By Patrick Hayes

White Artists Only

Fifty Years Ago Marian Anderson Sang at the Lincoln Memorial, and All Eyes Were on Washington

On Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939, at five o'clock in the afternoon, Marian Anderson stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Before her, a crowd of 75,000 was gathered alongside the Reflecting Pool. The nation's leaders surrounded her on the platform; the statue of Abraham Lincoln kept watch behind her. During the seconds before Anderson sang her first notes, a hush prevailed. At that moment, Marian Anderson represented a cause other than her art alone.

"O beautiful, for spacious skies," she began. She followed with an Italian aria, Schubert's "Ave Maria," and three spirituals. Her last song was "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." She finished with a brief but moving speech thanking everyone for the welcome she had received.

Marian Anderson sang that day at the Lincoln Memorial because she had been denied the use of Constitution Hall, owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution. It is a long and tortuous story almost lost in history until 1979, 40 years later, when then-president general of the Daughters of the American Revolution Jeannette O. Baylies asserted that Anderson had not been denied the Hall because of her race, but because the National Symphony Orchestra had booked the date months before for a concert at four o'clock. What Baylies did not reveal, or possibly did not know, is that other dates that month had been requested by Anderson's management and denied, and that all Constitution Hall contracts from 1935 to 1952 had contained a clause reading: "for the purpose of a concert by white artists only, and for no other purpose."

Marian Anderson, denied permission to perform in Constitution Hall, sings before a crowd of 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday in 1939. The controversy focused worldwide attention on racial discrimination in the nation's capital.

Anderson, already an internationally acclaimed singer, became even more famous because of what transpired during the three months before her appearance that Sunday in 1939 at the Lincoln Memorial. The Daughters of the American Revolution suffered both embarrassment and indignity.

In a letter to the editor that appeared in the *Washington Star* on September 9, 1979, Jeannette Baylies responded to singer Harry Belafonte's claim, during a 1979 appearance in Constitution Hall, that Marian Anderson had been denied the use of Constitution Hall "because she was black." He stated that he, too, had been turned down.

Baylies countered this allegation: "Mr. Belafonte made two very misleading statements to the audience. First, Anderson was not denied the use of Constitution Hall because she was black. The hall was rented to the National Symphony Orchestra on the date her manager requested. Second, our records show that Mr. Belafonte performed in Constitution Hall on April 24 and 25, 1956, and during the same week Miss Anderson also gave a concert in the hall."

Baylies's references were accurate, but she had not gone back far enough. Records in the DAR archives will reveal that no black artist was permitted to appear in Constitution Hall for seventeen years, from 1935 to 1952. During those years it was the policy of the DAR that only white artists be allowed to appear on that stage, and all concert rental contracts contained a clause to that effect.

Patrick Hayes was manager of the National Symphony Orchestra from 1941 to 1947, when he left to found the Hayes Concert Bureau. He then started and ran the Washington Performing Arts Society and has broadcast on cultural topics on WGMS for the last 33 years.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS McAVOY / LIFE MAGAZINE

Constitution Hall was indeed rented to the National Symphony Orchestra and a concert was played with Dr. Hans Kindler conducting on Sunday, April 9, 1939, at 4 PM. However, even if Dr. Kindler had wanted Anderson to appear as soloist with the National Symphony that day, it would not have been permitted by the DAR.

I was actively involved on the Washington concert scene from 1941 to 1979, worked within its constraints, labored to break them, and knew those involved in the events of the turbulent months of early 1939. I was taken aback by Baylies's assertion, and after her letter appeared I set out to reconstruct the story of Easter Sunday 1939.

CONSTITUTION HALL

Washington, D.C.

THIS AGREEMENT, Made this Twentieth day of August 1935, between the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, a body corporate, duly incorporated and existing under the laws of the United States as a society organized wholly for educational, historical and patriotic purposes and at no time for profit (hereinafter called the Lessor) and THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA (hereinafter called the Lessee).

WITNESSETH: That the Lessor does hereby let, demise and lease to the Lessee and the Lessee does hereby hire and take from the Lessor, the use of the CONSTITUTION HALL, situated in Washington, D.C., together with the stage and the corridors, foyers and vestibules leading thereto (except the pipe organ for which a nominal additional charge is made) for a term of 4 hours, commencing at 7 P.M. o'clock, on October 24th, 1935, December 19th, 1935, March 12th, 1936 and April 2nd, 1936

the said premises to be used by the Lessee for the purpose of CONCERT BY WHITE ARTISTS ONLY

and for no other purpose or purposes at a total rental of Sixteen Hundred Dollars ($1,600.00), of which Four Hundred Dollars/ ($400.00) have been paid at the time of signing hereof and the balance of Three Hundred Dollars ($300.00) for each concert to be paid on or before noon on October 24th, 1935, December 19th, 1935, March 12th, 1936 and April 2nd, 1936.

