

The Civil Rights Movement

in Newton: 1950s - 1970s

by Katherine Jones with Lillie Jefferson and Nina L. King



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The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1970s was part of a nationwide effort initiated by African-Americans to end segregation and discrimination based on race, to demand the right to vote, to use public accommodations unrestricted by race, and to obtain equal opportunities in education, employment, and housing. The myriad of activities Newton citizens participated in at this time, on both local and national

levels, represent a microcosm of the hope and commitment to change that sparked the Civil Rights Movement. People of different races and religions, young and old, worked unrelentingly to eliminate discrimination based on race. Although the initial demonstrations, sit-ins, and church rallies occurred in the South, the Civil Rights Movement spread across the country, forcing people throughout the nation to address and redress policies and practices

of racial discrimination in their own communities. The Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century is another chapter in the long history of resistance by blacks to the oppression that began as soon as the first group of enslaved Africans was brought to the shores of North America in the early 1600s. Lynchings and race riots, Freedom Rides by blacks and whites under the auspices of the Congress on Racial Equality, and finally desegregation of the Armed Forces for the first time in the nation's history, were notable events pertaining to race that marked the previous decade of the 1940s. However, the unanimous 1954 Supreme Court decision ruled that separating children on the basis of race in public schools was unconstitutional. It was therefore necessary for laws to be changed, executive orders signed, and court rulings made and enforced at city, state, and federal levels for African-Americans to gain full rights of citizenship. Demonstrations and protests, marches, and rallies using strategies of non-violence represented the first stage of civil disobedience, and as the movement for equal rights intensified across this country, many African nations fought for independence from colonial domination, and attained their objective of self-rule during the



After the Supreme Court decision of 1956, Rosa Parks rode at the front of the bus.

late 1950s and 60s.

Rosa Parks violated Alabama state law by refusing to move to the rear section reserved for "colored" and give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery public bus. Ms. Parks was arrested, fingerprinted and charged with disorderly conduct. Her defiant action ignited the 1955 boycott of buses by the African-American community of Montgomery. The severe economic losses to the bus company and downtown businesses after a year of successful boycotting ended when the Alabama Federal Court ruled that segregation on public transportation was illegal.

As the demand for equal rights accelerated, the resistance to change intensified. Televised news coverage depicted peaceful protest-

ers attacked by law enforcement officers with billy clubs and cattle prods, as blasts of water from firehoses knocked men and women to the ground. State officials barred African-Americans from integrating public schools and state universities, necessitating federal troops to escort students to classes amid the jeers and taunts of opposing factions, while firebombing of Negro homes and churches caused the death of young children and adults.

Despite Fair Housing legislation passed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1957, racial discrimination existed in Newton, and only two realtors in the city were willing to show housing to African-Americans. Melvin Klein, who headed his own firm, and Mary Rustin of Longwood Associ-

ates complied with the legislation. The Newton Fair Housing and Equal Rights Committee was organized in Newton in the 1950s as an affiliate of the Federation of Fair Housing and Equal Rights Committees throughout the Commonwealth. Their goal was to assist people of color in the purchase or rental of housing in the city. Some of the Newton residents who were members of this multi-racial committee included Richard Scobie, Edward Hickey, Jerry Grossman, Edward Richmond, Helen Evans, Dr. Charles Bonner, William and Joyce Holman, William Jones, Lillie and Matthew Jefferson, Helene LeVine, Ellen Finegold, Hubie and Kathy Jones, George and Louise Hauser, Jacqueline and Lawrence Cooke, Paul Deats, Sam Turner, Nancy and Michael Mann, May Takayanagi, Helen Levy, Eleanor Rosenbloom, Arthur Lyman, Joy and George Roberts, Dorothy Hopper, and Charles and Ena Lorant. Test cases revealed that prospective buyers of color were often told that a property was sold or rented, but when the same property was shown to a white prospective buyer, immediately following the African-American client, the property was still available, confirming continued discrimination against people of color by realtors.



Hubie and Katherine Jones with their children.

In 1962, plans for the extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike from Weston through Newton and into Boston necessitated relocation of 350 homes and businesses taken by eminent domain. Despite the objection of Mayor Donald Gibbs to the construction of this roadway through the city, the plans were implemented by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority which provided some financial remuneration for those dislocated. Twenty-six units of homes and stores in the vicinity of Myrtle Baptist Church in West Newton on Simms Court, Douglass Street and Hicks Place were demolished, and the African-American owners and renters, many of whom were members of the church, were compensated and assisted in relocation by social worker Lester Houston who was hired by the city for that purpose.

Newton Fair Housing and Equal Rights initiated a study of the housing needs for the City in conjunction with the Newton Housing Authority and the Newton Human Relations Committee. Their findings substantiated the need for low and middle income housing, and resulted in the formation of the Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF). In an effort to further expand housing opportunities, the

NCDF, a non-profit charitable foundation, was organized in 1968 with a mission to bring low and mixed income housing to Newton. Twenty-four Catholic, Jewish and Protestant clergymen, with Eloise Houghton representing Church Women United, initially took on this challenge as founders of the organization, chaired by Reverend Thomas Lehman of Grace Episcopal Church. Later that year, the leadership of the Foundation was transferred from the clergy to a predominantly lay board. However, Rabbi Murray Rothman, a founder, continued to serve with the citizen group which included Irene and Thomas Egan, Flora Houghterling, Helen and George Bresnahan, and William Carmen. Mark Slotnick was appointed the first executive director, and Eloise Houghton chaired the board of directors for many years. NCDF held a series of meetings with the Board of Aldermen and various City committees, including the Housing and Urban Development Committee, to win support for the NCDF initiative. The Massachusetts Housing and Finance Administration under the leadership of Marvin Siflinger and Eleanor White offered assistance in the development of the plans. However, NCDF met vigorous opposition from many people in the City, especially after ten sites

for building housing, one in each village, had been identified. Public hearings in various wards of Newton offered an open forum for heated debate regarding feared decline of property values and questions about the people who would occupy the units, based on race, residence, and economic status. The bitter organized resistance



Eloise Houghton at the Hamlet

delayed the project from actualization. Eventually, after nearly a decade of negotiation with city officials and the community at large, The Hamlet, located on Hamlet Street, off Langley Road near The Atrium, became the only site approved, and was completed in September 1977 with 50 units available for family housing. Applicants were interviewed and selected by a subcommittee of the board members for inclusion in a lottery as an impartial way to select occupants for the housing. Eloise Houghton, former chairman of the NCDF board, spoke at the 25th anniversary celebration. NCDF and METCO were the two organizations created during the Civil Rights Movement that remain vital

today. Casselman House, subsidized housing for the elderly, was opened in 1981, and the former Weeks Junior High School was renovated the same year into 59 units of mixed housing for the elderly in combination with family housing. Warren House, also a former junior high school, was converted to 59 mixed income apartments in 1992. The management of NCDF properties continues to follow its mission "to provide secure, comfortable, and safe environments for its residents."

