The pleasures and problems of

THE
BACHELOR
GIRL

BY RAGNI LANTZ

Among lucky ones who found satisfactory jobs and satisfying social life in Washington, D.C., is Ruby Barnes, 23, of Miami, Fla., a GS-9 contract compliance officer in the Office of Economic Opportunity. Here making up in front of Capitol.

Only a lucky minority of single girls escapes fate of loneliness in nation's capital

Each June, spawned by nation's high schools, vocational schools, and colleges, thousands of young Negro women join the swelling ranks of America's bachelor girls and in turn the single girl's perennial hunt for a prospective job, an eligible male, or both. Nowhere is the scramble for these two coveted commodities more acute, the competition more keen and the prospect for success more dismal than in Washington, D.C., where four unmarried Negro women must battle over three unmarried Negro men. But unimpressed by these forbidding odds, hopeful Negro girls—like their similarly disadvantaged white sisters—keep flocking to the nation's capital at an undiminished rate.

They are being lured by visions of VIP parties, of diplomatic splendor and, more important, of excitement and romance. There is no doubt that Washington has all of these—but only for a few. The Jet Set does include some Negro girls, but only those with the right connections, solid family background, top school preparation and exceptional skills. For the girl with just a high school or business course diploma, or for the holder of a degree from some obscure teachers college in the South, Washington's Great Society holds only the most paltry of GS-2 clerk-typist positions, and only if she is lucky, at that.

In addition, the Negro girl has some problems not shared by her white colleagues. She cannot move to the low-rent, little-white-suburb apartment buildings and must choose between slating a plush, but expensive, apartment in the Southwest sector of the city or living in constant fear of assault in less desirable neighborhoods. But housing is only a minor problem. The most frustrating one is the shortage of eligible males, especially for lower-middle-class Negro girls. The few available men are seldom husband material since most of them treasure their playboy lives. As a result, during office hours the capital's shining marble façades hide thousands of girls, Negro and white, to whom Washington spells LONELINESS.

During her first years in Washington, the bachelor girl tends to spend a disproportionately large amount of time and money on her appear-
ance, trying to outdistance—or at least keep up with—competing young females. But the aging single "girl" who realises that all her efforts were in vain, often tries to numb her feeling of loneliness and growing bitterness with tranquilizers and liquor and is an easy prey for married men on the prowl.

The two young ladies featured on these pages are not typical of the group just described. Thanks to looks, brains and good jobs, they are both close to the Washington In-Crowd and could probably belong there if they cared to. Contrary to most single girls, they are satisfied with all aspects of their lives and are in no hurry to get tied to a man.

Washington held no particular glamour for Dolores Bates when she started her government career in 1961. "It was just a place to be," she says. After high school and a four-month business course in Asbury Park, N.J., she had worked as a reservation agent for Eastern Airlines in New York. While visiting friends in Washington, she took and passed a Civil Service exam. When offered a secretarial job, she accepted because of the security a government position provides. The attractive 28-year-old has since advanced to receptionist in the office of Attty. Gen. Nicholas de B. Katzenbach. In addition to receiving his visitors she occasionally substitutes for his personal secretary. A GS-6, one grade higher than the average secretary, Dolores finds her work fascinating. She had a discouraging experience of job discrimination when she first came to Washington. But "the Kennedy administration helped open doors for Negro girls like me," she says. "Now, if you qualify, you'll be hired!"

Dolores rents an air-conditioned efficiency apartment in the Northwest section with access to a swimming pool. But like many newcomers she had roommates at first. After one year of living alone she can't think of going back to sharing. "I love living alone and should have done it long ago," she says. "You feel so free. If you feel like washing dishes—okay. If you don't—okay."

Dolores' social life includes dates with her boyfriend, a Jamaican dental student at Howard U., whom she met at a private party two years ago; courses at D.C. Teachers College ("not because I want to teach but just to broaden myself as a person"); occasional movie trips; impromptu get-togethers for a group of friends ("we'll have spaghetti and champagne and sit around singing folk songs and spirituals"); tennis, badminton and long walks in the zoo. On her vacation she generally goes home to her family in Asbury Park but this year she may go to the Caribbean instead. She shops for clothes in New York and

Enjoying fringe benefits of her job, Baby dances with her boss, Sam Yaffe, assistant to OLO Director B. Segal at Shuster. During annual banquet of Capital Press Club at Washington's International Inn. Lower ranked girls see titles of capital's glamour.

