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OVERVIEW ON PROBLEMS OF BLACK DEAF PEOPLE

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The opportunity to chair this Symposium on Problems of Black Deaf Persons is a blessing and a pleasure. There is no need to elaborate on the necessity of such, no need to give overdue congratulations to PRWAD for its sensitivity, and no need to say how honored I am to be selected to chair it. These are known facts. The real chairman of this symposium should be Frank Bowe, who planned and arranged the program before it was turned over to me. He was persuaded to serve on the panel. This partly prompted me to write the following word picture—a soliloquy which, I think, represents a universal feeling, especially of one who is in the minority —

Shall I join the group
Shall I not. . .
How will they take to me?
Tolerantly?
Why should I stand alone?
Alone within a crowd —
Am I not good enough for them?
I'll show 'em. . .
Why bother, it's easier to
Walk away.

Too many of us do walk away or avoid situations of which we are not sure, rather than approach them.

In my opinion, this symposium is a milestone in the direction toward understanding the black deaf citizens, their problems, their needs and their aspirations.

Time was when problems of black deaf persons were acknowledged and discussed only among themselves and a few sympathetic hearing friends. No one really seemed to care. This now has changed, although not too much. Very little research has been conducted in this area, very little recognition has been given to the problem and very little is happening to give black deaf

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individuals reasonable hope of being accepted as bona fide members of the deaf community-at-large.

Other areas of concern and problems are:

– Normally hearing parents, siblings and children of black deaf persons are not as involved as they should be.

– Neither they nor black deaf persons are aware of the progress made in education and rehabilitation of the deaf, or of the new manpower development projects and are virtually untouched by them.

– Integration has helped some, but social isolation remains.

– Society has delegated them to a role of inferiority thus they believe they are inferior.

– Black clubs for the deaf are led by untrained leaders who do not have the benefit of expert advice and guidance, nor the knowledge of where or how to seek it. The problems are overwhelming!

We do not intend to cover all aspects of the problems of black deaf people here but help create awareness of the most pressing, suggest some solutions and hopefully provoke many questions.

Now I shall turn the discussion over to the panelists.