

NOTE TO USERS

PREVIEW

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI[®]

PREVIEW

"THE SEED OF THE COMING FREE"

an essay on

Black Female Leadership

Submitted to

The Union Graduate School
Union For Experimenting Colleges and Universities

in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by
Rhetaugh Graves Dumas

May 20, 1975

UMI Number: DP10575

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform DP10575

Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

"THE SEED OF THE COMING FREE"

Introduction	i
Prologue	vi
Part One	
Steel Dreams in Black Souls: Centuries of Struggles	
Chapter 1	From Slavery 1
Chapter 2	Toward a Better Life 37
Part Two	
Up The Great White Stairs: In Defiance of the Peter Principle	
Chapter 3	The Mixed Blessings of the Twentieth Century 68
Chapter 4	The Dilemma of Black Women Leaders in Contemporary Organizations 79
Epilogue	106a
References	107
Bibliography	111

INTRODUCTION

People can master their history and they can use it, but they are never free from it. Accordingly, black women are constantly dealing with trends and issues from their past experiences that they must in some way synthesize with present realities. In their attempts to meet the challenges and demands that face them in this complex society with all its blind spots and inequities, they continue to struggle against the cruel social forces that threaten to keep them "stuck in their history." Implicit in their present resistance is the realization that although they are inevitably products of their backgrounds, they should not necessarily be controlled by the myths or the facts of their past. And all who are interested in promoting the upward social mobility of black women, who have remained among the underdogs in this society, are challenged to develop a better understanding of the forces that undermine their security and effectiveness as executives in contemporary organizations.

This is not an easy task. Leadership for anyone involves complex social and psychological phenomena about which there are conflicting views and widespread confusion. Efforts to develop

theories of organizational leadership have been focused mainly on white males. While some important progress is apparent in this area of study, theories pertaining to black leadership (male or female) or to female leadership (black or white) have yet to be developed. This project is necessarily rudimentary.

The guiding thesis is that black women have been controlled by their history as slaves in America and that myths based on interpretations of that history pervade modern social institutions and pose obstacles to progress in raising their status in this country. The purpose of this study is to explore the myths and realities of the history of black women in the United States, and to describe the dilemma of black women executives that is linked to that history and the myths. A further objective is to stimulate a more systematic study of the leadership problems of all minority groups and of women, of whom black women are the most disadvantaged.

Many important historical sources were utilized in preparing the first part of this essay, which reviews the black woman's social history. Most of these were the works of secondary authorities, but narratives of slaves and witnesses and black

autobiographies were among the materials examined. Very little literature is addressed to the problems and dilemmas of black women leaders--or to those of women leaders in general. In preparing part two, therefore, I have used my own experiences as an appointed city official, an associate professor and administrator of a professional training program in a large Ivy League university, branch chief in a Federal agency, and a member of the consultant staff for group-relations training in the Tavistock tradition. I have relied heavily upon the experiences of numerous other black women leaders around the country. Some of them described their dilemmas during informal discussions at social gatherings, or during professional meetings; others (totaling over 500 during the past two years) while participating in institutes, workshops, or group-relations training conferences. In addition, descriptions in the literature--particularly biographies and autobiographies of black women--have served as valuable although sparse resources. The data derived from these experiences are naturally less structured and more casual than those that come from a carefully conducted research project. Nevertheless, there are advantages in the intimacy of detail and the breadth of exposure that this

approach permits, especially at such an early stage of inquiry. At the very least the data serve to map out critical areas for a more intensive approach.

I am unable to list here all of the people who contributed to making this study a fruitful experience for me. I certainly would not have been able to complete the task without the consistent encouragement of my friends, the members of my doctoral committee, my colleagues and staff at NIMH, and the many black women who openly shared their experiences and dilemmas. Mrs. Luberta Sims, Mrs. Jeanette Boyd, and Mrs. Miriam Bates have held my hand throughout this endeavor. The critiques of Dr. Howard Harris, Mrs. Angela McBride, Miss Bette Davis, Dr. Oliver Osborne, Dr. Helen Nakagawa, Dr. Betty Mitsunaga, Dr. Roy Bryce-Laporte, Mrs. Lula Whitlock, Dr. Leah Gorman, and Dr. Elizabeth Smith were especially helpful at a time when I was struggling for clarity and organization of ideas. I am especially indebted to: NIMH for the opportunity to spend a total of nine months in full-time independent study in areas related to this essay; Dr. Elizabeth Smith who provided outstanding leadership to the Psychiatric Nursing Education Branch during my absence, and the staff who supported her leadership ; Dr. Rita Arditti, Dr. Boris Astrachan,

Dr. Daniel Levinson, Dr. Kermit Nash, Dr. Betty Pool, and Dr. Glory Van Scott who gave so generously of their time and effort in providing guidance, technical assistance, and emotional support for the work that has gone into this project; Mrs. Patricia Moore and Miss Lillian Silverberg for their assistance in preparing drafts of the manuscript, and Mrs. Hellen Galvin whose assistance enabled me to complete the final draft. The thorough and instructive editorial assistance provided by Mrs. Anne Wilde was invaluable in making this a coherent document.

