Blacks struggle to overcome 'second-class' status

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Clarine Boyer is secretary of the Easton Branch of the NAACP.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is the last in a series of three essays by local black leaders for Black History Month. Clarine Boyer is secretary of the Easton Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the board of directors of the Easton Area Neighborhood Center and the Easton Area Federal Credit Union. She sits on the boards of the Easton Boys Club and Project Aware of the Northampton County Area Community College.

By CLARINE BOYER

The black man is first to be fired and last to be hired. He is the most economically depressed person in this country and, in fact, the world.

No matter how much education or how much experience a black man might possess, he is disqualified because of the color of his skin.

No other nationality, no other race has been treated like him. He has been relegated to a second-class citizenship.

In the various industries in the Lehigh Valley, who holds the supervisory and the better-paying jobs? Whites.

The job unions, which are supposed to protect the workers' rights, defeat their very purpose when they keep blacks out of office. While blacks can and do belong to the unions, they are barred from the leadership in these unions.

Here in Easton, not one black works in the office of the Ladies International Garment Workers. The union says they help blacks, and blacks work in their shops. These blacks, however, have the lowest-paid jobs.

Again in Easton, under a former mayor, a white who was only a high school graduate held the position of city coordinator. A black would have had to have a string of letters behind his name to hold a like position.

From the very early stages of life — the school years — blacks are held back, denied training in the vo-tech school. It seems the classes are always full. Yes, once in a while a black child is admitted — tokenism.

I recall an incident of a young black girl who wished to take secretarial science. The white teacher advised the girl that this would be a waste of time, because no one around here would hire a black for such a position.

This girl ignored the teacher's advice, took the course, graduated and obtained a job at the Social Security office, in which she continued for many years.

Children — black children — are thrown out of school wholesale. Their white teachers refuse to take a little time with them. They don't care to be bothered. A little love, a little attention would go far and would work wonders.

Black teachers who do care and who would help the children are not hired.

Not one black works in the school board office. Even a white janitor cleans the floor.

The county jails are overcrowded with blacks, but blacks committing crimes on blacks are not punished. How many blacks who have murdered or maimed other blacks are walking the streets today? Let a black touch a white man, however, and the book is thrown at him.

Usually all-white juries send our blacks to jail. Seldom is a black person on a jury. There should be a better system that would include more blacks on the jury. Why is justice lopsided? Is there no justice for the black man?

Despite these depressing conditions, some blacks have risen up.

We blacks can feel a sense of pride in Martin Luther King Jr., who caused some of the walls of discrimination to come crumbling down, and:

- In Mary M. Lord Bethume and the part she played in the education of youth.
- In our own Linda Mann, who graduated from Harvard University with a law degree.
- In Lorenzo Crowe and Andrew Rodrigues, young black lawyers who practice law in our city.
- In Mrs. Shirley Goode, a black teacher in the Easton school system who has so lovingly given of her time and talents to help both little white children and black children. She has worked far beyond the call of duty; indeed, this teacher might well be a role model for all teachers.

There is Earnest Morial, mayor of the city of New Orleans, who as branch president of the NAACP of New Orleans was very instrumental in desegregating the schools, and who has done much to improve the city.

Among those of national fame and who were truly trailblazers are Thomy Lafon, Phyllis Wheatley, Benjamin Bonneker, Sojourner Truth, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman, James Madison Bill and many many more.

In spite of intolerable odds, we as a race are slowly rising. And in the immortal words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we will one day reach the "promised land."