

of the hundreds of able Negroes who served as State legislators, U.S. Congressmen and Senators.

Although I was disappointed in these young "history" students I was not surprised. I had seen the textbooks that my own children brought home from a suburban New York school. I recall two illustrations in particular from a social studies text.

One showed slave children frolicking in the cottonfields. The other was a picture of a "slave cabin"—a clapboard bungalow covered with roses which closely resembled a cottage in a modern housing development.

Ignorance about the role of the Negro in American history is not limited to white children. I have spoken in schools in Harlem and the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, as well as to NAACP adult groups, and have found, far too frequently, the same lack of knowledge.

Only last year a graduate of a Negro college in the South, now studying for his Ph. D. in New York, talked to me glibly of carpet-baggers and scalawags but did not know that two Negroes, Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce, had represented Mississippi in the U.S. Senate during Reconstruction.

Obviously, much of this ignorance can be traced to the American history taught in our schools which systematically suppresses and distorts the truth, whether by intent or default. Several studies have recently been made on the treatment of Negroes in history textbooks.

The best that I have seen is "The Negro in American History Textbooks," prepared by a panel of historians from the University of California, and published by the California State Department of Education. They found that the Negro was virtually omitted from the books they examined and that the texts "reflected views on racial and sectional themes that have been rejected or drastically modified by the best of current historical scholarship."

But I can speak only of my own experience as a writer. My books are what are known as "race books," bought by schools for supplementary reading rather than as classroom texts. All but one have been published by Doubleday & Co.

I first became interested in Negro history when I was looking for a dramatic subject for a book for girls and found it in Harriet Tubman, leader of the underground railroad. My biography of her, "Freedom Train," was published in 1954. It had a modest acceptance then and has been selling better in recent years.

Another book, "Captain of the Planter, the Story of Robert Smalls," was a more ambitious undertaking. It required over a year of original research because, remarkably, there were no full-length biographies of Smalls to draw on. Smalls was a slave who stole a Confederate gunboat and sailed it past the guns of Fort Sumpter to turn it over to the Union fleet.

Hailed as a war hero—with his photograph in *Harpers Weekly*—he was awarded prize money and freedom by a special act of Congress. Until the war's end he fought for the Union as captain of the *Planter*, the ship he had liberated. After the war he became a leader of the Republican Party in South Carolina and was sent to Congress five times. In the post-Reconstruction years he fought a losing battle for Negro rights. His last elective office was as a delegate to the South Carolina constitutional convention in 1895 which disfranchised the Negroes of the State.