

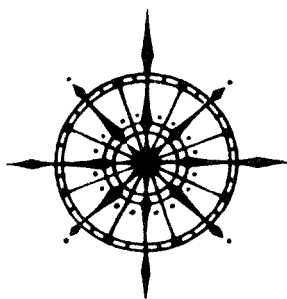
Theodore R. Kennedy

You gotta deal with it

BLACK FAMILY RELATIONS
IN A SOUTHERN COMMUNITY

YOU GOTTA DEAL
WITH IT

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YOU GOTTA DEAL WITH IT

*Black Family Relations
in a Southern Community*

THEODORE R. KENNEDY

New York Oxford
Oxford University Press
1980

*To Mama
and Daddy, Alvera, Saundra, Sonny, Billy, Clint,
Gene, Terry, Richard, and Baby Dean*

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PREFACE

*T*HE black family has long been a subject matter for social scientists and there are almost as many interpretations of the black family as there are writers on the subject. One reason for so many different accounts is that every author on the subject attempts to reify the concept of family. Lately, social scientists have recognized that this concept may not be applicable for a discussion of the black family. However, these later writers have had to contend with already established constructs concerning family and feel they are bound to follow preconceived ideas for representing family structure. As a result, the representations of the black family have become so analytical that one has problems recognizing the people being discussed.

The main reason for my writing this book is to indicate a departure from these preconceived ideas that force reification of the concept of family, as well as from the use of conventional ways of reporting data. In a way, I have taken the attitude that the members of the black family are better equipped to speak for themselves. And only when it becomes absolutely necessary do I try to provide an explanation instead of an interpretation of the data. Consequently, I have chosen to include actual dialogue between members of the families and myself, along with

dialogue between members of these families. The book is therefore not limited to the academic world, but its contents can be shared with everyone who is concerned with family life among blacks in a small southern town in the United States.

Obtaining actual dialogue required the extensive use of the tape recorder, accurate notes, and a good memory. In some cases using the tape recorder was not possible and I had to take notes. Sometimes even note-taking proved difficult. In this case, I had to rely on memory until I had time to make notes. I used both my memory and notes and then set up an interview to verify my data. During the interviews I was able to use the tape recorder.

Within two months of my stay in Vera Ridge I could use my tape recorder almost everywhere I went, in public places and social functions. However, in the few instances where the tape recorder was not possible I relied on my method of note-taking. As a result, the dialogue in this book is accurate. The only change made was to protect people from being recognized; I have replaced real names, places, and events that would make it obvious whom, where, and what I actually recorded.

The study presented here could not have been accomplished if it were not for the following people and organizations to whom I am sincerely grateful: Professors Barnett, Carroll, Lieber, Silverman; Szwed, director of The Center for Urban Ethnography, University of Pennsylvania; Taylor, director of Afro-American Studies at Princeton University; The Ford Foundation, Division of Administration, Manpower Service and The Department of Health, Education and Welfare. I wish to express a very special gratitude to the people of the community I refer to as Vera Ridge. Without their understanding and assistance I would not have been able to accomplish the task I set out to do.

T. R. K.

Port Jefferson, N.Y.
March 1979

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YOU GOTTA DEAL
WITH IT

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*T*HIS ethnography is a result of a year's study in a small town in the southern United States. For reasons of privacy I have changed the names of the town and the individuals in it. I have tried to enliven the narration with many of my personal encounters with the people of the town.

The town I call Vera Ridge has a population of approximately thirty thousand—of which one-third is black. Vera Ridge is a typical southern town. This is especially true in terms of the disparity between the black and white population. One characteristic that makes Vera Ridge a typical southern town is its clear line of demarcation, or, in this instance, the railroad tracks. There are other characteristics: the vast differences between the white and black standard of living. Poverty, unemployment, under-employment, low wages, inadequate housing, medical, educational, and recreational facilities—all signify problems in the black community.

