

*The RHODE
ISLANDER®*

**OUR
BLACK
HERITAGE**

Contributors to the issue

THIS ISSUE of *The Rhode Islander* began as an idea more than a year ago. At the beginning there were problems, questions, self-doubts. Could white editors tell the story of the Negro's heritage in Rhode Island? Should we rely exclusively on members of the Negro community — as writers, artists, consultants — to the exclusion of whites whose talents and objectivity we had never had cause to doubt before? Could anyone, black or white, tell it like it is?

These seemed to be important questions at the time, and maybe they still are. But when we started work, they became largely academic. Some things fell into place, and other things failed to fall into place, just as they do for any special issue. Ultimately both whites and blacks became involved, but by that time nobody was keeping track.

In the process we had re-learned a lesson we thought we had learned a long time ago, but maybe hadn't: That the Negroes who contributed were just as cantankerous, brilliant, kind, creative, limited, opinionated, gentle, profound — in short, various — as any other contributors. And that anyone of any color who sets himself up as a spokesman for "the Negro community" is, *ipso facto*, a fraud.

Aware of our limitations, we nevertheless tried to tell the story — like it is. We did so because there was a good story here, an interesting story to be told. And because we hoped greater awareness of this important and largely neglected aspect of all Rhode Islanders' heritage might lead to greater mutual understanding. And we hoped, finally, that this issue would be a beginning — a springboard for further research by historians and scholars — because there is still a lot to be learned.

Special thanks are due the contributors identified elsewhere on this page. Many others, such as James Williams, Frederick Williamson, Dr. Carl E. Gross — there are bound to be omissions — contributed less directly but just as significantly. To all of them, and to the many others who contributed in many ways, we are grateful.

If there is an accomplishment here, it is due to these men and women. If there are failures, they must be attributed to the editing and the sometimes arbitrary, always painful process of matching the available material with the available space. □

THE RHODE ISLANDER

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Del Padgett of Providence is trying to work his way out of a factory job by taking pictures, some of which are on exhibit in the Providence Public Library.

Contents

Rhode Island's Negroes today	pages 6-11
Picture essay: Images in black and white	12-13
History: A rich heritage	16-23
A gallery of notable people	24-25
Thursday was our day off	27-31
Where have they gone?	32-33
Food: This is 'Soul Food'	34-35
Fashion: Floating on 'Cloud 9'	37
Picture essay: Black IS beautiful	38-39

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One foot in the Ghetto, One on the Mall

By JAMES N. RHEA

RHODE ISLAND has responded vigorously to the call for racial equality from Negroes and other concerned citizens over the past few years. State machinery for ensuring fair employment and housing has been strengthened. Cities and towns have adopted human relations programs. Anti-poverty workers have started digging at the roots of many problems that plague Negroes and other poor people.

All these have produced some positive results. But the situation of the state's Negroes contains some extremely complicated contradictions. While they are joining in the affairs of the over-all community at a faster pace than ever before, they are still largely confined to special neighborhoods and still poorly represented in the higher wage brackets, for sociological reasons which no law can reach. From this it follows that they lag in educational achievement.

There were about 25,000 nonwhite persons in Rhode Island in 1965, according to U.S. Census figures. Of these, some 90 per cent were Negroes. Almost 15,000 of the nonwhites lived in Providence, 80 per cent of them crowded into nine of the city's 37 census tracts. In the same year, 3,600 of Newport's 47,000 people were nonwhites. There were 12 among Barrington's 14,000 citizens. The range in other cities and towns varied between these two.

The colored population has been steadily in-

Jim Rhea is a member of the Journal-Bulletin news staff.

creasing over the years. James N. Williams, executive director of the Urban League of Rhode Island, says that up to about 20 years ago the increase came mainly from the in-migration of southern Negroes. This was the pattern in other industrial areas outside the South. Currently, Mr. Williams says, the increase through births is greater than that through in-migration. The Negro population therefore is young. In 1960, the median age for the white population was over 32, while for the Negro it was under 23.

The behavior of youth, in Rhode Island and elsewhere, has been a cogent spur to responsible citizens working to help Negroes rid themselves of the shackles placed upon them by society. While Rhode Island has witnessed no full scale ghetto riots, it has had some dangerous outbursts of violence in recent years.

So far this year there have been no sizable community disorders. True, last spring there was violence at Hope High School; but, as bad as it was, it involved a relatively small group of teenagers and was directed at the school only. During the summer there were rather angry demands for "reparations" from Beneficent Congregational Church by a group calling itself the Black Liberation School. The demands were not met and those who made them went away, bitterly announcing they had a plan for dealing with well-to-do whites who refused to pay their "debts" to Negroes. Currently, despite the foul language and clenched fists of the hard-core militants, the general attitude seems to be coolly and cautiously optimistic. Negro youngsters have something going for them. They have arrived downtown.

THEY HAVE arrived downtown in droves. They mingle on the pedestrian mall with white youngsters. They wear varieties of African hairdos that would make news in any African beauty parlor. Sometimes a *dashikie* or other piece of African gear helps get across the wearer's message that he is proud of what he is and does not want to be white.

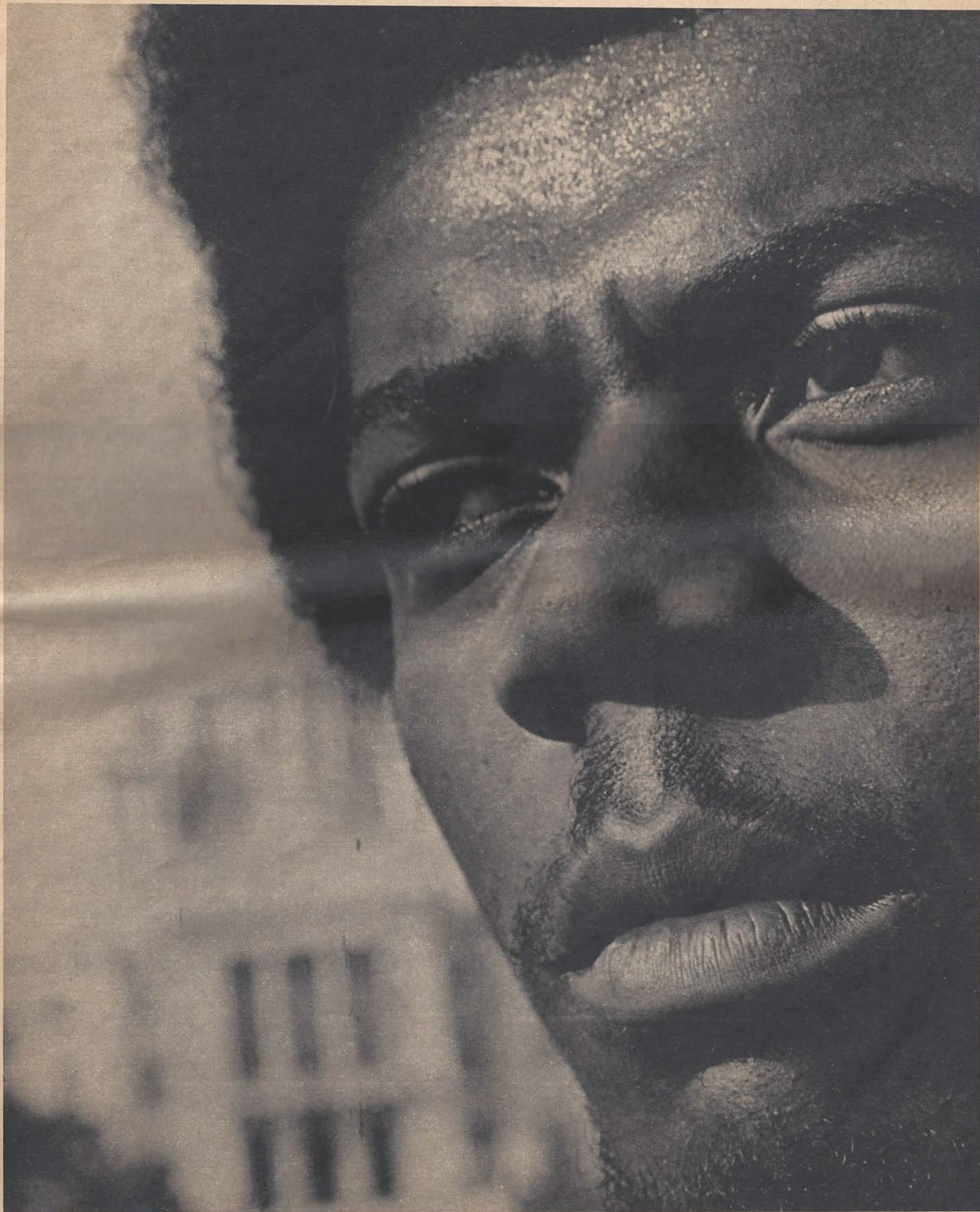
Among some of them it is fashionable to talk about "separation of the races" but apartness as a practice seems to be out among the youth in Providence. At least it is out on the mall, where in every noisy crowd of young people there are little units of black and white, accepting each other naturally and easily. More and more interracial couples appear, and no one seems to pay much attention to them anymore, at least not on the mall.

