

# THE ORIGINAL *H*-BLOCK

Melvin Miller & Howard Manly



Matthew Bullock, Class of 1904, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library

*M*odern-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. On Harold Street.

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.



Melnea Cass, the First Lady of Roxbury, courtesy of ABCD

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— Carter G. Woodson, PhD

Founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History; originator of Black History Month.

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## H-Block

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That message of intellectual strength was passed down to his grandson and granddaughter.

"I was very afraid to do anything that would reflect badly," Frank Snowden III told the Washington Post, recounting his experience in 1964 as the first black to attend St. Albans, an esteemed prep school in Washington, D.C. "I was imbued with the fact that it was just not my story but a collective endeavor."

Snowden III's racial awareness, even as a high school student, had its roots in both the Colonel's orders and the intellect of his father, Frank Snowden Jr., a Harvard Ph.D. and the author of countless scholarly books and essays.

"His aspiration for me," Snowden III said, "was to have demonstrated racial equality by achieving educational equality."

The Colonel's other son, Otto, married Muriel Sutherland, a graduate of Radcliffe College and the daughter of a prominent New Jersey dentist. Together, they started Freedom House. Their daughter, Gail, also went to Radcliffe and then attended the Simmons College School of Management. She later became executive vice president of the First National Bank of Boston.

Matthew Bullock knew a thing or two about opportunity and slavery.

In 1944, Massachusetts Gov. Leverett Saltonstall appointed Bullock to the chairmanship of the state Parole Board.

Noting the color of Bullock's skin as "coal black," Time magazine characterized the appointment as a shrewd political move.

"In Boston, bedeviled by uneasy racial relations," the magazine wrote, "the appointment seemed a step toward a new atmosphere."

And it was — at least to Bullock.

"It's a great thing for my people," Bullock told Time.

Bullock lived at the corner of Harold and Munroe Streets.

### 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 Horatio Harris Park.

He was the fastest runner in the neighborhood and the city's 50-yard dash champ. She was the second fastest.

H. Carl McCall, another great schoolyard athlete, was nine. He went on to Dartmouth College and later became the first African American to win statewide office in New York when he was elected state comptroller in 1993. In 2002, he ran unsuccessfully for governor of New York, losing to incumbent Republican Gov. George Pataki.

McCall attributed his success to his upbringing in Roxbury.

As a black student at Roxbury Memorial High School, McCall was tracked into shop courses instead of college prep classes.

"The people from my church marched right down to my high school and told them to put me in college courses immediately," McCall told the Boston Globe during an interview.

The Twelfth Street Baptist church wasn't the only factor in McCall's early life. "My mother always stressed education as the way to better myself, not sports," he told the Globe.

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 Muriel Snowden, the founders of Freedom House, one of the city's foremost community agencies.**

founder of the Bay State Banner, delivered groceries on weekends as a teenager from Oscar Sach's, a store further up on Harold Street.

Ruth Ellen Fitch was a baby back then. She lived on Harrishof Street with her two older brothers, the McKinney boys, Billy and Tommy. Billy went to Fisk University and became an official in the State Department's USAID program.

Ruth Ellen took a different tack. After attending Barnard College and Harvard Law School, she became the first black woman to become a partner in one of Boston's prestigious law firms. She is now CEO of Dimock Community Health Center in Roxbury, the place where many of the neighborhood kids were born.



**H. Carl McCall, the first black to win statewide office in New York when he became State Comptroller in 1993.**

It was a different time in the 1940s, and blacks in Boston were affected by international events. The fight for freedom against Nazism in Europe dominated life back in the states. Gas rationing was a part of life, as were recycling and civil defense drills.

More important for African Americans, as the Black Press dutifully reported, World War II was also a battle back home, particularly in the segregated military.

Unlike the First World War, "now the Negro is showing a 'democratic upsurge rebellion,' bordering on open hostility," the Amsterdam-Star News reported.

In May 1941, A. Phillip Randolph called for 100,000 African Americans to march on Washington to protest racial discrimination in the armed forces and war industries.

It was part of the "Double V" campaign launched by the Pittsburgh Courier to insure victory against racism abroad and at home.

In June 1941, Roscoe Dunjee, editor of the Oklahoma Black Dispatch, challenged the American government to come up with something more original than the idea that African Americans

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# H-Block

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were supposed to fight Hitler's army with only "a mop and a broom."