This entire endeavor is dedicated to my daughter Adrienne and her roots in Mississippi--her grandmother, great-grandmother, and godmother.

R.G.D.

PROLOGUE

Children, I come back today
To tell you a story of the long dark way
That I had to climb, that I had to know
In order that the race might live and grow.
Look at my face — dark as the night —
Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.
I am the child they stole from the sand
Three hundred years ago in Africa's land.
I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea
Carrying in my body the seed of the free.
I am the woman who worked in the field.
Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.
I am the one who labored as a slave,
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave —
Children sold away from me, husband sold, too.
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.
Three hundred years in the deepest South:
But God put a song and prayer in my mouth.
God put a dream like steel in my soul.
Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.
Now Through my children, young and free,
I realize the blessings denied to me.

I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.
I had nothing, back there in the night.
Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,
But I kept trudging on through the lonely years.
Sometimes, the road was hot with sun,
But I had to keep on till my work was done:
I had to keep on! No stopping for my--
I was the seed of the coming Free.
I nourished the dream that nothing could smother
Deep in my breast--the Negro mother.
I had only hope then, but now through you,
Dark ones of today, my dreams must come true:
All you dark children in the world out there,
Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.
Remember my years, heavy with sorrow--
And make of those years a torch for tomorrow.
Make of my past a road to the light
Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.
Lift high my banner out of the dust.
Stand like free men supporting my trust.
Believe in the right, let none push you back.
Remember the whip and the slaver's track.
Remember how the strong in struggle and strife
Still bar you the way, and deny you life--
But march ever forward, breaking down bars.

Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.
Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
Impel you forever up the great stairs--
For I will be with you till no white brother
Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother.

Langston Hughes
(The Negro Mother)

PREVIEW

Part One

Steel Dreams in Black Souls: Centuries of Struggle

1619-1900

PREVIEW

Chapter 1

From Slavery

There is a prevalent belief that from the time that they first set foot in this country black females have been a privileged group in American society. They are seen as very capable leaders, second in the minds of many only to the white male in their ability to wield great influence over the thoughts and actions of others. This leads to the assumption that black women are advancing more rapidly than their white sisters or their black brothers. Indeed, the black woman is becoming the object of admiration and envy, and at the same time a source of fear varying in degree with the sex, race, and social class of the observer.

The black female's reputation (predominantly among whites) alleges a bountiful supply of "soul," influence, and strength. All of these qualities are thought to be best exemplified in the feats of her predecessor "the great black matriarch." Small wonder that those who most actively seek out black female leadership perceive themselves to be in a

vulnerable position, under considerable threat, or powerlessness to accomplish without her some highly significant personal or professional goal. Those who are relatively secure and strong manage to keep her at a comfortable distance from the base of real power. In organizations she is kept busy tending the weak and powerless, guarding the role and territorial boundaries of "number one" and warding off actual or potential threats to his security, privacy, or prerogatives.

In thousands of subtle ways, black females are seduced into performing the work of the mammy, the missionary, the rescuer or, the security guard; no matter what capacity they were ostensibly appointed to. Because of the supposed threat of her leadership qualities, the black woman is not given access to the training that is vital for induction into the culture of the upper echelon. Consequently, she is not socialized for effective task-oriented leadership of groups, organizations, or institutions. The competence of black female leadership is thought to reside in the qualities of her person. Indeed, it appears that the only competencies

deemed by a large segment of this society to be important for black females are those she would be expected to bring "from slavery." Consequently, black women for the most part must fly by the seat of their pants, on guesswork and with little relief from stress, as they try to perform capably in leadership roles. And in many cases it is difficult if not impossible to transcend the idealized qualities of the black female slave.

Contrary to belief, black females as a subgroup have never been privileged in America. They are and have been grossly underprivileged. Compared to other black and white Americans, most have been at the bottom of the heap from the moment they were brought unwillingly to the New World. They continue to be at the bottom of the heap today. This is not to ignore the achievements and contributions of some black women, to which we can point with pride. Some black women are among our most prominent leaders of yesterday and today. Unfortunately, the accomplishments of those individuals do not change the general picture for the mass of black females in America: they remain among the underclass. The

image of the powerful, privileged black female is false, based upon myths about the position and role of black women in slavery, spun no doubt to mask the truth of her powerlessness and poverty.

The focus of this dissertation is toward a better understanding of the nature of the black woman's struggle in order to construct a more realistic image of herself, her roles, her problems of yesterday, and the implications for her today. Only through such a process can we hope to appreciate her position and pave the way for her greater participation in the structure of contemporary society.

Let us look at some of the sorry details of the black woman's beginnings in this country. A historical perspective is critical at this juncture when there are, at least in my view, increasing efforts to resurrect the Black Mammy in today's ambitious black woman who aspires to move up the socioeconomic and political ladder. Because early historians rarely distinguished males and females in discussions of slavery, it is difficult to picture the life of female slaves; historical appreciation of their roles and work is

sparse. There seems to be some improvement in the contemporary literature, but recent historians have had to put their information together from widely scattered sources.¹ Nevertheless, increasing interest in the black woman over the past ten years has produced a growing body of literature on the subject. It is hoped that the ideas and information presented here will contribute toward a clearer picture.