They have come downtown to other places. All of a sudden, it seems. Young brown men with closely cropped hair, conservative suits, attache cases — and master's degrees — trying to move in on the establishment through business offices. No longer are some banks contented to keep one token teller in a conspicuous position. For a half hour or so in one bank recently ALL the tellers were Negroes. There are cab drivers and bus drivers, and more black salespeople in the stores than ever before.

"THE GROUND YOU ARE STANDING ON IS A LIBERATED ZONE. DEFEND IT!"

This exhortation graced the top page of a leaflet which an African-haired young man was passing

►9



Photograph by LAWRENCE F. SYKES

October 12, 1969

R.I. NEGROES TODAY

Spokesmen aplenty,

cycle of poverty rather than break this cycle," the Urban League has concluded.

Figures on unemployment give an even sharper picture of the economic plight of non-whites. Unemployment among the white labor force was about 5 per cent in 1960 in the state, but it was 10 per cent among Negroes. Of course, the rate varies by areas, so that in some cases the jobless rate for Negro males reached 14 per cent. None of these statistics includes young people without work experience.

Low income and poor housing go hand in hand. There is ample evidence that a Rhode Island Negro with a good income can find a suitable home if he is patient enough — and in some cases willing to put up with insults and worse from white persons who don't want him in the neighborhood. But the poor and uneducated have to make do with the slums. Eighty-three per cent of all housing in Providence is classified as "sound," according to federal standards. But only 55 per cent of nonwhite families live in "sound" housing. About 20 per cent — or roughly 630 households — live in shelters classified as dilapidated and unsafe. About 2 per cent of the white Providence families live in such places.

Comparatively, slum dwellers pay dearly for their accommodations. The city-wide median gross rent in Providence is around \$60 per month. This covers heat and utilities. The median gross in the areas where most of the Negroes live is \$56 per month. The city, of course, has housing standards which it tries to enforce; but people who live in the substandard areas constantly complain that landlords do not keep up property and ignore requests by tenants for repairs. On the other hand, the landlords complain that tenants have no respect for property and damage it to an extent that makes repairs too costly.

RRACIAL BARRIERS in Rhode Island are crumbling, largely because some influential white people want them to crumble. Fortunately the state has a goodly number of white citizens who work with Negroes to obtain more effective equal-rights legislation and to convince the lay public that racial injustice is not only wrong but costly in terms of dollars and cents. A good deal of this work is done through the churches. The more militant Negroes may deride the white "do-

but no leaders

gooder," but the truth is that without that "do-gooder" there would be little advancement toward equality in Rhode Island.

Because of their small numbers, Negroes are for the most part politically insignificant in the state. Only one holds elective office of consequence, a General Assembly seat. In a ward or two some councilman may feel he had better listen to Negroes, but on the whole Negroes are in no position to reward or punish politically.

For any meaningful purpose, Negroes in Rhode Island are leaderless. The Urban League, by far the state's most stable and knowledgeable organization dealing in race relations, is still primarily a social working unit, despite the mildly militant gestures of the League's national headquarters lately. Perhaps against its will, the local League occasionally has to take a front-line position when there is no other agency or individual powerful enough to act.

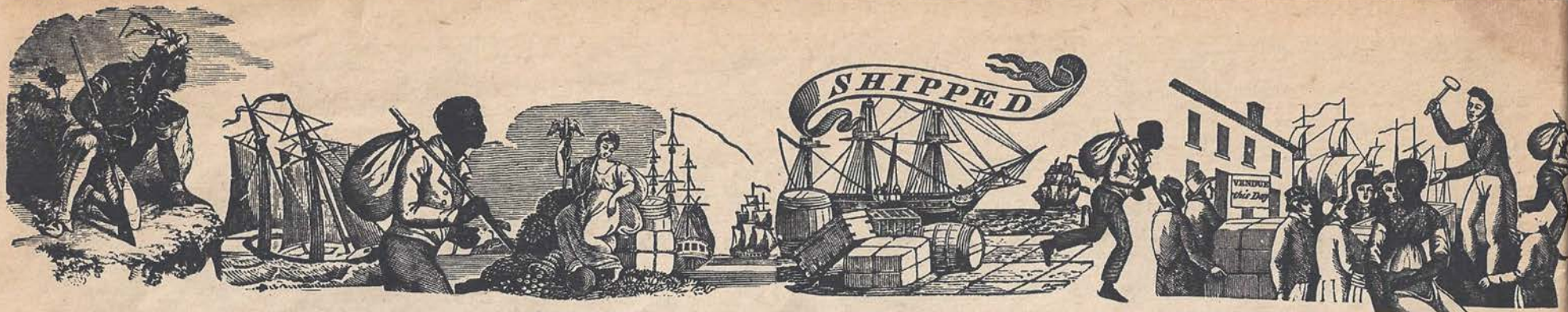
In the Negro community, self-appointed spokesmen come and go, articulate on discussion panels sponsored by white people but ignored by the Negroes they would lead, while the Urban League plods right along, finding jobs, cooling tempers, taking the social pulse of the community. There is little drama in such work these days, but to the League staff that work is important enough to keep some member at his desk on Saturday afternoons. The organization deserves a salute from all who care about good race relations in Rhode Island.

Mr. LeCount, the lawyer, and others in his age group in years past were effective mainly through the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. But the branch now is ripped to uselessness by disputes between the young and the old, the self-consciously militant and the defensively moderate. Whatever intelligence and energy it has is wasted through internal bickering.

Be all this as it may, the future doesn't look bad at all when you see the confidence, which sometimes borders on arrogance, in the faces of the young men who have decided to come downtown, with or without attache cases.

Something has happened. They are not going to sit in any ghetto and brood. Somebody told them they are beautiful. They know they own a piece of that turf.

They're going to make it. □



THE NEGRO IN RHODE ISLAND

From slavery to community

If I am not for myself,
Who is for me?
If I am for myself alone,
What am I?
If not now,
When?

— Hillel

This account of the Negroes' history in Rhode Island is a collaborative effort by CHARLES H. DURANT 3rd., SORAYA MOORE, ARLINE R. KIVEN and BRADFORD F. SWAN.

THERE IS A regrettable tendency on the part of many Rhode Islanders to discuss current black-white confrontations as isolated events of the Sixties. This is at best a nursery-rhyme approach to the historical process. What some call the "black problem" is an outgrowth of area slavery, migration, urbanization, increasing self-consciousness, and increasing alienation.

The factor of community, which is central to our understanding of the black-white situation, is analyzed on the basis of black decision-makers of the past and their success or failure in being able to relate to the white power structure. The factor of control is approached from the standpoint of the revolution in the use of words. Emphasis is placed on the quest for identity on the part of black men who have been denied an acceptable image of themselves by the larger societies' unilateral acceptance of stereotyped terms and meanings.

A community is a body of people sharing common expectations and common obligations. Real community is based on reciprocity of emotion and relations between individuals sharing a common vision of the possibilities and potentialities of man. The basic fact of race relations in Rhode Island is that white people and blacks do not belong to the same community. White people, with a few ex-

ceptions, do not feel that they have unqualified moral obligations to blacks, and blacks, in self-defense, return the compliment. It all began, of course, a long time ago.

