

Harold
enclosed is the Corsican experience in two printed versions.
The story from the National Observer was too inaccurate to
be of any real value. The Players version is a bit overstated
but they considered their readership I suppose.
I'll keep in touch.

les



decided to omit from memo for reasons length but
absence SDEF staff

PLAYERS

VOLUME ONE
NUMBER TWELVE

FOR THE WIDE

ST

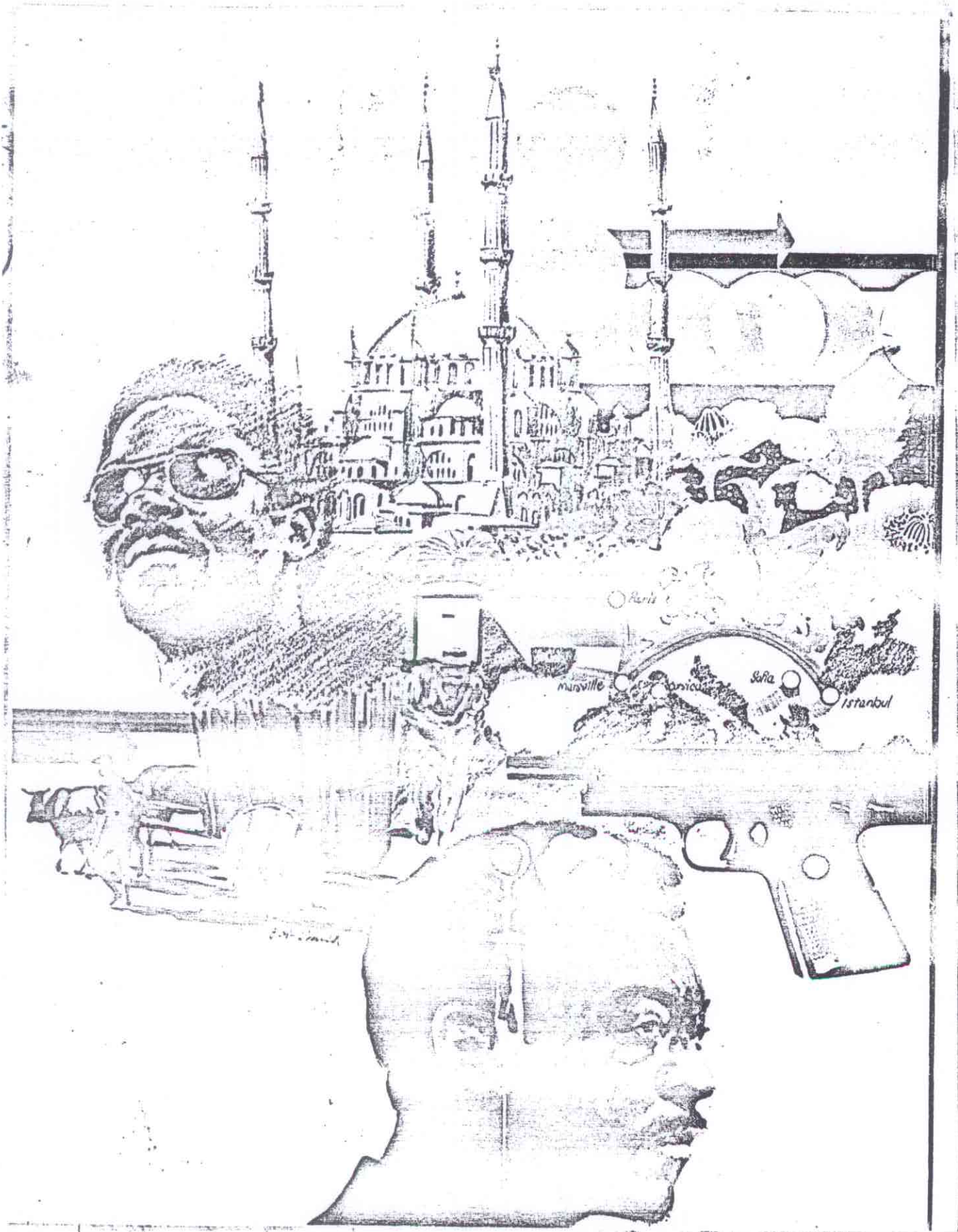
**FIGHTING TO KILL:
THREE DEADLY
MARTIAL ARTS
BY EXPERTS
KARATE, TAI CHI,
CAPOEIRA**

**ON THE HEROIN
TRAIL
WHAILES PAYNE
BLACK PULITZER
PRIZE WINNER**

**CAN THE
BOSTON CELTICS
BEAT THE HARLEM
GLOBETROTTERS?
DON'T BET ON IT!**

**HOW DOES IT
FEEL TO RUN A
USO TRIP?
BY HORSE**

**FROM SEXY SLAVE
TO FOXY LADY
AN INTIMATE
PICTORIAL FEATURE
STARRING
MS. GAYE THOMAS**



It seemed a typical June day in the rural village on the outskirts of Istanbul, Turkey. The setting sun cast an incandescent glow on the poppy fields below which stretched endlessly in all directions.

