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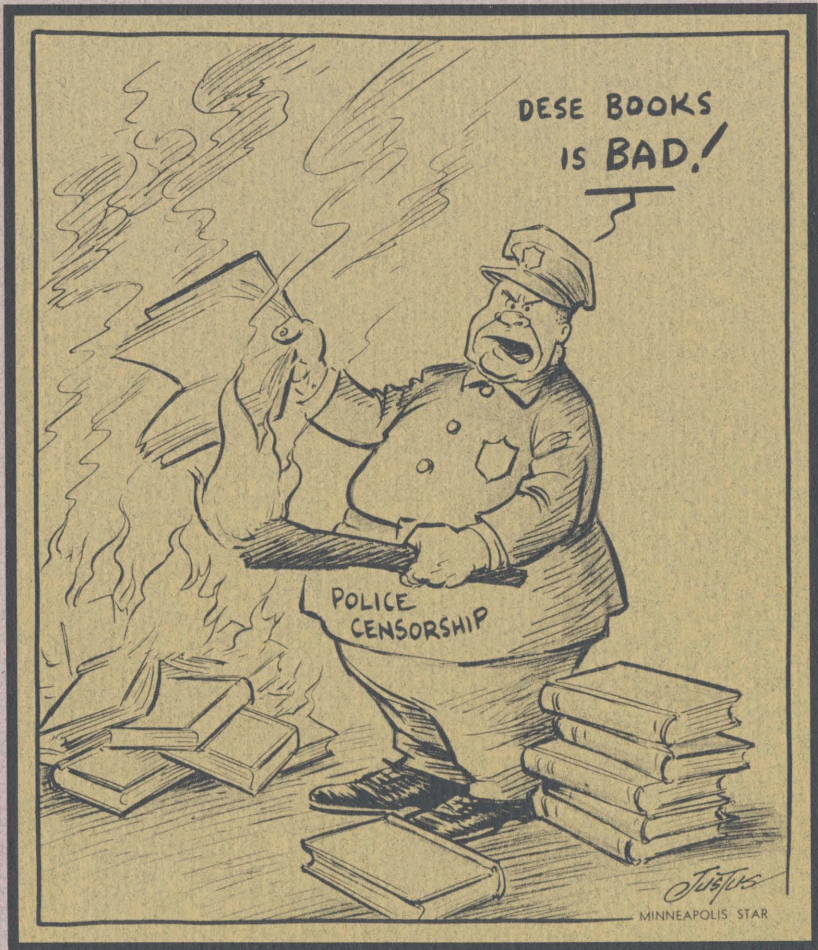
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*This issue is dedicated with gratitude and affection
to Gwen G. Robinson*

Portrait of a City: Syracuse, the Old Home Town

BY JOHN A. WILLIAMS

INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT PHILLIPS

THIS HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED portrayal of Syracuse from the perspective of John A. Williams, noted writer and native Syracusan, was written in 1964 for *Holiday* magazine. The typescript is now part of the John A. Williams Collection in the George Arents Research Library for Special Collections at Syracuse University.

Williams, the oldest of four children, went to local public schools—Washington Irving Grammar School, Madison Junior High School, Central High School (where he played football and basketball and ran track), and Vocational High School. He entered the United States Navy in 1943 and received an honorable discharge in 1946. He took an undergraduate degree in 1950, then did graduate work, both at Syracuse University, where he studied writing with Daniel Curley and literature with the legendary Leonard S. Brown. He worked at Oberdorfer Foundry, clerked at a Loblaw's supermarket on Adams Street, became an orderly at Memorial Hospital, joined the public relations staff at Doug Johnson Associates, and served as a caseworker for the Onondaga County Welfare Department before leaving for Los Angeles and then New York City in 1954.

At various times Williams worked in radio and television; he has been a publisher, an editor, a foreign correspondent, a lecturer, and a college professor at several universities (since 1979 at Rutgers University). Meanwhile, he has authored twenty-nine books, including thirteen novels. Many of them draw on his experiences while growing up in Syracuse.

Sissie (1963; reprinted 1964, 1965, 1969, 1975, and 1988) describes the effect of an African American mother's powerful personality upon her children. But it also limns the effect of a specific

environment upon the children. The city of Syracuse—especially the University and an area the narrators call “Jewtown”¹—plays a major role in the formation of the novel’s characters. Syracuse University serves as a symbol of aspiration for the city’s underprivileged:

High above on a hill stood the university. A clumsy shaft of sandstone, one of its sooty Gothic towers[,] was visible from Jewtown. From that tower came the majestic sound of the chimes played by the Delta Kappa Epsilon boys. Perhaps the chimes were responsible for the odd bond that joined the university and Jewtown. Generally the chimes were played twice a day, at eight in the morning and at noon, but during the football seasons they were also used to announce victories with a medley of fight songs. Because Mr. Weinstein [Sissie’s employer] had attended the university, Sissie and her family felt even closer than most to the school. The Weinstains never missed a game, would go off leaving their son with Sissie. Invariably they returned bringing pennants and celluloid football dolls for the Ralphs, Big and Little.

It was with the commoners’ amused tolerance that the residents of Jewtown lined the street to watch the students snake-dance down from the hill in their annual “Beat Colgate” parade. Torches flared, the streets abounded with clean-looking, block-lettered youth. The people of Jewtown dimly hoped that their children someday would be students, snake-dancing down the hill in one of those torchlight parades.