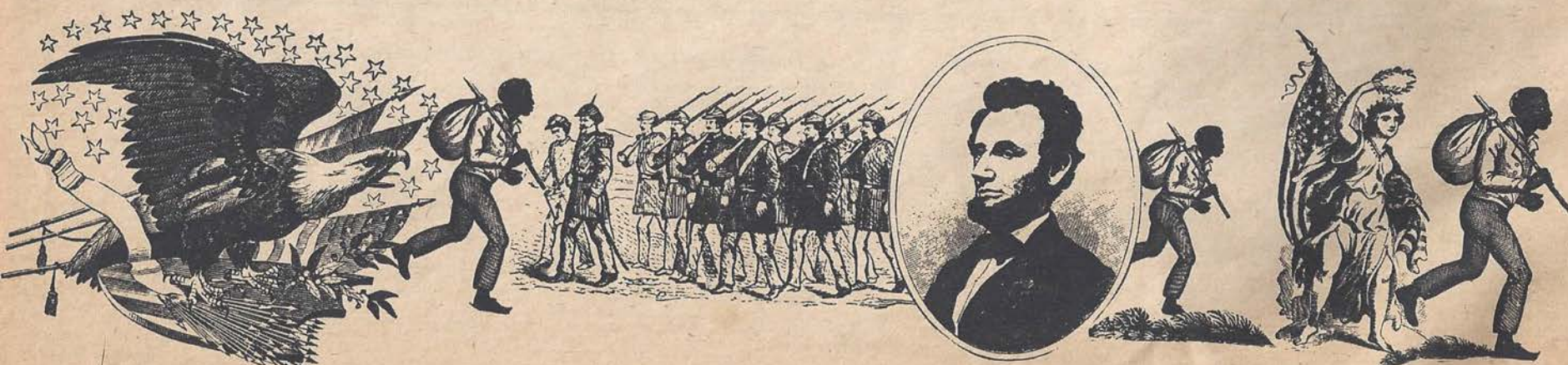
I — SLAVERY

HISTORIANS generally agree that slavery was introduced into Rhode Island when the brig *Seaflower* came to Newport in 1696.

The Narragansett Country of southern Rhode Island was most clearly marked by the institution of slavery, and by 1750 Newport had become the leading slave market on the Atlantic coast, with Bristol ranking second, and Charleston, South Carolina, third.

Rhode Island slaves generally followed a set route which became known as the Triangular Trade in the Eighteenth Century. Taking a cargo of rum from the local distilleries in Newport (there were more than 25 there) the slavers would sail to the coast of Africa where they bartered with native chieftains and exchanged the rum for slaves. This human cargo was taken to the West Indies and there some slaves were exchanged for molasses, which was brought home as the raw material for making Rhode Island rum, along with the remaining blacks.

Puritan merchants, many from socially prominent families, found the slave trade a most lucrative form of commerce. Much of the wealth, politics, and culture of New England can be attributed to this trade. Although the internal slave trade was comparatively smaller than that of the





Southern states, there was still the effect of institutionally accepted slavery, which brought about tragedy in the black family, annihilated one's personality, and confined him to a lower order of humanity.

Although the Puritans went to the greatest lengths to safeguard the integrity of their own families, they were unable or unwilling to extend the same protection to the slave family. On too many occasions Puritan love of money proved stronger than respect for domestic ties.

Slave owners often justified their actions on the highest spiritual grounds. Slavery, they maintained, was established by the law of God in Israel and, since they regarded themselves as the elect of God, New Englanders looked upon the enslavement of Indians and blacks as a sacred privilege which Divine Providence was pleased to grant His chosen people. Under this divine edict not only could a devout Rhode Island elder engage in the slave trade but he could also rejoice that "an overruling Providence had been pleased to bring to this land of freedom another cargo of benighted heathens to enjoy the blessings of a Gospel dispensation."

The black population was very dense in South Kingstown. Consequently, a strict slave code was enacted, not unlike the "Black Codes" of the South, to lessen the threat of slave uprisings.

Yet, in 1774, primarily because of Quaker influence, the General Assembly of Rhode Island passed an act prohibiting the importation of blacks into the colony.

Four years later, in 1778, in the midst of the Revolutionary War, the cause of freedom in Rhode Island appeared all but lost. For two and a half years Rhode Islanders had been fighting for their independence, and by February, 1778, they were confronted by the dismal fact that their forces were depleted and that Newport and much of the state was in British hands.

II — WAR

DESPERATELY in need of more soldiers, the General Assembly passed an act providing for the enlistment of slaves into the militia. Up to £120 was to be paid to the master or mistress of each slave enlisted and every slave thus purchased was "to be immediately discharged from the service of his master or mistress and be absolutely free, as though he had never been encumbered with any kind of servitude or slavery."

Less than two months after the passage of this act the first black regiment was formed and was receiving daily instruction in the art of war under its Rhode Island commander, James M. Varnum. More than 210 men served in this black regiment.

The regiment played an heroic role in the war and disproved assertions that the slave was lazy and could do nothing but sing. Probably the most famous exploit of Rhode Island's celebrated black regiment was performed in the Battle of Rhode Island. On August 24, 1778, the black soldiers three times threw back the charges of

Hessian mercenaries. According to tradition, on the day following this disastrous defeat the Hessian colonel applied for a new assignment, fearing rebellion among his own troops because of the losses they had suffered.

The black regiment continued to serve, and suffered heavy losses in the Battle of Point Bridge, New York, on May 13, 1781. After America had won her independence the people of Rhode Island could not easily forget their debt to the blacks. They remembered the stories of valor in those fateful hours during the Battle of Rhode Island, and for those short of memory Bristol Rhodes, a black who had left an arm and a leg on the battlefield of Yorktown, was a constant reminder that sacrifices for freedom had been made by men of all complexions.

III — ABOLITION

IN FEBRUARY, 1784, a Rhode Island law was passed providing for the gradual abolition of slavery in this state. Under its provisions all children born into slavery after March 1, 1784, were declared free and the responsibility of their education was to be borne by the master involved.

The last act regarding the slave issue was passed in 1787. By this act the slave trade in the state was abolished and so was slave trading with the West Indies. The law provided for a fine of £100 for each person imported and a fine of £1,000 for the ship engaged in the traffic.

Commendable as this legislation was, it still left much to be desired. For

instance, persons held in slavery prior to 1784 were not benefited by its provisions. As a result, slavery lingered for some years after 1784. It is estimated that in 1810 there were 108 slaves in Newport, and ten years later there were 47. The last known slave in Rhode Island, James Howland, died in Jamestown on January 3, 1859, the 100th anniversary of his birth.

IV — OPPRESSION

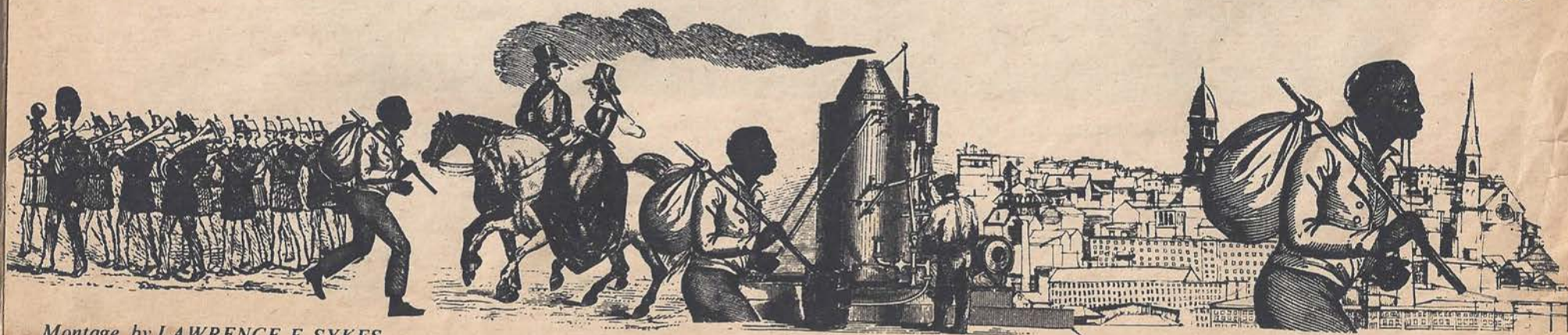
THE YEARS between 1784 and 1820 were a period of transition for blacks in Rhode Island. During these years the number of free blacks in the state increased while the number of slaves decreased. Economically the status of the free blacks was inferior to that of the slaves. Whereas in slavery every type of employment was open to them, in freedom, faced with the combined competition of slaves, indentured servants, and free white workmen, the freedmen were confined largely to domestic service.

Prejudice also contributed to their economic difficulties. A few blacks found work on the farms, on trading and whaling vessels, or in menial jobs, but only in the face of mounting hostility on the part of white workmen who, after the Emancipation Proclamation, often showed their antagonism by insulting and beating blacks and in riots against them.

This hostility received dramatic emphasis in the Providence riots of 1824 and 1831.

