

[The “Jones” Family]

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Gladys Buck

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Mabel B. Francis

Editor POOR WHITES? SARAH JONES

In a shack on Cocoanut Palm Drive, Princeton, Florida lives the “Jones” family. I have chosen this family for my work on the new project and will try to present them to you as they really are.

The house has been condemned and is in very poor condition. The main advantage in these people living here is that the owner can charge them no rent. The house leans slightly to one side and has been patched with box tops and various scraps of lumber where the original siding has rotted through. The front porch has been added recently by some member of the family and can hardly be said to add anything to the appearance of the house. It is about four feet wide and six feet long, covered with old pieces of tin and

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floored with various sized and shaped pieces of scrap lumber which are unnailed and overlapping.

The front screen has been patched and hangs a little crooked. To one side, under a sort of shed, is a large rustic swing which one of the boys has made. Blankets and clothing hang on the small porch and one must step over fish nets as he enters.

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Behind the house are some guava, orange and other fruit trees as well as high weeds and pines. In front are various kinds of shrubs and flowers planted rather like an old fashioned flower garden. Scattered around between the flowers are vegetables, mostly tomatoes.

When I called "Hello" to Mrs. Jones, who was not in, her daughter Virginia, let me in and told me that she had been washing clothes and scrubbing floors. She was bare footed and looked as though she had been sleeping. She wore a faded pink silk dress without a belt and combed her hair, which had just been waved, with a soiled and broken comb. She put a belt around her waist and made herself more presentable with the exception of shoes, which she never bothered to put on.

Virginia is a tall, slender girl with muddy complexion. She is about twenty-five years old, has been married and has had a child who was killed by an automobile as it played on a sand pile in front of this same house. for months after the child's death, she attended spiritual meetings and declared that she had talked with the baby. Sometimes she works at barbecue stands but that is infrequent and is the only work that she ever does.

I told her that I had come to see her mother to get her diet for high blood pressure as a friend of mine thought that he had the same trouble that Mrs. Jones suffered with. Virginia took me into the kitchen and allowed me to read the diet from a faded magazine article which was nailed to the wall. "mama doesn't stick to it though, it's too expensive to get the foods it calls for."

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We talked about various things and Virginia showed me a quilt that she was making from faded scraps of old dresses. She asked me what I thought about a lining of flour sacks which she had washed white. I showed her some crocheting that I was working on and was lucky enough to interest her in learning to make a chain. I persuaded her to let me leave my needle and crochet thread with her, promising to come back later and teach her to make a pattern. She accepted the offer very gratefully.

When Mrs. Jones returned, Virginia told her why I had come. She very kindly explained her diet to me and told me of some medicine that she orders from Tampa. She explained that her doctor did not know that she takes this preparation. In fact, he has forbidden her to do so but she thinks that she could not live without it. She goes to her doctor each week and takes "shots" as well as some medicine which he prescribes. Mrs. Jones is a stoop-shouldered woman of average height and build. Her face is pink and her lips are naturally red.

She was very much concerned about a neighbor's dog which had been hit by a car and had a broken leg. She sent one of her boys, John, to help put a splint on the dog's limb, telling him to be careful as the dog was so big it would be hard to hold down and work on without being bitten. Virginia was very angry and said that if anyone should hit her dog she would surely "cuss them out." Her mother said, "Now Virginia, you know you wouldn't do no such a thing," to which Virginia replied, "I would too, I think so much of him I couldn't help it."

Virginia also told her mother and me about some woman who passed and stuck her tongue out at her. She said "I should have gone on down to her house and beat the Hell out of her." This amused her mother very much.

There are six children in this family, two of whom are married. One daughter lives in the direst poverty and has had her arm shot off by a twelve gauge shot gun which was loaded with buck shot. The other girl is married to an illiterate merchant who owns several grocery

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stores and filling stations. She drives a new Buick automobile and takes her child to Miami to dancing school. It is said that this daughter loves her mother very much but that her husband will not allow her to help her in any way.

The boys are John, Columbus, and Edmund. All of them are of school age but the two older ones, who are fifteen and eighteen years of age, do not attend school. Edmund, who is the baby, is 5 eleven years old and is in the fifth grade. The two older boys hang around the stores in Princeton most of the time and at present they do not work.

The father of this family is in the Dade County Hospital and has been there for many months. The nature of the illness that keeps him there was not mentioned but the mother does not expect that he will ever be able to return home.

Meanwhile, this family of five live crowded together. The house consists of four unceiled rooms and a hall. The inside walls are also patched with pieces of box tops and scraps of lumber. No paint is to be seen inside or out. Sleazy cloth draperies hang at all of the narrow windows but there are no shades at any of them. There are no rugs on the floor, which was scrubbed very clean.

In the hall were two rocking chairs and a small square table which was covered with a huck towel. A pickle jar holding milky water and a sluggish gold fish, an ash tray and a couple of new magazines were on this table.

As I sat in the hall I could see into the kitchen, and two bed rooms. In the kitchen stood an immense wood range and a home made table with no covering. Packing boxes were nailed to the walls and used in lieu of cabinets. These boxes were also used 6 in the place of chairs. No sink or water tap were visible.

On one side of the hall was a bed room. Two dirty iron beds had sagging springs which made the mattresses sag in the center but these beds were neatly made and covered with sheets. Two suitcases under each bed were arranged so that the handles were even with

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the edges of the beds. Virginia said that she keeps part of her clothing in one of the suitcases. There was a dresser with no mirror and was piled high boxes, clothing, magazines and various other articles.

Across the hall opposite this room was another bed room. Here, the furnishings were quite different. An expensive looking, lovely, bed-room suite of modern design was here. The bed was neatly made with a blue crinkled spread and the dressers were orderly and well arranged.