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April 27, 1972

Black Southern Baptist
Named Teacher of the Year

By Beth Hayworth

WASHINGTON (BP)--A young black Baptist from North Carolina is "wowing" official Washington with a naturalness and old-fashioned idealism that have many persons applauding enthusiastically and staring in amazement--some with tears in their eyes.

He is James ("Jay") M. Rogers Jr., a history teacher at Durham High School. Rogers, 31, has been named 1972 Teacher of the Year in a nationwide poll conducted by educators and public school authorities.

Mrs. Julie Nixon Eisenhower, substituting for President Nixon, presented awards to Rogers in a special White House ceremony. Rogers is the first black teacher to be honored in the 21-year history of the oldest ongoing program honoring the nation's outstanding classroom teachers.

Commenting upon his selection for the honor, Rogers said he hoped it was not because he "happens to be black." He went on to say that he hoped the selection was an endorsement of his "idea of listening to young people."

Rogers was named the national Teacher of the Year by a panel of educators for his "superior ability to inspire a love of learning and intellectual curiosity in students of varying backgrounds and skills." The program is sponsored by Encyclopaedia Britannica, the Ladies Home Journal and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Rogers has been a teacher for only two years, making his nomination by his peers all the more significant. He was first named Teacher of the Year for North Carolina, representing all the "good teachers" in North Carolina schools, before receiving the national honor.

During a four-day visit to the nation's capital, Rogers has been honored by the sponsors and other educators and top government and congressional leaders in a number of receptions, luncheons and dinners. In addition to a reception in his honor at the White House, he has been on television and radio and his speeches will be broadcast worldwide over the Voice of America.

Rogers is a member of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., where he sings in the choir and is counselor to a youth group. His church is affiliated with three Baptist conventions, including the Southern Baptist Convention.

In an interview with Baptist Press, the young man said he was called on often to speak in other churches. His subject, at the request of the churches, is usually on Christian principles and racial issues and on communicating with young people.

Sounding every bit like a Southern Baptist lay minister in a youth revival, Rogers talks eagerly about his love for students, his commitment to education, his desire "to open doors to all the young people I can," and his dedication to "preaching" moral values in the classroom.

"In these days someone must get into the public education system who cares. I know what education has meant to me. I know what reading has meant to me. Therefore I am a teacher," Rogers declared simply at a press luncheon and conference at the National Press Club in downtown Washington.

This particular luncheon was attended by Health-Education-Welfare Secretary Elliott Richardson, who was present also at the White House ceremony the day before. J. M. Rogers Sr., sitting at a table with young Rogers' mother and three sisters, wept openly as he heard Richardson and a top Pentagon official praise the young man and thank his parents for "giving him to us."

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"We were poor," Jay Rogers said of his background, "but love was always prominent in our family." He called attention to his father's tears and said "the whole family cried easily because we care so much for each other." Though his parents lack much formal education--both are unskilled workers in Durham--"Education was important in our family," he said.

Rogers, chairman of the social studies department at Durham High, graduated from North Carolina Central University and has a master's degree from Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. Before doing graduate work he served in the U.S. Air Force as a lieutenant and then worked for three years in community action projects in four North Carolina counties. It was during this period while working with high school dropouts that he made the decision to be a teacher.

At Durham High, Rogers is one of 20 black teachers in a total faculty of 80. In addition to teaching four classes of American history, Rogers and a white teacher, Mrs. Ernestine Jones, are teaching the school's first course in black studies, a course that is as popular with white students as with blacks, according to the principal, Earl R. Hedrick Jr.

"This man is a rock," Hedrick says of Rogers. He explained that Rogers has a lot of influence with students who are thinking about dropping out of school, even with some who are "bordering on reform school and getting into trouble."

Hedrick continued, saying that "When Jay Rogers spends time with them, things happen--like magic. Suddenly out of nowhere, there's talk of making up lost credits--and of college."