The first disturbance, known as the Hard Scrabble riot, took place on the

►19



Montage by LAWRENCE F. SYKES



THE BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND

Picture courtesy Rhode Island Index: Providence Public

HISTORY

'Getting it together' began in the 19th century

low ground beyond the old cemetery on North Main Street. The violence was touched off on an October evening when "a sort of battle royal took place between considerable parties of whites and blacks, in consequence of an attempt of the former to maintain the inside walk as they strolled through the town." (In other words, the whites tried to make the blacks get off the sidewalk and take to the gutter.)

The following morning a notice was posted on the bridge calling for a mob to assemble that night. Between four and five hundred persons responded to this call. The mob descended upon Hard Scrabble "and in the short space of four or five hours leveled it with the ground."

After the houses had been destroyed the rioters turned their attention to the household goods which remained, and it is reported that many of these belongings were carted off to Pawtucket where they were sold at auction.

How the residents of Hard Scrabble survived is not known, but perhaps some of them followed the example of one man who pulled the roof of his

demolished house over the cellar hole, where he lived through the winter.

The second disturbance is commonly referred to as the Snow Town incident. It flared up abruptly on the evening of September 21, 1831. The specific cause of the riot is somewhat obscure. Apparently five sailors had "a row with darkies" at the foot of Olney Street. A crowd of about a hundred persons assembled and the sailors, with this mob at their heels, advanced up Olney's Lane into the black section. A gun was fired from one of the dwellings at the invaders, and one of the sailors was shot and killed. Word of the shooting spread rapidly through the town and within a half-hour a still larger mob charged into Snow Town, which suffered the loss of many houses and damage to many others.

These two riots were typical of the tensions existing between the freed blacks and white workmen. Frequently forced into idleness because of their inability to find work, the freedmen were often stigmatized as a lazy and dissolute class. Socially, too, the freedmen faced discrimination.

In the towns they were largely confined to the alleys, near the docks and along the river fronts. They were not generally permitted to send their children to the public schools, and on certain occasions they were forbidden to appear in public places. Like the slaves, they were segregated in the churches and were buried in a separate corner of the graveyard.

V — COMMUNITY

THE PERIOD from 1820 to 1840 saw the emergence of a black community within the state.

Probably the first attempt made by Rhode Island blacks to organize for their own improvement occurred at the home of Abraham Casey in Newport on November 10, 1780, when Newport Gardner, Prince Almy, Lyman Keith, and others established the African Union Society.

The purpose of this organization was to promote the welfare of the black community by providing a record of births, deaths, and marriages (often a better record than that kept by the

town); by helping to apprentice groes; and by assisting member times of distress. Crippled most of time by a lack of funds, the Society probably most important for moral influence it exercised over members.

"We beseech you to reflect," Society stated, "that it is by your conduct alone that you can refute objections which have been made against you as rational and moral creatures..."

The African Union Society also be responsible for the customs observed by Newport blacks, gathering every fourth Thursday April for a Thanksgiving service. Newport Gardner, a leader in the Society, wrote the 1791 proclamation in which he called upon his fellow give thanks that "Almighty God of late been pleased to raise up men to compassionate and befriend Africans."

The first formal attempt to educate black children in this state was made by the Rev. Marmaduke Brown, pastor of Trinity Church in Newport. In October, 1763, he opened a school

HISTORY

Laying the foundations of self-assertion

black children at the corner of Division and Mary streets in Newport. This school, accommodating about 30 pupils, was among the first to be established in America for the exclusive benefit of black children.

As conditions improved after the close of the Revolutionary War the more progressive members of the black race saw the need for better educational facilities for black children. On December 21, 1807, a number of blacks met in the evening at the home of Newport Gardner on Pope Street in Newport. They came together to discuss ways and means of opening and conducting a school for black children in Newport. The meeting was adjourned until January 1, 1808, when it was reconvened at the same address with a much larger attendance. At this second meeting those present organized themselves into the African Benevolent Society with the sole purpose of opening and maintaining a school for the black children.

A constitution was adopted, which provided for officers (a board of nine directors, five of whom should be black) and fixed the yearly fee at 50 cents. Newport Gardner was elected president and Isaac Rice secretary.

Steps were taken immediately to put the old schoolhouse, abandoned in 1799, in good order. This required considerable expense, but it was met when the African Union Society of Newport voted at its March meeting to merge with the new society and turn all its assets into the treasury.

By October 10, 1808, the schoolhouse in Newport was ready for occupancy and was formally opened with Newport Gardner and Patience D'Lyma as teachers. The school continued to run until the city of Newport took over the education of black children at mid-century.

With the exception of these two Newport organizations, however, and the founding of Hiram Lodge No. 3 in 1799, said to be the second oldest black chapter in Masonic history, little had been done toward building a black community.

But the time was fast approaching when the black populace would create its own institutions.

The opening of the African Union Meeting House in Providence in 1820 was the symbol of a new day for religious services. In June, 1820, the first worship service was held in this meeting house.

In 1824 the black citizens of Newport, led by the African Benevolent Society, purchased a lot at the corner of Church and Division streets and erected there the first black church in that part of the state. The Rev. Jacob C. Perry, a native of Narragansett, became the first pastor of this Colored Union Church.

Between 1820 and 1840 several other black churches were opened. In 1835 the Fourth Baptist Meeting House in Newport was established. In 1837 the African Methodist Episcopal Church appeared in Providence. In 1830 a splinter group from the African Union Meeting House organized a Free Will Baptist Church, commonly called the Pond Street Baptist Church; it is now known as the Second Free Will Baptist Church.

Similar steps were taken in founding schools. In 1836 the Rev. J. W. Lewis, a black minister in Providence, established the New England Union Academy, which offered such courses as history, botany, bookkeeping, and natural philosophy.

The city of Providence voted in 1838 to support two schools, one on Meeting Street and the other on Pond Street, solely for the use of black children.

Also, several social societies were established during this period. William Brown recalled that in the 1820s the Mutual Relief Society and the Young Men's Union Funds Society were organized in Providence; the former was a social club for the young men. In 1832 the Providence Temperance Society was founded at a time when the temperance movement was gaining in popularity all over the country. This society at one time had as many as 200 members.

VI — SUFFRAGE

UNLIKE most other states, Rhode Island did not frame a new constitution after the Revolutionary War but continued to operate under

the colonial charter of 1663. As a result a large number of Rhode Island citizens found themselves deprived of the right to vote. These men were brought together by the common purpose of winning the right to vote and they formed the Suffrage Party. They were opposed by the anti-suffrage or Legal Party, composed primarily of men of property and their oldest sons, who possessed the right to vote under the 1663 Charter and were thus able to maintain themselves in power.

By the summer of 1841 the dispute between the two parties had become extremely bitter and the members of the Suffrage Party, under the leadership of the fiery and idealistic Thomas Wilson Dorr, began planning to call a convention to frame a new constitution. In the midst of these preparations they were faced with the question of whether their program would include black as well as white citizens, for the blacks had long been ineligible to vote.

At a meeting of the Suffrage Party in Providence on September 27, 1841, nominations were sought for the office of treasurer. Two reports were brought in by the executive committee. The majority report favored Alfred Niger for the office; the minority report favored Thomas Greene. Acting upon a suggestion from the floor that Mr. Niger was a black, the Suffragists voted not to receive the majority report and the meeting fell into confusion.

Disputes over the question of black suffrage continually arose. In the end, however, despite the opposition of Dorr himself, the delegates to the Suffrage Party convention voted 46 to 18 to retain the word "white" in the clause in their proposed constitution defining the qualifications for voting.

The dispute between the two parties became extremely vehement and in February, 1842, to appease the Dorr-ites and prevent a possible outbreak of violence, the Legal Party had its own convention. It, too, voted to deprive blacks of the right to vote.

Acting in accordance with their constitution the Suffragists elected their own candidates to office and declared theirs to be the legal government of the state. The existing govern-

HISTORY

Finding a voice

ment, dominated by the Legal Party, declared martial law, called out the militia, and sought to crush the "rebellion" by force of arms.

In this critical period, it appeared that the black citizens were drawn into the ranks of the Legal Party. William Brown, a leader in the black community, estimated that more than 200 blacks in Providence alone enlisted in the militia. What effect this had on the outcome of the struggle is uncertain, but what is known is that Dorr and his supporters were crushed.

No sooner were the Suffragists defeated than the Legal Party, now firmly in control of the state, pushed through a new constitution on November 18, 1842, which allowed blacks to vote.

The role played by the blacks in the Dorr Rebellion has more than ordinary significance. During the decades between 1820 and 1840 the blacks forged the links of a definite community structure and by 1841 the black community represented a force for which rival politicians were forced to compete.

