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**-- PEOPLE -- TOPICS --**

## African-Americans and the U.S. Navy -- 1870s and 1880s



Following the Civil War, African-Americans continued to serve in unlimited roles among the Navy's enlisted ranks, though a tendency to encourage them to become officer's stewards was emerging.

This page shows views of African-Americans on board Navy ships and ashore during the 1880s.

For further pictorial coverage, see the [African Americans and the U.S. Navy](#) cover page.

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**Photo #: NH 53991**

**USS Galena (1880-1892)**

Ship's Mizzentopmen, with a pet goat and bird circa the 1880s.

*U.S. Naval Historical Center Photograph.*

Online Image: 87KB; 740 x 605 pixels



**Photo #: NH 53996**

**USS Galena (1880-1892)**

Ship's African-American sailors, circa the 1880s.

*U.S. Naval Historical Center Photograph.*

Online Image: 85KB; 740 x 615 pixels



**Photo #: NH 2860**

3/18/77

# Ex-slave achieved extraordinary prestige, prosperity 200 years ago

By Diana Ross McCain  
Special to the Journal Inquirer

Primus Manumit. His name alone offers tantalizing hints about the character of this black resident of South Windsor who achieved prestige and prosperity to a degree extraordinary for a black man more than 200 years ago.

His given name of "Primus," probably bestowed upon him by one who held him in slavery, is Latin for "first." "Manumit," which comes from the Latin word for "liberated," was likely a surname chosen by Primus himself as a proud pronouncement of the personal freedom that had at long last become his, at a time when all but a handful of the 5,000 blacks in Connecticut were held in slavery. Whatever its origin, Primus Manumit fulfilled the promise of his name.

When and where Primus was born is unknown. But eventually, according to Windsor historian Dr. Henry Stiles, he became the slave of Dr. Alexander Wolcott of Windsor, a Yale graduate who had wartime surgical experience.

Slaves in colonial Connecticut typically spent their days at some kind of manual labor, whether it be tilling their owners' fields or tending to their owners' household chores. They rarely received any training or education. In this aspect of his life, at least, Primus encountered unusual good fortune. According to Dr. Stiles, Dr. Wolcott took Primus with him on his visits to patients; in those days physicians made house calls on

horseback. Primus assisted Dr. Wolcott, observed him at work, and helped prepare the complicated concoctions that passed for medicine in that era when even the most advanced knowledge available about healing was primitive by modern standards. In short, Primus served an unofficial apprenticeship in medicine not much different from that which any white man seeking to become a doctor would have followed.

Eventually, according to Dr. Stiles, Dr. Wolcott decided to reward Primus for his years of faithful service by giving him his freedom, at which time the newly liberated man most likely adopted his significant surname of "Manumit." Primus Manumit soon moved across the Connecticut River, to the section of East Windsor that became the present-day town of South Windsor. There he began practicing medicine on his own, being qualified to do so by the standards of the time, which had no licensing or educational requirements for anyone who wanted to be a doctor other than an apprenticeship to an experienced physician.

Primus Manumit proved so skillful at healing that he was able to overcome the prejudice and discrimination that in 18th century Connecticut generally blocked even free black individuals from fulfilling their potential and realizing their dreams. He became a highly respected member of the community at large. The regard in which he was held is indicated by the fact that he was referred to as

Dr. Primus Manumit. How old Dr. Primus Manumit was when he became a free man, entitled to keep the fruits of his own labor and talent, and how long he practiced medicine is unknown. But by the time he died in April of 1782, at an age that was not recorded, he had amassed an estate the contents and value of which offer strong evidence that he was a literate, religious man practicing medicine on a level as advanced as just about any other physician in Connecticut and in the process earning a very good living.

**A** L P. Persons having any demands on the estate of Dr. PRIMUS MANUMIT, late of East-Windsor deceased, are desired to bring in their accounts to the Subscriber, who will attend said business on the second Monday of February, at Capt. Aaron Biffells, and at his own house the 1st Monday of February next; all persons indebted, are desired to meet on said days for settlement.

