Modern-day history has largely forgotten about men like Matthew W. Bullock. He lived in Roxbury, near what is now known as Munroe Park. More than anyone else, he set the tone of conspicuous achievement in a neighborhood filled with high achievers.

Melnea Cass was one of them. Valedictorian of her high school class, Cass eventually moved to the same neighborhood as Bullock — and promptly became one of Boston’s most prominent community leaders.

Back in the early decades of the 20th century, back when she was in her late teens and early 20s, she couldn’t find good work downtown. It wasn’t right, but she worked anyway — as a domestic servant.

“You could always make a living,” Cass told an interviewer. “But it wasn’t always what you wanted to do.” She lived in Upper Roxbury.

Not too far away were the Snowdens. Given the racial tenor of early 20th century America, their story is nothing short of incredible.

It starts with Frank Snowden Sr., “the Colonel,” a spit-and-polish man who served in the segregated military during the days of World War II.

No telling what the Colonel would say about his old neighborhood, a place where he raised his two sons — one of whom would become a renowned scholar on Africans in ancient Greece and Rome; the other a founder of “Freedom House,” one of Boston’s foremost community organizations.

No telling how the Colonel would react to police and media reports that his neighborhood is now called “H-Block” by reputed gang members, and that the streets he once walked are now dotted with makeshift memorials to slain youths.

In the Colonel’s generation, the fight was about academic achievement — not mindless, often bloody, turf battles.

Continued to page 2
If education was necessary, hard work was equally important. Malcolm X had a part-time job working behind the soda fountain at the drugstore on the corner of Townsend Street and Humboldt Avenue. Another neighborhood boy, Mel Miller, the

Otto and Mariel Snowden, the founders of Freedom House, one of the city’s foremost community agencies.

Community matters
In 1944, Bullock was 63 years old, and at the time of his appointment, the neighborhood was filled with children. Eleven-year-old Reginald Alleyne was one of them. He became one of the first African American professors at UCLA Law School. His sister Delores, however, had just as notable a reputation among the young that hung around the huge puddingstone boulders jutting from the ground.

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had that and Mrs. Bullock were attending “the Open Door,” a Negro pageant, at Boston Symphony Hall.

The black population in Boston was quickly expanding in those days. Between 1900 and 1920, the number of blacks grew from 8,125 to 16,350, due largely to northern migration of blacks from the Deep South. Even though the black population doubled over that 30-year period, blacks constituted only 2.2 percent of the Boston population. In all, Boston was the fifth largest city in the country. But the city had the nation’s 27th largest black population.

In 1920, roughly 45 percent of Bos- ton blacks lived in the South End and Roxbury, primarily in Ward 13. Before political redistricting disfranchised black voting strength, Bullock, a Republican, decided to run for political office. The 39-year-old Bullock lost a close race for state representative in 1920. He ran again two years later, but this time he won. His first legislative action reflected his racial sensibilities.

The bill was the first of the 1923 General Court legislative sessions, and described the Ki Kuan Klan as a “menace to the public peace,” imposing a fine of $100 or two years in jail or both for anyone caught joining the group or aiding any of its members.

The activist

She had died three years earlier at the age of 82. In his eulogy, the Rev. Michael Hayes asked a rhetorical question: “Who can find a virtuous woman?” he preached. “We have found her — as a modestly furnished third-floor walk-up … flat on Harold Street in Roxbury, Massachusetts, where a beautiful, radiant, strong, courageous, generous, God-loving, Christian black woman named Melonta A. Cass held court around a quaint, old-fashioned dining room table.”

None stood taller on Harold Street than Melonta Cass. Her father was a janitor, her mother a maid. They moved to the South End when Cass was five years old. Her mother died three years later.

Her father and her father’s sister — aunt Ella — raised her and her two sisters. She graduated grammar school in Newburyport, and then attended Girls’ High School in Boston and St. Frances de Sales Convent School, a Catholic school for blacks in Rock Castle, Va. She graduated in 1914 as a valedictorian of her class.

When Cass returned to Boston, she sought work as a salesgirl in Boston, but found that there were no jobs for blacks.

“Will, in those days, being black af- fected every black person getting a job,” she told an interviewer with the Radcliffe Oral History Project. “Of course, you could get domestic work, because they always felt that black people should do domestic work. But it was getting other kinds of jobs where the discrimi- nation came in … You couldn’t work in stores or the banks.”

Macys’ Downtown Crossing celebrates Black History Month, saluting a legacy of achievement!

Attend our fascinating discussion on “Africans in Colonial America,” followed by a reception and a special musical performance.

