

THE NEGRO YOU NEVER KNOW



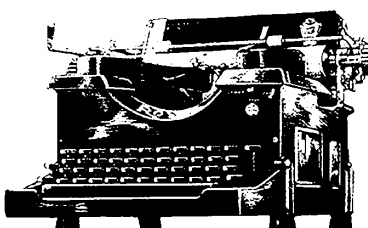
Blind Negro entertainer plays to his crowd

You, a Northerner, reach the South vaguely aware that there is a race question. You have always lived in a suburban community where there are only a few Negroes, servants who are treated in many respects like the Irish and Scandinavian "help." You have not been brought up in the tradition of an earlier generation, that Negroes belong to an oppressed race deserving special consideration; but neither have you much of the prejudice that exists in northern cities today where they have congregated in large numbers.

Your mind therefore is a blank page when you leave the train at Atlanta, insofar as the problem of white and black is concerned.

The writing on that page begins . . .

Atlanta:—A Negro teacher in one of the local colleges. "Our trouble is with the poor whites who are in economic competition with the more successful of our people. I know a Negro farmer who daren't paint his house or make necessary repairs which he can easily afford, because it would arouse the jealousy of the neighboring poor whites."



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attitude of his subordinates, and tactfully suggest that it must be difficult for a strict disciplinarian to be very happy in the position he holds.

He laughs. "You think I don't know how — and — feel toward me?" —mentioning the names of a couple of college officials he could have sent to jail for looting the institution, but instead retained in their positions. "At that, they're no worse than the rest. I don't care how any of them feel about me, any more than I should if they were children requiring discipline. I see that they do their work, and don't steal too much.

"The trouble with you and most Northerners studying the race problem is that you regard the Negro as a white man with a black skin. You won't get anywhere in solving it until you realize that the whites are as different from Negroes as if they belonged to a different species of animal.

"I know what you think about me. You think I'm a tyrant. Perhaps I am. I am governing a group of grown-up children, emotional, easily swayed by passion, entirely unmoral as to financial and sexual matters. If I am a dictator it is because I have to be to get results. . . ."

New Orleans:—A white physician, head of the largest Negro hospital in Louisiana. He has been a medical missionary in Africa and India before taking up institutional work in America. "The Negro is absolutely self-centered and incapable of an unselfish act. It is foolish to blame him for this. He is born that way. You can't judge him by white man's standards. He probably belongs to a different species, though the cross between the white and black is frequently fertile. I believe, however, that there is sufficient biological difference between the two races so that in cases of mixture the genes of either the one race or the other will prevail in the course of a few generations if the cross remains fertile, and the descendants will become either pure white or pure Negro."

This quotation is given to show the attitude of a man who has spent his life among Negroes, and not to deride his biological theory, which is probably inadequately stated. . . .

New Orleans:—A Negro physician comes from a house where a woman is screaming at the top of her voice. "Hysterical," he explains. "Her husband's just died."

"Why don't you give her something to quiet her?"

"She wouldn't want me to. She's getting too much kick out of it. The louder she yells the more devotion she shows the dear departed."

A man comes up and nodding to the doctor, goes into the house. In a moment the screams cease. "Who was he?" you ask.

"One of the widow's boy friends."

When you remark that he is apparently able to console her, the physician frowns. "There you go applying the standards of an alien race to my people. That's the reason you

"What could they do?" you ask.

"Burn his house or barn—run him out of the country—beat him up—have him arrested on some trumped-up charge. Perhaps worse."

"That hardly seems possible," you question doubtfully.

"You don't know the southern cracker. Many of them are degenerate as a result of interbreeding and hookworm. Poverty-stricken and inefficient, they have only one source of pride—their white blood which makes them superior to any nigger. Any evidence of success or prosperity on the part of a Negro reflects on their racial superiority. The only way they can assert that superiority is by physical violence."

"Then race riots and lynchings are due to an inferiority complex of the poor whites?"

"Not altogether. Lynchings and race riots are participated in frequently by the more prosperous and better educated people of a community."

"Most Negroes I've talked to deny that."

"It's true nevertheless," he asserts, "even if you can't often get one of our group to admit it. The situation which our northern white friends do not realize and which the educated Negro refuses to face is this: the black man in the South, 90% of him, at least, belongs to a primitive race barely removed from savagery. He has the strong passions of the savage which must be kept under control through fear. It isn't worth while blinking that fact."