This lease is made upon the foregoing and following terms agreements and conditions, all and everyone of which the parties hereto agree to observe, keep and perform and a breach of any of which covenants, shall constitute a breach of the entire contract:

First - In case the Lessee shall fail to make all payments required by this contract on or before the time or times above mentioned, the Lessor shall retain all su[illegible] paid on account of this le[illegible] [illegible]lance remaining t[illegible] [illegible]d to give p[illegible] [illegible]sion of [illegible]

A copy of a 1935 contract for a performance by the Philadelphia Orchestra in Constitution Hall shows the clause "concert by white artists only." Although black artists had appeared after the opening of the hall in 1930, all contracts from 1935 to 1952 contained the whites-only stipulation.

In the years before World War II, Washington was a small, quiet, slow-moving city. Its patterns of life were southern. The dynamism and restlessness of the New Deal were stirring, but Washington had more in common with Richmond, Virginia, and Atlanta, Georgia, than with Philadelphia, New York, or Boston. For a hundred years discrimination and segregation prevailed throughout the South, and Washington was no exception.

I was not familiar with Washington when I began my job as manager of the National Symphony Orchestra in January 1941, so I set about getting to know the place. I saw the gentle city of monuments and statues. I heard the music at the Library of Congress as well as the concerts in Constitution Hall, attended plays at the National Theater, visited university campuses. It suddenly dawned on me that all the faces around me were white. "Over there" were the "colored" sections of town.

In the spring of 1941, I began booking artists for the summer "Sunset Symphony" concerts of the National Symphony Orchestra, which for almost twenty years were played on the Watergate barge moored just off shore at the foot of the steps behind the Lincoln Memorial. The land is federal property and the barge was owned by the National Park Service, so there were no restrictions on booking artists because of race. In the summer of 1942 we set a record for attendance at the Watergate with Paul Robeson as soloist.

But in private facilities it was another story. I went over the Constitution Hall contracts that had been signed by my predecessor, C.C. Capel, for the 1941-42 season of the National Symphony and saw for the first time the clause, typed in capital letters on a separate line, "CONCERT BY WHITE ARTISTS ONLY." Over the next six years I would sign these contracts for the National Symphony Orchestra, and I would sign them for the Hayes Concert Bureau for the seasons 1947-48 to 1951-52, when the clause was eliminated.

Constitution Hall was not alone in its policy of discrimination. Discrimination and segregation prevailed throughout the city, in hotels, restaurants, clubs, the National Theater, and motion-picture houses. Most motion-picture theaters did not admit blacks at all. One owner built a cement wall down the middle of the center aisle of his theater and admitted both blacks and whites, who sat on different sides of the wall.

The public-school system was legally a "dual" one. We would take the National Symphony Orchestra to Wilson High School and Alice Deal Junior High School, where the audiences were all white, both students and teachers. In the same month we would go to Dunbar High School and Armstrong High School where the audiences were all black.

At Constitution Hall, blacks were permitted to attend performances, although they were seated only in Section O in the rear balcony. Under these conditions few attended. The social structure was riddled with contradictions. Constitution Hall forbade black artists from appearing on the stage, but permitted black citizens to sit in the audience, while at the National Theater the policy was the reverse, with black actors and singers appearing in plays and musicals while black citizens were turned away at the box office.

The manager of Constitution Hall, whom I dealt with for the National Symphony and later for the Hayes Concert Bureau, was Fred Hand. We became well acquainted, and during one of my visits to the hall in the spring of 1942, as I was handing over a batch of signed contracts for the upcoming concert season, I asked him how much longer the "white artists only" clause would be included. He replied firmly, "As long as I am manager here."

I asked, "Sometime will you tell me the whole story about it?"

He said, "I'll tell you now." I leaned back in my chair.

Hand said that when Constitution Hall first opened its doors in October 1930 it was available to all, artists and audiences. One of the first groups to appear was the choir from Hampton Institute in Virginia, an all-black college. The distinguished tenor Roland Hayes was a favorite and sang there almost every year.

