

TRAMP

Theodore Roosevelt Augustus Major Poston

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This paper is in the nature of a tale from the dark side - that is, how one of Hopkinsville's own citizens emerged from the constraints of black society in the early years of this century to achieve what would be called success by anyone's standards in his chosen field.

I became interested in Ted Poston when the New Era reviewed the book of short stories he wrote, The Dark Side of Hopkinsville. After I had read and enjoyed them, a biography appeared, which I also enjoyed. Most of the information in this paper is drawn from Kathleen A. Hauke's biography of Poston, Ted Poston, Pioneer American Journalist. Major pieces of his writings come from a later work she edited, A First Draft of History, which is a collection of some of Ted Poston's journalism.

Theodore Roosevelt Augustus Major Poston was born July 4, 1906 in Hopkinsville. He later became the first African-American reporter to spend his career at a mainstream American daily newspaper. His father was Ephraim Poston, born in 1863 to a slave couple in the Poston household in Clarksville. His mother, Mollie Cox, was born in 1871 in Bell's Station, Kentucky. The two met at Roger Williams University in Nashville and married in 1887 at Mollie's home. She was 15 at the time, he 23. They moved to Hopkinsville to begin their family, which was a rather tranquil backwater at the time. A law considered by city council at the time to prohibit pigs and cows from roaming freely throughout the city created an uproar only equalled in recent times by the pet leash law discussions of recent vintage. Seems we have always wanted our animals to enjoy the freedom of association.

Ted had four older brothers, Frederick Douglas, 1888, Robert Lincoln, 1890, Ulysses Simpson, 1892, and Ephraim Jr., 1893, along with two sisters: Roberta, 1895, and Lillian, 1903. The Poston parents followed the custom of the time in naming their boys after prominent heroes to the black community. All of Ted's siblings attended Male & Female College in Hopkinsville, where Ephraim Sr. taught. Mrs. Poston worked as a supervisor for domestic science in Christian and Trigg counties, basically a kind of county extension agent, boosting the morale of school teachers and instructing black homemakers in the arts of canning and preserving. They lived in a two story house on Hayes Street.

Much of Ted's childhood was like that of any child growing up in Hopkinsville at the time, and has been recorded in a series of short stories entitled The Dark Side of Hopkinsville. He and his friends attended school, went to the movies, swam in Little River, fished, and did all the other things boys do. Of course, as a little black boy, he learned not to swim when the white boys were there and attended Booker T. rather than West Side, Belmont, or Virginia St.. Also, blacks received medical treatment in a separate hospital because Jennie Stuart was not open to blacks. They also watched movies from the balcony at the Rex, Princess, or Alhambra. In fact, at the Princess, you can see the black entrance to the balcony on the side to this day. His family were members of Virginia St. Baptist, and apparently were active in the congregation. Then, as now, the route to prominence in this town runs through a church. As educated people, his parents maintained a library of some of the classics, along with subscriptions to

newspapers and journals such as the Courier-Journal, New Era, Ladies Home Journal, and leading black weeklies from the larger cities.

Ted was a dark-skinned black, and therefore at the lower end of the social hierarchy in the black community. The Blue-Vein society dominated Hopkinsville's black society, as it did in other communities. While there was probably never any actual group by this name, it does describe accurately the importance of light coloring, or skin color so light you could see the blue veins in the hands, in determining your caste. If you were light skinned enough, you could even pass for white at times. His skin color caused him trouble in his teenage years, when he dated, or tried to date, Mary Duncan, daughter of a local doctor, who was a member of the Big Six, a group of prominent light skinned girls. Her father was also concerned about rumors of insanity in the Poston family.

Of all Ted's siblings, only Ulysses survived into Ted's adulthood. His brother Ephraim, Jr. was the first to die, of a sarcoma on the neck in 1914. In 1917, when Ted was 11, his mother Mollie died of Bright's disease, an inflammation of the kidneys. All of Ted's comical stories about his childhood are set before the death of his mother. After her death, he was mostly on his own. His sisters, Roberta and Lillian, did the best they could to raise him, but he was apparently quite a headache for these young teenage girls.

