The S.S. Export Courier, a 10,000-ton American merchant ship, lies at anchor in Iskenderun, Turkey.

Top Man Aboard Ship

The captain is the absolute master of a sea-going vessel. His word is law for those under his command, and it is his responsibility to see to it that the ship and cargo accomplish the desires of the shipping companies. Few blacks have attained captain status — one who did feels blessed.

By John Metelsky

When young Edward Leroy Watson strolled the sandy beaches on Grand Cayman Island, he dreamed of being a seaman, or a mate, or even a captain on an American ship.

It was a big dream for a small black boy on a tiny Caribbean Island in the 1940s. His father, a cook on a schooner, sympathized with the boy's impossible dream and urged his son to study mathematics, a basic requirement for navigation.

But there were no educational opportunities on the Caymans, three obscure islands smaller than Brooklyn, N.Y. These flat islands, 500 miles south of Miami and 180 miles northwest of Jamaica, are not in the mainstream of world events.

The islanders, descendants of Scottish farmers, buccaneers and shipwrecked sailors, speak English with noticeable Scottish overtones. These rugged people, noted for their honesty and integrity, are some of the most reliable and determined seamen of the world.

Displaying such traditional determination, after Edward completed East End Grammar School on Grand Cayman, he got his first job as a sailor on a fifty-foot schooner, the Jimson. The tall, slender youth also taught the captain's young children reading, writing and arithmetic.

An eager and energetic sailor, Edward learned basic seamanship and became an expert in splicing, rigging sails, steering the ship and typing knots. He soon "knew the ropes."

"At that time, I yearned to see America," Watson recalls, "so in 1946 I caught a banana boat to Tampa. Then I went to New York to visit my uncle, a former patrolman with the National Maritime Union (NMU), a union for seamen."

Shipping was brisk. With a little help from his uncle and a bit of luck, Watson shipped out as a Ordinary Seaman on the S.S. Exanthia, an American Export Lines freighter bound for the Mediterranean.

Capt. Watson lays out the course to Palmermo in the chartroom of the S.S. Export Courier.

"After we docked at my first port, Genoa, I celebrated my 18th birthday like a true sailor — with my shipmates in a friendly Italian bar," he reminisces with a broad grin.

When the ship returned to New York, Watson faced a major shipping strike. "Shipping was tough," he says, "I couldn't get a job on an American ship, so I sailed Panamanian ships as an Able Seaman from 1947 to 1951."

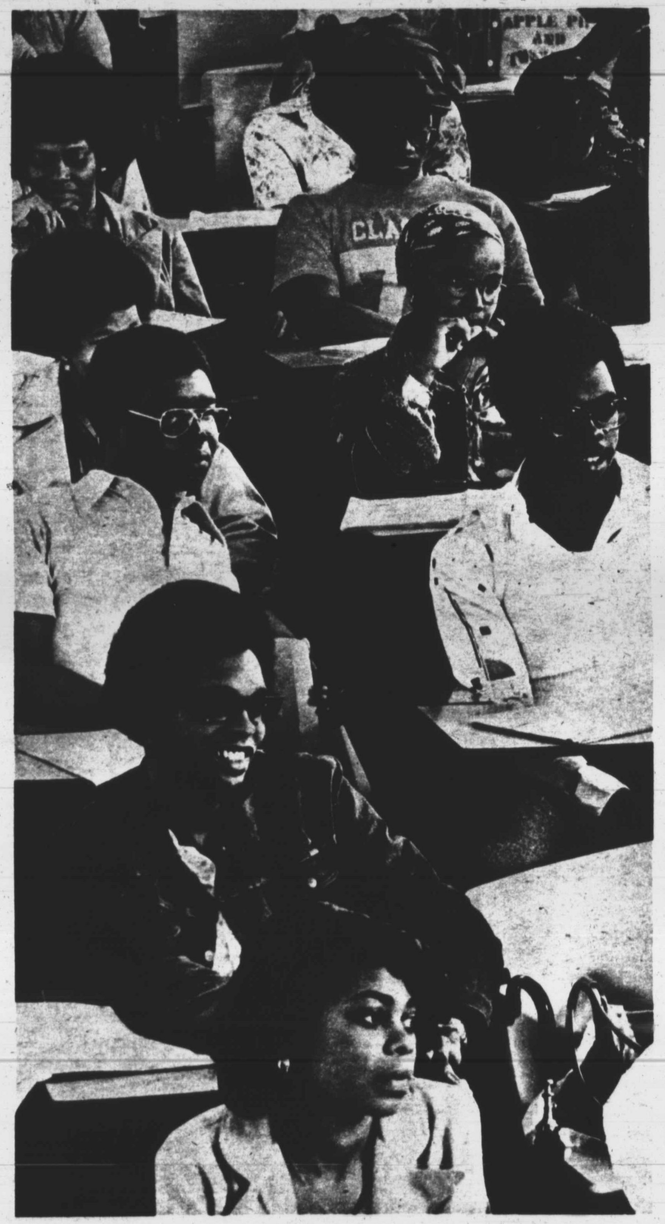
To make ends meet, between ships Watson grabbed any job he could get. Sometimes he worked as a "kitchen man" in a hotel restaurant in Greenwich, Conn., or as a dishwasher in a restaurant near the NMU hall on West 17th Street in New York City.

"In 1951," he says, "I was drafted into the U.S. Army, where I learned a lot about America and Americans from the people I met from all over the United States."

While in the army, Private Watson learned to type and, heeding the advice his father gave him long ago on the Cayman Islands, studied math, still clinging to his boyhood dream.

"I was honorably discharged from the army as a Private First Class on a Sunday in 1953," he

(Continued on Page 21)



To teach is to learn.

In the past few years, over 100 IBMers have taught at minority colleges and universities, in fields ranging from the sciences to the humanities.

They've taken part in the IBM Faculty Loan Program.

The program is our way of helping qualified people at IBM share their knowledge and experience where it can be especially valuable. They receive their full salaries and benefits from IBM so the program is cost-free to the schools.

So far, 62 schools and thousands of students have benefited.

And so have we.

Because our people often return to us with a deeper, richer understanding of human relationships and needs.

IBM