The Yankee Espied

by Cole Kinney

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What makes a Yankee? After all, considerable time is spent (and rightfully so) vilifying the term or at least employing it in discussion. What makes a Yankee a Yankee as opposed to a Southron? Corrollarily, what makes a scalawag a scalawag? Considering that it's normally a good idea to get one's terms straight before using them willy-nilly, perhaps it's time to investigate the term Yankee.

Now don't get me wrong. I think I know what a Yankee is and is not. Matter of fact, my friend Bob and I used to have a contest, when riding the back roads of Mississippi and Tennessee, to see who could spot a Yankee by sheer context or physical characteristics.

I'm personally inclined to believe that Yankees invented the whole line concept just so they could excel at getting to the front of them, elbowing their way past the elderly, the toddler, the teen, the tiny, and the woman.

"Bob," said I, "it strikes me that I seem to recognise Yankees before I even see their license plate or hear them speak or listen to their blather."

"Brother Cole," Bob replied, spitting chew out the F150 at 80 miles-an-hour, "of course. Why, we can prove it. Just keep your eyes peeled."

Sure enough. Down in Holly Springs, Mississippi, they stuck out like a yellow mater in a sea of green maters. Of course, the first one we ran over, um, I mean across, had a Massachusetts tag. Now, a Massachusetts tag in Holly Springs, Mississippi, tends to announce itself much the way a marching band announces itself: with drums, fifes, bugles. I'm not allowed to say just how we welcomed these good folk from Yankee Heaven, but safe to say we determined that they were lost and in need of help in skedaddling back north. Here to help, I always say.

Funny, now that I think of it, the Holly Springs Museum Incident. Brother Bob and I had walked into the museum after seeing its First, Second, and Third National flags flying in the soft breeze. Naturally, we struck up a conversation with the curator there, a lovely Southron Belle. The museum itself was like walking back in time. Muskets, dolls, little Mississippi cotton bales that played Dixie, history books, clothes. Very impressive.

I met a local historian there, and member of the SCV. Turns out later on, when I looked at my genealogy file, we were cousins by way of the Hudgins family, and the Hudgins and Kinneys still live in the area; in Blue Mountain and Ripley especially. Leaving out names to protect the guilty, I stood there talking with my cousin in the dusty entranceway of the museum. Suddenly, in walked a man and a woman. We all said howdy to them, but they looked at us with distrust and mumbled, "Hi." Then they slunk into the museum, their presence somewhat dark and foreboding. Was I imagining things?

No. Brother Bob looked at me and whispered, "Yankees." Oh.

My cousin, the historian, like most Southrons, likes to talk. So do I. So we stood there, jabbering back and forth, and Cousin "B" said that One Bad Word that scared these Yankees out of their wits. Naturally, I can't tell you what Cousin "B" said, such is the debased culture in which we cower, but it's nothing that would rattle anyone from Holly Springs, Mississippi. But it rattled these two Yankees so much that without a by-your-leave they rushed out of the museum.

I still imagine their conversation once outside, with the woman looking up anxiously at her husband (one presumes Yankees still marry from time to time):

> "Golly, honey, I'm glad we made it out of there alive!"
>
> "Yes, sweetheart. Don't worry. Those are just Southern hillbillies. Where's the car?"

Hillbillies? What hills? Holly Springs is as flat as Sheryl Crow. Now up the way a piece, in Blue Mountain, you quickly get into Dolly Parton country.

But I wander off topic. I repress, regress, egress.

There are certain physical characteristics that, while not an infallible guide, do tend to suggest Yankeeness, but physical features alone telleth not the whole story. It may be true that certain racial stocks settled in the north (sorry to use the N-Word) and others in the Southland. It's an old theory, and one that I'm inclined to, with certain exceptions. More important, though, are the cultural differences.

Off the top of my cranium, here are some quick guides to identifying a Yankee:

1. Rudeness. This trait has to be numero uno. By far and away. Perhaps all the other traits really are just subsumed under this one. Man or woman, I care not, how many times have you had a door slammed in your face by a Yankee? It seems almost genetic. If you're raised with that Yankee gene, you simply must slam doors in the faces of your fellow human beings. Or race to get to the front of the line; there's another dead give-away. I'm personally inclined to believe that Yankees invented the whole line concept just so they could excel at getting to the front of them, elbowing their way past the elderly, the toddler, the teen, the tiny, and the woman.
2. Fast-talking. Ever heard a New Yorker in Florida? Enough said.
3. Invasive. The Yankee seems to know little about the concept of personal space (unless it's his own). Ever sat down to eat with a Yankee? You know what I mean.
4. Condescending. This one goes without saying. Almost. The Yankee naturally thinks his New England Way, spread South, West, or to Iraq, is the One True Way to which the rest of the benighted world must bend its knee.
5. The Life-Story Syndrome. Really part of the the Fast-Talking and Invasive characteristics. The Yankee, for some reason, feels compelled to tell you his entire history, from womb on out, as if you really, truly cared. Of course, it never occurs to him that we already pretty much know his life story. "Hmm. Lessee. You wave a candy-striper, really believe what your Empire tells you, believe in justice for all (except the womb-bound), and, gasp, have doubts about Christians."
6. Rush to greet. Southrons tend to talk a bit before getting down to business, whether on the telephone or out and about. Not the Yankee. It's all business. Busy-ness. "Hi. Need insurance?"
7. Family. The Yankee's family always takes second place to his commerce. A man is what he does, not who are his. Thankee, Ben Franklin.
8. Dearth of religiosity. There is a reason the South is called the Bible Belt. Up yonder, where Those Folks live, it's more like the Bible Garter Belt. Thin and suggestive.

Now, I've met plenty of good Yankee folks. Even have several friends such-like. And of course one can't overly generalise without slipping into egregious error. Nevertheless, generalisation exists for some reason, presumably to help us with the Larger Picture.

Unfortunately, the Larger Picture of the Yankee is not one you'd hang up in Grandma's parlour.