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Section

The Advocate

Coming Stories by
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THE ILLUSTRATED FEATURE SECTION—October 31, 1931

BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN
THE FEATURE SECTION

The Harlem Policy Racket

\$6,000 A DAY COLLECTIONS HAVE SHRUNKEN TO \$685 NOW



Near the Dunbar Dance Palace, in Harlem, a favorite hanging out place for the runners.



The dapper little fellow who grinds out the numbers and who is right hand man to the boss.



THE PARIS OF U.S.A.—135th Street and Seventh Avenue, with "Small's" in the background, where black and white folks dance from midnight to dawn and many a runner is to be found.

Racket Once Employed 150 Men as Overseers, Money Changers and Runners. Customers Have One Chance in 500 of Winning. Middle Men Get 25 Per Cent Commission.

By GEORGE and PAUL

It is said by those who are wise on such matters that "The Ofay Boss" who runs the Harlem policy racket came to New York from Detroit when strong police activity in that city threatened the prosperity of flourishing policy houses there. In the little room on the third floor of the Lenox Avenue house, where he makes his headquarters, he is known simply and eloquently as "The Boss."

Long after the runners have brought in their daily take to Dan, the dapper little fellow who, with the sleeves of his blue silk shirt rolled to his armpits, checks up at the scarred oak table, the Boss walks in, says "Hello" and peers abstractedly out of the window where he sees at the corner a burly colored policeman in all importance directing the swirling traffic.

These storekeepers in the shops across the way, the tenants in that row of apartment houses that lines the avenue yonder, the dancers who write to the torrid strains of jazz in the dance hall up the block, all are his customers.

"The Boss" takes off his coat, but not his hat. He is sensitive, it is said, about his baldness. The cut of his expensive serge suit seems a trifle extreme for his comfortably middle-aged figure, but it is clearly tailor-made. Well versed in psychology, "The Boss" shows an understanding of nature that indelibly stamps him as a Southerner, although his speech does not betray him. It is said that during the war, as a non-commissioned officer in a Georgia training camp, he worked wonders with a regiment that did not respond to the more tender overtures of the Northern ofay commissioned officers.

"What's the take, Dan?" he asks, turning to the little brown man who is busily figuring with a stubby pencil.

"Six hundred eighty-five, Boss," is the answer. "A little off today."

Dan, who was with "The Boss" in Detroit, and who is fairly truthful, vouches for the statement that in the old days "The Boss" took in about \$6,000 a day and employed about 150 men as overseers, money changers, and runners. Now, in less palmy days, he is taking in much less, although the racket isn't a bad one.

"The Boss" will tell you confidentially that the customer has one chance in 500 of winning. If he thinks you are wise to such matters, he will casually admit that the player's chance is about 1 in 6,000, and if you happen to be a runner, you are

The Inside Dope of How the Policy Wheel is Turned and the "Numbers" Ground Out

you may determine that the usual method affords 225,000 combinations, giving the house an 80 per cent break. "The Boss" walks over to the table and experimentally whirls a cylinder that revolves on an axle mounted on a small stand. This and a few pieces of rubber tubing are all that are necessary for his policy game—or nearly all, for the strong gambling instinct of many people, of course, a highly important factor.

An elevator boy, whose dark skin

and slightly English accent proclaims him a West Indian, drifts in and makes himself at home on a broken cane-seated chair. "The Boss" looks at his wrist watch. It is almost time to grind out the numbers. A taxicab driver walks in, followed by another. These are runners, gathered to protect the interests of their clients in the grindout.

Upon them depends the success of the policy game. Elevator boys, taxicab drivers and dance hall loafers,—they canvass stores and houses in the vicinity, collecting from men, women and children impartially. Their "route" also takes in tailor and barber shops, shoe-shining parlors and other places employing colored help. "The Boss" gives them a commission of 20 to 25 per cent on their sales.

By this time the little room is crowded with at least a dozen runners. With the help of Dan, "The Boss" has penciled several small slips of paper in one to ten sequences and placed them in small rubber tubes

that are dropped into the cylinder. The combinations and the sequences of the numbers drawn out of the cylinder decide the winners. Various combinations pay odds running up to 350 to 1.

"The Boss" whirls the cylinder, which spins for several seconds. The room is quiet. "Pull'em, boy," the voice of "The Boss" finally commands and the West Indian, with teeth shining in a pleased smile, gingerly reaches into the cylinder and brings out four tubes, handing them to Dan. The latter pushes the paper out of each tube with his stub of a pencil and calls out the numbers: "Three! Seven! Five! Six!"

Eagerly the runners scan their lists. "That's on mine!" shouts one of the taxicab drivers. "Name's Mrs. Hearter. Four bits!"