A rugged, square-built figure clad in a dark sweatshirt and dungarees crouched in a field between the poppy rows, half-hidden by the foliage.

About 30 feet away, another figure glanced apprehensively about from time to time, simultaneously fingering the 30.06 which he held at the ready.

Carefully wadding up a scribbled, four-by-five inch piece of rice paper upon which he had spat several times, the crouching figure tucked the wad into the corner of his wallet and signaled the gunbearer that he was ready to go. The rice paper he had stashed would later be decoded and added to the growing body of confidential information. Swiftly and silently the two made their way through the fields to a waiting jeep. There was a secret mission and the penalty for an error in timing or judgment could be death.

Arriving safely at their hotel, an hour's drive away over back roads, the two unwound over cognac and solemnly plotted their next move.

If this sounds like an episode from a John LeCarre thriller, you're close. But it's real, and the main character—Les Payne—is black.

Alabama-born Payne is a veteran re-

porter for *Newsday*, a Long Island newspaper. He and fellow newsmen, Bob Greene and Knut Royce comprised a team which set out to penetrate the inter-continental heroin conspiracy and to come up with answers which had eluded U.S. narcotics agents for years. Namely, who was responsible for the torrential flow of heroin into the veins of U.S. junkies?

Armed with a Berlitz course in Turkish, a French-speaking interpreter, and



**Intrigue . . . suspense, the
exhilaration of the chase
. . . the search . . . as night
and day hold strange shadows
that may, at any moment,
become dangerous forces,
threatening the survival of . . .**

LES PAYNE

by EMILY GIBSON

ILLUSTRATION BY BOB SMITH

enough artillery to raise more than eyebrows, Payne and his companions entered the multi-billion dollar underworld in which the sacred and the profane have joined in an unholy alliance for profit. It is a world of bribery and corruption. A world in which they were forced to live by their wits—sometimes as hunters, sometimes as game.

In what turned out to be the better part of a year spent criss-crossing Europe, the newshounds put their noses to the heroin trail. They interrogated often-hostile Turkish farmers who grow the bulk of opium-producing poppies; relentlessly dogged the footsteps of smugglers who spirit the raw opium to Southern France where it is converted into heroin for illegal sales; and chased Corsican mobsters from Marseilles to Munich in an attempt to get a handle on the clandestine operations of the Mafia.

Newsday published their findings in a 32-part series of articles which were later compiled into a paperback bearing the title, *The Heroin Trail*. Last Spring, the series netted a Pulitzer Gold Medal public service award for the newspaper, and individual citations for the trio responsible for its contents.

To a journalist, the maximum stroke is a Pulitzer Prize. Les Payne's citation marks only the second time in the 58-year history of the Pulitzer that a black journalist has been so honored.

turn to page 76

LES PAYNE

from page 67

In a real sense, the Heroin Trail was a grand, but dangerous adventure. The job of the reporters was to get information, using whatever tactics the situation called for. And the tactics employed by them ran the gamut from "cloak and dagger" to "Harlem Bunco." Whatever the game, they knew too well that the stakes were high.

At one point early on in the investigation, the reporters were able to make contact with opium smugglers through an enterprising Turkish farmer whose primary concern was a quick buck. Posing as buyers, they agreed to accompany the smugglers from Turkey to the Bulgarian border where arrangements for the transaction were to be finalized. At the border the two groups parted, agreeing to meet later in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital.

In retrospect Payne says, "It was a hairy couple of days. When we got to Sofia, government controls were really tight and we had a tail on us wherever we turned."

Because they had failed to make contact with the smugglers at the appointed time and place, they were forced to double back to Marseilles in order to prevent their "cover" from being blown.

In France they fared better. One assignment was to secure a photograph of a captain in the French Secret Service who, after having cut his teeth as a Gestapo agent, then moonlighted as one of the country's leading opium exporters.

Since the elusive captain operated under a veil of secrecy in both occupations, the only way to get the goods on him was to come up with a scheme which surpassed his own ingenuity. Payne and company settled on Bunco—a con game which had been perfected into an art on the streets of Harlem.

