



new york

By Bob Denniston

Oregana Editor

Well, there I was in New York City. Richest and second largest city in the world. How do you help but be impressed? At first, anyhow.

My first shock came at Columbia University, where I spent six weeks. Not quite what you'd expect, hearing all about the greatness of it. Uptown, off-Broadway, well into the lower-class area. Morningside Heights: third highest crime rate in the city.

But I had seen the Albina District of Portland and the slums of Chinatown and San Francisco. This wasn't new, but I was still naive.

Then there were the kids at Columbia. Quite a few came from the poverty high schools of New York for an accelerated summer program at Columbia. All the kids showed promise, or they wouldn't have been there. Mostly Negroes, they all seemed to be having a good time, laughing, shouting, cutting up, although sticking together as a group. They were clearly enjoying themselves, perhaps for the first time ever.

One night at dinner I got to talking to a couple of guys, then finally got up enough nerve to ask them about the race problems and how they were affected.

"Hell, man, I'm living a good life. Gettin' enough to eat, going to school, getting a piece of ass now and then, haven't got any complaints."

Other attitudes were the same: "Why should it bother me? I'm away from all that now. Yes, there is still a few hard feelings now and then, but it's so much better than living in that hole like we used to."

Mostly a lack of concern.

A few militants: "Yes, we're better off now, and now we can see what it is possible to have, we're going to get it, one way or another. Give it or we'll take it."

Take an excursion on a tourist-laden scenic boat. The ghetto ignored. Up the East River, to the Harlem River.

"Folks, that's Harlem over there, the world's largest Negro community. And look across the river there, that's Yankee Stadium, home of the famous New York Yankees."

Then across the Hudson, Jersey side, Newark and Englewood, death, fire and hate and the New Yorkers wonder how long it will be before Uptown will be hit by the same thing.

People are more careful now. Elevators full of secretaries murmur how to avoid the areas on the way to work. "Guess I won't get to the beach this

weekend. You know, there will probably be trouble again, damn niggers anyway. Can't even go to the beach anymore."

The whitey-white collar workers in Manhattan got nervous. Limousines escort the rich to and from work after a roving gang smashed store windows right on Fifth Avenue.

"What is this world coming to if the police can't even keep them off Fifth Avenue?"

Take a bus, number 106, from the United Nations along 42nd St., then up Broadway. The whiter collars get off by 82nd St. second, then the make-up of the bus begins to change, slowly but definitely. More blacks, Puerto Ricans, Italians, fewer and fewer whites.

Up to 100 Avenue, into the second class areas, then to Columbia University and 100th and 16th. Then east to Lenox Avenue north of Central Park. Thank God for Central Park.

Lenox runs right through Harlem. Only blacks left on the bus with a Negro bus driver. The City doesn't want any trouble.

It was a wet summer in New York, rains kept things somewhat cool; probably saved a lot of violence. Hot weather and humidity brings things to a head, makes people irritable. A bus bumps a taxi, the race suffers. Two young Negroes call the white driver everything in the book, three whites start shoving, a cop breaks it up.

People stand and watch, waiting for something that would lead to a fight. Right here on Broadway. It doesn't take much. The dung-colored smoggy skies scorch; the nightly rains are appreciated.

One Saturday, a real ghetto. Walking out of Central Park, north on Central Parkway, a few more blocks, then into really ugly areas.

Five blocks, then ten blocks. I didn't know where Harlem was; it wasn't marked on the map, no signs saying "entering Harlem."

Two VISTA girls stopped, talked, "Are you with VISTA?" They thought so because I was the only other white around. We walked over to a blocked-off street, choked off with garbage and junk in the street. Guys on the corner comment, "My, looka that white tail, looks good enough to eat."

The girls ignore it; they are used to it. I am hurt for it.

We go down the street, passing houses that look fit for rats, not humans. The little kids follow us. They-are having

fun, laughing and playing. The older ones look at us, stare with hate and resent our presence. I am sick a little. Cultural shock, I think. Black masks start creating Negro stereotypes within me. I fight it, but . . .

The girls were on the way to set up games for the kids. They were both from a mid-western university, planning on entering the Peace Corps after graduation. The little kids wanted to play, too, but their mothers wouldn't let them play "damn whitey's games." The kids deserve a break, I thought.

Another weekend I went back to the

outskirts of Harlem, curiously, perhaps morbidly, fascinated with this ghetto within the richest city. I had a camera with me, wanting to record some of the poverty that is all around.

Walking down an alley, eyes watched and hated, there were a few barely heard comments, then a shout, "Better not take any pictures, whitey." I kept walking, then someone jumped in front of me, "Take my picture, whitey, c'mon, I dare you!"

I kept walking and felt sick and sorry, weak and helpless.



The articles reprinted here from the Fall "Oregana" 1967 are intended to focus campus awareness on the American dilemma of black urban poverty.

Commentators on the American scene have suggested one possible approach for Black Americans out of poverty is education.

During the remaining weeks of winter term, the Emerald will run a series of articles exploring this approach. What is the situation of Negro education in America and specifically at the University?

The first article in that series, an interview with University Black Student Union President Johnny Holloway, appears on page 9 in today's Emerald.