"Furthermore, you must remember that in large sections of the South outside the cities, the Negroes greatly outnumber the whites."

"I don't suppose you've ever been in a Negro liquor dive. Frequently the gin bottles have labels showing pictures of naked white women and printed statements that the stuff is guaranteed to increase sexual virility. Let a Negro buck with the passions of a savage and the brain of a child get drunk on this stuff, and you can well realize the danger to the wives and daughters of the farmers living unprotected in the lonely countryside."

"That's all very horrible," you say, "but I can't see that it explains the savagery of lynching. In all the southern states rape is a capital offense and the criminal is sure to be convicted."

"It's not as simple as that. If the woman isn't murdered she would have to go on the witness stand and testify against her assailant before a crowded courtroom. That, the average Southerner feels, is an impossible ordeal to force the wretched victim to go

through. Then a trial would take place at a courthouse away from the scene of the crime. A certain amount of time will elapse. The Negroes don't read newspapers. They would doubtless hear of the trial and punishment of the criminal, but there would be nothing sufficiently vivid about it to act as a deterrent.

"Now consider lynching from the southern white man's standpoint. It saves the victim from having to testify to her shame. The punishment of the criminal takes place immediately in the neighborhood where the crime was committed. It is usually in a form so horrible that it will act as a deterrent to similar crimes. . . ."

New Orleans:—A Negro physician, head of the local branch of the Marcus Garvey organization. He is a Northerner, openly a radical, proud of the red card he carries showing membership in the I.W.W.

"The trouble with the Negro is he wants to become an imitation white man. He has no pride of race. He cares nothing about other Negroes as Negroes, in spite of assertions to the contrary by writers in the struggling Negro papers that are published in every town of any size. There is a wider gulf between the successful Negro and his poverty-stricken neighbor than there is between the Negro and the white man. If a Negro is in trouble he'll always go to a white man rather than to another Negro."

"You didn't know we have an aristocracy among Negroes? We're graded according to color. The light coffee-colored hold the highest social position while the coal black darkies hold the lowest. Why, our richer Negro churches have a color line as strict as that of the whites. Only the coffee-colored are admitted to the choicer pews. The blacks are restricted to the gallery."

He laughed a little bitterly. "It's a hell of a joke, an intelligent man wasting his life trying to do anything for 'em! . . ."

Jacksonville:—A bishop of the A.M.E. Church. He was born on the island of Martinique and in spite of a lifetime in this country, is still more French than American. He is wealthy and has a house in Baltimore, though his bishopric is in Florida. He is president of the largest Negro college in the state, which he rescued from a condition of bankruptcy and put on its feet financially. The ministers under him hate him and some of them would cheerfully poison him if they were able. The members of the faculty of the college, while acknowledging his ability and what he has accomplished, have none too great a love for him.

You wonder whether he knows the

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Northerners when you live in the South for any length of time, become more violently anti-Negro than any Southerner."

"I've heard that said before, but I doubt whether it's true."

"It's true enough, I'll tell you why. The Negro always tries to appear the sort of man you want him to be. In the North you don't come into intimate contact with him. Those you see are to all appearance pretty good imitations of white people. Then you come South and discover the Negro as he is, an amiable semi-savage with an entirely different set of values from yours. You call him a liar because he tries to say the things that will please you. His unconcealed sexual promiscuity gets under your skin because you have inherited the prejudices of your Puritan ancestors. Soon distrust is succeeded by violent dislike. . . . The Southerner doesn't feel that way about the Negro. In fact, he is fond of him in what he considers his place. The Southerner is tolerant. He no more condemns the Negro for laziness, lying or immorality than he would his dog for the same reasons. . . ."

Jacksonville:—A Negro is fished out of the St. John's River by a couple of burly individuals who have driven up in an undertaker's wagon. They hustle the body into the wagon without making any attempt at resuscitation.

"How long was he in the water?" you ask a watcher.

"Fifteen minutes, mebbe. He threshed around quite a spell before he sunk."

"Aren't they going to try reviving him?"

"Hell no. Them guys works for the undertaker that's got the city contract. That nigger's worth \$50 dead and not a damn cent alive."

Jacksonville:—A police car stops beside an elderly Negro who has evidently been drinking enough to make him slightly unsteady in his walk. He shakes his head with a fatuous drunken smile when he is ordered into the car. One of the cops pulls a black-jack and bludgeons him until he slowly sinks to the ground with blood pouring from his mouth. . . .