Warily, sometimes, Sissie rummaged through her dreams and thought what all the other Jewtowners were thinking. One day, perhaps, that rare black face in the crowd of students might be her daughter or son. And Big Ralph himself, carried away by bathtub beer, often haltingly voiced the possibility that his son would become a football star. “A

1. See B. G. Rudolph, *From a Minyan to a Community* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1970).

natural little atha-lete,” he would say proudly, and Sissie, pleased, would snort and smile.²

Here is a portrait of a black family and its problems, particularly its financial problems, which tear the family apart. A secondary theme is that of guilt. In an introduction to the 1969 Anchor Books paperback edition, Williams wrote:

The question of guilt because of survival and perhaps even success remains one of the uncharted areas of black life. . . . We have asked combat soldiers who’ve survived the wars, we have asked inmates who outlived the concentration camps, about their guilt about surviving while corpses lay knee-deep around them. But we’ve not bothered to ask Negroes who are surviving the race war about their guilt.³

While sentence for sentence the novel seems simple, the structure is complex. In four sections, its flashbacks shift from the daughter’s point of view, to the son’s, to the mother’s. The fourth section brings the children together at their mother’s deathbed. (The author has said one technical influence was Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano* [1947], a novel that Leonard Brown not only taught, but in which he was rumored to have appeared as a character. That novel strongly influenced students and writers during the 1950s.)

Sissie had the misfortune to be published almost simultaneously with James Baldwin’s *Another Country* (1962). Apparently, American critics and readers could not embrace two big novels about the black experience at the same time. But *Sissie* had its admirers. One reviewer wrote:

Sissie is a chronicle of Negro life in transition, and it unites, as few novels do, the experience of the brutalized older generation of Negroes with that of the sophisticated young . . . [I]t is full of vivid contrasts, and it conveys memorably an image of the double war that Negroes wage—against

2. John A. Williams, *Sissie* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1988), 217–18.

3. Williams, *Sissie* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), vii.

their white oppressors on the one hand, and generation against generation on the other. . . . *Sissie* is by far better [than *Another Country*]. . . . Baldwin does not seem to possess the grasp of the Negro milieu that Williams displays. . . . *Sissie* is permeated by a quiet anger that builds and builds inexorably. John A. Williams may well be a front-runner in a new surge of Negro creativity.⁴

Sissie was the novel that introduced the Joplin family. Although *Sissie* dies at the end of it, her husband Big Ralph, son Ralph Jr., and daughter Iris inhabit other novels that followed *Sissie*.

In *The Man Who Cried I Am* (Little, Brown, 1967) Iris continues her career as a cabaret singer in Paris, but as a very minor figure. In *The Junior Bachelor Society* (Doubleday, 1976) the city the characters return to for their reunion is Syracuse, though it is not named. Iris is a friend of a failed concert singer from “home” who also lives in Europe. Ralph Jr., who was established as a playwright in *Sissie*, returns to put on a play accompanied by his second wife Eve. While in town he visits his father Big Ralph. In *!Click Song* (Houghton Mifflin, 1982) Ralph’s daughter Raphaella, a college student, is a more-than-minor character. In *Jacob’s Ladder* (Thunder’s Mouth, 1987) Iris is again a major character placed in Africa in the middle of international intrigue; her brother Ralph is mentioned in passing. In *Colleagues*, a work in progress, Raphaella is now a college teacher.

The city of Syracuse has changed drastically in the thirty years since Williams recorded his version of it—as both Democrats and Republicans would rush to agree. Yet he brings it all back, from the battle against impoverishment in the 15th Ward to the “piercing beauty” of Syracuse in the 1920s and ’30s.

4. David Boroff, “Blue Note for Bigotry”, *Saturday Review of Literature* (30 March 1963), 49.

Portrait of a City: Syracuse, the Old Home Town

This was where I lived and grew and was sometimes stunted. Here I romped in the parks, hit the only home run of my life (it was down the third-base line and there was some dispute as to whether it was fair or foul) and thought at first that all bodies of water had bottoms upon which you could walk while moving your arms and call it swimming. This was where I learned how to ice skate, play football, basketball, and baseball, and how to play house with the daughters of the neighbors. Here I found books and went plunging through the doors of other worlds. This was where I was taught a great many myths, but where I also learned a great many truths.

What is this place? Man, it was my home.

I arrived in Syracuse quite early in October last year and went to the real estate agent's office to pick up the key to the apartment I had leased for a month. I had moved away from Syracuse 11 years before after spending most of my first 28 years there. I had not missed the city, only a few people in it. But I had missed the exhilarating four-phase dance of nature; you feel each of the seasons very keenly in Syracuse. It was not by error that the Iroquois Confederacy chose the area around what is now Syracuse as its headquarters. Nature was most bounteous and seductive there. It still is.

My apartment—which I had secured only because a friend of mine convinced the real estate agent that I was a special kind of Negro, an artist of sorts—was located not in a black ghetto, but on North Salina Street, in the heart of the Italian section. That section, I had learned on good authority, was proving to be the most difficult to integrate.

