

[Leroy Spriggs]

Beliefs and Customs - Occupational Lore Tales - Anecdotes 14

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Frank Byrd

ADDRESS 110 King Street, N.Y.C.

DATE March 6, 1939

SUBJECT Pullman Porters & Dining Car Workers Stories.

1. Date and time of interview March 6th, 1 P.M.
 2. Place of interview 200 West 135th Street
 3. Name and address of informant Leroy Spriggs, 200 West 135th Street New York City
 4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. Met him in pool room.
 5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
- No one.

Library of Congress

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Office building with branch office of P.P. union, cabaret in basement, bar and pool-room on street floor.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Frank Byrd

ADDRESS 110 King Street

DATE March 6, 1939

SUBJECT Pullman Porters & Dining Car Workers Stories I - CHEF WATKINS' ALIBI

Chef Watkins was a short, fat squatty little Negro with the meanest [most onery] disposition of any cook I've ever known; and I've known some mean ones in my time. He had a jet black skin, full pork-chop lips and a belly on him that shook like tapioca when he was working the lunch-hour rush. He could curse cuss like a top-sergeant and seemed to take a fiendish delight in giving the boys hell.

When we had taken about as much of his crap as we could stand, the boys got together and hatched up a plot to get rid of him. The trouble was, he stood in too well with the big bosses. He was one of those kow-towing, old-fashioned, handkerchief-headed- darkeys darkies who would grin and yes a white tan to death and give his Negro subordinates hell from morning till night.

Library of Congress

We all knew that Chef Watkins was killing the Company for everything he could steal. He had bought a huge, rambling old country house down in Maryland and a large breeding farm for jumping horses and prize stock [/?] ... and you can't do that on what the Pullman Company pays you even if you have worked for them twenty years and have full seniority rating.

2

Nothing was too big or too small for him to steal. He had worked out a system with the commissary steward and between them they did an awful lot of bill padding. In addition to that, he used to throw hams, chickens, legs of lamb and anything else off to his wife or children whenever he passed his place near Bowie. You know, that junction where the Pennsy crosses the Seaboard?

Well, the boys got together and decided that old Cheffie had to go. So what we did was to drop a little hint here and there to Mr. Palmer, our chief steward, that if he'd just happen around the kitchen when we were nearing that Seaboard crossing, he might find out what was happening to all our missing supplies that he was catching hell about back in the New York commissary.

To make it short and sweet, when we neared the junction this day, Chef Watkins was busy, as usual, getting his hams and chickens together to toss out the window to his wife who was armed, as was customary, with her old potato sack in which she carried home the bacon; not to mention eggs . (well-packed of course .) .

Just as the train slowed down and the chef leaned back, ham poised like a football about to take flight, [old?] [man?] Palmer drawled in that deep Southern accent, as only [old?] [man?] Palmer could: "What in hell do you think you're doin' there , Watkins?"

Well, you could have knocked the chef over with a feather. He stumbled, coughed and did everything but turn pale. It's the only time I've ever seen him stuck for words.

Library of Congress

“Know one thing, Mr. Palmer?” he finally spluttered . “ dere's Dere's a ol' black, nappy-headed woman who stands out dere by duh crossin' and cusses me an' calls me all sorta names ever time I pass hyeah, an' it makes me so mad I jus' grabs up duh fus thing I gits mah han's on an th'ows it at / 'er.” 3] Old [man?] Palmer just looked at him with a cold stare and a wise smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

That was the last we saw of Chef Watkins. But, back in the yards, we heard that he was not only transferred to a lousy run but also lost his twenty years seniority that he was always crowing about the old bastard.]