

## Excerpt from *Heidelberg* by Robert D. Gaines and Andrew Heidelberg

Andrew and Freddy were suddenly in full view of seemingly thousands of white people ... boys and girls, men and women. There are policemen everywhere, some wearing long, knee-length boots with stiff hats and holstered guns.

“Over here,” they heard someone shout, setting off a near stampede in their direction. Suddenly, news cameras flashed as hostile voices screamed a plethora of chaotic chatter, the most discernible word being

“nigger.” Staggered by the scene, both Andrew and Freddy wanted to stop, retreat, but the crowd quickly closed in on them. They kept walking, slower, their defenses on high alert.

Amidst the slurs and screams, a stupid cheer grew louder.

“Two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate,” many chanted in poetic exhilaration.

More noise ...

“Niggers go home,” some were screaming. “Go back to Africa where you belong, you filthy coons.”

Andrew was shocked—his mind disconnected, his legs weak, his body pulled apart, the verbal taunts like jagged rocks aimed directly for his head, few missing their mark.

For some strange reason, it seemed as if his anger and humiliation had managed to pull his mind outside his own body, as if he were watching his own death, certain it would be accompanied by fierce and unrelenting pain.

“Hey, tar baby, get your nigger ass outta here.”

As they tried to move toward the front door, Andrew momentarily saw a group of white boys standing on the steps at the corner of the building. It seemed as if the group was moving toward them in unison.

Andrew glanced at the once-confident Freddy, obviously overwhelmed with trepidation, jaw tight, searching for a way to somehow escape the terror.

“Here come two more niggers,” one of the white boys angrily screamed.

Chaotic insanity ...

The crowd moved closer, a smothering wrath surrounding them. From a distance, many were singing slurs to the tune of Old MacDonald Had a Farm.

“Here a nigger, there a nigger, everywhere a nigger, nigger ...” The boys tried to move forward, though they wanted to pull back. Maybe another day, another time.

“Niggers, coons, spear-chuckers, spooks ...” The words attacked from all directions, pounding like incoming bombs, nowhere on earth to hide.

Cameras broke through the crowd, jostled and thrust into the faces of the two boys. Reporters were trying to yell questions, many drowned by the noise. The surge was so tight that Andrew could feel the heat from their breath, the spit from their mouths.

As the NAACP had instructed them, both boys attempted to avoid contact, but the reporters and the mass of bigots were directly in their faces. Andrew and Freddy remained silent, the insults relentlessly hammering their humanity.

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