

Metco coordinator - respected woman

by Linda Jordan

Committed, concerned and extremely intelligent are just a few of the words used to describe Newton METCO coordinator Mrs. Katherine Jones.

"I grew up in a neighborhood where most of the people who were instrumental in the civil rights movement lived. I was exposed to this feeling for black self-respect and pride at an early age," said Mrs. Jones.

The METCO idea originated in the late '50's and early '60's when the white citizens of Prince Edward County closed their schools to avoid desegregation. The white children were sent to private schools and concerned Newton citizens arranged for a few of the black students to come and live with them and attend school here.

Mrs. Jones was so impressed with the idea that she met with former Newton School Superintendent Dr. Charles Brown to try and arrange a similar program for some of Boston's black students.

As a teacher in the Boston schools for two years Mrs. Jones told Dr. Brown of the way in which she felt the Boston schools were destroying black students. "Teaching in Boston was my first personal experience with the destruction of black minds," said Mrs. Jones.

With Dr. Brown's enthusiastic approval Mrs. Jones contacted an early METCO director to relay her idea. METCO came to Newton in September 1966.

Mrs. Jones remembers the beginning: "Newton really didn't know how to deal with urban black people. It was a whole new thing."

"They thought that the blacks who lived in the city were just like suburban blacks, which wasn't true by any means. Suburban whites accepted suburban blacks as their equal.

"Their kids grew up together and there were no real problems. Now they were faced with the 'oppressed' people. I am referring specifically to

education oppression," continued Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. Jones organized a committee to place black students in the Newton School System. The Committee also investigated the degree to which the Newton school curriculum met special needs of black students.

The committee purchased books dealing with the black experience both in the past and the present. A black person now handles the curriculum work once done by the committee.

In 1968 the School Committee asked Katherine Jones to accept the position of METCO coordinator for Newton. Mrs. Jones has made the Newton METCO program what it is today.

Mrs. Jones feels that the progress Newton has made in METCO could not have been achieved if the community, administrators and teachers were not receptive to the program and its students.

A survey taken shows that after high school 86 percent of METCO students go on to college compared to only 26 percent of Boston's black students.

A Race Institute was established with federal funds obtained under Title 7, The Emergency School Aid Act, last year. The institute provides workshops to help administrators, teachers and students learn more about racial relations within the Newton schools.

The METCO population in the Newton schools is the largest in the state. Although Newton also has the greatest number of black teachers Mrs. Jones would like to see more black teachers and black administrators.

Robert Hayden, former director of METCO has an unqualified respect for Mrs. Jones. "I've known Kathy for about nine years now. She is committed, loving and an extremely intelligent black woman. I've always felt and still do that she is too modest.

"She is known as the 'Dean of METCO coordinators.' The consensus is that she is a very highly respected person."