East-Windsor, January 6, 1783.  
**EDWARD C. GRANT.**

Jeff Klevy / Journal Inquirer

The value of Dr. Manumit's worldly possessions, including a house of his own, were assessed in January of 1783 as being worth 128 pounds. When all the debts due him at his death were collected, the final value of his estate was set at 303 pounds, a substantial sum at a time when Connecticut law estimated that a physician would earn at least 10 pounds in a year.

Included in the inventory of Dr. Manumit's belongings were well over a dozen books, an extraordinary number in an era when

the typical Connecticut household's entire reading collection consisted of a Bible and the most recent almanac. Four of the books were in Latin. The rest were primarily religious works or books of "Physick and Surgery," including a volume on midwifery — the care of pregnant women and the delivering of babies, an aspect of medicine which then was almost exclusively the province of women.

Dr. Manumit's "shop" was well equipped, with "tooth instruments, surgeon's instruments, medicine, a mortar and pestle with which to prepare medications, and other equipment, which together accounted for more than one-sixth of the value of his possessions. He also owned an unusually large number and assortment of garments, including a pair of silver shoe buckles.

Dr. Manumit appears to have numbered many white individuals among his patients. It seems unlikely that he would have been able to prosper as he did by ministering only to the health needs of the members of the tiny black community of Windsor and East

Windsor, which in 1774 totalled only 81 people. Many of the dozens of individuals who owed him money at his death, or to whom he was indebted, were white, and some of them were probably his patients. When it came to finding the best medical care for themselves and their loved ones, the people of colonial Windsor and East Windsor seem to have been willing to rise above racial prejudice and turn for help to a man of acknowledged ability, regardless of the color of his skin.

When all his outstanding debts had been paid by the administrators of his estate, Dr. Manumit still left more than 100 pounds that was divided equally between two heirs. Both were black, although whether they were related to him, or simply friends, is not known. One was Jenny, the wife of Obad Freeman. This free black couple had helped care for Dr. Manumit in his last sickness. The other was Cuff Grant, whose relationship to Dr. Manumit is also unknown.

Substantial as was the material inheritance he left, Dr. Manumit's true legacy was the remarkable respect and success he was able to achieve as a practitioner of a profession that required intelligence, education, skill, and compassion, in the world of two centuries past that generally had little appreciation of blacks' capabilities.

Diana Ross McCain is public information officer at The Connecticut Historical Society.

MARCHESTER STURMANT - EMPOWER

farmer, makes an appearance. "We have review cards people can fill out," Bordner says. "We get all kinds of responses and interesting information."

Artists began to gather in Old Lyme as early as 1899. Some of the artists lived here year round, although many spent their winters in New York City. The landscapes in Old Lyme were apparently one of the attractions.

The film shows moments in the lives of artists such as George Bruesle, Edward Volker, Percival Rosseau, Eugene Higgins, and Ivan

pictures of Florence Griswold, who was probably around 84 or 85 years old when the film was shot, this is the first time anyone can remember seeing any motion picture footage of her.

"This is just precious," Andersen says he watches the part in the film where Griswold is holding two kittens and showing them off for the camera. The film also shows Griswold feeding geese on her property, and picking flowers in her garden.

"It's quite poignant because she died two years later in 1937,"

antique automobile expert, who noticed a 1934 Packard in one of the scenes.

In the museum room where patrons can view the film, works of the artists featured in the short movie are displayed. Each artwork is placed next to a picture of a scene taken from the film in which that artist appeared.

The movie opens with Lyme artist Bruesle painting in his studio, and ends with a shot of Griswold watching a couple of geese. In between are several shots of the artists working.

him in order to figure out what they are saying.

Andersen says he was relieved to see what was on the film, which was discovered in two 8-millimeter canisters. When the museum found out the film was being put up for auction, the museum paid \$7,100 for it — even though they had only heard about what was on the tape, but not seen it.

"We were nervous about it. It was a leap of faith, but we took the plunge," Andersen says. "It surprised all of our expectations. We didn't want it to end."

7:30, and 9:30 p.m. throughout the exhibition. "The Lure of Lyme will be on view at the museum through May 30.

Museum hours are Wednesday through Sunday from 1 until 5 p.m. through March. Starting in April hours will be Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Sunday from 1 until 5 p.m.

Admission is \$5 for adults a \$4 for seniors and students. Members and children under 12 are free of charge. For additional information, call the museum at (860) 434-5542.