Educational opportunities for African-American children were examined when the Newton Fair Housing and Equal Rights Committee sponsored a public lecture at Warren Junior High School on

April 10, 1964 at which time Dr. Kenneth Clark, distinguished psychologist and professor at the City College of New York, addressed the effects of segregated schools on black children. Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark's research findings, known as "The Doll Study," were included in the social science brief used by the Supreme Court in the 1954 decision to desegregate public schools.

Newtonites were also actively involved with issues of discrimination in education in other parts of the country. In response to the Supreme Court decision of 1954, many counties in the South closed their public schools to avoid integration and established private academies to educate white students, leaving African-American parents to devise methods of educating their children without public funding. In many areas of the South, African-American children were deprived of schooling for years.

Prince Edward County, Virginia shut the doors to its public schools in 1959 to avoid compliance with the law. "Freedom Schools" held in local churches were staffed by African-American teachers who were no longer employed by the County since the public schools were closed. These instructors received a modest sti-



Building the Hamlet

pend raised from voluntary contributions and church collections from the local African-American community, yet the effort to provide adequate education under these conditions was futile.

Through the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Newton families hosted African-American children from Prince Edward County in order that they might continue their education. Of the 1700 African-American school age children of Prince Edward County, Virginia, two hundred of these youngsters were transferred to other parts of the country to be educated.

Eloise Houghton and Samuel Turner, chairpersons of the Newton chapter of the Greater Boston Committee for the Emergency Placement of Prince Edward County Children, an arm of the American Friends Service Committee, placed Moses Scott, Skip Griffin, and Barbara Botts with the Beckett, Hertzfield, and Penzer families of Newton who welcomed these children into their homes. L. Francis "Skip" Griffin attended Warren Junior High School and completed his education in Newton after being granted a waiver of tuition by the superintendent. Griffin graduated from Newton North High School in 1966 with an outstanding academic and varsity ath-

letic record attributed in part to Alvin Fortune, his coach and role model. After completing Harvard University, Griffin registered black voters in the South, then returned to Cambridge to work in the public school system until he was appointed Assistant Head of

Charlestown High School during Phase I of the Boston School desegregation order. Later, Griffin joined the *Boston Globe* staff where he became the Director of Community Outreach.

While the demand for equal rights reverberated throughout the

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Newton Boy Student Is Grateful To City

A grateful Negro boy, as spokesman for two other students of his race, has written a letter from his heart to the people of Newton to thank them for the opportunity afforded to obtain an education here when the public schools of his Southern homeland were closed to Negro youngsters.

Three Negro students who attended the Newton public schools during the past year after being denied a public school education in their hometown of Prince Edward County, Virginia, have expressed appreciation through their spokesman, Moses Scott, one of the students involved.

Mrs. Proctor Houghton, local co-chairman with Samuel Turner, of the Emergency Committee for Placement of Prince Edward County Children, was the recipient of the letter which is published in its entirety in *The Graphic* today.

It may be recalled that all public schools were closed in Prince Edward County since 1958 in order to prevent Negro children from attending them. White children continued their education at private schools.

The Emergency Committee was formed to aid these unfortunate Negro youngsters. The three who came to Newton, Moses Scott, writer of the letter, Barbara Botts and "Skip" Griffin, attended schools here and resided with Newton families.

They achieved outstanding scholastic records and "Skip" Griffin added considerable prestige as an athlete. The letter from Moses Scott follows:

To the Editor:

Prince Edward's students speak just to say . . .

Prince Edward County, located 60 miles west of Richmond, Virginia, and adjacent to the famous Appomattox County, is an insignificant area, so insignificant that under normal conditions, the average American would be ignorant of the very existence of this small rural county.

However, this county diverges far from the normal; one could almost say that Prince Edward County is

country, Fannie Lou Hamer, an African-American sharecropper, was denied the right to register to vote in her home town of Ruleville, Mississippi because of her race. Rose Fishman, a volunteer supporter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a Waban resident, contacted Mrs. Hamer, a member of SNCC, and invited her to attend a fundraiser at the Fishmans' home to raise money for Hamer's organizing work in Mississippi. Mrs. Hamer, who later became chairperson of the Freedom Democratic Party in Mississippi, graphically described the beatings and jailings she endured in her fight to gain voting rights. Since many people in Mississippi lost their jobs because of their civil rights activity, Mrs. Fishman organized clothing drives to assist those families.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was formed in February 1960 as a student-led outgrowth of Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Committee. These African-American college students in Greensboro, N.C., staged sit-ins at lunch counters, demanding service. Soon these sit-ins spread throughout the South, in defiance of seating arrangements where signs marked "colored" and "white" determined where you could eat in public

places. Student Freedom Riders began a trip through the South on a bus which was bombed and burned in Anniston, Alabama, but they continued on their way to Montgomery, where they were again attacked. Four hundred U. S. Marshals were ordered to keep peace in that city with the assistance of the National Guard. A benefit for SNCC organized by Rose Fishman brought Dick Gregory, a nationally known comedian, to Sanders Theater in Cambridge in April 1964.

The following year, on March 7th, the Selma to Montgomery March for voting rights, led by SNCC, was brought to a halt by the brutal beating of participants. Its leader, John Lewis, suffered a fractured skull from a clubbing to the head delivered by a member of the police force. Lewis was later elected and still serves as United States Congressman from Georgia. *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, a history of the organization, was written by Newton resident Howard Zinn, professor emeritus at Boston University.

Two days after the thwarted Selma march, Dr. Martin Luther King, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Council, called clergy from all over the country to join with him to complete the march from Selma to Mont-

gomery, Alabama. Reverend James Reeb was one of the white Unitarian clergymen that came to Selma from Boston. He was beaten by three white men as he and two other colleagues strolled into an area dominated by opponents of desegregation. He died two days later from injuries resulting from the clubbing. A rally in Reverend Reeb's honor was held on the Boston Common, joined by many Newtonites who walked to Boston from Eliot Congregational Church in Newton.

