**Southern Journey**

By Emanuel H. Demby, '36

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"Man," shouted one of the salesmen of the Alabama Mercantile Co. of Birmingham, Alabama, "what did you say you did?"

"I just switched the drinking dippers; the one labeled 'White' is on the 'Negro' hook," I replied.

The salesman's face paled. He rushed to the back of the store, where the dippers hung, tripping over some tarpaulins on the way.

"Lord, Emanuel! Haven't you any sense? You know you shouldn't do such things; this isn't a laughing maker!" he lectured as I almost doubled over with laughter.

In less than an hour, everyone who had been at the store earlier in the day knew about the great catastrophe which Abe Berman, herosalesman of the Alabama Mercantile Co., had partially prevented. The southerner then realized that a northerner could be just "dumb" enough to switch the Negro and white dippers.

That was my introduction to the south; one of my hopes for a tolerant, progressive South, to which I had looked forward, when I left New York in June, had been shattered, but there was still a long list of ideals that awaited confirmation . . . or destruction.

My first contact with Southern "tolerance" of "Yankee" ideas came after a heated argument with an Alabama counterpart of the Georgia "Cracker" who had been one of the victims of the dipper prank.

"Boy," he said, "if we didn't like you, you'd be going out of town on a pole."

That, I soon found out, was the general attitude of the southerner.

Walking by the many newsstands, I noticed the absence of many popular magazines. Inquiry solved my astonishment. Laws passed in Alabama made reading such liberal magazines as "Common Sense" as illegal as the more radical publications like the "New Masses." I was told by one of Birmingham's more outspoken people that a common way of imprisoning labor leaders, termed "disturbers" by the authorities, is to plant radical journals on the "disturbers'" property and, in due time, by coincidence, a raid occurs.

Here is a partial list of the discriminations against the Negroes as I found them in many Southern states: they are not permitted to ride in the same section or car as white people; they are forced to attend schools that are structurally and technically inferior in most cases to white schools; they cannot attend the same movie houses or drink out of the same fountains; and they are frequently paid less for, in many cases, much harder work.

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It took me almost two months to realize that all those signs about a "Magic City" did not concern an exhibition, but was Birmingham's nickname. It was so "christened" because of its rapid rise from a railroad crossing in 1871 to the steel center of the South today. But, when the depression arrived, Birmingham was plunged into a hole that over-speculation and over-building made even deeper. There was hardly anyone who, during the boom years, had not invested some in real estate. In fact, there had been so much speculation that an entire city near Birmingham was sold because of defaulted mortgages. Birmingham's own relief rolls are so crowded that many of her storekeepers find a large percentage of their receipts on pay-day are relief checks. One business man estimated sarcastically that half of the people in Birmingham are on relief, while the other half are starving.

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With all his faults, the Southerner retains the renowned Southern hospitality. One hot summer morning, I traveled to another part of Birmingham to go swimming at Eastlake, a municipal pool operated on a paying basis.

Dressing myself in tights, I started to walk onto the beach. Suddenly, a shout halted me.

"You can't go swimming without a shirt!"

I turned to face the man whose morals I had offended.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but orders are orders. You can have my shirt, though, if you want it."

Did I want it? I put on the shirt, and, after maneuvering myself into it, spent the rest of the day in cool water. I had to thank that good old Southern hospitality for it.

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But, finally, we left Birmingham and vast stretches of road lay before us. As the car sped across the countryside at fifty miles an hour, the fast disappearing telegraph poles grew monotonous; only the small historical notices by the highways' shoulders, relieved the grind. There's a certain thrill reading these tiny mileposts of history! Every few miles they pop up like white guide marks and reveal the secrets of past generations that would otherwise remain hidden with the dead in the neighborhood graveyard.

We switched from signs to scenes at Chickamauga, Ga., where one of the most decisive battles of the Civil War was fought. As a guide gave a description of the battle, the sudden clearings, wooded lands, and battle-scarred trees suddenly brought back to life. Yankee soldiers running toward the Confederate batteries; soldiers falling as each side poured volleys of bullets at the other. The Civil War lived again for a moment!

Those tiny mileposts of history were popping up again; we were on the road: through Georgia, into South Carolina was only a matter of hours. Once, while stopping for gas in South Carolina, I overheard two Southerners speaking. Said one: "Them 'niggers' kin niver be edjerkated." And yet, there are 248,872 white and 228,003 Negro children amending school in South Carolina, although there are only 4,451 teachers for the Negro children, while there are 8,687 instructors for the white pupils.

We continued through South and North Carolina, passing Gastonia, the great textile center of the South; it was not long before the dome of the Capitol at Washington came into view followed in a few hours by the George Washington Bridge. We were finally home. Southern Journey had come to an end.