# Hebron family paid a high price in fight for equal rights for all blacks

By Diana Ross McCain  
Special to the Journal Inquirer

When Connecticut Civil War Governor William Buckingham at last agreed to the demands of the state's black men that they be allowed to fight in the war to preserve the Union, three members of the Peters family of Hebron stepped forward to enlist. Only two would come back alive.

Fighting for freedom was in the Peters family's blood. The lives of the many generations of the Peters family that lived in Hebron and nearby towns from the middle of the 1700s down to the beginning of the 20th century are documented in the 1980 book "Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut," by Barbara Brown and James Rose.

The common ancestor of the three Peters men who served in the Civil War was Caesar Peters, born a slave sometime around 1750. Caesar belonged to the Reverend Samuel Peters, an Anglican minis-

## HISTORY

ter whose outspoken loyalty to the British crown in the turbulent months leading up to the American Revolution got him run out of Hebron and, eventually, forced him to flee to England.

Following the end of the war, Rev. Peters sold Caesar, his wife, Lois, and their eight children to a man from South Carolina named David Prior. But white residents of Hebron sympathetic to the plight of the Peters family pulled off a scam that prevented Prior from taking the Peters family away from Hebron. In 1789 Caesar Peters successfully petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly for his family's freedom, and the next year, in a fine gesture of independence, proceeded to bring a lawsuit for damages against David Prior.

The go-ahead came in August

of 1863 for Connecticut blacks to serve in the Union Army — although in a separate black regiment all of whose officers would be white. Despite these indignities and injustices, the Twenty-Ninth (Colored) Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry as it was officially known was soon filled with hundreds upon hundreds of black men willing to fight and if necessary die to help liberate the millions of fellow blacks held in slavery in the South and to advance the cause of civil rights for all blacks by demonstrating that they were as capable, as brave, and as patriotic as any white man.

Caesar Peters's great-grandson, George E. Peters, about 20 years old, enlisted on Dec. 15, 1863, in Company D of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment. Less than a month later, on Jan. 5, 1864, George's father, Leverett, who was about 40, joined his son in Company D. The Twenty-Ninth Regiment was another of Caesar's great-grand-

sons, 30-year-old George Sylvester Peters.

Tragedy struck the Peters family before the Twenty-Ninth Regiment even left Connecticut. Maria Peters, wife to Leverett and mother to George, died in February of 1864. Leverett Peters had to march off to war leaving behind his other six children, ranging in ages from 3 to 15, without a mother to care for them.

The men of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment met the Confederate enemy in combat on five different occasions, as well as engaging in several skirmishes, all in Virginia. On Oct. 13, 1864, at the battle of Darbytown Road, George E. Peters was wounded. He died of his injuries 17 days later, leaving his grieving father to fight on alone.

Leverett Peters and George Sylvester Peters survived to come home after the war's end in 1865. But both had been marked permanently by the hardships of mili-

tary service in the Civil War, of which poor food and rampant disease were just two.

George Sylvester Peters received a disability discharge and returned to Hebron only to discover that his wife, having received a report that he had died in the service, had left town. George never found her.

Leverett Peters received a disability pension from the United States government for the rest of his life. He also was awarded a pension for his son George's death.

Leverett, George, and George Sylvester Peters each paid a high price — in George Peters's case, the ultimate price — for their courageous decision to fight for liberty, dignity, and equal rights for all blacks. In so doing, they were following a path blazed by their ancestor Caesar Peters, who had waged and won the battle for his family's freedom more than 70 years earlier.

## community support."

MARC RYAN

Deputy secretary in the state Office of Policy and Management, on local opposition to Wesleyan University's bid to buy the campus of the Long Lane School

**"Rather than point fingers and call each other names and talk of betrayal, we've got to come to the table and deal (Long Lane) is going somewhere."**

TOM CHRISTOPHER

Middletown resident, arguing that the city must deal with the state, or lose say in the future of the facility

**"Don't pit neighborhood against neighborhood. To say you can put a prison at CVH and say it won't have an impact on the city is like putting a crying baby under a blanket."**

EVELYN RUSSO

Officer in Residents Against Institutional Dumping, arguing that if Long Lane can't be moved out of the city, it should remain where it is