Boston became the focus of national attention when its School Committee consistently refused to rectify de facto segregation, replace inferior neighborhood school buildings, or update instructional materials in schools that serviced largely African-American students. On June 11, 1963 the Education Committee of the Boston chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) challenged the Boston School Committee to correct these discrepancies between the education of white and African-American students.

Noel Day and Reverend James Breeden, leaders in the African-American community of Boston, called for a one-day boycott of the Boston Public Schools because the School Committee refused to ad-

dress the issues presented to them. On June 18, 3000 black students failed to attend classes despite a ruling by Attorney General Brooke that the boycott was illegal. Instead of attending their regular schools, the students attended Freedom Schools set up in neighborhood churches and community centers.

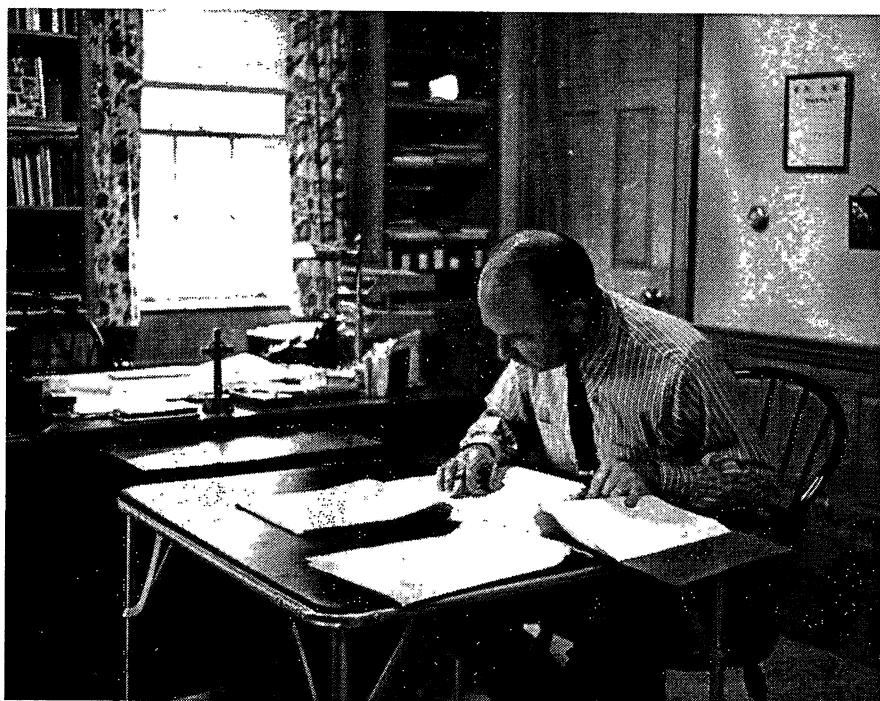
Following the Boston school boycott, on August 28th that summer, Newtonites Freda Rebelsky, Lillie and Matthew Jefferson, George Moreland, Reverend Randall Gibson, Richard Scobie and Ida Zallen joined 250,000 people for the March on Washington to display their support for passage of civil rights legislation.

After a year of continued refusal by the Boston School Committee to address de facto segregation in its schools, Breeden and Day called for a second boycott, the Boston School Stay-Out for Freedom, which took place on February 26, 1964. This time the boycott organizers encouraged suburban involvement. Three weeks prior to the boycott Reverend Harold Fray, minister of Eliot Congregational Church, issued this statement on behalf of the Social Concerns Committee of the Newton Council of Churches: "Because of the segregated nature of many public schools in Boston, which mili-

tates against equal educational opportunities, and because of the refusal of the Boston School Committee to discuss the issue of desegregating the schools, the Newton Council of Churches goes on record in support of the Stay-Out for Freedom."

The Newton School Committee engaged in heated discussions with its members and members of the community-at-large regarding the School Stay-Out. Although the Newton Teachers Association, represented by William Holman, restated "its professional responsibility for guaranteeing and improving equal educational opportunity for all the children of America without regard to race, creed or color,"

the chairman of the Newton School Committee, Haskell Freeman, countered that this body had no right to make an official entry into the controversy. Subsequently, no vote was taken on the matter, although support for equal educational opportunities was cited as a goal for everyone. Since the Stay-Out occurred during school vacation week, the issue of Newton student participation was moot. Many groups from suburban communities also joined in this one-day protest, including Newton teachers William Holman, Manson Hall, Samuel Turner, Alvin Fortune, Robert Zeeb, Luther Manning, John Livingston, Margaret Tyler, Alan Gartner and Robert



*The Rev. Harold Fray correcting galley proofs of his book "The Ruin and Joy of the Ministry."
Photo: Howard Boardman.*

Hayden. Three hundred junior high and high school students from Newton traveled on rented buses to attend Freedom Schools where topics of African-American history and current events were discussed. Co-chairs who organized suburban participation were Reverend Charles Harper of Eliot Congregational Church, and Hubie Jones. Richard Toomey, S.J., members of the Catholic Interracial Committee, Sue Berkeley, Kay Lapidus, Phyllis Ryan, Helene Levine, Kathy Jones, Anne Ricks, and Minibelle Benn were volunteer organizers for Newton, and Matthew Jefferson was in charge of transportation.

On February 20, 1964, six days before the School Stay-Out, a letter to the *Newton Graphic* from Sylvia and Joseph Kelley of Newton urged the Newton School Committee to be "pioneering in creative education of the Newton schools . . . to offer to educate 50 young Negro children from the Roxbury and South End area. . . . Newton has forged ahead in new programs. Let Newton lead the nation in education." This letter was prophetic. However, at the Newton School Committee meeting in March, Haskell Freedman stated that "the committee had no legal power . . . to become involved in the educational problems of

other communities; therefore, to accept Negro students from Boston . . . is inconsistent with our obligations to the children of Newton and is not acceptable." As an example of making a positive contribution to the education of Negro children, Freedman referred to the three students from Prince Edward County, Virginia who attended Newton schools free of charge in 1963 when their public schools were closed.

