

Between The Lines

By Dean Gordon B. Hancock for ANP

MAMMY COMES BACK

The arrival of the "New Negro" was marked by a stolid determination to drive the Black Mammy from the forefront of national thinking. Black Mammyism in all its relations and ramifications was spurned as beneath the dignity and social notice of the newly arrived "New Negro" and his heirs and assigns forever. Mammy had to beat a hasty retreat in spite of the fact that her influence and financial backing was behind much of the advance of the Negro race. She helped to lay the foundation of the hopes and aspirations of her stricken people. Her sweat and her tears and her blood were swift witnesses before the bar of public opinion where the race is ever on trial. That the Negro should attempt to disqualify her in the eyes of the world was somewhat startling if not indeed distressing.

Few indeed are the prominent Negro families today who cannot number among their members some Black Mammy who acted well her part and won recognition for her nearest kin. Our schools are well populated with sons and daughters whose places were secured in part by the influence of 'Mammy'. Many of our diplomas have been drenched with the sweat of some Black Mammy. Just why the 'New Negro' should turn so violently against her and her lowly ministrations of service is somewhat puzzling. But thanks to Hattie McDaniel, whose genius sparkles in *Gone With The Wind*, Black Mammy is back and with flying colors!

When one sits four hours and sees the superb acting of this genius of the screen, one is convinced that the actor is more important than the role. The role is important but acting is the thing. That Miss McDaniel ran away with a perfectly fine show is not an accident. She put her heart in her role and this humble role lifted her to fame and fortune. The fine portrayal of Black Mammy by Miss McDaniel is not an exaggeration in any wise, but faithful to the true traditions of the old South. None but the flagrantly misguided could ever disparage the fine influence of the Black Mammy on the social life of the South.

The white men and women of the South who have time and again stayed the flood gates of violence against the defenseless Negroes are those who have been made humane by the tender touch of some Black Mammy. The fine influence of these noble souls upon the mores of South have made the Negro's cross much less heavy than it would otherwise have been. It is a mighty fine thing for Hattie McDaniel to bring Mammy back, until the New Negro can recover his sense of values and proportion. In other words of the New Negro-so-called can play his role as effectively as the Black Mammas of the South played theirs; he will do himself an honorable service. It is not the role but the actor that counts.

The Negro race and the nation is under obligations to Bill Robinson, Louise Beavers and Hattie McDaniels for the part they have played in getting the Negro on the screen at all. I well remember when Bill Robinson accepted a subordinate role, he was heckled by these supposed New Negroes who called his role Uncle Tomism. Bill Robinson is a wise Negro and would not be deterred. He faced reality. He knew that if the Negroes entered the movies they would have to assume humble subordinate roles. There were the rash among the Negroes who clamored for leading roles or none. To take less than the leading role was betraying the race. Bill Robinson went ahead.

It was the same or nearly so when Louise Beavers appeared in *Imitation of Life*. But by the arrival of Hattie McDaniel the Negro had awakened to the fact of reality and the odium had largely passed and so instead of heckling Miss McDaniel, the Negro hailed her. This is one of the healthiest signs that the Negro is not hopelessly lost in the maze of untoward circumstances. When the Negro wakes up to the fact that it is the actor and not the role that counts we are going to get somewhere. As in *Gone With The Wind* so in the life of the nation, the Negro cannot always select his role, it is often selected for him and he must play it or not play at all. It looks as if the lightning of common sense has struck certain segments of the Negro race and for this may God be praised. Black Mammy comes back on the rising tide of common sense.