

TRAMPing Through History
The life of Theodore Roosevelt Augustus Major Poston, part 2

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In my maiden voyage, I reported to you on the early years of the life of Theodore Roosevelt Augusts Major Poston, who wrote the series of short stories published posthumously as The Dark Side of Hopkinsville. My material for that paper, as for this one, came primarily from Ted's biography by Kathleen Hauke, Ted Poston: Pioneer American Journalist and from the supplementary book containing selections of his writings, edited by Kathleen Hauke: A First Draft of History. In the previous paper, Ted grew up, attended Tennessee A&I, moved to New York, began a career in journalism writing free-lance for various black papers, and traveled to the Soviet Union on a trip sponsored by the Soviet government. By this point in Ted's life, I had sufficiently tried the indulgence of the members of the Society, so the remainder of his life awaited a second paper. This evening's dissertation will cover the period of Ted's life from his return to New York in 1932 from the Soviet Union until the Brown versus Board of Education case in 1954.

After Ted Poston returned to New York in 1932 from his jaunt to the Soviet Union, he had to find a job in Depression-bound America. He began working for the Contender, a black paper, which folded after the 1932 election. Therefore, he and Henry Lee Moon, who also worked for the Contender, had to find new jobs. Moon went to work for the Public Works Administration, but Ted found a job with the Amsterdam News, partly because he enjoyed journalism and partly because he distrusted patronage as an avenue for personal advancement. While at the News, he organized the writers into the Newspaper Guild in order to advocate for better conditions and higher pay. His efforts did not sit well with the editors, who tried to lock out the organized reporters. Ted and the others ended up walking the picket line; they received support from a number of other organized labor outfits in New York. This support was newsworthy in and of itself, since several unions had previously declined Negro members or had

declined to advocate on behalf of Negroes. One supporter was Heywood Broun of the New York World. While a communist, he was a friend to Negroes. Because of Guild pressure, the News' circulation dropped by half, in spite of a reduction in the cost of purchasing the paper. Sadie Davis, the black publisher, fired the organizing staff, then declared bankruptcy. Two doctors bought the paper out of bankruptcy and were forced to re-hire Ted and the other strikers, but the new owners kept the strikers only as long as the law required, claiming that they had to let Ted go because of his strident attitude. While Ted's visit to the Soviet Union disillusioned him about the Worker's Paradise, it did convince him of the importance of solidarity when seeking improvement in labor conditions and civil rights. He was therefore willing to make common cause with anyone willing to help his cause.

The picket line at the Amsterdam News became quite the rage in Harlem, receiving support from almost all portions of the community, including taxi drivers, preachers, and debutantes. While on the picket line, Ted met Miriam Rivers, a light-skinned well brought-up young black debutante, who was quite a contrast to dark, boisterous, rough and tumble Ted. In this case, opposites attracted, and they married at St. Phillip's Protestant Episcopal Church in New York on November 13, 1935. Unfortunately, she was not well-suited to be Ted's wife. While Ted continued to grow most of his life, Ming was "mousy, just a little girl". Ted took her to Hopkinsville, where she also did not fit in: "She wouldn't set her own bait, then she raised the devil about cleaning the fish" reported Allison Williams. During their marriage, the couple moved regularly and often shared rooms with other couples. They entertained themselves as much as they could. A common entertainment was a rent party, in which all the participating guests paid a small admission fee which went to make up that month's rent. The couple appears

to have separated within three years; in any case, by the time Ted moved to Washington in 1940, they were divorced.

Prior to the dissolution of the News, Ted covered what is known as the Scottsboro Trial, in which nine black hoboes were charged with raping two white female hoboes. This trial was probably the first to awaken Americans to the extent of injustice experienced by blacks. Ted had to be quite clever to obtain his reports and send them back to New York, because no blacks were accredited newsmen at the time. Ted reported that many of the white reporters would help him, slipping him news that their papers would not print and helping send out his reports. In order to observe the trial, Ted had to dress up on raggedy overalls and sit in the Negro gallery, and made notes under his overcoat in his lap. Later, he would slip into the colored men's restroom and set his story on the partition, from whence a report with the New York Daily News would pick it up and relay it to New York. If that did not work, Ted would walk up the railroad tracks and put hand the notes in to the mail car. One evening, a group of white youths, having heard that a Negro reporter was in town, discovered Ted walking near the tracks. In order to convince them that he was not the reporter, he pulled out false credentials claiming to be a preacher. The ruses got him a kick in the pants, but probably saved his life. During the trial the Decatur paper published a picture on the front page of two white men lynched in California for kidnapping Bret Harte's nephew, suggesting by indirection that this economical form of justice would serve Decatur better than the current trial. Once the trial was over, Ted ostentatiously purchased a rail ticket out of town on the evening train, as did the defense attorney. When the train pulled into town, a crowd of 500-1000 waited for Ted and the attorney, both of whom had slipped out of town earlier.