At one recital, Hand said, Roland Hayes came on stage to observe a large group of black men and women seated together on one side of the orchestra. It was a "group sale," purchased by a social club or alumni group. Hayes saw it as segregation and announced that he would not sing until the audience was properly mingled. He then left the stage. There was a long delay, during which the ushers stood still. Hand stood with his arms folded in the middle of the aisle facing the stage, and the black patrons remained silent in their seats, not venturing to move.

Roland Hayes finally did appear and sang the recital. But the incident so infuriated Fred Hand that he vowed, he told me, that no black artist would ever ap-

pear again in the hall while he was manager. He did not tell me, nor did I ask, whether this was the policy of the DAR or merely his own policy, to which the DAR acquiesced; after all, it fit the mores of the city in the 1930s. In any event, the policy stood unchallenged until late in 1938 and early 1939.

Marian Anderson's rise to fame, as told in a 1939 press release, was a typical American success story. Anderson was born in 1902 in Philadelphia's "Negro quarter" and lived as a child in a single rented room with her two sisters and parents. Her mother was a school teacher who frequently took in washing to make ends meet. Her father was a barber and later an ice and coal dealer.

Signs of Anderson's unusual voice were evident at the age of six when she sang in the choir of the Union Baptist Church, and at the age of eight she was called the "baby contralto." Up until the age of sixteen her musical education was sporadic, but she continued to impress listeners with the extraordinary range of her voice.

People in her neighborhood eventually raised enough money to allow her to take lessons from the well-known voice teacher Guiseppe Boghetti. Under his tutelage Anderson entered a contest held by the New York Philharmonic Society and won the opportunity to sing at the Lewisohn Stadium in New York. Later, she received a Julius Rosenwald scholarship, which provided training abroad.

In 1933 Anderson toured England, France, Belgium, Holland, the Soviet Union, and Scandinavia, and in 1935 she achieved worldwide recognition: She was invited to sing at the Salzburg festival. Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini was present, and after she sang, he rushed up to her and said: "A voice like yours is heard only once in a hundred years."

Back in the United States, the famous impresario S. Hurok placed her under contract. Her tours in America were the most successful in concert history. She was awarded the Spingarn Medal, received a Doctor of Letters from Howard University, and sang at the White House for President and Mrs. Roosevelt. She trailed clouds of glory in South America and throughout Europe. But during her long train journeys she spent time sewing dresses for herself with a portable sewing machine she carried with her. In Europe she was dressed by Chanel of Paris, but in America, as she put it, "by Anderson of Philadelphia."

The first calls for a date for a Marian Anderson concert in Constitution Hall came in early 1939. Anderson had sung

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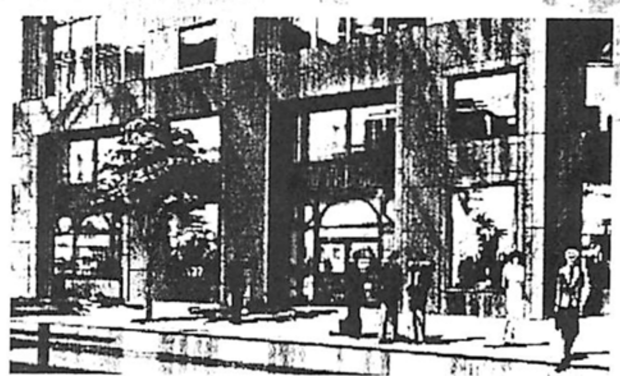

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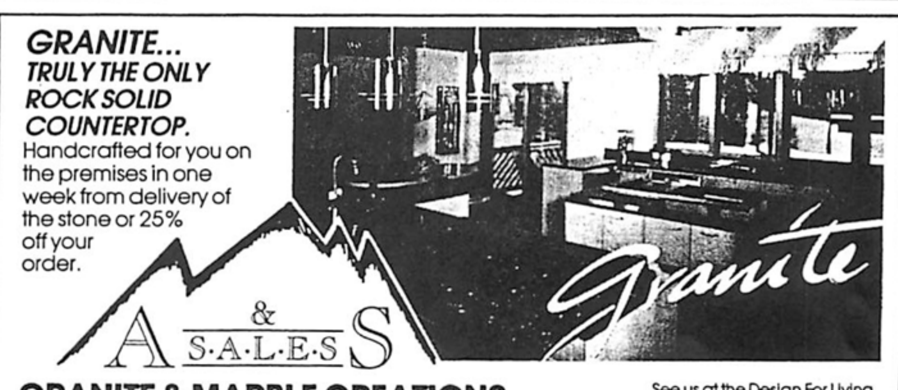


a recital in the Rialto Theater in Washington on May 9, 1938, sponsored by the Howard University Concert Series.

