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Imani Kazana

BLACK SPRINGFIELD: A HISTORICAL STUDY

This is the conclusion of Imani Kazani's history of Springfield, Massachusetts, the first part of which, covering the period from 1636-1900, is printed in Contributions to Black Studies, no. 1, 1977.

THE BEGINNING of the new century was perhaps the most dismal period in the history of black people since slavery. White Southerners had regained political power and solidified a system of strict segregation and repression of the race. Lynchings took place with regularity. In the country as a whole, industry was prosperous and growing. Race riots, led in many instances by immigrants, were numerous. White people of the day did not want to compete with black people for jobs. A distaste for mob action in Massachusetts was evident in editorials which condemned the lynchings taking place over most of the country.¹ Studies, however, generally confirm that there were no lynchings in New England.²

Unfortunately, the most widely recognized spokesman of black people was Booker T. Washington whose doctrines were narrow and limited. Although as Du Bois says, "his programme of industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights, was not wholly original,"³ the vast majority of black people acclaimed him as their leader in spite of the few who recognized that this technique for elevation accepted too much limitation of black aspirations. That is, his emphasis on the training of service workers and encouraging silence at a time when higher skills and protest were needed was not the way toward getting black people those rights denied by white society. From most who disagreed there was only a murmur of protest. For a few, however, serious exception was taken to his philosophy and they organized a counter force known as the Niagara Movement led by Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois. Locally, black people were influenced by all these events and attitudes.

Springfield's white population was enjoying the job opportunities and money from the booming industrial age as was evidenced in the presence and prosperity of such companies as Smith and Wesson, G. and C. Merriam publishers, Milton Bradley, bicycle plants and power tool manufacturers. The convenience of the Connecticut River for travel and power and the central location for railroads made Springfield the center of industrial activity for Western New England.

A black Civil War veteran, William Hughes, said to newspaper reporters in 1907, "I have been in all the large cities of the East, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and the rest and Springfield is the best place for the colored man."⁴ While this may have been relatively true, it did not mean that conditions were good. Studies done in 1905 on employment clearly indicate that Blacks were not sharing equally with Whites in the fruits of industrialization. Among the 1,021 black residents there were one doctor, four clerks, seven or eight men at the Smith and Wesson factory, four restaurant owners, three barbershop owners, one tailor, two female teachers, and 14 waiters, bellmen, and elevator men at Hotel Worthy. No Blacks were employed in the city government. There were few black men enjoying the industrial jobs because, among other reasons, unions barred them. The seven or eight employed at Smith and Wesson were working in a non-union shop.⁵ Of the men employed, 320 of the 375 were menial laborers. Sixty percent of the black female population worked. Of these 201 were domestics, 196 housekeepers and 76 laundresses.⁶

Dr. William N. DeBerry, the pastor of St. John's Church and a widely respected leader in the community, held some of Mr. Washington's views. For example, the thrust of job training set up by the church was the training of domestics. But positive elements of Washington's philosophy were also evidenced in Springfield. Many of the migrants from Virginia established their own businesses. That many residents purchased real estate can also be attributed to Washington's philosophy. Thompson's study of 55 prominent black property owners, estimated holdings at approximately \$145,000.

An indication that the population did not fully accept the Booker T. Washington philosophy of staying out of politics is that 258 of the 375 black male population were registered voters. It seems that even then an attempt was made to create a bloc of voting power. It is not clear how the presence in Springfield of Mrs. Susan Rainey influenced the politics of the people, but it is interesting to note her presence as she was the wife of Joseph H. Rainey, the first black man to sit in the

House of Representatives and a fluent and eloquent spokesman for the 14th Amendment and against the Ku Klux Klan Act. The residents of Springfield were also concerned with the preservation of their history and the propagation of race pride. A celebration in 1907 of John Brown's 107th birthday was observed by the recital of the life experiences of six residents of Springfield who were ex-slaves.⁷ It was in ways such as this that William N. DeBerry and others sought to make the people retain their history and a sense of identity and pride.

More immediate problems, however, pressed the Blacks. In housing it seems that because the town was still growing and everyone had room to move, discriminatory practices were not severe at that time. Thompson's black population breakdown by wards indicates that they were fairly spread out. That there was discrimination in housing is clear in reports such as that of Thompson who says, "the pastor of the largest colored church found it extremely difficult to rent a desirable and convenient house in a respectable portion of the city."⁸ Recreationally, Springfield offered little for its black population. Life for 50% of the population was centered in the black churches. There were also secret societies and beneficial organizations. There was, however, little else socially except the poolrooms downtown where men and boys gathered especially on winter nights.

One might recap the beginning of the 20th Century for black people in Springfield as a time when self-benefiting organizations were firmed up (business enterprises, fraternal orders and churches). It is also the time when Springfield was fortunate enough to attract Dr. William N. DeBerry who assumed leadership of the community. Born of slave parents after the Civil War in Nashville, Tennessee, he struggled through public schools, obtained his Bachelor of Science degree from Fisk University in 1896, went to divinity school and took up his duties in Springfield's St. John's Church in 1899. It was through his published studies of the black community of Springfield and those of race problems and his lectures throughout New England that his influence which lasted well into the century was most felt.

