

## The Urban-Rural Divide

The culture war that mostly divides our country these days is not the racial divide, but the urban-rural divide. For example, urban blacks and whites and rural blacks and whites are both hiring each other, going to school together, and marrying each other at rates unknown in the history of this country. But they rarely socialize between these geographical and lifestyle divides and have now largely chosen opposing political ideologies (Democrats and Republicans), a choice which has been exploited by a superelite political class. The newly formed suburban class rose in America's periurban areas to accommodate the rural-to-urban overflow of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the first century during which more Americans lived in cities than on farms. This class too was largely coopted by the Republican party.

The story of how this suburban class was created is also the story of how a majority of American stereotypes about black people became part of popular culture, but was also really the story of an earlier urban-rural culture clash.

And it all makes perfect sense when you think about it.

After the Civil War, millions of freed rural plantation slaves declared to themselves that they never wanted to work on a farm again. This resulted in the first wave of the Great Migration, wherein those new citizens moved to the nation's cities and got industrial jobs. However, just because they were blacks in the city didn't make them city blacks. A lot of these new migrants still retained "countrified" mannerisms and public comportment—and it was starting to embarrass the free urban blacks who had always been living amongst whites. Soon, a host of unflattering portrayals began popping up in popular media that lampooned the mannerisms of black people. This is where early Jim Crow minstrelsy, movies like D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, and all those awfully racist commercial knick-knacks you see from that era come from. All of the stereotypes about blacks being lazy, ignorant, sex-crazed, and cowardly became as part of American culture as apple pie. But many of America's citified blacks had gone through quite a bit to convince city whites that blacks really were not what racial narratives around savagery and primitivism had made them out to be. All blacks were happy that slavery had ended, and hundreds of thousands of Northern and Midwestern blacks welcomed country cousins to the city. But now these Southern blacks were ruining all the work they had done for racial justice, and it was ticking people off. In 1938, both the Urban League and the Chicago *Defender*, one of America's preeminent black newspapers, published lists of Do's and Don'ts for these new American migrants.

Don't Sit Around In The Yard And On The Porch Barefoot And Unkempt  
Don't Wear Handkerchiefs On Your Head  
Don't Use Vile Language In Public Places  
Don't Throw Garbage In The Backyard Or Alley Or Keep Dirty Front Yards  
Do Not Loaf. Get A Job At Once.  
Do Not Live In Crowded Rooms. Others Can Be Obtained.  
Do Not Carry On Loud Conversations In Street Cars And Public Places  
Do Not Send For Your Family Until You Get A Job

They were mostly “Don’ts” I guess, actually. But it was to oppose these new cultural stereotypes that the New Negro Movement I talked about in “What Does Sambo Mean” was constructed. And it was to get away from the attendant criminalization of blackness in urban areas that the suburban spaces I talked about in “White Flight, Inner City, and the ‘Burbs” were created. But so far in the 21st Century it has been this unwillingness for either the urban or suburban-rural class to give each other credit for their cultural differences that has led so many people to distance themselves from the president the other group elects.