Another organization making education a special concern was the Catholic Interracial Council, founded in 1965. Under the leadership of David Nelson, who later became the first African-American federal judge in Boston, C.I.C.'s mission was to encourage Catholics to become involved in civil rights activities. Newton resident Richard Rowland became the successor to Nelson and expanded the organization to 32 chapters within the diocese of Greater Boston. Although some of the original members of the Council lived in Newton, the work of C.I.C. initially was concentrated within the city of Boston, but the leadership determined that suburban members should also focus on their communities by joining local civil rights groups.

St. Bernard's Church in West Newton and Sacred Heart Church

in Newton Centre were the two Newton parishes actively involved in this venture to establish better relations between people of different races. Because of resistance from many parish priests, the group met outside of the local churches, most often in members' homes, where they planned an ongoing program of tutoring students in Roxbury. The core group of C.I.C. in Newton was Thomas and Irene Egan, Helen and George Bresnahan, Anne Marie and Robert Carleo, Frank and Helen Drinan, and Helen and John Cort. Their collaborative programs with Myrtle Baptist Church brought closer cooperation and better understanding across racial and religious lines in the city.

The crisis of the Boston Public Schools, coupled with the positive impact of the Freedom Schools set up during the boycott, became models for the Newton/Roxbury Freedom School, the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO), and Operation Exodus. All of these programs provided an alternative educational experience for African-American children who lived in Boston, and were organized and supported by many Newton residents.

Phiely Krieks spearheaded the active Newton supporters of Oper-

ation Exodus, founded in 1965 by Ellen Jackson of Boston. The organization appealed for assistance in raising money for financing a busing program to transport Boston African-American students to fill vacant seats in under-enrolled Boston Public Schools. Rohna Shoul, Annette Maleson, Helen Cort, Hilda Schwartz, Helen Drinan, Mary Berger, Roslyn Zinn and Barbara Kramer were among the Newton women who responded to this appeal.

The struggle for equal education in Newton has a long history. As early as 1800, a petition to provide education for black children in Boston had been submitted to Boston's Primary School Committee. This petition was promptly voted down by a town meeting. However, a separate school for black children was established in 1820. Although additional schools for black children were added, these schools were all judged to be decidedly inferior to the schools for white children. In 1849, the Massachusetts legislature made it illegal to disqualify a student from admission to any school because of race, color or religious opinions. This legislation established the precedent to educate black children in any school. Nevertheless, the Boston School Committee banned funds to transport pupils to the

7000 available seats they identified in 1965. Using money from private fundraising events, African-American parents sent more than 400 of their children to predominantly white Boston schools to fill available seats. By 1966 the number of students in Operation Exodus increased to 876. Some of the funds for transportation were raised by the Newton support group through auctions, theatre benefits, concerts, and a champagne reception at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum involving the parents of Operation Exodus children. Parents involved in the program set up enrichment programs for their children and acquired skills of their own. Ellen Jackson furthered her education and served as dean at Northeastern University from 1978 to 1997. Finally, in 1969 the Boston School Committee bowed to new political pressures and instituted funding for busing within Boston, which desegregated some schools.

The Stay-Out for Freedom became a model for the formation of many Freedom Schools in the Boston metropolitan area, and similar Freedom School programs were established throughout the country. The Roxbury/Newton Freedom School began in 1964 as an after school program, meeting alternate months at the Eliot Congrega-

tional Church in Newton and the Roxbury Neighborhood House. The organizers of the Freedom School were Lillian Ambrosino, Katherine Jones, and Mary Ellen Williams. In 1965, 150 children from Boston and Newton, in grades 4-8, visited historic sites in Boston of special significance, including the Crispus Attucks Memorial; the Robert Gould Shaw Monument portraying the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, one of the first all-black regiments in the Civil War; and the Black Freedom Trail, where safe houses for escaped slaves involved in the Underground Railroad Movement still stand on Beacon Hill. The visit to the State House, however, was the most memorable event for Robert Carleo, then a Newton sixth grade student. After meeting with State Represen-



Katherine Jones

tative Michael Haynes of Roxbury, a group of students and teachers was meeting with Attorney General Edward Brooke, (a Newton resident, the first African-American Attorney General in Massachusetts, and later the first African-American elected to the United States Senate since Reconstruction). At that very moment, a power failure darkened the entire Northeast region, causing the group to make their exit downstairs by candlelight. Outside of the State House doors there were no street or traffic lights in operation, making the ride back to Newton a real adventure, as private citizens directed traffic.

Ann Marie Carleo and Lillie Jefferson helped in preparation of dinner at Freedom School, where students and volunteer staff discussed the events of the afternoon. Janet Egan, a Newton participant, recalls folk singer Jackie Washington leading the group in gospel songs and the freedom songs sung during marches and in Southern jails where many of the demonstrators were confined. Ms. Egan also learned about the principles of non-violent resistance, the underlying philosophy of the SCLC demonstrations. The lending library of children's books that Irene Egan organized included African-American history, biographies of

black cowboys, and stories illustrated with African-American children and adults. Joyce Hollman attended to the children of the volunteers while classes were conducted, and Josephine Lambert organized the parents at the Roxbury Neighborhood House to prepare meals for alternate monthly meetings there. Freedom School instructors included John Ertha, Marcus Mitchell, and Mary Barber. Reverend Charles Harper attended sessions as a representative of the Eliot Congregational Church.

As an alternative or addition to Freedom Schools, a more consistent means of educating African-American children from Boston in suburban schools was considered by Brookline School Committee chairman Leon Trilling. Respond-

ing to a suggestion from the Brookline Civil Rights Committee, Trilling invited Paul Parks and Ruth Batson of the Boston NAACP, Brookline Superintendent of Schools Dr. Robert Sperber, and Brookline High School students to a series of meetings beginning in November 1964 to discuss the possibility of Boston African-American children attending Brookline public schools. There was no enabling legislation at the state level to make this proposal a reality, but the 1965 Kiernen Commission Report on racial imbalance in the schools led to passage of the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act, making it legally possible for children to attend schools in communities outside their city of residence. This legislation was supported by the efforts of organizations including the Federation of Fair Housing, the League of Women Voters, and the NAACP.

