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**MUSIC**

**The Faces of Harry Belafonte**

**NAT HENTOFF**

DEPENDING ON whom one reads and talks to, Harry Belafonte is several people. A recent widely publicized *American Weekly* article characterized him as arrogant and narcissistic and quoted his former wife as saying he wants to be white. This April in Washington, members of the Youth March for Integrated Schools presented him with a citation. A booking agent who dislikes his singing style nonetheless watches gleefully when Belafonte appears at the Waldorf-Astoria because "he not only crams those songs about Jim Crow down their throats, but he makes them pay so much to hear the truth."

Belafonte's mail similarly is sent to different images of him. There are protest letters, some psychotically violent. Belafonte files the latter in case anything should ever happen to his family. A recent letter from a girl in Mississippi asked if he'd sell her an autographed picture. She isn't allowed, she explained, to watch him or any other Negro on TV at home, and has to slip over to her friend's house to see him.

There are protests from Negroes. Just as older jazzmen were not allowed to play the blues in the parlors of upper-middle-class Negroes thirty and more years ago—and in many homes the blues are still not welcome—so Belafonte is criticized by some contemporary Negroes for singing of chain gangs, cotton picking, and other reminders of the times when the Negro was regarded as property.

"To some of them," Belafonte says sadly, "the supreme goal has come to mean not just equality with whites but total acceptance of white culture. Their own past is no good. They don't like my singing 'Cotton Fields,' for example. They want to forget all the pain of that life, but they don't see the history that's there. The cotton empire was built on the sweat, blood, and annihila-

tion of hundreds of thousands of Negroes. And in that very song, there are the lines

*Yes, I was over in Arkansas  
When the sheriff asked me  
What did you come here for?*

that are another indication of the pressure that was always on to contain the Negro. It's hardly a song that accepts those conditions."

OTHER Belafonte songs are blunter. He will not appear on television unless he has complete control of his part of a program. On his Steve Allen appearance a few months ago, he chose all the songs, including "Darlin' Cora":

*Wake up, wake up, Darlin' Cora,  
I want to see you one more time  
The sheriff and the hound dogs are  
comin'  
I got to move on down the line.*

*I don't know why, Darlin' Cora,  
Don't know what the reason can be  
I never yet found a single town  
Where me and the boss agree.*

*I ain't a man to be played with  
I ain't nobody's toy  
Been workin' for my pay for a long,  
long time  
How come he still calls me boy...*

*I whopped that man, Darlin' Cora,  
He fell down where he stood  
Don't know if I was wrong, Darlin'  
Cora,  
But Lord, it shore felt good...*

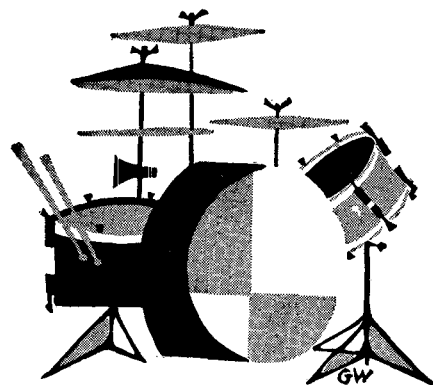
Belafonte is careful, however, not to editorialize throughout a program on television, in a night club, or at a concert. "If there's no relief, they won't be entertained, and if they're not entertained, no message at all will get through. Also, whenever we're singing material that has protest in it, the audience must un-

derstand that this is a protest they're more or less invited to be part of, and not be the recipients of. Otherwise, how could we make our point?"

IN ALL his work—singing, acting, producing films—Belafonte feels that he is living at least a double existence. He is an artist, but he is also a Negro artist. "There are certain roles I've been asked to play in films, roles as a villain. I wanted to do some of them badly, but the pictures weren't balanced. They didn't have another Negro who was *not* a villain."

"You're being hypersensitive," a visitor told Belafonte. "If the Negro wants to be accepted as an equal, he has to make it as a bad guy as well as a hero."

