

Plateau of Progress?

By ELSA L. WALSH Washington Post Staff Writer

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Blacks Fear Gains of '60s Will Be Lost in '80s

By ELSA L. WALSH

Washington Post Staff Writer

In the center of King and Washington streets in Alexandria stands a statue representing an unknown Confederate soldier. Two years ago, Nelson Greene, the only black member of the City Council, objected strenuously to a plan to renovate the statue.

"It [still] reminds me of bondage," Greene says today. "It represented everything in southern history that we had fought against for so long ..."

"Few people understood why I was angry. But why should they understand? Most people here have never had to contend with what I have had to contend with.

"What white man has had to pack a lunch when he wanted to drive from Raleigh, N.C., to Washington because there were no restaurants en route that

would serve you? What white Army captain was not served at National Airport while he was waiting for a plane to return to fight for his country?"

"Few days pass that I don't think about how far I might have gone if I had been white. I've come a hell of a long way from where I was, but I just wonder—with all the luck, ability and advantages—what difference it would have made if I had been that white boy up the street."

As far as Nelson Greene is concerned, that Confederate soldier is the white boy up the street—a symbol, he says, of the growing concern in the black community that the gains of the '60s have reached a plateau and may, in fact, be slipping away.

The final proof, at least for some in the black community, came last Tuesday with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency and a shift toward conservative politics.

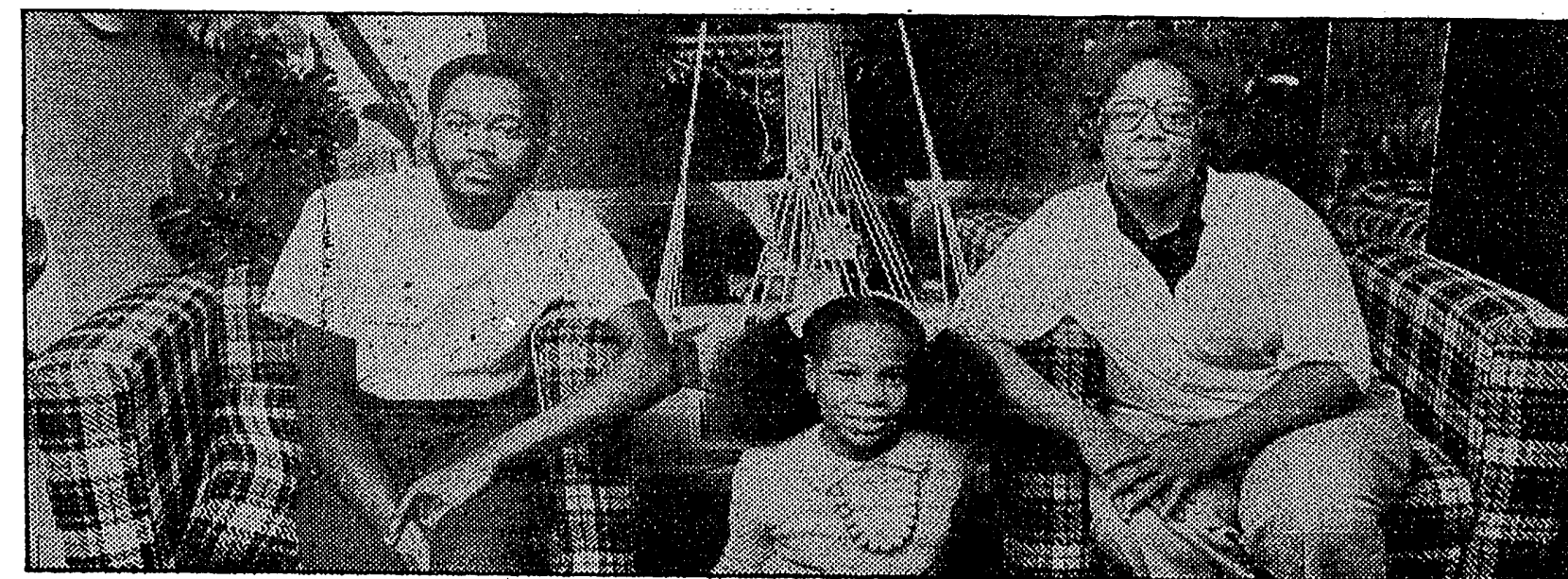
Few persons, including Greene, would disagree that the black community in Alexandria has changed radically in the past two decades. Once restricted to certain neighborhoods, schools and low-paying jobs, blacks now can be found in every neighborhood of the city. Nearly half the black residents now own their homes, all the schools are integrated and blacks hold jobs at nearly every level.