The racially isolated education of suburban students and the crisis of education in Boston brought suburban school officials, Boston civil rights leaders, and the president of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters together to develop an alternative voluntary educational plan that would enable some Boston African-American students to attend suburban schools. METCO was formed in



Lillie Jefferson

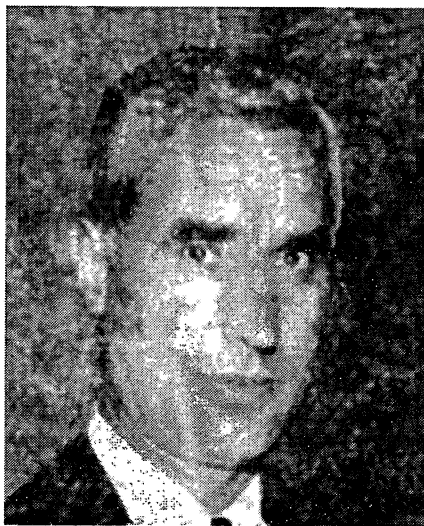
December 1965 to actualize this idea. Dr. Charles Brown, Superintendent of Newton Public Schools, wrote the proposal submitted to the United States Department of Education to fund METCO, which initially made it possible for 220 children to attend six suburban school systems, including Newton, Braintree, Brookline, Lexington, Needham, and Wellesley, under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. (Lincoln schools also participated but with private funding.) Newton members of the founding METCO Executive Committee Board, which planned the implementation of the innovative program for the participating communities, included Superintendent of Schools Charles Brown, Newton School Committee member Norma (Mintz) Fink, Helene Levine, Ellen Goldfine, and Katherine Jones who prepared the educational guidelines for participating communities.

Many Newton community and religious organizations agreed with the concept of METCO and formed a groundswell of public support for the program. The Newton School Committee voted to accept 50 children in grades 4-6 to attend Newton Public Schools in September 1966 based on available space in each school, with the intent that these children would com-

plete their education in the Newton schools. However, an annual vote on the METCO program by the School Committee determined the continued participation of each city or town.

This educational program also met strong opposition. Among the questions raised by many Newton citizens were: Why should these children come to suburban schools? Will they detract from the attention my child should receive? Are only the cream of the crop coming to school here, or does the program represent children from various backgrounds? Won't these children be isolated from their own community? Why should my tax money be used to support a program like this?

Public meetings to present the program were held in a series of meetings in Newton with the Superintendent of Schools and the



Dr. Charles Brown

Assistant Director of METCO, Ruth Batson. A great deal of preparation and planning was done to ensure a smooth beginning for the METCO program. A community committee chaired by Katherine Jones, volunteer Newton METCO Coordinator, met with school personnel and the METCO assistant director, Ruth Batson, who was responsible for selecting students after interviewing potential students and their parents in the METCO Roxbury office set up at Freedom House.

Prior to the students' arrival at school, principals, teachers, school administrators, and community volunteers met frequently during the summer months to plan an orientation program for teachers of METCO students, and to select host families who served as a home away from home for the children. When the METCO program began in Newton, elementary school children ate lunch at home three days a week, and school was dismissed at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The METCO students needed a place to eat lunch and a place to stay in order to participate in after-school activities. Host families would serve that purpose. Both Norma (Mintz) Fink, School Committee member from Ward 2, and Dr. Charles Brown, Superintendent of Schools, demonstrated their sup-

port for the program by serving as host families. Interested potential host families met with African-American Newton parents and a social worker in each school participating in METCO to discuss the program and the responsibility entailed in being a host family, which included willingness to build reciprocal relationships with METCO students and their families. The METCO students and their Newton hosts were then selected and paired. A letter from the superintendent of schools explaining the program was received by every parent in schools where METCO students were placed.

Each METCO parent received a communication from their host family and a letter from the principal welcoming them to school. The day before the opening of school, METCO children and their parents visited their new school, met their teacher, and visited the host family in its home.

Dr. Brown described the rationale and implementation of the METCO Program at his annual address to Newton faculty and staff, the day before the start of the school year. The previous afternoon, the superintendent hosted a reception at his home, followed by dinner at the Second Congrega-

tional Church. Later that evening, a film about the self-concept of African-American children was viewed and discussed. In October, teachers and principals of schools attended by METCO students met for an in-service training session with Dr. Alvin Poussaint, a psychiatrist and faculty member of Harvard University Medical School.

In September 1966, 50 eager METCO students from Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, traveled on hour long bus rides to Newton to begin their suburban education in seven Newton schools including Countryside, Claflin, Horace Mann, Hyde, Oak Hill, Williams



Hi, Ho, Back To School We Go

Pupils of Countryside School, some from METCO program, hustle along to books and classes at Dedham St. building as another school season opened this week in Newton. (Robert Charles Photo)

and Spaulding. The METCO Coordinating Committee included Nina King, Bob Hayden, Eleanor Rosenbloom, Eunice Perry, Donald and Sissy Cutler, Sandy Latner, Louise Lown, Barbara Kovar, Dee Morris, Rohna Shoul, Isabel Fortune, Shirley Ericson, and Charlotte Ramsey.

The organization for the METCO program brought teachers, parents, and principals from various parts of the City together for educational and social activities in collaboration with the METCO parents and students. Newton host

parents and school officials were feted by METCO parents at a dinner held in Roxbury at Freedom House on March 19, 1967 offering another opportunity for people in the suburbs and the City to come together. The METCO program expanded in 1967, adding 25 children and two additional schools. Three hundred Boston and Newton METCO participants attended a luncheon sponsored by the Newton METCO Committee and the Newton Fair Housing and Equal Rights Committee when METCO families, host families,

and teachers and administrators gathered at Brown (Meadowbrook) Junior High School in October 1968 to enjoy a concert given by the Newton Symphony Orchestra with Mayor Monte Basbas in attendance. Many friendships between students and parents from Newton and Boston continue to this day.

In 1968, when Federal monies were no longer available, METCO became a state-funded program, under the supervision of the Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Newton School Committee submitted a METCO budget enabling the Newton Public Schools to hire a director and a social worker. Previously, all the work related to the METCO program in Newton was performed by professionals and lay volunteers. On April 11, 1968, three days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, the Newton School Committee voted to waive tuition and added 25 more METCO students, including some first graders to the program.