They put the word out through the French underworld that they were the trustees of a will which left a large sum of money to the captain. All that was required of him was that he present photographs and other documents to prove that he was the lawful recipient.

It worked. The captain's wife contacted them immediately and arranged a meeting. But until the moment she appeared with the documents, the suspense of not knowing who would show, or with what, provided some anxious moments.

"Anxious moments" became the norm during the nearly 7 months long journey through 12 foreign countries. For Les Payne, however, there would be more anxious moments before reaching the end of the trail. Towards the end of the investigation, Payne decided to go to Corsica to delve deeper into the background of an official of the Corsican government who was also one of the

island's top-level exporters of illicit drugs.

The official had protection from all sides. His elected position guaranteed him respect, if not admiration, from a large segment of Corsica's non-criminal element and his pivotal position in the Mafia's inner circle made him untouchable.

"You'd be crazy to go there," warned a fellow journalist in Marseilles as he recounted an incident which involved a well-known Corsican photographer who had narrowly escaped death at the hands of hoodlums for daring to invade the official's privacy. The warning only served to enhance the challenge.

Payne has a way of lapsing into low key when it comes to talking about his exploits. But even in low key, his mission to the heartland of the Mafia conjures up scenes from "Godfather."

Taking along a miniature Minolta camera and an interpreter, the journalist checked into a hotel not far from a rendezvous point for second-level drug dealers which masqueraded as a restaurant. Then he got in touch with a pre-selected informant and explained the nature of his mission. The would-be informant copped out: "Look. Let's get one thing straight. It's too dangerous."

Payne ignored this warning too. Left to his own devices, he soon found what he was seeking.

Seated at a table in an outdoor plaza with the interpreter, Payne was pretending to read a newspaper while in fact snapping pictures of one of the official's clandestine operations. Suddenly he realized that simultaneously, three shrouded figures atop a nearby building had a movie camera trained on him.

Survival instincts took over as Payne and the interpreter fled through a maze of alleys and back doors to what they thought was the relative safety of their rooms.

Back at the hotel, however, the desk clerk—a middle aged woman, obviously distraught—informed them that a sinister looking man had taken up a perch on the balcony across the street from the hotel and had been inquiring into their activities.

Sure enough, when Payne peeked out through a slit in the curtains, "There was a dude right out of the *Godfather*. Oily black hair, long sideburns, mustachioed and holding a pair of opera glasses."

That was enough for him. Hastily throwing their few belongings together, Payne and the interpreter made their way to the airport where they jetted back to France to join their companions and wind up their adventurous assignment.

At the culmination of the investigation, the reporters were able to expose the facts surrounding the failure of domestic plans to curtail opium production in Turkey; name 54 of the leading foreign narcotics exporters, and lend

valuable assistance in fingering a number of U.S. sources whose collaboration makes possible the growing menace of heroin addiction.

Heroin Trail was Les Payne's kind of story. Not only did it have international intrigue, but the young Alabama-born journalist saw it as a way of paying his dues. He was aware that "heads were gonna roll when the public found out what was really happening with the drug scene," but it didn't matter. What did matter to Payne was that "The covers were pulled on some of the King Pins who make so much black death possible on the streets of Harlem."

Not long after his return to the U.S. from the heroin investigation, another "big story" was breaking. Millionaire newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst had just been abducted in Northern California by a mysterious group calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army. A new wave of hysteria had hit the country. Police and FBI had unleashed a manhunt for Donald "Cinque," DeFreeze—militant black escaped prisoner and reputed leader of the SLA—which was unparalleled either by the "witch hunts" of the McCarthy Era of the '50s or the coast-to-coast purge of the Black Panther Party of the late '60s.

Payne couldn't resist the story. Arriving in California a few months after the Hearst kidnapping, he charted the exploits of the SLA up to the time of their entrapment last May 17 in a South-Central Los Angeles ghetto hideaway. It was there that DeFreeze and five followers met their deaths in a blazing inferno.

The nature of the story dictated more time and latitude than *Newsday* was willing to expend, so Payne took a 7 months leave of absence in order to write a book on the subject. The book—his first—is entitled *CrawlSpace: the Rise and Decline of the Symbionese Liberation Army*.

Payne is a hard man to convince of anything unless all the facts are laid bare. He was never able to accept the making which branded Donald "Cinque" DeFreeze as either a police patsy or a mad man, or the SLA as mere terrorists for the sake of terrorism. About midway through his book, Payne, in a letter to a friend wrote:

"It dawned on me early this morning that i am going to be changed by the experience of this book. i have been re-reading DeBray and George Jackson and Lenin and Ché and Marx and Fanon, and not only do i see what the SLA was attempting with their undernourished politics, but the blueprint is becoming clearer to me than ever before . . ."