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New Jersey ("I get better buys there"), and invests in quality rather than quantity while keeping up with the latest fashion trends. Delores has no car of her own, but her boyfriend, who finances his studies by driving a cab, will deposit her and pick her up when he cannot share an evening's activity with her.

Although she enjoys her present liberty and has no plans to get married within the next few years, Delores does intend to remain single all her life. "I want to live with a man," she insists. She hopes she won't have to work outside the home after marriage. "At my age I want some children," she says.

Completely different motivations led to Ruby Burrows' GS-9 position as contract compliance officer in the Office of Economic Opportunity. A Southern belle, Ruby majored in history at Talladega College in Alabama, taught social studies to migratory students in Lake Wales, Fla., for two years, studied law at Howard and worked as Sen. Edward Kennedy's legal research assistant after graduation from law school in 1965. After passing the Florida Bar examination in August last year she intended to practice law in Birmingham, Ala., since she is firmly committed to returning to the South, but decided to accept the OEO offer and stay in Washington for a couple of years "for the experience."

Ruby describes herself as something of a loner. "I like my own company," she declares, and her social life proves it. She lives alone and drives her own car so she won't have to depend on anybody for rides. She frequently drives up to New York for a day to see a play, and her Sundays are often spent alone on a beach, reading "all the Sunday papers" or just philosophizing. "I find a tremendous consolation when I'm by the water," she confides. "That's where I unwind and do my deepest thinking." Ruby likes to dream and read—one favorite pastime is browsing in bookstores—and she prefers the company of a person who has something to offer mentally. More interested in exploring men's minds than holding their hands, she will open a conversation with anybody. "It's not being fresh. People seem surprised
BACHELOR GIRL. Continued

at first when you smile and talk to them, but most of them smile back when they recover from the initial shock. I have come to the realization that people are just people with the same emotions and feelings and I can stand on a street corner talking to a bum or walk up to a congressman and say: "Hello, I'm Ruby!" Often the bum is the more interesting person." She does prefer men's company, however. "I have very few girlfriends," she admits. "Most of my friends are fellows; they are more reasonable and less envious and you can talk to them."

With her time for dates limited by her work, Ruby stays in touch with her friends via the telephone. "One fellow calls at 3:00 the other morning from Florida and talked for half an hour. Girls will call and tell me all their problems," she says. In contrast to most other bachelor girls, Ruby is alone by choice, not by necessity. "Two, three fellows call every night and want to date me, and they cannot understand that I may prefer to stay home and file personal papers or read to go out with them." She recently took up golf because "I had to find out why this friend of mine was so excited about it."

A firm believer in the institution of marriage, Ruby nevertheless is in no hurry to join its ranks. First she wants to start practice law in the South. "I'm not fighting serious love, but I'm not looking for it either." Although very different in most respects, Dolores and Ruby were both attracted to Washington's All Souls Unitarian Church, home church of Alabama murder victim, the Rev. James Becht, explains Ruby. "I found the churches of my denomination (Episcopal) here cold compared to my little home church, but at All Souls I experienced a tremendous community feeling."

Unlike Ruby and Dolores, most of the girls interviewed for this article admitted that finding a husband was their main purpose for coming to Washington. One girl, who had given herself one year to find a man, was lucky enough to have match-making friends in the city and is now planning a future with a man she met only two weeks after her arrival. But such success stories are rare. It's hard enough to...
BACHELOR GIRL, Continued.

find a nice escort in the capital. Catching a prospective husband is almost impossible. The best opportunities seem to be at house parties and on the job. If a girl is fortunate enough to be assigned to convention and conference duty, but girls who come as perfect strangers have great difficulties finding friends. Complained one strikingly attractive secretary: "I knew the ratio was against me, but I thought I would stand a better chance of finding a promising professional or student here than in my home town. But I was lost until I met a native Washington girl who introduced me to people and told me who to and who not to associate with. I have a steady boyfriend now, but I am still looking for someone else. He is a typical Washington playboy too aware of his value and unwilling to stick to one girl when there are dozens to be had. I keep him just for companionship, but I am lonely.