Jacksonville:—A policeman is shot by the Negro lover of a prostitute of his own race. The cop was beating the woman up because his rake-off from her earnings wasn't as much as he expected. The Negro escapes, and excitement in the city mounts from day to day as he remains at large. One morning you hear that the police are going to get some niggers that night in revenge for the slain policeman.

Disregarding the freemasonry that binds all whites together in the South, you pass the news along to such Negroes as you can reach, including the dean of the local Negro college.

That night the police, accompanied by a mob, attack a house in one of the better Negro residential districts and set it on fire. A young Negro tries to escape from an upper floor and is

shot down without any attempt to arrest him. The next morning the papers announce that the man killed is the murderer of the policeman.

A curious fact is that the Negroes you had openly warned over the telephone were seriously worried as to the consequences to you of your interference. As it turned out, this worry was entirely needless. The matter was never referred to by any of your white acquaintances. . . .

Jacksonville:—A white insurance collector is murdered in a Negro saloon. Two men are arrested and charged with the crime. The governor orders out the militia to protect the prisoners from mob violence. The city remains quiet until the troops leave. That night the two Negroes are taken from the jail and burned to death. What is left of the bodies is dragged through the principal streets of the city, tied to automobiles. The father of the murdered man, an eminently respectable person whose other son is a local judge, tells you the inside story:

"The boys come to me right after the niggers was arrested and said they were going to take care of 'em. By that time the governor had ordered out the militia. I said, 'Boys, there's no use any of you getting killed. The governor can't keep the troops here always. Wait till they go.' And that's what they done. . . ."

Jacksonville:—A crowd is waiting at the Union Station for a street car. You stand aside while the women, including several Negroes, get on. A man behind you becomes impatient. "What's the matter with you? Why don't you get on if you're going to?"

You look back and see he's a little fellow who probably isn't carrying a gun. "Ladies first, black or white," you respond airily. He pales with rage.

"You call niggers ladies! Say, where in the hell do you come from?" He sits across from you in the car, studying you as if you were some kind of dangerous and repulsive animal. . . .

Jacksonville:—The colored principal of a nationally known school in Daytona phones a telegram to the Western Union office and gives her name prefixed by Mrs.

"Aren't you colored?" demands the clerk at the office.

"What has that to do with my sending a telegram?"

"You ought to know colored people aren't called Mr. or Mrs. in this part of the country. If you want to send a telegram you'll have to use your given name. . . ."

Charleston:—Post office. A Negro in line at the stamp window steps aside when you pause behind him. You motion him back into his place. A passer-by taps you on the shoulder. "I reckon you're from the North, stranger. Down here niggers don't get served while white men are waiting."

"That's right, suh," says the Negro. "Us niggers know our place and we don't have no trouble with the white folks. . . ."

Macon:—A railroad brakeman talking. "They had the black bastards

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strung up on a telegraph pole when the train pulled in, but I didn't miss all the fun. They was shootin' at 'em and I pulls my gun and jumps off the engine before she comes to a stop. There must of been a thousand guys there by the time we cut up what was left of them bastards for souvenirs. Let me show you what I got. . . ."

Atlanta:—The principal of an Atlanta school tells of the Atlanta race riots in which, according to his account, a large number of whites were killed and the Negroes left in possession of the section of the city in which most of the trouble occurred. He tells also of a happening in one of the smaller Georgia towns where he was teaching at the time:

A Negro woman, angered at a white child stoning her, catches the youngster and slaps him. A group of influential men in the town go to the Negress' house, strip her naked and hang her on a near-by tree. With the exquisite sense of humor of the southern cracker they then send for the woman's husband who is working in the fields. "We just killed a nice fat sow," they tell him, "but we ain't got any use for her. You can have her if you want her."

standpoint; but the interesting feature of the affair is its sequel. During the next two weeks a number of Negroes are killed by the police, usually in their homes "resisting arrest." There may have been no connection between the killing of the four cops and these shootings, but the Negroes believe otherwise. They assert that when a Negro kills a cop a certain number of Negroes are always killed by the police in revenge. . . .

You return North with your mind no longer a blank page insofar as the problem of white and black is concerned. But what is written on the page is confused and contradictory. . . .

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