



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Roxbury Community College
625 Huntington Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

May 12, 1986

This is not a news release or even a "letter to the editor." This is a personal appeal to you as men and women who determine what Boston area people will know about important events which happen in the city, from us as educators and fellow citizens.

More than 1,300 people participated in a conference at our college this month. Major political leaders, including a former Prime Minister and the wife of another former Prime Minister, as well as the current leader of the popular opposition in Haiti, addressed the Conference. The Haitian leaders brought word directly from the struggle in Haiti where they had been involved only a few days earlier in a demonstration where seven were killed and over fifty wounded by police. This was the first tri-lingual Caribbean Conference in history, and leaders of opposition groups in 12 nations met each other, some for the first time. Leading scholars from many universities took part, including Dr. Gordon Lewis from the University of Puerto Rico, author of the most widely-read books on the politics of the Caribbean. Boston's local Caribbean communities came out by the hundreds -- English, Spanish and Creole-speaking -- and the evening meeting on Haiti, with over 1,000 in attendance, was one of the largest primarily black political gatherings in the city this year. This was no merely academic conference. The political leaders present hammered out a joint statement of solidarity on such topics as Haiti, the invasion of Grenada, Nicaragua, the debt crisis and U.S. policy toward Cuba. Details of a major war-game exercise simultaneous with the conference involving 20,000 U.S. soldiers and 1,000 from the English-speaking Caribbean were made known by speakers from that area, including a mock invasion of Grenada carried out on May 2, facts still not made known by U.S. media. Yet none of this was deemed "newsworthy". There was no coverage by Boston's media.

Although we had no media staff or budget, we did our work. More than 150 news releases were sent, including several each to major radio, TV and newspapers, assuming we should send to the foreign desk, the city desk (for community interest) and the education editor. Several follow-up phone calls were made to each media group. This is not our first experience of this kind. Last year, nearly 1,000 persons attended an "Africa Solidarity Day", including a protest demonstration against Apartheid and the raising of \$3,000, plus major speakers. Not one word about the RCC event, though a demonstration by 40 people at Harvard the same week was widely covered. We have likewise seen broad coverage of a number of smaller conferences on topics ranging

from Ukrainian famine memorials in Jamaica Plain to promotional material for symposia at Harvard scheduled for next fall. Are we to assume that your lack of coverage is due to (a) discrimination against events of interest to people of color, especially those from low-income groups and institutions; (b) bias in favor of elite institutions of higher education and against the low prestige community colleges; (c) political censorship of ideas and events which lie outside the mainstream; (d) an inability to cover events which do not neatly dovetail with existing "news categories" or the current "news fads"? We strongly suspect that all of the above are involved. We also doubt that any of this is due to your personal biases, or even those of your managers, owners or advertisers. Rather, we think the biases are built into a system which regularly cheats the American public of its rightful access to a wide variety of information. It is also unfortunate that all news media seem to use the same exclusive and market-motivated criteria for newsworthiness. There seems no room for variety. No wonder the news is so bland and boring.

We ask you to respond to us on this matter. Is it possible, even now, to let our city know that this major event took place at Roxbury? How can we get your attention in future so that other events of importance to all working people, especially people of color, at least see the light of day in Boston media? We enclose a short summary article about the Conference in the hope that you might use it, or at least you yourselves might entertain the possibility that you failed to let Boston know about something important.

Sincerely,

Thomas Reeves
Chairman, Department of History and Social Sciences;
Chairman, Caribbean Conference Committee
(for the whole committee of thirty faculty and students)