

Walter White
By Davide Poles

"I knew who I was. I was a Negro, a human being with an invisible pigmentation which marked me a person to be hunted, hanged, abused, discriminated against, kept in poverty and ignorance."

Walter White was a man who helped the blacks during the Harlem Renaissance. Walter wrote many books. He also decreased the killings of blacks in the south.

This quote struck me because Walter was more white than black and I did not understand what he was trying to imply in his statement. Walter chose to be black. The reason why is because he wanted to fight for the black people in the south.

Walter White's history explains why he chose to help the blacks in the south. Walter was born on July 1, 1893, the second of five children. His parents, George and Madeline White were people from Atlanta's small black community. His father was a mail carrier for 43 years. He only attended one year of college before Walter's father's parents died. Walter's mother was a schoolteacher to support her family.

White's parents were light skinned. His mother was 1/16 Negro and his father was 1/4. "Walter was 63/64 white." (Marks, Edkins p.40) Walter White considered himself a black because wherever he went, when he said he was a black the whites would call him "n\$%^\$." He would see how much the black people put up with from the white people. Walter said blacks are as good as whites.

Walter White went to Atlanta University in 1908 and graduated in 1916. During his years at Atlanta University he said that every year 12,000 white skinned blacks seemed to disappear because they disguised themselves as white.

Walter's interest in the community services quickly got him into education controversies. White decided to appeal to the NAACP in New York. One controversy was that blacks were not allowed to go the seventh grade. The white people thought that the black people were getting to smart. The NAACP was protesting for black people to go to the seventh grade. Walter was elected to write a letter for the seventh grade for blacks. Fearing for what would happen to him, he did it anyway and succeeded. The strategy worked so well the NAACP wanted to do the same for the eighth grade too.

White found many different ways to help black people. The leaders of the NAACP elected Walter as secretary for the NAACP. To show appreciation they invited James Weldon Johnson a famous musician, to speak.

At the meeting held for Johnson, White gave an introduction that impressed Johnson so much that he said Walter should go to New York. The job at New York paid \$12,000 less than he earned at his other job, but Walter took the job. All Walter cared about was helping the blacks. His job involved handling complaints of discrimination from across the country.

His first trip was to go to the south and go pose as a white man interested in buying cotton land. He had made friends with a lot of whites who had told him about an event involving a black sharecropper who had been slowly burned to death because he defended himself from a beating. White was very disturbed at what had happened to that person but he had to

still pursue his goal. Walter's skin color acted as a camouflage to investigate situations in the south, a chance he took at his own risk.

After being married and divorced once, White married Leah Gladys Dowell in 1922. She was a staff member of NAACP. He later divorced Gladys and then married Poppy Cannon. They met in a party in 1929 but did not marry until 1949.

Walter wrote many novels and he loved to read. Walter wrote for 12 days and parts of 12 nights. He stopped when it was impossible to write another word. He wrote a book called *Fire in the Flint*. The story dealt with race hatred and lynching in the south. He tried to get the book published but the editor kept on rejecting it. But finally he got it printed.

On November 20, 1931 Walter received a telegram from his brother George saying that his father was dying. George White Sr. had retired from the post office in 1921 after 43 years. He had been walking home one night when he fell off the curb of the sidewalk and into the path of a car. The driver, Dr. Henry Grady, a white surgeon from the Municipal Hospital, picked up the victim and put him in the car and rode to the modern equipped faculty for whites in Atlanta. He was placed in intensive care.

Walter's father died 8 days later. Water's father died because of the poor medical attention. He was transferred from the white hospital to a poor black hospital with not as much attention as the white hospital. Walter himself died on March 28, 1935, of a heart attack.

Walter White was more involved with his work than with his family because he was always trying to help black people. I believe that is why he had so many divorces during the time he lived.

I think it's important to learn African American history and about people's lives. Walter White did something to help the world. By being proud of his blackness instead of ignoring it, Walter made a big difference in the world by being the person that he was. By being that person Walter was, he stopped a lot of racial violence towards blacks in the south.

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