The period of 1910 to about 1925 is significant not only because it is a time when several organizations and institutions were started but because of the rapid increase in the black population. These new organizations could only serve a small portion of the black community. A thesis by Joseph Bowers, a member of St. John's Church gives us some insight into what the total black life was and how it was later to be complicated by the influx of more migrants during World War I.

From 1905 to 1914 the black population rose from 1,253 to 1,841 and was evenly distributed between the Hill area and North and South ends, and the downtown areas. Of the adult population, 24.7 percent had been born in Virginia alone and 51.6 percent had been born in the South, generally suggesting that the population had common experiences.⁹

Employment opportunities for black people had not changed significantly which meant that black women were still primarily domestics and black men were still menial laborers. Of the 894 Blacks employed, 75.5% were unskilled labor, 22.4% skilled labor, and 1.9% professional. This was the result of discrimination as was much of the unemployment. Without specifying which factories, Bowers states that there were some which refused admittance to black workers.¹⁰

The black churches were particularly active up to this time in creating a better life economically, socially and spiritually. Members of Loring Street AME in 1907 formed the Mutual Housing Company. Each person saved one dollar per week as shareholders in order to someday obtain land and create more housing. By 1914 it had been able to purchase one tenement building. St. John's Church under the leadership of William N. DeBerry had by far the most extensive and comprehensive program for social development. Some of its activities included running a home for working girls similar to a YWCA, operating a free employment bureau, hosting a night school for domestic training, running Men's and Boys' clubs for the moral, mental and industrial betterment of their members, organizing athletic and debating clubs and supervising a club for young girls. This last club strikes an interesting note. Bowers mentions that the girls worked in crafts with "raffia" which is strikingly a very African medium, used traditionally for centuries on masks, costumes, etc.

Adding to existing organizations, the Harmony Lodge of Elks was founded in 1907, a social organization whose aims were charitable as well as cultural. These black Elks had impressive bands and marching units and donated scholarships to black students. Women's clubs were created to help the poor and needy and to raise scholarship monies to send students to Southern colleges. The Negro Civic League was organized in 1910, committing its 135 members to the protection of rights of Blacks as citizens, the advancement of political rights, the cooperation of each male member of the community to protect Blacks, to develop strategies of behavior considering conditions of the whole community, and to plan for systematic bettering of those conditions.

Although only 38.5% of the males voted in 1914, the League's contribution of money helped defeat a candidate for Senator who had opposed an amendment intended to protect black votes in the South.¹¹

Another organization which was not social but political and extremely important to bettering the position of black people in Springfield was the NAACP. In 1915, Rev. Garnett Waller, a native of Baltimore and pastor of Third Baptist Church started the local branch of the NAACP, obtaining its permanent charter in 1918. This branch was persistently active in its fight to end discrimination against Blacks in Springfield. Two of its earliest accomplishments were the opening of the pool at the YMCA and the educational facilities at Springfield College to black people.¹²

In education, the black population showed little progress from 1905-1914 as only 20 black students had graduated from Springfield high schools during this period. Six of these went to college. After the compulsory age of 16 an average of only 27% of black children remained in school.¹³ Bowers' study makes no attempt to account for these dismal facts, but in light of circumstances, it is easy to understand that faltering economic situations made it necessary for the youth to get jobs as soon as possible. It is also clear that the majority of black men were relegated to unskilled and menial jobs regardless of their education, making a high school diploma of little value.

World War I and the prospects of more jobs in armament production, especially in the Springfield Armory, attracted waves of black people especially from Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina in 1916. Dr. DeBerry's sociological survey done in 1922 indicated that one-third of the new migrants had come from Georgia. Not only did these people come in search of employment, but also came seeking more educational opportunities for their children. An editorial from the Springfield *Union* dated July 16, 1916 demonstrates the attitude of the white community of the time and the problem to be faced by the black migrants:

The North has been strong for the Negro, . . . but our communities are manifestly not desirous of supplying a field for him to expand and adapt himself to the social structure. . . . We have enough of a problem already to absorb and educate the large alien element that has come into our midst from the Old World.¹⁴

Obviously the white community desired to have no more Blacks than it already had. The use of the aliens as justification, however, is weak in view of the fact that there was never a chance for black people to ex-

pand and adapt even before the wave of Old World immigrants. The newcomers, however, most of whom settled in the North End in tenements as evidenced by school enrollment figures, expanded the population from 1,289 to 1,922 over a 15-year span. The major problem for these people remained in the area of employment. Although wartime job opportunities were greater, the proportion of Blacks employed as common labor and menial servants remained at 73.5%. DeBerry's study in 1922 also showed that of a total of 462 black women employed, 288 were domestics and 83 were laundresses.

The hostility of the white community was not only shown in the inaccessibility of good jobs but also in police practices. Although black people constituted only 2½% of the population in 1921, they comprised 6% of all those arrested.

Black churches, as usual, worked to provide social services to the newly arrived. In 1919, Mount Calvary Baptist Church was organized in West Springfield but the small congregation decided one year later to move over the river into the North End to better serve the black community. Its minister, Silas Dupree, served for 24 years in various activities such as inspiring the formation of the Community Association in 1928. The purpose of the Association was to carry on programs for youth and recreation for the community at large. It quickly became the center of black activity in the North End.