Across the street and a few doors down from me was a firehouse. Several times going and coming, I noticed the firemen watching me. As for the rest of the people in the block, there was no reaction. Downstairs was Stagnitta's Music Shop. Mr. Stagnitta and his son were very friendly, anticipating my rushes into their store for change in order to feed the meter where my rented car was parked

before the neighborhood nemesis, George, the motorcycle cop, could give me a ticket. George was driving everyone in the neighborhood crazy. His sense of timing was uncanny. One swing around the block and he could remember which meters were running out and when. Seconds before the red flag sprang up, screaming EXPIRED, old George was there with his book of tickets. I got one of his calling cards for each week I was in Syracuse.

Syracuse has become such a white collar town that workers in heavy industry seldom wear their work clothes to and from the job. They dress in open shirts and sometimes ties going and coming. They change clothes in the locker rooms. But when I was a kid, we looked forward to the workmen coming home about 4:30 or 6:00, pushing their hand trucks, their faces ringed with sweat and dust, polka-dotted red or blue kerchiefs around their necks and battered hats pushed down upon their heads.

The Syracuse Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, composed of Onondaga, Oswego, and Madison counties, has a population of over half a million people. The city itself should have 222,000 by 1970. It is a growing city that has had great forward economic binges, usually locally controlled. The Ford Foundation has called it "one of the two best places (in the entire United States) for investing money in enterprise". *Fortune* magazine reported that more major corporations have operations in Syracuse than in any other city in the country.

Not far from my apartment was the old Salt Museum. In the seventeenth century the French, urged by missionary-explorer Father Simon LeMoyne, came to the region for salt. They were run out by the Indians. But the city became the principal supplier of salt for the nation. Syracuse is still called the "Salt City". It was incorporated as a village in 1825, bringing together several bickering little communities.

The Syracuse region hankered to be a classic place. This can be seen by the name of not only the city, but also the towns surrounding it: Camillus, Marcellus, Fabius, Tully, Manlius. But the Indians, who were banished to the ragged reservation beyond the south edge of the city, also left their marks: Oswego, Skaneateles, Genesee, Onondaga.

I stood at the window and looked down at the street. It was quiet. Church was over. Syracuse is a church city. There are 252 churches and synagogues throughout Onondaga County, encompassing 28 denominations, and Syracuse is the county seat. Fifty-three percent of the people in the county are Catholic.

I had been across America five times and had flown over or sailed on five of the seven seas; I had visited three continents and been in at least twenty countries. Now I was home again with no pyramids to fill my windows, no sounds of the Mediterranean to wake me, no sprightly calliope music to cheer me as in Amsterdam. It was just quiet.

Syracuse is a city that traps people. You wait to make your move when the summer is over; summer is a dazzling thing here, with the hills and lawns and trees a lush velvet green. But then comes autumn and the city and the outer edges of it are a wild splash of color: bronze, flaming red, ochre, slowly dying green. No one moves during the winter when the Canadian winds, skirting the western edge of the Adirondacks, come roaring down upon the city. The winters are usually so hard that it takes until spring to get over them, and by then you are trapped again.

I learned some things about Syracuse history at Washington Irving School. I always remembered that the bricks of the school were very red. Even on previous fleeting visits when I drove past it, memories of bright red brick shut out the reality that the bricks had become dark and dull, dirty. When, at the demand of the law—and to my mother's relief I am sure—it was time for me to attend public school, I started at Washington Irving. One of my kindergarten teachers was Miss Beatrice Reilly. She is still teaching. I went to the school, where I stood in a hallway and watched her through a window. Her hair is white now, but otherwise she looks almost as she did 33 years ago. I watched her move from blackboard to blocks, from piano to toy cupboard. She was inundated with adoring children whom she sent gently back to their games so that she could give her attention to still other children. There were only two or three white children in her class; the rest were Negro. The neighborhood had changed drastically.

Had children changed? I asked her, pointing out that when I attended her class Negroes were in the minority in the neighborhood. And more than a third of a century had passed. "No", she said firmly. Children are always the same. Sure, there is television now, and I think that makes them somewhat brighter." She became a little angry. She motioned to the hordes of colored children pulling at her. "As for these, Americans are only now doing what they should have done 100 years ago for them." In a softer tone she said, "That was a good class you were in, wasn't it?"

I didn't know. But there were people in it who are still my friends, and I supposed that went a long way toward making it a good class. We all lived then in what is now becoming the legendary 15th Ward, or just "The Ward". There were a lot of Eastern European Jews there, a few Polish families, a few Indians, Italians, and Irish. We had one binding thing in common: we were all poor.

Historically, poor neighborhoods and communities have been most heavily policed. Now I know that we were not being policed, but guarded; we were in many ways in a prison. It is costly to be poor, and those of us who lived in The Ward grew up with no illusions about the police in Syracuse. The 15th Ward paid for the crime that flourished inside its borders. A more corrupt police force would have been hard to come by. Police corruption flourished openly, at least to us, for better than 25 years, mostly in The Ward, but also on the north side, the Italian section. Corruption seemed to go hand in hand with the long-time dominance of the Republican Party.

The cleaning out of police corruption and the upheaval in the GOP, one of the more fortunate things that has happened in Syracuse, began one September night in 1960. Troopers of the New York State criminal investigation unit pounced upon the county GOP chairman and county secretary while he was in a parked car doing immoral things with someone else's wife. The county chairman pleaded guilty to various charges and was rewarded for his services to the Party with two years' probation. Months passed. The police department was shaken from top to bottom. The numbers "czar" (as the press called him), a Negro, was made the chief fall guy and was packed off to jail. Ultimately, prostitution,

narcotics peddling, gambling, and a few other things came under investigation.