In that same year, Ted's father lost the family house on Hayes St., probably due to a complete lack of financial acumen. Ted started working at a fairly young age, which he probably would have

done anyway. He had typical jobs for a young black boy, including picking strawberries in Pembroke, helping his uncle John Braxton, "the barbecue poet laureate" with shindigs, and possibly working at the Latham Hotel. One of the jobs a bellboy could end up with was procuring for guests of the hotel. These boys always seemed to know where a man could obtain a good time for money. However, if the man wanted a colored woman, he had to make his own arrangements. Colored women were available, at least at the Tin Top Saloon on 5th St. between Virginia and Main.

One of Ted's early jobs involved cleaning fireplaces at Dr. Tunks home, one of Hopkinsville's dentists - white, by the way. He brought the wood and cleaned away the ashes - a typical job for a black boy. William Turner reports that all of the Tunks are now dead and have no living relatives, so this story can be repeated with impunity.

In one room on Ted's job, Williams says,

was a grown young lady. She was layin' in the bed. . . . But she kept looking at Ted, and one morning she said, "Come here, Ted." He walked over and she put her hand on the front of his pants and said, "Well! You're quite a young *man!*" Ted was maybe thirteen years old. And the word he said she used, she said, "Are you *diddling* with the little nigger gals?" Ted was so frightened he didn't know what to say, and she repeated, "Well, are ya?" He wanted to *be* a big man, so he said, "Yessum, yessum!"

She said, "Well, if you can do it to them, you can do it to me." She threw the cover back and she was lyin' there just as naked as a jay bird.

He told me, "Oh, that pussy was so pretty."

She pulled him down on her. He said he wasn't really big enough to do anything, but it got to be an every-morning occurrence. He was *scared* to tell anybody. Back then, they did all kinds of things to Negroes if they caught 'em with white girls. Ted finally told the lady he was going to quit his job. She said, "If you quit, I'm going to tell the doctor you raped me." That scared him even more. Ted stuck it out there for two or three years and every morning she called on him, and he was scared enough to perform. But he said he was *glad* when that was over with.⁹

Obviously,

life for black boys was fraught with difficulties unknown to white boys.

In 1919, death struck the Poston family again, this time taking Roberta. She had been a teacher in Oak Grove, working at "'a little house on a little ground, with a little equipment and a little attendance from a little district having little ideals of education (obviously nothing has changed in Oak Grove), where a teacher . . . for a little period of her life, for a little term during the year, at a little salary, taught little children little things in a little way.'" This was practically the only remunerative option to black women aside from domestic work. The eldest brother, Frederick Douglas, also presumably died during this decade, since he appears in the 1910 census but not subsequent ones.

During World War I, both Ulysses and Robert were inducted into the army at Camp Zachary Taylor, near Louisville. Negro children were urged to buy Thrift Stamps and negro inductees were told that things would be made better for them at home, but there were still 259 lynchings in America during the 14 months the US was at war. Both Ulysses and Robert were clearly intelligent men, Robert being promoted to sergeant. After a dispute with a white officer of lower rank than himself, he was demoted back to private, and finally honorably discharged in 1919. After the war, both brothers went into journalism, working for and publishing a series of papers for the black market. They even started one in Hopkinsville, which did not last long. The brothers took exception to the placing of the colored regiment at the end of a parade to honor Great War Veterans and said so. The town then refused them permission to print their paper in Hopkinsville, finally resulting in its

transfer to Detroit.

While in Detroit, the two brothers came into contact with Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican born man promoting a separate economy - blacks making and selling products for other blacks, rather than buying from or selling to whites. You may have seen clothing that says FUBU on today's youth - it stands for: For us, by us, and is a line of clothing targeted to the black community. History repeating itself. Anyway, Garvey did not have a very good grasp of private enterprise - when a lieutenant arranged for molasses to be shipped from black farmers in the south to users in the north and received the check, Garvey just pocketed it rather than paying the farmers. Ulysses left the movement fairly quickly, but Robert stayed longer. His last project for the movement was working on arrangements with Liberia for American blacks to emigrate to there, accompanied by investment capital. After a successful meeting with the Liberian officials, Robert succumbed to pneumonia on the boat home, dying in 1924. His body was conveyed back to Hopkinsville with quite a bit of ceremony - he had a private railcar for his coffin - quite unusual for a black man in that day. Hopkinsville's black schools let out for the funeral as a mark of respect, and he was buried in Cave Spring. Ted was broken hearted at the death of this nationally prominent brother.