In those years, white performers such as Jascha Heifetz, Vladimir Horowitz, Gladys Swarthout, Kirsten Flagstad, and Sergei Rachmaninoff made annual appearances in Constitution Hall. Marian Anderson had appeared along with them at Carnegie Hall in New York and at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. The Howard University Concert Series Committee, headed by Charles Cohen, now wanted to have their heroine make the big-time appearance that was her due.

Howard University made application to Constitution Hall in a letter addressed to Fred Hand, requesting Sunday, April 9, 1939, Easter Sunday. Hand was able to reply that the date was taken by the National Symphony Orchestra. The committee requested information about other dates that might be available in early April; all were "taken by other artists," according to Hand. The committee then reported to the Hurok office that it could not obtain a date for a Marian Anderson concert in Constitution Hall.

Hurok's associate manager, Mae Frohman, coordinated all bookings in the office. It takes little imagination to hear Hurok saying to Frohman, "Call the hall directly and see what is going on. No concert hall is fully booked at that time of year, and all we need is one date."

Frohman telephoned Hand, inquiring about the date of April 9, 1939. "Who is the artist?" asked Hand.

"Marian Anderson," Frohman replied. "Sorry, that date is taken by another artist," said Hand.

Fred Hand exploded: "No date will ever be available for Marian Anderson in Constitution Hall!"

Frohman went on to ask about five other dates, and as each date was mentioned, Hand repeated the question, "Who is the artist?" All requested dates were "taken by another artist."

S. Hurok's publicist Gerald Goode gave me this account of what transpired after the Frohman-Hand exchanges:

Goode telephoned a rival manager in New York to tell him what was going on. Discrimination in an important hall in an important city was something that affected all artists and managers. Goode asked the manager to call Hand and inquire about the same five dates Frohman had requested but answer Hand's question "Who is the artist?" with the names of the manager's artists, who were all white.

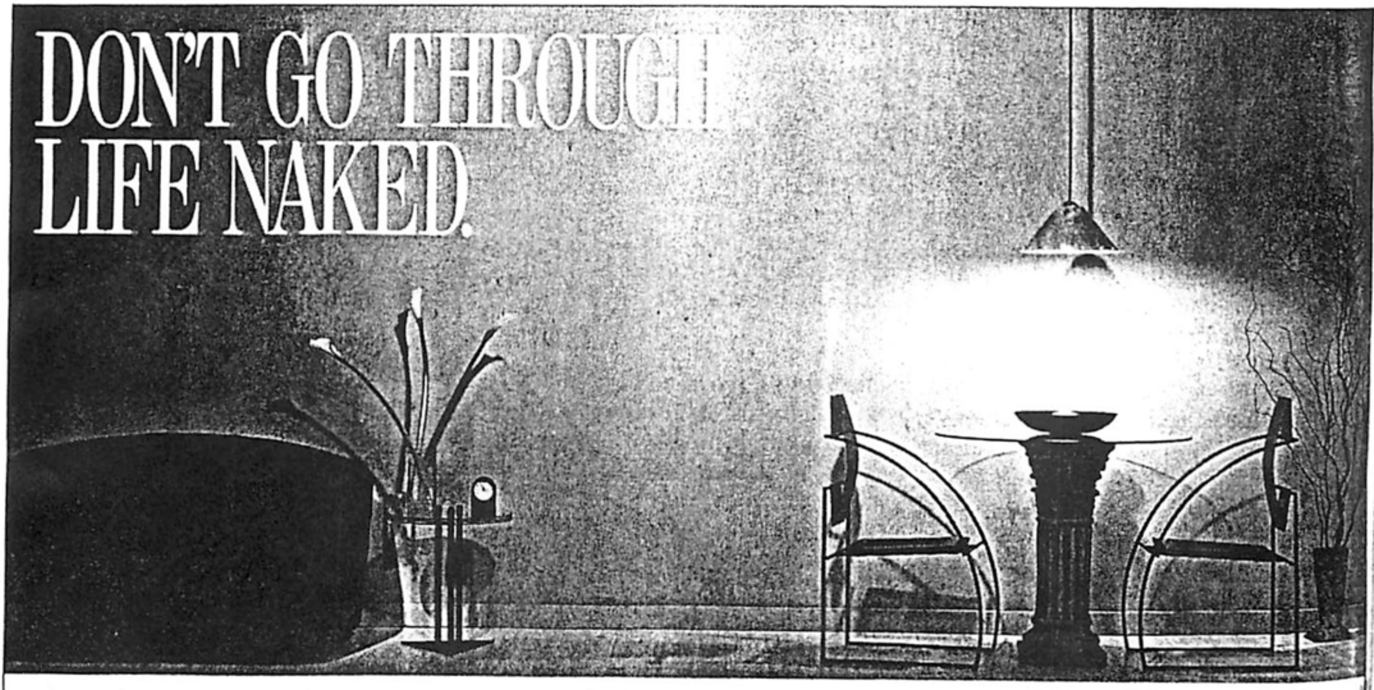
Within an hour the rival manager called Goode to report that all five dates were open on the books of Constitution Hall, and available to his white artists.