And another girl from the Deep South summarized the despair of a girl whose six year search has not brought her any closer to her gentle religious family man. "I sit at home and no one calls," she complains.

Whites and Negroes work side by side all over Washington, but so far integration is generally restricted to office hours, at least for Negro girls. The fact that quite a few Negro bachelors date white girls while examples of the opposite situation are rare further limits the choice for the single Negro girl. Few of the girls interviewed had even been seriously involved with white men; but of course a certain amount of "night-time integration" does exist. One talented beauty who meets many white men through her job said: "I'm very conscious of white fellows looking at me and I have been attracted to some of them. But no white boy has ever made a pass at me."

Although Washington is short of men, eligible bachelors, it has an ample supply of married men. In addition to those residing in the city, thousands come to attend conventions and do business every year. Many of them regard Washington's assortment of attractive females as a smorgasbord from which they can pick what they want. But even if married men are good for a free meal, they are not popular among young Negro women. Word has gotten around that all men are inter-

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Swimming pool and deck for residents of apartment building in which Dolores lives adds touch of glamour to her bachelor's existence. Taking full advantage of unlimited access to facility, she often gives pool parties for her close friends.

DINNER DATE. Maria de Chabert, a Howard Law student from Virgin Islands, gallantly opens door to his Sugaray before taking John for evening on town. Although she has no problem finding suitable style events, she frequently prefers whatever.

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BACHELOR GIRL Continued

cisted in sex, but with most married men the interest is too obvious. Most bachelor girls accept their role as women and require no marriage promise to have an affair with someone they really love, but less would waste themselves on wolves. "Sex is not just recreation for me; it is an expression toward someone I really know and understand and want to share everything with," was one typical remark. Those girls who do accept dates with married men do so usually against their better judgment when the hollowness becomes unbearable.

Saying so to intimacy may mean losing a date, but most girls would rather risk that than lose their self-respect. There are exceptions, however, and they have brought Washington the reputation of a modern day Geometra where everything goes. It is true that some small-town (and some big-city) girls who arrive in Washington without other marketable skills become full-time prostitutes. And it is a well-keeping fact that some girls—rightly or wrongly—think they can reach the top faster by sleeping with their bosses. But most Negro girls have little interest in a life of that kind, be it for money or just for kicks. Said one secretary, "I know girls who have these big crying spells from going from guy to guy, sooner or later their consciences catch up with them."

So what fills the life of the girl who looks out to the fight for the male, who refuses to buy dates with her body or who stays true to a sweetheart in some other part of the country or the world? Domestic chores and letter writing only take so much time. Some girls become television addicts. "I know it is stupid, but my life is centered around Peyton Place," said one dateless girl. Said another: "I sleep a lot." Many, however, make more constructive use of their time, doing volunteer work and taking courses. "I started going to school to fill the gap after a nine-month romance," said one woman who now has 50 credits toward a degree.

Some lonely girls are fortunate enough to live close to home. There is the cute 18-year-old Virginia girl who has gone back home every other weekend since she came to Washington a year ago. Others persuade sisters or even mothers to come and stay with them. But the most common substitute in a male-less world is the girlfriend.

In some cases, the friendship between two girls—often two roommates—becomes an actual love affair. Lesbianism occurs more frequently in the higher echelons of Washington society than among the less educated, less sophisticated, according to some girls. There are Negro members in the Mattachine Society of Washington, which is actively fighting for the "civil rights" of homosexuals. But to the large majority of lonely bachelor girls the girlfriend is only second-best. Sometimes they can turn to her companionship while they are waiting for their ideal man. With her, they can explore the capitals historic sights, listen to open-air concerts, see movies—most romantic with happy endings—go bowling and listen to blues or folk singers over a drink. And they can cry on her shoulder when life becomes so miserable and plan for their joint vacation in Hawaii where, maybe, HE will enter their life—the man for whom most bachelor girls would gladly give up careers and pension plans.

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