

JIM CROW EAT CROW

Reference Department
By ELSA MAXWELL

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The glamorous and great artists of the Negro race are gradually turning the whole race "problem"—which is not, and never was a problem—into a glorious absurdity. When stiff-necked whites are faced with the beauty and charm of a Katherine Dunham or a Lena Horne, or netted by the magnificent talent and intellect of Paul Robeson, the idea of "prejudice" seems a matter for concern only in lunatic asylums.

A short while ago, in New York, Katherine Dunham, who is a fine anthropologist, as well as a great beauty and a startling dancer, was to be guest of honor at a dinner arranged by Tim Durant—the producer.

A friend of mine, who is exceptionally wealthy and very sweet, where sweetness is of no matter, was invited. "Would you mind," said Tim, "stopping by in your car and picking up Miss Dunham."

No, this friend of mine doesn't get around much—in the places where getting around counts. She had never heard of Katherine Dunham. She was aware neither of the fact that Miss Dunham was a celebrity, nor that her skin has a little more pigmentation to it than, say the skin of a run-of-the-mill starlet.

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When her car stopped at the Dunham hotel, and when Katherine stepped in, as gay, delightful, and poised as a wood nymph, my friend was flabbergasted. She made what little conversation she could, then relapsed in stony silence.

My friend sat through the dinner like a frozen statue. Everyone there was uninhibited and relaxed—everyone but my pure little Nordic.

As soon as the coffee was served, she ran for her wraps, calling her car, and bolted into the Stygian night. And, I can assure, she was never missed.

The next day, she called Tim Durant. "What do you mean," she demanded, "inflicting this on me?"

"You should have been honored," said Tim, "Katherine Dunham is one of the greatest dancers of our time—and you, my dear, can't even rumba."

"Well," said the society lamb, petulantly, "she didn't dance in the car."

For myself, I can say sincerely that I would feel highly flattered if Miss Dunham even honored me with an invitation to lunch—and this can be taken as a broad hint.

* * *

Now let's look this matter of

prejudice straight in the eye. I'm sick and tired of all the pussy-footing that's been going on about Jim Crow. Either we are believers in the principles of democracy—as we piously declare, three times a day, or we are a collection of the greatest frauds the world has seen.

For generations, the conventional and learned citizens of this republic have stood stolidly silent while the American Negro has been villified, libeled, and denied almost all access to the privileged places of sweetness and light.

The Solid South has stood as dumbly solid as a block of granite. The American Academy of Arts and Letters has not taken up the good fight nor has the sacrosanct Daughters of the American Revolution. Democracy has been wayward in the cause of democracy, and its cultural institutions are all of them suspect.

The myth of "inferiority" has been bandied around like a Tammany Hall political issue. As soon as opportunities for learning were opened up to Negroes—even partially—that myth was exploded. The list of Negro intellectuals, a list which would include such men as George Washington Carver, Richard Wright, Walter White, Countee Cullen, and James Weldon Johnson, would be a credit to any national academy. Such Negro artists as Marian Anderson, Dorothy Maynor, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, Duke Ellington, and Dean Dixon, the conductor, are outstanding in their respective fields.

I would like to wave this list in the face of every one of those Fascist-minded citizens of Hillsboro N. Y., who are trying to force Jim Crow into the educational life of this state. I would like to wave it in the face of every hill-billy southern senator.

One of these days the good people of these potentially-great United States are going to wake up to the fact that there is one thing much greater than the myths of tradition and pseudo-sanctities of custom. And that is culture.

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