

So-Called Negroes Told:

Be Satisfied With Self!

makes a practice of giving Negroes with uncombed hair its best jobs as assistant managers, floor walkers, clerks and salesmen, and hiring those whose heads have been "processed" to push hand trucks, run errands, pile crates in the storeroom and perform other menial tasks.

"Frankly," says the white executive vice president, "I'm afraid of those who come here looking for jobs whose heads are heavy with lard, wax or whatever they use. We're in business to make money and we figure that kind of help to be unstable and in some cases, untrustworthy. And our experiences have proven this to be true because we can't depend on those with conked hair and our turnover in the departments where we require manual labor is very high."

Another employer at a large Chicago manufacturing concern says: "We don't discriminate because of color here, and hire white and colored on a basis of equality. However, we made a policy of giving our better paying and more responsible jobs to neat, intelligent looking, alert colored men and women. My secretary is a very efficient dark-skinned girl who does not have those awful looking blonde streaks in her dark hair. That young man over there is a very capable accountant and I was at first tempted to hire him for our staff. But when I saw he had straightened his hair, I said no, even though he seemed qualified for the higher position. Instead, I hired him as a member of our shipping department."

Even Negroes themselves are developing prejudices against the hair-conking vogue. A Fisk University sociologist said recently that "some Negroes seem more interested in having their hair conked than in getting civil rights.

"We don't hire them," said the woman director of a nationally known mail order company, "because we figure they must be jitterbugs or even dope fiends to get their heads done up in that disgusting manner. We are in business to make money, not to run a training school for people who don't seem to realize how much their appearance affects their chances of getting jobs."

Today Urban League branches in many large cities across the country, have become aware of the fact that one of the big obstacles in the path of mass hiring of Negro workers is the "problem" of the conked head. Urban League industrial department secretaries are finding that many thousands of jobs would probably be given to Negroes if it wasn't for the fact that the applicants show up for interviews with heads "greased so slick that a fly would skid on them and break its neck."

"It seems to be a national craze among Negroes on a certain level," remarked a prominent sociologist, "to get their hair burned so it will look slick. Some kind of bug seems to have gotten into their minds that they have to have 'white folks' hair in order to survive when the fact is that white folks themselves laugh at them and show more regard for Negroes who simply keep their hair clean, well-brushed and neat."

But these mounting protests have done little to stop the trend because the Negroes who want their skulls seared with acid are taking their examples from such national heroes as Sugar Ray Robinson, the world middleweight champion; Duke Ellington and Count Basie, the bandleaders; singers Billy Eckstine, Deek Watson of the Ink Spots, Nat (King) Cole, Sammy Davis Jr. and such others as pianist Earl (Fatha) Hines, world light heavyweight champion Archie Moore, former welterweight titleholder Kid Gavilan, ballplayer Minnie Minoso and hundreds of others.

When tapdancer Bill Bailey, long regarded as the natural successor to the late Bill (Bojangles) Robinson, suddenly stopped dancing at the Apollo Theater in Harlem and bent his head forward into the spotlight and hollered: "It may be greasy but it sure ain't nappy no more," he probably echoed the sentiments of untold thousands of Negroes who didn't hear him say it but who have the same idea.

Many years ago when the late Mme. C. J. Walker made a discovery that kinks could be scientifically ironed out of nappy hair and quit her washtub in St. Louis to become one of the very first Negro women millionaires off her hair straightening system, she also opened the door for Negro men to appease their own vanity. For some fellow made the equally startling discovery that a portion of lye mixed with boiled potatoes could be rendered into a solution that would straighten even the "nappiest hair" for longer periods of time.

In spite of the fact that thousands got their scalps badly and sometimes permanently burned by lye or

incurred serious scalp diseases, the passion for straightened hair spread among colored men. In these early days of the present century, pimps and sweet men, gamblers, night club dancers and hustlers become leading exponents of the vogue. Not long after, chemical companies, seeing the money that was to be made, turned their research chemists to the task of developing waxes, pomades, greases and oils that would aid in pressing short nappy, wiry hair into laying down for two or three days or longer in order to appease the vanity of those Negroes who believed such hair would solve their social problems.