Other projects were created such as St. Mark's Community House on Seventh Street. It was a rooming house and social center for men, providing among its services a free dental clinic. On the Hill, St. John's Church received two gifts of property from white philanthropists. One parcel was an apartment building at the corner of Orleans and Quincy Streets which helped mitigate the acute housing problem for Blacks. The other parcel, a 54-acre farm in East Brookfield near Worcester, was made into a summer camp for black youth which still functions.¹⁵

The period of the early twenties would not be complete without mention of the Garvey movement in Springfield. Marcus Garvey was a Black Nationalist/Pan-Africanist whose movement was most important. Its major thrust was to instill a sense of pride and of identity into the suffering black population and to organize these people and their pennies into cooperative money-making business ventures which would benefit them and eventually help to free Africa from the clutches of white people. Once creating a strong base there, it could in turn serve to help free black people in the Western Hemisphere.

Most older people report that there was indeed a branch of Garveyites in Springfield to which their parents belonged. They had regular meetings and went about the task of raising funds for the movement. Many children of the time were well informed and proud of the ideology and goals of Garvey.¹⁶

The early part of the 20th Century, then, represents for the black population of Springfield a period in which they faced increasing white hostility. Drawing on its own strengths, however, the community through its organizations, associations and churches was able to aid its growing numbers and sustain a sense of pride.

The early 1930's was a difficult and confused period for the entire nation, but for the black community a continuation and increase of difficulties the majority of Whites had not experienced until the economic crash. During the flourishing 20's the black population of Springfield grew to 3,141 by 1930.¹⁷ The Depression hit the community hard. Over half of the adult membership in St. John's Church had no regular employment. Mr. George Gordon, the then president of the NAACP, estimated that 75-85% of the black population was on welfare.¹⁸ A study done in 1934 by a student at Springfield College¹⁹ indicates that the status and occupations of those who were employed had changed little. The majority of employed Blacks were in unskilled and menial jobs:

Total black males 10 and over employed in 1930	1,032
Agriculture	10
Manufacturing and mechanical industries (machinists, mechanics, painters, etc.)	347
Transportation (chauffeurs, truck drivers and laborers)	161
Trade (laborers, porters, etc.)	88
Public services (watchmen, doorkeepers)	14
Professional services	35
Domestic and personal services (janitors, waiters, hairdressers, etc.)	341
Clerical	36
Total black females 10 and over employed in 1930	544
Agriculture	1
Manufacturing and mechanical industries	30
Trade	8
Professional services	15
Domestic and personal services	483
Clerical occupations	7

The difficulty of the times can be further realized when one considers that 35.2% of the married women had to work. It is clear, however,

that their labor did little to relieve the suffering of the times considering that 88% of them were employed in low paying domestic and personal service jobs. Another indication of harder times for the black community was the decrease in black-owned business from 51 in 1922 to 41 in 1930. The only area of improvement was the increase in the number of professionals which can be attributed in large part to the establishment of social organizations by Blacks which created jobs for college graduates. From 1922 to 1930 this group increased from 16 to 31. But again the majority suffered unemployment and under-employment.

Geographically the black population was clustering into two wards. Approximately a third lived in Ward 1 where Mount Calvary Baptist Church was the center of activity and assistance. Among its works was a hot lunch program, the creation in 1932 of a home for transient black men on Grays Street, and a continuation of the athletic activities for the youth.²⁰ Over a third of the population was in Ward 4 on Armory Hill. By this time St. John's Institutional Activities, Inc. had split entirely from the church under the leadership of Dr. DeBerry and taken on the name of Dunbar Community League, Inc. Out of several locations, the League operated a Girls' Club, Boys' Club and classes in printing, woodworking, athletics and government. For all the work done by the black churches and other organizations, it was not enough to fill the needs—the youth were hard pressed.

Statistics of the Juvenile Court as provided in Mr. Taylor's study indicate that instances of arrest of black youngsters were numerous. Even though black people comprised only 5% of Springfield's population, 20% of all juvenile cases involved black youth—males and females. The author of the 1934 study offers some reasons for the high incidence of arrests:

As is the case everywhere, the home offers the first and greatest opportunity for leadership. Very often, however, the Negro family does not find circumstances conducive to obtaining the best results due to social, economic and educational handicaps.²¹

Further, he states that "the youth is affected by these circumstances since what his elders do and what they possess in the way of possible financial assistance determines in large measure what he may do." The problems are largely the result, as he sees them, of the depressed conditions of the 1930's—the lack of employment and poverty. Another reason for the problem, to put it bluntly, is racism. Given the institutionalized racism in the public schools and the day-to-day personal

racism, it is small wonder that black youth dropped out of school after they had reached the mandatory age requirements. This racism is well documented and a single example will serve as illustration. A probation officer in referring to a 15-year-old offender logged in official court records, "Intelligence: He is retarded in school. However, this is a characteristic of his race." Obviously his judgment is of a race and one wonders whether the boy was originally arrested for what he had done or his blackness.

Reverend Roland Heacokle, minister at St. John's Church, discussing this racism in an article points to the limitations it places on opportunity in the city, "Springfield will lose numbers of young people who, having finished in the schools here, can find but limited opportunity and so must go to other cities for their careers."²² It resulted in the heavier load carried by Blacks during this period when the majority of the poor were burdened.

