

Uncle Tom Dies As New Negro Emerges In 1956

By JAMES L. HICKS

This is the first in a series of articles in which Amsterdam News writers will seek to evaluate the NEW Negro in 1957 in the light of his progress in 1956. Other articles to follow will include the NEW Negro in politics, the world of women, the business world, sports, church and community activities.

In December of 1956 a bomb exploded under the home of a Negro minister in Birmingham, Ala., who had been threatening to sit "up front" with the white people on the city's Jim Crow buses.

As the Negro minister crawled from under the wreckage of his home he told reporters:

"I'm going out now and lead my people on those buses and I'm going to sit right up front behind the driver." That was a NEW Negro speaking. The bomb didn't frighten him. He just wasn't scared anymore.

Not Afraid

In Wheatcroft, Ky., a Negro mother whose seven-year-old child asked her why he couldn't go to an all white school said, "If you've got the guts to go—I've got the guts to send you."

This was another NEW Negro talking. She too was unafraid. A few days later the tiny seven-year-old walked into the all white school in the face of an angry

mob and under the barrels of National Guard tanks.

He was a NEW Negro, too. And he wasn't scared either.

Early in 1956 a white mob chased a shapely Negro curd out of the University of Alabama. She nearly lost her life in the struggle.

But a few days later when a federal court ruled that she was entitled to admission to the university like any other American, Autherine Lucy said:

"I'm going back tomorrow." She was not afraid. She was a NEW Negro.

Birthday Uncertain

It might not be correct to say that the NEW Negro was born in 1956. It might be more correct to say that he was germinated as far back as 1619 when the first slaves were brought to America.

Or in 1896 when the separate but equal doctrine was handed down. Or on May 17, 1954 when the separate but equal doctrine was reversed.

No one can say just when the seed of the NEW Negro was first fertilized—but no one will deny that the NEW Negro began to come of age in 1956.

From Beale St. in Memphis to Seventh Ave. in Harlem, the NEW

Negro suddenly sprang up in 1956 as a new phenomena on the American horizon.

And as the year comes to a close we find him engaged in a rampaging non-violent social revolution the likes of which no nation has ever seen take place in a single year.

He is out for one thing — full equality as an American citizen.

But in 1956 he went all out for it like he never has before.

He walked a solid year for it in Montgomery. He braved mobs for it in Kentucky, Texas and Tennessee. He defied the KKK for it in Georgia. He went hungry for it in South Carolina. And he went to court for it all over the United States.

Who Is He?

Many things stand out about this NEW Negro. But the thing that stands out most is the fact that he is determined—and he is not afraid.

Who is this NEW Negro? Where does he come from? Where is he going? How does he expect to get there? What are the things which stand in his way? What are his chances of achieving his goals in 1957?

It is easier to define what the

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NEW Negro is by pointing to things which he is not.

He is not the extreme optimist for the extreme optimist believes that the Negro has come a long way in race relations, that the problem is just about solved and that all this nation has to do now is to sit back and wait for the rest of the race problem to solve itself.

The NEW Negro is not that extreme in his optimism.

On the other hand the NEW Negro is certainly not the extreme pessimist. The extreme pessimist contends that all the racial difficulties we had in the nation during 1956 were due to the fact that we tried to disturb and overthrow the "status quo."

He points to every act of violence as an example of laws not being able to change the minds of people.

And he, like the extreme optimist, suggests that the nation simply sit back and let things be as they are, because nothing can really be done about the situation.

In short, the extreme optimist says do nothing because integration is inevitable. The extreme pessimist says do nothing because integration is impossible.

Rejects Both Ideas

They both have something in common — neither one wants to do anything about the situation. The NEW Negro rejects the thinking of each one.

The NEW Negro, as Martin Luther King has pointed out, seeks to reconcile the truths of the two opposite extremists and avoid the extremes of both.

So the NEW Negro will agree with the optimist that he has come a long, long way in solving his problem, but he balances that statement by saying in the same breath that "I still have a long, long way to go."

Theme

Here then is the theme of the NEW Negro.

He concedes that he has come a long, long way and he is willing to give credit where credit is due.

But he is not satisfied to stand still no matter how far he has come. The NEW Negro never looks back over the road he has traveled. He is too busy measuring how far he still has to go.

This is the badge of the NEW Negro. He is a man in motion. An impatient, driving, pushing NEW Negro who is determined never to take a backward step in his march for freedom, and who refuses to pause and rest even when he makes a giant step forward.

