

A Negro: Fred Woodbridge

By Terry Kindle

The Negro in America is a strange creature because society, noting that his skin is dark, immediately marks him as one who is different. He is always aware of this marking and thus adjusts his attitude toward other people accordingly. "How should I, a black man, evaluate myself in respect to this white man, and where exactly is my place in society?" This is a question which frequently confronts the Negro in today's world. One hundred years ago the answer was simple. The black man was unquestionably inferior: but all of that has changed now. The Negro no longer has to consider himself below the status of the white man. But just exactly what attitude should the Negro assume? Through our news media we often hear of the young militants such as H. Rap Brown who want equality in every sense of the word, and who are willing to fight to obtain this goal. Frequently, we of the white community hear the words of a thirty-nine year old Negro leader, the late Rev. Martin Luther King, who spoke of gaining equality through a program of conscientious non-violence. However, another large group of Negroes, those of the older generation, are not united behind any spokesman, and therefore the opinions of this class are usually overshadowed by the more vocal and boisterous messages of their offspring. For the past two years it has been the privilege of this writer to have been associated with a Negro of this older generation. Through working side by side with this man, sharing the frustrations of conflict as well as the satisfaction which labor can bring, I have been able to observe him as a man, and as a black man. Consequently, this careful observation of his character and his background have given me a unique chance to evaluate his answer to that inevitable question.

Fred Woodbridge is sixty-three years of age. As a young boy growing up on the Kentucky bank of the Ohio River, he learned to enjoy the pleasures which farm life afforded. Sweet honey over homemade cornbread, a slab of beef, and a cool drink of water were then luxuries of life. After a day of working in the fields, Fred would go with the other children down to the bank of the river where he waded in the shallows of the cool water with the muddy river bottom soothing the soles of his tired feet. However, life was not completely sweet. The crop would always feed the large family, but beyond that

money was scarce. As one of five children in a poor family, recognition was limited to a mother's love, and that had to be rationed out to all five. Resting in the shadows of the evening, Fred often thought of going far away from this farm life to a medical school where he would learn the trade of the doctor; but his education was limited and money was almost nonexistent. Thus the dreams of a colored boy were washed away with the silent flow of the Ohio River.

Opportunity for a Negro is extremely limited in Kentucky. After working in such jobs as mining coal, where the amount of brawn is the only qualification, Fred moved to Indianapolis, Indiana. Here is a state with a more northern attitude toward Negroes; the jobs may not have been too much better, but the opportunity for improvement was not limited to whites alone, and the living conditions were much improved. That was thirty years ago. Now Fred is employed in a new apartment project where his skills of fixing gadgets and his general knowledge are the important factors of his job. Although he is not a large man, standing only five feet ten inches, his general build still reflects the years of hard labor. His chest is solid; his arms and legs are stronger than those of the average man of sixty-three. The face, however, is the most deceptive factor. Despite the years of physical strain, the face is that of a much younger man. Wrinkles are just now beginning to appear around the flat, broad nose with the wide nostrils characteristic of a thoroughbred horse. The foremost hint of age is in the steadily greying hair, but the light brown hue of the skin gives a very pleasing background to the face.

As is often true, the condition of the body reflects the condition of the mind. Fred now feels that the years which are left to him should be spent in enjoying the small pleasures of life. As a deacon in his church, he is moderately religious, and holds the general attitude that God is waiting in heaven with a resting place from this turmoil called life. However, whatever degree of placidity which Fred Woodbridge finds here on earth, he is still confronted with the factor of race. Unlike the young militants who will not tolerate a double standard for the Negroes, and the moderates who believe the double standard must be removed through active non-violence, Fred much more readily accepts the fact that a double standard for the Negro is present today and will endure for many years to come. Fred Woodbridge, perhaps, represents the conservative side of the Negro view of race. His answer to this question which was raised previously would un-

doubtedly include a note of caution. When Fred meets a white man, he waits to see in what light the white man will regard him, and then he assumes this position. There is no fight in the man other than the struggle to preserve personal dignity. Fred Woodbridge will not fight for his rights because he lived too long in a world where they were denied; but he will not tolerate anyone trampling on his right to be a human being. As the young militant is the symbol of the new Negro who wants to live a life which is free of racial prejudice, thus Fred Woodbridge characterizes the old Negro who bears the scars of years of prejudice. For Fred the struggle of the Negro in America is one which will be settled on the personal scale, not in any group action. He would rather return home to Kentucky for a meal than to fight the battle of the Negro in the streets of America.

CHILDREN CROSSING

by Jeff Devens

SIGN: CHILDREN
CROSSING

CHILDREN: Let's cross the street.

MOTORIST: Damn kids — always playing
in the street where they don't
belong.

CHILDREN: (screams and cries, then silence)

PEOPLE: Oh, my God!

GOD: Oh, my people.