The white community varies economically from a small exclusive wealthy section to project housing for welfare recipients. The exclusive part of the white section is divided into two areas: One is Pine Crest, where the Culpeppers, Ropers, Golfs, Orrs, and other well-established southern families reside. The other

section is referred to as "Jew Hill." This is where the Jewish population live. Pine Crest is adjacent to a golf course. Amidst the golf course is Vera Ridge's Country Club that excludes blacks, Jews, and "foreigners."

To the black population, all the people who lived on the other side of the tracks were white. Black people did not distinguish between Jews, foreigners, and other whites. However, on two occasions I was able to gain some insight into how whites felt about other whites in Vera Ridge. Once when I was shopping at a drug store buying film and other camera equipment, the owner and I got into a conversation. He did not have the right equipment for my camera, but he said, "I think that Jew boy has it over there at Goodman's Supplies."

I asked for directions and he said, "It's right down the street. You can't miss it."

I didn't feel comfortable asking him what he had meant by "Jew boy" at that time. Later, after I had been purchasing items from his store for about a month I decided to find out what he did mean. I walked into his store and when he saw me coming, he said in his customary way, "How are you doing today, Reggie. What can I do for you?"

He had become very friendly toward me, but I am sure it was only because I spent as much as a hundred dollars a month in his store. So, I decided I would ask him about his remark. He replied, "Now let me get this straight. I don't have nothing against anybody so long as they stay in their place. But, we've been calling them Jew boys ever since I can remember."

"Is Mr. Goodman Jewish?"

"They all are. All of them up and down that street. It used to be one old boy there. He owned a hardware store. Now half the town's business is owned by them."

I knew that wasn't true, although I didn't know how many Jewish-owned businesses were in Vera Ridge. So I asked, "Are there that many Jewish people in Vera Ridge?"

"More than otta be here . . . I mean, if we're not careful, they are gonna take over all the businesses."

"Where did they come from and what would make them want to come to a small town like this?"

"That furniture factory. They brought it down here. Ain't nobody said too much about it because it gave jobs to so many of our people, even your people got jobs there. But it didn't stop there. They brought this discount house here, ran some white people outta business, then came a doctor and now there's two lawyers. There may be more, you never can tell."

"Who uses the doctor and lawyers?"

"The Jew People, your people go to them too, and some poor white trash who don't know no better. None of us would ever think of using them—at least I wouldn't. I think them lawyers came down here when we had all that trouble from them people up North coming down here trying to tell us how to live our lives."

"Where do they all live?"

"They all live over there next to that wooded area just as you come in to town from the North. Up there on the hill. We call it Jew Hill. They built these fancy houses. Every one of them is rich. Of course I never been up there myself, but they say those houses are big and expensive and that in front of every one of them sits a big new car. You gotta give them credit. If they are poor, they get rich. If they are rich they get richer. They tell me they'd sell their own mama if there was money to be made. 'Course I don't know nothing about that. That's what they say."

"Who are they?"

"Oh, people around town. People who ought to know what they are talking about."

"What do they do besides work? I mean what kind of community activities are they into?"

"They stick pretty much to themselves for the most part. I think they go out of town, to 'The City,' when they want to have some fun. We had some trouble with them a while back. Them lawyers that came down here, they tried to join our country club. That's when we put our foot down. We don't want them there. That is one thing I could never figure out about

people, why do somebody want to be where they ain't wanted. If you let one of them come in, pretty soon the Jews would take over the place. They didn't get in though."

Although I would have liked to continue my conversation with him I didn't feel that comfortable in talking with a white man. During our conversation he would come very close to revealing his position about black people and I felt it would be unwise for me to respond to him. There were times when he would become emotional about his position on the Jewish population, while at the same time he would be saying that he did not have anything against them. He would turn red and pound his hand to emphasize a point he was trying to make. I learned that there were approximately three hundred Jewish people living in Vera Ridge. I wanted to talk with some of them, but felt it was unwise because, for me, there was no way to distinguish people who were Jewish from any other white person.

I was able to obtain a further distinction made by the white community between "us" and "them." A banquet was being held at the Vera Ridge Country Club honoring some politicians. The regular staff of blacks who serviced the club wasn't enough and additional help was needed. A member of one of the families I studied told me about the event and asked if I wanted to work. I agreed and he said I would have to wear a uniform. I told him I didn't mind because I wanted the opportunity to observe blacks working in an environment among white people. I also wanted to see the white "society" people of Vera Ridge. Of course I had never waited tables before and didn't know if I'd last through the event.