VII — CIVIL RIGHTS

PROBABLY the most famous black in the state during the last half of the 19th Century and the man most responsible for abolishing segregated schools was George Downing. Choosing to make his home in Rhode Island, he came from New York to Providence in 1850. A struggle evolved when the Newport schools refused to admit his children as students. The issue was fairly drawn between public and segregated education in the state, and the injured minority was assured of vigorous, intelligent leadership.

The city had previously taken on the responsibility of educating the black children. At best, however, it was a hesitant step in the direction of equal citizenship, for the two races of children were separated.

George Downing published a broadside putting the black position before the public. Maintaining that public schools were state institutions supported by taxation and that blacks were citizens of the state, taxed in common with other citizens, Downing

contended that the establishment of separate schools for black children "wars against the principles of the state."

In March, 1859, the Committee on Education reported to the General Assembly on a petition signed by Isaac Rice and 338 other citizens, protesting the segregation of schools.

Downing's fear was realized in 1865 when the majority of the Committee on Education brought in a report which required each town to admit blacks to public schools or to provide them with separate schools, "equal in appointments, instruction and grades to other public schools in the same town or city."

Blacks again brought the protest petition before the General Assembly in 1866. The Committee on Education at last brought in a report which asserted that segregated schools, contrary to the spirit of the state constitution, had been established "by a prejudice stronger than the constitution and stronger than justice." The Committee therefore recommended that the petitioners' request be granted and that separate schools for black children be abolished. Complying with this report, the General Assembly on March 7, 1866, wrote the following sentence into the statute books:

"In deciding upon the application for admission to any school in this State, maintained wholly or in part at the public expense, no distinction shall be made on account of the race or color of the applicant."

A continuation of this momentum came on March 23, 1881, when Rhode Island repealed a 1701 act and recognized for the first time a marriage between a white and a black citizen. In 1885, another civil rights law was passed, according to which no person was to be denied the facilities of any licensed place of public amusement "on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude." The act also made it an offense to disqualify any citizen from jury service on account of color.

On January 12, 1914, the original meeting of the Providence Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was held in Odd Fellows Hall on North Main Street. And in the summer of 1939 a landmark was passed in the his-

tory of the black man in Rhode Island with the founding of the Providence Urban League. Organized on an inter-racial basis, the League pledged itself to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of blacks and to promote inter-racial understanding and cooperation in Providence.

Then came the Rhode Island Commission Against Discrimination (now Commission on Human Rights) which was established in 1952, and the Providence Human Relations Commission in September of 1963.

The most recent landmark of the black community is the establishment of the Afro-American Art Center in December, 1968, which seeks to stimulate greater esthetic interests in individuals from impoverished neighborhoods and contribute to self-development.

EPILOGUE

NO LONGER does the black believe that white is always right. The black community, in the person of its

most gifted members, is moving within itself and taking a more objective stance toward American culture. It is beginning to refine itself and of necessity to redefine the white man.

This is a desperately serious business, an attempt to grasp from the white man's books and his images and myths a lost and devalued part of ourselves. What black citizens of Rhode Island are doing, at best, is wrestling the black image from white control. The black image in Rhode Island, as it is elsewhere across the nation, is basically a contrast conception, one part of the familiar dichotomies of good-evil, clean-dirty, white-black. In the past, some blacks attempted to define themselves by becoming counter-contrast conceptions, by becoming in short, opposite blacks, opposite, that is, to what white men said blacks were.

The strategy is now being abandoned by those of influence who say that white Americans can no longer tell them who they are, and where they came from and where they should want to go. Refusing to be bound by

the white man's definitions, they contend that the black is not a white man with black skin, but simply a man, undefined, unpredictable, free.

Seen within this context the black-white crisis which many individuals in this state have been involved in recently becomes an act of affirmation, a creative leap into being, a leap directly related to the crises of culture in the heart of not only this nation but the world as well.

In the historically direct circumstances of fear and trembling, in blood and suffering, the black man in Rhode Island has retained a certain dark joy, a zest for life, a creative capacity for meeting adversity and transcending it, that is beautiful and meaningful.

It was this that undoubtedly inspired W.E.B. DuBois to say that there was something strange and holy about the ghetto's Saturday night. He was not talking about race, nor a romanticized ghetto. He was trying to get at the terrible aliveness of that night. He was talking not about blacks

but about life: good and bad preachers and prostitutes, gin and champagne, tragedy and triumph, having and not having, giving and taking, losing and winning — LIFE.

Today, black Rhode Islanders are daring to ask the question "Not free from what, but free for what?" Today they are not only attacking racism but hypocrisy, black and white. They are not only demanding respect but are seeking a society open to all for the creative possibilities in man. They are demanding integration but they are thinking beyond integration, and saying: "Not integration, but transformation, with the personal conviction that the darkness is light enough." □

Much of the information in this account comes from the following sources: *Negroes on the Island of Rhode Island*, by Charles A. Battle (June 14, 1932); *From Slave to Citizen — The Story of the Negro in Rhode Island*, by Irving H. Bartlett (1954), and articles appearing in the *Providence Journal* and the *Evening Bulletin*.

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STATE

A gallery of notables

By SORAYA MOORE

Soraya Moore, a college sophomore, worked on the Journal-Bulletin news staff this summer.



From Profiles of Negro Womanhood

NEWPORT GARDNER opened a Newport singing school which he conducted for many years, having scholars at various times from some of the leading families. Such money as he acquired from this school was used to better the condition of his less fortunate brethren. By the time he was 50 years old, he had composed several anthems and set them to music. His *Promise* anthem was published in Boston and was much used by the black churches 100 years ago. He also established a church and financed a school for the benefit of his people. At the age of 80, he led an expedition back to his native Africa, where he died.

HANNIBAL COLLINS was born in Wadsworth, just outside the Newport line, and obtained his freedom by enlisting in the Continental Army. He fought and was wounded in the Battle of Rhode Island. At the outbreak of the War of 1812, he enlisted in the Naval Forces and accompanied Commodore Perry to Lake Erie, where he helped construct the fleet that drove British naval power from the Great Lakes forever. He was in charge of the commodore's barge during the famous engagement fought at Put-in-Bay on September 13, 1810, commonly called the Battle of Lake Erie.

GEORGE T. DOWNING was born in New York City on December 30, 1819, and established a summer business in Newport in 1846, leasing an estate at the corner of Catherine and Fir Streets. From the outset he was successful. In 1850, he conducted a business in Providence on Mathewson Street near Westminster. In 1854, he erected the Sea Girt Hotel on the site of what is now the Downing Block in Newport. This was destroyed by fire and immediately thereafter he set to work and built the present Downing Block.

Mr. Downing was early active in the abolition movement and was a conductor on the Underground Railroad. He also fought for a good many years against the separate school systems in Rhode Island, and when that victory had been achieved, he threw himself into the fight to remove the law from the statute books preventing intermarriage between the races. He died July 21, 1903.

MRS. JOSEPHINE SILONE YATES was born in Mattituck, Long Island, November 17, 1859. She was taken to Newport in her early youth, attended the public schools there, and was graduated at the head of her class in 1877 from Rogers High School, being the first of her race to do so. She received a medal for scholarship and was graduated two years later from the State Normal School in Providence. While successful as a teacher, her chief contribution to her race was her outstanding work as an organizer and club woman. She died September 3, 1912.

EDWARD MITCHELL BANNISTER, a gifted artist, was born in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, in November, 1828, and died in Providence, January 9, 1901. In Providence he maintained a studio, and became one of the founders of the Providence Art Club. He painted more than 100 pictures. His picture, "Under the Oaks," a scene on the William Goddard Farm, took first prize in Philadelphia at the Centennial Exposition in 1876.

MATILDA SISSIERETTA JONES, one of the most famous opera stars of the late 19th Century, was known as Sissieretta Jones, or "Black Patti." She was born Matilda S. Joyner in Portsmouth, Virginia, and came to Providence as a young girl to study at the Academy of Music. In 1892, she sang at a White House reception given by President Harrison. She was called "The Black Patti" after the famous Italian soprano Adelina Patti. She left the concert stage to star in an all-black group called "The Black Patti's Troubadours," which performed for 19 years in many southern and western cities.

FREDERICK DOUGLAS "FRITZ" POLLARD, a 160-pound halfback elusive as quicksilver, was the star of the Brown University football teams of 1915 and 1916. The 1915 team was invited to play in the first Rose Bowl game and Pollard won election as the first Negro to be named to Walter Camp's All-American team.

