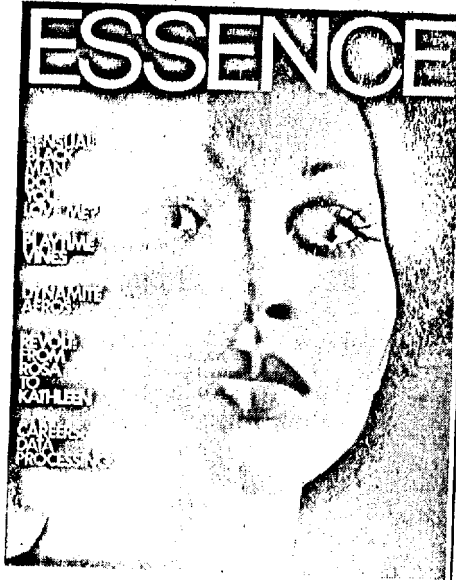


Black Venture

The birth of a new magazine is always a struggle against the odds, but consider the case of four young black businessmen, none of whom had ever published anything in his life. They were brought together one evening in Harlem 18 months ago at a "black capitalism" meeting sponsored by the Wall Street brokerage firm of Shearson, Hammill. This week the result is on the newsstands: *Essence*, a stylish monthly magazine for black women.

The idea of a magazine was suggested by Jonathan Blount, then 24 and an ad salesman for the New Jersey Bell Telephone Co. "All right," said the Shearson, Hammill adviser. "There's Cecil Hollingsworth behind you, and



"ESSENCE" FIRST-ISSUE COVER
 A good beginning.

he knows about printing. And Ed Lewis over here is a financial planner for First National City Bank, and he knows financial planning." Joined by Clarence Smith, a salesman for Prudential Insurance, the foursome began getting together at the end of their regular workdays. From publishing talent up and down Manhattan's Madison and Sixth Avenues, they picked up ideas and expertise.* From stationery left over from a graphics consulting firm Hollingsworth had once started, they took a name: the Hollingsworth Group. Their first budget proposal was \$5,000,000. Shearson, Hammill ordered a cut. Finally, the four began canvassing potential investors with a \$1.5 million proposal.

It took a few months, but the group

* Among companies that volunteered advisers: TIME-LIFE, *Newsweek*, *Psychology Today*, New York, CBS, Young & Rubicam, J.K. Lasser Tax Institute, Cowles Communications, McCann-Erickson and Lorillard Corp.

eventually sold the idea to such investors as First National City, Chase, and Morgan Guaranty banks. They also intrigued LIFE Photographer-Writer Gordon Parks into taking command as editorial director. His professional hand and eye are evident in the monthly's first issue (circ. 150,000), out this week in 145 cities at 60¢ a copy. Its tone is best described as *Vogue-cum-Ramparts*—a somewhat uneasy combination.

In the *Vogue* mode, 20 pages of high-fashion color photography show black models in playsuits, pants, shawls, bathing suits, midis and minis. Six of the pages stop the show with bangles and baubles of jewelry against a background of body stockings and black skin. The "People Are Talking About . . ." department of *Vogue* is obviously the source of an *Essence* section called "Folks Are Rapping On."

Ramparts' tone of voice is heard throughout. It is handled well in a collaboration between Parks, his son Gordon Jr. and Freelance Writer Gilbert Moore. Together they fill eight pages with black-and-white pictures and text about "Five Shades of Militancy." But the militancy carries over even into features on employment tips, travel and a kind of black Joyce Brothers psychiatric column. After a while, "the young, urban, inquisitive and acquisitive black woman," for whom the magazine is intended, is going to get tired of being reminded of "the long-standing, dehumanizing rape of the black woman in America." In the second issue, which the editors were busily revamping last week, "the approach is more woman, less black," says Executive Editor Barbara Kerr, formerly of *Mademoiselle*.

That the magazine made its first deadline at all, let alone impressively, is a phenomenon in itself. *Essence's* full-time staff numbers only 26 (four of whom, including Kerr, are white). The first issue took its toll of editors in chief, losing both Bernadette Carey (of *Vogue*) and Ruth Ross (ex-*Newsweek*) to shakedown strife. "It was a good beginning," says Ida Lewis, 34, the pert, formerly Paris-based freelance writer just signed on as the new editor in chief, "but I want to emphasize the positive aspects of black femininity. The black woman already knows what she's up against."