The Newton METCO Committee, chaired by Nina King, and METCO host parents played an important role in lobbying state representatives to ensure continued funding by the elected legislators. Most Newton city officials, including Mayor Theodore Mann (ex officio member of the School

THE NEWS-TRIBUNE, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 1968



ATTENDED CONCERT—Among those attending the Newton Symphony Orchestra concert were Newton Mayor Monte G. Basbas, who is also an honorary trustee of the year-old Newton Symphony Orchestra; Mrs. Katherine Jones, Newton METCO co-ordinator; Michael Sasson, music director of the Newton Symphony; Arthur Lyman, chairman of the Newton Fair Housing Organization; and Ken Felopulus. Center row: Eileen Frank, West Newton; Sandra Hubbard, Roxbury; Peter Morse, West Newton; Eriol Robinson, Roxbury; Alan Handel, West Newton. Front: Sonya Johnson, Roxbury; Julie Morse, West Newton; Eric Handel, West Newton; Loren Jones, West Newton. More than 300 attended the event at Meadowbrook Junior High School when the Newton Fair Housing Organization and the Newton METCO Committee were hosts to Roxbury-Dorchester Newton METCO children and their parents. (News-Tribune Photo by Anthony Lago.)

Committee), enthusiastically supported METCO but the more conservative members of the School Committee raised critical questions about the program. In the fall of 1976, when sufficient state monies from the legislature were unavailable before the opening of the school year, the METCO budget was cut by the School Committee on a 4-3 vote after heated deliberations lasting until 2:00 a.m., and against the recommendation of Superintendent Fink. The METCO staff was thereby reduced by three professionals, and a science program which brought students from Boston and Newton together in a neutral sitewas eliminated. This cutback prompted Newton METCO director Katherine Jones to resign her position after ten years and to run for election to the Newton School Committee. Adequate funding for the METCO program has always been an issue of concern, especially during the past ten years, when level funding has prevented the program from expanding, and has resulted in reduction of bus transportation as well. Many communities have filled the gap in funding by absorbing the shortfall in their own budgets. Fortunately, in May 2000 the METCO budget was increased by \$1 million by the State Legisla-

ture, to be distributed over a three-year period.

In 1998, eighty percent of the Newton METCO graduates went on to college. The following year, 415 METCO students attended school in Newton from kindergarten to grade twelve. Several Newton METCO graduates have enrolled their own children in the Newton METCO program, and two members of the second generation of Newton METCO students have graduated to date. It was wonderful to see the Newton METCO grandparents and parents celebrating with the newest member of the Newton METCO family. It is also inspiring to have the graduates of the Newton METCO program come back to this celebration as guest speakers to offer advice and describe their own college and graduate school experiences.

Although METCO was conceived as a stopgap program, it is now celebrating thirty-six years of operation as the only program of its size in the nation. More than 300 METCO students have graduated from the Newton Public Schools, and today a second METCO generation has completed its education in Newton.

Adult education was expanded when the Community Lecture Series programs were presented in

1967 and 1968. These lectures, six offerings each year, alternated between Roxbury and Newton sites, and provided a cooperative educational experience for Roxbury and Newton communities with topics-- on African-American history, culture, and politics. The planning committee, chaired by Hubie Jones, included representation from the Newton Committee for Fair Housing and Equal Rights, Roxbury/Newton Freedom Schools, First Unitarian Society in West Newton, Voice of Women, Committee for Operation Exodus, Temple Shalom, Newton METCO Coordinating Committee, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and a similar group of Roxbury organizations.

M.I.T. professor Dr. Willard Johnson of Newton led off the first series of lectures, followed by the editor of the *Bay State Banner* newspaper, Bryant Rollins. Other guest speakers were Dr. Adelaide Cromwell, professor emeritus at Boston University, and national leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, including Bayard Rustin, strategist for the March on Washington; Wyatt T. Walker, aide to Dr. King; and Lerone Bennett Jr., senior editor of *Ebony* magazine.

Myrtle Baptist Church, the only African-American church in

Newton, actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement, and celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 1974. The church is the nexus for the community of color in Newton and also draws its membership from surrounding areas.

African-Americans have lived in Newton since 1829. The present minister of Myrtle Baptist church, Reverend Howard Haywood, is a descendant of one of the first free African-American families in the City, although at least six people were slaves when Newton was first incorporated.

The City elected its first mayor, James Hyde, in 1874, the year that African-American parishioners of Lincoln Park Baptist church in West Newton decided to form their own congregation. A

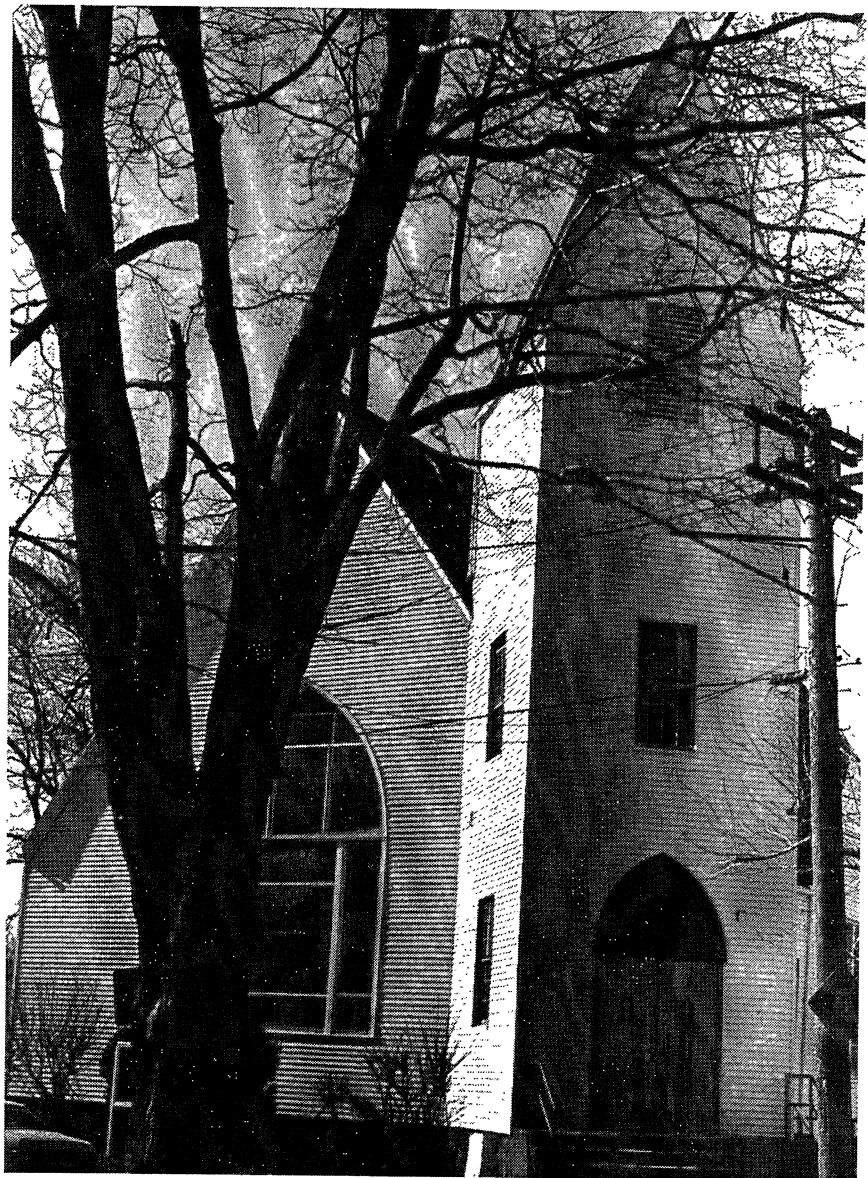
settlement of black residents circled around the new church, and has remained, despite the intrusion of the Turnpike Extension which divided the area. Myrtle Baptist Church was the community gathering place of mourning when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968. The church subsequently hosted the

