ST. CROIX-PAST AND PRESENT

Author(s): Erle R. Williams

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ST. CROIX—PAST AND PRESENT

By ERLE R. WILLIAMS, Washington, D. C.

After an absence of over twenty-five years from his native Virgin Islands, the writer has just returned from spending a wonderful and very happy vacation in Christiansted St. Croix. During my stay, I was very fortunate to have several interesting interviews with the Hon. Dr. D. C. Canegata, Administrator for St. Croix, Virgin Islands. The Administrator, one of the most outstanding natives of the Islands, is a graduate of McGill University School of Medicine of Montreal, Canada. He has been the elected representative from the Second Christiansted Town District to the Colonial Council for twenty-four years, and has served as the Council's Chairman for eleven years. Dr. Canegata has visited the mainland on several occasions with fellow council members to give their views on the Organic Act for the Islands before many a Senatorial Committee. Since the transfer of the Islands to the United States, the Administrator has been the Islands' Chief Municiapl Physician, and also has been the Police Judge for St. Croix.

My thanks are due to Mr. Claude Markoe, a native Principal of the Christiansted High School, who was so very kind to brief me on the educational set up of the schools since the transfer to the American educational system, as compared to that under the Danish Administration. I am sure that the readers of the BULLETIN *will find good reading in this small pen sketch of the history of St. Croix, Virgin Islands, related to life past and present of one of America's latest possessions.*

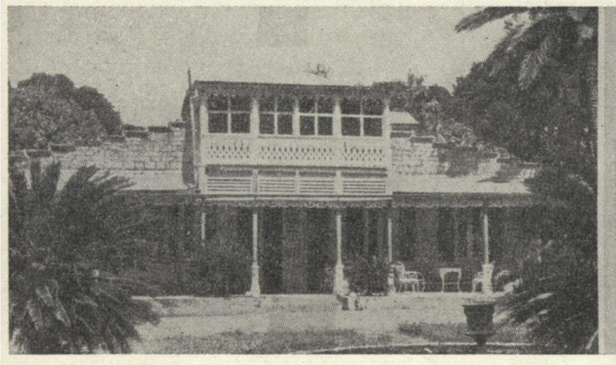
E. R. W.

Although St. Croix is only thirty-five minutes by air from its sister islands, St. Thomas and St. John, this largest of the American Virgin Islands will surprise the visitor arriving from bustling St. Thomas. It has the tropical scenery, the uncrowded beaches of most West Indian vacation spots, but in addition it has miraculously preserved the classic simplicity of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century architecture. And the remnants of an even earlier period are to be found all over the island: the ruins of once majestic estates, particularly the tall sugar mills, which add certain graceful melancholy to the over-all picture.

It is the living, untouched architecture that gives the island its special character. The main square of Christiansted, its larger town, is almost too pretty, a perfect set for an opera, with its Government Place, its arches of stone and its pavilions, all late eighteenth century. Nothing has been added. No modernistic building disturbs the impression that the vistor has gone back in time to a sort of Virgin Island "Berkeley Square." The few new houses erected by people who have settled here have adopted the same pure style.

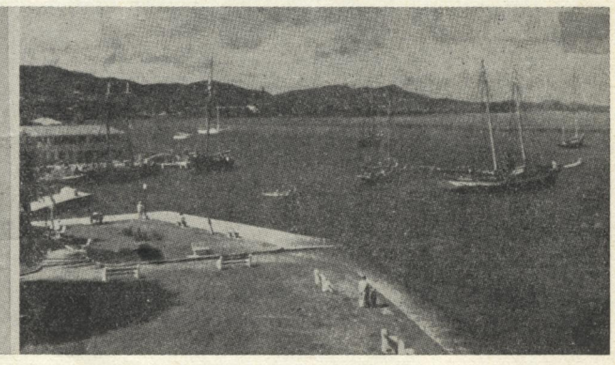
Because St. Croix has kept its architectural integrity over so many centuries, the island Government and the Department of Parks in Washington started working on a law that will declare Christiansted a national shrine, will prohibit road signs, neon lights and garish hotels. And, to tie the island even closer to its past, Governor Morris de Castro set up, in a few rooms in Christiansted's seventeenth-century castle, a museum of relics of the West Indian aborigines, the Carib and Arawak Indians. At the same time, the Danish Government agreed to return to Christiansted's enormous Government Palace the original Biedermeier furniture removed in 1917 when the United States bought the Virgin Islands.

