

The Deep South

Alfred H. Greenberg

JEAN JENKINS, in her study of life in the U.S. South (your Winter 1958 issue), expresses surprise at "the degree of restraint shown on both sides" in the recent events at Little Rock, Ark. If the South were indeed as she paints it, such restraint would not be surprising—it would be a miracle.

The hatred Mrs. Jenkins obviously has for Southern racists has certainly been merited by many acts of barbarism. Use of such terms of abuse as "Georgia cracker," "Mississippi clay-eater," "Arkansas hill-billy," however, reveals an emotionalism not conducive to an understanding of the area and its problems. Mrs. Jenkins disdainfully packs into one group the poor-whites who were anti-slavery because anti-Negro, who vote Republican, inhabit "lily-white" towns, form the bulk of the membership of the KKK, and live as did the characters in Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*. Such impressionism has nothing in common

with scholarship and gives a wholly distorted view of the South today.

The writer of this letter lived in the South in the 1940's—and also in the 1950's. Even in the 1940's the Caldwell picture of Southern life was disintegrating. Today that picture bears very little relation to reality. But I don't intend to match my impressions against those of Mrs. Jenkins.

Historically, one can trace the Republicanism of certain areas in the South, for instance, to quite sounder reasons than the subjective anti-Negro feelings cited by Mrs. Jenkins. The terrain explains a good deal, for example. The competition between the slave-based cotton economy and the small-scale, free-labour farming of the hill country accounts for the antagonism of the mountain folk to slavery. Besides, these were border lands, with other ties to the Union. And these are lands (north-eastern Tennessee, West Virginia, north-

western Arkansas) where even today there are few Negroes—and few incidents of a racist nature.

Actually, most of the Republican votes in the South come from Negroes—who identify the G.O.P. with the party of Lincoln, and the Democrats with the party of Dixie. In any event, Mrs. Jenkins would be hard put to show where Georgia Tobacco Road people ever voted Republican. Where they vote at all, they are the main supporters of the Talmadges and Eastlands.

Further on, Mrs. Jenkins says: "No-one is eligible for such a position (foremen, skilled workers, etc.) unless he is white." This was probably true in the 'thirties and early 'forties. It is certainly untrue today, since the wholesale moving of Northern industry to the South. In Atlanta, Memphis, Birmingham and almost every other major Southern metropolis there are branches of such industrial giants as Ford,

which employ thousands of workers, Negro and white, organized by the major C.I.O. unions. No one could pretend that hiring and upgrading policies in such plants are ideal—but a simple check of the employment roles would show that Negroes today are *not* excluded from the better jobs. In many parts of the South today there are Negro policemen, Negro firemen, even Negro sales clerks in the department stores. It would be inconceivable to have an organization like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that would be strong enough to force such issues as desegregation of the schools, and yet not be strong enough to have made advances on the job front.

No doubt a section of the white ruling class does finance such lost causes as the Ku Klux Klan—although Mrs. Jenkins would have been more helpful if she had discussed the White Citizens' Councils rather than the now almost defunct KICK. But the Southern bourgeoisie by no means presents a solid front in this regard. In many areas of the South the Negro com-

munity represents close to 50 per cent of the population. Therefore, sections of the business community which depend on Negro buying power are not anxious to cut down the Negro's earning potential. And the Chambers of Commerce want racial peace so as to attract Northern capital.

Mrs. Jenkins seemed to be writing of another time, another place when she said of the white child: "He may not become a domestic servant, a cook, a barber, an unskilled factory labourer." Whites are generally not domestics, but one can find thousands upon thousands of them occupying any of the other jobs all over the South today.

Caste system there is. Jim Crow laws there certainly are. (These did not, however, get placed on the statutes "immediately after the Civil War" as Mrs. Jenkins avers. She should read W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* for the story of how *democratic* those post-Civil War legislatures were. The "black codes" came much later, near and after the turn of the century).

"The brief period of effective C.I.O.

work in the South" would seem to be the span of years during which Mrs. Jenkins was an S.T.F.U. organizer. No doubt her efforts were not without effect. But she was not the last to brave the goons and company police. If much remains to be done, much has also been accomplished.

True, a Harvard Ph.D. may be called by his first name if he is a Negro. But today, if he is so addressed in a store, he might insist on being spoken to more respectfully. The N.A.A.C.P. has organized boycotts of many a Southern store for just such insults. An effective boycott, it has been discovered, breaks down more prejudice than appeals to conscience. Riding trains in Mississippi? Hasn't Mrs. Jenkins heard of Supreme Court decisions on segregation in transportation?

It is not my intention to paint a rosy picture of the American South. But it is irresponsible to write of it as though an unreported lynching could take place there today. Those days of open Dixiecrat terrorism are gone—forever. And U.L.R.'s readers should know this.