Scheduled for publication in the Fall, *CrawlSpace* deals with the advent of the SLA both in terms of the mountain of myths and facts surrounding it, and also from the standpoint of a political analy-

"We always look for our actors to commit that sweet act of larceny, that nod, that brief moment of defiance, that flashing of the black sign."



sis which has not been previously attempted by myriad other writers.

Payne joined *Newsday's* staff in 1969 as a \$160-1-week "leg man," after spending more than 5 years in the Army writing for the USIS. Now, at nearly triple the salary, he sits on the national desk, in charge of special features on minority affairs. He has not, however, joined that caravan of black writers on white dailies who came into journalism only "to land respectable jobs and use their press passes to get into rock concerts."

Over the years, the prize-winning writer has developed a pattern. Whether he is dissecting the politics of the SLA or the Black Panther Party; covering the carnage of Attica's cesspools or exposing the perversion of forced sterilization on black women, Payne sticks to the socially relevant.

Payne's news stories evidence the thoroughness of his research but social commentary is his forté. His searing brand of satire has developed into an art which rivals masters like H.L. Mencken. His viewpoint pieces have been printed in both *Newsday* and *Encore*, and are generally considered radical. Payne likes to call them authentic.

Prompted by Angela Davis' appearance before the recent Senate confirmation hearings on Nelson Rockefeller's nomination as Vice President, Payne penned the following opinion:

"It somehow seems appropriate to these cynical eyes that with a half-wit driving, a murderous dollar-baron should be in the rumble seat of this Republic . . . It's like having the curtains pulled on the marionette's string jerker. Rockefeller should be confirmed, not because he is not the butcher of Attica, but because there must be no buffers, no mirrors to deceive the people about the real intentions of this oil-drum republic.

"Rockefeller represents the worst instincts of the republic—but those in power represent the worst instincts in mankind. Those instincts can be better attacked by attacking a Rockefeller head-on, as opposed to attacking a surrogate Laird or Percy or even a Ford."

Coming from a man who started out as a speech writer for Gen. William Westmoreland, these words might sound contradictory were it not for Payne's metamorphosis over the years to a point where he is at peace with himself.

Payne, who had always wanted to be a writer, joined the Army in the pre-Watts '60s like many other college-trained blacks who were unable to find jobs in private enterprise. "We hadn't thrown enough rocks nor burned down enough buildings at that time."

At any rate, he found himself "hiding out in the Army's airforce artillery unit, practicing shooting down planes on the

range" when his luck changed. Not unlike the Biblical Saul on the road to Damascus, Payne received his calling as a writer. His conversion, however, was to come later.

The Vietnam war was in full swing, as was the domestic anti-war movement. The Army needed image-makers to restore the glow to its tarnished halo. "At that time if you had English anywhere in your background, they would summon you forth and anoint you an Information Officer."

Payne has a disarmingly subtle sense of humor which pops up sporadically, animated by a smile that lights up his darkly-handsome East African features, but somehow never reaches his eyes.

"They explored my background at the University of Connecticut and sent me to the Department of Defense Information School. After a nine-week crash course, Whammo! I became a journalist."

Among other things, Payne's job was to write speeches for Gen. William Westmoreland and various members of the Army's hierarchy. On the one hand, being an Army propagandist gave him a chance to master the rudiments of writing, while on the other, it was the opposite of what he really wanted to do.

To a principled man, the act of making the Army's embattled Chief of Armed Forces in Saigon come off like an unsung hero at a time when the American public was getting a pretty bad impression of the war was about as easy as making Alabama's George Wallace come off as an integrationist. "Writing speeches for Westmoreland is the kind of prostitution that I had become accustomed to at that point in my life."

The words are matter-of-fact, but the prominent, intense eyes convey the depth of Payne's feelings about this period his life.

Payne is a proud man. Not pompous. Just proud. Prostitution—if indeed his Army duties could be called that—went against his grain. His values were in conflict with his own view of what was principled and what was not.

This internal, covert conflict gave rise to an overt kind of bitterness which Payne discovered was not easy to make peace with. "I was just so goddamned pissed off at the world, I used to walk around angry."