St. Croix, the largest of the Virgin Islands, was also once the richest island in the Caribbean. Called by the Caribs "AY AY," it was christened by Columbus Santa Cruz, when he discovered it on his second voyage in 1493. Its wood-



—Courtesy Don Toschi

LA GRANGE HOUSE, FREDERIKSTED, ST. CROIX



—Courtesy Fritz Henle

HARBOR AT CHISTIANSTED

ed green hills and rolling, fertile valleys tempted the colonists of all nations in turn. Ponce de Leon, it is said, obtained a grant from the King of Spain that he might have a plantation there to maintain him while he searched elsewhere for gold, and the fountain of youth, to enjoy the gold when he found it. But the English and Dutch were the first to attempt a colony there, about 1641, the English in the Frederiksted end and the Dutch in the area around Christiansted. For a few years they lived in peace, but the English drove the Dutch out in 1645. Five years later the Spaniards, reasserting their right to the island by virtue of its discovery by Columbus, drove out the English and were in turn driven out by the French six months afterward.

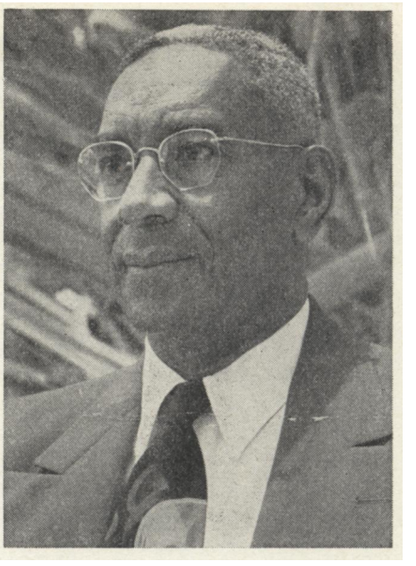
Now the Knights of Malta, grown politically powerful after the Crusades, attempted an empire in the wealthy West Indies. They purchased St. Croix, with its sister islands of St. Christopher, St. Martin, St. Bartholomew and their dependent islands. The dream of empire was shortlived, and fifteen years later they sold the islands back to the French West Indian Company. But in the interim, while they built no roads, they had built many estates, each a handsome group of stone buildings. Their cane was sent out to passing schooners in longboats. Their Governor's residence, at Judith's Fancy, was modelled after a French palace. Ruins of that as well as the fort which they built in Christiansted in the early 1750's and several of the graceful French buildings still stand in memory of that period. The Cross Church, built by the Dutch even earlier, is used as a schoolhouse in Christiansted, topped by the steeple which the Danes added later.

But the French West Indian Company failed, and the Danes, who had started a colony on the nearby Virgin Island of St. Thomas, looked with longing eyes at the green valleys of St. Croix. In 1733 Denmark purchased St. Croix from the French, and for the next two centuries, except for brief intervals when the English captured it during the Napoleonic Wars, the Danish flag flew above its buildings.

St. Croix grew rapidly under the Danish management. Estates were laid out with mathematical accuracy in checkerboard pattern. Roads were built, and from all over the West Indies planters of other islands accepted or purchased land in St. Croix. The Governor of St. Eustatius, the Governor of Antigua, an expatriate colony of French Huguenots, a compact band of exiled Quakers, a missionary group of Dutch Reformists, a working mission of Moravians, adventuring younger sons of English aristocracy; all flocked to St. Croix and rebuilt the burned French estates or created new ones on virgin ground. Though the taverns of the town were crowded with swaggering buccaneers and pirates who fed on the unprotected high seas, the planters were a grim and tenacious group, who had come to the new colony educated by the mistakes of the old. This was to be their permanent home.

Law and order were quickly established. Christiansted became the first capital of the Danish West Indies. Frederiksted, laid out with wider streets than any of the old towns in the West Indies, flourished as a port of call for vessels from all nations. Alexander Hamilton grew to maturity here and went away to become the first Secretary of the Treasury of the new United States. In that country's struggle for independence the planters of St. Croix helped materially, hampered though they were by Denmark's neutrality. The port of Frederiksted became the first foreign port to salute the new flag of the United States.

