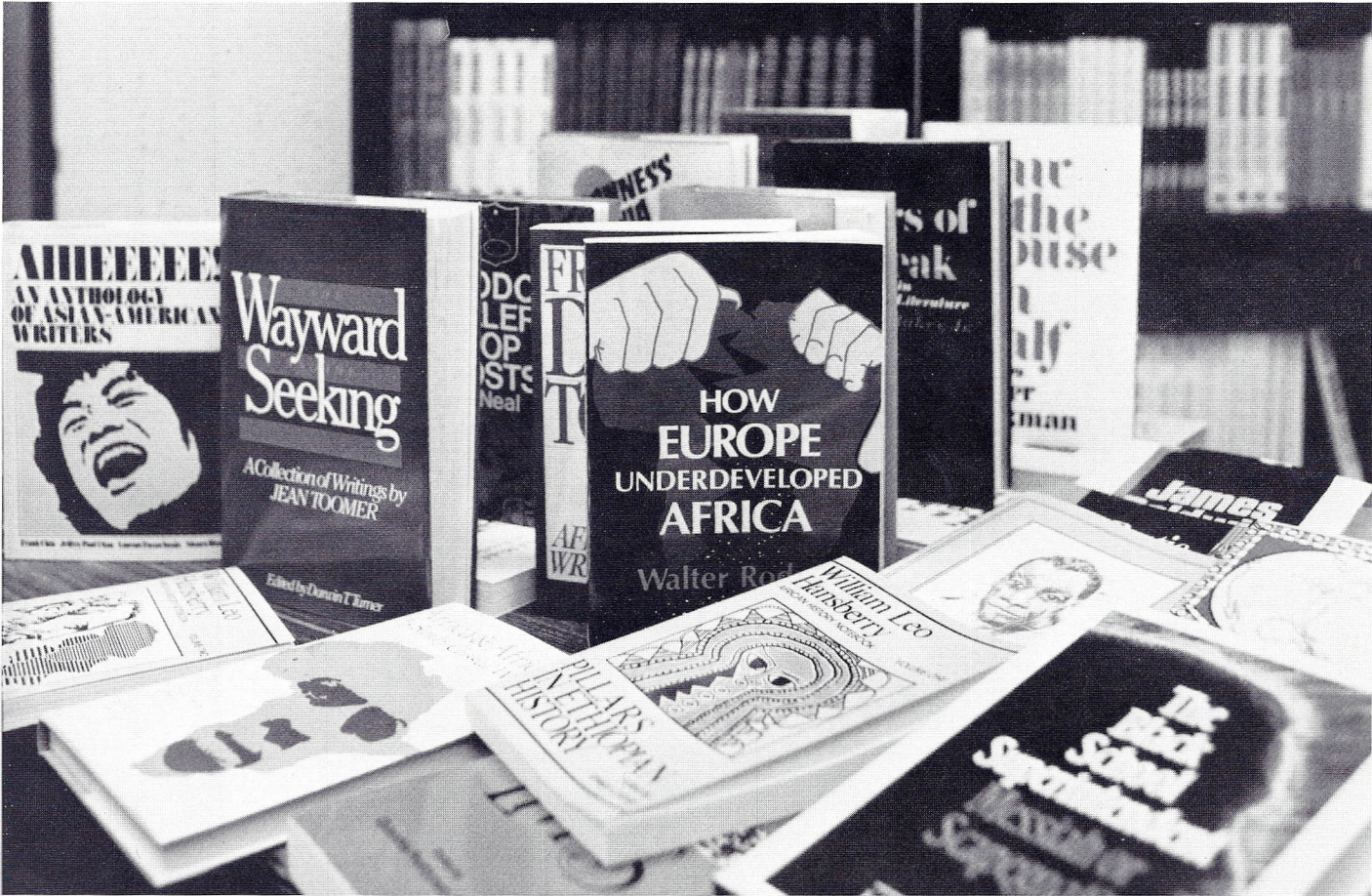
The more books the press publishes, Harris believes, the more assured will be its future. "We have had many problems because we are an embryonic organization," he says. "With something like a university press, it takes a long time before you actually have established your reputation so that you attract outstanding authors, so that you can convince the faculty members who have already published [elsewhere] that you can also publish them. It takes a while to build credibility."

It also takes a while to educate those in the university community about all the complex decisions and operations that go into book publishing.