I learned two things. One, how much the white community hated the blacks, especially "trouble makers," and, two, their contempt for the Jews and "those foreigners." I never quite understood who constituted the foreigners. At one point, Italians were referred to as foreigners, and at another point the foreigners were "them white northerners." At any rate, if you were not a Culpepper, Roper, Golf, or Orr, and you were white you were in trouble.

I had a difficult time keeping my composure when serving these people and listening to their conversations, which they did not try to disguise. Once I was approaching a table with drinks and the conversation was about "that nigger who was running for mayor." I thought they would at least lower their voices or postpone their discussion until I had served the drinks but, as if I were not there, one of them said, "Them niggers are getting too smart for their own good. We're going to have to do something about them."

They went on to indicate that a visit from the Ku Klux Klan would do the job. I shook as I placed the drinks in front of them. One man said, "A nigger had the nerves to ask me to call him Mister. I looked him dead in the eye, then I spat at his feet, turned and walked away. I should have spat in his face."

At another table people were talking about how the black population of Vera Ridge was growing and that they would have to redistrict the population so that no part of the black section would constitute half the number of people in any given section. What I later learned was that Vera Ridge was redistricted into a pie-shaped section. The center of the pie was the black sections, so that the closer you are to the center, the fewer people (black, that is) represented a part of each section. The farther from the center, the greater number of people represented each section. Therefore, no matter what district, there would always be a majority of whites over blacks.

Most of the men's conversations that I heard dealt with politics and had black overtones. While serving a table where mostly women sat I overheard one say, "I'll go to my grave before I ever let any nigger or Jew join this club."

She indicated that it was all right for niggers to work there because they could be controlled; however, "If you let a Jew in here, he'll own the place before you know it."

The others at the table seemed to agree. One of them mentioned something about Italians. She said, "Out yonder them Italians keep to their farming and they don't try to come where they ain't wanted."

Another woman remarked, "But you have to watch out for them foreigners. You can never tell what they're up to. They have funny eyes and when they look at you they seem to stare right through you."

In a way I felt a sense of relief. It was good to know that blacks weren't the only hated people in Vera Ridge. On the other hand, I felt hostile toward the Jews because I felt they were strong people. They are intelligent and powerful enough to establish themselves anywhere in the United States because they had judges, doctors, lawyers, and money to fortify their position. I thought to myself, "Why do they have to put up with this shit?"

I felt hostile toward the Italians because they had the power of one of the most powerful organizations in the world at their hand. They should be able to move freely anywhere they wanted to go. They didn't have to be dirt farmers living on the outskirts of any town. I realized that my hostility really wasn't directed at the Jews or the Italians, it wasn't even directed toward the blacks. I was angry with myself for being there in the first place. I rushed to the kitchen, put down my tray, and told the black man in charge I was quitting. I asked how he could take the things that those people were saying right to his face, and he said, "Now don't you go starting no trouble. I have to work here. I live in this town, you don't. It's always been this way, so long as I get my pay I don't care what they say."

"Well, I'm leaving. You can have whatever money I have coming to me. I don't live here and I don't have to work here and I won't take their shit. I'm changing my clothes and getting out of here before I do or say something that may get me into trouble."

"You're doing the right thing then. That's the trouble with you young people, you don't have no patience. Things don't come right over night."

I didn't even want to respond to that statement. I got into my car with the intention of driving home. However, when I reached the exit gate I decided to go by the residential areas of

Pine Crest and “Jew Hill.” Just after leaving the golf course you come to a main street that will take you to the highway leading through the center of Vera Ridge. If you turned left on this main street you could approach the periphery of Pine Crest. I felt safe entering this area because the street that leads you there is the same one that leads to the freeway leaving Vera Ridge.