Travelers in the early nineteenth century called St. Croix the garden spot of the West Indies. Its estates were poems in stone upon every hilltop. Even its factories where the cane was ground and processed into rum and molasses were beautiful, buttressed in stone and supported with delicately turned arches of brick and stone. They were dominated always by the conical stone towers that supported the snowy canvas of the great windmills which powered the rollers to grind the cane. Here in St. Croix, the correspondent of the New York Herald-Tribune reported a hundred years ago, was greater wealth than anywhere in the West Indies, greater beauty of estates and country sides, and greater tolerance for the less fortunate of mankind. The lot of a slave was better than in any other island of the Carribean, and far better than on the larger plantations of the southern United States.



—Courtesy Fritz Henle

DR. D. C. CANEGATA
CHAIRMAN OF THE ISLAND COUNCIL FOR 23 YEARS AND PRESENT ADMINISTRATOR OF ST. CROIX

In 1813 the population of St. Croix was 31,387, while that of St. Thomas was 5,050. Until 1840, when the gradual decline of the islands began, the population increased to almost 40,000. It is hard to say what caused the decline. New and fertile sugar areas were developed in the New World, the planter's way of life was too extravagant and luxurious for them to survive under adversity. The slaves revolted and were freed in

1848, but revolted against conditions again in 1878, with severe damage to property both times. Irish and Scotch overseers and managers acquired the bankrupt estates. The capital shifted from Christiansted to St. Thomas in 1875. For the next half century, until the United States bought the Virgin Islands in 1917, the economic decay continued.

Today, after more than thirty-five years under the American flag, St. Croix is beginning to show firm signs of prosperity. More and more continentals from the United States are buying property and settling down to enjoy St. Croix's perfect climate and placid peace. Beach villas have blossomed where the old Buccaneers pulled their longboats ashore, modern architecture blends skillfully with the mossy stone. Even some of the stone windmills have been cleverly converted into homes. But the traveler still sees St. Croix against the tapestry of her past.

The island has the aura of a vanished era still influencing the land. All over its fertile landscape are massive windmill towers, hewn of stone centuries ago. Set always on hilltops, these towers are monuments to the days when, with the aid of the trade winds, each St. Croix plantation ground its own sugar. They are relics of the 18th century when the island was a famed sugar and rum producer for world markets. Near these towers are often the crumbling ruins of what were once gracious estate houses.

SECLUDED GRANDEUR

When larger ships began to be built the St. Croix harbors would not accommodate them. The island lost its rich trade. St. Thomas, with its perfect harbor, claimed the limelight and became the capital of the Virgin Islands, leaving St. Croix to her memories of grandeur.

Today in St. Croix there is a landed gentry of Scotch, Irish and Danish descent. In tradition and mores, this land-owning aristocracy is similar to the old southern aristocracy of the continental United States. They are cautious about welcoming a stranger into their homes or business places without careful inquiry into his antecedents and close scrutiny of his manners. Once you're accepted, however, their hospitality knows no bounds.

The two towns on the island, Christiansted on the north coast and Frederiksted on the western tip, are connected by the "centerline," a 15-mile-long paved road. Both towns are delightfully rustic. Clucking hens and preening roosters wander about the shady public squares. In each there is the inevitable blood-red brick Danish fort.

Christiansted, as the seat of the local government, is the commercial and social center of the island. Like St. Thomas, it is a splash of yellow, pink and buff buildings, centuries old, with peaked red roofs and the same arched doorways and arcaded walks.

Its small wharf bustles with the comings and goings of schooners and yawls which connect it with the neighboring islands.

On King Street is the store where Alexander Hamilton came to work from the British island of Nevis where he was born. At 15 he managed his patron's store and plantations. After the death of his mother, who is buried on St. Croix, he went to the American colonies to help found the republic.

HUMAN RIGHTS

In a study of political progress in the Virgin Islands, it is not necessary to go farther back than the entrance of the Danish regime. Before that time the islands were the toys of European Powers bent on colonizing the West Indies for economic gain. With the advent of the Danes in 1733, a more permanent form of government was established, although this government also was set up primarily for the purpose of developing the economic resources of the islands.

During that regime the legislature was made up of fifteen members, eleven elected by the people, and four appointed by the Governor. No citizenship was required of the candidates: there was simply a residence of five years. This alone indicates that residence in the then Danish West Indies was transitory, therefore citizenship was impractical. At that time the ancestors of the present natives of these islands were slaves imported from the coast of Africa, and were used to amass wealth and build commercial greatness for their masters.

