



BLACK EMPOWERMENT

By Dr. Nathaniel Wright, Jr.
Human Rights Activist

HEROIC FIGURE

On a recent trip to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, I encountered a memorable event which should serve for many as an inspiration of a lifetime.

Leaving the large Anglican Cathedral after attending early Sunday morning service, I noticed men at work unloading chairs evidently in preparation for an exceptionally large number of people. Upon inquiry, I learned that a Mr. Timothy Gibson, a school teacher, had died and that there was to be an especially large funeral.

I reasoned at this point that "getting an education" was a highly prized goal among the good people of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, as it was throughout the largely black English-speaking islands of the Caribbean and nearby eastern Atlantic Ocean.

"A dearly beloved schoolmaster has passed" so I said to myself, "and the Bahamian people partly out of personal respect but probably more greatly out of respect for what this venerable schoolmaster had symbolized, will be coming together to pay tribute."

Later, I was to discover, as streets began to be cordoned off and proud people bearing impressive sashes began to move through the streets, that Mr. Timothy Gibson, C.B.E., M.B.E., J.P., was a kind of "Martin Luther King," of the Bahamian people. Hardly anyone in Bahamian history had so touched the hearts of the people as did he.

Some 20 years ago, there were scarcely a dozen native Bahamians with advanced college degrees. To this low level of practicality for ser-

vice as colonial natives, alone had the enlightenment of British-sponsored education brought the Bahamian people.

It was Mr. Timothy Gibson in his proud but quiet manner who had inspired or instilled within the masses of Bahamian people an almost insatiable desire for better things. A teacher of music, Mr. Gibson wrote hymns of loyalty and devotion to the British Crown; and at the same time he quietly encouraged ideals within his pupils which only the abolition of the inherent limitations of colonial rule could satisfy.

The bell captain at the hotel where I was staying was doubtless typical in his feelings of gratitude and affection for Mr. Timothy Gibson. "I shall never in my life forget," he said, "the day that I was misbehaving in Mr. Gibson's classroom. He called me up before the class and said, 'Ronald, I have always had the highest expectations of you and have seen in you a person committed to the highest ideals.' Then he gave me a whipping before the class. I cried outside, but inside, both then and ever since, I have been filled with pride over the high promise he saw in, and expected of, me."

This is the kind of symbol he was to thousands of the Bahamian people. It has been said that no one, outside of active political life, had done more for both the independence and the betterment of Bahamian life.

While it was left to others to clothe organizationally the political, social, economic and civic will of the Bahamian people, it was Mr. Timothy Gibson who aroused the spirit and evoked perhaps

most largely the will for independence and for progress.

Today the Commonwealth of the Bahamas has the most prosperous and promising economy and perhaps also the most stable governmental structure in the English-speaking Caribbean. It was left to Mr. Timothy Gibson to write, "March on, Bahamaland," the national anthem of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, made independent in 1973.

While quietly a revolutionary spirit, he yet bore so majestically the duties imposed by an educated leader of once colonial masses that he was twice honored by the Queen with the titles, "Member of the British Empire" and "Commander of the British Empire." Later the Bahamian Government awarded him the title and dignity of Bahamian "Justice of the Peace."

In setting aside the Cathedral for an unusual Sunday afternoon requiem, the Bishop of Nassau and the Bahamas noted that the departure of Mr. Timothy Gibson called for a public recognition by the Bahamian people as a whole.

But doubtless infinitely more than this, we may recognize that in so many places it is the rare and exceedingly precious spirits, like that of Mr. Timothy Gibson, who hold our entire world together in spite of frustration and other hardship.

Whether believers in the traditional sense of the term or not, all lovers of peace and freedom, truth and justice... and of human fulfillment may join in his farewell chorus, shouting or saying silently, "Alleulia."



The first marriage performed in the American colonies is believed to have taken place between Anne Burros and John Laydon in Virginia in 1609.

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OUR GIANTS SPEAK

W.E.B. DuBOIS AND
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON
REVISITED

We continue a most important and in-depth look at Dr. W.E.B. DuBois and Dr. Booker T. Washington. Older persons and thoughtful college and university (or high school) honor students will want to examine the bibliographies of these men. A period of 2 to 4 years of leisurely focus upon their lives will bring the kind of rich insight needed to re-interpret their lives today. Shorter periods of formal study, or of work on your own, will also be rewarding. In this part of the series, you may enjoy listing fresh insights and intuitions which you have gained.

In the following excerpt, Booker T. Washington describes his impression of Emancipation as he experienced it as a young man:

Part I of Two Parts

Finally the war closed, and the day of freedom came. It was a momentous and eventful day to all upon our plantation. We had been expecting it. Freedom was in the air, and had been for months. Deserting soldiers returning to their homes were to be seen every day. Others who had been discharged, or whose regiments had been paroled, were constantly passing near our place. The "grape-vine" telegraph was

kept busy night and day. The news and mutterings of great events were swiftly carried from one plantation to another. In the fear of "Yankee" invasions, the silverware and other valuables were taken from the "big house," buried in the woods, and guarded by trusted slaves. Woe be to anyone who would have attempted to disturb the buried treasure. The slaves would give the Yankee soldiers food, drink, clothing—anything but that which had been specifically entrusted to their care and honour. As the great day drew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom. True, they had sung those same verses before, but they had been careful to explain that the "freedom" in these songs referred to the next world, and had no connection with life in this world. Now they gradually threw off the mask; and were not afraid to let it be known that the "freedom" in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world.

The night before the eventful day, word was sent to the slave quarters to the effect that something unusual was going to take place at the

"big house" the next morning. There was little, if any, sleep that night. All was excitement and expectancy. Early the next morning word was sent to all the slaves, old and young, to gather at the house. In company with my mother, brother, and sister, and a large number of other slaves, I went to the master's house.

All of our master's family were either standing or seated on the veranda of the house, where they could see what was to take place and hear what was said. There was a feeling of deep interest, or perhaps sadness, on their faces, but not bitterness. As I now recall the impression they made upon me, they did not at the moment seem to be sad because of the loss of property, but rather because of parting with those whom they had reared and who were in many ways very close to them.

Key Questions:

1. What peculiar problems does this episode reveal? Are they still present today?
2. How well were today's circumstances handled? Were there any "hidden agendas"?
3. What important lessons may be learned from today's episode? How would you have possibly handled them differently?



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