Hurok, Frohman, and Goode decided to call Hand and confront him with this information, demanding to know why, if these dates were available for other artists, one date could not be made available for Marian Anderson.

Hand exploded: "No date will ever be available for Marian Anderson in Constitution Hall!"

Some time later, in the calmer years of the 1940s, I asked Hand if this story was true, that he alone had denied the Hurok office a date for Marian Anderson. He nodded and said that it never occurred to him to discuss the matter with the officers of the DAR to see if an exception might be made.

As an immigrant Russian Jew, S. Hurok had a deep sense of justice. He knew he was on solid ground in challenging the DAR-Constitution Hall denial of a Mari-



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an Anderson date, especially because Anderson was recognized as one of the great singers of the century. Hurok instructed Goode to assemble a file of all correspondence and logs of telephone calls bearing on the subject. Goode compiled what he called a "White Paper" and prepared a press release.

The story broke on front pages all over the United States and abroad, and a copy of the "White Paper" was sent to the White House. Civic groups and religious leaders issued statements of protest; members of Congress expressed their indignation. On March 7, 1939, Senator Robert La Follette, chairman of the Bronson Cutting lecture committee, announced that the Cutting lectures would be taken out of Constitution Hall because it was barred to Marian Anderson. He was joined by Adolf A. Berle, then Assistant Secretary of State, in condemning the DAR.

Stunned both by the suddenness of the attack and the degree of embarrassment, the officers of the DAR nevertheless held firm, backing up the decision of its manager. But embarrassment soon spread well beyond the walls of Constitution Hall.

The Howard University Committee had stayed out of the controversy over Constitution Hall and turned to the District of Columbia School Board. The committee applied for the use of Central High, the largest high school auditorium in the city, at 13th and Clifton streets, Northwest.

The school board turned down the application on two counts: first, that such an appearance by a black artist would violate the dual school system that was legally established; and second, that the school auditorium should not be used for commercial purposes. (Marian Anderson would receive a fee for her services.)

Outrage and derision greeted the announcement. A congressman took the floor of the House to demand an investigation of the school board. Civic groups, PTAs, and religious leaders demanded that the decision be reconsidered. A special meeting of the school board was called, and on a split vote it was decided to allow the concert to take place, but on the understanding that it would not be considered a precedent for the future.

Charles Cohen, representing the Howard University Committee, questioned whether that was in effect a statement of future discrimination. The school board construed Cohen's reply as a refusal of the offer as given and, apparently welcoming a chance to get off the hook, declared the subject closed. The denial for the use of Central High stood.

The school board's action turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the fight

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for equality in Washington. The issue was now larger than the DAR-Constitution Hall denial; the entire city was closed to the committee and the artist. It was now more than a concert booking; it was a moral and ethical issue.