In the early part of the Danish rule the members of the Colonial Council were influential planters and businessmen. Laws passed during that period were for the benefit of the Danish planters. Due to the unfortunate fact that the ancestors of the present natives were slaves, they were not considered as human beings, but as property with an economic value.

With such a background it is easy to understand how the offspring of such people were bewildered when they were liberated in 1848. From that time to the present it has been an uphill battle for the natives of these islands to learn the functioning of government, their responsibility as citizens, and their political rights.

When the islands were transferred to the United States of America on March 31, 1917, that nation immediately placed them under the jurisdiction of the Navy Department. The islands were bought primarily for defense purposes, and their value as such is very much appreciated in this present world conflict. Although in the primary purpose no regard was given for improving the natives in citizenship and social and economic development, yet it is obvious that under the American regime the natives have progressed politically, socially, and economically to a much greater degree than under the Danes.

As a matter of expedience, the United States continued the same paternal system of government

that it found upon receiving the ownership of the islands. But when we reflect seriously we find that this was the best type of government for the islands at that time. The inhabitants were not familiar with American Democracy, its citizenship, and functioning, and it would have brought chaos to the islands to have given them full citizenship and self-government rights at the beginning. There had to be a period of transition and learning by contact with American citizens, through Americanized public schools, and by the absorption of democracy by its mere presence.

Therefore, under the jurisdiction of the Navy Department, the Legislature continued to carry the name of the Colonial Council, and it consisted of fifteen members, eleven elected by voters with certain property and income qualifications, and four appointed by the Governor. It was claimed in theory that the four members appointed by the Governor were to represent the non-voting populace. But in practice they consistently supported the will of the Administration. The control of community affairs remained with the high-income classes of the islands. While in the Danish regime, this class consisted mostly of Danes and foreigners, in the early part of the American occupation, this class included many natives who had inherited wealth and property, or had developed commercially through initiative and perseverance. However, a broad social outlook had not been developed.

Further progress was made politically when in 1927 natives of the Virgin Islands, who resided in the Islands in 1917 were granted American citizenship. More natives were granted American citizenship in the Act of Congress of 1932. Before 1927 the natives were virtually men without a country. But with the granting of American citizenship, they began to gain recognition in the sphere of democratic government. Slowly the people began to realize their value as citizens under a democracy, and began clamoring for more and more self-expression in government. Around this time two outstanding native leaders began agitation for civil government and an Organic Act. These leaders were Judge Hamilton Jackson of St. Croix and Rothschild Francis of St. Thomas. Francis, as Editor of the Emancipator, had a very hard time convincing some of the people that this was the way toward social, economic, and political progress. For years this agitation continued, until suddenly in 1931 the islands were awarded civil government. The first Civilian Governor, Dr. Paul M. Pearson, now deceased, was welcomed with open arms by the people.

The turning point of political progress in the islands came with the passage of the Organic Act of the Virgin Islands by the United States Congress, and its approval by the President on June 22, 1936. This Act placed the reins of self-government mostly into the hands of the natives. Universal suffrage was organized and legislatures in both islands were set up consisting only of elected members. This Act also made an effort toward the separation of powers, according to the American democratic standard of government.

While the passing of the Act may have found the people somewhat unprepared, since it was unprecedented, it is very important to record the fact that the inhabitants had long before grasped the principles of American democracy, and so far have been able to carry on admirably. The change in the texture of the legislature; the awakened and active public opinion; and the social, economic, and progressive legislation of the past years indicate that the natives of the Virgin Islands understand their duties and responsibilities of self-government.

We may look forward to more and more progress in the future and will always be grateful to the United States of America for its indulgent, democratic education, its patience in developing the islands and its people as fast as possible with the material at hand, and its willingness to turn over to the people the right of self-government. May the Untied States continue to shed light on the democratic system of government throughout the world!

CULTURAL PROGRESS

In considering the educational system of the Virgin Islands today, thirty-five years after the transfer, compared with aspects of the system prior to this event, we find, as we would expect, many pronounced differences; but it is interesting to note also, that there is evidence of survival of certain characteristics of the earlier system. We may find, for instance, that the system of teacher classification now in effect shows close resemblance to that employed before 1917. The upper age limit for compulsory attendance has been extended from 13 to 15; the school organization from "classes" I through X, to "grades" I through XII; while the school year has been shortened from a 12-month term to a 10-month term. School enrollment in this municipality has increased.

