

## Chapter 20

# Does the Negro Hate The White Man?

By Ray Sprigle

Strangely enough, the Negro in the South doesn't hate the white man. It could well be that my four weeks as a Negro in the deep South falls grievously short in equipping me as an authority on the subject. But I'll still stand on my opinion.

Remember that I talked at length with the real leaders of the Negro not all of them by any means - but with scores of them in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. They are the men on the firing line who are battling for Negro rights and Negro progress where it's dangerous to do it.

They are the local heads of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, ministers, business men, college professors, doctors, lawyers, school teachers, Negro plantation owners, men of substance and influence in their own communities among both whites and blacks.

I wasn't a white man interviewing them, remember. I was a Negro from the North, a friend of Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP. I was a guest in their homes. We sat for hours over their dinner tables. I slept in their guest rooms. We were just a group of Negroes talking things over.

### **Solid Basis for Hatred**

Frankly, why the Negro doesn't hate the Southern white is a mystery to me. Give me another couple of months, Jim Crowing it through the South - forever alert never to bump or jostle a white man - careful always to "sir" even the most bedraggled specimen of the Master Race - scared to death I might encounter a pistol-totin' trigger-happy drunken deputy sheriff or a hysterical white woman - and I'm pretty sure I'd be hating the whole damned white race.

It seems to me that the intelligent Southern Negro has realized that this fabric of segregation with its development of vicious discrimination; its pattern of organized brutality and oppression - all of it with its roots in slavery - has become a tyrant over both White and Black.

There are - and every Southern Negro, field hand or college president, knows it decent, humane, tolerant white men and women in the Southland. The Negro knows too, that those white people lack courage - and it would take courage of a high order - to take a definite stand against the more vicious and unnecessary forms of discrimination. He knows they don't approve of wanton, brutal murder. They just lack courage to condemn it publicly. He knows that they lack the courage to spearhead a movement to jail, indict, try and hang the trigger-happy "nigger-killers" who are the men who actually set the pattern for race relations in the South.

### **Might Be Mobbed**

The least that could happen to any white who so "betrayed" his race would be to be dubbed "nigger lover" and see his wife and children and his business suffer. He might easily be lashed within an inch of his life by a hooded mob.

In practically every group of Negroes of which I found myself a part, somebody was sure to say in one fashion or another:

"I'd almost be willing to quit the fight for better education for our people for five or ten years, if I could have some sort of assurance that all of these cracker whites would get a sound education. That way, the cruelty and ignorance and gullibility would be educated out of them and they'd forget their hatred and intolerance of the Negro."

Your more cynical, educated Negro has a sort of kindly contempt for most of the white race in the South. In business contacts he is accustomed to outsmarting the white - in cultural contacts he can't help realizing that quite frequently he is the superior of the white man he's dealing with.

### **And Nothing Will Happen**

But no Negro in the South - no matter who he is and no matter how high his station - ever forgets that the white man always has the one final all-conclusive badge of superiority. The white man can kill him in his tracks, in cold blood, for fun or for no reason at all. And nothing will happen to the white man.

That's the one thing that overshadows every phase of race relations in the South. It's the terrifying specter that leers over the shoulder of every white man who talks to a Negro in the Southland. Why, I don't recall hearing a single Negro refer to the "Mason and Dixon" line. To him it's the "Smith and Wesson" line.

And despite all that, your black man in the South doesn't hate the white.

But what he does hate with all his heart is the discrimination and the oppression that dog his footsteps from the cradle to the grave. He hates most of all the fact that he is but half a citizen. He has all of the obligations of a citizen but not a single one of the rights. He fights and dies for his country, but he can't vote. He pays his taxes at a Jim Crow counter usually - but no Negro in the South has half the representation that a colonist had in 1775. The ringing sentences of the Declaration of Independence are a grim and tragic joke to him. He has no right of liberty that a Southern sheriff, court or white plantation owner is bound to respect. As witness the fact that he is killed by the score every year - and his slayers walk free.

### **He Wants Two Things**

Those are some of the things that the Negro hates.

As for what he wants - two things. And in this order. First, the ballot. Second, proper and adequate education for his children.

At first when they'd tell me this every where it was the same, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee - I'd try to argue.

"Why not end murder first?" I'd demand. "Why not stop the senseless slaughter of Negroes in the South?"

One answer I got in Georgia will do for all of them - they followed the same line.

"Look," this Negro leader said, "Voters don't kill easy. Nobody's going around shooting voters just to make a record. With the vote, the Negro will have a voice in picking his officials. That's going to make it tougher for the candidate for sheriff whose only platform is the number of unarmed Negroes he killed."

### **Don't Want a Negro Party**

No Negro I talked to expects to see an elected Negro official in the South in his lifetime. In fact many of them don't want to - not for a long, long time.

As the franchise comes slowly to the Negro in the South, notably in Georgia where close to 200,000 Negroes will be registered this fall, what Negro leaders are on the alert to oppose is anything resembling a Negro political faction, or a Negro party, or even block voting by Negroes. They realize the danger of increased racial tension if that should occur now.

In Atlanta, where some 30,000 Negroes are registered, Negro leaders carefully avoid endorsing candidates. Who am I to say that there's no quiet, under-cover proselytizing? But there are no public endorsements. For one thing, it probably would be a kiss of death for the favored candidate.

But, believe me, white candidates do diligently cultivate the Negro vote in Atlanta. They call on the Negro in home or office and solicit his vote in quite courteous fashion. How do I know? Brother, I was there.