"If the March on Washington does nothing else," the Chicago Defender asserted, "it will convince white America that the American black man has decided henceforth and forever to abandon the timid role of Uncle Tom-ism in his struggle for social justice, no matter what the sacrifice. On to Washington."

In her book "Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955," Carol Anderson described the clear picture of discrimination painted by the NAACP.

"As late as the summer of 1942," the civil rights organization reported, "only three percent of the people working in war industries were colored. Only when there was virtually no one else to hire and almost every other labor source was exhausted" were African Americans even considered.

As a result, of the 29,215 defense contract employees in the New York area, "only 142 were Negroes." In St. Louis, with a population of more than 100,000 African Americans, 56 defense factories "employed an average of three Negroes" each.

But not all the news was negative.

On June 25, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 8802, forbidding racial and religious discrimination in war industries, government training programs and government industries. Six months later, black pilots were training in Tuskegee for the first Army Air Corps Pursuit Squadron — the Tuskegee Airmen.

And for the first time, the New York Times reported in May 1941, a 12-month period passed without a lynching in the Deep South. That had not happened since 1882.

Matthew Bullock knew first hand about lynchings and the Ku Klux Klan. He was born on Sept. 11, 1881.

When he was 8 years old, his parents fled the Deep South to escape a lynching bee. Born into slavery, the Bullocks had seven children and \$10 in cash when they arrived in Massachusetts.

Matthew Bullock attended Everett High School and excelled in academics and sports. During his senior year, he was elected captain of the school's baseball, football and track teams.

When he graduated, his father gave him \$50 and told his son to find his own way.

Bullock found a way in 1900 when he enrolled at Dartmouth College. He again excelled in school and sports, playing varsity football for three years and track for four years. He was also a member of the glee club and Paleopitus, Dartmouth's secret senior society.

After that, it was on to Harvard Law School, from which Bullock graduated in 1907. He paid his way by coaching at Massachusetts Agricultural College, now known as the University of Massachusetts.

Unable to find suitable work in Boston, Bullock took a position both teaching and serving as athletic director at Atlanta Baptist College, now known as Morehouse College. He taught courses in economics, history, Latin and sociology. He later moved to Normal, Ala., when he became dean of The State Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes, today called Alabama A&M University.

Bullock stayed there for two years before returning to Boston, where he was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1917. Community-minded, he served as executive secretary of the Boston Urban League and special assistant attorney general for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

He quickly became part of the black society whose comings and goings were reported in the white press. The Boston Daily Globe reported on Oct. 31, 1920



Wade McCree, the federal judge who was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to become U.S. Solicitor General

that he 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 1890 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's 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 Boston's blacks lived in the South End and Roxbury, primarily in Ward 13. Before political redistricting diluted 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 session, and described the Ku Klux Klan as a "menace to the public peace," imposing a fine of \$500 or two years in jail or both for anyone caught joining the group or aiding any of its members.

## The activist

Her name became a boulevard in 1981.

She had died three years earlier at the age of 82.

In his eulogy, the Rev. Michael Haynes asked a rhetorical question.

"Who can find a virtuous woman?" he preached. "We have found her — in a modestly furnished third-floor walkup ... flat on Harold Street in Roxbury, Massachusetts, where a beautiful, radiant, strong, courageous, generous, God-loving Christian black woman named Melnea A. Cass held court around a quaint, old-fashioned dining room table."

None stood taller on Harold Street than Melnea 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 Girl's 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 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.

"Well, in those days, being black affected 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 discrimination came in ... You couldn't work in stores or the banks."

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## Macy's 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



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.

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



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 unsung heroes among her ancestors. Professor Gates will discuss genealogical and historical research methods, and how DNA analysis can help

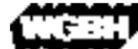
the process of finding one's ancestors. Professor Gates will sign your purchase of *Finding Oprah's Roots, Finding Your Own*, as well as the *African American Lives* DVD, available during the event. Reception to follow.



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.

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Oprah's Roots: An African American Lives Special, is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET New York, Kunhardt Productions and Inkwell Films. Finding Oprah's Roots, Finding Your Own is published by Crown. Events subject to change or cancellation. \*Only Macy's authorized materials will be signed and only while Professor Gates is on site.



Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture  
The New York Public Library



## Children's Hospital Boston

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!



### 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."*



### 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."*



### 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



## Ronald "Ron" Wilkinson

Manager of Business Intelligence  
2007 Children's Black Achiever Award Winner  
Employee since 1993

*"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."*



## 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."*



## 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."*

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To read the complete profiles of these exemplary employees, please visit [www.childrenshospital.org/blackhistory](http://www.childrenshospital.org/blackhistory).



Children's Hospital Boston

**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 Veteran's 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 Prince 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

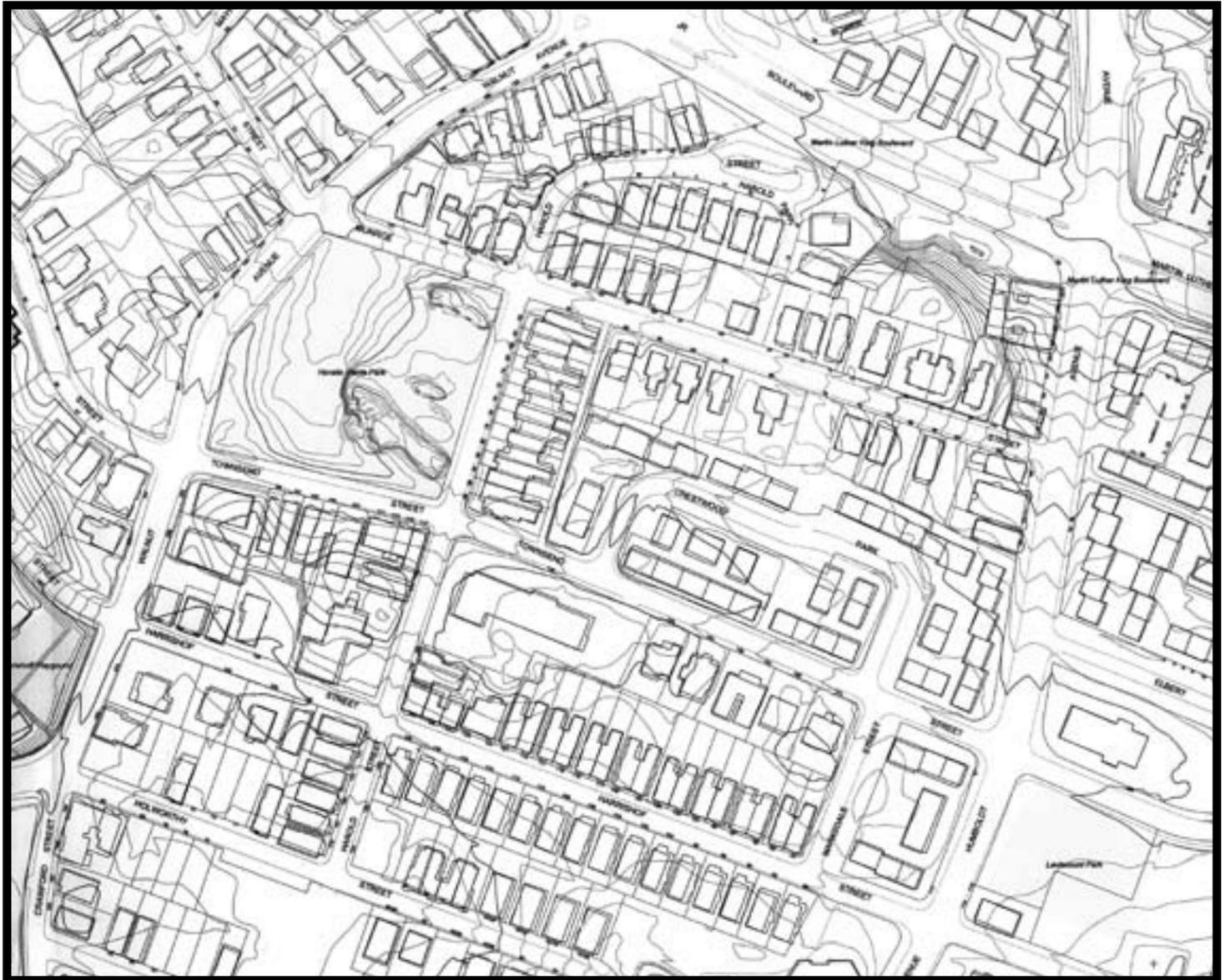
**Jean McGuire**, Tufts AB, Executive Director of METCO (Harold Street)

**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 (Harold 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)



This map shows the area around the Munroe Park that includes Harold, Harrishof, Holworthy Streets and Humboldt Avenue.

