

Gloria, The Leader

It is not at all out of joint with history that one of the great dramas of the present hour is being enacted under the leadership of a resolute woman, Gloria Hays Richardson, at Cambridge, Maryland. For this was the birthplace, the home, the early slave-dwelling environment of Gloria's illustrious spiritual ancestor-Harriet Tubman.

Harriet Tubman was born only a few miles from the present scenes of contention and it is inconceivable that her great work in the underground Railroad is unknown to Mrs. Richardson and to the militant community of Cambridge.

In fact, it is more than likely that the Negroes of this area, troubled by the knowledge that one of the greats of American Negro history had her origins there, and troubled by the profound darkness of human relations in that area, decided finally to move in the same spirit and with the same vigor as that which motivated the great heroine of the Underground Railroad.

This region was especially feudal and slave-ridden and oppressive in the time when Harriet was born, which was 1820, and it remained that way throughout the period of pre-Civil War days. It remains one of the hotbeds of supremacist racism to this day.

One can speak highly of the lush vegetation of that part of America, but little that is noteworthy can be said of the social relations governing the two racial groups in that land. The Eastern Shore might well be some Distant Shore of another country, as far as the practice of democracy is concerned.

It was against this mood and background that Harriet Tubman revolted and it is in opposition to the perpetuation of this type of civilization that Gloria Richardson finds herself.

It is good to be able to say that at her side she has the intrepid type of militant which so often characterized the groups of slaves which Harriet led off to freedom via Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York and into Canada.

Today, it is a little different. The Negroes of Cambridge make their stand at Cambridge. Gloria Richardson does not need to go North or lead her followers North. They stay, they sit, they stand, they block, they use their fists if need be, and there has been stronger recourse than this.

The life of the whites of the Eastern Shore is in some cases about the same as it was in the colonial period, and by the same token they rather expect their fellow citizens of color to abide by the social customs of that earlier day: stay in your place, say yessir, nosir, stay in your own backyard, stay out of our restaurants, our schools, our lives, our country.

But Gloria Richardson and her fellow citizens of Cambridge have cast the die; they will have no more of this. America is theirs as well as anyone's. It is they who have tilled the soil of Dorchester County, and many, many Negroes were settled in that community long before the whites arrived.

A time of reckoning is at hand. Old Harriet must watch it all with a bit of vinegar and much laughter, and she has her eyes on that spiritual grand-daughter who runs about in dungarees, sneakers and a white blouse—and leads the men!