In the late 1930's, the Works Progress Administration initiated a section for writers called the Federal Writers' Project. Ted and Moon, among many others, were taken on, given assignments writing about the conditions of blacks on the eastern seaboard. Others wrote children's books, plays, or whatever they were assigned. This job ended in 1939, partly because important southern Senators were upset by how much relief money flowed to blacks and partly because of national discontent with using relief money to pay for writing. Facing unemployment once again, Ted and Moon decided to apply for newspaper jobs with white papers, especially since the Amsterdam News had died. Moon applied for a job at the New York Times, which turned him down. Ted applied at the liberal New York Post; the city editor, Walter Lister, said he would hire Ted if Ted could come up with one inch of material from Harlem worthy of front page coverage. Serendipitously, on the way home, Ted and a policeman rescued a white man being forced into a phone booth in the subway station by a group of black youths. It turned out that the man was serving a summons on Father Divine, a popular Negro cleric of dubious morality. Father Divine demanded celibacy from all his followers but not for himself and also took the full paycheck of all his followers in return for providing them food, shelter, and clothing. In several years, he accumulated enough funds to purchase a private estate on the Hudson River near President Roosevelt's home.

While this story obtained Ted a job, he really became established when Gov. Dewey of New York raided the numbers games in Harlem. None of the white reporters knew anything about the numbers game, but Ted knew all about it and had plenty of contacts in Harlem, so his stories made the front page. Up to this time, the Post paid Ted 30 cents an inch, but the editor said it would be cheaper to have Ted on staff, so he hired Ted, making him the first staff reporter on a major American daily. Thus Ted began a career of explaining blacks to a white audience

and educating blacks about themselves. Some of his early work included coverage of Thurgood Marshall's work to root out Ku Klux Klan members from the New York City Police Department and coverage by black papers of the treatment of the Jews in Germany.

At this time, Ted is also doing occasional pieces for black papers. In spring of 1940, he embarked on a journey south with photographer Billy Rowe to cover black participation in social and economic programs. He wrote a series of articles, one of which I excerpt here:

Your companion is Philadelphia-born and Harlem-reared, but he sees your point. A short time later you are amiably debating the race question with a Duke University student, also en route to Norfolk. You are so engrossed in the conversation that you look up blankly when the conductor taps your shoulder just after the train crosses the Virginia line. The Duke student prides himself on his liberalism and has settled the question to his own satisfaction.

"It's only a matter of education," he is saying. "If all Nigras were as intelligent as you two, there would be no problem. He has to be treated like that. Now if you get down to Catfish Row in Charleston. . . ."

Young Duke is still defending his view when the interruption comes. The conductor is very polite. His voice is pitched so low you can hardly hear him. "Won't you please move forward?" he asks.

Young Duke flashes and starts to speak. He checks himself, however, and buries his face in his magazine after nodding an uncertain farewell. You gather your luggage and stumble forward to the Jim Crow car which has been switched on at the station. The car you are leaving is air-conditioned. Its dual seats are comfortable. It is clean and well-lighted and all its equipment is modern. The Jim Crow car is filthy. Its green-backed seats are moth-eaten. Its floor is littered with dirt and tobacco juice. Its windows are streaked with soot and its air is foul.

You stand aside as thirty-six other Negroes crowd in the car which has seats for only twenty-four. A Negro minister sits in the corner and listens intently as you try to keep your companion from making a row. Finally the conductor comes. You try to speak calmly about the car's condition. You point to the four other people standing in the aisle. You insist that something be done. The conductor interrupts. "It's the law," he says. "I don't own the railroad. I just work here."

"The law says separate but equal accommodation," you say. "What's equal about this?"

The conductor doesn't answer and you press your momentary advantage. You point out that only three white people are occupying the air-conditioned car behind you. You demand that those three be transferred and the first car turned over to the Negroes.