**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)

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**MASSACHUSETTS**

# H-Block

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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 his 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," she frequently said, "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..."

As early as 1933, Cass participated in protests against Boston department stores that refused to hire blacks. The next year, she demonstrated to force Boston City Hospital to hire black doctors and nurses. She helped form the Boston local of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

In 1949, she was a founder and charter member of the Freedom House, the brainchild of Muriel and Otto Snowden.

Because of her community leadership, Boston Mayor John Collins appointed Cass in 1950 as the only female charter member to the Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), a nonprofit agency that helped people displaced by urban renewal. She also served on the Board of Overseers of Public Welfare, advising mayors on ways to provide services and support for the city's poor.

Called the "First Lady of Roxbury," Cass never gave up her fight to end discrimination and took pride in the results of her efforts.

"There are a lot of places where you see [blacks working] now," she said shortly before her death in December 1978. "You didn't in my time, my working days. We were working for those things for them, trying to open the way that they could get there."

It was a community. Everything had racial and political overtones.

Even jazz. 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 acts 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 that went on to become prominent sidemen 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 Shwachman, courtesy of University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections Department, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts.

Paul Broadnax is another. A talented musician, he learned music at an early age from his mother, Ellastine Lee Broadnax, the legendary voice and piano teacher.

Of the most notable, Irving Ashby, a guitarist, stood among the greats. Ashby was part of the Oscar Peterson Trio and the Nat King Cole Trio. At the time, Nat King Cole rivaled Frank Sinatra as the most popular male vocalist in America.

Ashby appeared in the 1943 movie "Stormy Weather," and went on to R&B fame as lead guitarist on Ernie Freeman's "Living Around" in 1956.

He was also one of the studio musicians that performed on Ritchie Valens' huge hit, "La Bamba."

Aside from music, Holgate, Broadnax and Ashby share one thing in common.

They all lived near Munroe Park.

It was a community. It was filled with hundreds of people who went on to earn significant employment as educators, doctors, lawyers, social workers and business owners.

It included among its residents Sarah-Ann Shaw, a former prominent television reporter for WBZ-TV. Another media star was George Strait, who had earned a bachelor's degree in biology at Boston University and was working on a master's degree in biochemical genetics at Atlanta University before television called. He went on to become a medical reporter for ABC news network.

David Nelson, the first black federal district court judge in Massachusetts, grew up on Munroe Street, along with his brother J.D. Nelson, proprietor of Rhumblin' Advisers, the third largest black asset management firm in the nation, according to Black Enterprise.

Also on Munroe Street was the dentist J. Gideon Garnett. Another dentist, Dr. Alfred Russell, lived on Hazelwood Street, a short street between Munroe and Townsend, with his two daughters. Inez Russell became an administrator in the Boston Public Schools. Georgine Russell married and moved to Bermuda, where she became a prominent figure in the fight for racial equality there.

Doctors were seemingly everywhere in the neighborhood. Dr. William Markham, another dentist, lived on Harold Street and had an office on Tremont Street near Slade's Bar and Grill. Dr. Franklin A. Myers lived on Humboldt Avenue. Dr. C.E.C. Philibert lived on the corner of Walnut and Elmore Street. Dr. John Hall lived on Harrishof. Dr. Ovid McKinnon, also a dentist, lived on the corner of what is now Martin Luther King Blvd.

On Townsend Street, there was John Ross, who performed and arranged a number of local projects, including the annual Christmas musical "Black Nativity," for which he was the music director. The Janey family has also done Townsend proud. Dr. Clifford Janey is now superintendent of schools in Washington, D.C. He was formerly superintendent of schools in Rochester, New York.



This photograph of Jaspán Pharmacy is from the Freedom House Collection, courtesy of University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections Department, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts. of University Libraries courtesy of University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections Department, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts.

