

[Commercial Enterprise]

Beliefs and Customs - Folk Stuff 19

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

June 19 1939 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 West 130 Street

DATE June 1, 1939

SUBJECT COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE — 111th Street and 7th Avenue

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

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6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE

The girl stood near the curb leaning heavily against the hydrant. She was in earnest conversation with a man who shook his head violently from time to time and then edged away. She stood glaring at him passing down the street. When the man turned the corner I walked over to her.

“Whut you want?” she said, with evident annoyance and suspicion.

“Y'aint gotta git sore at me.” I tried to be as hard as she, assuming an attitude of one who's in on it. To come as an enquiring reporter would have evinced either suspicion of a policewoman, or a healthy stream of invectives and to go and mind my goddam business.

“How I ain't gotta git sore at you? Who you? I ain't seen you before. Watcha want, huh?”

“Sure y'aint seen me before. I just got into town. I been workin' this in Philly an business is so hell lousy I just couldn' do much. The cops is a gettin strict. Wuz run in last week an' got warned to stay hell outa Philly or be sent away. So I come here. I don't know nothin' about New York. I gotta get acquainted. I gotta talk to sumbody. I don' know one square from the other. So I come over t' you. Nothin' wrong in that is there?”

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“Naw, I s'pose there ain' nothin' wrong. Watcha wanta talk about? That ole _____ got me sore They're gittin' cheaper alla time. I gotta make a livin'. What the hella they care. They ain' gotta heart. Offerin' me a buck. Imagine! A buck! Just the kinda guys that want more outa yuh fur their lousy buck than whut they use to git fur five. Well, c'mon, sister; let's go ova t'my bung hole an' I'll show yuh th' ropes. But don'tcha go pickin' up on nis block. We' strict on territory, an' th' boss ain' got no sympathy with outside chiselers. Maybe he'll take ya in an' maybe not. Let's git.”

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The girl pulled herself off the hydrant, suffled her clothing and took me to her room.

The room was the filthiest affair imaginable — not like those in the wealthier districts who cater to the monied population. The whole get-up consisted of a bed with soiled linen and no pillow, an old bureau and a single chair. The walls were de-plastered in numerous places. No windows.

“Some dump;” she stated factually.

“There's worse. Whut else d'ya need?”

“Whut else? Oney ina las' year I been pullin' in cheap customers. Had a joint ten times bettern nis. Them days is gone. Let's git t' talkin'.”

“How'dya git into this business. Y'r pretty young yet. Been in it long?”

“Naw, oney four years. 'T ain't long; some a us has worked fur the boss ten n' fifteen years. Been doin' swell some a em till the depression. Things kinda fell out. Some 3 'em customers lost jobs an' asked fur cuts. We hadda accommodate or else lose 'em.”

“How come ya got into this stuff. It's kinda lousy business. Y'ain't so bad lookin'.”

“Hey, you askin' me questions or whut? Awright, ain' no harm askin'. Yeh, it ain' hot. Yur right, sister. I hates it like all hell. I hates myself too fur doin' it. But whut the hell are yuh gonna do? Whut? I ain' got no folks. I'm 22 now, oney 22. Figger it out. Been at it four goddam years. Means I wuz oney 18 when I git started. Why? Cuz I didn't have nobuddy here an' didn' have no job an' no money. I gotta eat, I gotta live, Hey? I need cloes. Livin' in a stinkin' hole ain' no joke. Nuthin' wuz in sight so I hadda do ump'. I hadda. I wuz oney 18, see—18! Imagine.”

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The girl burst into tears that left tracks down her heavily rouged and powdered face.

“Awright, I don' hafta cry. It's a long time ago. A whole lifetime fur me. Oney four years an' 'at means a whole lifetime, see? Whut wuz I t' do? I gits acquainted with sumbuddy an' gits introduced to this here boss, an' the bastard makes more outa it than I do. I supplies myself an' he takes the cash an' gives me a goddam handout. I can't even do business ona side. He'd kill me. He'd break my neck. I tried it oncet an' he beat me up. I ain' done it since. Jail? Been in jail more'n hair on yo' head. They gits tired jailin' me. All they say is 'again?' Take a tip sister; if yuh works fur somebody git holda white customers. They pays better. — Yeh, I wanta git outa this like all hell.

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When? An' how? No jobs forced me in an' no jobs is keepin' me in. They says this is a rich country. I ain' seen it nevva. I don' expects t' see it nevva. I almos' give up hope fur anythin' except this here so n' so business. Whut else is there, huh? Nothing. — Well, if ya wanta see th' boss, let's git. — Y'ain' goin' now, Awright— I'll be seein' yuh!”