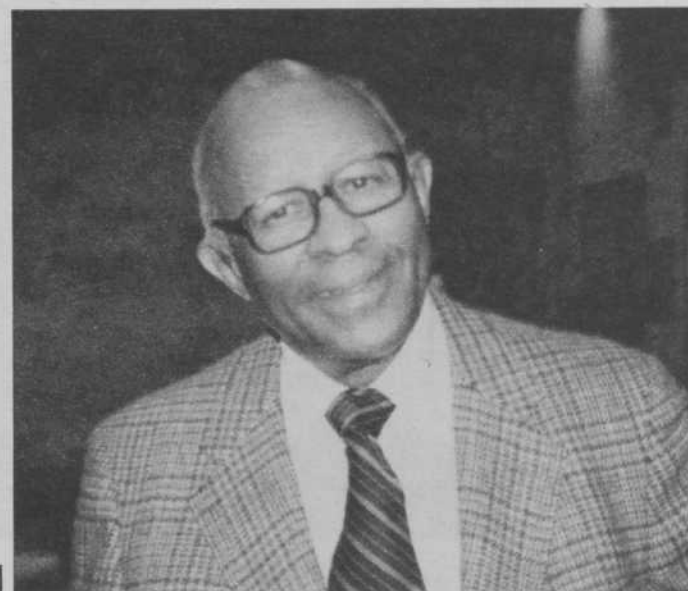


# MONITOR Memorables

## CLARENCE LEROY HOLTE: A Pioneer Bibliophile



*"Black bibliophiles are rarely known, rarely seen, rarely written about and, for the most part, they rarely exist. But their presence and their life work, which result in massive and voluminous collections, sustain and carry the intellectual artifacts of past Black generations into the future, long past their physical demise. Thus, their contribution to the race and to mankind in general is immense and nearly beyond measure. Each new Black generation which builds on the intellectual foundations of its forefathers owes a debt of gratitude to those Black bibliophiles who saved and preserved that wisdom in a society which had no use for it—or its developers.*

—Hanes Walton Jr.

These words introduced an essay entitled "The Literary Works of a Black Bibliophile: Clarence L. Holte," which appeared in the July-October 1978 issue of *The Negro Educational Review*. The essay highlighted Clarence Holte's work of collecting and preserving books about Black people.

The true meaning of *bibliophile* is "one who loves books" and Clarence LeRoy Holte is a true bibliophile. His circuitous route to becoming a book collector took him from his native Norfolk, Virginia through Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to New York City. The route led from transit clerk at the Dunbar National Bank in Harlem to race relations specialist with the WPA to traffic manager with the Conlan Electric Corp. of Brooklyn to sales representative at Lever Brothers Company and finally to the Ethnic Marketing Department at Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn, one of the largest and most prestigious advertising agencies in the United States.

### Black Business Pioneer

Clarence Holte ranks high on the "honor roll" of Black business pioneers. Hiring a Black man in a sales capacity to represent Lever Brothers Company, a major American manufacturer, in 1944 was an advanced development of steps having been taken in this direction. The late Ramon Scruggs and two other graduates of Fisk University in 1932 worked for three and one-half years in a community relations program in the Nashville,

Tennessee area representing Rumford Baking Powder Company. The late James Albert "Billboard" Jackson was hired in a national public relations capacity by Esso Standard Oil Company of New York in 1933. A number of other companies followed suit, mainly in the soft drink, beer, liquor and tobacco industries.

Memoranda from Holte's superiors at Lever Brothers are glowing testimonials to his exemplary record in sales and relations with retailers. They are greatly augmented by his equally impressive and successful public relations activities.

Holte was not aware that the Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn Advertising Agency was seeking a Black marketing specialist for its staff until a friend told him that an appointment had been made for an interview. His first thought was to cancel the appointment, for to him, the job was too unstable, but to withdraw would be discourteous to his friend.