Harry J. Elam Sr. lived on Walnut Avenue. He became the first black judge appointed to the Boston Muni-

pal Court. His sister, Harriet L. Elam-Thomas attained the rank of career minister as a senior Foreign Service Of-

ficer. President Bill Clinton appointed

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**Harry J. Elam became the first black judge appointed to the Boston Municipal Court.**



**Clifton J. Wharton, Jr. the first black to head a major college and a Fortune 500 company.**

## H-Block

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her ambassador to Senegal. Fluent in French, Greek and Turkish, her skills were in great demand by the U.S. State Department. His 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 co-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 businessmen in the neighborhood was Herbert Dowse Sr. Back in the 1930s, he became a black executive of a major white business, the Boston Linotype Co. That was a rarity.

The Dowses lived on Harold Street.

On Holworthy was Herbert P. Wilkins. Born in 1942, he received a MBA 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 Rumania 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 \$30 million in today's dollars.

"My father had high personal standards for achievement and strove for excellence in himself," Wharton Jr. said.

And for his children.

Wharton's brother William, a Harvard graduate, became a lawyer and also worked for the U.S. State Department, retiring as director of Citizenship Appeals 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

New Jersey public schools.

### A rich legacy

By the time Matthew Bullock died at the age of 91 on Dec. 17, 1972, two of the neighborhood's brightest children had left Boston to work on a national and international stage.

Wade McCree Jr. was born in Des Moines, Iowa on July 3, 1920. His father, a pharmacist, owned the state's first black-owned pharmacy. Later, he was one of the first black narcotics inspectors to work for the federal government. That job took the McCrees to Hawaii, Chicago and later to Boston.

The younger McCree graduated from the prestigious Boston Latin School, the nation's oldest public school, and then went on to Fisk University, where he graduated summa cum laude and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, considered the most prestigious American college honor society.

His family had a long history at Fisk. His grandmother, Martha Hale, a widow of a Union soldier with 13 children to support, worked in food services at Fisk and encouraged her children to attend college. McCree's father was one of her three children to attend the university in Nashville, Tenn. He worked as a butler to pay his tuition.

Because of his sterling academic record at Fisk, McCree Jr. earned a scholarship in 1941 to attend Harvard Law School. But his studies there were interrupted by World War II. During the war, he served with the 92nd Infantry Division in Italy and fought in three Italian campaigns. He received the Bronze Star for valor.

After his discharge as a captain in 1946, he married Doris McCrary, a library science student at Simmons College and they lived on Harold Street, not too far from McCree's family home on Wabon Street. Two years later, McCree earned his law degree, finishing 12th in his class.

Unable to find work at any of Boston's law firms, the McCrees moved to Detroit.