Saturday, February 17, 2pm on The Main Floor

In the recent premiere of the PBS program Oprah’s Roots: An African American Lives Special, and in his new book Finding Oprah’s Roots, Finding Your Own, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. guides Ms. Winfrey on a remarkable journey through her family history, discovering unsusued heroes among her ancestors. Professor Gates will discuss genealogical and historical research methods, and how DNA analysis can help the process of finding one’s ancestors. Professor Gates will sign your purchase of Finding Oprah’s Roots, Finding Your Own, as well as the African American Lives DVD, available during the event. Reception to follow.

Macy’s is proud to sponsor a series of special programs celebrating Black History Month on WGBH. WGBH enriches people’s lives through programming and services that educate, inspire and entertain, fostering citizenship and culture, the joy of learning and the power of diverse perspectives.

Join us as one of America’s most prominent scholars explains what Oprah’s past can reveal about your own.

Tuesday, February 20, 6pm on The Main Floor

Dr. Howard Dodson, Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, L’Merchie Frazier, Director of Education for The Museum of African American History in Boston, and Mt. Holyoke College’s Dr. Lois Brown are members of the distinguished panel for this enriching discussion, moderated by WCVB’s news anchor Pam Cross. A reception will follow for attendees and panelists. Everyone will enjoy a spirited performance by the Paige Academy Drum Team from Roxbury, Massachusetts.
As we celebrate the culture, achievements and contributions of African-Americans during Black History Month, Children’s Hospital Boston also celebrates their positive impact in our hospital, among our patients and throughout our community.

Everyday, Blacks in all areas of our hospital—from emergency medicine to nursing to psychiatry to administration—play a critical role in supporting our mission to provide the best possible health care to children. At Children’s, we have created a culture of collaboration in which different people with different talents, experiences and cultural backgrounds work side-by-side to pursue a common goal.

Join us in recognizing some of Children’s finest Black employees, who work tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of our patients and in the health of our entire community. To all of our passionate, dedicated and talented employees—we would like to say thank you!

Michael Shannon, MD, MPH
Chief of Emergency Medicine
1989 Children’s Black Achiever Award Winner
Employee since 1983

“There’s commitment, passion and optimism here. This is a place that’s never complacent. No one here feels that he or she has ever done enough. You can always do more and you can always do better. This is why I am proud to say that I work at Children’s.”

Malissa Williams
Supervisor, Food Services
2006 Children’s Black Achiever Award Winner
Employee since 1993

“I love my heritage and where I come from. I’ve learned more about our history from my grandparents who were raised in Alabama. They lived during the era of sit-ins, segregation and MLK. Their struggles make me appreciate what others did to help us get to where we are today. I think today’s youth should learn more about their history and the importance of Black History Month.”

Stacey Williams
Office Manager, Pathology Department
2007 Children’s Black Achiever Award Winner
Employee since 2001

“It’s great that Children’s celebrates diversity and multiculturalism. I have never worked at an institution that seeks out and recognizes people like they do here. They go above and beyond to celebrate people who are doing a good job. Maybe if others see me or hear my story they will feel that they can do this and become an office manager like me.”
We proudly celebrate Black History Month

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“Dr. King was always a hero of mine growing up. His message of hope had a profound impact on me. We were pretty poor growing up in the Bronx. Yet I aspired to go into computers and studied very hard. After graduating from the Bronx High School of Science, I was accepted to Yale University on a full scholarship, which helped my career goals become a reality.”

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Manager of Business Intelligence
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Tarsha Weaver
Assistant Administrator
Employee since 2000

“I was born and raised in Dorchester in a single parent household. My mother was a stickler for education. She went above and beyond to show my sisters and me that we can always do better for ourselves. ‘Don’t ever tell me you can’t do something unless you have exhausted all other options,’ she would often say to us growing up. She worked two jobs and went to school to get her degree in computer programming. She was our role model. Sometimes, we thought she was strict, but now we know exactly why.”

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Office Manager, Pathology Department
2007 Children’s Black Achiever Award Winner
Employee since 2001

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Toby Grooms
Practice Administrator, Orthopedics
Employee since 2006

“The sky is the limit. Be a leader and not a follower. Don’t be afraid to stray away from the pack, and make your own path. Perseverance is key. You have to fight for what you want out of life. Failure is also key, because you learn from your mistakes.”

Malissa Williams
Supervisor, Food Services
2006 Children’s Black Achiever Award Winner
Employee since 1993

“I love my heritage and where I come from. I’ve learned more about our history from my grandparents who were raised in Alabama. They lived during the era of sit-ins, segregation and MLK. Their struggles make me appreciate what others did to help us get to where we are today. I think today’s youth should learn more about their history and the importance of Black History Month.”