Later on in that spring of 1924, Ted graduated from Attucks High, not at the top of his class, but regarded by all as an intelligent boy destined to make something of himself. He aspired to a career in journalism, influenced by his brothers and by urgings in the black press of the time to produce more black

journalists to report the black story.

Later that summer, Eph remarried - to Susie Forrest, and they moved to Paducah where he became head of the English department at West Kentucky Industrial College and she taught home economics. That left just Ted and Lillian at home on Hayes St., along with a couple of cousins. Poor Lillian had been weakened by influenza in the terrible outbreak of 1918 and broke down while attending M&F trying to follow in Roberta's footsteps. She was committed to Western State in 1924 and died there in 1927, to be buried in Cave Spring Cemetery.

Like the rest of his family, Ted figured that education was his ticket to a better life, and so enrolled himself in Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College (TSU today), where he majored in journalism. He used the address of some the Clarksville Poston relatives and so managed to claim in-state tuition, which was a good thing, since his father had very little income.

Ted was a proud man, appearing like a Beau Brummel in A&I yearbooks, but he had little money to accomplish his desires. To prepare for college, he went downtown to Franklin's in Hopkinsville, where he tried on a new suit of clothes, put his old suit on over it, and walked out of the store. Likewise, to obtain shoes, he went to Abe Arkovitch's second hand store, found a pair he liked, and left his old ones behind. It was not that Ted had anything against the proprietors of these particular stores, but rather that he took pride in his appearance but was also too proud to beg, so he resorted to an old custom prevalent since slave days of 'borrowing' from the master what would be rightfully yours if

you were paid appropriately.

While in college, Ted enjoyed the amusements typical for college boys at the time: riding the streetcar downtown to see movies and date actresses appearing at the Bijou, playing on the baseball team, writing for the yearbook and other publications, and joining various undergraduate clubs.

Ted also wrote to Mary Duncan, his hometown sweetheart, on a regular basis. Their plan was that she would follow him to Nashville, enrolling in Fisk when she finished at Attucks. However, her father insisted that she attend Butler University in Indianapolis, primarily to remove her from Ted's influence. Sure enough, while there, she met and married someone whom her father considered more desirable.

To help meet his financial obligations while in college, Ted got a job as a railroad car porter. He worked all over the east during the summers, serving on the L&N, the IC, the New York Central, and the Pennsylvania. Travelling on the railroad broadened Ted's horizons, giving him the opportunity to travel wherever these great railroads went, from Chicago to New York. He gained exposure to blacks from all over the east, and made a point of seeking out the black newspapers wherever he went. He saw how black newsmen focused on the fight for racial dignity - advocating for better housing, encouraging blacks to vote for candidates favorably disposed to Negroes, and encouraging better habits among blacks themselves.

While working as a Pullman porter, Ted became convinced of the necessity for a union to fight for the common worker. At the time,

the average wage for a Pullman porter was \$110 per month, including tips. To achieve this, the porter worked long hours and had to leave on another trip right after arriving from the first one. During the depression, wages became worse, because tips disappeared. When Ted laid over in New York, he stayed with his brother Ulysses, who lived in Harlem with his wife Sybil. The couple were part of an intellectual circle that met regularly for drawing room forensics, discussing all of the important topics of the day. When he graduated from A&I in 1928, he moved to New York to live with his brother and to work for him on the New York Contender, a Democratic sheet Ulysses put out for the November elections.