The conductor still hesitates, and then the Negro minister reaches over and touches his arm. "It's all right, Cap'n," he says, nodding in your direction, "they're young and don't know no better. We'll make out all right."

You turn back and the conductor is gone. Your companion curses, opens his camera bag, adjusts a flashlight bulb and steps into the other car. He snaps the near-empty coach and then snaps the Jim Crow car.

The conductor and a trainman rush in and raise hell about the pictures. Your companion ignores them and calmly dismantles his camera. When the trainman pushes toward him, a large overalled Negro steps into the aisle. "They done took the pitcher now, Mister," he says softly, "so what the hell you gonna do about it?" The trainman steps back and you address the conductor. You ask his name and tell him you are going into Federal Court. You smile inwardly when his fear becomes evident. You feel a little better. But you are not going to sue. You recall that Representative Arthur W. Mitchell of Chicago did just that—to no avail. And you have neither his time, money nor influence.

Three weeks later, though, your companion has made a hurried trip back to New York and returned with his 1939 Pontiac and a car has settled some of your early difficulties. And then one day you take the wrong detour in Virginia.

Your gas only carries you to the first filling station—a country store with a gas tank—so you pull under the shed and wait. You don't sound your horn for attention; you've learned that much. Five minutes later a white woman's face appears in the grocery window. She regards you silently and then disappears. You sit quietly for a full twenty minutes before a slate-faced white man steps from the store and approaches. He spurts a splash of tobacco juice near your front wheel and wipes his mouth on his sleeve. Then he asks abruptly: "Well, what do you want?"

"I guess thirteen gallons will be enough."

The grocer almost chokes on his tobacco cud. "You say *thirteen*? Yes, suh! Coming right up. Fine car you got there."

You recall this incident a half-dozen times during your next ten days in Virginia and North Carolina. There is the time, for instance, when you hesitate about taking your laundry to a large white establishment in Hampton.

"I don't think they wash colored clothes," a passerby says. But you are in a hurry, and overnight service is advertised, so you go in anyway. The clerk receives you courteously and reaches almost eagerly for your large bundle.

And the next morning when you complain mildly over the loss of a pair of shorts he is visibly disturbed.

"I'm really sorry about that, Mr. Poston," he murmurs anxiously, "and I'll look for it right away. You come back this evening and ask for me, Mr. Poston. I'm Ed. You just ask for Ed, and I'll have it for you." [. . .]

By this time, Moon had gone to work in Washington as part of Roosevelt's black cabinet. He courted Ted's participation, ultimately enticing Ted with a job as a Field and Public Relations Assistant with the National Defense Advisory Commission. At first, the job was a three month temporary one, but the agency kept extending his contract. Ultimately, Ted had two other jobs and stayed in Washington for the entire period of the War. Roosevelt and some of his cabinet, especially Harold Ickes at Interior, recognized that winning the war would require mobilization of all Americans, including blacks and that in order to inspire blacks to full participation in the war effort, something would have to be done to improve their opportunities, which would mean conflict with southern politicians. Roosevelt felt that the goal justified the expenditure of political capital, so he formed his black cabinet to advise him on how best to secure the full participation of Negroes in the war effort. The black cabinet decided that the best way to secure full participation would be to work towards equality, which they did by securing some early affirmative action work on government contracts. Ted and his colleagues fought and negotiated with unions, management, and government agencies to obtain fair treatment for Negroes on war-related work. One requirement was that blacks be paid the same amount as whites for the same work; another was that a certain percentage of the payroll on government contracts would go to blacks. Ted's worked largely in the public relations area, explaining to whites the desirability of greater Negro participation in the war effort and explaining to blacks how participating in the war effort would help them advance. In this way, Ted helped secure the active support of the Negro population for the war effort.

While in Washington, Ted met Marie Byrd, a tall black woman who loved the limelight as much as Ted. She was calculating rather than submissive and pursued her own career. Their marriage lasted 15 years, so obviously she felt some affection for Ted, but early on, she might

also have found a connection to Ted, known to every important black in Washington and also known to many important whites, desirable. After she and Ted moved to New York at the end of the war, she made their home a social gathering place. Many prominent Negroes floated through parties at the Poston home, as did some liberal whites, especially Post employees. The Postons evened hobnobbed with the Rockefellers.