To appreciate the decade of the 1940's one must remember the deprivations of the 1930's—the denial of decent jobs, the housing shortage and the insufficient social and recreational support—and then multiply the population by two. The population expanded from approximately 3,100 to 6,137 in 1950. This increase was again the result of a World War. World War II expanded employment opportunities in defense and non-defense plants, and black people came from all parts of the country seeking work in places like Fisk Tire Company, Chapman Valve Manufacturing Company, and Moore Drop Forging.

Black Air Corps men coming to Westover Air Force Base were significant in increasing the population. There were so many that a black branch of the USO was chartered in Springfield and was headed by the minister of Bethel AME Church.²³ The bulk of the West Indian population came during this period, many came on temporary visas to work in the war plants, on farms and as domestics later returning to establish permanent residence.²⁴

The 40's marked the beginning of another round of organized pressure against the racism rampant in Springfield. Dr. DeBerry's 1942 survey showed once again "that the Negro in Springfield is discriminated against by both society and industry, is poorly housed and lives a life of economic instability." Once again the reasons given by the Whites were based upon racist fears and stereotypes—Blacks could not be hired in larger numbers by industry for fear of bad public relations and because of the stereotypic notion that Blacks were inefficient workers.²⁵ The pressures applied were not as militant as those

of the Gileadites in the 1850's, but protest did come. A preview came, when in 1938, black people elected and kept in office for five years, Attorney Clifford Clarkson, a Springfield native and Howard University graduate, to represent them in the City Council.

Westover was a major source of irritation to the community as was the Air Force nationally for its policy of segregation and discrimination. Black troops were separated into black units relegated to menial duties—delivering mail, driving trucks, working in the hospital and kitchens, working in maintenance. There were, of course, no black pilots. It was not until A. Philip Randolph's march on Washington in 1941²⁶ and serious riots took place at various camps and bases that conditions changed even slightly. Black pilots, however, were not trained to fly multi-planes, thus Westover still had no highly skilled black personnel; and although segregated facilities were integrated, job classifications were hardly changed.

The Communist Party made its bid for black support by striking out publicly against discrimination in jobs and housing. In 1942 at a rally in Springfield, the national party leader demanded that Blacks be hired on the police force and that a new housing development be built.²⁷ In 1948, they created quite a stir charging the local bus company with discrimination and urging black men to challenge it by applying en masse.²⁸ They attempted to take over the policy-making body of the local NAACP during the war years running a Party member who lost the presidency by only one vote.²⁹

The Communist Party did find support among those members who sought allies where they could find them, and those who perceived the Party as more forceful and vocal in complaints than the NAACP. In addition, Paul Robeson's family lived in nearby Enfield, Connecticut and had many personal friends in the area.³⁰ After this superb actor and singer's 1934 visit to Moscow where he saw racial freedom, he became a Communist Party sympathizer. Although he was not an official member of the Party, the U.S. government's sanctions and harassment practically destroyed his career and reputation as in 1951 they would attempt to destroy W. E. B. Du Bois. The black community respected him and his beliefs and those of his son, Paul Robeson, Jr. who attended Technical High School in Springfield. The community's knowledge of the crass treatment Robeson was receiving from the government coupled with the agitation for racial equality coming from the Communist Party led the community to a sympathetic view of it.

The NAACP, with a large membership of 475, was also active in the drive for better job opportunities. Their protests coupled with those of the Communist Party did open a few jobs. In 1947, two black policemen were hired and a Black, Leon Houston, headed the United Packing House Workers of America Union at the Handy Company. Others at Monsanto Chemical Company got better positions through the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers Union.³¹ These were but token gestures and political moves to keep Springfield calm.*

* A beautiful example of the politics involved was the appointment of Mary McLean as a teacher in 1939. Although she preferred to live at the Black Dunbar Center, the white folks insisted that she live in the white YWCA so that the public would know who hired her and for whom she worked.

This period was marked by a doubling of the black population—one forced to confront the same problems of inadequate housing, low levels of employment and discriminatory practices in hiring and advancement. It was further marked, however, by political action and protests that though producing only token success were noble.

In 1950 the battle for civil rights intensified when Reverend Albert Cleage, now a Black Christian Nationalist minister of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, turned his focus from reorganization of St. John's Church to community political activity. He has been described by most commentators as being before his time in Springfield but in reality he was not for the struggle for civil rights was in progress throughout the country.

Working on several committees of the NAACP, he spurred that organization into a major struggle with the public housing people. Cleage authored a pamphlet entitled *Segregation is a Community Problem* (1950) to inform people about the segregationist policies of the Housing Authority. It cited a particular case in which a black veteran and his family were denied admission into a Veterans Housing Project where there were empty units but designated as "white units." The illustrated pamphlet was heavy with action oriented rhetoric such as "We must act now—before it is too late!" It accused the managers of the Riverview Project of segregating by streets while those of Reed Village segregated by units. Beyond reporting, Cleage organized a petition protesting these policies, gathering over a thousand signatures. Before he left in 1951 he also led pickets and boycotts of the stores in Winchester Square and downtown to encourage the hiring of Blacks as clerks.