At the same time, black unemployment in certain parts of the city continues to be high, and the city has seen a tremendous drop in its black population, primarily a loss of low-income residents, who city officials believe have been forced out by the tightening housing market.

In short, most political observers say, the black community has undergone such a transformation during the past two decades that one can no longer say who, where or what the black Alexandrian is.

The election, some say, was a signal of the increasing maturity and diversity of the community. Although the majority of black voters there backed Jimmy Carter—paralleling 85 percent support for him among blacks nationally—the reasons given for that support

BY RICK REINHARD FOR THE WASHINGTON POST
Alexandria City Council member Nelson Greene.



Alvin and Vivian Stuart with daughter Tiffany.

BY JOEL RICHARDSON—THE WASHINGTON POST

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Alexandria: Blacks See Uncertainty In the '80s

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vary. And, somewhat surprisingly, some black Alexandrians voted Republican.

There were those, like Greene, who campaigned and voted for Carter because they feared Reagan's election would mean an end to social programs and financial aid to poor blacks.

"I don't know what's going to become of us blacks," said 55-year-old Mary Bostick, a disabled resident of the John Roberts public housing complex. Bostick receives \$280 in disability benefits and \$24 in food stamps each month. "I pray to God, he (Reagan) doesn't mess with disability. I'd work if I could, I'd work two jobs if I was able."

There were other blacks—middle-class families with two cars, two incomes and kids in college—who voted for Carter for different economic reasons.

"With Carter everybody had to tighten their belts. But he really didn't have much of a chance in four years to prove himself," said 39-year-old Vivian Stuart, a psychiatric technician who lives with her husband in the Del Ray area of Alexandria. Stuart and her husband together earn about \$30,000 a year. They have two daughters, a college freshman and a 10-year-old.

"I didn't vote for Carter because I believe in welfare programs or because I am black," Stuart added. "I don't have time to worry about being black, and 90 percent of the welfare cases can be attributed to pure laziness. I only have time to worry about running my family, taking care of the kids and communicating with my husband."

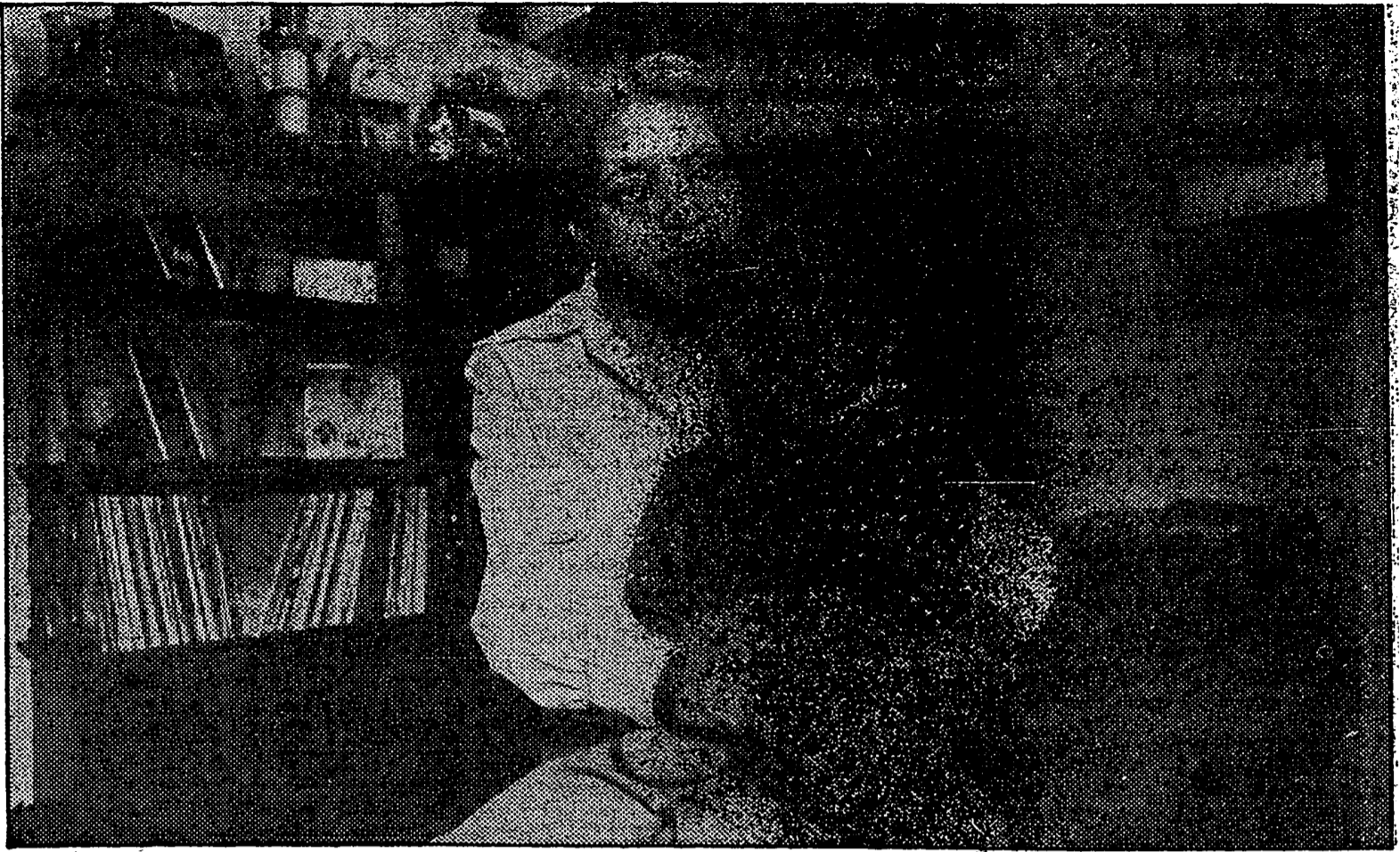
There also were members of the black community—although few—who voted for Reagan, believing he could solve the economic woes of the country.