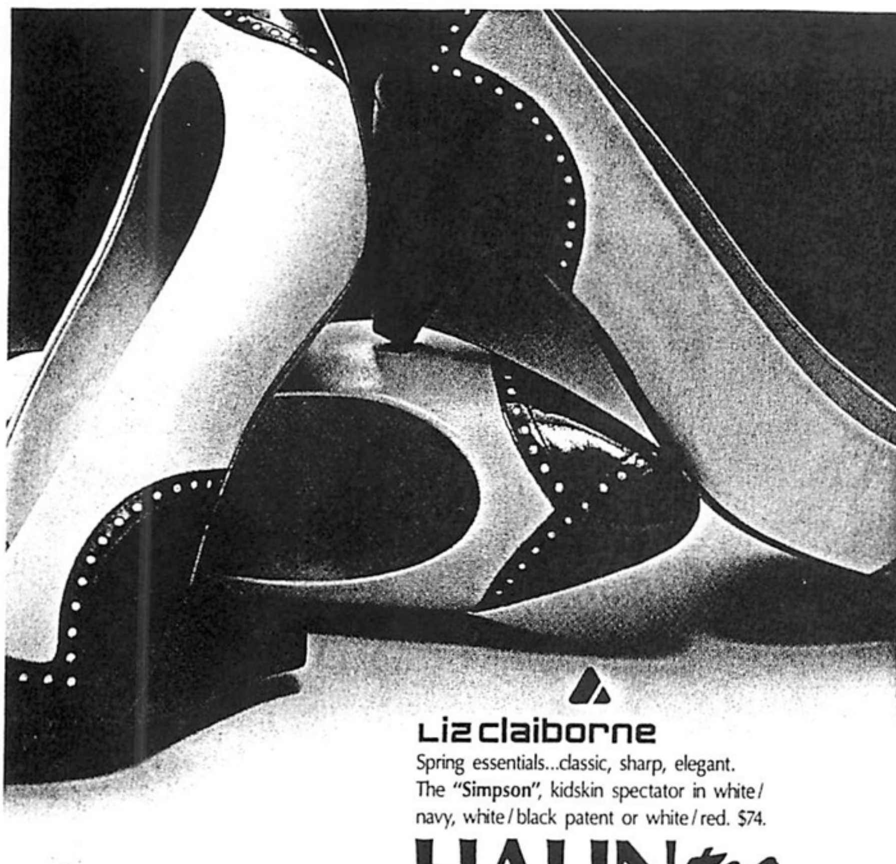
On February 26, 1939, a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post,* signed by Abram L. Harris, responded to an article in which the *Post* asserted that Constitution Hall was under private ownership and the owners had the "unquestionable right" to determine who might use the hall.

The entire city was closed to the artist. It was now more than a concert booking; it was a moral and ethical issue.

"The issue is to be judged not alone on what is legally right or wrong but on what is civil, just, and decent policy in a society committed to the realization of democratic ideals," wrote Harris. "The editor of the *Post* pleads ignorance of the facts that motivated the action of the DAR. He . . . admonishes that it would be dangerous 'to assume that any unusual discrimination' was involved. Does not the editor know that Constitution Hall is rented only to those who agree in writing not to permit Negro artists or artists of Negro descent to use the stage. . . . Or does the editor simply mean that the DAR's decision implies no 'unusual discrimination' because the racial policy underlying it simply reflects Washington's customs and traditions. . . .

"While pleading ignorance of the facts and suspending judgment you flatly state, 'It should be obvious that in neither case [the school-board decision as well as the DAR decision] was any slight to the famous singer intended.' " Obvious to whom? Harris queried. The basic question raised by the whole affair, he concluded, "is whether those of us who hope to achieve real democracy in this country can at this time afford tacitly or otherwise to condone acts and policies which deny civil and humane treatment not only to the distinguished but the ordinary man because of his racial origin."

Two days after Harris's letter appeared, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR. The story of her resignation made the front page of newspapers nationwide. On February 7, in her daily column called "My Day," the First Lady wrote: "In the past, when I was able to work actively in any organization to which I belonged, I have usual-



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ly stayed in until I had at least made a fight and had been defeated. Even then I have as a rule accepted my defeat and decided I was wrong or perhaps a little too far ahead of the thinking of the majority at that time. . . . But in this case I belong to an organization in which I can do no active work. They have taken an action which has been widely talked of in the press. To remain as a member implies approval of that action, and therefore I am resigning.''

On tour in San Francisco, Marian Anderson made one of her few public comments on the issue: ''I am not surprised at Mrs. Roosevelt's action because she seems to me to be one who really comprehends the true meaning of democracy. I'm shocked beyond words to be barred from the capital of my own country after having appeared in almost every other capital in the world.''