I didn’t stray from the main road while driving through Pine Crest. This was the wealthy area of Vera Ridge. People living here were said to be families with “old money.” On both sides of the road you could see old, large two- and three-storied houses. All were painted white or near white. Each home had a large, fenced yard. The lawns were well kept and hedges making different patterns stood neatly trimmed. There were large oak and pine trees—some of them clustered, others spaced apart. Every home had a black cast iron figure with a hat and lips painted red. Most of them were holding some kind of light fixture. Some homes seemed very old and looked more like plantation mansions, while others seemed to copy early post Civil War architecture. I traveled almost a mile before I came to the end of Pine Crest.

In order to get to the Jewish section, I had to retrace my drive to the golf course entrance. Once I reached the street that takes you downtown Vera Ridge, I had to turn right and travel approximately a mile. I then turned off the main road toward a wooded area. I had a story in case I ran into trouble for being there: I’d simply tell anyone who stopped me that I had gotten lost. I drove on a narrow road that wound its way up a hill and came to a fenced area, only there was no gate where a gate would normally be. I drove through the opening in the fence. A short way into the enclosed area you have a choice of three possible directions. I could see some homes through the wooded area and I didn’t feel apprehensive because I was in a Jewish section. They couldn’t be too bad—I thought.

I chose the extreme right turn; however, that led directly into someone’s driveway. Before I could turn around and head

out, I was stopped by a man carrying a shotgun. He came over to the window of my car with the gun pointed at me. I didn't know what to do. I thought of taking off, but I figured he would probably shoot at me. He said that I was on his property and wanted to know what I was doing there. He told me I had better be careful driving into this area because they had had some trouble "a while back and people living here are pretty uptight about strangers."

I wanted to ask him why he carried the gun, but I thought better and decided to tell him I had gotten lost. Having checked my car, especially my license plates, which were out of state, he must have believed me. He gave me directions to downtown Vera Ridge and told me that it was not safe for me to be in the area. He said I could have gotten shot.

I didn't wait for any further explanations or ask any further questions. I followed the road he had suggested until I had reached the exit from which I had come. I did not see much of the so-called Jewish area, but what I did observe led me to believe that the homes were large and occupied large areas of land. Had I known the area better I could have approached it from the front side where I could have gotten a better view. Nevertheless, the homes were expensive and the economic status of those living there was upper middle class and above. I later learned that Jews with lesser wealth also lived in the area but I didn't revisit this section of Vera Ridge.

Those blacks who worked as domestic servants were mostly employed in these two areas. The majority of the whites, however, lived in or near the downtown sections of Vera Ridge. They are mostly white and blue collar workers and live in single dwellings. There were some apartments, but they were few. The sugar factory employed over half the white people living in this section of Vera Ridge. Vera Ridge, like most small southern towns, had its poor whites.

Most of the poor whites lived in the project housing and were on some kind of welfare. The project housing was set close to the

railroad tracks, only it was in the white section of Vera Ridge. It covered four blocks and looked very much like the project housing in the black section of Vera Ridge. Any time during the day, if you drove by, you could see lines of clothes, people sitting on porches, and children playing in the yards and in the streets. The project housing was just as dilapidated as the one in the black section. There were abandoned cars in yards and on the streets. Tobacco spits had turned the grass and sidewalks brown. A sort of stench pervaded this area. The people in this project who work hold the unskilled jobs at the sugar factory and other places of business in Vera Ridge.*

On the outskirts of Vera Ridge, away from the Jewish section, there are scattered houses occupied by whites who are as poor as the whites living in the project housing. The houses are old and run-down and are badly in need of repair. They approximate the conditions of most of the houses in the black section of Vera Ridge. There are broken-down cars in the yards—some being repaired, others sitting abandoned. Some yards have chickens, pigs, and cows in a fenced area. Often you can see old people swinging on the porches, or very young children playing in yards. Some of these homes are still without modern conveniences and the toilets are on the outside. You do not have to go into the houses to see their internal conditions, often doors hang open and flies and other insects are very noticeable.

In contrast to the white section of Vera Ridge, the black section is even more bleak. What industrial unit there is, is located in the black section. So are the sewage processing plant and the garbage dump. On the other hand, the central business district, with all its public services, is in the white section of Vera Ridge. Only three small white businesses are located in the black section. These are food and dry goods stores, and a liquor store.