It was during this period—around 1963—that Capt. Leslie Payne would sit at the officer's club at Ft. Bliss and, without concern for rationale, proclaim the solution to the republic's problems. Namely, that every black person should march out and shoot three whites. "People used to think I was crazy. I figured that if there were 25 million blacks in this country, there would probably be 25 million dead blacks when it was all over, but there would also be 75 million

turn to page 88

ing the gun is stupid," said Mr. Manley, "and we shouldn't follow your mistakes. Guns wiped out the Indians in your country and there is nothing glorious about that. Freedom of expression is most difficult for a new government to face, though the government must remain an instrument through which people can express themselves even if they are critical. But when things which are in themselves evil come about, they



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should not be encouraged. That's social suicide." The inference, of course, is that the government decides what is evil and what is not.

But despite the seemingly insidious dictatorial air which permeated the proceedings, one got the feeling that this man was trying at the bottom of it all to keep the interest of the people—his people—at heart, even though that may sound contradictory on the surface.

Still, it was difficult to believe that the Prime Minister was unaware of the monopolistic activities of the reported Jamaican movie mogul, since we were told by one government official that the man is Manley's close friend and confidant.

At least one member of the American group invited to participate in the festival, Raymond St. Jacques, who was producer/director/star of "Book of Numbers" and who is readying another film to star The Jackson 5, objected unabashedly to Manley's stated intentions to censor any possible movie scripts before allowing them to be filmed in Jamaica.

"I would not produce a film in Jamaica," insists St. Jacques, "or any place else where my script had to be censored before I shot it. If I were to do a film in Jamaica, I'd be bringing money into the country. The film would not necessarily have to be premiered or even shown in Jamaica. It would be shown throughout the rest of the world. If the Jamaicans didn't want to show the film, I doubt if the overall gross income would be affected that much. But by no means would I tolerate any kind of tampering with my script."

Barbara Blake, the Jamaican lady who put the festival together, is in basic agreement with her Prime Minister's stand on censoring films. "I don't really like films with guns and violence," she says. "They're destructive. But I don't approve of the fact that Jamaica imposed a ban on the showing of such films. Jamaicans are very much a movie-going public. I'm a typical Jamaican and at age 15 I thought I would never be able to get a good man because I was not white and all the beautiful, successful people were the whites I saw in the movies. So I can see how a young boy can go to a movie and suppose he can be a hero by becoming a gunman. So I think I'm in agreement with the Prime Minister if his reasoning is that we should concentrate on making good films."

It became immediately evident to this writer that in addition to being Black. I am, like the vast majority of my Brothers and Sisters in this country, far more American than I perhaps care to discuss. However, being in a foreign country brings this feeling quickly to the fore. And it was my basic American nature which was offended by the bla-

LES PAYNE

from page 77

dead whites."

Payne has gotten over that kind of anger "either with age or sense or whatever."

"The only question I face today is whether or not I'm authentic." Payne believes that America clings to the image of inauthentic blacks "who run away from their experiences, shuffle when their hearts call for a war dance, and feign love for their oppressor when they really want to rip his liver out."

Authenticity, in Payne's view, can be smuggled into whatever one does "whether it's writing, theatre, or ditch-digging." It can be the kind of thing that makes a William Marshall or a James Earl Jones stand out on the screen when they transcend the pale dialogue of white script writers and pump black strength into characters intended to be weak or self-hating. "You know, black audiences love it. We always look for our actors to commit that sweet act of larceny, that nod, that brief moment of defiance, that flashing of the black sign."

Towards the end of his military career, Payne decided to smuggle in some authenticity on his own. Under the pen-name of Z.E. Kumo, he edited and published a magazine called *Uptight*. *Uptight* was dedicated to the authentic point of view. Its name derived from the original meaning of the word—the one Stevie Wonder had in mind when he christened it and sent it souling into black America's vocabulary.

As an opinion journal, *Uptight* analyzed contemporary domestic and international problems in terms of their relationship to black and "third world" people. It provided a forum for young, gifted writers, photographers and poets whose voices had not been heard, and whose works articulated experiences which had been distorted, misunderstood and neglected by the Establishment-dominated media.

It was in *Uptight's* pages that the budding genius of Payne's style blossomed. His tongue-in-cheek satire struck at the heart of the Republic, exposing its evils and making light of its inconsistencies. At least four years before the dams burst on Watergate, Payne was penning potshots at the "political sleight of hand and confessed mediocrity in high places" which predicted the fall of the Nixon Administration and provided prophetic insight into the Ford/Rockefeller duo.

Payne's dream of the future is to be able to revive *Uptight* to fulfill the black community's need for a credible organ. "Right now it's very exciting to be alive. I see this an era when black writers are going to be able to create a new tradition in journalism."

Without question, Les Payne is the prototype of that new tradition. ●

turn to page 90