

RECEIVED 1/15/71

EBB TIDE AND THE HAPPY WARRIOR

* Leonidas H. Berry, M.S., M.D.
Clinical Associate Prof. of Med., U. of Ill.
Past President, National Medical Association

Mr. Chairman of the Board, honored guests, friends and members of the Council for Biomedical Careers; my very personal friends, ladies and gentlemen: First, I must express my very deep gratitude and humility to the members of the Board and Staff of the Council for Biomedical Careers; to my friends and to everyone who has made this affair, on my behalf, a possibility.

When I was first approached with the thought that I should be the honoree of a testimonial banquet on a cold night in January, my first reaction was that somebody had run out of ideas. When it was further disclosed that the Council for Biomedical Careers, a group which I helped in founding some 15 years ago, was to be the vehicle by which this idea of questionable strength was to be launched, my second thought was -- I know that 1970 has probably been the busiest and toughest year of my life, but I had not realized that I had missed so many Board meetings that I needed this kind of appeasement to get me back in line. I began to hear from Nate Willis, our very fine Board President who keeps the "lids on boiling black pots", and Lou House, our busy Production Manager of innovative dreams, "listen, doc, your pet career council is in great need and the gristmill for Black doctors and nurses in Chicago must not stop grinding. Besides, you have sailed the rugged black sea of medicine for such a long time that you are sometimes thought of as Black Barnacle Bill, the Medical Sailor Man. The Board says you must be the symbol of our struggle

* Address delivered at First Imotep Award Dinner of the Council for Biomedical Careers, Colonial House, Chicago, January 15, 1971.

and hopes for future years."

So, here I stand at ebb tide, obedient to your call. The first meaning of ebb is to "recede from the flood." When the tide is at its ebb, it flows towards the sea and there is peace and serenity in the shadows of the afterglow at sunset. The sea, the enormous sea, says the poet has rest for our desires and here I find, as it were, a place and a time for reflection. I am reminded that we are at the beginning of the Seventh decade of the 20th Century after the birth of Christ and today, January 15th, marks the 42nd year after the birth of the sainted Dr. Martin Luther King. As I stand here figuratively looking backward over the years, I am blessed with reasonably good health while many around me have not been so fortunate. I am cursed with unsatisfied and ~~ceasing~~ continuing ambition, probably out of proportion to personal capacity. I am disenchanted with the quality and direction of the health care delivery systems that I see for the Black and the poor. I smile through tears when I reflect upon the mountainous roadblocks against opportunities for Black men to make their contributions to the medical arts and sciences in my time.

I could be bitter for the discriminatory practices and bigotry that beset the ambitions of my youth and on up to the present day, especially by some of those authoritarians who can always be found in tax-exempt and tax-supported institutions. But at this time in my life I prefer to be the "Happy Warrior", for happiness comes from having a goal in life and aiming for the stars. Happiness is unremitting zeal to achieve and faith to overcome ^{the} formidable odds. Happiness is outwitting your adversary when you have done it with honesty and fairness. Happiness is

measuring your triumph attained by sharpened intellect and hard earned skills. Happiness is standing alone by the sea at ebb tide and watching a beautiful setting sun cast the lengthening shadow of a man and having the awareness of self-identity.

I find encouragement in the apparition of gazing into the after-glow at ebb tide, for gradually the glowing light in the sky appears to me to be the beginning of the crack of dawn of a better world and a better America over the distant horizon. beyond a devastating social revolution. Just as the social flood tide is reaching towards its crest in America, individuals like most of us -- we who are the "sheet rock" on which the American dream must find support or flounder, must also reach a crest. We must crest at the height of the tide. Medical careers? -- that has been the name of the game for some of us and the "supporting life raft" for all of us. We must concern ourselves with the question of who shall compose the manpower of this "bludgeoning-giant-of-an-industry" we call Health and Welfare in America. It can become a gigantic technological Frankenstein which makes more people live longer with less humanity, or it can be a much more meaningful quest for the good life with a co-partnership between technology and the blessings of human concern. Biomedical careers can become more increasingly a vehicle of integrated opportunity for the souls of Black folk, and of brown folk, and of white folk. (If you reject the homy expression -- f-o-l-k-s). The big industry of health services may soon be the biggest enterprise in our economy at its present rate of growth. As this time approaches, the work of physicians, nurses, psychiatrists, medical sociologists, economists, ecologists, nutritionists; and last, but not least, the professional medical administrators will play a major role

in directing the tide of history in the evolution of world culture.

