

DOPE

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DATA

by

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Julius Adams, a veteran newsman and the right hand man for Governor Dewey in Harlem politics, tells a story about a monkey. According to the story the lowly monkey can really talk but he never says anything. The monkey figures that if man found out he could talk, he would put him to work.

There is another story about the man who pushed his wheelbarrow upside down. Everyone thought he was crazy but the guy explained that if he pushed the wheelbarrow right side up, some wise cat would put bricks in it.

Such stories dealing with the brother's effort to dodge the necessity of honest toil are part of the folklore of Harlem. It used to be said that the Jews own New York, the Irish run it and the Negroes enjoy it.

In the so-called good old days Harlem was the fun capital of the country. All the brothers who felt they were talented, or slick enough to live without perspiring, from all over the nation used to pull up stakes and head for Harlem. The Harlem night life, of course, was celebrated in song and story and in its gayest period you could see and rub elbows with celebrities from all over the world.

Negro writers, artists and musicians crowded the sidewalks or so it seemed and the mixing of the races in public and otherwise reached a point unparalleled in contemporary experience. The big names, Bojangles, Florence Mills, the old Cotton Club crowd kept the populace in perpetual excitement and the culture vultures were debating Alain Locke's views on the New Negro.

Marcus Garvey was one of the great prophets of that period and he was painting pictures of a dream land in far off Africa where the brothers who were short-changed here would build a mighty nation. Garvey put the brothers in uniforms decked with gold braid and gave an opportunity to many humble folk to prance and strut.

Harlem was a magic name covering a multitude of brownstone rooming houses full of eager beavers who lived on the hope that lightning would strike one day and bring fame and fortune and one of those nice houses on Strivers Row.

As the song goes "them days are gone forever." Harlem is dead sober today. Even the bebop crowd which succeeded the flapper period is restrained and the dizzy characters who won wide acclaim for their strange dress and weird mannerisms no longer walk the streets.

Not only has the old screwy culture disappeared from Harlem but the people crowding the streets today are different people. In the last few years there has been a vast invasion of Puerto Ricans and almost every store on 125th st. today has little signs in the window saying, "Aqui se habla espanol." You can hear Spanish spoken on all the main streets and Spanish language newspapers are on all the newsstands. Many of the service jobs in the area are held by Puerto Ricans who range in color from white to black.

The Puerto Ricans are more impoverished than the Negroes and their difficulties with the English language cause them many hardships. Now it is the Puerto Rican rather than the American Negro who is low man on the totem pole. Surprising little friction has developed between them although language differences tend to keep them apart.

The New York city fathers who have always worried about the brothers in Harlem are now also wondering what to do about the Puerto Ricans. Harlem is an area in transition and no one knows what the future holds. It is not as gay and carefree as in the good old days but it is just as interesting.