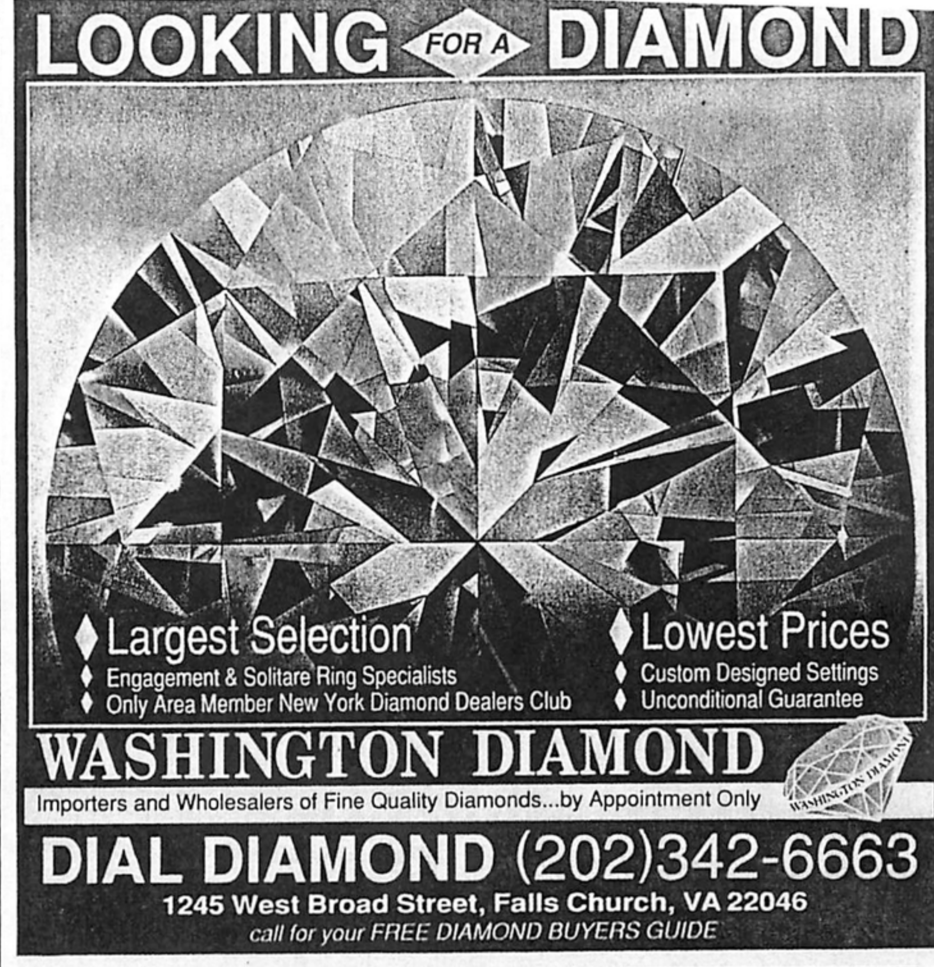
During the weeks leading up to Easter Sunday 1939, Anderson fulfilled her contracts for recital appearances. S. Hurok told the press that Anderson would sing in Washington if he had to put up a tent. Charles Cohen said that if the date of April 9, 1939, came and went without Anderson appearing, shame would forever be a shadow over the city of Washington, and no future appearances would ever erase it.

On this note, Oscar Chapman, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, obtained immediate consent from the White House that Anderson not only could appear at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday, but that she would appear under the sponsorship of the Roosevelt administration. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes's granting use of the Lincoln Memorial marked the first time that the exterior of a government structure had been designated for concert purposes to any person or organization.

The excitement that met the announcement was like that on a convention floor when a political candidate wins the nomination. There were no parades and no confetti, but hearts danced.

The announcement of the Lincoln Memorial appearance for Anderson came on March 31, nine days before the scheduled concert. The Howard University Concert Series Committee issued invitations for honorary sponsorship and for leading national figures to attend the concerts. Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes agreed to head the committee of sponsors. Associate Justice Hugo Black joined him, as did Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson.

In a few days, the names of Katharine Hepburn, New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, and Senator Charles McNary of Oregon were added, followed by the



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noted conductor Walter Damrosch, Felix Morley, editor of the *Washington Post,* Mrs. Eleanor Patterson, publisher of the *Washington Times-Herald,* and well-known conservative Nathan Straus.

Marian Anderson would arrive the following Saturday—having just sung in a public auditorium in Birmingham, Alabama. She would sing in the civic auditorium in Atlanta two nights later, with every seat sold in advance.

Both the Howard University Committee and the National Park Service were inundated with ticket requests for the Lincoln Memorial concert. Only 150 seats would be reserved, at the top of the terrace steps, for dignitaries and other invited guests; admission to the area surrounding the Lincoln Memorial would be free. The First Lady sent word from Seattle, Washington, that she would do her best to attend.