**"Rather than point fingers and call each other names and talk of betrayal, we've got to come to the table and deal. (Long Lane) is going somewhere."**

TOM CHRISTOPHER

Middletown resident, arguing that the city must deal with the state, or lose say in the future of the facility

**"I could sit here and do nothing and say, 'I oppose it, I oppose it' and it would be built where it is... It's already here, and the state isn't going to move it."**

DOMENIQUE THORNTON

Mayor of Middletown, saying that she is trying to be realistic in negotiations with the state over Long Lane's future

**"We're here as long as we're welcome."**

RICHARD HUBER

# A Look At Blacks' Role In The Revolutionary War



DIANA ROSS MCCAIN

## CAPSULES

TIME  
Includes approximately 400 men from Connecticut, of whom more than a dozen have documented connections to Middletown, which at that time also included Cromwell and Middletfield.

What little is known about these black patriots must be pieced together from fragments of information in manuscript documents, the Revolutionary War papers of the Middletown selectmen, vital statistics and applications by veterans for land grants and pensions. While in military service, black soldiers received the same pay and supplies as their white compatriots and, for the most part, served alongside white soldiers in integrated units.

One such African American freedom fighter was a man known as Cuff, who on April 27, 1776, purchased his freedom from William Ward of Middletown. Evidence of how very much Cuff cherished his new personal independence is demonstrated in the record of his "manumission," as the legal release of an individual from slavery is called. At two points, a surname was inserted after Cuff's name, obviously added after the original document was completed. Cuff had decided to live as a free man under the new name of Cuff Liberty and made it part of

the document certifying his freedom.

In 1776, 1777 and 1778, Cuff Liberty was a taxpayer in Middletfield. But in 1778 most of his tax bill was abated for Cuff Liberty had taken a major step toward giving even greater meaning to his surname. In the spring of 1778, he enlisted in the Sixth Connecticut Regiment of the Continental Army for the duration of the war for American independence.

As a soldier of the Sixth Regiment Cuff Liberty may have been part of the patriot force that armed only with bayonets, made a successful surprise nocturnal assault on the fort at Stony Point, N.Y., on July 15, 1779. He probably suffered through the Continental Army's encampment at Morristown, N.J., during the winter of 1779-1780.

Cuff Liberty was discharged from the Continental Army at the end of the war in 1783. The new United States, which Cuff Liberty had fought to bring into existence, rewarded him with a grant of land on Sept. 15, 1789.

Enduring with Cuff Liberty, the daily dangers of military service was another African-American from Middletown, Peter Freeman, who, upon being manumitted, chose a surname that proclaimed his personal independence. Peter Freeman was a taxpayer in Middletfield in 1778 and 1779, but had his taxes abated for both those years, because at the age of about 24 he also enlisted in the Sixth Regiment. Peter Freeman survived the hardships and perils of the war and received a grant of land in 1789. He eventually moved to Farmington, where in 1818, he received a pension for his Revolutionary War service.

Philemon Freeman of Middletown enlisted on April 22, 1779, in the Second Connecticut Regiment of the Continental Army. Records indicate that after the war, Philemon

Freeman returned to Middletown and was listed as a taxpayer in Middletfield in 1785 and 1786. In 1794, Philemon Freeman received a grant of land for his military service and in 1818 he received a veteran's pension.

Kay Cambridge of Middletown enlisted for a three-year hitch in the Fifth Connecticut Regiment in May 1777. The Fifth Connecticut fought at two important engagements, the battles of Germantown and Monmouth. The unit was stationed at Valley Forge during that terrible winter that came to symbolize the extreme suffering that many Continental soldiers endured in support of the cause of independence. He also spent the brutal winter of 1779-1780 at Morristown, N.J. Members of the Fifth Connecticut also took part, along with the Sixth Connecticut Regiment, in the capture of the fort at Stony Point.

Despite having experienced three such harrowing years of military duty, when his term expired, Kay Cambridge immediately re-enlisted. He was still serving in the Continental Army at the end of 1781, but whether he survived the war is unknown. He was, however, dead by 1800, when his widow, Jane, who had since remarried, sought to receive for Kay Cambridge's only surviving son, Ishmael Cambridge, the land grant to which his father had been entitled for his service in the revolution.

As was the case with the Civil War, the idea of allowing black men to serve in the military was a controversial one early in the revolution.