The female slave was among those black captives from Africa who were sold to European adventurers dealing in cheap labor for the colonials. The Indians of the New World were unable or unwilling to meet the arduous labor forced on them. They died or ran away in overwhelming numbers. Similarly, the poor whites who were indentured as servants did not work out well; they were expensive to maintain and when they ran away they were difficult to identify because they looked so much like the rest of the population. These problems would be resolved by black captives. The initial demand was for strong, able-bodied workers and initially that meant males. Therefore, until the middle of the 18th century, we are told, most of the black slaves were males (about two-thirds).²

They were encouraged to marry white females, but the alarming rate of intermarriage eventually led to its prohibition and black women were brought over in larger numbers.³ Early on, therefore, black females were of secondary importance; at best, they lessened the tensions that were developing between black and white males.

Black women were captured, as the men were, and endured that horrible voyage commonly called the middle passage. They too were often passed through the hands of several purchasers before they finally reached the slaveship. Some were pregnant but that did not alter the processing or shipment of this human cargo. Men were fastened together two by two with handcuffs and leg irons.

Aboard ship the females were berthed together. There were separate quarters for males, and the men were separated from the boys. On the ships described in the abolitionists' publications, the space for the females was considerably smaller than that allocated for males.⁴ More often than not all the captives were packed like sardines on shelves between the decks too close together to allow headroom. In bad

weather the portholes were closed and ventilation was not possible. The health of the slaves suffered and infections spread very rapidly. The "flux" was a common condition that weakened or took the lives of large numbers of the cargo. The decks of the slave holds were often covered with blood and mucus and the slaves, sick and well, often had to lie in this filth. The women were further at the mercy of the crew, who used them for sexual gratification.

The black woman's experience throughout her history in America deserves to be recorded as unique in the annals of the New World. Her struggles to elude the captors, to escape the long torturous voyage, were but a small part of a lifetime that many of them spent in a constant battle to survive with dignity and freedom. Today, black women continue their struggle for dignity and upward mobility.

The first shipment of slaves to the English colonies arrived at Jamestown in 1619, the same year that unindentured white women reportedly arrived whose status was second only to that of white men; indeed no such comparisons were appropriate

for slaves. Although historians tell us that the first slaves to Virginia were probably treated very much like the indentured servants, the attitudes toward them were obviously different. The following quotation from E. Franklin Frazier's book, The Negro in the United States, reflects the difference.

. . . note the words of the court in the case of a white man who had sexual relations with a negro woman. The white man was ordered to be "soundly whipt before an assembly of Negroes and others for abusing himself to the dishonor of God and shame of christianity by defiling his body in lying with a Negro, which fault he is to ack. next Sabbath day." 5

According to John Hope Franklin the black captives were listed as servants in the Virginia colony census enumerations of 1623 and 1624. As late as 1651 some of them whose period of service had expired were being assigned land in much the same way as was done for white servants. Virginia records many indentures of black servants during the forty-year period following their introduction, indicating that there were free blacks in Virginia during that time. Although there was no formal statutory recognition of slavery in Virginia until

1661 the attitudes demonstrated by the case cited above suggest a movement in that direction very early on.⁶ But from the very beginning, females as well as males dreamed of alternatives to their way of life in this new land. They resisted their servitude and never ceased to plan ways to move up from the depths of degradation that was to increase with the formalization of slavery. But, as Frederick Douglass wrote in his autobiography:

Sickness, adversity, and death may interfere with the plans and purposes of all, but the slave had the added danger of changing homes, in the separations unknown to other men. Then, too, there was the intensified degradation of the spectacle. What an assemblage. Men and women, young and old, married and single; moral and thinking human beings, in open contempt of their humanity, leveled at a blow with horses and sheep, horned cattle and women, pigs and children -- all holding the same rank in the scale of social existence, and all subjected to the same narrow inspection, to ascertain their value in gold and silver -- the only standard of worth applied by the slaveholders to their slaves. Personality swallowed up in the sordid ideal property. Manhood lost in chattelhood.⁷

The lowest denomination of that chattelhood was black womanhood.

No matter who looks at slavery, by what methods of analysis, it is a cruel, dehumanizing, racist institution in which

the women suffered at least as severely as the men, and many women suffered added burdens and insults. Female slaves worked side by side with males in the fields from sun up to sun down. Some males attained higher positions as "drivers" of the field slaves; no women had such positions. A small percentage of the slaves worked in nonagricultural roles. Some of the slaves, more males than females, worked in the skilled crafts. The house slaves have been the focus of a great deal of attention in attempts to differentiate status among the slave population. From a number of descriptions it would seem that the house slaves had some advantages over those in the fields. Outstanding among the house slaves were the "mammies" who are alleged to have been the most privileged of all.

The Black Mammy was a strong, tough, uneducated but worldly-wise and enormously resourceful person. She was self-sacrificing, bringing all of her resources into the service of others. Not only did she put her work above herself, but above her family as well. She was unquestionably loyal, generous, compassionate, and courageous. She was iron-willed