The Republicans meanwhile had succeeded in finding a “clean” man and ran him successfully for mayor, although his margin of victory was slim. Syracuse closed down as a sporting town, a place for illegal activities. Republican strength has steadily declined, and during the last election the county, so traditionally Republican that it has been in the GOP column for decade upon decade, went for Johnson two to one, ousted the congressional incumbent who had served 18 years, and forced through a number of Democratic judgeships.

Change is in the air.

You hear machines tearing down or building up; girders mount the low horizons. Nowhere is change more evident than in the 15th Ward. Urban renewal and new highways have leveled most of it to the ground. Yellow bulldozers groan back and forth making sure that every vestige of the unhappy Negro who, toward the end, alone inhabited The Ward, is crushed out of sight, out of memory.

One rainy afternoon, I went to The Ward with Walter Carroll, editor of the *Post-Standard's* Sunday Magazine section. We had met in 1953 and, shortly after, when Carroll was writing a series on slum conditions there and I was a caseworker for the Onondaga County Department of Welfare, I took him on a few nocturnal, unofficial and I guess prohibited visits of my district in The Ward. His series shook Syracuse to its foundations and resulted in the formation of the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights, which, as far as I could gather, greatly underestimated the work before it. Carroll, a southerner by birth, was nominated for a Pulitzer for the series. He has a shock of black hair and a sullen look about him except when he has discovered the undiscoverable—the peculiar glow of the sun at dusk, a good piece of writing, a story about a David walloping the brains out of a Goliath. He is inordinately proud of his one-quarter Cherokee blood.

I had lived as a child in one of the few remaining houses in The Ward. The rooms seemed very small and very shabby. The houses in the neighborhood had been sturdy in my childhood, but, like people, houses wear out too. As I approached one of the bed-



John A. Williams standing in one of the homes that would soon be demolished to make way for the construction of Interstate 81. © 1964, Dick Bandy, Syracuse *Post-Standard*.

rooms, I saw a pair of legs stretched across the door and I thought without any great reaction, A corpse. But it was only a derelict sleeping off a night of too much wine. When we went out, Carroll said, “Maybe I ought to go back and see if he’s all right and if he is give him a dollar so he can eat or get another drink”.

“Leave him alone”, I suggested. The man had crept into that abandoned house, burrowed beneath old newspapers like a wounded animal isolating itself from the world. You don’t disturb wounded animals; they are vicious.

From where we stood in the middle of the rubble of the 15th Ward, we could see new buildings rising in every direction. The sounds of riveting and hammering drifted flatly through the rain. The new buildings are sleek, of glass and metal and polished marble. The massive Onondaga limestone, used in so many buildings the century before, is no longer chic. But the newer homes, set in the suburbs amidst the piercing beauty so common to this region, are among the most attractive I’ve seen anywhere.

One day when I was in the eighth grade running and jumping, shouting and wrestling in the cloak room, the teacher, when she finally broke up the melee—there were four other boys involved—took me aside and angrily said, thrusting her finger before my nose, “John Williams you are not like that!”

It had always been my intention to ask Mrs. Emily B. Schamu what she meant, and if I wasn’t like that, why not. Two of the boys later died violently. The other two are serving long-term prison sentences. On previous visits, I had been afraid to ask her; there was something altogether too psychic about it, like having your palm read without being told what your fate is. Mrs. Schamu still teaches Latin and English. Like Miss Reilly, her hair is now completely white, but she is the same small, perky woman she was in Madison Junior High. I conquered my hesitance and drove to meet her in her classroom.

“How did you know I wasn’t like that?” I asked.

She was sitting at her desk, marking papers. Latin verbs were on the blackboard behind her. She simply said, “I knew, and if a teacher doesn’t know her pupils, then she has no business in the profession”.

So the mystery remained. I had not been an angel, and I had not been bright. I do not know, therefore, what she saw, but I am glad she saw it and let me know that she saw it.

My favorite teacher did not teach me in a classroom. Strictly speaking, he is not a teacher in the formal sense. His name is William Chiles, now relocation director in the Syracuse Urban Renewal Program. The city has asked a lot of this mild-mannered little Negro; it has asked him to secure homes on a rental or purchase basis for the residents of the destroyed 15th Ward, who were mostly Negro. It has been an uphill battle, but Bill has been scraping in Syracuse ever since he arrived here from Kansas and Colorado 40 years ago. He has his careless moments when his exhaustion comes down and the depth of the hurt shows. His work goes so slowly, and the hurt is deep and filled with salt.

Syracusans, like most Americans, pride themselves on how far back their family roots go in America. A few Negro families put down roots here before the American Revolution, and one hundred years before Europeans were tempted to emigrate as they ran out of potatoes, truffles, akvavit, sauerbraten, or hot sausage.

Syracuse commemorates its past dedication to "The Cause" with a plaque honoring the rescue by abolitionists of a slave named Jerry. The Reverend Samuel May's name is called up to share the old glory, and that of Gerrit Smith, supporter of John Brown, Frederick Douglass, and a parade of others. Twenty-six miles to the west, on the front of the Cayuga County Courthouse in Auburn, there is another plaque, this one dedicated to Harriet Tubman, who guided hundreds of fleeing slaves up from the South and through the Underground Railroad stations of Utica, Syracuse, and Auburn.

