

300 Years of an Uphill Fight

By CLAUDIA JONES

SINGING paeans of praise to Negro womanhood, a prominent Negro journal recently carried a series of four articles on "Fifty Years of Progress of Negro Woman."

It is fitting to examine in what wise these articles appraised the lot of Negro women in Mid-Century America. Did the article, for example, deal with the plight of over seven million Negro women, the majority of whom, despite ability, are forced to do menial domestic work? Did it dwell on the mockery of American justice which has planned to doom Negro mothers and wives to "lynch widowhood" as in the case of the framed up Negro men in Martinsville, Virginia?

Did it deal with the growing gnawing terror in the heart of every Negro mother and wife, whose son or husband now in the insane Korean Wall Street adventure, walk in fear that their kin may become another Lieut. Gilbert?

Indeed not! These articles based on the widely perpetrated falsehood, currently prated by bourgeois ideologists and reformists, sought to convince its readers that Negroes, that is "individual Negroes," are achieving "integration" at home and in the armed services, etc.

One does not have to look far to refute this lie and particularly as regards the lot of seven million Negro women of our land. For instance, in the very next issue following the appearance of these articles in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, this item appeared in its news section:

"Wife Whipped as Mate Flees—Night of Terror in Farm House." This story dwelt with the vicious feudal whipping of a Negro woman in Chadburn, N. C., by a mob of 40 white supremacists, over what is common practice in the Black Belt—a dispute over the property boundaries of Negro owners, boundaries not satisfactory to complaining white neighbors.

Of course, no one will deny that Negro women by dint of struggle, sacrifice and by clearing tremendous hurdles have made significant advances in the last 50 years. For women generally in our capitalist society to break into the professions or other fields of endeavor—as is still true even in the trade unions—they must contend against numerous anti-woman prejudices, designed to perpetuate the inferiority of women in our

society. How much more true is this of Negro women—thrice oppressed as Negro, worker and woman.

But a nation can hardly boast of strides and advances for seven million of its citizens, whose status is one of the most shameful blots on American history, without being subject to question. Facts show that in 1945, of the more than

seven million Negro women, over a million were still confined to domestic pursuit and close to another million work as agricultural workers. A National Urban League Study made in 1947-48 shows that insofar as occupations are concerned, the rest of the Negro women were distributed as follows: approximately 6,000 Negro women were in white

collar industries; 52,000 are teachers, 9,000 nurses, 12,000 practical nurses, 1,000 college professors, etc. This Urban League study was forced to point out that while in 1946, white women working in non-farm rural areas had median earnings of \$1,142, Negro women earned but \$497 annually. Only 4 percent of Negro women earned as much as \$200 a year although 17 percent of white women did.