annual celebration of Dr. King's birthday for the Newton community until the number of people attending outgrew the facilities of the church.

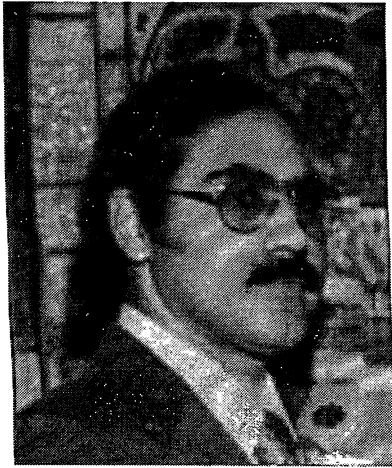
The annual METCO scholarship awards ceremony takes place at Myrtle Baptist Church, when graduating students, their parents, and Newton school and City offi-



The current minister of Myrtle Baptist Church, Reverend Howard Haywood.



Myrtle Baptist Church



Rev. Harold Pulley

cialists join the community to celebrate the accomplishments of the METCO students. Funds collected from the community make it possible for every college bound student to receive at least one thousand dollars toward tuition expenses. Lillie Jefferson, former Newton METCO director and church archivist, is the long-standing chairperson of the Scholarship Committee, which includes Van Seasholes, Marilyn Sicurella, and Herbert Regal. One scholarship is dedicated each year in memory of Helen Bresnahan, an active supporter of METCO in Newton. The tradition of providing financial assistance to college bound seniors began in 1974 when the first graduating class and their parents dined at the home of Katherine Jones, the first Newton METCO director.

Some of the archives of Myrtle Baptist Church are housed and on permanent display at the Jackson Homestead, a nineteenth-century

City landmark building on Washington Street, which was used as an Underground Railroad stopping place for escaped slaves. Minister Charles Collins and Reverend Harold Pulley, who served the congregation during the Civil Rights Movement, developed outreach programs involving other Newton churches and temples to promote better understanding between people of different races and religions. These men were deeply involved in the political and racial issues during their tenure. In 1998, Myrtle Baptist Church hosted the Newton

community with a program honoring walkers of all faiths and nationalities who participated in the Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage by retracing the path of enslaved people along the East Coast of the United States to the Caribbean Islands, and back to the continent of Africa, where the journey culminated in South Africa. The church also sponsored activities of a civic nature which emanated from the ministerial leadership and included the formation of the Black Citizens of Newton in March 1974.



Annie Houston, Esther Carter, and Madonia Ford of Myrtle Baptist Church.

The Black Citizens of Newton was organized after Reverend Ernest Davis, an African-American resident of Newton, graduate student at Newton Theological School, and minister of a Brockton church, was arrested January 4, 1973 while making an early morning phone call from the telephone booth at the Newton Centre MBTA station on Union Street. According to subsequent court testimony, Davis refused to identify himself to the police officer, who called reinforcements of two additional officers. When the minister reached into his pocket to get a cigarette, the arresting police officer drew his revolver, pointed it at Davis, patted him down, handcuffed him and took him to headquarters in a police ambulance. When it became obvious that Reverend Davis was not a suspected robber, he was asked to sign a waiver to drop the charges of rude and disorderly conduct in order to be released. He refused. This incident mobilized the African-American community of Newton, led by the minister of the Myrtle Baptist Church, Reverend Harold Pulley, and other African-Americans in Newton to meet with City officials and police representatives to ascertain why this incident occurred, and to prevent further

actions of this nature from taking place. Newton has long prided itself on good relations across racial lines, and this arrest caused great consternation in the community.

Formation of the Black Citizens of Newton (BCON) on January 28, 1973 brought together members of Myrtle Baptist Church and other Newton black residents scattered throughout the city. Long time residents and relative newcomers addressed this issue and other concerns regarding police practices. The planning com-

mittee of the fledgling 56-member organization included Dr. Henry Brooks, professor at Newton Theological Seminary, Leahnora Hill, Irving Houston, Alice Hunter, Wilber Jackson, Robert Jackson, Lillie and Matthew Jefferson, Katherine Jones, Richard Lawon, Reverend Eddie O'Neal, Charlotte Ramsey, Mary Grace Rogers, James Stevens, Elvira Williams, Nancy Turner, and Shirley Wright. Student members were Henry Evans and David French, Jr. Task forces in human relations, education, eco-



Rev. Ernest Davis and his attorney, Arthur Sullivan Photo: Howard Boardman.

conomic development and legal procedures were established. Joan Carter, Lillie Jefferson, and Elvira Williams were the first elected officers.

On February 22, 1973 Ernest Davis' trial resulted in no finding by Judge Franklin Flaschner. In his letter published February 23, 1973 in *The Newton Times*, Howard Boardman asks, "how were the rights of Mr. Davis 'protected' through seeking recourse to a Newton court of law?" A subsequent three-hour inquiry based on a complaint filed by Davis was held by the Police Department under the direction of Chief William Quinn and was reported in the *Newton Graphic* on May 24. Neither Reverend Davis nor his lawyer, Arthur Sullivan, were notified or invited to attend. The hearing found no fault with the behavior of the po-



Matthew Jefferson

lice officer involved.