A further characteristic of Vera Ridge that makes it a typical southern town is its organization of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

* The sugar factory is the major place of employment for blacks. The furniture factory is small and only employs a small number of blacks.

Some people say Vera Ridge is the original home of the KKK. I have heard whites boast of having hung more "niggers" in Vera Ridge than in any other southern town of its size. Blacks still talk about the executions they witnessed. One man told me, "They did it two ways. If they wanna git you right away, they hang you. The tree's still up there. Right over them tracks. They got a sign nailed on it so people can see it. I would be 'shamed to let somebody see something like that. Then they had the chair. 'Least you didn't get it right away. 'Course I don't know which one was worse, hanging to death, or waiting for the chair. They had to wait 'til the man made his rounds before they could 'lectricute you."

"And you still remember all of that?"

"'Member it! I 'member it all right. I can still see it now. Just as it was happenin' right here today. I had to be there."

"I don't understand. You said you had to be there."

"Yeh! I had to be there 'cause my daddy made me."

"He made you watch people being electrocuted? They let anyone watch?"

"No! Not just anyone. My daddy was the undertaker for the black people and he had to take the body once they got through with it."

"And he made you watch?"

"Yes! I had to watch so I'd know what to do when it came my time. You see, he wanted me to be a undertaker just like him. He wanted me to take over the business when he got too old."

"How old were you during all of this?"

"I guess I saw my first one when I was around nine. I was scared. I told him I didn't wanna watch, I didn't wanna go, but he made me go, and he made me watch—all of it—everything."

"Why aren't you running the business today?"

"'Cause I couldn't take it. Oh, I went to school for it and I got my license and everything, but I just don't wanna practice it."

"What? Don't they make good money?"

"Let me tell you somethin'. And after I tell you, you tell me

if you was me, would you be practicing. I want you to tell me that."

"Was it that bad?"

"Bad! It was worse than that. Have you ever seen anybody after they been 'lectricuted? I mean before he's all made up, if you can make him up and lay him out after they get through with him."

"No, I haven't and I don't think I want to."

"Well, once you do, you'll never forget it 'til your dying days. You'll never forget that look on his face and the screaming while he's being strapped in that chair. They tie you up tight, so tight that the straps seem like they will snatch the raw flesh off of you. And then they do it. That man start sending the juice through his whole body. Nothing sound worse than hearing that juice being turned on and going through your body. And they just keep pumping that juice into you—long after you're already dead, they keep giving it to you. Many times I stood there crying and holding my hands over my eyes. But my daddy would snatch my hands from my face. He'd tell me to 'shut up and look.' I didn't know what I feared the most, my daddy or seeing that man 'lectricuted."

"No wonder you don't want to practice undertaking."

"That's not all of it. The worst of it was smelling flesh frying—just like you was cooking somebody over a open fire. You never smell nothin' 'til you smell burning flesh from a man. After they got finished with him, me and my daddy had to take over. Sometimes we had to scrape the flesh from the chair—'cause they done cooked him so much. What do you think it's like, seeing a man alive one minute and a few minutes later you're scraping his burned up flesh from that chair and trying to piece him together? I had to do that. Now you see why I drink so much? Now you see why I can't hold my hands steady? Now you see why I can't practice that? Now can you see!"

"Yeh! That must have been something. I feel bad enough just hearing about these kind of things, but to have seen them. I'm telling you, I don't know what I would have done. Maybe your

daddy was also showing you how terrible the white man can be in hopes that you would never become a victim to the electric chair."

These experiences exhibit just some of the characteristics that make Vera Ridge a typical southern town. Another is the hate and fear that exist between the black and the white people. For the most part, the whites hate the blacks and the black people fear the white people. The blacks of Vera Ridge still fear the vengeful whites. There were recent instances of bombings, with groups of blacks jailed for demonstrating, a woman dragged by her legs, and a young man hanged while in jail. It is this latter incident that created the widest despair between the races. Most of the blacks feel they will never get "true" justice from the people of Vera Ridge.