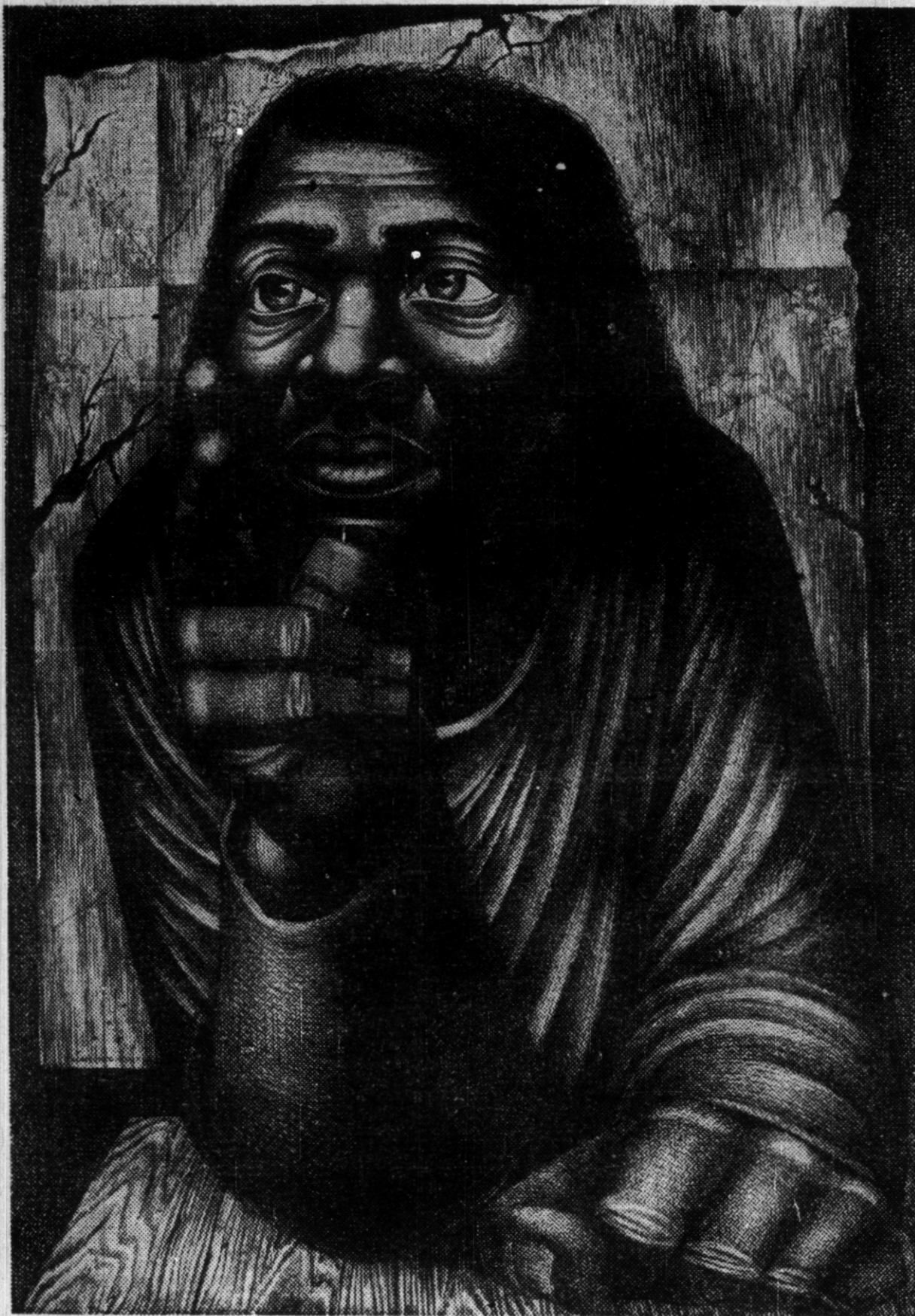
These figures merely reflect the continued concentration of Negro women in midcentury America in menial jobs. The wartime gains of six to seven years ago have all but been wiped out for Negro women. Yet it is the Negro women who as family heads are the breadwinners, because due to growing unemployment Negro men have been the heaviest hit. This picture only emphasizes the responsibility of progressives to fight for, and take steps to organize, the domestic worker, who recently was given, begrudgingly the status of "worker" in the new social security regulations.

Of course, the American bourgeoisie, based on its "free enterprise," "rugged individualism" and the "devil take the hindmost" precepts regard success of individuals as its measure of its democratic progress. Negro reformist writers, aping these concepts similarly measure these individual achievements ignoring the plight of the great mass of Negro women who are sorely oppressed.

And there is a method to their madness.

For thus, a renowned artist, such as Marion Anderson, can pass with equanimity, a picket line (despite repeated appeals from Negro and progressive spokesmen) in Richmond, Va. A picket line, mind you, which protests the jimcrow seating of an audience, before whom she sings in a jimcrow theatre in a jimcrow city where even men—sons and husbands of Negro mothers and wives from whose loin she springs, are doomed to die merely because of the color of their skins!

Thus Hazel Scott can state at a meeting of Negro and white artists being primed to support the Truman program of war and fascist reaction that she is neither for facism nor communism, but for equality of the Negro people. The same Hazel Scott was discriminated against by the Daughters of the American Revolution and was recently forced to sue for discrimination a Northwestern hotel from which she was barred.



HARRIET TUBMAN

(A drawing by the distinguished Negro artist Charles White)

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Half the World

by Claudia Jones

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Thus, the Truman UN appointee Edith Sampson, can boast on an American Town Hall of the Air, that "under a democracy we have freedom and opportunity to better existing conditions" no doubt, using herself and not the masses of Negro women as an example of this contention.

It behooves an American ruling class and bipartisan Truman Administration hell bent on World War III and fascist reaction at home to utilize Negro women as "symbols" to prop up their so-called claim to stand for democracy and freedom all over the globe. Fraternization and "courtship" of such Negro women is being hailed as the sign that the leopard has changed its spots. Thus, the prominent National Council of Women at its recent annual convention was attended by Truman, Acheson and Social Democratic representatives. Acheson paid court by extolling the work of Mrs. Sampson. Her "good humor, good sense and energy" Acheson termed as a "positively invaluable assets." The heart of his speech however sought to head off criticism of the U. S. state department and the present foreign policy. Any change to the contrary he declared might prove disastrous.

