

## Roy Meachum



# Apology

8/16/89

In a commentary piece on the page opposite this one, attorney Willie Mahone takes me to task.

According to Washington County Sheriff Charles Makes, the Frederick lawyer was not "clapped" in handcuffs as I wrote last Wednesday. Nobody was when protesters appeared for a Ku Klux Klan rally in Hancock late last month.

Having set the record straight, now I come to "apology," a word that has nothing to do with saying I'm sorry. It derives from the Greek *apologia* which means in English "a defense." I prefer to offer apology in this context as an explanation.

The source for my misunderstanding of what took place in Hancock was Mr. Mahone himself. At one point in our conversation he made reference to being in the presence of "40 Klansmen armed with clubs." He mentioned being handcuffed; perhaps he meant in a hypothetical way. The impression left with me was that he had been physically restrained. My impression was wrong.

But then according to the Washington County sheriff and one of his officers, the Kluxies were scarcely "armed with clubs."

Sheriff Makes said that upon his arrival he was told one Klansman had been apparently posted as a guard to the rally site. The sheriff was told the man had a club in his hand that was dangling by his side. Both the official and an officer said, otherwise, they saw some sticks stuck in belts, but none brandished.

The law enforcement problem in Hancock, Sheriff Makes said, was keeping Mr. Mahone and his fellow protesters away from the rally. "We had no trouble with the Klan," the sheriff said. "They acted very businesslike. They held their meeting and then dispersed."

When asked to break down the crowd gathered that day, Sheriff Makes estimated the Kluxies as approximately 30, supported by maybe 40 more ("mostly from Pennsylvania and West Virginia"). The protesters' numbers were about the same. How many from Frederick? "Ten or 15," the sheriff said.

In his commentary, Mr. Mahone quite accurately points out that I have consistently denigrated the real threat posed by today's Bedsheet

Brigade. I oppose the tactic of anti-Klan demonstrations as lending importance to meaningless human beings who seek to give themselves meaning by spouting hate.

On the other hand, I did not rush to criticize the groups that gathered in Baker Park on July 1. I wrote the August 9 column only after a number of people had passed along disturbing stories about what had happened that day.

As "an officer of the court," attorney Mahone should have recognized in his letter the "calls to violence" made in printed fliers distributed in the community days before the Baker Park anti-Klan demonstration. The fliers were cited in my column.

On my part, I will not construe Mr. Mahone's silence on that subject as constituting his endorsement of the violence, urged by the fliers.

I am somewhat at a loss to understand why he attributes my attitude toward the Klan to my "unique cultural ethnic status." In fact, the NAACP and most other leaders of Frederick's black community disagree with Mr. Mahone's tactics of confrontation.

I will accept as the hyperbole natural to his profession as a defense attorney that in his letter Willie Mahone, in effect, accuses me of being a white racist. Since the Klan pronounced some months ago it judged me black, I now find myself under attack from both sides. In my business, we call that balance.

In fact, I view the current narcotics epidemic as far more threatening to blacks than the hollow KKK spouting hate by rote.

Part of my frustration with Mr. Mahone derives from a deep-seated feeling that the energies expended on battling noisy bedsheets should be devoted to fighting the war on drugs from his position inside the black community.

From conversations, I know that the Frederick lawyer appreciates this column's attempt to help the community understand that existing anti-narcotics laws are racist.

The General Assembly may consider itself color blind. But it consistently excuses buyers (mostly white)

while preaching and passing ever tougher bills against sellers (generally black).

As I have written frequently, this approach not only smacks of prejudice but it dooms the war on drugs to defeat. The growing appetite for narcotics among society's more affluent segments guarantees a never-ending supply of dealers from the ranks of the nation's impoverished, all too often black.

For examples, we need travel no farther than Frederick's housing projects. The city police's Operation "Crack" Down continues to exceed its target of averaging one arrest every day, most of them taking place in and around the projects.

While I promise to go on waging war against the unfair laws, it would seem logical that Mr. Mahone and his colleagues in the anti-racism struggle could find the time and means to help the projects' good people who want their streets, sidewalks and children drug-free.

Here is the potential for true human kindness that can be exercised best by their own people. Whites are automatically suspected in the projects as probable law enforcement or other representatives of authority.

Through his combined status as a native Frederick "home boy" and as a defense attorney, Mr. Mahone has unrivaled contacts in the black community, particularly among the young. In our conversations, I have been impressed by his intelligence, perceptivity and capacity for communication.

In my view, Willie Mahone is uniquely qualified to formulate and create a series of positive programs that could make a real difference in the local struggle against racism. I regret our disagreements, but still consider myself his admirer and a friend.