

# THE SOUTHERN GENTLEMAN

Perhaps no two single things shaped the world's view of the southern gentleman as much as Margaret Mitchell's novel, *Gone with the Wind* (and the movie based on the novel), and the image of upper-class Southerners that frequently emerged in the press during the civil rights era.

The first was an image of a gallant, romantic gentleman who, like the landed gentry of England, loved high adventure, had impeccable manners, and was addicted to gracious living, tradition, fox hunting, gambling, and mint juleps. He was a man of action with an exaggerated sense of chivalry, not far removed from his forebears who fought duels at the slightest insult. This view of the southern gentleman had been formulated by many post-Civil War novelists, including Thomas Dixon and Thomas Nelson Page, excerpts from whose works are presented here.

The second view of the upper-class Southerner, almost a self-parody, is the less flattering one that emerged during the 1950s. This is an image of a man who resists change and progress with all his might, who holds fiercely to values and ideals that are dead and gone. His blindness and backwardness, as he clings to the "good ole days," make him a figure of ridicule. This image is conveyed in a letter written by a former state senator from Alabama who objects to the integration of the university.

Harper Lee's portrayal of Atticus Finch exploded those stereotypes. Atticus is not a man of fox-hunting type action. He is not a dyed-in-the-wool Confederate who reveres the past above all else. And he is certainly not a bigot who would fight to the death to keep the South segregated.

## FROM THOMAS NELSON PAGE, *GORDON KEITH*

(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903)

Gordon Keith was the son of a gentleman. And this fact, like the cat the honest miller left to his youngest son, was his only patrimony. As in that case also, it stood to the possessor in the place of a good many other things. It helped him over many rough places. He carried it with him as a devoted Romanist wears a sacred scapulary next to the heart.

His father, General McDowell Keith of "Elphinstone," was a gentleman of the old kind, a type so old-fashioned that it is hardly accepted these days as having existed. He knew the Past and lived in it; the Present he did not understand, and the Future he did not know. In his latter days, when his son was growing up, after war had swept like a vast inundation over the land, burying almost everything it had not borne away, General Keith still survived, unchanged, unmoved, unmarred, an antique memorial of the life of which he was a relic. His one standard was that of a gentleman.

Gordon, like some older men, hoped for war with all his soul. . . . He would be Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great at least. One day Gordon was sent for to come home. When he came downstairs next morning his father was standing in the drawing-room, dressed in full uniform, though it was not near as showy as Gordon had expected it to be, or as dozens of uniforms the boy had seen the day before about the railway stations on his journey home, gorgeous with gold lace. He was conscious, however, that some change had taken place, and a resemblance to the man-in-armor in the picture over the library mantle suddenly struck the boy. There was the high look, the same light in the eyes, the same gravity about the mouth; and when his father, after taking leave of the servants, rode away in his gray uniform, on his bay horse "Chevalier," with his sword by his side, to join his men at the county-seat, and let Gordon accompany him for the first few miles, the boy felt as though he had suddenly been transported to a world of which he had read, and were riding behind a knight of old. Ah! if there were only a few Roundheads formed at the big-gate, how they would scatter them!

## **MR. BONNER'S RESPONSE TO INTEGRATION**

### **EX-ALUMNI HEAD ASKS MOVE TO "KEEP UA WHITE"**

A former state senator and past president of the University of Alabama Alumni Association today proposed petitions urging the Capstone's Board of Trustees to bar Autherine Lucy from the campus permanently and "keep the University a white man's university."

The petition was proposed by J. M. Bonner of Wilcox County in a letter to the *News*. Mr. Bonner's letter, addressed to "All friends of the University of Alabama," is quoted in full.

"Our University today faces the greatest crisis of its 125 year existence. It must answer NOW the most momentous question of its history: Will it continue to live, a great White Man's University?"

"My answer is: It must live. It shall not die.

"But it cannot so live without a fight. I call now on every Southern White man to join in this fight.

"I proudly take my stand with those students who resisted, and who will continue to resist the admission of a negress named Lucy. Their enthusiasm may have carried them a wee bit far; but their actions were prompted by loyalty to and love for our University, and the conviction that ours is a White Man's College. I do not find it in my heart to condemn them.

"I take up the cudgel and gladly join with them in the fight they have fearlessly begun.

"To this end, I suggest to them, and to friends of the University *in every* part of Alabama, that petitions be circulated on the Campus, in Tuscaloosa, and in various parts of the state, worded substantially as follows:

" 'We, the undersigned students, former students and friends of the University of Alabama, hereby petition the Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama as follows:

" '1. That the admission of Lucy to our University never be tolerated.

" '2. That no student of the University be punished for any action heretofore taken in resisting her admission.

" '3. That every member of the faculty, from TOP to bottom, be given to understand that the University of Alabama will continue to be operated for WHITE students only.'

'Respectfully submitted.' "

"As a former student, and as a former President of the U. of A. Alumni Society, I would like for my name to be the first name signed to that petition."

*Tuscaloosa News*, Tuesday, February 21, 1956.