For one Middletown black man, military service was the path to freedom. On March 18, 1782, Lydia Hosmer relinquished all of her rights "to the property or service of my said Negroe Man Pump," who had enlisted in the state service for a tour of duty "at Hors Neck (Greenwich) or wheresoever else he may be ordered by his commanding officer." Lydia Hosmer did, however, claim for herself the bounty money Pump was entitled to for having signed up, but she also agreed to provide Pump with clothing. "Pump" said Tour of Duty Suitable to His Character and Station.

Courage, patriotism, personal sacrifice and a fierce commitment to the ideal and the reality of freedom for themselves and for others are evident in these brief sketches of the Revolutionary War service of Cuff Liberty, Peter Freeman, Philemon Freeman, Kay Cambridge and Pump.

Diana Ross McCain of Durham has written about Connecticut history for numerous newspapers and magazines. If you have suggestions for future columns, please drop a line by fax at (860) 343-5220, or by writing to The Extra, c/o The Couriers, 373 East Main St., Middletown, CT 06457.

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## Want to live healthy? Grow favorite plants

### They improve your indoor environment



**FRIED ETHEL GARDEN NOBLEBOOK**

Growing plants is good for you. Most gardeners don't need to be told that. We already know that nurturing plants — indoors and out — is a healthy, stress-relieving occupation that promotes physical and mental well-being. And most of us also know that large plants like trees and shrubs play a major role in our health by removing pollutants from the air. But a growing body of evidence now suggests that houseplants may play an even greater role than previously thought in keeping our indoor environment healthy as well. And given the growing incidence of "sick building syndrome," this becomes an important piece of knowledge.

IT WAS A QUESTION FROM A READER last fall that piqued my interest in this topic. Then quite by coincidence, I visited a local bookstore a few weeks later and found "How to Grow Fresh Air" by B.C. Wolverton, a noted scientist who has been involved in research for NASA designed to help create an environment in a closed ecological life-support system.

As part of the research, 50 plants were tested for their ability to remove various toxic gases from the air, with particular emphasis on formaldehyde, one of the most common indoor air toxins found in everything from garbage bags and paper towels to floor coverings and building materials. As has been true of other areas of research done for our space program, the findings have implications for all of us. For as Dr. Wolverton points out, though we are used to thinking of air pollution as an outdoor phenomenon, the air we breathe indoors may be as much as ten times more polluted than the air outdoors. And because we are exposed to it for greater lengths of time, the health risks may be greater. So it becomes important to find economical and effective ways of minimizing the risks. Fortunately, Dr. Wolverton's research provides proof that common houseplants can be an integral part of keeping the air in our homes healthy.

In "How to Grow Fresh Air," Wolverton presents his ratings of the 50 houseplants tested for their ecological benefits. Each plant has been given an overall rating, along with ratings of its ability to remove chemical vapors, how easy it is to grow and maintain, its insect and disease resistance and its transpiration rate (its ability to evaporate water from its leaves and move air). Also provided is some basic horticultural information about each plant.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT AMONG the top ten are some of the most popular, easy-to-find and easily grown houseplants around. Chances are excellent that you're already growing one or more of them. I was delighted to discover I have four of them in my home. Tied for first place are a pair of palms — Areca palm (*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*), also known as yellow palm or butterfly palm, and lady palm (*Rhapis excelsa*). Areca palm ranks slightly higher in its ability to remove chemical vapors and its transpiration rate, while lady palm is a bit easier to grow and more disease resistant. Right behind in third place is another palm — the bamboo palm (*Chamaedorea seifrizii*). All three are tolerant of the conditions found in most homes and are generally easy-to-care for and trouble-free.

That rugged Victorian stalwart, the rubber plant (*Ficus robusta*), is in fourth place, receiving high marks in all categories, especially its ability to remove formaldehyde from the air.

The six remaining "top ten" houseplants on Wolverton's list are coccaea, Janet Craig, English ivy (*Hedera helix*), the dwarf date (*Phoenix roebelenii*), Ficus air, and Boston fern (*Nephtolepis exaltata* (*Bostoniensis*)). The 10th and 11th plants are so close in

## Samuel Cuff enlisted in Revolutionary War Windsor resident among blacks who served in fight

By Diana Ross McCain  
Special to the Journal Inquirer

For a man to join the Continental Army in the winter of 1780-1781 was no easy decision.