"Society won't let me forget that I am black and I don't think the country ever left racism, but I'm a professional and the way out for me is through drive, competition and ability," explained Stan Turner, a Reagan worker who is public-relations director for a major architectural firm in Alexandria. "I have not abandoned social programs by voting Republican, but I am more concerned with putting energy into getting into the business world and showing that blacks can function and make decisions. Blacks have to realize they need people on both sides."

It seemed to some blacks that neither Carter nor Reagan offered much of a choice. One man who said he did not bother to vote explained that he believed neither candidate would make a difference to poor blacks.

"Each day I feel I'm pushing one step closer to jail," explained the 30-year-old man as he leaned against the side of a grocery store at Queen and N. Fayette streets, waiting to make a drug deal. He has been out of work for eight months after working four years as a messenger. His 11-year-old daughter is living with his parents because he cannot afford to support her.

"From Monday to Wednesday, I spend the entire day filling out applications," he said. "The rest of the week I spend waiting for the letter that never comes and the telephone that never rings. I have to steal or come up here and sell a few reefers. There is no other way I could survive—all I want is a little money in my pocket."



Mary Bostick at home with granddaughter Irene.

BY GARY A. CAMERON—THE WASHINGTON POST

"This affirmative-action thing might work for middle-class black folk, but for us poor it's like trying to be a carpenter without a hammer."

That feeling of powerlessness is a theme that runs through many conversations with black Alexandrians. For some, like the man on the corner, the lack of jobs or adequate housing is the focus of their concerns. For others, like the Stuarts and Turner, lack of political power is the major stumbling block to equality.

The most recent Northern Virginia figures set the black unemployment rate at 6.9 percent, but NAACP officials say it is three times as high. Unemployment among black youths exceeds 30 percent, according to state figures. Statewide, the most recent figures show black employment is about 11 percent, compared with 3.4 percent among the white population.

City figures set the number of minorities employed by the city in 1979 at 29.1 percent, but most of the higher-paying jobs went to whites. According to city statistics, more than 90 percent of city employees earning more than \$16,000 per year were white.