For Ted and other blacks, "'One of the glories of New York (is) that (t)here - more than anywhere else in America - a Negro can, at times, forget that he is a Negro. It is one of the tragedies of New York - and America - that no Negro, at all times, can forget completely'". In New York, Ted supported himself by working for his brother's paper, waiting tables at the Cotton Club, running elevators, and continuing to work on the railroads. He also wrote a column called "Harlem Shadows" for the Pittsburgh Courier. All of this activity gave Ted a knowledge of Harlem that would stand him in good stead in later years. Eventually, the Amsterdam News, perhaps the leading black paper in New York, offered Ted a job. He wrote several pieces there that gained him quite a reputation and helped the paper's circulation. One of these was a series entitled "Garland Patton, Gigolo", about a black man who lived off his girlfriend's relationship with her wealthy

white lover. The black readership of Harlem loved this tale of a black man bluffing the white man. Another series that gained him a great deal of respect was one on lynching. He covered lynchings all over the country, south and north, in an effort by the Amsterdam News to combat this heinous practice.

While financial times were not easy, he could revel in pleasures unavailable to him in the south, such as sitting in an orchestra at the movies or on Broadway, using a public drinking fountain, or just going to an integrated beach. However, even in cosmopolitan New York, prejudice would rear its head regularly.

~~An~~ ~~The~~ ~~other~~ incident took place at Far Rockaway Beach in July of 1928.

It was the first integrated beach you'd ever seen and no one seemed to notice that whites and Negroes were romping uproariously together in the rather clean sand and the [dirtier?] water.

You are luxuriating near one of the bulkheads when a scream for help comes from the deeper water. You are no Johnny Weissmuller, but you swim as fast as you can toward the screaming woman.

A stronger swimmer, a husky, swarthy white youth, spurts past you and has the drowning woman in his arms as you paddle up. You reach out to give him assistance, and he snarls:

"Get your goddam black hands off this white woman; she don't need no help from you."

Before you can make a shocked reply, a foam-crested wave dashes the couple into the end of the bulkhead. The man is knocked unconscious; you push the woman to the bulkhead where she clings precariously.

For a moment, you contemplate murder—"Let the bastard drown"—but you pull him to the bulkhead and safety and hold him there until the lifeguard arrives.

"This is one white man," you tell yourself wearily as you climb unaided back to the beach, "that you'll hate as long as you live."

But you don't. A half hour later, after he's been revived, he comes over and apologizes to you for what he said. And how can you hate the first white man who has apologized to you for anything in 19 years of life?

During this time, Ted learned that New York had some of the most advanced Civil Rights laws in the nation, and he would often insist that they be honored, even going so far as to take someone to court to defend his rights. Ted writes: (~~see p. 108 of Articles for elevator story~~).

Moon and another friend, Thurston Lewis, were with you that year when you made your first test of the Civil Rights Law which had been amended to make possible the arrest as well as civil action against any person who discriminated because of race, creed or color.

You order the arrest—much to the indignation of an Irish desk-lieutenant—of a Negro elevator operator at a Claremont Av. apartment house near Columbia University for refusing to take you up to visit two friends.

“We don’t allow Nigras in this house,” said the Negro elevator man, speaking for the insurance company which owned the building. (The girls you wished to visit, summer students at Columbia, were both colored, but apparently their fair complexions had fooled the management. Thurston, who was fair also, had visited them earlier with no difficulty.)

Anyway, after the offender had been booked and jailed, you triumphantly call an NAACP lawyer and boast that you have forced an arrest under the amended law. The lawyer listens closely to the details and then reluctantly informs you:

“Ted, the amended law covers apartment hotels, but not apartment houses. You’ve locked that man up illegally. He’s got a good case of false arrest against you if he ever finds out.”

Fortunately, the elevator operator never did find out. He was arraigned the next morning before Magistrate Benjamin Greenspan who apparently wasn’t aware of the extent of the law, and defended by insurance company lawyers who also didn’t know that apartment house elevators were not covered. ~~(They are now.)~~

In fact when Greenspan recognized you and Moon as star reporters on The Amsterdam News, he called all three of you behind the bench for a whispered consultation.

