

Obituaries

BENJAMIN QUARLES

Benjamin Quarles died on November 16, 1996, in Mitchellville, Maryland, in the Collington Episcopal Life Care Community, where he and his second wife, Ruth Brett Quarles, had been in residence. His passing marks the end of an era during which Quarles, John Hope Franklin, and others bridged the scholarly gap between the era of the 'discovery' of African American history by the legendary Carter G. Woodson and his circle, and more recent times when black history has been the subject of unending and evermore sophisticated scholarly inquiry. Quarles's own publishing history testifies to his place in the broadening reach of African American history. His *Frederick Douglass* emerged in 1948 from the Associated Publishers, an arm of the small, seemingly parochial, Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. His subsequent works were published not only by distinguished university presses—Illinois, North Carolina, and others—but also by worldwide trade presses such as Oxford University Press and Collier-Macmillan.

Blessed with a broadly eclectic mind, Quarles was never content with ploughing familiar ground. His *Douglass* led him to range over the broad sweep of antebellum antislavery movements and their impact on black Americans in such books as *The Negro in the Civil War* (1953), *The Negro in the American Revolution* (1961), *Lincoln and the Negro* (1962), *Black Abolitionists* (1969), and

This reminiscence has been adapted by Mr. Cripps from 'A Certain Style: Benjamin Quarles and the Scholarship of the Center,' a tribute published in the Fall 1998 issue of *Maryland Historical Magazine* (93: 289–300).

Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown (1974). But his most far-reaching work was his 'best-selling' *The Negro in the Making of America* (1964), a book that went into multiple editions and printings, thereby affecting the intellectual lives of thousands of high school and college students, for whom it was their entry into a heretofore hidden, incomplete, indeed distorted history. For these readers—'not . . . for the scholars,' as he wrote in his preface—he meant to sketch a black history as 'a tidal force in American life,' a tale of 'the tragic and the heroic.' In it he was more teacher than researcher.

Indeed, this is how many of us remember Ben Quarles: the rigorous, quietly driven, scholarly mind that was as much master of the classroom as of the printed page. Although spending the bulk of his teaching career at historically black Morgan State College (now University), he insisted on his students first seeing black history 'in the round,' in the setting of a larger world, and second, respecting the field enough to bring their finest effort to it.

In fact, that is how several of them conveyed to me the sense of the man many years, even decades, after they had sat in his classes. One of them, herself a veteran teacher, recalled *his* black history as 'typically American, always hopeful.' Another of his students, also later a teacher, thought of Ben's classes as 'completing the mosaic or the quilt' of American history. As to the intellectual rigor he expected of his students, one of them, now a judge on the Baltimore bench, remembered that 'he was always so prepared for every class, that he left you with a benchmark.'

Yet this undemanding teacher grounded each moment of teaching in bedrock of unassuming humility leavened by an occasional spark of sly wit, a trait noted by the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian James M. McPherson in his introduction to the 1997 reprint of Quarles's *Douglass*. Quarles's writing, said McPherson, 'is imbued with a quiet sense of humor and irony.' Whenever a student would contribute a shakily supported fact, Ben would inquire archly: 'And is this *new* information?' Or in a similar encounter he might have asked: 'And what is your source for this

date?' But always with a wry grin rather than a satirical edge. As for his humble manner, at the end of every particularly stimulating class he would close by saying, 'Thank you for this hour.'

How did an African American young man take on this circumstance, quietly mannered dignity that was so lightened with a strain of wit? Perhaps it was a youthful life in black Boston, attending Boston English high school, or whiling away hours reading in Columbus Park or in the Boston Public Library, or, as his nieces recalled at his memorial service, his 'museum hopping.' Or as it must have been for a young black man whose fathers and brothers worked as porters on the Boston subways and as summer waiters on the Bar Harbor packet: waiting tables taught one the most elegant of etiquette. Or perhaps this veneer was polished after college at Shaw University in North Carolina, when he boldly went off to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, where his thesis adviser was the gruff-mannered William B. Hesseltine, in response to whom a cool diffidence might be a wise course. In any case, his distinctive combination of quiet dignity and self-effacement marked his entire life. Toward the end of his service at Morgan, we discussed the fate of his 'papers' (the university was planning a commemorative 'Quarles Room' in the library). He confessed that there were no Quarles Papers. Upon reading and reviewing a book, he would sooner or later give it away to a passing colleague. As for his research notes and drafts of his books and articles, they either repose in his publishers' archives or are lost. Like his correspondence, they were routinely, almost annually, discarded, so the Quarles we might have found in them is lost to us.

Quarles came to the American Antiquarian Society rather late in his career, having been elected to membership in the autumn of 1975, only months after he had retired from Morgan. Thereafter, he attended only one meeting of the Society, in Philadelphia in 1976, wrote an obituary for Charles Wesley, and contributed an article to its *Proceedings* in 1979: 'Black History's Antebellum Origins.' Never much of a traveler, save on family visits, and rarely in attendance at historical conferences, he promised as

much upon his election. 'I may not find it convenient to get to Worcester as often as I should like,' he wrote in response to his election.

By the end of his active career, Quarles had sat on numerous boards, commissions, and councils, among them the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, the Maryland Historical Society, the Frederick Douglass Museum of African Art, the Amistad Research Center, the Library of Congress, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Joint Center for Political Studies. Along the way he had written or edited no less than ten books, written chapters and introductions for twenty-eight others, three dozen articles, and sixty-some informal, lesser works that he called 'shorter pieces.' In addition to these works, he served as counsel to other editing and publishing enterprises, among them the Booker T. Washington Papers, the Frederick Douglass Papers, the Black Abolitionist Editorial Project, and the Lydia Maria Child Papers, among others. By the end of his life he had been awarded more than a dozen honorary doctorates.

At the time of his death in 1996, he was survived by his wife, Ruth Brett Quarles, his daughters, Pamela Quarles of Falls Church, Virginia, and Roberta Knowles of St. Croix, American Virgin Islands, two brothers, Henry and Lorenzo of Boston, a sister, Ann Silvera, of East Elmhurst, New York, and three grandchildren.

Thomas Cripps

J. RICHARD BULLOCK

J. Richard Bullock became a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1984 shortly after he was elected chief executive officer of the Wyman-Gordon Company. Dick, as he was known by his friends and associates, was born in Worcester on March 2, 1923, and spent his entire business life with the Wyman-Gordon

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