Today there are over 2,100 children in 12 public elementary schools, and 1 junior-senior high school. The changes which are, or should be, of greater interest and importance to us at this time are those pertaining to educational concepts and philosophy. Despite the fact that contrasts of this nature are not so readily detected and described, it is in this connection that the most significant changes have taken place. Some characteristics of the system before the transfer are revealed in the nomenclature employed in reports of Danish school directors, in which we find extensive concern with the "disciplines" pertaining to the subject matter of the "common branches" and "tuition," the manner of presentation. The emphasis here, as it was elsewhere generally, was largely academic

attainment; and there was little or no regard for individual differences of ability, aptitude, or for social and economic factors which enter so largely into the educational planning of the present. Consequently, that which most distinguishes the educational system of today is a matter of emphasis. In some respects this may be little more than an awareness, but it is this awareness that guides us in our planning to reflect a growing concern for the child's welfare and for his potential place in school and society. And it is this which must be credited with the development and maintenance of a number of new or greatly extended services and facilities within or in conjunction with our school system which now provides special supervision and direction in the fields of art, music, health and physical education; periodical physical and dental examinations, and free medical and dental treatment; nursery schools; free lunches for school children; an extended secondary school program and differentiated curricula; student loans for higher education; evening classes for adults; vocational education for unemployed out-of-school youth; summer scholarships for teachers.

When inquiring about the Virgin Islands, a prospective visitor is usually given a description of the splendid year-round climate, the white-sand beaches and clear blue water, the picturesque red-roofed buildings of the quaint little towns, and the beauty of the natural scenery. With such a picture of subtropical beauty in mind, the visitor eagerly packs his bags and flies to the Virgin Islands on the very next plane. But when he arrives in the Islands he is very much impressed with another feature which is not so widely publicized. The visitor finds himself among a people with a culture of Old World charm and hospitality.

For two hundred or more years, during the Danish regime, the natives of these islands mixed freely with people from most of the European countries, including Germany, France, Spain, Russia, Italy and England. Because of this background of association it was easy for the natives to learn several languages much to the wonderment of visitors who are often astonished at meeting natives conversant with German, French, Spanish, Dutch, Russian and Danish.

This European background has also developed in our people a courtesy and politeness which savor of the royal courts of the Old World. It is inbred in the natives to greet strangers on the streets. A simple morning greeting when passing an Islander shows a definite musical tone quality that works itself out in a rhythmic pattern that makes an indelible impression upon a visitor. The tempo of Virgin Islanders is leisurely and rhythmic. They walk with a proud air with head thrown back and no indication of servility. However, they are kind-hearted and neighborly, to the point where it is made a boast that no one can starve in the Virgin Islands as long as his neighbor has a piece of bread.

Rising from slavery over one hundred years ago to active participation in American democracy, the natives have retained some of the culture of their African ancestors. This is mostly manifested in the local music and dance. The music and dance were originally an unconscious re-creation by the slaves of their previous manner of life. In their ballads they sang of the hunt, of daily labors, of religious rites, of love, marriage, death, and of numerous other subjects depicting their life in the tribe before they were transplanted from Africa to the New World. The bamboula has lived through the decades, but today it is not as popular as in years gone by. A song and dance still used in St. Croix is the Mackshun. Superimposed on these basic African dances are the quadrille and an old Irish dance known as the lancer's dance. Music and the Virgin Islands are inseparable. Its wide range is to be found from the humblest dwelling and condition to the pinnacle of artistic culture.

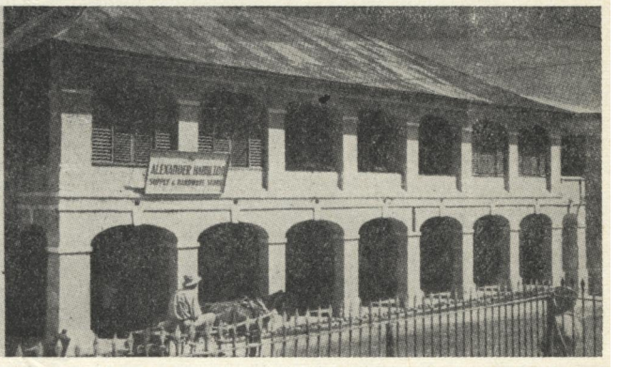
Virgin Islanders love to celebrate; thus christenings, weddings, birthdays, Christmas and New Year's Eve are all occasions for merry-making.

