

# Area group to trace historic route of runaway slaves

Kevin E. Cottrell is planning a mind-boggling trip — following in the footsteps of runaway slaves in the mid-1800s.

As president of the newly formed Underground Railroad Committee of the Niagara Frontier, Cottrell is coordinating a walk — at least 15 miles through each state — from Atlanta, Ga., to the Niagara border.

The summer 1993 event, tracing the route of the slaves, will be climaxed with a march from Lewiston to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., marking the 200th anniversary of the Fugitive Slave Act in Ontario.

"We're planning to travel by bus — about 50 people — and then walk through some of the communities, following as closely as possible in the steps of those slaves. We're also hoping that people in those various towns will turn out and participate in the march too," Cottrell explained. The nonprofit group plans to stay in community shelters, church halls, or perhaps school facilities that might be available. They will avoid hotels to make their march authentic, Cottrell said.



On the final leg of the journey, the marchers will walk from the museum on the Niagara University campus, across the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge, and along the Niagara Parkway to Niagara-on-the-Lake, where the legislation was signed in 1793.

The route was drawn with the help of Charles Blockson, an author and historian, and artist Houston Conwill, who designed sculptures — symbolic of the stations where slaves were sheltered. (The Castellani Art Museum has been placing the sculptures at sites throughout the county.)

It has been reported that between 1830 and 1850, an estimated 30,000 slaves made their way from the Deep South to Canada, with many of them passing through Niagara County and

crossing the international bridges.

Cottrell, the minority grants specialist for the district state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, has been working closely with Relena C. Jones, the project coordinator at the Castellani Art Museum on the Niagara University campus.

Blockson, an expert on the Underground Railroad and curator of a vast African-American historical collection at Temple University in Philadelphia, has been reassuring Cottrell that everything will work out. Blockson noted that even Harriet Tubman, who made numerous trips South to lead the slaves to Canada, succeeded in her delicate missions.

Cottrell and his committee have been seeking sponsors through countless contacts with civic and business groups. Organizations interested in participating in the project may contact him at 278-1773.

*Don Glynn is a veteran Gazette reporter, editor and columnist. His column appears Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.*



James Neils/Niagara Gazette

**THE ORGANIZER:** Kevin Cottrell, head of the new Underground Railroad Committee, is reconstructing the route of blacks who traveled secretly from Atlanta — through Niagara Falls, N.Y. — to Canada to escape slavery.

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# Media depict African peoples as savages

5/13/94

One day in April, I was watching the noon news on Channel 7. Susan Banks was reporting on events in the African country of Rwanda. She characterized the Rwandan military rebel's acts of violence against the civilians as "hacking them to death with machetes."

This comment was followed by filmed footage of what appeared to be a person kneeling on the ground in a forested area while another person standing over him brandished a long knife. An instant later the knife was swung downward and the head was seen to separate from the body, raise into the air, fall to the ground, bounce and roll several feet away.

The assailant stepped back, then moved in to knock the still upright headless body over and was joined by another assailant wielding a long knife. They proceeded to flail away at his body and what appeared to be another

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*"The white-controlled media emphasize the positive within their own culture."*

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body lying on the ground.

My stomach turned; I stared blankly at the changing images on the TV screen in disbelief. Moments later, as the feeling of queasiness subsided, I began to sense the reality of what had just taken place.

At high noon, without the obligatory advisory of viewer discretion normally issued for explicit depictions of sensitive material, Padow! In your face mayhem.

As if the African peoples of the world do not have enough to contend with, we also face the media's consistent attempts to portray us as brutal savages by graphically showing the results of violence. They have now taken

it to a new low by forcing news viewers to witness such acts in process.

I do not know if this incident was staged, but the intent seems clear — sustain the stereotype of blacks' moral inferiority. I see clearly here a double standard, one by which the white-controlled media emphasize the positive within their own culture and plays down the negative. The other standard applied to blacks emphasizes the negative and plays down the positive.

It must be stated here that there never has been any grisly act of carnage committed by blacks that has not been equaled or surpassed by non-blacks. This has been clearly revealed in the history of imperialism, colonialism and the civil rights struggle, and in the current affairs of worldwide ethnic and political strife.

RASHEEN B. ROLLINS  
Buffalo

# Human relations group will discuss segregation

By CARL ALLEN  
*News Staff Reporter*

The city's Commission on Human Relations, largely dormant for the past 16 years under the Griffin administration, will attempt to become more active this summer by holding public hearings on some thorny issues in City Hall next month. One of the thorniest is segregation.

"The city doesn't have to have the image of the fifth most-segregated city in the nation," said Otis N. Glover, chairman of the newly revised commission.

Glover refers to a study released by the sociology department at the University of Michigan.

The study compared census data from 1980 and 1990 and found segregation has retained a grip on many of America's older cities, despite anti-discrimination laws. Buffalo ranked fifth among the most-segregated cities, after Gary, Ind., Detroit, Chicago and Cleveland.

Integration has moved into the newer, economically growing cities in the West and South that were attracting an influx of younger and middle-class blacks, according to the study.

Glover said the commission —

set up to foster mutual respect, encourage equality, and prevent discrimination — will hold hearings beginning Aug. 15. They will give people a chance to talk about the problems they see leading to divisiveness in the community and to offer possible solutions.

The hearings will be held from 5 to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday. An additional session is scheduled for Aug. 22.

Long established under the city's charter as the Board of Community Relations, the body became the Commission on Human Relations in 1975.

Mayor Masiello has revitalized the commission as a vehicle for keeping his campaign promise of breaking down barriers and bringing the city's people together.

"I see our diversity as our strength. This will serve as an opportunity for people to better understand and relate to each other," Masiello said.

Griffin reappointed Glover as chairman last year. The committee is made up of two residents of each district, who are recommended by their Council member and appointed by the mayor. Fourteen seats on the commission have been filled, with four remaining.