Another minister, Reverend Charles Cobb, a native of North Carolina, took up the civil rights struggle. A new feature of St. John's Church was the School of Civic Responsibility begun in 1952. This six-week school was open to the community and geared to informing voters of the issues in order that their vote reflect their interests. A significant battle in which Cobb took part with the Pastors' Council, the organization of black ministers in Springfield, was an attack on the school department for discrimination and prejudice in 1956. Within a year, nine black teachers were hired.³²

Although Blacks were moving into previously all-white neighborhoods on the Hill, 31% of the black population was still living in the North End in 1957 where living conditions had gone from bad to worse. A survey indicated that even though 40% of the adults had at minimum a high school education, unemployment was high. The housing standards were such that less than a third of the dwellings had central heating.³³ In addition, there was little access to recreational facilities because the city government failed to give priority to projects in the black community. However, white people ran 16 bars within this small area. In order to cope with these problems, Mt. Calvary and several storefront churches, the House of Prayer and Muhammed's Temple of Islam being but two, began to cooperate. The Highland Branch YMCA ran programs to add to the continuing work of the churches and the Dunbar Center. But neither in the North End nor the growing Hill district did services keep pace with the need.

The 50's might be summarized as a period of pushing by the black community out of the previously defined confines. There was the push to obtain better housing and better jobs. There was also the push politically. After the terms of Attorney Clarkson on the City Council, Paul Mason represented the predominantly black wards from 1949 to 1959. Headway was also made in local PTA's. With so many black children on the Hill, some black parents were able to get leadership positions in the PTA's of the schools affected by the shift. All of these accomplishments plus others, like the demonstrations of the superior predominantly black athletic teams and bands, gave the black residents in the 50's a growing sense of pride and the desire to push for more.

The Civil Rights demonstrations and protests of the 50's served as an eye-opening experience for Blacks across the country. The experience fearlessly brought to the surface inequalities where they existed and fought through protest to change them. Because racism is

more subtle and seemingly less severe in Northern cities, intensive organized protest was not a factor in Springfield. A study done in 1955 by a black resident studying then at Columbia University attributed the apathy of black people to the fact that most of the respected citizens had lived in Springfield for 10 years or more and were less apt to be conscious of their second-class citizenship than those people just moving in. He also noted that, ". . . solidarity will be strengthened to the extent to which persecution or repression is added."³⁴ Because racism was subtle and life in Springfield seemed to be better than elsewhere, there was general reluctance on the part of black people to ruffle feathers. But, repression and persecution was stepped up in the 60's which caused a reaction on the part of the community.

During the late 50's and early 60's black people in Springfield were subjected to what was referred to as "Nigger Removal," Urban Renewal, in the North End. Thirty-one percent of the black population lived there in substandard conditions. Despite a 1950 study showing that room existed in the area for new housing, thus allowing people in substandard housing to be relocated in the same area, city officials decided to tear down the entire section and make it a commercial area, thus deciding against the convenience and well-being of the black residents. The result was that the greater percentage of these people were relocated into the decaying confines of the Hill, for housing in other areas of town was generally, for racial and economic reasons, closed to Blacks.

The census figures of 1960 show that regardless of the patience Blacks had maintained over the years, hoping and having faith that things would get better, they were still at the bottom of the job ladder. A racial breakdown of the employment figures from the 1960 Census Report indicates that while the bulk of the general population engaged in white collar or semi-skilled jobs, the greater part of the employed Blacks were concentrated in unskilled, menial occupations. For example, while constituting 7.5% of the population, 50% of the people employed as domestics were black. At the same time the median income for Springfield was \$5,994, for its black population it was \$4,316. The figures show our representation high only in low-paying, marginal jobs.

As if the picture were not dismal enough, in 1961, a new form of city government was instituted calling for City Councillors to be elected at large rather than by wards. Plan A, as it was called, effectively disenfranchised black voters for they did not have the numbers

to elect a representative for minority concerns to the City Council as in former times. Urban renewal, low pay and high unemployment, and something akin to gerrymandering all served to enrage the black community, but few organized efforts were developed beyond those which had already existed. Among the few, however, was the establishment of the first black credit union in the state by Mt. Calvary Baptist Church which has grown and flourishes to date.

Most progressive folks such as Ben Swann and Oscar Bright were trying to revitalize the NAACP. Ben Swann, one in a family of several dedicated and active people originally from Mississippi, served as editor of the NAACP newsletter and constantly appealed to the masses to unite against racism. The general membership was reluctant to act and rejected progressive acts of organization. This was shown when Ben Swann was nearly expelled from the NAACP for cooperating with the Muslim mosque in a voter registration campaign.³⁵ It is fact that when the Muslims were trying to expand their operations under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakan, conservative elements in the black community, including the leaders of the black churches, called for police protection and blamed the mosque for many problems. Of course, as one can readily see now, the Muslims were only attempting to organize black people into taking progressive steps toward self help. The mosque has expanded and now runs a black school and several businesses. At no time has there ever been violence caused or inspired by the mosque—only solid self-help activity.

In 1963, Oscar Bright felt it necessary to establish a local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in order to organize the community away from the conservative restraint of the NAACP. In March, 1965, CORE organized a demonstration of about 300 people at City Hall to mourn the deaths at Selma, Alabama. Before more solid organization was realized an incident of police brutality resulted in something of a setback.