Anderson was scheduled to sing for half an hour, and the concert would be broadcast by the Blue Network of the National Broadcasting Company. She would sing without fee, and S. Hurok, her manager, would waive all commercial considerations and defray all operating expenses.

The DAR's policy of allowing only white artists to appear at Constitution Hall was to hold for twelve more years. Then, early in 1951 I received a telephone call from Harold Maynard, who succeeded Fred Hand as manager of Constitution Hall, having been his assistant for several years.

Maynard, without explanation, asked if I could suggest a black artist about whom there had been no controversy who might appear with the National Symphony Orchestra during the 1951-52 season in Constitution Hall. I named Dorothy Maynor, then a leading soprano who had appeared regularly with the National Symphony Orchestra during the summers at the Watergate barge.

He thanked me, and I heard nothing more until I read the National Symphony Orchestra list for that season, which included Dorothy Maynor for the midseason date of February 17, 1952. The concert took place with no fanfare—it was the next concert in due course.

I congratulated Maynard on his diplomatic success. I then asked when Marian Anderson might be scheduled for a concert in Constitution Hall.

He replied, "Go ahead and set your date."

Marian Anderson sang on March 13, 1953, presented by Patrick Hayes as managing director of the American University Concerts.

The sadness in this story lies in the embarrassment to the city of Washington and to all of its citizens who were trapped in the customs of the time.

The DAR continues as a patriotic organization and as a source of historical information, and I believe that the members of today, 50 years after the turmoil of 1939, need not be held accountable for the deeds of long ago. But discrimination and segregation are rooted in prejudice, and prejudice persists in most societies. Crosses have been burned on lawns within twelve miles of the center of the city of Washington in recent years. Synagogues are violated in cities in this country and abroad. It falls to each generation to be alert to violations of freedom, for it is only when each of us possesses freedom that we can all feel secure in that which we possess. □

Prejudice persists: Crosses have been burned within twelve miles of Washington in recent years.

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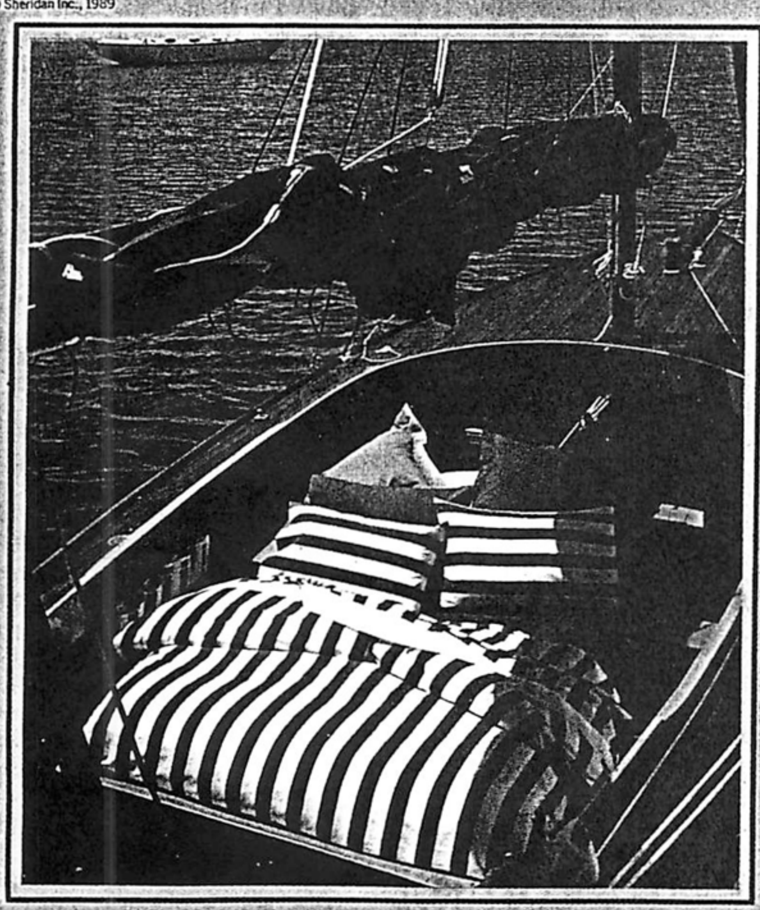

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