As one woman told me, "Day after day you see things happen to your children, you see things happen to you and you are helpless to do anything about them. Who can you go to for help—no one. If you try to show when you've been mistreated if they don't laugh at you, they're telling you 'If you don't watch out you'll be next.' It ain't been over two months since Mr. Laddy and his grandson went for a walk and nobody have seen or heard from them since. If you try to call your people together, you may get a few soon after something like that happen to us. Take this young man who they said hanged himself in jail. We called for a meeting, but the fighting and arguing between ourselves didn't produce nothing much. If we boycott the white people's stores it ain't long before some of us are bought off and the whole thing fails."

"With the kind of problems you are having down here how can someone let himself be bought off, and what do you do about it?"

"Money! Honey! Money! All you have to do is wave some of that green stuff in some of these black faces and they'd snap at it in a minute. In one way I can't blame my people. Any time you stand up for what you believe in you never know what day will be your last one on this earth. They got us either way. If

we try to do something for ourselves you may wake up dead. If you don't do nothing for yourself, you may never wake up. Now just like that poor boy who they said hung himself in jail. No black person in his right mind would believe that story. I know only too well when they take you to jail they take everything away from you before they lock you up. Now how was that poor boy able to get his belt and hang himself in jail? I know our people, even if he had a belt, we don't like dying—especially if it means killing ourself, no way—they did it as sure as I'm standing here talking to you. I know in my lifetime I ain't never gonna see any change; maybe for our young people—if they don't kill them off—they will."

The hanging of the young man in jail stirred up the black community for a little while. No one knew that he had hung himself until the next day, in the afternoon. His mother was told by the authorities that he had apparently committed suicide. When she received the notification the young man had been removed from the jail, taken to a local hospital where an autopsy was performed, and then brought to the funeral home where he had already been placed in a coffin. There was a sign on the coffin, DO NOT OPEN. All of this had taken place before the mother learned of her son's death.

Many questions were raised, but never answered to my knowledge. The mother at first denied that she had told the authorities (police) her son was on drugs and fighting with his sisters and brothers. However, before anyone else could corroborate her story it was alleged that a black member who proclaimed himself to be the spokesman for the black community had told her not to talk to anyone. A lawyer representing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was persuaded to come down to Vera Ridge to investigate the situation. He agreed to render his services only if the community could come up with a certain amount of money as his fee. The people of the community were not able to raise the amount needed so I provided them with the balance.

The lawyer came several days later. However, he said that he

could do nothing about the situation unless he was provided with evidence that the young man's civil rights had been violated. One woman at the meeting told me, "Well, there goes another one of our young men. They're killing us like dogs and we can't do nothing about it."

The check I had given them to make up the balance of the lawyer's fee was to produce a final warning to me that I was next on the list of the white man. I was seen as a trouble maker and was told that if I knew what was good for me I had better get out of town. I received a call from the black member who proclaimed himself the spokesman for the black community. He told me that he had heard from the authorities downtown that I had better watch my step because I was heading for serious trouble.

The mother of the young man was under extreme pressure. She and her nine children (now eight) had been persuaded to move into the white projects by the proclaimed spokesman of the black community because the court had ordered that government housing be integrated. Hers was the second family to try living in the white project housing. The first family, after only a few weeks, decided to return to the black section of Vera Ridge because it could not take the harassment it received from the white people, not only of the project housing, but in the community itself.

Therefore, the death of this young man was seen as a warning to his family to move out of the white project housing. And the bitterness between the races continued. Where legal separation has been abolished, actual separation and reprisals against legal action in favor of blacks have caused even more hatred among the whites and equal fear among the blacks. Vera Ridge is a typical southern town because its problems are shared with many southern towns throughout the United States.

Blacks, especially the younger ones, are afraid to seek medical attention from the white clinics and hospitals. Young blacks are seen as the source of the trouble coming from the black community—and this is reflected in the way they are treated. A

member from one of the families I studied had a toothache. I told him he should see a dentist and have it pulled. The tooth had been broken off at the root, and the root had rotted and become infected. The entire left side of his face was swollen. He was in constant pain. He carried a bottle of whiskey around with him and used it to deaden the pain. I asked him why he didn't see a dentist, and he said he didn't trust any white man—especially one with a needle. I told him I would go with him, but he said that he would have to think about it.