Perhaps this trait may be misunderstood by visitors who might wonder how a people with limited financial resources can devote so

(*Continued on page* 180)

—Courtesy Don Toschi

BEAUTIFUL BEACHES FRINGE THE SHORE



—Courtesy Don Toschi

HAMILTON HOUSE, CHRISTIANSTED, ST. CROIX

ly occupied him at the time of his death he has been succeeded by well known and able individuals, as follows: as director of the Department of Surgery, H. H., by Dr. Aubré de L. Maynard; as president of the Medical Board, H. H., by Dr. A. Charles Posner; as director of the H. H. Cancer Research Foundation by Dr. Jane C. Wright, a daughter; as chairman of the Board of Directors of the N.A.A.C.P., by Dr. Channing H. Tobias; as police surgeon of the city of New York, by Dr. Robert S. Wilkinson; and as a member of the editorial board of the Journal of the National Medical Association by Dr. Howard M. Payne.

Dr. Wright is survived by his wife, Mrs. Corinne Cooke Wright whom he married May 18, 1918, two daughters, also physicians, Dr. Jane Cooke Wright (Mrs. Jones) and Dr. Barbara Penn Wright (Mrs. Pierce), three granddaughters, and a half-sister Mrs. Jessie Penn West, wife of the president of Meharry Medical College.

St. Croix

(*Continued from page* 175)

much time and expense to frivolity. However, such actions of the natives are not necessarily those of spend-thrifts, because very often the celebrations are not expensive, and in other cases they are taken care of by collecting contributions from the participants.

Inherently the people are a happy group. They have their sad moments, but they are not prone to mope and grieve too long. Thus they are able to unconsciously attain a mental balance and lack of neurosis which is remarkable. It should be remembered that the forefathers of these people were slaves who attended to the great banquets and celebrations of their European masters. These celebrations on the plantations involved extensive cooking preparations, music and guests from near and far. The slaves observed these activities and subconsciously linked them with freedom. Thus upon being emancipated they endeavored to act like freemen by holding celebrations on all occasions. At native celebrations, the uninvited guest is welcome, and white and black may mix in merriment without the slightest reservation or atmosphere of discrimination or segregation.

It is a time-worn tradition for the natives to celebrate New Year's Eve, locally referred to as "Old Year's Day." This celebration is based on the theory that one must forget all his enemies and troubles of the past year and begin the new year with a clean slate. On this eventful day you would find friend and foe joining in the merry-making. "Kallalue" is the traditional dish for New Year's Eve, and the preparation of it alone takes on the air of a spree.

It was a wonderful treat to be in St. Croix last Christmas to witness an old fashioned Christmas celebration, with the people of both towns, Frederiksted and Christiansted, getting together to make the day one which shall long be remembered.

E. R. W.

Broadcast

(*Continued from page* 177)

MRS. BROOKS: Thumb-nail sketch of a great American—Born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1904, this man became an athlete and a scholar of considerable ability at the University of California at Los Angeles, from which he graduated in 1927. From Harvard he received the master's degree in 1928 and the doctor of philosophy degree in 1936. He studied further at Northwestern and the London School of Economics. He carried his ideas of fair play in sports and the scholarly attitude of inquiry in search of truth, into his life's work. He was an outstanding teacher at Howard University before entering government service.

He became chief research analyst in the Office of Strategic Services in 1942 and the State Department's first Negro division head in 1945. He became director of the Trusteeship Division of the United Nations in 1946 and secretary of the United Nations Palestine Commission in 1947. As special mediator in 1948, he guided the negotiations which resulted in, at least, temporary peace in Palestine. For his efforts in this connection, he received in 1950 the Nobel Peace Prize.

For your life of high principle and courage, Dr. Ralph Johnson Bunche, we salute you as a great humanitarian. Thumb-nail sketch of a great American!

MR. BROOKS: the historical materials presented on this broadcast came from publications of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. The Association sponsors Negro History Week annually. The men whose lives were portrayed served human progress. The theme for Negro History Week: "Negro History and Human Relations" becomes clearer with the understanding of the lives of Douglass, Carver, Drew, and Bunche.

MRS. BROOKS: The churches should join the schools in supporting the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in order that the Association might help create better understanding for better human relations.