Today the roots have sprung into a full grown sociological problem. During World War II, one of the biggest and continuing beefs of Negro GIs stationed in Europe, the South Pacific and in the China-Burma-India theaters was the fact that "we can't get nothing over here to make this bad hair lay straight." Touring USO-Camp Show Units whose male dancers and singers used straighteners for the hair, they came back to the United States telling how they could have made small fortunes peddling hair conk to distraught GIs.

Popularly known as a "burn," the conk has graduated from the old straightener job that used to turn the hair reddish to the modern "process" which is the same thing because the stuff "still burns the hell out of your head," as comedian Allan Drew, a conk user for years, puts it.

Process jobs cost between \$5 and \$6 and need to be repeated every week to ten days at barbershops that look like beauty parlors. Chairs are equipped nowadays with built in basins with running water behind the head. "We need chairs like this," says barber Eddie Coleman of the J. F. Mitchell barbershop in the swank Lake Meadows shopping district. "You've got to have water where you can get it right away in order to wash out the acids in this stuff. Otherwise, the customer might get his scalp burned."

Fortunately, a healthy trend away from the hair conking mania has been started, strangely enough, by bebop, "progressive" and "modern musicians." Among the younger followers of these new jazz forms, it is counted as a sign of intelligence to wear the hair short, ungreased but neat. Musicians whose hair is worn in this fashion include bandleader Dizzy Gillespie, pianist-writer Billy Taylor, Percy Heath, Milt Jackson, and John Lewis, composer pianist Thelonius Monk, bandleader Lionel Hampton, the late Charlie (Yardbird) Parker, the veteran king of jazz, Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong, blind singer Al Hibbler, blues shouter Big Joe Turner, Count Basie's star guitarist Freddy Green, world heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson, and many others prefer to "keep the hair God gave them" than to endure the misery and expense of having their heads fried in acid every ten days or so.

Meanwhile, an "educational campaign" is gaining ground among school teachers, employment and vocational counselors to discourage teenagers from having their hair "processed."

"They don't know how bad they look when they go downtown among thousands of white people," says a Philadelphia newspaperman. "They might look all right in some night club or tavern after dark with the lights bouncing off their heads, but when they get out in the daylight with all that stuff on their heads, you can't blame a white employer from thinking they might be anything from thieves, burglars, sex fiends, jitterbugs to murderers."

Narcotics bureau detectives in Chicago, Newark, N. J., Los Angeles and Philadelphia said in off-the-record statements that two out of five Negroes they arrest on charges of using or selling dope have conked heads.

Other authorities agreed that the addiction of Negroes to hair conking may be due to a "self defense" mechanism and "fear that they are odd people set apart from others because of certain racial characteristics that include color of the skin, texture of the hair and other identifying physical traits.

"Of course this business about being odd people is a lot of bunk," a Cleveland social worker contends. "But even that is no excuse for Negroes to partially mutilate themselves in the vain hope that they may acquire hair characteristics of the white man. They have to be awakened to the danger that white employers are turning them down by the thousands simply because they are afraid to take a chance with people who persist in putting acid on their heads."



SINGING STAR NANCY WILSON, a Miles Davis discovery, exhibits great pleasure, as does model Betty Sebastian, upon hearing that the Muslim musical drama "ORGENA" may be revived. So enthused were they by the play's success at Boston's John Hancock Hall and New York's Carnegie Hall, that they volunteered to help publicize the two performances at the Tivoli Theater in Chicago earlier this year.

Howard U. Prof. Will Lecture At Tokyo Univ.

WASHINGTON, D. C.—A Howard University professor has accepted an invitation to deliver a week-long series of lectures at the University of Tokyo. He is Dr. Harold S. Fleming, professor of research in the College of Dentistry, who will speak on his studies of salivary glands. Dr. Fleming's lectures at the Japanese University began Nov. 21.

A specialist in dental research, Dr. Fleming has been conducting studies of salivary gland extracts since 1954. His lectures will deal with the relationship of salivary glands to the gonads (sex organs). Recent findings by Dr. Fleming indicate a relationship of the salivary glands to a hormone that stimulates the sex organs.

The Howard professor was invited to the University of Tokyo by Prof. Yosoji Ito, head of the University's Department of Physiological Sciences. He will present a paper at the fifth symposium of the Japan Salivary Glands Society. His itinerary also will include lectures in Kyoto and Osaka, Japan, as well as tours of the research institutes at the University of Tokyo and the Tokyo Medical and Dental College.

**We Must Go
For Self!**