There is a great need for more physicians. There is a greater need for Black physicians. There is a great need for ecologists and social scientists. There is a greater need for more Black ecologists and social scientists. There is a great need for more nutritionists for a better and more effective use of the world's limited food supply. There is a greater need for Black nutritionists in Chicago, in racially decadent Southern Illinois, in prosperous and rich America. We must face up to the problem of hunger and disease among the poor in our land, before we can do very much about their ignorance. To be poor and Black in America is to live on a peninsula jutting out into America's sea of plenty. To be poor and Black and sick is to have that land bridge cut away and to exist on a desolate island in America's sea of plenty. There is a great need to motivate, to inspire, to understand, to help, the youth of our time. There is a greater need on the part of Black Anglo-Saxons as well as white Anglo-Saxons to inspire, to understand, to help, the youthful masses of today's America. How can we, the so-called Black bourgeoisie, bridge not THE generation gap, but the gap of several cultural periods during the last 40 to 50 years of our rapidly changing times? I have special reference to the insensible widening breach between the Blacks who have and the Blacks who have not. In my opinion this is the greatest challenge of our time.

Black patriots at home and abroad have always met the challenge in every crisis of American history from Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey to the Boston Massacre; from conductor Harriet Tubman of the Underground Railroad, to the sailors of Admiral Perry on Lake Erie and from turning the tide of victory in the War of the Rebellion to San Juan Hill and Vietnam. Black

orators of my childhood would say with biblical authority, Ethiopia will again stretch forth her hands unto God and princes shall come out of Egypt. I have the faith that Black America will again rise to the challenge of today's great social revolution and again carry out its role of destiny, that of saving America -- only this time, it must be for ALL Americans.

It is my firm conviction that the pattern of my life and that of other physicians of my generation is an insufficient guide by which to cut the cloth of the lives of today's youth in the medical field, whether they are Black or white. I must continue to hope, however, that more and more of today's youth will accept the axiom that whatever they build that is substantial must be built to some extent, at least, upon the foundations which we were able to erect upon the building stones erected by our sainted forebears. I am still hopeful that more qualified and qualifiable Black youths will dedicate their lives to the "fire and flint" of America's medical crucible for Black professionals as others of my generation and I have done. There will still be "flint", but less "fire" for those of today's generation who will accept the challenge.

The challenge must be met because Black physicianships can become by default, if not otherwise, as vulnerable as Black apprenticeships for the "elite" building trades with the continued growth of bureaucratic medicine in today's world. The challenge must be met if we are to prevent or slow down the development of Hitlerian concepts of experimental medicine in today's experimental world. I hope that the predictions of Dick Gregory will never come true -- that the sacred remains of some poor mortal will have to be dissected into its component organs for purposes of burial with accepted dignity in the proper racial cemetery. You and your sons and

daughters deserve to have more equal opportunities in America for development and service in the health professions. I challenge the Black youth of this City and Country to seek the help of the Council for Biomedical Careers and others into directing your lives into the dedicated study and practice of the health professions. I suggest also that a good doctor may have one dimension, but that a great doctor must be multi-dimensional. There will always be the challenge and a duty to the ailing community as well as to the sick individual.

The epitome of the thoughts which I have tried to share with you tonight is expressed by the poet in the story of the builder, "an old man traveling a lone highway who came in the evening cold and gray, to a chasm vast and deep and wide. The old man crossed in the twilight dim, the sullen stream had no fears for him. But he stopped when safe on the other side and built a bridge to span the tide. "Old man," said a fellow pilgrim near, "you are wasting your strength with building here, your journey will end with the ending day, you never again will pass this way, you've crossed the chasm deep and wide, why build you this bridge at evening tide? "The builder lifted his old gray head, "Good friend, in the path I have come," he said, 'there followeth after me today, a youth whose feet must pass this way.' 'This chasm which has been as naught to me, to that ... youth might a pitfall be. He, too, must cross the twilight dim, Good friend, I am building this bridge for him.'"