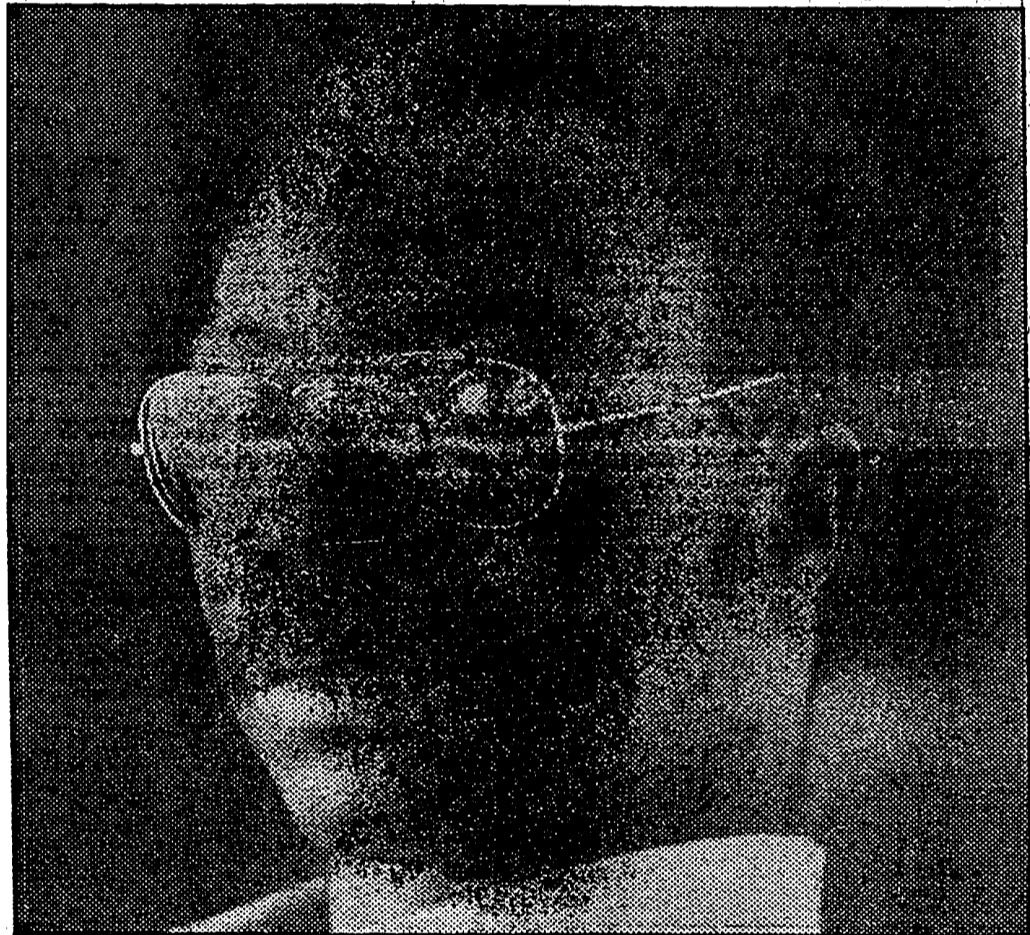
In addition to unemployment problems, a severe housing shortage and real estate speculation have forced some of Alexandria's blacks to look elsewhere for a place to live.

More than a 16.5 percent of the city's rental units have been lost to condominium conversion since 1976, and housing prices have skyrocketed 135 percent since 1975. The average price of a house in Alexandria is now \$80,000.

According to preliminary census figures, more than a third of the city's black population has moved out since 1974, due to increasing housing prices and the loss of more than 2,100 rental units when the largely black Shirley Duke Regina Complex closed. The census figures show blacks now comprise about 14 percent of Alexandria's population of 102,500.

Planning officials say most of the remaining blacks live in the low- and middle-income housing of Del Ray, Arlandria and the downtown area west of Old Town, including the DIP urban-renewal project.

"In the last 10 to 12 years, adequate housing has been a tremendous problem for blacks," said Ulysses Calhoun, head of the Northern Virginia chapter of the NAACP. "Our inner-city areas have been invaded by speculators who come in here and offer people what



Stanley Taylor, head of Blacks for Reagan in Alexandria.

BY JOEL RICHARDSON—THE WASHINGTON POST

seems to be a good price. But where do these people go when they sell?

"We've taken the city to task . . . but we're not getting our fair share."

City officials say they are working hard to prevent the migration of low-income blacks from Alexandria, and to improve minority hiring.

Affirmative-action programs have been enacted for all city offices—goals set and training programs devised—and some interest-free and low-interest loans are available through the city's community development block grant office. The Shirley Duke complex—now Foxchase—recently was reopened, and the owners have agreed to maintain the building as rental housing for 20 units, and reserve 20 percent of the units for public subsidized housing.

"I feel confident we're going to show improvement in our hiring figures soon," said Jack Lindsay, the city's deputy personnel director. "We're recruiting and training minorities . . . but the problem is that we have a merit system."

"With the civil service, we've got to stick to the rules . . . most of our pro-

motions are filled by people moving up from within the civil service. Therefore, there are few blacks we can promote without creating special positions."

The news that the city is trying, however, does little to appease those blacks who fear city policies can do little to mitigate the conservative trend prevailing through the nation.

Already, they say, their political representation in the city is not proportionate to their numbers. Nelson Greene is the only elected black official, and although the school system is almost 50 percent black, only three of the nine school board members are black.

"Power comes from numbers, and our numbers might be united, but we're not satisfied with our position in the city. Our numbers may have increased in the lower echelons, but at the decision-making level we have remained the same or decreased," said Calhoun. "We love this city, but if you think Alexandria is a utopia for blacks, you're wrong—dead wrong."