In October of 1942, Ted took a position as head of the Negro desk of the Office of War Information. Basically Ted continued to interpret blacks to whites and to show blacks how participation in the war effort furthered their own self-interest. While in this position, Ted created a pamphlet explaining the contribution of Negroes to the war effort. It received widespread distribution, as its publishers intended it to encourage Negro participation and improve morale. Some black leaders disliked the pamphlet, feeling that it covered up the discrimination blacks experienced while helping the whites fight their war. On the other side, some southern Congressmen expressed displeasure at the publication of this pamphlet that trumpeted the achievements of Negroes. Ted's white boss defended the work and Ted by saying that "the Negro is 'the largest racial minority in the country and has a special interest in their part in the war. The pamphlet was written specifically to point out the stake that 13,000,000 American Negroes have in the war, and to help counteract Japanese propaganda designed to foment racial discord in this country'". Eventually southern Senators created enough pressure that Congress defunded the Office of War Information. In March of 1943, Ted moved over to the White House, basically to do the same thing – explain Negroes to whites and to themselves. The death of Roosevelt saddened Ted, as it did many Negroes, and with the end of the war, he moved back to New York, where he rejoined the staff at the Post.

When Ted rejoined the Post, he took a job as a rewriter, which meant that he took stories over the phone from others and then prepared them for publication. It also meant a larger salary. Sometimes, Ted would write stories himself, especially if the story had a focus on Negroes. During his 27 years with the Post, Ted wrote extensively about the civil rights movement, as well as doing personality profiles, book reviews, international news, and later, obituaries of black leaders.

In 1949, Ted covered the Little Scottsdale Trial in Tavares, Florida, near Orlando. After four black men were accused of raping a white housewife, the white citizens of Groveland rioted, shooting up the black settlements and torching them. The trial received national coverage, especially from the Post. Ted wrote a series of articles covering the riots, the facts about the rape uncovered in court testimony, statements made by witnesses that were not used in court, the behavior of the citizens towards Ted, the Negro reporter, and towards the Negro attorneys, and the treatment of the four accused men, one of whom was shot to death by sheriff's deputies 10 days after the alleged rape. Ted himself experienced some of the hostility that the local blacks had faced.

"Horror for Sunny South: Lynch Mob's Breath of Death Scorches Reporter Fleeing Florida"

New York Post 8 September 1949: 2, 7, 8, 10, 18

How does it feel to be chased down a lonely moonlit Florida road—in a small car careening from side to side at a 90-mile clip—and with sudden death facing you from a possible collision ahead or a bloodthirsty mob behind?

Believe me, I had no desire to find out personally when I went to Tavares, Fla., last Thursday to cover the trial of three Negro youths accused of raping a young white housewife.

But I found out. And so did Franklin H. Williams and Horace Hill, Negro NAACP attorneys who defended the three youths, and Ramona Lowe, a Chicago Defender reporter.

I had only one purpose in going to Tavares. I wanted to cover the trial, and to record the personal stories of some of the reign-of-terror victims who had fled to the woods last July 16, when burning and pillaging mobs invaded Negro settlements in Glendale, Stuckey's Still, and the neighboring Bay Lake area.

And by 8:56 P.M. last Saturday night—an hour and 30 minutes after an all-white jury began deliberating the fate of Samuel Shepherd and Wal-

ter Irvin, 22-year-old veterans, and Charles Greenlee, 16-year-old itinerant worker—I thought I had pretty well served my purpose.

There had been irritations and limitations over the three-day period [...] but nothing that a Southern-born Negro couldn't survive, even having lived in the North for 20-odd years.

In fact, at 8:56 Saturday night, I was in Tavares' one long distance phone booth a half block from the stately Lake County courthouse trying to calm the fears of my Post Home News editors, who had not heard from me in a mere three hours: I thought they would be worried, even after such a short time out of touch with me, because I had been jostled by a couple of hoodlums on the courthouse steps the day before (that's when my glasses broke). I explained to the office that I had tried to phone twice since 5 P.M., but that the lines had been busy. And what proof had I that the lines had not been busy?

And could I explain to Jimmy Graham, my city editor, that the long distance operator had seemed a little miffed at our last conversation; that she had probably realized then for the first time that I was a Negro, and that she had committed the faux pas of calling me "Mr. Poston" for three days running.

