

TO: Philip Finkelstein

FROM: Mitchell Chanelis

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RITA WEBB SMITH VISITS BOSTON

Celebrated Harlem activist Rita Webb Smith's visit to Boston recently (18-21 June) sparked controversy and inspired many--- including sponsors of the visit, Boston's Henry George School and the Massachusetts Chapter of the Incentive Tax League (see enclosed Bay State Banner article).

Miss Smith's opening public address---'Forty Acres & A Mule'--- at the Harriet Tubman House in Boston, began as a discussion of the important role of land in achieving economic freedom but wound up in a heated, but essentially polite, open discussion of racism in American society. Some members of the audience were grateful for the opportunity to "express real feelings in an open forum".

The remainder of Rita's weekend was not nearly as controversial but, nonetheless, provided excellent exposure for her/our Georgan philosophy and garnered a good deal of publicity for the sponsoring groups.

After the Tubman House event on Friday evening Rita appeared on '5 All Night Live', a local TV talk show with a substantial (approximately 60,000) audience in the greater Boston area. She discussed her fight for the land in Harlem (see enclosed Daily News article) and mentioned her Boston sponsors.

Saturday was devoted to a presentation/workshop "Survival In A Hostile Environment" at First, Inc. a residence for ex-drug offenders. Members of Women, Inc., a similar program for women and their children, joined the group discussion.

In her workshop, Rita stressed the need for self-reliance and responsibility, and the necessity for "not giving up on America once one decides to stay here, since there is no where else to go". Nat Askew, director of First, Inc., was very impressed with that perspective on social change and has indicated a willingness to learn more about the Georgan perspective, particularly relating to economic development. Nat is also president of the Federation of Black Directors in Boston, a group of about 30, one-third of whom are concerned directly with economic development in the black community.

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Sunday morning, Rita addressed the congregation at St. Martin/St. Paul Episcopal Church in Boston's South End. Her talk, "Christianity, A Way Of Life", echoed George's emphasis on 'abundant life' being the essence of God's love. Ron McLean, president of the Black Ecumenical Commission of Massachusetts, who arranged the slot for Rita, has become interested in Georgian economic philosophy from an ethical standpoint. Ron and I have arranged a showing of "One Way To Better Cities" for the Commission on August 26. Ron hopes for a formal endorsement of our economic perspective from the Commission's annual meeting in October.

After church, Rita and I were guests for brunch at State Representative (D-Boston) Mel King's house. The dialogue begun Friday evening (again see Bay State Banner article) evolved into an intense discussion of capitalism vs. socialism and how our, i.e., George's, philosophy fits in. The result of this animated dialogue was an invitation to Rita to participate in a 10 month residency program at MIT, with which Mel is involved, and an invitation for myself to show "One Way To Better Cities" at Mel's house sometime in the Fall (upon my return from conferences, etc.). Mel King is running for Mayor of Boston in 1983. He ran in '79 and came in third, which for a black man in Boston is phenomenal.

Sunday evening, Rita and I appeared on the 'Lovell Dyatt Show', a popular call-in radio program. Lovell appeared to be quite interested in our perspective on tax issues.

The general enthusiasm and admiration with which Rita Smith's visit to Boston was met, indicate that her Monday departure may not signify the end of what may turn out to be a regular commute for the indomitable "Miss Rita".

cc: CGO  
Rita Webb Smith