RESTON BLACK FOCUS

PURPOSES AND ACTIVITIES

JUNE 1974

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INTRODUCTION

Reston Black Focus is a group formed in 1969 by black Restonians who were concerned that black people participate as citizens of Reston and that black culture and life styles not be lost. Reston Black Focus serves as a framework for black cultural, educational, and civic activities.

This booklet describes the basic premises under which the organization was formed and the major activities which have been undertaken over the past five years. Reston Black Focus is a major influence on the development of Reston and on the educational and cultural atmosphere for black families in Fairfax County. We have been successful by alerting the Reston developers and the county government to the sensitivities of black people and the insufficiency of "standard operating procedures." These successes have proven that black people working together across economic and political lines, are uniquely qualified to contribute to the solution of the urban crisis in America.

BASIC PREMISES*

A new town is special to a black man. We support the Reston concept—a diverse integrated community where men can comfortably and meaningfully live, work, and raise families. The developer has indicated that Reston will be in large part what its citizens make it. Black Restonians have an even larger stake in the complete fulfillment of the Reston concept than do most citizens; the black family has limited choices. Black people must be able to look to "new towns" for housing, schooling, and recreational facilities unencumbered by the built in racism prevalent in "old" urban and suburban systems.

**Reston Black Focus—What? Why? How?*, Eli Blake, Mona Blake, Ed Sharp, Beverley Sharp, Rodney Smith, April 1969.

This special, personal involvement that we feel in the success of the Reston concept is accompanied by unique capabilities to participate in guiding Reston's development. Black people have seen and experienced the worst of urban environments. We have seldom participated in the decision making but have often lived in and with the results of laissez-faire and "standard operating procedures." From these experiences black people have developed keen sensitivities to the potential ramifications of certain types of expedient and "sound business" decisions. These sensitivities are useful guides for examining and if necessary proposing alternatives to the policies and practices of the developers and other groups active in the community.

We also know that the black middle class cannot avoid the negative ramifications of political and economic exploitation of black people. None of us have made it until all of us have made it. Thus, the conditions of low income families in Reston, of black people in the immediate vicinity, and in the entire metropolitan Washington, D.C. area are relevant to the successful development of this new town.

American society forces on the black citizen an awareness that he is something different, but offers few opportunities for establishing identity or collective worth. We have been robbed of our cultural traditions, and of the knowledge of our artistic, social, and scientific accomplishments—the natural basis for establishment of collective worth. We must assure that we are not invisible men with no past. We need to intensely explore our history, our culture, and the creation of this society. We must come to better understand ourselves and present to our children a non-racist view of who they are and their relationships to each other and to the positive development of America.

Black people working together on their unique problems does not mean opposition to anyone, anymore than Jewish, Italian, or Irish people working together. Reston Black Focus will, however, oppose decisions in the community which would allow it to drift back to the old patterns of neighborhood exclusiveness by race and class. These patterns have consistently destroyed the ability of American society to change and grow. A new town must, if it is to be truly open, have all kinds of people in positive encounters with each other—to lose their fears of the unknown other.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Reston Black Focus is a framework for expressing the black community's interests in a variety of activities rather than an exclusive organization. The Steering Committee is the policy and decision making body. It consists of four persons elected by the membership and the chairpersons of all operating committees. New operating committees may be started by any four members. The chairperson of the new activity is automatically a member of the Steering Committee. General meetings are held several times a year and the membership is also informed of general concerns and specific activities by means of a newsletter. All members are urged to support or expand current activities, start new activities or otherwise communicate with the Steering Committee and the general membership of Reston Black Focus.

ACTIVITIES

The activities of Reston Black Focus reflect the concerns of the membership and the needs of the community. Activities have been oriented to educational and cultural development, the rearing of black children, the development of the new town of Reston, and relationships among black Restonians.

Reston Black Focus has been active with the Fairfax County Schools:

- A training seminar on black history and racial attitudes in the schools was presented for elementary school teachers.

- Meetings were held with teachers, principals, and administrators at both elementary and secondary levels to discuss the needs and contributions of black school children.

- Testimony has been presented at Fairfax County School Board budget hearings supporting programs for special educational needs of black children.

- We were instrumental in persuading Fairfax County to establish a Human Relations staff working in the schools.

- We testified at the Governor's Conference against compulsory testing of all black school children in Virginia for the Sickle Cell trait. We were a major force in sensitizing the school system to the abuses in the state Sickle Cell legislation.

In April, 1969, Reston Black Focus planted a tree in memorium to Dr. Martin Luther King on the first anniversary of his assassination. Since that time our adult book discussion group has concentrated on black history, culture, and contemporary black life.

Reston Black Focus has held five Black Arts Festivals over the Labor Day weekend. Each festival has presented black culture and history to the Reston community through a several day program of our dance, music, poetry, painting, fashions, foods, crafts, and books. Beneficiaries of funds raised by this activity have included the Inner Voices, the Northern Virginia Music Center, the Howard University Mississippi Project (HUMP), the United Negro College Fund, and Africare. Throughout the year we have sponsored other educational and cultural programs including guest speakers such as Dr. Alyce Gullatee, the film series "Of Black America" (in conjunction with the Washington Plaza Baptist Church and the Vienna Teen Council), and the Paine College Choir (with the United Christian Parish).

Children's programs have been part of the Reston Black Focus activities for the past three years. Activities include educational and recreational field trips for three age groups. We have supported a summer school for 2-7 year olds featuring African music, dance, arts, and crafts.

Since its beginning Reston Black Focus has worked with Gulf Reston:

- We have encouraged the hiring of blacks in all areas of Reston's development with special emphasis on sales, property management, and planning.

- We have commented on the impact of racially stereotyped or "country club" advertising and convinced Gulf Reston to adopt a positive approach of advertising Reston as a place for all people.

- We have met with major contractors active in Reston to urge wider employment of blacks in the construction of this new town.

- Reston Black Focus encouraged Gulf Reston to hire black architects. As a result a black firm designed and monitored the construction of the Glenvale Condominiums.

- We have advised Gulf Reston of the importance of welcoming the employees of the United States Geological Survey to Reston and the needs to disperse moderate income housing throughout the community.

Reston Black Focus plays a very active role in Fairfax County:

- We have established relationships with many black community groups for mutual assistance on issues affecting us as blacks in Fairfax County, including the Mount Vernon Black Parents for Quality Education and the Fairfax County-wide Citizens Association.

- We have worked with or supported social action groups in the county such as the Fairfax Community Action Program, the Northern Virginia League for Progress, and the Saunders B. Moon Community Action Program.

- Reston Black Focus has provided person-to-person assistance to rural blacks and ex-coal miners moving to Reston as well as black families in need all over Fairfax County.

One of our major objectives has been "to maintain a swinging, non-uptight, friendly atmosphere in Reston." Reston Black Focus has sponsored dances, family picnics, open-house parties, pool parties, bridge parties, and poker parties open to all members and friends.