

What It Means

Speaking for minorities are representatives of six different groups within our population. Some write bitterly of discrimination and prejudice; a few have found in this country a refuge from persecution. Such frank and honest statements from minority members, seeking an answer to their personal problems and those of their people, help us to understand the hearts and minds of these young Americans.

THIS IS WHAT BEING A NEGRO MEANS TO ME:

When Marian Anderson sang at the Lincoln Memorial, feeling as if I really belonged and not just being a step-child of the United States.

When reading about a crime committed by a Negro, feeling shame and wondering whether every white person feels ashamed when a white person commits a crime. Why is it my race is compelled to feel this way?

When my father and my brothers are given the "rotten ends of deals" from the Army and Red Cross, feeling as if I could burst with hatred.

When some one of your race wins a medal for military achievement, his not receiving recognition in the local white papers.

Trying hard to conceal your feelings about the race question behind a smile or a "dead pan" expression when every atom of your

being aches to express your true emotions.

Learning that your sister had to "pass" as an Indian in order to receive decent accommodations on a train going through the southwest as far as Oklahoma.

Meeting some one like my favorite teacher and thinking perhaps there is some hope.

Being able to discuss the race question openly in class, although not without some embarrassment.

Going into stores with some of my white friends and feeling that I am a girl not just a Negro girl.

Wondering whether white people realize that color does not rub off.

Being able to write my feelings and believing that they will be read thoughtfully and with sincerity, not with mockery.

Going to see the African Art Exhibit and becoming proudly aware of my cultural heritage. (16-year-old girl)

Check and Double Check

When dealing with individual white people, I usually get along very well. However, I find that in a group these same individuals have changed their attitudes or viewpoints. (Negro child)

The Negroes are nice when you talk to one or two at a time but when there is a group together they try to boss the whites around. (White child)

There are some ways in which negroes aren't as bad as white people. For instance white people get lice; but negroes don't and they don't get other objectionable afflictions. (Negro child)

I think we should have separate buses for colored and white. Because when the colored get on the bus with the white people they stink so bad you feel like heaving. (White child)

I think the country people are as good as any other people in the world. I say this because I am from the country myself. Some people in the city make up wise-cracks about the country people being Hoosier. Well I might be a Hoosier, but I'll take the country anytime before I'll take the city. (Country child)

I don't think it is right for the country people to come in and get jobs right away. But we, the People of the United States, had to wait a long time because the Hoosiers get the jobs first. (City child)

The negroes live next door to white people even in the same building and they are dirty and filthy. (White child)

I think whites are some of the dirtiest people in the world. They don't want to give a colored person a share. (Negro child)

I, **TONY TORRENTO**, an Italian descent boy think America is a wonderful country because every one has freedom to do almost anything. I know that some of the old Italian people say, "I wish I were in the old country right now." But deep in their hearts they thank God that they are here safe and know that they don't have a dictator to tell them what to do and when to do it. They don't have to fear that any minute a Gostapo might come in and take them out side and kill them or torture them for something they didn't do. I know they think this because I live with them, and I too thank God we are safe.

I AM A 17-YEAR-OLD BOY. My parents and I are Jewish and we associate, for the greater part, with Jewish people.

In my daily life, because of the liberal school I attend, my religion has had little, if any, effect on me. By this I mean that it hasn't affected my relationship with my classmates. There is literally no prejudice at school and I usually forget entirely the fact that I am the only Jewish boy in the class.

Some of the effects that it has had have been, to my mind, good ones. I believe that it has made me more tolerant of other minority groups because I think that it would reflect badly on me, a member of a minority group, if I were to show contempt for others in my situation.

Another worthwhile effect that my being Jewish has had is that I try always to be on the look-out for displeasing traits commonly thought of as belonging especially to the Jewish race. I think that doing this has caused me to be more generous and, though it may sound strange, fanatically clean in dress as well as person. I want no one to single me out as being "tight" or being a "dirty" Jew.