One night in July, 1965, a fight broke out at a neighborhood bar to which the police force responded with a brutal attack against many of the innocent patrons. Eighteen people were arrested and one person was hospitalized. Most of the people arrested were beaten and handled with severe disrespect. In response to this incident, "The Octagon Lounge Incident," the leadership of CORE organized a mass demonstration. For a couple of days there was a constant sit-in on the steps of City Hall which was supported by many factions of the com-

munity, including Reverend Charles Cobb of St. John's Church. The demands of the black community included suspension of those policemen involved in the incident, a reassignment of black police into the area, and the creation of a Civilian Review Board elected by wards to act in all future incidents of this type. In response the National Guard was called and crushed the protest.³⁶ Later the harsh ruling of the court against those arrested tended to quash further protest. Black people, in response, unsuccessfully ran candidates in the city election that year—Charles Cobb for Mayor and Andy Griffin for City Council.

In 1965 the legislature passed the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Law which called for schools to be racially mixed numerically. As a result, black children were bused to city schools away from their community. The schools in the black community began phasing out programs or closing. For years Blacks had labored with the problem of the schools individually instead of collectively. In May 1969, however, the NAACP supported by most people in the community went to Boston to present their plan for two-way busing and demanded inclusion in the planning for its implementation. In August a list of recommendations was drawn from a community meeting calling for more black school personnel at all levels, two-way busing, an end to exploitation of black athletes, a program of in-service training for teachers and administrators in minority affairs, and school holidays commemorating Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. There was no response from the School Committee which added to the tensions in the schools and community.

In 1969, racial fights broke out at Technical High School which spread to the other schools and ended in several days of conflict in and out of school between black and white students and policemen. Once again the black community united to support the black students. The NAACP attempted to calm things with anti-riot leaflets and by discouraging destruction of the Square. With the leadership of Andy Griffin, president of the NAACP and a young man himself, black men went to school with the students to protect them, supported a boycott of the schools and created Freedom Schools in the black churches. "The togetherness of the Black community proved to the White power structure that a new day had dawned in Springfield," read a NAACP report.³⁷

One previous effort which resulted in part in the development of this leadership shown by these men and the various coalitions was the

1967 Project Awareness. Ben Swann wrote this proposal designed to train a cadre of black men in racial identity, group pride, black history, political action and economic power. It was funded for a short time as Uplift, Inc., which began analyzing the problems of the community and defining relationships with public and private institutions in order to bring about change.³⁸

With the explosion in the early 60's in Watts and other black communities, the "War on Poverty" commenced. The earliest product of this game in Springfield was the Springfield Action Commission (SAC) in 1965. SAC is made up of several branches, each working on particular projects—the Youth Program, Hispanic Affairs, Community Organizing, Neighborhood Legal Services, Headstart-Preschool, N.E.S.—a tutorial and counseling component and Concentrated Employment Program. Funds for these programs came primarily from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and the Department of Labor.

These programs have most of the usual built-in failure apparatus, principally budgets too small intended to support too many projects thus making it impossible to attack any single problem successfully. As of 1971, even this funding did not rise from its 1965 level to reflect rising costs. But the games continue. It seems clear that the real intent of the programs was to keep Springfield "cool" rather than solve problems of poverty when one examines the methods of funding—especially during the "long hot summers." For example, the Youth Program received \$40,000 to run a 12-month training program for school dropouts, but \$125,000 for its summer projects³⁹—obviously an attempt to keep down demonstrations and violent upheavals.

The CEP program was a dismal failure giving only false hope to Blacks. Limited funds from the Department of Labor make it possible to run only a mediocre training program. Proof of this is a quick glance at the job placement records which reveal that its clients have for the most part moved from unemployment into low paying, unskilled, temporary jobs. CEP has trained people to maintain a cheap labor force rather than to significantly help them break into the new technological fields. Government guidelines for the make-up of the governing boards are still another part of the failure mechanism. Once city government appointees and a white-dominated professional staff is added to a board its decisions are watered down and reflect the paternalistic wishes and perceptions of Whites, rather than those of Blacks. Despite these problems the programs did accomplish some-

thing; however, as OEO was cut back and funds disappeared, even these pacifying programs faded away. Only those which were able to beg funds from other sources remained.

All of the projects should be commended for what they have accomplished over great odds. In fact, programs like Neighborhood Legal Services have been a vital resource for community people. In 1969 the Welfare Rights Organization, working out of the community organizing segment of SAC, made meaningful strides in getting legal rights for welfare mothers before it was defeated. The mothers staged a sit-in at the Welfare Office in the Square but were tricked outside by the police. The result was a violent confrontation resulting in the calling of the National Guard and imposing a three-day curfew. Within a year, that branch of SAC was quietly ended. It is particularly sad that the poverty war with its programmed failure for black people has caused many residents to be pacified into inactivity, for it is obvious these programs were not intended to create real change for Blacks as this closing down of the Welfare Rights program indicates. The real intent appears to have succeeded.