Of course not. I had been more amused than irritated when she curtly called me "Ted" on my two unsuccessful calls later, so I merely told the city desk:

"Keep your shirt on. There's absolutely nothing to worry about. Tell Jimmy the verdict will be in any minute, and I'll be heading for Orlando—40 miles away—later tonight."

I was still chuckling 10 minutes later when I went back to the press table (the Negro press table over near the railing) and Williams walked over from the other side of the room where he had been conferring with Alex Akerman Jr. and Joseph Price Jr., the two white Florida lawyers who had also defended the boys.

"Judge Futch wants us to get out of Lake County the minute this verdict is read," he whispered. "Neither he nor Jess Hunter (the State's attorney) want any more trouble or bad publicity. You watch the judge for the sign, Ramona; Ted probably won't catch it without his glasses."

Even then there was no alarm—Lake County had had enough bad publicity during the three-day rioting; no one was fool enough to risk any more.

The jury filed in three minutes later and Shepherd and Irvin were doomed to death while Greenlee was given "mercy," life imprisonment.

As the courtroom spectators, already warned by Judge Futch against any demonstration, received in stony silence the news that at least one of the boys would not be electrocuted, Williams and Hill walked rapidly to the door behind the judge's bench.

As four state troopers escorted them quickly down the corridor, Ramona and I started to follow, but hesitated when Jess Hunter started to address the audience.

"This verdict is the verdict of the people of Lake County," he was saying. "I ask you to accept the verdict and retire quietly to your homes."

I looked beyond Hunter at the courtroom and felt my first but momentary apprehension. The once-jammed room was half empty. Women, children and 75 Negroes in the Jim-Crow half of the balcony filled most of the still-occupied seats.

I touched Ramona's arm, guided her into the corridor—where we almost bumped into Mrs. Norma Lee Padgett, the 17-year-old housewife whose unsupported word had wrecked three youthful lives—and headed for the crowded third-floor stairway.

We became separated as Ramona preceded me down the steps through a hostile sea of white faces. I walked carefully—there was some slight jostling—but I intended taking no chances at this late date.

I reached the courthouse lobby without incident and headed for the rear door through which the troopers had escorted the lawyers, but an almost imperceptible nod from a departing Negro spectator sent me out the side door to the sprawling lawn where I heard Hill calling softly: "Ted?"

He had turned his 1948 sedan around, double-parked it in the wrong direction on a one-way street, doused his lights but kept his motor running. I walked swiftly across the shadowy lawn, between two of the towering royal palm trees surrounding the courthouse, and jumped in the front seat. The car was already moving.

But suddenly Frank Williams asked: "Where's Ramona?" I realized then he was on the back seat alone and opened the door to go back. Horace Hill stopped the car, but put out a hand to restrain me. "Wait a minute. . ." he stated.

"Don't argue now, Horace. Let him go," Williams snapped and Hill turned around to face him.

"Look, Frank," he spoke soberly but quickly, "you're not in New York now. These clay-eating crackers aren't joking. I know; I wasn't born down here for nothing—"

They were still arguing as I ran swiftly across the lawn again, cursing

both Ramona and myself under my breath, but refusing to admit my own growing fears.

I found Ramona in the lobby, calmly talking to James Shepherd, elder brother of one of the doomed boys, and apparently oblivious of the hateful stares of the dozen white men. As I approached, Ramona cried:

“The sheriff won’t let him have his car back.” (James’ 1942 Mercury had been a state exhibit.) “He told him to come back Tuesday—”

I ignored Ramona and spoke to James Shepherd. “You got a way to get back to Orlando tonight?” I asked. He nodded, saying “Mr. J. P. Ellis of the NAACP is—”

“Well, take it. Now.” I cut him off, firmly guiding the still-protesting Ramona towards the side door. “But we can’t leave him like that, Ted—” she was saying until I snapped shortly:

“The hell we can’t. Come on.”

Hill was really angry as we raced back to the car, although his anger had some of the quality of the fear I was admitting to myself for the first time.

“Now you’ve done it,” he said, as Ramona scrambled through the single far-side door and I took my seat beside him. “The state patrol escort’s been gone 10 minutes with the others. We’ll never catch up now!”

With our lights still doused, we pulled around the corner and headed for the Orlando highway. For 10 minutes and two miles out of Tavares Hill cursed us for the “damfoolishness” which had made us miss the escort. Even Williams said at one point:

“You both should have thought of our spot. After all, we were the lawyers. They blame us for getting Greenlee out of the chair. You both might have had a chance, but not the first Negro lawyers to ever appear in Lake County Circuit Court.” [. . .]

