

# THE NEW NEGRO.

## He Depends More on His Own Race than on the White.

By Ray Stannard Baker.

The negro in the South is both the labor problem and the servant question; he is pre-eminently the political issue, and his place, socially, is of daily and hourly discussion. A negro minister I met told me a story of a boy who went as a sort of butler's assistant in the home of a prominent family in Atlanta. His people were naturally curious about what went on in the white man's house. One day they asked him:

"What do they talk about when they're eating?" The boy thought a moment; then he said:

"Mostly they discuss us culled folks."

Not long afterward I was lunching with several fine Southern men, and they talked, as usual, with the greatest freedom in the full hearing of the negro waiters. Somehow, I could not help watching to see if the negroes took any notice of what was said. I wondered if they were sensitive. Finally, I put the question to one of my friends:

"Oh," he said, "we never mind them; they don't care."

One of the waiters instantly spoke up:

"No, don't mind me; I'm only a block of wood."

I commented that evening to some Southern people I met, on the impression, almost of jollity, given by the negro workers I had seen in the streets. One of the older ladies made what seemed to me a very significant remark:

"They don't sing as they used to," she said.

"You should have known the old darkies of the plantation. Every year, it seems to me, they have been losing more and more of their carefree good humor. I sometimes feel that I don't know them any more. Since the riot they have grown so glum and serious that I'm free to say I'm scared of them!"

Passing the postoffice, I saw several mail carriers coming out, some white, some black, talking and laughing, with no evidence, at first, of the existence of any color line. Interested to see what the real condition was, I went in and made inquiries. A most interesting and significant condition developed. I found that the postmaster, who is a wise man, sent negro carriers up Peachtree and other fashionable streets, occupied by wealthy white people, while white carriers were assigned to beats in the mill districts and other parts of town inhabited by the poorer classes of white people.

"You see," said my informant, "the Peachtree people know how to treat negroes. They really prefer a negro carrier to a white one; it's natural for them to have a negro doing such service. But if we sent negro carriers down into the mill district they might get their heads knocked off."

Then he made a philosophical observation:

"If we had only the best class of white folks down here and the industrious negroes there wouldn't be any trouble."

No other one point of race contact is so much and so bitterly discussed among the negroes as the Jim Crow car. I don't know how many negroes replied to my question, "What is the chief cause of friction down here?" with a complaint of their treatment on streetcars and in railroad trains.

Fundamentally, of course, they object to any separation which gives them inferior accommodations. This point of view—and I am trying to set down every point of view, both colored and white, exactly as I find it—is expressed in many ways.

"We pay first class fare," said one of the leading negroes in Atlanta, "exactly as the white man does, but we don't get first class service. We don't know when we may be dislodged from our seats to make place for a white man who has paid no more than we have. I say it isn't fair."

In answer to this complaint the white man says: "The negro is inferior; he must be made to keep his place. Give him a chance and he assumes social equality, and that will lead to an effort at intermarriage and amalgamation of the races. The Anglo-Saxon will never stand for that."

Conditions on the railroad trains are also the cause of constant irritation. Well-to-do negroes who can afford to travel complain that they are not permitted to engage sleeping car berths. Booker T. Washington usually takes a compartment where he is entirely cut off from the white passengers. Some other negroes do the same thing, although they are often refused even this expensive privilege. Railroad officials with whom I talked, and it is important to hear what they say, said that it was not only a question of public opinion—which was absolutely opposed to any intermingling of the races in the cars—but that negro travel in most places was small compared with white travel; that the ordinary negro was unclean and careless, and that it was impracticable to furnish them the same accommodations, even though it did come hard on a few educated negroes. They said that when there was a delegation of negroes, enough to fill an entire sleeping car, they could always get accommodations. All of which gives a glimpse of the enormous difficulties accompanying the separation of the races in the South.

One curious and enlightening example of the infinite ramifications of the color line was given me by Mr. Logan, secretary of the Atlanta Associated Charities, which is supported by voluntary contributions. One day, after the riot, a subscriber called Mr. Logan on the telephone and said: "Do you help negroes in your society?"