Although Brown was beaten 14-0 by Washington State in the Rose Bowl's mud and rain, the team had an 8-1 record the following season and on successive Saturdays defeated Yale and Harvard by identical scores of 21-0, with Pollard scoring five of the six touchdowns.

Fritz Pollard played professional football for a couple of years and then went into the newspaper business. He is now, at the age of 75, a semi-retired public relations man and entertainment booking agent in his native Chicago. In 1967 he came to Providence to be inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame. Earlier he had been voted into Football's Hall of Fame at Rutgers.

REV. M. A. VAN HORNE arrived in Newport October 1, 1868 and was shortly thereafter elected pastor of the Union Congregational Church, a position he held until 1897. He was a delegate to the National Council of Congregational Churches held in Massachusetts. He was elected a member of the Newport School Committee from 1873 to 1892. He was elected member of the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1885 and served for three successive terms. In 1897, he was appointed by President McKinley as U.S. Consul to the Danish West Indies. He died April 24, 1910. □



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Guess who's coming to Equality?

By CATHERINE S. ROBINSON

FUNNY THINGS happen on the tortuous ascent to Equality. The most that can be said for this slow-motion process is that it allows the traveler time to look around, to observe, to take stock and to plot his course — if indeed the will and strength hold out to do it. Some weary travelers have long since given up the struggle as not worth the candle; but others plod doggedly on. It is they, the "come hell or high water" ones, who succeed in turning apparently negative conditions into positive assets.

Coping as we must with a split level society, we become, of necessity, rather adept at negating negatives. And with a modicum of luck, we might even wind up with the last laugh.

To win a war one must search out the weaknesses of his adversary and attack him where he is most vulnerable. In black-white relationships such knowledge is a sort of secret weapon and is quite effective when used judiciously—as circumstances require.

So from our vantage point — the lowest rung on the ladder — we eye him sharply while all the time seeming not to do so. He's so busy being high man on the totem pole he doesn't notice anyway, and eventually we figure out the pieces of the not-so-secret puzzle that white folks, with few exceptions, are notoriously inconsistent, saying one thing and meaning something entirely different. They are ruthlessly self-serving, are accomplished fabricators, and invariably "talk down" to non-whites whom they regard as inferior (even the least pretentious whites feel constrained to do this). And their egotism is monumental.

They sermonize at great length on how we ought to imitate them, but they

sure as heck don't mean it — not in areas where it matters most. Graphically illustrating this point is the experience of a couple I knew some years ago. The husband worked regularly at the kind of job, then, reserved for Negro men. The wife did what most women of our race were expected to do, housework.

If you don't know that where white folks live is the most advantageous place to discover what makes them tick, you should have the experience. There the masks are off, the guards are down, and you see them as they really are. Some good, some not, some kind and considerate, others critical and condescending, generous or chinchy, ill-mannered or gracious, coarse or refined, sincere or superficial, the entire gamut. But I am digressing and that's easy when attempting to recapture events of the past.

The distaff side of this couple attended to the needs, wants, wishes and whims of a well-to-do family. Over the years this family conveniently nursed the illusion that she was utterly content, supremely happy. For didn't they treat her "just like a member of the family," didn't they enjoin her and her husband to "put down some roots" by buying a little house — somewhere — and to educate their children? One of those nice little colleges down South would be just fine — and a safe distance from the "lily white" institutions, above the Mason-Dixon Line.

THIS WOMAN was neither happy nor content. Like many of us she was simply resigned. But a deceptively complacent facade, to which they were accustomed, masked a smoldering fury companioned by the oft asked question — WHY? Why were all the desirable things reserved to *them*? The ease, leisure, beauty, the billowing affluence, the range of gracious living — why only for *THEM*? By "them" she meant not alone the family she worked for but WHITES — period.

Poor deluded people, we. Time has

tattered the myth of all-inclusive "white affluence" and disclosed that many whites feel the same way about other whites as we did. And to an understandable degree they, as well as we, still do. That, however, is a whole new horse race and *that* track is still muddy.

My friend loved the beauty reflected in the luxurious furnishings of the house where she worked. Such exquisite china, pure unattenuated silverware, priceless oriental rugs, the custom made draperies and bedspreads, fine linens, rare paintings, the sleek looking automobiles — and the space. Space in which one could move and breathe. She loved them all and cared meticulously for those entrusted to her care. Thus doing a flame ignited within her. A promise and a determination that someday, some way, she and her family would have some of those things she so deeply admired and a home of their own to enhance them.

It took a while. A painfully protracted while of self sacrifice, penny pinching and a seemingly interminable struggle to keep alight the often flickering flame in her heart. But she made it. The dream finally became reality. One of the couple's three children did go to college, the other two finished high school. And they bought a house. A sturdy six-room cottage set back some distance from a quiet street where brilliant azalea bushes brazenly competed with a blanket of velvety green grass which covered a sizable and well manicured lawn. There was even a one-car garage, though they had no automobile.

Furnishings came slowly as limited funds permitted and were selected with discriminating taste and loving care. At last the goal, a beautifully appointed home — with room enough to breathe in — was achieved. Modest according to present day standards, but at that time a showcase in a "blue collar" community predominantly white, sparsely sprinkled with Negro families. It was the envy of the neighborhood.

Many Negroes striving to reach a cherished goal find the road to it so rugged they are utterly spent by the time they reach it — if ever they do. This friend was no exception. Years of driving herself mercilessly began to take their toll. Since some sort of employment was still a must for her, she gave up her fulltime job for day work by the hour. This type of service was more impersonal but far less demanding. As the lesser of two evils, she became the laundress for two upper-middle-class families on the East Side.

One day during a violent rainstorm, one of her employers offered to drive her home. When they drew up in front of the house the laundress had pointed out, the woman looked stunned. "Is this *YOUR* house?" she inquired. Nodding affirmatively but misreading the question for pleasant surprise she invited the employer in and proudly showed her around what she loved to think of as her masterpiece. Gazing about in obvious astonishment the employer murmured stiffly, "It's very nice" and hurried out without a backward glance.

The next week when her work was finished she went upstairs to collect her pay. The employer paid her, then calmly announced, "I won't be needing you anymore. From the looks of your home you don't need this job — or the money — and I would rather have someone who does."

Fantastic? It happens. A lesser parallel once left me, temporarily, in a state of shocked bewilderment. I was fired without notice — by mail — because, presumably, I had not exhibited the "proper" attitude of a servant. The letter stated, among other things, that I was "arrogant, brazen, bold and brassy" that "your struggle (for equality) will be in vain because you have no HUMILITY." Shades of Julius La Rosa! And the postscript: "Don't *bother* to return the umbrella you borrowed, **KEEP IT!**" Whew!!

That my very presence upon the premises was undesirable could not have been more clearly indicated.

One provocative glimpse of a multi-

Mrs. Robinson is assistant director of the University of Rhode Island Extension Division Service, in addition to countless activities in the area of black-white relations.

Some carried music cases

sided situation is not necessarily conclusive but serves to suggest there must be other sides. There are — and not all negative, depending of course upon the way one looks at them.

When I first came to Rhode Island, some women engaged in one of the few types of work we were allowed to do — and I do mean “allowed” — taking care of other peoples’ homes — carried their house dresses to work in music or briefcases to give the impression that they were either music teachers, music students or at least associated with some more “acceptable” kind of industry.

What a pity that large numbers of a proud and worthy people should be so humbled that they must feign a false sense of status because of the work they were obliged to do to earn an honest living. Others, however, took a more philosophical view. If this is the way things are, they reasoned, self pity and false pride won’t change them. So let’s get on with it and make the most of it — for us. And so they did with all the vicarious eclat imaginable.

IT IS ALMOST impossible to be continually exposed to the lush and cultural environment that wealth and education can provide without becoming, at least partially, indoctrinated. Even without the educational background — which few of us had — it was and is still possible for the presumably untrained faculties to absorb by association much that surrounds them. And a developed “sixth sense” enables the perceptive ones to choose between what is and what is not desirable. Hence there is among many Negro people a aura of refinement that astounds members of the majority society. Long years of service in families who did things “according to Emily Post” prompted their servants also to aspire to these niceties. And if in their modest homes they could not approximate them precisely they certainly produced reasonable facsimiles.

“Back in antiquity” as my children refer to the time of my youth, Thursday afternoon—jokingly referred to as “Kitchen Mechanics Day”—was the domestics’ day off. On those Thursdays domestics did what would today be called “their thing.” They did their entertaining.