BCON sponsored other activities, including art fairs, dinners, dances, and educational and musical programs, and kept citizens aware of civil rights issues confronting the Newton community. It supported the METCO program, encouraged the addition of minority staff to the Newton schools, and monitored the activities of the School Committee. Nationally renowned guest speakers addressing BCON included Arthur Flemming, chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights. A BCON scholarship for a Newton METCO graduate was awarded in two successive years; in the name of Newton METCO Coordinator Katherine Jones in 1976, and Alderman Matthew Jefferson in 1977. BCON presidents from 1975 through 1992 included Frank Ollivierre, Joseph Warren, Arthur Lyman, Russell Houston, and Samuel Turner.

Newton elected its first African-Americans to political office during the Civil Rights Movement. Matthew Jefferson joined the Board of Aldermen in 1967, filling the seat vacated by the resignation of Paul Burke, Ward Alderman, and served on that body until 1987, leading the Board as its president from 1978-83. Jefferson was involved in all aspects



Frank Ollivierre and Bob Hayden

of community life as the president of the NAACP South Middlesex Chapter, Deacon of Myrtle Baptist Church, and a myriad of other civic activities. Carol Robinson was the second African-American to be elected to the Aldermanic Board.

In 1978, Katherine Jones of Ward 2 took a seat on the School Committee as the first African-American elected to that body. Jones resigned from her position as director of METCO after a decade to run for election on the "liberal" *Concern* slate of candidates who opposed the slate of "conservative" candidates endorsed by *Voice* in a very heated contest that electrified the city. NAACP South Middlesex Chapter President William Beckett urged the Committee to be actively involved in the School Committee election of 1977. Dr. Jones served on the

Committee from 1978 to 1986 during a time of declining enrollment and school closings. She was elected four times, the maximum of eight consecutive years in that office allowed by Newton statute. No person of color was elected to the School Committee or the Board of Aldermen between 1987 and 2001. (In 1974, U.S. Congresswoman Shirley Chisolm was the first African-American woman to campaign for nomination as a Democratic presidential candidate. Newton's Eunice Perry collected signatures for her.)

Newton state representatives including Congressman Barney Frank, Jack Backman, Lois Pines, David Mofenson, and Mayors Monte Basbas, Theodore Mann, Thomas Concannon, and David Cohen, who served between 1950-70, championed many of the legislative initiatives of the Civil Rights Movement at the State House when Newton was developing creative programs in education and housing as the number of people of color increased. The City provided a haven for political exiles from South Africa, Zimbabwe, (Southern Rhodesia), Russia, and Vietnam.

The Civil Rights Movement prompted more active public participation in the decision-making process regarding schools, which included teachers and students. In

1982 the Newton School Committee adopted a policy to increase the number of people of color at all levels of the school system, to reflect the percentage in the population. Student representatives were elected by the two high schools as non-voting members of the School Committee. The Open Meeting Law passed by the Massachusetts Legislature prevented the School Committee from discussing or voting on any matters behind closed doors, with the exception of personnel issues and salary negotiations. Parent involvement in the hiring of school principals and public hearing sessions for the selection of superintendents also began during this period. Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act required equal access in physical education and varsity programs for girls. Special Education Chapter 766, enacted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1975,

mandates schools to provide services for physically handicapped and other children with special needs, who should be mainstreamed into regular classes when feasible. Because of the increasing number of mothers joining the paid work force, elementary school children stayed in school for lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and after-school programs cared for children until parents returned home from work. Schools also offered day care for preschool children when space was available. METCO helped support children from foreign countries by including their languages and cultures into the curriculum. Sign language offered at the high school level made communication with deaf students easier. As mothers took an active role in the work force, the energy and skills previously devoted to volunteer community work subsided during this period.



Alderwoman Carol Robinson, the second African-American to serve on Newton's Board of Aldermen.

Notes and Bibliography

Interviews: Edward Richmond, Richard Scobie, Eloise Houghton, Lillie Jefferson, Matthew Jefferson, Helen Drinan, Anne Marie Carleo, Irene Egan, Richard and Martha Rowland, Terry Holzman, Francis Griffith, William Jones, Lois Smith, Ena Lorant.
Written by Katherine Jones, with Nina King and Annette Meleson.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN NEWTON: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

1950-1970

by Katherine Butler Jones

Organizations and Movements Included:

Myrtle Baptist Church

Operation Exodus

METCO

Newton Fair Housing and Equal Rights

Newton Community Development Foundation

Roxbury Newton Freedom School

American Friends Service Committee

Community Lecture Series

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Massachusetts Turnpike Authority

Catholic Interracial Council

Freedom School Stay-Out

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Myrtle Baptist Church Program Books

Newton Room: Newton Archives and photographs

Newspapers

Newton Graphic

News Tribune

Newton Times

Newton Tab

Acknowledgments

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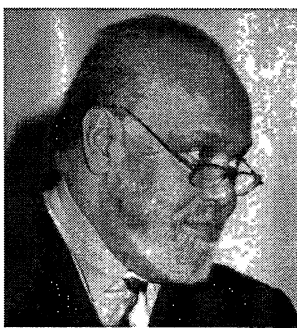
In researching newspapers for this report, I found women identified by their husband's given name, e.g. Mrs. John Doe. I have taken the liberty to substitute the given name for women in this report. African-Americans were referred to as "Negroes" in the press during these decades, and I have again taken the liberty to substitute "people of color" and "African-American" in place of "Negro." I assume sole responsibility for names of people I have inadvertently omitted. This summary provides a graphic picture of the range of activities Newtonites participated in at local, state, national, and international levels, as part of the ongoing movement for change and social justice.

- Katherine Jones

The Civil Rights Movement in Newton: 1950s - 1970s

by Katherine Jones with Lillie Jefferson and Nina L. King

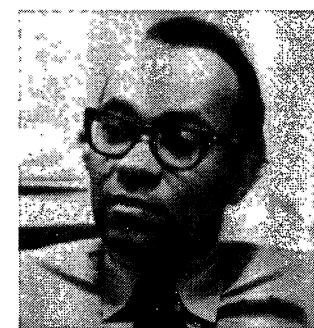
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