Join Children’s Family

A range of career opportunities are available at Children's Hospital Boston. To view all of our openings and to apply online, please visit us at www.childrenshospital.org.

To read the complete profiles of these exemplary employees, please visit www.childrenshospital.org/blackhistory.
Among the Notables

Gustave Anglin, former headmaster, Mario Umana and John O'Bryant High schools (Humboldt Avenue)

Richard Banks, Harvard University, A.B., J.D., Chief Judge, Roxbury District Court (Harrishof Street)

Anne Murray Bell, M.D., Psychiatrist, Brockton Veterans Administration Hospital and assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Tufts University School of Medicine (Humboldt Avenue)

Donald Callender, First black state police captain (Harrishof Street)

Alvin Fortune, Colorado State University, A.B. Harvard University, M.Ed. Integrated Princess George's County, Maryland in 1969 and helped to establish Head Master Program at Harvard School of Education. (Harold Street)

Pritchett Klugh, Harvard University, A.B., Harvard Medical School, Biology teacher, Norwood High School

Jean McGuire, Tufts AB, Executive Director of METCO (Harold Street)

Theos McKinney, Northeastern University, B.S. engineer federal Aviation Administration (Humboldt Avenue)

Melvin Miller, Harvard University, A.B. Columbia Law School, J.D. Publisher and Editor, Bay State Banner (Harrishof Street)

John Parnell, Sr., Boston University, PhD, Biology professor, Virginia State University (Harold Street)

James Scott, principal of Deco Supply and real estate executive (Harold and Townsend)

George Sheehy, District Court Judge, Springfield, MA, retired (Munroe Street)

Joshua Smith, Boston University, A.B., Harvard University, Ph.D., Former Chancellor of the Community Colleges of California (107 colleges and 1.2 million students), Professor Emeritus of Higher Education, New York University (Harrishof Street)

William Strickland, Harvard University, A.B. Professor of Political Science and Director of the DuBois Papers Collection, UMass Amherst (Harrishof Street)

Herbert Wilkins, Sr. Boston University, B.S., Harvard University MBA, Founder and Principal Syncom Management Co. (Holworthy Street)
Cass had little choice. She worked as a maid until her marriage in 1917 to Marshall Cass. While her husband was in the service, their first child, also named Marshall, was born. While he was away, she lived with her mother. After his return from World War I, they had two other children, Marianne and Melanie.

Unable to find work after her husband's military service ended, Cass moved in with a family in Newton as a live-in maid, allowed only one day off a week to visit her family. Despite her lack of opportunities, Cass lived by a long-forgotten creed: “If we cannot do great things, then we can do small things in a great way.”

To Cass, that meant community activism.

She founded a mothers’ group that pushed for the establishment of neighborhood nursery schools. She was an active member of the Robert Gould Shaw House in the South End. With her mother-in-law’s help, Cass organized black women to vote after the 19th Amendment to the constitution passed in 1920. “Soon after women got the vote, it wasn’t very popular … because a lot of colored women at that time were scared to death,” Cass told an interviewer. “And of course a lot of poor white women were scared, too … because they felt that if they voted it might affect their husband’s job or [have] some repercussions, cause that is what they were telling them.”

By 1915, black musicians were organized and had formed Local 535, a union that received its charter from the American Federation of Musicians. The leadership handled some of the biggest names in the business, including Duke Ellington, Earl Hines and Cab Calloway. Many of those nationally known artists played in joints like Wally’s Paradise, the Hi-Hat, the Pioneer Club, the Royal Palms and Louie’s Lounge.

Boston had its share of musicians during the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s. Danny Holgate was one of them. He conducted and arranged for Cab Calloway for two decades. His Broadway credits include: musical director and arranger for “Eubie!” and “Bubbling Brown Sugar.”

Malcolm X worked behind the counter of the Townsend Drug Store on the corner of Humboldt Avenue. Photograph by Irene Sheatschman, courtesy of University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections Department, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts.
her ambassador to Senegal. Fluent in French, Greek and Turkish, her skills were in great demand by the U.S. State Department. Her son, Harvard alumnus Harry J. Elam Jr. is the Olive H. Palmer Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University. He is a recognized authority on black theater.

The renowned African American scholar Adelaide Cromwell, with her husband Henry Hill, was another resident of Walnut Avenue. Hill, a Ph.D. alumnus of MIT, became the first black president of the American Chemical Society. Cromwell is a founder of the African Studies Program at Boston University, one of the oldest such programs in the nation. She also founded the African American Studies program there.

One of her neighbors was Kern Grimes. He started the Grimes Oil Company, which is still operated by his son, Kern Grimes Jr.