How they managed to achieve the results they did on their meager earn-

ings was a mystery. Areas to which we were assigned to live were not then—or now—prepossessing, and so gave no clue to the charming oases they made of their individual homes wherein these unique domestics sought to insulate themselves from the dreary monotony of the usual Negro neighborhoods. Their parties were revelations, demonstrating an amazing grasp of the propriety of what’s what. There were always damask covered dining tables, replete with matching napkins, glistening crystal and silverware and bountiful assortments of foods rarely seen or served outside their places of employment. If

the entertaining hosts worked as a couple (that was a popular arrangement in those days)—she the cook, he the houseman-chauffeur—the man would sometimes don a white jacket and play the butler bit, just for fun. After dinner the guests retired to the “parlour” for a few games of whist (we play bridge today) or just conversation. Later, more dessert and coffee was pressed upon the guests and in lieu of the expensive “hard stuff” the hostess often served homemade wine. It was all very rewarding.

Offbeat elegance? Gracious living? Or pipe dreams? Call it what you will—but those domestics of yesteryear made the most of an inherited situation they felt helpless to change and passed along their acquired concepts of graciousness to their children. Countless whites of comparable income and education have little knowledge of those amenities and are totally devoid of the charm of graciousness and gentility exhibited by those workers.

True, many whites—especially the newly arrived Europeans—worked “in service” but they were never restricted to it as most of us, generally, were.

AS A YOUNGSTER I always wanted something better than what I saw around me in the sleepy little Southern city in Virginia where I was born. My uneducated but very perceptive grandmother recognized this and urged my mother to send me “up North” to Rhode Island, to live with an aunt who resided here. And so, more years ago than I care to remember, I was packed off to Providence in search of “something” my folks felt I would never find in Petersburg. ➤30

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The cultivation and Northernization of Catherine

I attended school evenings and worked days. There were no child labor laws then and kids my age holding down fulltime jobs was commonplace. Few factories hired Negroes back in the early twenties and many laundries discriminated because of color. There were a limited number of laundry owners who placed willingness and ability to do good days' work above race. I found a job in one of those but thoroughly disliked the environment and soon moved on to the next laundry that hired colored.

This rapid transit eventually brought me to a laundry where I met a woman who quite obviously had that "something" I was looking for. I could not then verbalize it but I recognized it. A most unlikely spot to find it—or her. A hot steamy laundry—a veritable inferno in summer—housing a conglomerate of personalities, morals and manners. But there she was, every inch a lady of quality with the most beautiful speech I had ever heard. I was completely capti-

vated; admired her tremendously and longed to be exactly like her. But accomplishing it was something else.

I tried—how I tried! Grooming a poorly-lettered little Southern girl to acquire what she imagined were the requisites of a fine Northern young lady henceforth became the combined but arduous effort of my bewildered aunt, my wonderful friend, the Reader's Advisor at the Providence Public Library, and of course some of the "quality" families I later worked for. As can be well imagined, the "cultivation and Northernization of Catherine" was such a hilarious process it was almost pathetic and would have filled a small book.

But, never mind. When the time came to take my place within the "dynasty of domestics" I had a pretty clear idea of what I expected to gain from it. Looking back I have often referred to my experience of domestic service as my "finishing school," much to the discomfiture, indeed chagrin, of some of my Northern friends.

Being only a "Northernized" Southerner and not a real "black Yankee," I just don't have quite the "thing" about some things that they do. Realistically I have come to see that it matters not at all whether one is Southern black or Northern black; both are placed in the same category here, as well as elsewhere, if you are BLACK.

Any fancied idea of regional superiority between us is based on fiction—pure delusion.

Meanwhile, it didn't take long for me to distinguish between the types of families I preferred to work for. In the vernacular of today's children, I "got an attitude" about a family from which I perceived I could learn nothing. I intended to become "a fine cultured young lady" and the moment I realized that a family could contribute little or nothing to the furtherance of that determination, I would beat a hasty retreat. But not without some unspoken but acid observations such as: "They have MONEY but they certainly don't have anything ELSE!" or

"Ummph! *She* has the money but *I* have the MANNERS!" or "It should be *perfectly obvious* to *anyone* that *I* am the lady in *this* house."

Oh boy! One must be very young, very naive or very brash to assume such a self-satisfied attitude. I went through all the stages before reaching, years later, a reasonably mellow middle ground. Before that though, I played the newly emerging "me" to the hilt. I attempted to imitate the manners and speech of everyone I admired. Without a fixed pattern or a special model in mind I just observed and listened to a variety of types, picking out what intrigued me most about each one and mixed them all together. The mixture was truly one grand mess.

The final product emerged with an uneasy grand duchess manner and a very stilted, precise form of speech, which has stuck. It has sometimes labeled me as a "phony" among some of my own people and confounded whites who are inclined to think that most Negroes—unless highly edu-

cated—speak in terms of dis, dat, dese and dose.

Actually this acquisition was partly for the purpose described and partly as a defense mechanism against the sport my contemporaries made of my lazy Southern drawl that went something like this: "Good evenin' to y'all." (At 12 o'clock in the day no less). "How come y'all laff at me all-a timme?" "I cain't talk like y'all."

Discarding my "Northernese" I found to be just as difficult (do I really want to?) as acquiring it in the first place.

MEANWHILE back in the kitchen the lady of the house is discussing with me a proposed luncheon menu. "How about filet, stuffed mushrooms and lemon chiffon?" To which I respond, "Oh no, that's too *ordinary*! Mrs. Million Bucks would think we had no imagination! Now, I would suggest the creamed crab in bread baskets,

summer salad and that delicious German chocolate roll."

Answering the telephone—every hostess' indispensable pipeline to what's happening—became a provocative game of "guess who." "Yes-s, this is Mrs. Lesser Bucks' residence. I'm sorry she's not at home at the moment, may I take a message or have her phone you? May I ask who is calling, please? Who am I? Oh—the maid."

The front hall became a stage where I instantly assumed the role of assistant hostess when an unexpected visitor appeared at the door. "Why, Mrs. Majestic, how *very nice* to see you! Do come *in*! I expect Mrs. Lesser Bucks momentarily and I *know* she *wouldn't* want to miss you. May I offer you tea?"

Over played? Sure! But marketable, and you are convinced of it when a guest mutters, sotto voce, to the hostess, "Where did you get HER?" And finally those thoughtful guests who come to the kitchen to thank you for a delicious meal and Mrs. Million

Bucks detaches herself from the rest and whispers an aside: "If you aren't *completely* satisfied *here*, I'd love to have you. And you can name *your own* price." Nice people? They are legion.

The now-highly-developed "sixth sense" smells out what we should accept and what to reject. With it we discern that "back biting" and wearing "two faces" is not a malady ascribed exclusively to blacks but is a universal affliction, practiced most adroitly by whites.

Along with learning to cook, to clean, to baby tend and all the et ceteras of housekeeping, we learned a lot of other things too. Any way one looks at it, that phase was a liberal education, of sorts, especially for black women who had in those times little choice. And because their lack of preference was practically a fixed tradition, they should not be scorned but commended for making the most of a situation not primarily of their choosing. The skills they learned, the amenities they assimilated and ob-

served, the taste for the genteel way of life may not have been attained in any other way. In their own unsung ways these domestics have helped smooth the way for many of the newer generations.

Indeed many bright young Negro professionals and more recent college graduates owe their education, at least in part, to parents who did domestic work. If there was any fancied stigma attached to this type of bread winning it obviously did not noticeably infect the money, because it didn't keep the young ones from using it to speed their climb upwards.

Some of us old warriors have not stopped to rest—we are still in harness. But thanks to the tempo of the times we are riding a new horse now, with the same purposefulness and aplomb we had when we had to ride the old one.

Yes, funny things do, indeed, happen on the climb to Equality, and if we play it smart, we will make it, we will make it. □

Why don't more of 'my people' go to college?

BY WILLIAM D. WILEY

PRESENTLY in and around Rhode Island there is considerable activity and concerted efforts to enroll more black students in the colleges and universities of the state. Various programs are being offered to interest black graduates of Rhode Island high schools in higher education, and when necessary to give them special remedial training and preparation. All this is to the good, and to be commended.

Many well meaning and considerate whites have asked or implied the question over the years: "Why do not more of 'your people' go to college?" — suggesting a lack of motivation or desire on the part of black people, and that such motivation or desire has been the hallmark of the success attained by many of the ethnic groups which make up the Rhode Island population.