The war for American independence had dragged on for nearly five years, with no end in sight. Conditions in the ranks had become so desperate, with food, clothing, and pay in such woefully short supply, that soldiers stationed at Morristown, N.J., had actually munched on Jan. 1, 1781.

Yet on that very same day, despite the gloomy prospects for the patriot cause, Sampson Cuff of Windsor enlisted in the Second Company of the Fourth Regiment of the Connecticut Line of the Continental Army.

What makes the young man's decision even more noteworthy is the fact that Cuff was an African-American, signing up to fight for the establishment of a United States throughout almost all of which, including Connecticut, the enslavement of blacks was legal.

### Patriotic cause

Cuff was one of more than 400 African-American men from Connecticut who rendered military service for the patriot cause in the American Revolution. Among their numbers, according to the 1973 book "Connecticut's Black Soldiers, 1775-1783," by David O. White, the most thorough study of the subject, were more than a dozen men from north-central Connecticut towns.

The majority of them, unlike Cuff, were identified in military records only by their first names, since most African-Americans did not at this time have a surname. Slaves were sometimes known by the last names of their masters, while free blacks typically chose a surname for themselves. Thus we know that black men named Jack, Cesar, and Peter from Hebron, and Plymouth and Providence from Windsor, served in the patriot

## HISTORY

Why Cuff, who was in his early 20s, or any of the others enlisted is unknown, although there are many possible explanations. If Cuff were a slave he might have been sent to serve by a patriotic owner, with or without — a promise of freedom if he survived his hitch. Or he might have been ordered to take the place of a master who had been drafted into the army, such replacements then being legal.

### Cash bounty

If Cuff were a free man, he may have joined up for both the cash bounty received upon enlistment as well as for the regular pay, which was equal to that of white soldiers, perhaps with the goal of saving enough to purchase the freedom of relatives still held in bondage.

He may have believed that America was as fully his country as that of any white man, and that it was his patriotic duty to serve in defense of the nation's liberty. Perhaps he hoped that the participation of black soldiers like himself in the war for independence might earn them respect that would in turn help hasten the elimination of slavery and the granting of equal rights to blacks. Or, like any young man of any race, he may simply have seen military service as an opportunity to exchange the boring routine of daily civilian life for the novelty and possible excitement of the army experience.

### Integrated regiments

Whatever his motive, Cuff signed on for a three-year hitch during most of the war black side-by-side with white men in integrated regiments. However, the unit Cuff joined was a company composed entirely of 48 African-American privates, but with all white officers. Since there were still dozens of black soldiers seat-

tered throughout other Connecticut units, it would seem that segregation was not the reason for creation of this all-black company.

Perhaps the unit was formed to foster a spirit of special pride among its members. How strongly many of those in its ranks felt on a personal level about the cause for which they were fighting is suggested by the fact that seven of them had the surname of "Freedom," or "Freeman," and four others had the surname "Liberty" — which they had almost certainly chosen for themselves, most likely upon being emancipated from slavery.

### Serious jeopardy

As it turned out, Cuff never fought in a battle, which does not mean that by enlisting he did not put his life in serious jeopardy for his nation. Diseases such as smallpox, dysentery, and typhus, for which there were no effective treatments or cures, ran rampant through army camps and killed many more American soldiers than enemy bullets and cannon balls ever did.

Cuff served two years of his three-year hitch, being discharged in 1783 at the end of the war. He did not settle permanently in Connecticut, but by 1800 was living alone, a free man, in Berkshire County, Mass., where he apparently spent the remainder of his life.

The nation Cuff had risked his life to help bring into existence did not forget what he had done. In 1818, while living in Richmond, Mass., Cuff, still apparently a man with no family, applied for and was granted a pension from the federal government based upon his service in the American Revolution nearly 40 years earlier. He continued to receive his pension until his death in 1842, at about the age of 80 — less than two decades before the outbreak of the Civil War, in which more than 180,000 members of a new generation of African-American men would fight to preserve the nation that Cuff had played a role in creating.

### CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Series focus: on charming topics

### Show at UConn

By Journal Inquirer Staff