Bill Chiles knows what happened: when men had died, nearly 800,000 of them, and the Negro was freed, when the Civil War was over, the future was left to God and good fortune. But God was still in the vineyard where "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" had placed him, where the grapes of wrath were stored, and fortune had no smile, let alone features. The citizens of Syracuse ended their self-deceiving game called "Save the Negro".

Among a hundred other things, Bill taught me that gold doesn't

necessarily glitter, and that what glitters isn't necessarily brass. In short, he taught that the man who would seek the truth must become enmeshed in paradox.

In a city where too many people avoid the responsibility of leadership, Bill Chiles, without searching for it, has come to be a leader; but City Hall doesn't know it and most of the accredited "Negro leaders" hold reservations about Bill because he lacks their formal education. Formal education is one of the musts for leadership status in Syracuse. Ideally those leaders must derive from Northwestern Europe; they must be Protestant and, of course, Republican. Their fathers must have been born in Onondaga County and also be college graduates; they must earn \$20,000 a year or more.

At one time not long ago the right family politics and a business of some kind automatically placed a man in a leadership position. Then a group of such local leaders could band together and prevent the invasion by large national concerns, for fear that wage scales in the area would be raised. They did just that, avoiding in the process any contact with the labor unions. Most of the local businesses were comparatively small; the owners could themselves oversee wages and raise or lower them according to economic conditions. Control was paternalistic. Until recently, Syracuse was one of the most studied cities in the nation because social conditions had been stable for so long.

Although there were many men of leadership capacity in the community, they were seldom used in more than advisory capacities. They were of the wrong ethnic origins—Jewish, for example, or Italian, or their fathers before them had not been white collar workers. Except for the Irish who over the years grew strong in the city, the rigid requirements for community leadership were retained. Once congregated in a region called Tipperary Hill, the Irish commanded so much power that they demanded and got the green light placed at the top of the traffic signal rather than in its customary position at the bottom. The current mayor, William F. Walsh, is Irish and Catholic.

Because it is now in transition, leadership in Syracuse has become more diverse. Syracuse ranks third among 41 Standard Metropolitan Areas in economic diversification, which suggests that

the quality of leadership is high. It may be. However, the inbreeding of the old bosses has produced weaknesses; sons are not as effective as their fathers. Or perhaps they know that, with the changes brought by social and economic progress, they cannot do what their fathers did. Paternalism hangs on in a few places. The women, the wives, who belong to the League of Women Voters or the Junior League and are members of the Corinthian Club, also have an unrecognized influence.

Young men being bred as possible leaders or advisors avoid certain sections of restaurants because they are reserved for the old breed. Social workers, for example, will not sit with the same group of leaders that industrialists will seek out.

Backers of professional sports go to still another group of leaders. The city has had its ups and downs in sports; it has produced boxing families and boxing champions, most recently Carmen Basilio. It had a championship professional basketball team, which moved to Philadelphia two seasons ago. In many cases, two or three people who are members of one leadership group may also belong to others. The leaders more and more are less local in origin. In most cases they conform to the old income, professional, and educational requirements, and therefore are not dissimilar to other leaders around the nation.

University College of Syracuse University recently conducted a study of leadership in the community and discovered that in 39 major decisions that will influence the growth of the city and its facilities, the number of people involved ranged from 2 to 57, the mean being 21.9 persons present per decision. Far less than one percent of the citizens of the city participated. The study states that "the doctrines of local democracy are incorporated into pieties rather than practices".

In pursuing the question of leadership, I did not think it wise to tell all the people I met that I had come from Syracuse. Chancellor William P. Tolley of Syracuse University, whom I have known since my graduate student days, was not one of those people. He is a medium-sized man, robust, and an executive. He has brought boom to the University and is currently engaged in a capital campaign to raise \$76 million by 1970. The University is a Methodist

school, founded in 1870. Its budget last year was only one million dollars less than the city's \$46 million. There is another school of higher learning, the Jesuit LeMoyne College, but Syracuse University is most prominent. Its 14,000 graduate and undergraduate students from 17 degree-granting schools and colleges spend over \$11 and a half million downtown every year. If the culture of this city within a city moved from "The Hill" to downtown as fast as the dollars, Syracuse, the non-university city, would be another place. The University people like to think that their multi-million dollar art collection, their theater, the total of all their vast cultural enterprises reach the "town guy". They don't. But the city people, although they might even grumble at the increasing power of the University and look with distrust at its representatives who sit on the Common Council or serve with top community committees, are proud of it.

It is the contention of Chancellor Tolley that the East has never poured all the money it could into public education. He means to build Syracuse into one of the most powerful institutions in the country. The University already owns a great deal of property that ostensibly passes for private housing. The Chancellor envisions this area with above par housing and many "green grass areas". Much of this property is in the old 15th Ward. Among its enterprises, the University supervises educational programs in 16 countries and now specializes in Peace Corps training of volunteers for East Africa. The University is the largest Air Force language training center in East European languages in the nation. The State College of Medicine on campus got a big boost when the Upstate Medical Center, containing about two-thirds of the hospital beds in the county, was opened. Quietly, the University is building a superb manuscript collection: the papers of Leopold von Ranke, Averell Harriman, Dorothy Thompson, actor Ed Begley, and sculptor Ivan Mestrovic are only a few of the collections filed away on the top floor of the University's Carnegie Library.