Whenever the word "Jew" or a Jewish person is mentioned when I am among gentiles, I immediately become tense to see if what is being said is complimentary or otherwise. I try to appear outwardly uneffected when my religion is mentioned or discussed but inwardly I hope desperately that what is being said will be entirely good and in no way slandering.

When gentile boys talk about their fraternity dances or the experiences they have had the preceding night, I try to act



*OWI Photo by Gordon Parks
Negative in Library of Congress*

as though it meant nothing to me and as though I hadn't heard. I don't join in at all because I don't want to appear to be or try to act like one of them if I'm not one. Of course I try to keep on very friendly terms with the gentile boys because I like them but I don't try to be a "regular guy" when I'm not one. I don't regret in the slightest not being able to associate with these boys more outside of school than I do because I have my own circle of Jewish friends. I also try not to make the gentile boys think that I envy them or would like to be one of them because I don't envy them. I like to feel that we are just of different religions.

When a name that is definitely Semitic is mentioned in class or among other gentiles I try to laugh along with the others, but unfortunately I feel that anyone with such a name should change it immediately and not single himself out so.

In spite of all of this, however, I am sure that I am in no way ashamed of being Jewish. On the contrary, I think it a definite asset if I can make my classmates admire me because I am a Jew that acts as they do. Of course, I don't want any gentile to think that I am ashamed of my religion in any way. I earnestly try not to carry a chip on my shoulder because I want at all times to be like the others at school and to act perfectly natural and not to seem to care one way or another what my religion is.

Prejudice means you are down on what you're not up on.

DEAR MOM AND POP: I'm now with the famous 115 Infantry Bn. in Italy. I hope I can always be a credit to the organization and never bring disgrace upon them.

Someday we may go into battle. If it should be my fate that I may not come back, don't cry, but think that I have done my part for my country. I know that you people have been mistreated and have suffered tremendously at the beginning of this war, but you have taken everything in your stride with your heads high; for this I can say you are more an American than I am. You may not be a citizen, that is not your fault, it was the law, but the confidence you have that our work over here will bring back peace is truly American.

I am fighting for your new country and mine and if I must pay the highest price for victory I will give myself gladly. I have confidence in everything because I know your spirit is back of me. I only regret that I cannot repay you both for everything you have done for me.

God bless you Mom and Pop. Don't worry about me I'll be alright.

Your son, Taro (*Nisei boy*)

I'M A "MEXICAN KID." Once when I was with some "white kids" they said, "Everytime we have any trouble, or get in a fight, it's the Mexican kids who cause it."

Whenever I'm walking with these kids and they see any Spanish youngsters they turn around and walk the other way. I think these "white kids" are afraid of the Spanish kids. This makes the Spanish boys think they want to be bullies.

If these "white kids" would be more friendly and unafraid the Spanish kids would like them and there wouldn't be any trouble.

I'm Mexican and I can get along with everybody. My parents say, "See to it that you get along with other people; it's your business to get along with others." Most Mexican families teach their children this, but unfortunately there are some Spanish families where the parents say, "Don't take a thing off of those 'white kids.'" Children from such homes are always spoiling for a fight and they give the rest of us Mexican kids a bad name.

I WAS BORN IN GERMANY, lived there, in England, and now the United States. I have been in this country for over four years. Next year I will become a citizen of these United States, but even now I can honestly say, that I thoroughly think, talk, and feel American, and it is indeed a blessing to be an American! Take it from one who has travelled extensively abroad, especially in Europe, under the recent conditions, where there are gallons of blood spilled every day, that could have remained unspilled if people would have been given a chance to think about, and discuss intercultural relations.
(16-year-old girl)

¶ I am a white boy of French decent. I am fourteen years of age. I have lived near Atlanta, Georgia for most of my life although I now live in Bigtown. My grandfather and my great-grandfather fought to keep the Negro in slavery in 1864. Most people think that all Southerners are against the Negroes. This is not true, for the educated Southerner is the Negro's best friend. I have seen how they live in the South and how they persecute the whites who persecute them. I believe that this could be stopped if the Negro had better living conditions and both races were more educated. Most of the trouble is caused by foolish hotheads of both races.

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