

W. D. WORKMAN

Negroes Make Mistake
By Denying Heritage

"Tain't often that I agree with the Southern Regional Council, but when that anti-segregationist, outfit calls for preserving some of the old-fashioned Negro dialect and humor, I say "Amen."

One of the really distressing consequences of the strained race relations throughout the land has been the tendency of many Negroes to deny their own heritage. In effect, many modern Negroes seem to be re-writing history, a la George Orwell's "Nineteen-Eighty-Four," by simply ignoring history. They seem inclined to pretend that today's Negro sprang, full-developed, on the current American scene — instead of going back to slavery as a reference point which pointedly emphasizes the great progress made by their race.

SUPPRESSION

Along with this strange turn of mind is an obvious desire to suppress all reminders of what many Negroes regard as a shameful past, although the past was not actually of their own doing. Thus there is a conscious aversion to old speech patterns, customs, songs, and other characteristics which once marked the American Negro, especially the southern Negro.

"Offensive" words such as "darker," "nigger," "pickaninny," and others have been pressured out of song and story. The image of "Uncle Tom" is ridiculed. Tempers rise at the recounting of folk tales and jokes involving Negroes.

But comes now a knuckle-rapping of such suppression, and from the unlikely source of "New South," monthly publication of the bi-racial Southern Regional Council.

The editor of this little booklet is Margaret Long, whose credentials are well-established as a friend of the Negro and a foe of segregation. Thus, when she says things like this, her words should carry weight:

"Why, indeed, should the NAACP and other commendably Negro-advancing devotees seek to pressure out of existence fictional, dramatic or musical preservation of a dialect so rich, regional and full of humor? Does the New Negro take comfort or increase his stature by pretending that every one of his race is, and always has been, a suave dark cat in a Brooks Brothers suit, talking tediously learned sociologi-

cal talk out of Harvard or Chicago? Or a tawny slender lady with a bouffant hairdo who talks polysyllabic educationese in accents from Cleveland?

"Is Negro 'culture' from here on out to be all jazz, smart comedy, opera arias, social protest and arid sociology, forgetful of ancient wrongs, persisting love, profound laughter and terrible sorrow? Can it cut off, really, from the old true eloquence of dialect and spirituals? This seems a heritage as fertile as it is bitter, and proud as it is humble, from which the brave and urbane new Negro has emerged. And I, for one, think it deserves loving respect rather than a shamed and angry extermination."

Accompanying this rise of stiller protestation which Miss Long so ably deflates has been a sad loss of amiability and friendliness between the races.

BANNED BY NEGROES

The ready smile, the quick laugh, the effervescent good humor and other traits which endeared "the old Negro" to his white friends are not tolerated by "the new Negro." In spite of faulty logic, apparently the new breed feels that the attaining of new status means the necessary repudiation of everything associated with the old.

This attitude is reflected in the cold formality with which Pullman porters go about their work, in the surliness of Negro waiters in far too many establishments, and in the general demeanor of self-conscious Negroes who wear their dignity as a suit of armor.

Whites and Negroes alike realize that there will be litigation, argument, irritation and continuing controversy for years to come in the field of race relations.

But even this does not mean that all warmth of contact and culture must be frozen out of existence.

25 Years Ago

January, 1937

Mr. and Mrs. Beaty Whiddon spent the weekend in Greenville.

Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Ayres spent the day in Marianna.

Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Page were visiting his parents in Florida.

Mrs. W. B. Smyth was visiting in Birmingham.



Clipped By:

avereemcnear2

Mon, May 16, 2022