The city and University have their period of greatest rapprochement during the autumn, football season. The most loyal fans and most crashing critics of Bill Orange, as the football team is called, are the "town guys". I can never envision the football season with-

out thinking back to the days during the Depression when I would trudge with my father up to “Jumbo’s Back” (later called “Mount Olympus”) to sit and peer down into Archbold Stadium. When he had to work I went myself and often managed to sneak into the stadium past the ROTC cadets who stood guard against the restless, sports-loving, Depression-maimed men. One night, trying to climb up the wall of the gym in order to open a hall door that led to the stadium, I fell and would have been killed had not two strangers, one with red hair I remember, caught me.

Big Bill Orange used to walk around the edge of the playing field on stilts then. Before my childish, bugging eyes there was Brud Holland, All-American from Cornell; “Indian Bill” Geyer from arch-enemy Colgate; and Al Blozis, a mammoth tackle from Georgetown. Syracuse had Bunky Morris, a pint-sized halfback, and New York sportscaster Marty Glickman, who was also a track star (the United States Olympic Committee would not allow him to compete in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin because he was Jewish); and there was Hugh Daugherty, now director of athletics at Michigan State. Daugherty was a “watchcharm” guard, small and fast. Vannie Albanese also played for Syracuse, as did Wilmeth Sidat-Singh, a Negro who was considered to be a native of India. He had to stay behind when Syracuse played teams like Maryland. During my own days at the University there were Bernie Custis, Billy Haskins, Jim Dragotta, and Jim Ringo. Then along came the likes of Jimmy Brown, now fullback of the Cleveland Browns, and the ill-fated Ernie Davis, who died of leukemia.

I knew many of the Negro athletes. One day I went with one, a quarterback, to his job downtown. We drove in his new convertible. His job consisted of brushing off the pool table in a private club with a whisk broom. When I was a graduate student, I happened on this same athlete in the library, who was then a senior scheduled for graduation. He asked me to instruct him on how to check a book out of the library.

After the second game I saw during my visit, the University versus Pittsburgh, I heard some of the fans snickering about Syracuse’s (winning) Congo Contingent. This was a backfield made up of a white quarterback and three Negro running backs.

Syracuse University produces the most independent paper in the city. It is the *Daily Orange*, a student newspaper. The two downtown dailies, the *Post-Standard* and the *Herald-Journal*, are both Republican papers, although both endorsed Johnson last fall. Both are owned by S. I. Newhouse, who only last August had his gift of the Newhouse Communications Center dedicated by President Johnson. Newhouse is also the owner of one of the 13 radio stations, 6 of which are independent. Most are “howlers” or rock ‘n’ roll music stations. There is one “country music” station. Over the three television channels, I noticed a preponderance of commercials sponsored by loan companies or banks.

Before I left Syracuse it had been my impression that, of the two papers, the *Post-Standard* was the more liberal. But Alexander F. “Casey” Jones, editor of the *Herald-Journal*, insists that, when the liberal Democratic tide is at the full, the *Herald* will prove to be more liberal. Many of the people I talked to felt that the Democratic era would arrive soon, led by college professors, immigrating Negroes, ministers, and union members.

In the early 1950s these people would have been called communists without hesitation. Their crime? For the most part, being engaged in civil rights demonstrations. The academic freedom that Chancellor Tolley has so often stood for was like a straw in the wind, some alumni say, when the city pressured him to curtail sharply the role of students and professors in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) demonstrations of 1963. One man who did call a demonstrator a communist in print is now facing a libel suit.

A dozen years ago, many Syracusans took second place to no other group in witch hunting. The blacklisting of radio, television, theater, and film people got a big boost in the Salt City, particularly because of the Veterans Action Committee of Syracuse Super Markets. The committee, using the Korean War as a springboard, applied some coercion to national sponsors that used men it thought were communists or “commie fronters”.

A Syracusan, Laurence A. Johnson, a former super market owner, was implicated in the blacklisting when John Henry Faulk charged that because of him and another man he had been deprived of his livelihood as a CBS personality and libeled in the bargain.

Faulk charged that Johnson had blacklisted him or taken part in blacklisting him. Faulk was awarded \$3.5 million dollars by the jury, but Johnson had died in a Bronx motel the night before.

In Syracuse the nastiest men are no longer communists or sympathizers; they are Democrats. But some people get involved in phrases that seem to be current without taking them apart to see what they mean or who they are hurting. My Dad, for example, used to believe that Europe was overrun with communists and he put it to me when I returned from there once, that they were “bad”. He has changed; communists and communism are about as familiar as coffee containers these days, and mean just about as much.

My Dad is a small, chunky man with a mop of gray hair. He has countless smile wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. He is a football buff, always has been. When coaches at Syracuse University were unimpressed with Jimmy Brown, who was trying to win a scholarship there, my Dad, who had seen him work out with the freshmen, concluded that he was going to be one helluva ball player. In eight years with the Cleveland Browns, Jim Brown has proved my father to be more than right.