He went for the interview and learned that those who had been considered for the post lacked sales experience, a prerequisite for consultation with clients of the agency. Holte was offered the position and was given a month to decide if he wished to make the change.

### The BBD & O Experience

He went to BBD & O in June 1952. To him it was just another job, but both general class and Black-oriented media found it good news copy. One excerpt from *Time Magazine* will illustrate the kind of publicity that Holte's appointment generated: "On advertising row, the appointment of another marketing man is hardly headline news, but last month, when Clarence LeRoy Holte, 43, joined BBD & O, his appointment rated attention—he may very well be the Jackie Robinson of advertising's major leagues..."

The *Chicago Defender* included the agency as a recipient of its 1952 "Honor Roll of Democracy Award." Accepting the award at a luncheon held at New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Ben Duffy, president of BBD & O, said:

The employment of Clarence Holte as marketing specialist in a firm with 1,600 workers and 200 stockholders was not an emotional decision. It was done for strictly business reasons to help clients sell more foods—and make more commissions for the agency.

There is nothing worse than a forgotten man. And the same holds for a forgotten market. Mr. Holte is our insurance policy against forgetting an important specialized market.

There was no precedent or resource to which Holte could turn for guidance in what he set out to do in his new position. Practically everything had to be started from scratch. In order to properly define the Black consumer market and validate its reality, his first objective was to assemble evidence of distinct buying habits among these consumers and to relate the sociological and psychological factors which influence the distinction.

BBD & O took great pride in its unique Ethnic Marketing Department of which Clarence Holte was a very important part. The agency referred to the department in all of its literature and presentations for new accounts. Articles about the operation appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Post*, the *Tribune* and in a number of leading trade magazines.

### Bibliophile Extraordinaire

This term is an inscription to Clarence Holte by the late Dr. Rayford W. Logan in his book *The Negro and the Post-War World: A Primer*. The avocation of collecting books about Black people was an outgrowth of interest generated while Holte was a student at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. It was at this time that he came to understand that a knowledge of a people's past is the only force that can instill the degree of self-esteem and pride of race which makes it possible to endure the suffering of casualties, injuries, insults and taunts and generate the strength and determination to fight until the battle is won.

Later, he began to purchase these books to read. As they accumulated, it dawned on him that he had the core of a collection. His pur-

chases were then extended to include books for reference. Thus, the collection, over a period of more than 20 years, grew to over 8,000 volumes.

Collecting books was not something Clarence Holte talked about, but some of his friends who saw what he was doing thought he was wasting money. Although this was not a money-making venture, fifty-four titles from the collection were reprinted by Johnson Reprint Corporation in 1966 on a royalty basis. The books form the Afro-American Reprint Library.

The collection came to the attention of *Ebony Magazine*, which ran an article of almost eight pages entitled "Clarence Holte's Search Into the Black Past" in the April 1970 issue. Charlayne Hunter, a Black journalist, then with the *New York Times*, wrote an article entitled "7000 Books on Blacks Fill a Home" for the March 18, 1972 edition. On May 7th, NBC televised a tour of the collection while interviewing Holte.

By the time of the planning for the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), sponsored by 55 African countries and held in Lagos and Kaduna, Nigeria in 1977, Holte's collection was known internationally. He was invited to exhibit his collection. The invitation covered all expenses—cataloguing, packing and shipping. He was engaged as curator, along with Mrs. Holte and two assistants.

Impressed by the quality of the collection, the administration of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria prevailed upon Holte to let them acquire the collection. The transaction was consummated and a room in the modern, well-equipped library, which houses the collection, was named in his honor. Now he is endeavoring to build a comprehensive collection for his daughter.

*"So, when it comes right down to it, along with Black scholars, intellectuals and leaders, their contributions are no more important than those who have helped to preserve the Black heritage from friend and foe for future Black generations. Such a man is Clarence L. Holte."*

—Hanes Walton Jr.