"Okay," Dan calls, checking the duplicate list. The taxicab driver is given a slip calling for a pay-off of \$150 for Mrs. Herter. If his customer had paid in a dollar instead of fifty cents, she would have collected double that sum. But Mrs. Herter, ac-

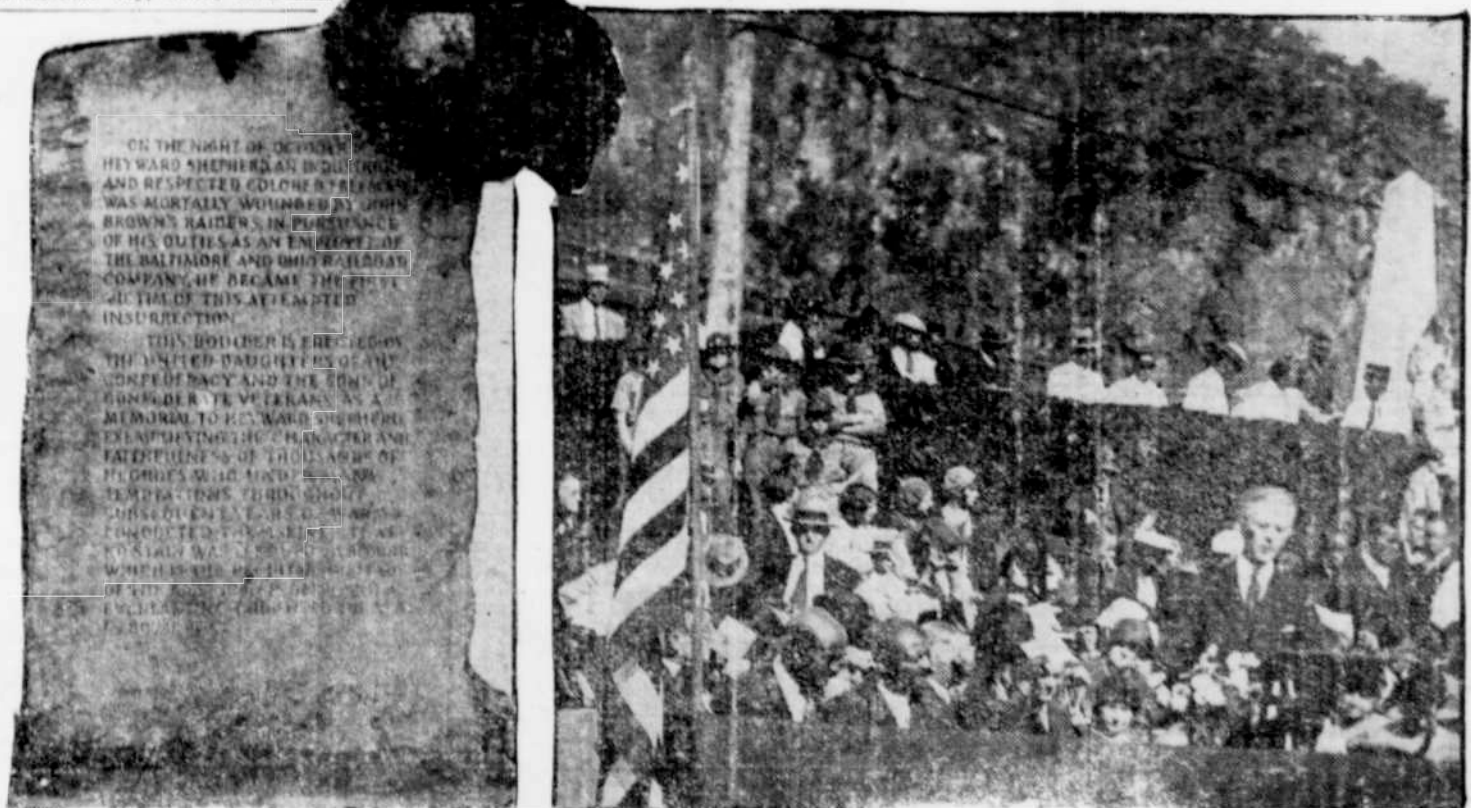
ording to the taxicab driver, had invested the other half dollar in a dream book that helped her to pick the lucky number. The West Indian chuckled and "allowed" that he would borrow "that there dream book."

Again and again "The Boss" whirls the cylinder. The second number drawn isn't on any runner's list. It is a "house" number and "The Boss" tells Dan to credit him with a hundred dollars. And so it goes right down the line until all of the tubes are drawn out.

The runners collect their customers' pay-off slips and depart. They will scrupulously turn in those winnings to the proper customers, perhaps getting a small percentage from them. The West Indian, the last of the runners to leave, treats "The Boss" to a final show of his teeth. A happy-go-lucky chap.

"The Boss" carefully tears up all his tabulations into tiny shreds, puts on his coat and says goodbye to Dan. The latter smiles and carefully rolls down the sleeves of his blue silk shirt. The house is ready for another day's business.

They Threw Dirt on John Brown



THE MEMORIAL TO FAITHFUL SLAVES—This marker which was erected and dedicated by the United Daughters of the Confederacy was unveiled recently at Harpers Ferry, W. Va.

SAYS HE DID NOT HAVE FULL UNDERSTANDING ABOUT CELEBRATION—Dr. Henry T. McDonald, president of Storer College at Harpers Ferry, making the welcome address to the U.D.C. delegates. The white shirt on the right is the John Brown Memorial.