When my father was a boy he swam in the Erie Canal. He was too young for World War I (and thus, too old for World War II). When most people were walking a mile for a Camel, we’d be hiking two to see a football or baseball game in someone’s cow pasture. Or riding streetcars. The trains came and ultimately the streamliners, and the canal was out of business. His friends were Italian, Polish, Jewish, Irish, Negro. Sometimes he had other names for them. On the bad days. But he liked Italian and Polish foods, and my mother, deft in the ways of southern cooking, preferred American to foreign fare. Sometimes there was a clash in the kitchen. Now my father finds himself surrounded by grandchildren. Sometimes he looks bewildered. But it is nice now to have the football and baseball games played right in the living room via television. What the hell, he seems to say, it’s all gone by anyway, and this is easy.

One night, after days of heavy talking and seeing people, I drove

out to Walter Carroll's home in Marcellus, slept the night, and got up to go pheasant hunting. Marcellus is a few miles southwest of Syracuse and is hilly country. The center of the village itself sits at the bottom of a steep valley. As DeWitt, a suburb to the east of Syracuse, has expanded, so has Marcellus, but with less noise, less garishness. Marcellus still retains, unlike DeWitt, a rugged atmosphere of almost pure country. The Carroll home is a remodeled two-story colonial. A line of Norwegian spruce stands beside the driveway, and behind the house, the slight hills roll, swell, dip, and grow until, far off, the hills almost become mountains blazing with the saucy colors of autumn.

A few days after I visited the Carrolls, I went to DeWitt to see Dr. and Mrs. Robert Seidenberg. Since there really isn't much to do culturally, Syracusans generally entertain at home; one could get very tired of the Italian restaurants of which there is an overabundance. The Seidenberg home is just the opposite of the Carrolls'. It's low and long, extremely contemporary, and with its great picture window viewing west, it seems to jut out beyond the crest upon which it sits. Mrs. Seidenberg is an attorney. She doesn't have to work, and the suspicion among some Syracusans is that she is losing more money than she is making. The cases she handles are not popular. Many of them involve, or have involved, CORE demonstrators; others are concerned with police brutality charges. While Mrs. Seidenberg emphasized that she found the courts in Syracuse extremely fair, she declined to discuss the police department. In one month I had seen cops along Madison Street, which runs through the 15th Ward, stop and examine the papers of three Negroes. One afternoon, I returned to my apartment to find a police car parked across the street. As I started up the stairs after nodding to the superintendent, I heard a voice say, ". . . in this neighborhood!" When I gained my rooms, I looked out of the window and saw the superintendent talking to the cop in the patrol car. And one night, as I started into the building, a cop driving by turned clear around and hit his brakes, then slowed his pace and moved on after looking at me.

I do not know Mrs. Seidenberg's abilities in the courtroom; I have heard no complaints. But I personally would consider it a

mark of shame for a city to have but one person, and that person a woman, willing to handle such unpopular cases. Not from her, to be sure, but from what the newspapers would call “an unimpeachable source”, I heard that the Onondaga County Bar Association, while not making life miserable for her, has given very little aid and comfort. It is little wonder then that Mrs. Seidenberg was described to me as a woman who looked as though she wanted to cry. She is far from tears, but she must be very sad with the state of things she is concerned with. In her lovely home, I am sure, she must be able to regain any of the balance she has lost in the office.

There are few places I have been in the world where I have not met someone I know. And although Syracuse is filled with new faces, the old ones keep reappearing. One face out of the past belonged to Herbert Alpert, “Hecky” as we called him. I remembered that he had been great in arithmetic. He is now an accountant. Heck came by to take me to his house for dinner and to meet his family. He is tall, but his face remains just as I remembered it. “I thought you were skinny”, he said when he came in. “I remembered that you were skinny.”

“Some people tell me I’m skinny”, I said.

We drove to his home on Scottholm Terrace where I met his wife Ettarae, his mother-in-law, and another friend from grammar school, Sidney “Red” Bluman. Red looked the same, although fatter. He was the one everyone was trying to marry off. Still a bachelor, Red was having none of it. We talked about all the guys and girls, from kindergarten up. The Alperets also live in one of the contemporary houses that mark the extent of Syracuse’s housing boom. We were supposed to get together once more before my visit was over, but we didn’t; there was too much to do, and still too many people to see. I left the Alperets feeling that Heck had great pride in being a Syracusan. I hadn’t felt that with any other person.

On another night I had dinner with Larry Katzman, his wife Elaine, their children, and—Red Bluman. Larry and I had had the notion that we were the best runners in the fourth grade, and nearly every day, leaving Washington Irving School, we’d dash along the grounds trying to prove which of us was the best. Where

Heck is tall and thin with an elongated face, Larry is short with broad shoulders and a sharp face. He is working at the University in the Peace Corps program; his profession is physical education. Later we were joined by still another 15th Ward alumnus, Eli Pearson, who is now an attorney. Eli's father used to have a meat market on the corner of the block where we lived. The father was a man of great and warm humor; Eli seems to have inherited some of that.

Outside of formal meetings, there was a parade of faces. Joe Bongo, now principal of Madison Junior High School, went to high school with me, and I met him the same night I met Bernice Alpert Schultz, another schoolmate. Then there was Johnny Reddick, whom I saw sitting on a stool in a restaurant, his Oriental face creased in a smile. I saw "Fatty" Levine on the street and said, "Hi Fatty", and he said, "Hello, Johnny". We kept on walking our separate ways. I never knew why he was called "Fatty" because he was always slender. He's still not fat, but his hair is going at a frightful pace. Mike Novak was a dark-haired athlete who often doubled as a referee at the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) when we of the old Dunbar Center played there. Mike always impressed me as being a "neat" athlete, a kid who always made the right move at the right time. I ran into Mike, but he didn't know me. Two or three times, driving along in traffic, I was hailed with "Johnny! Johnny!", and I would catch a glimpse of a brown face smiling, a brown hand waving. Hello, goodbye.