Model Cities, another invention of the 60's to "aid" poor communities, almost repeated SAC's failure. Fortunately, however, in 1969, the NAACP and its president, Andy Griffin, demanded that the Board consist primarily of Model Cities area residents rather than city appointees. The budget is originated in the policy board by acceptance or denial of funding proposals submitted to it. If the City Council approves it, it is sent to HUD from whom most of the funding comes. Although Model Cities is actually a city department, the major input and decision-making comes from community people. Despite this, however, the city government reaps most benefits from these anti-poverty grants. First, funds go to projects for which the city should be responsible. Thus they free up city funds making possible further development in white sections such as the downtown area. Further, and perhaps most damaging, the projects tend to keep black people fairly quiet and politically out of other city affairs.

In some instances there is even blatant exploitation of these funds designed to give maximum benefits to black people. For example, the *Springfield Star*, July 10, 1971 reported that although the city had many teachers' aides hired with special Title I monies designed to help "disadvantaged" youngsters, only 40% of these teachers' aides had been assigned to schools attended by the "disadvantaged."

During the late 1960's a new element, the black college students,

became an important and progressive factor in community affairs adding to the churches and other organizations which have traditionally led it. They began by recapturing their own identities and making demands on college administrators intended to benefit themselves and the surrounding community. These demands included active recruitment of Blacks as students, adequate financial aid and black cultural centers with operating budgets. With the support of the black community the students won over the colleges and in return have provided the community with valuable black cultural and political awareness education. American International College students with the help of Model Cities, the Urban League, and other groups have presented each spring the Black Arts Festival. Springfield College students made their facilities such as the cultural center available to the community. Thus the black students and the black community work together, aware of themselves as a people with beauty, pride, and strength.

In 1968 the first Harambee took place. The originators envisioned that this yearly summer festival as an experience in self-awareness, education, and pride. Although it has been basically good, it has been severely and correctly criticized. Dr. Charles Hurst, President of Malcolm X College in Chicago, who when invited to give an address at the Harambee, was most critical saying “. . . this white carnival atmosphere is not needed, because the money is going in his pocket, not the people’s.”⁴⁰ He was referring to the fact that exploitive white concerns were operating carnival rides at the event. Andy Griffin charged that same year that Harambee had lost sight of its original educational goals for commercialism as exemplified by the predominantly white parade which opened the event.⁴¹

The decade saw some changes in the traditional organizations in the community. For example, in 1968 the Urban League took a new direction nationally which subsequently had an effect locally:

No longer can the traditional social work approach be applied to solving ills which plague our society [members] must use all of their talents to develop ghetto power. . . . [We] must aggressively attack those areas which bring about the vehicles which promulgate the problems of the oppressed. . . . We can no longer run the Urban League from the norms of the middle class.⁴²

Since that time the organization has been involved in such things as on-the-job training programs where the emphasis is on technical, clerical and research occupations rather than “production” training.

The period of the sixties beginning as it did with a great many setbacks for the community, furtive attempts to revitalize old organizations, starting new ones, protests resulting in further oppression, undermining government programs by city officials, eventually saw the community pulling together—both culturally and politically.

The Model Cities Program Analysis of January 1972 begins, “The Model neighborhood area is in short, an economically depressed area.” It indicates that the median family income was approximately \$4,300—the same as in 1960. This at a time when the National Department of Employment Security has estimated that a family of four needs at least \$7,000 to secure basic goods and services. It estimates the unemployment rate at between 14 and 18% which means that the black community between low income and unemployment had been in a constant state of depression and that 23% of the residents received some form of welfare.

There are many reasons for this continued depressed situation. The primary one is that there are still discriminatory practices in employment. Out of a total of 4,273 trade union members in Springfield, only 187 were black. There are still less than 200 black employees among 2,000 at the Post Office. Of these, none are in secretarial or white-collar positions. The *Springfield Star* reported that in September of 1971 after a series of delaying tactics, 20 minority youths were hired into a special training program at the Post Office but that they were subsequently assigned to the “bucket brigade.”⁴³ Further the *1970 Annual Statistical Report* of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination indicates that in 1970, 50% of its complaints were in the area of employment and concerned with racial discrimination.

There are other reasons behind this high unemployment. Much of the city’s new industrial development is in outlying areas where access by public transportation is poor. To large numbers of the community, unable to afford cars, these industries are inaccessible. Black business in the community cannot grow to provide employment to offset this trend. Potential businessmen lack capital, but further for those who might, success is unlikely. These few are discouraged by the high crime rate, the run-down appearance of the neighborhood, and the poverty of the target clientele. Inadequate education remains a cause for unemployment. Guidance and counseling—there are only five black counselors in the system—appears to be as much a cause as a curriculum which is irrelevant to the practical problems facing

Blacks. The result is a shockingly low 40% of the Model Neighborhood children entering first grade graduate—this when the city's rate is 70%.

The Model Cities Program Analysis shows that housing remained a problem for the black community. Approximately 55% of it in the Model Neighborhood area was classified as substandard. 87% of the units are occupied by low income families unable to afford improvements on their domiciles. By 1980 an estimated 2,951 new units must be constructed and 1,291 units rehabilitated to support the expected population.