Williams started to say something, but another car suddenly appeared behind us and shot ahead, blinking its lights three times. (Even now, I can’t recall whether this car had been following us or whether it dashed from one of the many dirt side roads.)

Simultaneously, [. . .] two parked cars lighted up and started diagonally across the highway. The one on the left swerved swiftly back towards the side however as Hill, stepping on the gas, drove straight towards it and almost sideswiped the signal car as we shot ahead of all three.

The other car righted itself and all three dashed up the road directly behind us, two of them almost abreast.

Williams and Ramona peered anxiously out the rear window as Hill—the sedan was now making 83 miles an hour—caught up with and passed

three slow-moving cars ahead, executing an almost perfect “S” as he shot by the first on the left, the second on the right and the third on the left again.

Williams reported softly that one of the cars had remained on our tail during the whole intricate maneuver and had lost only a few yards in the process. The other two were dropping slightly behind. We were on a short straight stretch and the speedometer climbed slowly past 85.

“I think he’s picking up a little bit, Horace,” Williams reported, adding softly: “This might be it, after all.”

Ramona was sobbing, muttering, “Oh, God. It’s my fault. I got you into this. It’s my fault. I should’ve —”

I yelled “Shut up!”, more to quiet my own fears than her moaning voice. [. . .]

I was left alone with my thoughts.

What were they? How can you tell? Really scared people don’t think much of anything, but getting away. You try to deny the existing situation. You tell yourself “It’s only somebody trying to scare you” and you close your eyes and nurse the thought even when you know it isn’t true.

You curse yourself, of course. You recall that you really didn’t have to be in this spot. Hadn’t the city desk three times turned down your request to cover Florida’s “Little Scottsboro Case?” But, oh no, you wanted to be a big shot.

Then your anger shifts to your pursuers — even if it is only a cover-up for your stark fear? What right have they to chase you, to kill you — to make you kill yourself?

And suddenly you open your eyes to find yourself hurtling forward in a stygian blackness, lighted only by the reflection of pursuing headlights in your own rear-view mirror. You are on a long straight stretch of highway and Hill has cut off his own lights, trusting only the light of the Florida moon.

And only when Williams yells: “Straighten up, Horace!” do you realize that not only are you plunging through darkness at 85 to 90 miles an hour, but that the car is also zig-zagging from side to side on the road. Hill explains succinctly:

“Getting closer. Might shoot at tires.”

You picture what this will mean and your fright is almost paralyzing. But suddenly you see the lights of Apopka, a bustling rural village, up ahead. [. . .]

The green of the first of Apopka’s three traffic lights is visible only as a blur to my weak eyes, but as we shoot towards it the blur turns to red.

"For God's sake, stop, Horace," Williams yells from the back seat. "If we hit some of these crackers—"

But Hill only muttered "Naw" and sent the car hurtling through the light and the country town at 80 miles an hour, scattering a few pedestrians near what appeared to be a movie house, and missing by inches a pickup truck which crossed our path at the third traffic light. [...]

No one said anything, but Hill pushed the car back up to 90.

Williams spoke again: "I got a good look back there in Apopka. There's three on the front seat. One is bare-headed."

[...] Williams' voice, almost detached in its seeming calmness, went on.

"I really believed that pickup truck saved us," he was saying. "One of the crackers was leaning out the front window just before we passed it. I'm sure he was aiming at our tires or this back window one . . . I believe that skidding knocked him out."

Ramona was looking out the back window. [...] None of us was prepared for her sudden scream:

"They're not back there now," she was yelling, "they must have turned off. They're not back there any more."

Williams fumbled for a match in his side pocket. Hill glanced briefly at the rear-view mirror but didn't slow down a bit.

Two minutes later, we hit the city limits of Orlando.

Well towards the center of the city, Hill headed the car to a lighted curb and parked.

We looked at each other in silence. There was no elation, no release from the fear which still gripped us. [...]

Williams broke the silence:

"Drive over to Akerman's office, Horace," he said. "We've got to get to work on that appeal."

This series of articles won Ted numerous awards, along with a nomination for a Pulitzer Prize.