“Look,” he said, motioning at the disheveled defendant, “that poor guy didn’t know the law. He was only carrying out orders from the insurance company which hires him. So, since he’s already spent a night in jail, I’m

going to give him a real lecture on tolerance and civil rights, and let him off with a suspended sentence.”

Thurston, to whom you have not confided the facts of life, starts to protest, but Moon stomps him on his instep, and graciously seconds Greenspan’s proposal.

So you magnanimously accept the now-repentant elevator operator’s apology in open court, and make a dignified exit under the benign smile of the magistrate.

With the deepening of the Depression, times became more difficult. Ted eventually moved out of his brother’s apartment, taking a room with Henry Moon, a public relations man from Cleveland who would become a lifelong friend, and Thurston Lewis, a social worker from Greeneville, Miss. The three had numerous adventures during the Depression, since they were always broke. One time, only Ted had a job, so he insisted that the other two

apply for relief, but they were too proud to do so. They drew straws, Moon lost, and the other two forced him down to the relief office and physically threw him inside. After he came out smiling, he said that it had been alright, that he had just signed Ted's name. Another time, Moon substituted for an usher at the Metropolitan Opera; he hated to do this because it involved bowing and scraping to a white clientele. Ted told the story for years afterward about how a white woman had tipped Moon \$5.00 and he had followed her 40 blocks up Park Avenue saying "Oh, thank you ma'am" over and over.

During this time, Ted told a story illustrating the provincialism that could crop up even amongst New Yorkers. He wrote:

We had just received a letter from the pater down in Paducah. (Yes, stupid, your humble correspondent is a scion of the deah ol' Bluegrass state, suh). The letter disclosed . . . that the sire had suffered . . . heavily

when his local bank closed its doors suddenly. . . . Feeling badly about it, I relayed the information to the sister-in-law. . . .

"That's terrible!" ejaculated the shocked Mrs. Poston, but with the characteristic patriotism of a Harlemite who thinks that everything South of the Ferry is wilderness, she added, "But what can one expect of those Southern Banks? I'm surprised that you should allow your father to keep his money down there. Write him immediately and tell him that as soon as he gets on his feet again, he should send it to you and let you bank it up here—for New York is the only safe place in the world to bank money."

And the next morning—less than twenty-four hours after her little speech—sixty-two separate banks, all branches of the Bank of the United States, located in New York City, closed their doors . . . to set a record for the biggest banking crash in history.³²

With all of the difficulties facing the black population at that time, we might understand that some amongst them might be attracted by the utopian promises of socialism or even communism. These ideologies must have indeed had appeal to those suffering from financial want and subjected daily to indignities and

disrespect. In fact, at that time, there were a small but significant number of Americans, white and black, who moved to the Soviet Union, seduced by the utopian appeal of its propaganda. While Ulysses Poston did not endorse communism, he did not fear it either. Some of his circle of intellectual friends did flirt with communism, and a few even joined the party. Through one of these people, Louise Thompson, Ted received word that the USSR wanted to make a movie about racism in the US and was hiring 22 American Negroes to act in it. The Soviets even preferred non-actors, presumably so that the final result would be in some way more natural and credible. The Soviets promised all expenses paid. Ted saw this as quite a lark - an all expense paid trip to Russia to act in a movie, so he signed up, along with 22 other interesting young blacks, including Henry Moon, Thurston Lewis, Langston Hughes the poet, and various other artists and achievers. Of the 22, only a few flirted with communism or joined the party. The others appeared motivated by some of what motivated Ted: curiosity, poverty, and a desire to get away from Jim Crow.

They set sail from New York in June of 1932, docking in Germany, then traveling to Berlin by the boat train. In Berlin, they found that no Soviet visas awaited them. They had to spend several days in Berlin waiting for the visas to appear, eating up their pocket money. Many in the group were amazed by the poverty in Berlin, as well as the dissolution. In the area around the train station where they stayed, they found prostitutes and panderers of every persuasion. Langston Hughes remembered that when he tried to use a vending machine to buy a candy bar, he

received a prophylactic instead. Remember this is 1932, not 2001. He also recalled that some of the young men in the group got acquainted with 'perversions' for the first time. Apparently, any unusual sexual pleasure could be purchased for pathetically low prices. The general poverty, the slums around Berlin, and the social turmoil surprised the group; this group of Negroes felt that America, for all its problems, did not suffer from the turbulence they sensed in Germany.