"Why, yes, occasionally," said Mr. Logan.

"What do you do that for?"

"A negro gets hungry and cold like anybody else," answered Mr. Logan.

"Well, you can strike my name from your subscription list. I won't give any of my money to a society that helps negroes."

Now this sounds rather brutal, but behind it lies the peculiar psychology of the South. It was not necessarily cruelty to a cold or hungry negro that inspired the demand of the irate subscriber, but the feeling that the associated charities helped negroes and whites on the same basis, as men; that, therefore, it encouraged "social equality," and that therefore it was to be stopped.

One of the natural and inevitable results of the effort of the white man to set the negro off, as a race, by himself, is to awaken in him a new consciousness—a sort of racial consciousness. It drives the negroes together for defence and offence. Many able negroes, some largely of white blood, become of necessity leaders of their own people. And one of their chief efforts consists in urging negroes to work together and stand together. In this they are only developing the instinct of defence against the white man which has always been latent in the race.

The negro has long been defensively secretive. Slavery made him that. In the past the instinct was passive and defensive; but with growing education and intelligent leadership it is rapidly becoming conscious, self-directive and offensive. And right there, it seems to me, though I speak yet from limited observation, lies the great cause of

the increased strain in the South. Let me illustrate. In the People's Tabernacle in Atlanta, where thousands of negroes meet every Sunday, I saw this sign, in huge letters:

FOR PHOTOGRAPHS, GO TO  
AUBURN PHOTO GALLERY,  
OPERATED BY COLORED MEN.

The old fashioned darky preferred to go to the white man for everything; he didn't trust his own people; the new negro, with growing race consciousness, and feeling that the white man is against him, urges his friends to patronize negro doctors and dentists and to trade with negro storekeepers. The extent to which this movement has gone was one of the most surprising things that I, as an unfamiliar Northerner, found in Atlanta. In other words, the struggle of the races is becoming more and more rapidly economic.

One day, walking in Broad street, I passed a negro shoe store. I did not know that there was such a thing in the country. I went in to make inquiries. It was neat, well kept and evidently prosperous. I found that it was owned by a stock company, organized and controlled wholly by negroes; the manager was a brisk young mulatto named Harper, a graduate of Atlanta University. I found him dictating to a negro girl stenographer. There were two reasons, he said, why the store had been opened; one was because the promoters thought it a good business opportunity, and the other was because many negroes of the better class felt that they did not get fair treatment at white stores. At some places—not all, he said—when a negro woman went to buy a pair of shoes, the clerk would hand them to her without offering to help her try them on; and a negro was always kept waiting until all the white people in the store had been served. Since the new business was opened, he said, it had attracted much of the negro trade; all the leaders advising their people to patronize him. I was much interested to find out how this young man looked upon the race question. His first answer struck me forcibly, for it was the universal and typical answer of the business man the world over, whether white, yellow or black:

"All I want," he said, "is to be protected and let alone, so that I can build up this business."

"What do you mean by protection?" I asked.

"Well, justice between the races. That doesn't mean social equality. We have a society of our own, and that is all we want. If we can have justice in the courts, and fair protection, we can learn to compete with the white stores and get along all right."

Such an enterprise as this indicates the new, economic separation between the races. Most Southern men I met had little or no idea of the remarkable extent of this advancement among the better class of negroes. Here is a strange thing. I don't know how many Southern men have prefaced their talks with me with words something like this:

"You can't expect to know the negro after a short visit. You must live down here like we do. Now, I know the negroes like a book. I was brought up with them. I know what they'll do and what they won't do. I have had negroes in my house all my life."

But, curiously enough, I found that these men rarely knew anything about the better class of negroes—those who were in business, or in independent occupations, those who owned their own homes. They did come into contact with the servant negro, the field hand, the common laborer, who make up, of course, the great mass of the race. On the other hand, the best class of negroes did not know the higher class of white people, and based their suspicion and hatred upon the acts of the poorer sort of whites with whom they naturally came into contact. The best elements of the two races are as far apart as though they lived in different continents; and that is one of the chief causes of the growing danger of the Southern situation.—The American Magazine for May.