Belafonte, characteristically tense and careful about what he says and how he says it, paused for what seemed a long time. "Certainly that's a valid point," he finally said, "but we're in a period in which all of us—white and Negro—are in a state of growth in our relations with each



other. That's why we need a balance now in Negro roles in a powerful medium like films."

By balance, however, Belafonte doesn't mean the Negro in films should be, as he said recently in the *New York Times*, "one side of a black-and-white sociological argument where brotherhood always wins in the end." In the pictures his own company, Harbel Productions, is planning, he intends "to show the Negro in conflicts that stem from the general human condition and not solely from the fact of his race."

"What about Amos and Andy?" Belafonte was asked. "Negroes watch and like them and yet they're criticized by hypersensitive people in

much the same way some Jews protest against dialect comedians."

"I'm not offended by their sense of comedy," Belafonte answered. "They're skillful. But they do contribute to the caricature of Negroes as shiftless people who look for easy ways out, who are inarticulate, engage in subterfuge, and get into outlandish situations. Nearly all Negroes are like that, according to their scripts."

Belafonte's concern with spreading a more accurate image of the Negro extends to what's taught about Negro history in schools. "Except for advanced students in colleges and universities, most pupils are given a distorted idea of what the Negro has done and who he is. You ought to look at some of the history books in grammar and high schools. Many Negro history professors have called for the revision of those books, and it'll have to be done. The sooner, the better."

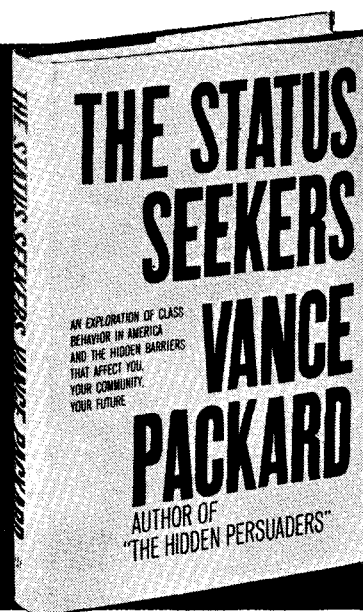
BELAFONTE'S own multiple image of himself figured in his long search for a New York apartment last year. It was the same year in which the city had passed the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs bill, the first municipal law forbidding discrimination in private housing. Despite the law, Belafonte found himself welcome as a passing celebrity but not as a neighbor.

"The most frequent reaction," he says drily, "was 'I love you as an artist and I do want you to understand that it's not me who won't let you have the apartment.' The tenants would say it was the landlord or the renting agent. The landlord or the renting agent would say it was the stockholders. The stockholders, when I got that high, would say it was the will of the tenants."

"The answer is, the law hasn't enough teeth. Discrimination has to be made a *criminal* offense. It's nothing for people with large investments to pay a small fine and risk breaking the law again and again. I don't want to minimize the importance of the bill, but it has to be a lot stronger."

"But," Belafonte grinned with little humor, "the apartment hunting didn't make me any more bitter. I'm not the last angry man. I've got no monkey on my back."

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# The Generalissimo's Birthmark

SID GOLDBERG

**MILITARY BIOGRAPHY OF GENERALISSIMO RAFAEL LEONIDAS TRUJILLO MOLINA, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, by Lieutenant Ernesto Vega y Pagan, with a foreword by Major General Rafael A. Espailat and dedication by Lieutenant General José García Trujillo; translated by Ida Espailat. Editorial Atenas, Ciudad Trujillo, D.R. Price unmarked.**

This is unquestionably the finest military biography of Generalissimo Trujillo to appear in several years. It is written by Lieutenant Ernesto Vega y Pagan of the Dominican Navy, the same author, it may be recalled, who supplied us with the *History of the Dominican National Guard* some years back. His second offering is every bit as timely, objective, and appealing as his first.

Although the *Military Biography* has only seventy-six pages of text (in addition, there are prefaces, appendices, and some eighty full-page photostats of important documents), it cannot be read in one sitting. It is the sort of volume one likes to pick up, read a few pages, reflect, and then put down again.