Hedrick replied with a quick, sharp "no" when asked if he thought Rogers was selected for the national honor because he was black.

"He loves kids; that is his biggest asset," he declared proudly during the press luncheon. Hedrick went on to point out that since joining the faculty, Rogers has visited in the home of every one of his students.

During his speech at the Press Club, Rogers told about an assembly program where the black students applauded only blacks and the white students applauded only whites. Returning to the classroom, he wrote on the chalkboard: "I hate Niggers and crackers. I like people." The students were stunned into silence, he related. But soon they were talking to each other, beginning a communication between the white and black students that spilled over into the newly desegregated high school.

Rogers' philosophy of life is posted in his classroom: "First we must develop trust. Then there will come understanding--and as we understand, we come to have peace. And once peace is accomplished there will be time to love."

One student said of Rogers: "His enthusiasm was like a magnet, and I was the metal. He doesn't force one to relate to others; he merely enables one to do so."

Another said: "I entered Durham High School second semester last year after a year of the 'hippie' life . . . all I can say is that what our sick world needs now is more people on the road Rogers is on."

"He is complex as a Swiss timepiece. He is dynamic, concerned, creative, dedicated, spirited, efficient, and in our eyes, 'with it,'" declared another.

The Ladies Home Journal will feature Rogers in a two-page story in the June 1972 issue. Evan Frances, author of the Journal story, includes the following quote from Mrs. Willie Boone, Durham High librarian for 36 years:

"Twenty out of our 80 teachers were black when we became integrated. I admit that I didn't seek out the newcomers any more than was essential to my job. But that didn't stop Jay. He introduced himself and got me talking about books and writers. I was so weary before--just sick of spirit, I guess. Now I'm eager about work again. Not only because of Jay, but because everybody around here has caught the fire he lit."

Baptist Paper to Devote
Issue to Readers' Letters

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--The entire June 7 issue of the Illinois Baptist will be devoted to letters to the editor from readers commenting on virtually any topic, the editor of the weekly paper announced here.

Robert J. Hastings, editor of the paper, said a recent readership survey had disclosed that the "Mail Box," the weekly column of letters to the editor, is one of the most popular features of the Illinois Baptist.

"So that's exactly what we're going to give our readers--more letters," Hastings said.

Hastings said he believed that it would be the first time any of the 32 Baptist state papers across the country had devoted an entire issue to nothing but letters to the editor.

He estimated it would take about 160 short to medium letters to fill the 8-page tabloid format publication. "If we don't get that many, we'll go ahead and print what we do receive," he noted.

In an editorial on the topic, Hastings outlined the "very few" rules: "Write on a topic of interest to you. Keep it short and to the point. Only letters with name and full address will be considered."

The editorial was entitled "Box 3486," the Post Office box number for the paper in Springfield. (Zip 62708)

"The June 7 issue is yours--the readers," the editorial concluded. "Let's see what you can do with it."

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Ohio Crusade Results in 805
Professions, 2,800 Decisions

4/27/72

ELYRIA, Ohio (BP)--A city-wide evangelistic crusade here which shattered attendance records for Baptist-sponsored meetings in the region resulted in 805 professions of faith and 2,800 public decisions, including the conversion of two prison inmates and former drug users.

The two prisoners were among a group of 17 inmates from the Crafton State Farm. Both men were in prison from crimes resulting from drug addiction.

The night after the two prisoners told of their conversion in public testimonies to the crowds, more than 1,000 young people came forward saying they would abstain from drugs and immoral acts, according to crusade officials.

The crusade was led by Evangelist Freddie Gage, head of the Pulpit in the Shadows program in Houston, a ministry to drug users and hoodlums. Gage describes himself as a former hoodlum and drug user.

As many as 6,000 attended the nightly services at Elyria District High School. Gage also spoke to an estimated 12,000 youth in area schools.

The crusade was sponsored by 25 Baptist churches in the area, with 75 evangelical churches also participating.

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