

Donald

No Trials & Tribulations

The title of this article may or may not make sense by itself, but with the ^{body of the} article ~~it~~ it is my job to make it intelligible and that is what I am going to try to do.

Maryland is below the Mason & Dixon line & being a neg's there entitles one to all the abrogation of rights & privileges attendant to a Negro living in a Southern State. The idiotic customs of Jim-Crowism, the startlingly prevalent belief in a neg's inherent inferiority & even the barbaric defiance of law and order by the masses of the Easter Lhd' in the form of lynchings, are present in the same ^{to some degree} form as they would be in the state farthest south in these United States. A more insidious form of ^{racial} persecution is in the disparity of educational facilities of neg's & whites in the state. Suffice it to say here that there was no provision for professional training for neg's other than teaching either in the state, or out of it, until \$10,000 (a pitifully inadequate sum, as may be witnessed by the total number of applicants and the total number of grants etc for the funds) was appropriated by the legislature in 1935.

In December of 1935 I sent my application for the Law School of the University of Maryland after having had to secure the blanks by a circumventious method. By equally circumventious means, the regent president and Board of Regents of the school referred me to the scholarship fund (non-existent in fact) Princess Anne Academy (a Junior College), Morgan College (which has no law school) and Howard University (the total living cost which was beyond my means). By this time however I had secured the

able advice of Mr. Thurgood Marshall, Mr. William Gosnell who in turn had consulted & interested Dr. Charles Houston, new legal adviser of the N. A. A. C. P. From this time on the matter was in their very able hands. The Board of Regents at last overtly refused to consider the application at all. So the next step was court action in an effort to secure the mandamus which would force the University Law School to admit a negro. Omitting the details after an able argument before the bench occupied by a judge who in his own words was ^{more} "interested in justice than procedure" the mandamus was issued.

September the twenty sixth was official registration day. On September the twenty fourth accompanied by Mr. Marshall, and at the invitation of the Dean of the Law School I went to register. We met in the Dean's office. There he proposed that he and a member of the Student Council address the first year law class in my absence on the opening day & ask for 'fair play' after explaining the circumstances to them. The proposal met with approval with the one exception that I wanted to be present. This was agreed upon after the Dean explained that the only reason he had suggested that I be absent was because it might be a little embarrassing for me. I thought I could stand that embarrassment to satisfy my curiosity as to what one says before bringing an amiable but rude species to feast at the table of civilized learning. I had missed that at Amherst College where they hadn't [possibly] deemed the table civilized enough, or more improbably still deemed me ^{not} rude enough.

However I think I am being a little too
 unfair to the Dean who all too obviously was
 well meaning but in a difficult position. For
 there were those more violently opposed to the
 entrance of a negro in the school and in most
 influential positions. He was very kind, taking
 me to the registrar's office where I paid the
 necessary money after receiving no more than
 casual glances. He also gave me my schedule, locker
 and book lists and wished me quite sincerely the
 "best of luck".

from other
 registering
 students

On Wednesday however he thought
 differently of the "good-will" speeches for the
 following day, and called Mr. Marshall saying
 that they would be postponed. I think I felt
 a pang of disappointment for I believe that would
 have been what one would call an "unforgettable
 experience".

Thursday, opening day! I awoke and
 readied myself for school and surprisingly
 enough felt no "stage fright" I think I must
 be getting too old. Class opened at nine and
 I arrived at the building at about eight-twenty.
 Besides ample encouragement from my family,
 I myself had no desire as a neophyte to
 make the celebrity's late entrance on the figurative
 "first night". As I entered the building I noticed
 the usual groups of students who paid little
 attention to my entrance. I had a book, which one of the
 professor's sold, on my list so in the intervening
 time I decided to go to his office and get it.
 Of course like a good freshman or first year student

I barged into the wrong office. There the man sitting at the desk busily writing turned hurriedly and with an effusive greeting stretched out his hand and said, "You're Mr. Murray aren't you? Good morning. I am Mr. R. . . . You're looking for Mr. S. . . . His office is down the Hall".

Thereupon he directed me to Mr. S. . . . 's office. The latter in his turn was as courteous and kindly as the former. He sold me the book adding his "good wishes".

I have included this seemingly unimportant incident because more than anything else it is illustrative of the uniformly kind and courteous treatment that I have received from the faculty of the law school of the University of Ind. since my advent.

After I had secured my book I went down to the class room which by this time was being filled by students some of whom were acquainted with each other. I took a seat in the room and the bell rang.

Mr. S. . . . came in and after greeting the class immediately proceeded to give his introductory talk on law & the mechanics of law school study. The lecture was for two hours and was followed very attentively. Just before the end of the period seats were assigned permanently for the year. The first year class occupied the same room for all classes. To some of the readers this may be extraneous to others informative but for what it is worth let me add — my assigned seat was in the middle of the room and next to another student. The bell rang

and the first day was over! The class dispersed noisily and a few students murmured greetings.

The next day work had begun rather earnestly. At the end of the first period the student sitting next to me introduced himself to me then turning introduced a friend of his, following the introduction he added that he had followed the case in the summer rather closely and anything he could do to help me he would. I thanked him, since that time he has been very cordial as only males thrown together in a school can be.

The attitude of the ~~other~~ other students has ranged from P--'s courteous kindness to simple non-committal acceptance. But in no way have there been any unpleasantness. Indeed I can only say the situation has been mostly one of generous acceptance.

There was the student who as I waited for a street-car introduced himself adding that he had followed the case for his uncle in the summer and thought it was "a damned biased thing and hoped I'd get in".

Then there was the day when having two hours between periods I had taken Stephen Spender's "Bene" to while away the time. As I read M--- stopped to look over my shoulder and began a conversation which lasted the whole two hours.

An amusing thing happened one day. As I was in the library a student, an upper classman passed my table. As I looked up and murmured a greeting he stopped and spoke. He said

"I hope I didn't sound gruff the other day when I spoke because I certainly didn't intend to sound that way."

I assured him that he had not, for the truth was that I had not even remembered him. He sat for about a half an hour asking me how I was getting along, talking about various subjects & offering various hints as to study.

I have enumerated these incidents because in no other way can I more clearly express the attitude of my class & to a lesser extent that of the remainder of the school. They have been kind, reasonable, and mature in their attitude of acceptance and several times I have found myself wondering if prejudice isn't simply an unreasonable bias ^{toward} ~~of~~ some ~~thing~~ one does not know — at least I am fairly sure this can be said of the more educated.

There are those who read this who may want more specific details — suffice it to say here that the primary motive in my going to the school is to secure an education in law and my time has been mainly devoted to securing that. The responsibility of securing that education and comporting myself in a manner that may in some way measure up to that anomalous concept — a gentleman — is sufficiently serious to preclude minute observation of every detail of my fellow student's movements. There have been no hisses or catcalls and passive acceptance — where there has not, as in the majority of cases; been genuine friendliness. Indeed the whole attitude has been ^{so} hearteningly encouraging ~~that~~ ^{that} it makes one feel that Negroes will not always be pariahs in Southern states & if I can only in small measure impress upon some of my fellow students that we

have the same virtues that they have and are capable
of and should be given the same opportunities
of education as themselves I shall feel more
than deeply grateful.