Lieutenant Vega is particularly solicitous of those who would know more of the early military career of the future Benefactor. He answers all those questions which for years have tantalized so many of us: How did Trujillo receive his first commission in the Dominican Constabulary Guard? Who was responsible for his preliminary physical examination, and who wrote the memo regarding it? Moreover, was this memo handed to young Trujillo personally or was it delivered through interoffice mail to the appropriate physician?

All this—and more—Lieutenant Vega fully answers, and, in the historical tradition of Leopold von Ranke, supports each of his findings with “narratives of eye-witnesses and the most genuine immediate documents.” Indeed, in his faithful reproduction of source material, he might be said to out-Ranke Ranke.

Among the documents Lieutenant

Vega has dug up, for example, is the actual written request for a commission which Trujillo sent to Colonel C. F. Williams of the United States Marines, then administering the Dominican Republic.

“On December 9, 1918,” Lieutenant Vega writes, “young Trujillo applied for ‘a commission in that worthy institution, the Dominican Constabulary Guard,’ in a letter addressed to its Commanding Officer. We consider the letter so important that we quote it below and include a photostatic copy of the original in Spanish.”

SANTO DOMINGO, December 9, 1918  
COLONEL C. F. WILLIAMS  
COMMANDING OFFICER, D.C.G.  
CIUDAD

COLONEL WILLIAMS:

I respectfully request a commission in the Dominican Constabulary Guard, worthy institution you command.

I would like to state that I do not drink or smoke and have never been arrested even for minor infractions of the law.

I am married, 27 years old, and belong to one of the best families of my home town, San Cristobal, which is 30 kilometers from this city.

Honorable persons from my home town can vouch for my character. Here you may contact Judge Rafael A. Perdomo, Mr. Eugenio A. Alvarez, Secretary of the Lower Court and Lic. Armando Rodriguez, Legal Adviser to the Department of Justice and Education.

Sincerely yours,  
RAFAEL L. TRUJILLO

“The letter speaks for itself,” Lieutenant Vega notes. “The American authorities must have checked on this young man who with so much assurance described himself . . .”

The self-assurance and forthrightness of this young Caesar apparently overwhelmed the Marine Corps commandant, for on the following day

Colonel Williams informed his subordinate, Major James M. McLean, of Trujillo's request—and just two days later, on December 12, 1918, Major McLean shot back a memo stating: “I have no objections to the request.”

For those who doubt that this memo was ever written, Lieutenant Vega supplies a full-page photostatic reproduction of the original. (The photostat, however, shows Major McLean writing: “I have no objections to this applicant,” not “I have no objections to the request,” as it appears in the textual part of the book. This is one of Lieutenant Vega's small factual errors, which, though annoying, do not affect the general merit of the book.)

AT THIS POINT, the author permits himself a bit of historical speculation—the only time he does so in the entire work, it should be noted. He states that Colonel Williams, after receiving the memo from Major McLean, prepared a memorandum for Manuel Aybar, Jr., presumably one of Colonel Williams's aides-de-camp:

AYBAR

Have Trujillo xmined [sic] by doctor Monday.

CFW

“We believe it was handed to Trujillo himself, with the request that he be given a physical examination the following Monday,” is the way Lieutenant Vega brilliantly analyzes the pithy note.

That Colonel Williams intended the examination to be scheduled on Monday there is no doubt, for his scrawled message is duly preserved in a full-page photostat on page twenty-five of the *Military Biography*. Whether or not this memorandum was actually placed into the hands of young Trujillo, however, is problematic, and Lieutenant Vega offers no supporting evidence for this except his own convictions.

In any event, perhaps to ensure that there would be no mixup, on December 16 another memo was sent to Dr. C. A. Broadbuss, a lieutenant in the U.S. Marines Medical Corps. Lieutenant Vega's caption to the photostatic reproduction has it that this memo was written by Major MacLean, but the signature is that