If there is a lack of motivation or desire we need to seek the cause of this lack. Much of it can be found in the lack of opportunity which has existed in Rhode Island for years so far as black people are concerned.

Parenthetically, any problem which affects the general population of any area usually affects the blacks of that area a great deal more. During the past two years a great effort has been made to keep the Rhode Islanders who graduate from our colleges in Rhode Island. Surveys revealed that many of these people were taking positions elsewhere because of greater opportunities and financial rewards.

This has been going on for years and years so far as blacks are concerned — and not only at the college graduation level, but before. Because there were limited opportunities for work in certain categories, and for advancement, there was little motivation to go on to college, or to do many of the things people do normally.

There is hardly a black family living in Rhode Island for any length of time who cannot point to some member who left this state and is living and making good somewhere else. It has been pointed out, and with considerable justification, that had many of these people, who received their college training in Rhode Island or elsewhere, remained here, their children and grandchildren would have been the ones who would have given us generations of young people of college age today.

The fact that so many left because jobs were not open to them here presented those who remained with a sense of frustration which is very hard to overcome.

There was the time when any black girl who wanted to become a nurse had to go somewhere else to get her training, for no hospital in this state would accept her. There were many girls who wanted to enter this field, and they did train elsewhere, often remained where they were trained, married, raised families, and were forever lost to Rhode Island.

William D. Wiley, father of Alton W. Wiley, is a founder of the Urban League of Rhode Island.

There was a time when any black man or woman who wanted to teach had to go south, or to New York, or anywhere except his home state to do so. Providence was even worse than some other places in the state. Newport and Pawtucket had taken black teachers long before Providence. One black girl, Charity Bailey, was told she could not teach in Providence. She went on to New York where she has made a national reputation in her field, and has been awarded an honorary degree by her alma mater, Rhode Island College.

MANY TEACHERS from Rhode Island are high in their profession all over this country — people who at one time could not find jobs in their native state. One of these returned only recently to attend the dedication of a building named in her honor at Rhode Island College. Charles Harry taught for years in Indianapolis (he is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island), his son is an administrator in the Indianapolis schools, and his daughter is a librarian in California.

It is ironic to review these facts at a time when every school system in this state is scouring the country for black teachers — a search which might not now be necessary had the opportunities existed two or three generations ago.

Now it is rather common to see beautiful black girls and handsome black men behind desks in banks and offices, clerks in stores. To see competent black men driving trucks and busses. It is indeed beautiful. But it was not always so. And these advances did not come about because the white community finally came to the realization that all people, regardless of race or color, needed the same opportunities in life. Often doors were opened after great pressure, and then with great reluctance by some employers.

This writer remembers when black men were given jobs as street sweepers and rest room janitors in Providence, and the political powers felt that they were being very generous in dispensing these "patronage" jobs to the black faithful. In Providence in those days, black policemen and firemen were just non-existent. Yet black men from Providence and other Rhode Island communities took up residence in New York and Philadelphia and became firemen, policemen.

A girl who completed a business course in one of our high schools, and was among the top ten, was the only member of her class not sent for interviews for an office job. She was the only black girl in the class. She went to a midwest city and was hired for a position in a large office. She married there, and now has children to send on to business school or college. She might have married and remained here if she could have secured a job where she could use her training.

Perhaps the professions have suffered most from the lack of opportunities in Rhode Island. Today in Providence there is but one black practicing attorney. Yet scattered through the United States are black lawyers who were born in this state, and who received their early education here. Some of these have attained high station

and importance in their adopted states. One of these, Chester Allen of Pawtucket, received his A. B. at Brown University and law degree from Boston University. He moved to Indiana, and married a young lady who was also a lawyer. One of their sons is also a lawyer. Mr. Allen was elected to the Indiana legislature, the South Bend City Council, and has been president of the local bar association.

Physicians, denied for many years the use of hospital facilities in Rhode Island, have shied away from Rhode Island. Not only have the native sons who have gone into medicine settled elsewhere, but the hospital policies kept others from settling here. The practicing black doctors in Rhode Island today can be counted on the fingers of one hand, even if a couple of the fingers have been amputated. Yet Rhode Island has given the country many fine doctors who are pillars in their communities.

There was the late Dr. Rudolph Fisher, a graduate of Brown — Phi Beta Kappa, valedictorian and commencement speaker, who got his M.D. at Howard University, and became a specialist

in his field — in New York City. Dr. Clarence Foster has been active in the National and International Association of Psychologists. He lives in Philadelphia. Then there is Dr. Gregory Carter, Dr. Chester Hedgeman, Dr. Walter Beckett, pharmacist; and many others.

There are engineers such as George Bland, who has a Ph. D. in electrical engineering from the University of Illinois; Howard Reckling, who has his own drug store in New York; Harvey Turner who received a degree in civil engineering at URI and went on to become a college administrator in Texas; the Lingham sisters in education.

The list is endless. They were all born and raised in Rhode Island. They went to school here, and many attended Rhode Island colleges. But when they had worked hard and taken advantage of the educational opportunities, they were often rebuffed by business men and public officials when they tried to work and live in their native state.

So they sought other fields, and found they could find jobs, that they could find fulfillment. Result: they settled in their new environment, married, often raised families, sent their sons and

daughters on to college. They in turn are raising families—girls and boys who will go on to college.

WHERE HAVE they gone? They are everywhere, from New York to California, throughout the north and south — black folk from Rhode Island who, had they been given the opportunity, might have remained at home to give this state a goodly number of young people to enter our colleges and universities, and to contribute to a pool of potential teachers for our schools.

Things are somewhat better, but far from perfect. Many parents who realize the frustrations of their parents, which they themselves experienced, are not convinced that things really are better for their children. Therefore it is going to take a selling job to convince many of the present generation that there are new opportunities, and that they should prepare for them.

This is a job for all of us, but especially for the whites who still have within their hands so much of the power to open jobs and opportunities for all.



BARBECUED RIBS, once a lowly leftover for the slaves' tables, is now a popular "in" choice, prepared in many styles.

prepared in many styles.

Soul food

By CATHERINE S. ROBINSON

WITH THE present emphasis on black consciousness, black assertion, awareness, identity — you name it — the curiosity of white America is understandably piqued about the folk ways of those other Americans who have been for centuries invisible (?).

Hence the subject of "soul food" is convulsing the nation's gourmet cooks. What is it? When and where did it come from? Are black people the sole consumers?

The answer can be briefly stated: Soul food, so called, is very simple and unpretentious fare, the secret of which is seasoning, and slavery gave it birth. During the years of our physical bondage, slaves were not allowed to eat of the same foods served to their masters. Instead they were consigned to assuage their hunger with what the masters rejected as unfit for civilized consumption. This included certain parts of the hog and to a limited extent, other animals.

Exclude the popular and well known cuts of pork and there remain the intestines, called chitterlins (chitlins); the feet, knuckles, ears, snout, tail, head, liver, ribs and "fat back" (all fat salt pork). The latter flavored the acrid greens which grew in abundance and were an important part of the slave diet. The heads were cooked up to make a dish called "souse" or head cheese.

From calves came sweetbreads and from oxen came tripe, both favorites of many black people. It is interesting that Webster's dictionary gives one definition of tripe as "anything useless."

Were it not so ironic, it would be funny that liver, particularly calf and chicken

liver, — once so thoroughly disliked — is today considered a delicacy, along with the lowly spare rib. Even pickled pigs' feet are now glorified as cocktail tidbits, and sweetbreads are very "in" food for many white people.

Concerning preparation, my guess is that most of the foods now characterized as "soul" had to be "jazzed up" with an abundance of herbs and spices in order to be palatable.

Wild rabbit and squirrel, stewed or fried, often made up the meat course for slaves. Fish, always easier to come by than meat and requiring less "doctoring up" than the coarser fare, is still a great favorite. Indeed, among southern Blacks, a "cookout" is a fish fry.

That necessity is the mother of invention has been ably demonstrated by our early ancestors in the ways they used what was available to them. Later generations have continued to improve upon them. Following are recipes submitted by two friends who, when it comes to "soul," can cook up a storm!

FRIED FISH

Fish fillets (haddock, butterfish, scup, flounder)

Pinch of garlic salt

Paprika

Mazola oil

1/2 stick margarine

Bread crumbs

Wash and dry fish. Heat half an inch of oil in heavy skillet with margarine and a bit of sage. Coat the fillets with bread crumbs and fry a few at a time. Serve with greens and corn bread.

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

*Yesterday, Now
and Tomorrow
As proof, we offer
Karen Wilson . . .*

Pictures by Dizlo