One of the first successful businesses in the neighborhood was Herbert Dowse Sr. Back in the 1930s, he became a black executive of a major white business, the Boston Lanyon Co. That was a rarity.

The Dowses lived on Harold Street. On Holoworthy was Herbert P. Wilkins. Born in 1942, he received a M.B.A from Harvard in 1970 and went on to start Syncom Management Co., Inc., based in Silver Springs, Md. According to Black Enterprise, Syncom is the sixth-largest black private equity firm in the nation.

The Wharton family lived on Walnut Avenue.

Clifton R. Wharton was America’s first black Foreign Service Officer. When posted to Romania in 1958, he became the first black to head a diplomatic mission to a European country. President John F. Kennedy later appointed Wharton ambassador to Norway.

His son, Clifton Jr., attained even greater achievements. As president of Michigan State University, he became the first black to head a white university. As CEO of TIAA-CREF, he became the first black to head a fortune 500 company.

In May 2006, the U.S. Postal Service honored Wharton Sr. with a commemorative stamp. At the ceremony, his son offered a brief glimpse of his family’s life.

His father’s maternal grandparents, Wharton Jr., said, owned one of the largest department stores in Baltimore in the late 1880s. When they died, their estate was worth an estimated $50 million in today’s dollars.

“My father had high personal standards. This was an environment and some for excellence in himself,” Wharton Jr. said.

And for his children.

Wharton and his brother William, a Harvard graduate, became a lawyer and also worked for the U.S. State Department,retired director of Citizenship App- alges and Legal Assistance. Their brother Richard also graduated from Harvard and later earned a Ph.D. in education from Columbia University. Their sister Mary became a respected teacher in the same U.S. Court of Appeals post once held by his father.

McCree died on Aug. 30, 1987. Until his death, McCree was the Lewis M. Simes Professor of Law at the University of Michigan. He had retired as solicitor general in 1981. McCree’s name is inscribed in gold on the upper frieze of the Boston Latin School auditorium, eight up there with other notable alumni — John Hancock, Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Phillips Brooks.

Family tradition was very much a part of Roxbury.

No family demonstrated that more than the Snowdens.

Otto P. Snowden moved to Boston at the age of three. His father, the Colonel, a member of the Army Quartermaster Corps, was transferred here in 1917.

At Boston Memorial High School, Snowdens first act of political resistance was to organize his fellow track team members in a boycott to protest racial policies at the school.

After World War II and a short stay in the service, Snowden became executive director of St. Mark’s Social Center, where he began organizing the Council for Community Affairs of Upper Rox- bury, the precursor of Freedom House.

His wife, Muriel R. Snowden, daughter of a successful dentist, grew up in an upper-middle class white neighborhood in New Jersey. When she arrived at Rad- cliff as a freshman, Muriel was forced to live off campus in order not to disturb the “sensibilities of the Southern girls.”

After protesting this unfair treat- ment, Muriel was allowed to move into a dormitory. Muriel attended New York School of Social Work, studying commu- nity organizing and race relations until her marriage to Otto in 1948.

She was the executive director of the Cambridge Civic Unity Commission prior to becoming co-founder of Free- dom House.

Ott’s brother, Frank, distinguished himself through scholarly work, graduat- ing from Boston Latin School and earn- ing undergraduate and doctoral degrees from Harvard University. He taught classics at Georgetown University, Vassar College and Mary Washington College.

He was dean of the college of liberal arts at Howard University.

He served as a member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations Educa- tional, Scientific and Cultural Organiza- tion (UNESCO) in Paris, as cultural at- tache to the American embassy in Rome, and as a special lecturer for the U.S. De- partment of State.

His many books include “Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco- Roman Experience,” published in 1970, which received the Charles J. Good- win Award of Merit of the American Philological Association; “The Image of the Black in Western Art I. From the Pharos to the Fall of the Roman Empire,” which he co-authored in 1976; and “Before Color Prejudice: the Ancient African Experience,” published in 1963.

In a letter to the Washington Post, Walter B. Doyle described an encounter Snowden had while he served as cultural attaché of the American embassy in Rome in the 1950s.

Doyle was the press attaché, and, more than anything else, the story embodies the spirit of Roxbury and the intellectual fearlessness of Snowden’s generation.

Early in his tenure, Doyle wrote, a visiting congressman skeptically asked a few questions.

Learning that Snowden had received his bachelor’s and doctoral degrees from Harvard University, the congressman asked the subject of the doctoral thesis.

“Slavery in the ancient roman empire,” Snowden replied.

“Well, since you are a Negro, I sup- pose that was of special interest to you,” the congressman said.

“Actually my special interest was in the fact that nearly all of the slavers in an ancient Rome were white,” came the reply.

The congressman ceased his ques- tioning.