Finally, the visas appeared and the group set sail for Leningrad. They received a welcome in Leningrad that in other cultures would have been called royal - perhaps comradely in this circumstance. Many of the group relished being the center of attention wherever they went and behaved a little like puppies let off a leash. Most Russians had never seen a Negro and were wont to run up to them to touch their hair or skin. Ted and others among the men enjoyed going out in the evenings and dancing at the various halls with all the white women - pleasures denied them at home, even in New York.

The attention accorded them did not extend to the food. Mostly it consisted of what we, even today, perceive as a typical impoverished Russian diet: cabbage, potatoes, borscht, black bread, and vodka. After the group complained, the Soviets sent trucks out into the hinterlands to forage up some food, especially meat, which they brought back to the hotel with instructions to serve only to the black comrades. Even then, it was clear that some were more equal than others in the Soviet system.

The Soviets paid the members of the group something like four

times what any of them earned at home, so they had money to burn for the first time. This group did include many intellectuals, so we should not be surprised that many among them hired teachers to learn Russian. They also ate in restaurants and went out to the night spots. The script for the movie turned out appallingly, so Langston Hughes had to go to work rewriting it. In the meantime, the group enjoyed the pleasures of Moscow, which included bathing in the Moscow River. As typical Americans, they wore their bathing costumes; the Russians asked why they were all covered up for bathing in the river? So, Ted and Thurston Lewis adapted themselves to local custom and bathed nude, much to the shock of the women in the Negro group.

While in Moscow, they met Anna Louise Strong, an American emigree who published an English language paper in Moscow, the Moscow Daily News. Upon meeting Ted and Moon, the visiting journalists, she engaged their services for her paper. Usually, its prose was turgid at best, and liable to be retracted the next day, depending on what Stalin did. Primarily, it covered American events for expatriates, including baseball scores, but always with a Soviet propaganda slant. Ted later told a story about how he and Moon wrote an entire issue of the paper.

"Poston Thrilled by Sell-Out Editions in Moscow and New York"

Editor and Publisher 20 April 1963: 146, 148

(*Editor and Publisher* Editor's Note: Ted Poston, a Negro staff reporter of the *New York Post*, told this story recently at the 15th Headliner Banquet at Lincoln University in Missouri when he accepted a human relations citation for his newspaper.)

Last March 4, while eight other New York dailies still remained in darkness [on strike], I received an unusual thrill. For the second time in my long career, I found myself working on a newspaper which actually sold out every copy of a full day's run to a news hungry public.

The first time this happened to me was more than 30 years ago. And since it happened in the Soviet Union, I think I should hasten to assure you that the FBI has since looked into the whole matter, and is willing to testify that I have always been a loyal American — albeit a newspaperman.

Being a little bit younger and much more adventurous then, I joined my long-time friend, Henry Lee Moon, now director of public relations for the NAACP, in a journalistic journey through Europe. Armed with imposing

credentials from the *Amsterdam News* and the Associated Negro Press but with no expense accounts nor cash expectancies — we set out to see how the other half of the world lives.

And, after working our way through France and pre-Hitler Germany, and anywhere else where any solvent publications were willing to buy the free lance opinions of two unexcelled experts on the Great American Depression, we found ourselves eventually in Moscow.

And to our surprise and consternation, we found our arrival there created a bit of an occasion. The late Anna Louise Strong, an early Soviet sympathizer, was then editing the *Moscow Daily News*, that country's only English language daily at that time, and Moon and I were promptly invited to become managing editor and makeup editor for one day's edition.

Of course we knew that it was a propaganda stunt, but the bait they offered us was too tempting. For anything that anybody did to that four-page English language tabloid was bound to be an improvement.

Up until that historic day, for instance, the *Moscow Daily News* had never had a front page streamer. Their picture reproductions were passable, but their choices of pictures had been rather mundane. We were reliably informed that the nearest the *Moscow Daily News* had ever come to "cheese cake" had been a stirring picture of a tractor being delivered to a collective farm in the Ukraine.