Disastrous for whom? For the millions of oppressed African and Asiatic women, of Latin America and the West Indies, who see in the powerful strides to equality of their Chinese sisters something to emulate to build a good life for themselves and their children, free of imperialist colonization and contempt of poverty and death? One need only ask the women of Korea, 45 percent of whom have been killed by MacArthur's bombers why they burn with a fire of hatred against the Yankee invaders who are supposed to bring freedom to the "unhappy Korean peoples." But according to a symbol of individual success, Mrs. Edith Sampson, who introduced Acheson at this gathering, the real cause of the unrest of the colonial and nationally oppressed peoples was that the Russians were imposing their colonialisms on these people "under the attractive banner of nationalism."

History is rich in example of Negro women who went down to everlasting fame and glory in their association with the cause of all oppressed peoples of the earth, with the cause of peace, social progress and equality for the masses of the Negro people. Such a woman was Harriet Tubman.

As a child of 15 burning with a fire of revolt against the injustice of slavery she declared of the sufferings of her peoples: "I had seen their tears and sighs and I had heard their groans and I would give every drop in my vein to free them."

Nor did honors and publicity which later came to her for her daring exploits as the conductor of the Underground Railway, her work with the Union Army as a soldier, for which she was dubbed "General" by John Brown, and "Moses of her people," by others, turn her head. She was ever critical of Lincoln's failure to utilize the powerful arm of Negro troops in the just anti-slavery war; she was critical of Lincoln's failure to equalize the pay of Negro soldiers with that of whites: her entire philosophy was summed up in her homespun statement: "Never wound a snake—kill it."

In an interview with a New York World Reporter in 1907, she observed of her own lot: "You wouldn't think after I had served the flag so faithfully I should come to want in its folds." Subject to want and insult in her latter years she was forcibly ejected from a north-bound train when she embarked in the South, because the white supremacist conductor expressed disbelief that a Negro woman carrying a soldier's pass could have been a soldier in the Union army. This incident resulted in a physical and spiritual wound that remained with her for the rest of her life. . . .

Imprisoned for over three years in the foul hellhole of a Georgia jail, Rosa Lee Ingram, whose freedom must be won in a revived, struggle, stands as a shameful and courageous example of the fight of Negro women for full equality and human dignity!

It is the outstanding Negro women peace heroines who were the outstanding Stockholm petition campaign collectors that are the real inheritors and progenitors of the legend and tradition of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.

It would be wrong of course to conclude without mentioning that in the articles appraising Negro women's advances in the last 50 years, the author, Marjorie McKenzie, observed that "the individual successes (of Negro women, C. J.) . . . are not the key to the cultural progress of the Negro woman in the last 50 years. The secret lies in her ability to organize, her genius for cooperating. This quality of managing joint activity of inspiring others—a deeply feminine gift—is in her very soul." And again: ". . . the organizational groundwork for the power which the Negro woman wields was not laid by college girls. It rests for example on the pennies and prayers of the women's missionaries, societies of the AME Zion, the CME and AME churches. Indeed Negro women comprise 60 percent of the membership of the Negro church . . . an institutional structure worth nearly two billion dollars and still the most powerful medium for reaching the Negro masses." Mrs. McKenzie also notes the numerous mass organizations of Negro women such as the Daughter Elks, and we might add, such powerful organizations as the National Association of Colored Women, etc.

Mrs. Ada Jackson, Negro woman progressive peace leader at a Women's peace meeting, made a profound observation when she stated recently that she is "galled" at the fact that once a year Negro History Week must still be observed in these United States. For progressives, and particularly the sisters of Negro women, white women have a special responsibility. The first of these is the struggle for peace, to involve, organize and unite the powerful sentiments of Negro mothers and wives with the growing women's peace movement in our country. Such unity can immeasurably strengthen the peace movement, since it will bring the powerful militant anti-imperialist current of the Negro women to the peace struggle.

Secondly, is the need to struggle for the economic rights of Negro women in the trade unions, for jobs outside of domestic work, while fighting to organize the Negro women domestic worker.

Third, is the importance of recognition that the virus of white chauvinism which dogs the footsteps of Negro women at every turn, must be fought against. This means alertness in the economic political and social sphere against special forms of white chauvinism towards Negro women, particularly in the sphere of social relations, white and Negro men and white women have a special responsibility to help integrate the Negro woman in the progressive mass movement.