### Manuscripts and Personnel

Some of the press' books evolved when a writer approached an editor with an idea; others were initiated by an editor who approached a writer or writers; still others resulted from unsolicited manuscripts





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## FROM MANUSCRIPT

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book; staging autographing parties and other events to publicize the book.

"Every book is different so every book is marketed differently," says Wanda Lofton, the press' marketing manager. "And you have to gear your marketing strategy to how well you think the book will sell." Thus a big book like "The Daemonic Genius of Richard Wright" will have a far more elaborate (and costly) marketing strategy than a book like "Profile of the Negro in American Dentistry" which for the most part is sold to dentists and dental libraries as well as some general libraries.

The aim of any marketing strategy is simple: to get people to buy the book. The hope is, of course, that readers will like the book, that reviewers will like the book, that word will spread that this book—which originated as a small glimmering idea in the back of some writer's or some editor's head—simply *must* be read. □

sent to the press. [See Box: From Unsolicited Manuscript to Contract.]

**T**he average person never knows what goes into a book," observes Iris Eaton, journals editor for the press, a woman who'd worked in publishing since 1946. "He may pick up a book and see that it's nicely bound and like the way it looks or what the critics say about it or the way it reads. But he never realizes what went into the whole process." [See Box: From Manuscript to Book.]

Those who are a part of that process at the Howard University Press have taken various paths to arrive at the institution's doorstep.

Harris had originally been interested in pursuing a journalism career, but in 1956 an Urban League staffer told him about a job opening for a research assistant at Doubleday. He applied, was hired and has been in the business ever since, becoming an editor at Doubleday, then moving on to John Wiley as a vice president and general manager of a subsidiary corporation, Portal Press, and then to Random House as a senior editor. The first contract he ever signed as an editor was with John Hope Franklin for the book, "The Emancipation Proclamation."

Mayo had previously worked in the business divisions of Simon & Shuster, Hill & Wang, Basic Books, Emerson Hall and Intext Publishers. Production manager Catherine Cauman worked in production on children's books at Viking Press. Eaton worked at American Heritage where she was associate editor for "The Horizon History of Africa" and has a long string of other publishing jobs behind her. Walden was an editorial assistant at Doubleday and was a writer on a book project about Black women commissioned by the Department of Education. Editor Gregory Kearse had been an editor for the Mutual Black Network [now Sheridan Broadcasting] and briefly held a sales position at Random House. Marketing manager Wanda Lofton was an assistant buyer at Bonwit Teller in New York City. Mayfield did promotion work for the Chamber of Commerce in Washington and was a copy assistant at a St. Louis advertising agency. Fay Acker, senior editor (part-time), is a former *Saturday Review* proofreader. Publicity assistant Donna Ennis came to the press directly after graduation from Boston University where she was a communications major. . . .

Typically, they all fell into publishing, true exemplars of why publishing is often called "the accidental profession." But while they may have fallen into publishing, they stayed in it because it somehow clicked. What the diverse members of the

Howard University Press staff seem to share are a predilection for creativity; a love of books and the written word; a recognition of the important role books play and can play—still—in shaping the way people think; a commitment to increasing the Black presence in publishing; an appreciation for the historic role and importance of Howard University.

Simply put, those on the staff of the press like what they do. There are strains at time, true. Rejecting a manuscript, for instance, can be almost as traumatic for them as it is for the disappointed would-be author. But such strains can't dim the excitement that inevitably breaks through when you ask them about their jobs. Perhaps no one more enthusiastically (or elegantly) embodies that excitement as well as Charles Harris.

"There are a lot of books that we have that are unlike what's being done by a large number of houses," he says. "I'm not necessarily talking about the race of the authors. I'm talking about a way of looking at things and looking at issues, those significant issues that affect every society.

"I wouldn't want to be going out to produce another book that's an extension of something Sigmund Freud said. Let somebody else do that. But if somebody wants to take a large look at how Sigmund Freud's philosophy impinges on the social problems in America—particularly as they affect the Black and the poor—I think that's an exciting thing. Or if somebody wants to look at how oppression is institutionalized with regard to those people who are disadvantaged in a particular society, and if it's dealt with in a serious way and has a sound, cogent presentation, I think that's exciting and interesting.

"That's a good way to live your life as far as I'm concerned: to be on the cutting edge of the real problems in society. I don't think there's a better way or a more exciting way to live your life if you like intellectualism." □