During the brief ascendancy of Senator McCarthy, Ted and several other reporters at the ultra-liberal Post were targeted during the communist hunts. Like many of his contemporaries, Ted had flirted with communism, seeing in it a potential for improvement over the legal discrimination of his day. Like Ted, most became disillusioned with it after a period of time, recognizing that, at least in practice, Communism stifled freedom of expression and other

personal freedoms. As an experiment, Ted and another reporter repeated an experiment tried by the Madison, Wisconsin paper. The two reporters drew up a petition containing solely quotations from the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, then went out on the streets asking people to sign it. Hardly anyone would sign it and some of those approached accused the two reporters of being Communists, even after reading the petition.

After New York passed a strengthened Civil Rights Law, Ted sent Marie out to test it. Previously, the best nightclubs in the city would not admit Negroes. When Marie set out to test the new law, each club admitted her, but in several cases, the club management put her and her escort in a separate room away from the white patrons. The clubs did not have any entertainment and very few other patrons in the rooms to which they relegated Marie Poston. Each night, Marie went home and reported her experiences to Ted, who turned them into an article.

In the summer of 1953, Ted and Marie vacationed in Hopkinsville, staying with his cousin Mary Belle Braxton Fleming. They went fishing, visited with friends such as Allison Williams and even Rat Joiner. Ted in particular envied Rat and the other friends their children. He and Marie tried to persuade some of his Hopkinsville cousins to come live with them in Harlem for school or jobs.

Ted also covered the career of Thurgood Marshall, including a case in Charleston, South Carolina. In this case, Ted became more than an observer. The judge, J. Waties Waring, had already earned a reputation for liberalism by ruling that black teachers must receive the same pay as white teachers and by ruling that blacks must be allowed to vote in primaries. When a case involving school segregation in Clarendon County appeared on his docket, the judge received death threats. Rather than pass them along to the police or other local officials in Charleston, the judge passed the details of the plot on to Ted, who was to reveal them only if the judge met a

violent death. When the court case was over, the Judge Waring moved to a New York bench and Ted never revealed the details of the plot.

This case was a precursor to Brown versus Board of Education. As part of the evidence in the Clarendon County case, Thurgood Marshall and his team included testimony from a psychologist who used dolls for testing black children to show that segregated schooling fostered a poor self-image. In the final Supreme Court decision, the justices singled out this testimony as a particularly cogent argument against Plessy versus Ferguson's doctrine of separate but equal. In 1954 when the Supremes decided Brown versus Board of Education, Ted was in the Post newsroom getting the news line by line over the wire. Everyone in the room, including Ted, was surprised by the unanimous verdict. Quoting Ted: "Everybody was all excited and yelling and screaming, and there I was gettin' this stuff fed to me and being very happy and not being able to hear myself think. I remember climbing up on the desk and shouting: 'Will you goddamn niggers shut up so I can write this story?' Of course I was the only Negro in the room".

After the decision came down, James Wechsler, editor of the Post, sent Ted into Dixie to cover Southern reactions. He spoke with black and white teachers and politicians, including Governor Talmadge of Georgia. After keeping Ted waiting for a long time, the governor's secretary led Ted into Talmadge's office via a back door. During the interview, the governor addressed Ted by his first name, even though the two had never met. Ted reported the governor's remarks: ""You say you were born and raised in Hopkinsville, KY. . . Well, I'm sure they don't have any mixed schools in Hopkinsville. And it doesn't seem to have hurt you none. You seem like a pretty smart boy.' 'But, Governor,' I remonstrated quietly, 'I'm inhibited.'"" Several days later, the Hopkinsville school board announced that they would begin desegregating

the schools the following fall. Ted responded in print to this news by replying familiarly to Governor Talmadge: "I felt less inhibited already – and I wanted to tell Herman about it."

On the same trip, Ted passed a nice new school several miles south of Albany, Georgia. He asked the Negro workman if he had heard of the Supreme Court decision. The workman answered in the affirmative. Ted then asked if he was surprised. The workman answered in the negative. When Ted asked why, the man responded: "Well, as soon as these white folks started building this fine new combination school for us Negroes, I knew they were going to figure out some way that they could get into it too."

Seeing that my time is up and not wishing to try your patience any further, I will break off the discussion of Ted Poston's life, to resume it at a future date. A hint of things to come would include the integration of Little Rock Central High School and other educational institutions, the passage of voting rights legislation, and Ted's decline and death.