Uncle Tom Dead

It is this type of aggressiveness which has set the NEW Negro apart even among Negroes themselves. Uncle Tom is definitely dead — he has been slaughtered in cold blood by the forward march of the NEW Negro.

But many Negroes who helped the NEW Negro kill Uncle Tom stand aghast when the NEW Negro says that he doesn't even have time to give Uncle Tom a decent burial.

The NEW Negro at times causes a shakeup in his own community. Uncle Tom had a few friends who didn't mind seeing him die. But when the NEW Negro refuses to bury him, Uncle Tom's old friends form little cliques with other Negroes to challenge the leadership of the NEW Negro.

Thus we find the NEW Negro creating some mild conflict within his own racial group.

Confounds Whites

But if it can be said that he has created conflict within his own race it can truly be said that the NEW Negro has utterly confused and confounded the patterns and thinking of people of the white race.

The NEW Negro has confused and "shook up" some of the most liberal of whites by his demands for an immediate breakdown of racial barriers.

On balance, most of the liberal white people of this nation have always been for a "gradual" lowering of racial bars. They took a particular delight in pointing to this fact before the NEW Negro emerged.

Backed By Masses

But when the NEW Negro entered the picture and began demanding that all the walls be knocked down overnight, many so-called "liberals" became embarrassed and many found themselves being accused for the first time of harboring racial prejudices.

But the one thing that has given the NEW Negro strength is the way that the Negro masses picked up and supported his demands for the immediate end to all race bias. Another is the way the federal courts have come to his aid.

One of the great surprises of

1956 to Negro leaders themselves has been the fact that they suddenly found that the Negro masses were far ahead of them in their willingness to demand their freedom and to back up their demands with sacrifice. Another surprise was that Southern white judges would rule in their favor.

White Support

No one believed in 1955 that any Negro could persuade 50,000 other Negroes to spend thousands of dollars and walk to work an entire year in protest to Jim Crow buses. And none believed that three Southern judges would back them up.

Yet the lessons of the Montgomery bus boycott have been so dramatic that no one doubts that it can be done today, and most Southern cities fear that it will be done in their own cities.

This solid backing by the NEW Negro masses and the federal courts has made it easy for the NEW Negro to slaughter the Uncle Toms in the Negro race by the thousands.

To be labelled an "Uncle Tom" in a Negro community today is the quickest road to oblivion a Negro can find. The NEW Negro is almost as violent in his dislike for Uncle Tom as he is in his dislike for race baiters like Senator Eastland.

The white man who must deal with the NEW Negro and his ever growing strength has watched all this with growing alarm.

Some whites have simply capitulated and admitted that integration is inevitable and that it might as well be given to Negroes now as later. Others have elected to fight.

Government Problem

In governmental circles diplomats and politicians have become increasingly aware that what happens to a Negro in Georgia may well be the topic of conversation when they sit down at the conference table to try and negotiate a deal for a strategic oil pipeline in Egypt.

During the first part of 1956 there were many warnings from friendly white people that the Negro should "go slow" in his demands. The Uncle Toms were willing to listen to these warnings but the whites suddenly found that Uncle Tom did not represent true Negro thinking.

This proved particularly disastrous to Adlai Stevenson who issued a "go slow" warning to Ne-

groes early in the '56 campaign.

Stevenson's Suicide

The reaction of the Negro masses to Stevenson's plea was so great that Stevenson never fully recovered from it, despite some fine statements made later in the campaign.

President Eisenhower stuck his toe into the "go slow" waters early in his campaign but his advisers quickly sensed the danger of such a move and rescued Ike before too much damage was done.

The one unchallenged thing about the NEW Negro's position is its moral and legal correctness.

In the United States, it's a matter of constitutional record that all men are created equal. By the same token a government founded on the principles of brotherhood simply cannot preach the fellowship of God while at the same time deny the brotherhood of man.

The new Negro argues this way: "When men seek to evade a law which they do not like, they weaken the strength of all the laws which they do like. Therefore, when you seek to evade the law which gives me the right to be a first class American, you are weakening the strength of the law which makes you a first class American. I want my rights today, right, now."

It's politically difficult and morally impossible to get around such an argument by the new Negro and this is the dilemma of the white man in America today.

In My Lifetime

The new Negro today is demanding "full integration in my lifetime."

As 1957 looms on the horizon one can not say that he will get it this year — but if 1956 is any indication of how fast the new Negro can move, it seems safe to say that he will certainly make it in his lifetime in the United States.

Let's take a close look at some new Negroes in their various fields of endeavor.

(To Be Continued)