The reasons for this poor showing remains monotonously the same. Racism within white neighborhoods makes housing there inaccessible. Real estate dealers have refused to share information about available housing with Blacks. Bankers have refused to lend money to minorities desiring to rehabilitate their homes or buy new ones. Finally, real estate people, bankers and city officials have teamed up to block decisions which support rent control, housing code enforcement, and housing as an urban renewal priority.

The Program Analysis further shows there are still inadequate recreational and cultural facilities. The Dunbar Community Center and the Girls' Club are the only indoor centers. The only indoor pools are a small one at the Barrows playground site and at the Girls' Club. Playgrounds, parks and picnic areas are practically non-existent. These problems are clear indications of neglect by the city government.

Health care for the black community is shameful. Only seven doctors practice within the black community out of a city-wide total of 306. There are only 4 dental facilities. With the exception of a women's clinic on State Street opened up by Model Cities, there are no other health care centers. A particular health problem which is plaguing the community and for which there is a total absence of care within the black community is heroin addiction. The drug program analysis estimates that there are over 1,000 addicts within the Model Neighborhood area alone. Crime as a result is increasing. But the closest drug treatment is several miles away at the Springfield Hospital Methadone Detoxification Center which provides merely limited after-care or counseling.

At the beginning of the seventies a description of the black community does, as the Program Analysis states, resemble a disaster area; however, the work that is taking place must be noted. Model Cities

and SAC have contributed some to the improvement of the neighborhood, but the funding of these programs and the allocation of the monies cannot be depended upon. As the past has shown, the black community can best depend upon those programs which are not dependent upon federal funding nor subject to local government interference. It is, then, to such organizations as the Black Businessmen's Association, the Urban League's Black Seeds Program, Core City Associates, the Dunbar Center and the church programs that we turn for the most enduring work toward the solution of the community's problems if not the most spectacular.

It is clear from the earliest parts of the history of Springfield's Blacks that the ideas expressed by W. E. B. Du Bois in 1934 were not new nor alien to its black community, but they bear repeating:

Learn to associate with ourselves and to train ourselves for effective association. Organize our strengths as consumers; learn to cooperate and use machines and power as producers; train ourselves in methods of democratic control within our own group. Run and support our own institutions.

Without this allegiance to ourselves, he asserts:

We would suffer the loss of self-respect, the lack of faith in ourselves, the lack of ability to make a decent living by our own efforts. . . .⁴⁴

NOTES

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² Ralph Ginsburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (New York, 1962), pp. 9, 12, 19.

³ Allen D. Grimshaw, *Racial Violence in the United States* (1969), p. 57.

⁴ Springfield Scrapbook, Vol. 38, p. 127.

⁵ Elmer E. Thompson, "A Study of the Negro of Springfield," an unpublished thesis, Springfield College, 1904, p. 4.

⁶ Springfield *Republican*, February 5, 1905.

⁷ William N. DeBerry, *The Social Needs of Negroes in Springfield* (Springfield, 1922), pp. 52-53.

⁸ Thompson, pp. 2-3.

⁹ Joseph William Bowers, "The Springfield Negro," an unpublished thesis, International Young Men's Christian Association College, 1914, pp. 4-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-73, *passim*.

¹² Interview: George Gordon, retired real estate and insurance man, April, 1972.

¹³ Bowers, pp. 39-41.

¹⁴ Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (New York, 1969).

- ¹⁵ *The History of St. John's Congregational Church* (Springfield, 1962), pp. 67-70.
- ¹⁶ Interview: Ernest J. Henderson, funeral director, March 1972.
- ¹⁷ Harold Taylor, "A Study of the Negro Youth in Springfield, Massachusetts," an unpublished thesis, Springfield College, 1934.
- ¹⁸ *History of St. John's*, p. 78.
- ¹⁹ Taylor, pp. 23-25.
- ²⁰ *Springfield Daily News*, May 13, 1937.
- ²¹ Taylor, p. 23.
- ²² An undated newspaper article on file in the Springfield College Library vault, circa. 1930.
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- ²⁴ Interview: C. A. Woodburn, President of the West Indian Benevolent Club, March 1972.
- ²⁵ *Springfield Daily News*, October 1, 1942.
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- ²⁹ Interview: Mary McLean, board member of the NAACP, March 1972.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ *Springfield Union*, March 11, 1947.
- ³² *History of St. John's*, pp. 91-99.
- ³³ Massachusetts' Council of Churches, *Springfield's North End* (Boston, 1957).
- ³⁴ Walter H. English, "A Study of Minority Group Attitudes of Negroes in Springfield, Massachusetts and the Implications for Guidance Services in the Public Schools," an unpublished dissertation, Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1955.
- ³⁵ Interview: Benjamin Swann, candidate for State Representative, January 1972.
- ³⁶ *Springfield Daily News*, July 17, 1965.
- ³⁷ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Special Education Committee Report*, 1969.
- ³⁸ Benjamin Swann Interview.
- ³⁹ Interview: Raymond Wiltshire, Deputy of Planning, C.E.P., April 1972.
- ⁴⁰ *Springfield Star*, August 29, 1970.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, September 12, 1970.
- ⁴² Urban League of Springfield, *55 Annual Report Meeting*, 1968.
- ⁴³ *Springfield Star*, September 11, 1971.
- ⁴⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Segregation in the North," *The Crisis*, XLI, April 1934.