Every day I would go by his home to see him. He would be lying in bed, groaning. Each time I suggested taking him to the dentist he refused. He had not worked for over a week, and he and his wife argued daily. She said she would throw him out of the house if he didn't go to work. How could he work with an infected tooth? He stayed drunk. The more his tooth hurt, the more he drank. The more he drank, the drunker he became—thus the more he and his wife argued. Finally, I convinced him to go to the dentist by assuring him that the dentist wouldn't hurt him. He became even more convinced to go once I told him that he wouldn't have to worry about the pains anymore.

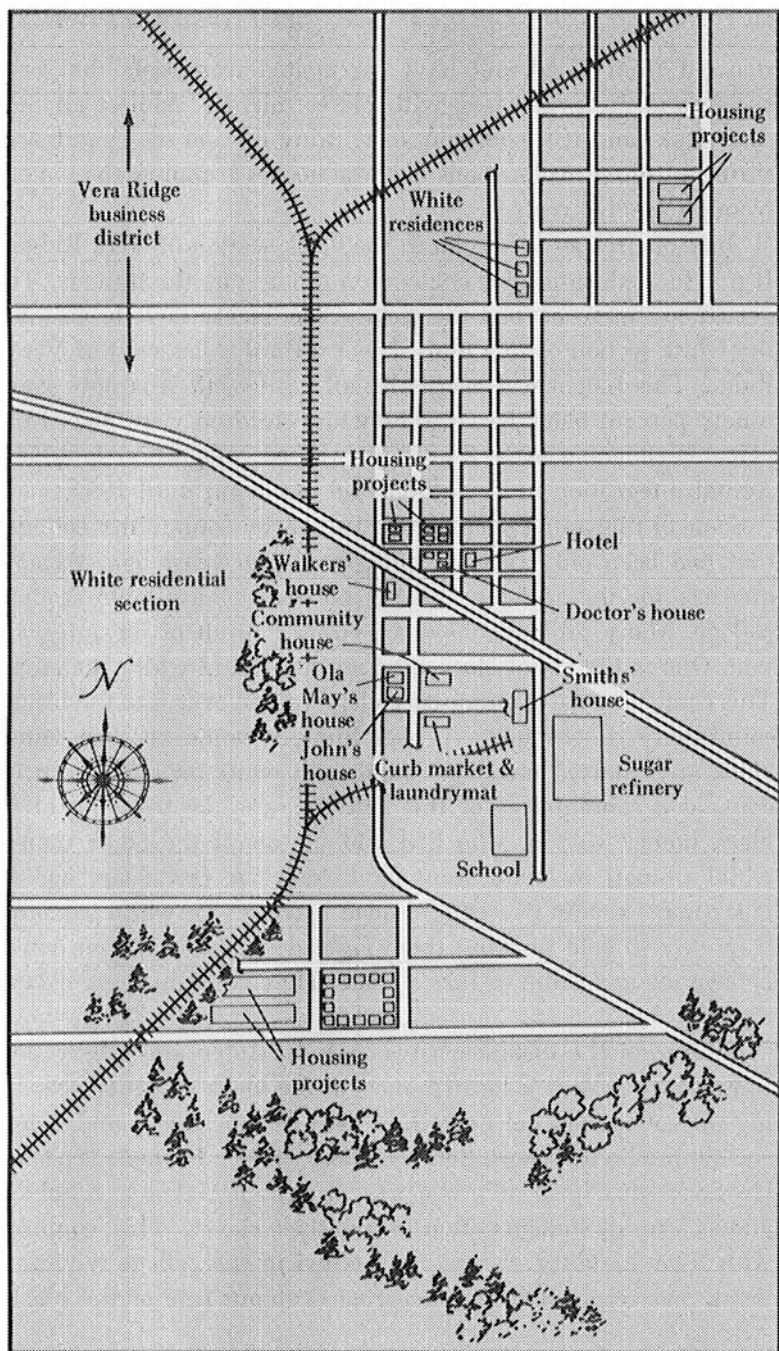
The next morning, I called for him and drove him to the dentist. He didn't have any appointment, but I thought he would be given something to get rid of the infection and after the swelling had gone down he could return to have the tooth removed. The receptionist took his name, and asked him if he could pay. I said I would pay for it. She told us to be seated. In a few minutes he was called and the dentist's assistant asked him to enter a room. He wanted me to come with him but I said I didn't think they would allow me. He hesitated, but I gave him a nudge and he went in. In less than five minutes, I heard him scream—he was yelling very loud. He yelled so loud I wanted to go in and see what was happening. I thought perhaps the dentist was lancing his gums to drain the tooth. He continued to yell for more than fifteen minutes. About a half hour later, he came out. There were tears in his eyes, and he was holding the swollen side of his face. I first joked with him, and