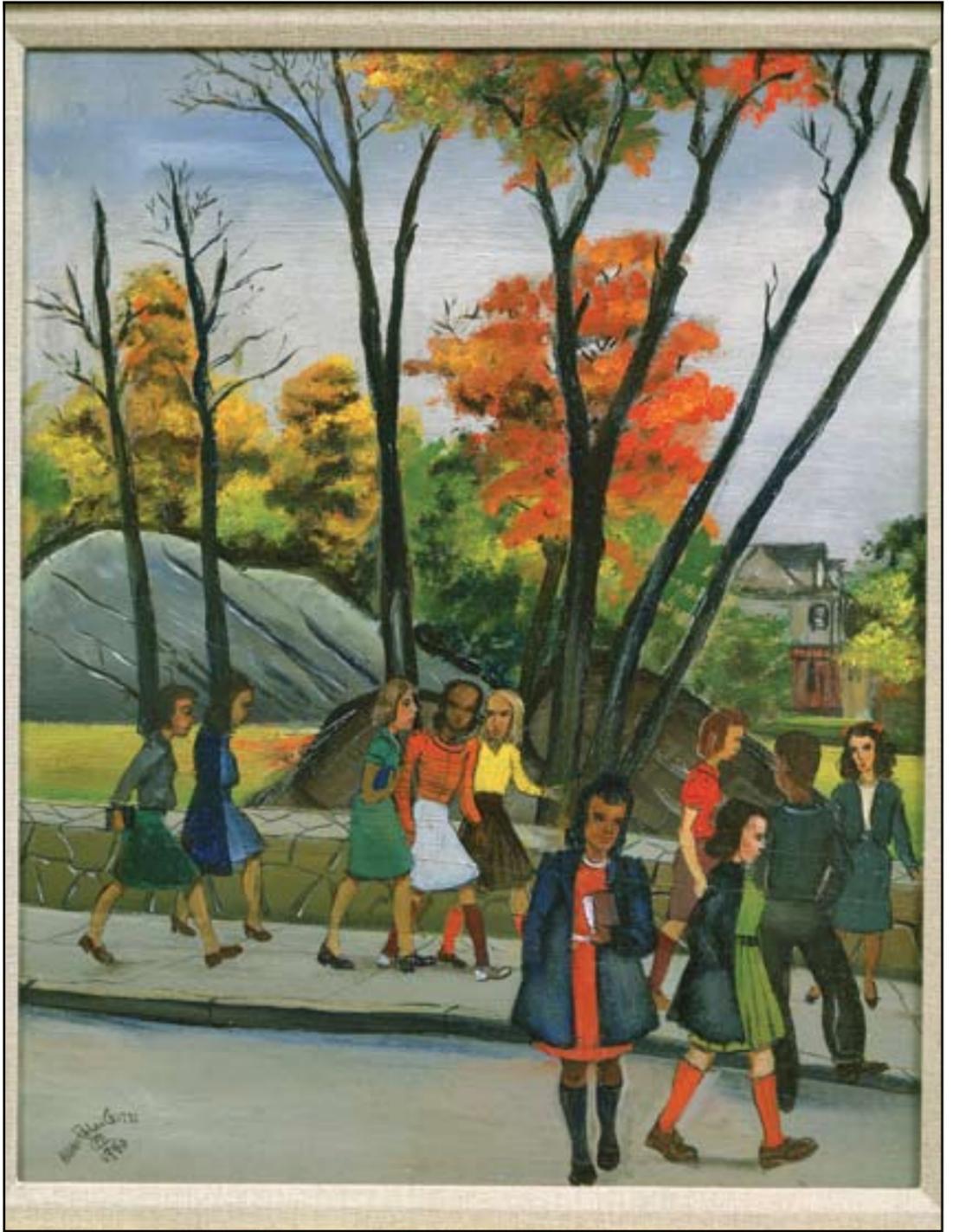
In 1952, Michigan Gov. G. Mennen Williams appointed McCree to the state's Workmen's Compensation Commission, and in 1954 to a vacancy on the Wayne County Circuit Court. In 1961 President Kennedy appointed Judge McCree to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, where he served until his appointment to the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. He resigned from that court in 1977 to accept appointment as U.S. Solicitor General in the Carter Administration.

As an appeals court judge, McCree took part in several school desegregation cases. As solicitor general, the government's lawyer, he personally argued 25 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, most notably the 1978 Bakke reverse discrimination case and the 1974 Nixon tapes case.

McCree's eldest daughter, Kathleen Lewis, explained the importance of education to her father.

Education, she told an interviewer, was considered "an obligation to yourself."

Lewis took those words seriously. An appellate lawyer in Michigan, she was nominated by President Bill Clinton to



**School Days, Harold Street (1940) by Alan Rohan Crite, courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum**



**Sarah Ann Shaw when she was a young reporter for WBZ-TV.**

the same U.S. Court of Appeals post once held by her 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, right 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, Snowden's 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,



**David Nelson, the first black federal district judge in Massachusetts.**

where he began organizing the Council for Community Affairs of Upper Roxbury, the precursor of Freedom House.

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

After protesting this unfair treatment, Muriel was allowed to move into a dormitory. Muriel attended New York School of Social Work, studying community organizing and race relations until her marriage to Otto in 1945.

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

Otto's brother, Frank, distinguished himself through scholarly work, graduating from Boston Latin School and earning 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 Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, as cultural attaché to the American embassy in Rome, and as a special lecturer for the U.S. Department of State.

His many books include "Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience," published in 1970, which received the Charles J. Goodwin Award of Merit of the American Philological Association; "The Image of the Black in Western Art I: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire," which he co-authored in 1976; and "Before Color Prejudice: the Ancient View of Blacks" in 1983.

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 suppose that was of special interest to you," the congressman said.

"Actually, my special interest was in the fact that nearly all of the slaves in ancient Rome were white," came the reply.

The congressman ceased his questioning.