When I was a child, people, Negro or white, in our neighborhood always spoke. It was as though they were glad to have survived the Great War and the Depression, and glad that someone else had survived with them. If both parents were away at work or shopping, you could bet your life that some old biddy or old man whittling on a stick had their eyes on you. If you misbehaved, the folks had the report as soon as their feet hit the steps. Ours was a community, despite everything else, in which survival of the other fellow or his children meant survival for you. That is all gone now. Now there's nothing. Not unfriendliness, just nothing.

Once we lived next door to Mrs. Levy, whose hair was as white as snow. She died some years ago. Her shop with home in the rear

smelled of dill pickles that she kept in a barrel near the door; and there was the rich smell of kosher salami. She had two sons, Herman and Milton (Hermy and Miltie). Mrs. Levy and her boys and the store are gone. Farther down the street, in one of the few remaining buildings, was Guido's market. I walked into the store one day filled with memories. The old man, named Mike, had been a crusty, sharp-voiced Italian. But it was Mrs. Guido who impressed you because she was tall and stately. She always held her hands, one folded gently inside the other, in front of her. I felt that Mike, the father, was dead, but something told me that Mrs. Guido was still alive. Two of the sons, both now gray-haired and lined, Mike Jr. and George, told me that not only was she still with them, but she worked in the store two days a week. The other brother, Willie, was not around, and the daughter, Rosie, was with the mother that day.

I felt foolishly proud of Mrs. Guido and vain about my prediction that she would be alive and going strong. There was just something about her—she was one of the last Romans living in that troubled, bulldozed 15th Ward. Although the city fathers came to the conclusion that The Ward had to go—and it had deteriorated badly—great strength emanated from that polyglot community and, it seems to me, was not utilized. Nothing so badly demoralizes a person who cries out, “I AM! I AM!” as being ignored.

But this is the way of American cities, and may even be the way of most cities of the world.

For generations Syracusans believed that just because they lived in almost the precise center of the state, economic, educational, and cultural benefits would come to them automatically. In its brochures the Chamber of Commerce pointed out the advantages of being centrally located. Syracuse was called the “Central City” or the “Hub”. General Electric, currently “phasing out” its government contracts, moved in during the 1940s. Now, with the previous industries included, there are almost 600 manufacturing firms employing more than 56,000 people in the area. The total labor force in blue and white collar fields is close to 125,000. The city seems to be on its way to a new economic era, and this, of course, will influence education and culture. It is the only city along the

500-mile New York State Thruway that has five exits. Syracuse is the gateway to the Thousand Islands, the Finger Lakes Region, the Adirondack Mountains. The new Penn-Can road, Interstate 81, will provide an important north-south route through the city.

Anticipating even greater expansion, the city is arranging for a 25-million-gallon per day water supply to be piped in from Lake Ontario, which is about 30 miles to the north. And one of the world's largest nuclear reactors, a 500,000-kilowatt, boiling-water system that will supply the city and environs with electricity "at the same cost and maybe less", will be completed in 1968 near Oswego. Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation, which is building the reactor, has been a driving force behind the industrial expansion of Syracuse.

In October 1963, following a wave of demonstrations by CORE, the Syracuse Metropolitan Development Association, an organization formed for the purpose of attracting new businesses to the area, sent a committee of top members to Europe. Among them was the Director of Area Development of Niagara Mohawk, Mayor Bill Walsh, and two Syracuse University officials, one of whom doubles as the president of MDA. Sixteen other people were on the trip, which covered 18 cities in 16 days. Most stops were made in Holland and West Germany. However, James M. Hanley, the new Democratic congressman from the 34th congressional district, said, "That trip accomplished absolutely nothing".

Now licenses for the upstate manufactures of European products are being made available. In the horrible, gothic monstrosity that must continue to be City Hall until a modern one is built (it is already projected), they talk about European malls and promenades and traffic symbols. However, the single most important thing is that, finally, a group of people in the city, worn out mentally, physically, or financially—the reason doesn't matter—decided that the peculiar ecological inbreeding of Syracusans was leaving them far, far behind. Swift, new modes of transportation (the Greyhound bus easily beats the New York Central trains from New York City to Syracuse), vast superhighways, pressure from the University, which itself is in touch with all the nation and all the world, suddenly changing social values, the hard looks of newcomers—all

have forced Syracuse to drive hard to realize the potential it has had since its very inception. At Mayor Walsh's office—"John, call me Bill"—new phrases crackle: "walk-to-work housing"; "more people, more greenery"; "my code of human rights".

Transition has come like a whirlwind. One could have seen it far off on the horizon had he looked. Or maybe a number of people did look and some old guys from the country clubs and leather offices said, "That's no whirlwind, only a blighted tree out there". And the people said, "Of course, it's only a blighted tree".

So the whirlwind of change came hurtling on, blowing some of the old guys away with their tees and golf clubs. Syracusans are scrambling in it now; they have gone out to shake hands with a world that must regard them as suspect and repatriates from the ranks of the missing. One thing is obvious: the people of Syracuse know that they must dig once more for their salt.