told him he was acting like a baby. He said nothing—just held his face and the gauze that was in his mouth. Blood began to drip from his mouth. I asked him what had happened, but he said nothing, just nervously stood on one foot and then the other while motioning me to take him home; he was in pain.

I went over to the receptionist and asked when he was to return. She said he didn't have to return unless something went wrong. She then said I owed thirty dollars. I asked her why I owed her that much. She said the dentist had extracted three teeth. No wonder he was yelling as loud as he did. Later I learned from him that he had no X rays, no Novocain—nothing! "He just open my mouth, looked in it, took some pliers and started pulling," Billy told me. Now I knew why he feared going to the dentist.

Approaching Vera Ridge from the south, you can see a forest of pine trees. The earth is painted with red clay. A creek flows under the road, a meadow breaks the forest of pines, and a golf course can be seen in the distance. But you must keep going. You have five more miles before you reach the tracks—cross them and you enter the black section of Vera Ridge. If you stand on the other side of the tracks, where the white people live, and look north, you cannot see the black section because a row of very tall trees borders the tracks. Further down the tracks, where the row of trees ends, the business section begins on the white side of the town.

There are only two asphalt-paved streets with sidewalks in the black section of Vera Ridge. Most of the streets are clay-paved or simply dirt roads. There is no drainage system; therefore, when it rains, the streets and yards are flooded. Most of the houses are built on brick blocks and escape the onrushing water. In some cases, where the houses are built close to the ground, the floors are often inundated with water. Except for recently built houses and apartments, the houses owned by some well-to-do blacks, most of the buildings are dilapidated—some more so than others. These dilapidated houses are con-



structed from wood and have corrugated iron roofs that are rusted and, in some cases, with pieces missing. Almost all the roofs leak; and it is common, on a rainy day, to see containers sitting in different locations of these houses trapping the water from the leaking roofs.

Only one school is located in the black section of Vera Ridge. It provides education for students in grades one through six. To get an education beyond the sixth grade, blacks have to go into the white section or to a high school several miles west of Vera Ridge. This school was originally all white, but it is now over ninety percent black because the white children were placed in private academies after the Court ordered integration in 1954. Actual integration in Vera Ridge did not begin until 1965.

Some of the young people attend a nearby community college that had been only recently integrated two years ago. Except quarters for the athletes, there is no housing available at this college. Many problems have arisen as a result of the integration. One is the racial clash between black and white students. This conflict at the community college spilled over into the black community. I was told, "It was brought home because some black guys started messing 'round with white girls." One incident, as a consequence of this activity, was the bombing of a black home. Melvin, who had told me about the black man-white woman incident, went on to say, "A few years ago a black man wouldn't be caught dead looking at a white woman. Now he's so bold to bring them right down here. If you don't believe me go 'round to Jake's place. They come in there every night."

Because of the distance between Vera Ridge and where the community college is located, most of the black students attending the college did not have their own transportation and there was no public transportation provided, so they formed carpools. However, this form of transportation was not always reliable, and as a result students often missed their classes. This, coupled with their inability to cope and adjust to the college environment, was responsible for the great drop-out rate of the black