And even Anna Louise Strong had been mystified by some of the paper's practices. There was the time, she recalled, when they had carried a three-line item on the front page about coal production in the Ural Mountains. And the next day's issue had devoted three full pages of a four page tabloid to a retraction of the three-line item.

"Some day," she confided to me and Moon, "I expect the paper to carry only one story. It will be a simple statement saying: 'Our last issue was a mistake; excuse it please'."

But undaunted even by this, Moon and I set out to meet the challenge. We waded into the Tass copy and came up with a gem. We made it the *Moscow Daily News*' first streamer headline: JIMMY WALKER FORCED OUT AS N.Y. MAYOR. (Of course they changed it later to read: DANCING JIMMY, CAPITALIST DOG, KICKED OUT. But they let it remain a streamer.)

We dug up single column cuts of Jimmy Walker and his bride-to-be, Betty Compton, and balanced off the bottom of page one — at Anna Louise Strong's insistence — with a three column feature on a rally in Union Square for the Scottsboro boys.

But, all in all, though, it was a one day sensation. And Anna Louise Strong rushed to the Mininskaya Hotel the next morning to tell us that our issue of the *Moscow Daily News* had enjoyed the first complete sell-out in the paper's history.

"I'm sure it is because of the new English classes they've started in the Red Army and the secret police schools," she said. We modestly accepted her compliments.

So it came as quite a shock to me and Moon three days later when we discovered that the Moscow outlet for the Soviet Fish Trust was located next door to the offices of the *Moscow Daily News*. And that on the day our great triumph came out, the store had received a record shipment of fresh fish for immediate sale.

How were we to know that the Soviet experiment had not advanced so far at that point that neither wrapping paper nor shopping bags were available to fish-hungry customers?

So last March 5, I hastily checked the Fulton Fish Market and other New York outlets after the *Post* had made its first complete sellout in ending the almost three-month news blackout. And I was assured that not a single one of our 666,000 copies had been purchased for such nefarious purposes.

Ted also served as a writer for a black version of the AP, the Associated Negro Press, sending articles back to the US for it and the Amsterdam News to publish.

Ultimately, the project collapsed. No one today really knows why, but the group ended up having to go home after their interesting summer-long vacation in Moscow. Upon hearing the news, the members of the group reacted variously: normally soft-spoken Moon said: "'We've been screwed'. . . The Comintern official presenting the news then said 'That's a very courageous speech, Mr. Moon, but I wonder if you would be so courageous in Atlanta, Georgia.'" Ted later reported, untruthfully, that Moon replied "'Oh, does it take courage to speak the truth in the Soviet Union?'" Some, like Langston Hughes, accepted the Soviets explanation for why the movie was cancelled, others felt betrayed, or at least felt used. Ted and several of the others at least disliked having been spied on and tailed everywhere they went. While Ted and the others may have found some parts of Communism attractive, or at least sufficiently so to entice them into the

project, their treatment during the film, and their observation of living conditions in Russia persuaded them that, whatever its faults, American democracy at least offered a greater promise of future good, if it could only be made to live up to its high ideals. Ted did see the fight of the workers to join unions and improve their working conditions as the one worthwhile facet of communism and followed up that observation by helping fight the battles for unions in the US.

After the demise of the film project, the group went its separate ways. Some stayed in Russia for a little while, others travelled in Europe, but most came home. In October of 1932, Ted and Moon arrived back in New York penniless, almost literally, and moved back into Ulysses and Sybil's spare bedroom.

And so, seeing that my allotted time is up, we leave Theodore Roosevelt Augustus Major Poston for this evening. He has matured from a mere tadpole of a boy in a segregated school in Hopkinsville, Kentucky to a traveller of the world and a major figure in black journalism in New York City. I have tried to show some of the experiences from his early life that fueled his lifelong passion for civil rights and for trade unions. Perhaps my next paper will explore the fruition of these passions and comment on his development into the leading black journalist of his time.