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NEGRO MINORITIES



## N E G R O E S

In America we are accustomed to think of the Negro primarily in terms of a race problem. As one Negro writer has expressed it, he is more a formula than a human being--a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, kept down or helped up, to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a bogey or a burden. This feeling has made it difficult for white Americans to regard Negroes as persons and even the colored man's attitude toward himself has been affected by the prevailing notion.

The American Negroes of today are not Africans; they are a new people who, in custom and temperament and even in physical features, have been modified and changed by their life in the New World. They, in turn, in no small measure have molded and influenced the total life and history of the American people of which they are a part.

There are today more than twelve million Negroes in the United States. Forming almost a tenth of the total population, they are concentrated in cities and scattered through villages, towns and open country in some degree in every state in the union.

The Negro has long been a contributing if not a determining factor in dividing political parties, and for a hundred years figured in the wars and treaties between the United States and other nations. He has been the occasion of countless state laws and three amendments to the Constitution. He has furnished the theme of thousands of books and unnumbered lectures, sermons and orations. His presence has brought



forth riots, lynchings and bitter hatreds, though he has continued to be the theme of sentimental song and story. He was for years a commodity on which fortunes were made and lost, and on his labor was built in large measure the social and economic life of the old South. Opinions regarding him and attitudes toward him still divide the country in sections. Yet he has long since quietly moved on to the national stage as an active rather than a passive factor.

Negroes themselves, on the whole, are ignorant or indifferent regarding their own past, and indeed they could hardly be otherwise since schoolbooks are for the most part silent regarding the Negro peoples and authoritative information is not easily to be had.

For fifty years the importation of slaves was casual, but by the end of the century economic conditions had changed and the slave traffic was soon to be in full swing. It is estimated that one hundred thousand slaves were brought in during the first fifty years of the eighteenth century. By 1790 the slave population numbered close to seven hundred thousand, there being also sixty thousand or more free Negroes.

The first slaves were probably kidnapped or bought along the west African coast from native rulers who, like their European contemporaries, justified the enslaving of prisoners taken in "just wars." But a world economic pattern was developing that made some form of cheap and forced labor a necessity. It seems probable that the large number of American slaves came from the region of Dahomey, the Bight of



Benin, and the Gold Coast, though a number were doubtless brought from the Congo and we find frequent references to Negroes from the region of the Gambia and Senegal Rivers. It must be remembered, too, that the slave trails sometimes extended far inland--perhaps for a thousand miles--and slaves were drawn from a large part of Africa south of the Sahara.

The method of securing slaves is significant for our story in that it is known that many persons bought by the slave traders were already slaves or prisoners of war, or else were sold into slavery as punishment for crime. From these facts it has been easy to put forth the argument that the Negroes brought to America were the more cowardly, and servile individuals of their tribes, that they were primitive peoples who were criminally inclined, or that they were too weak to fight off intruders. If it is true that the more powerful and wealthy usually escaped the clutches of the trader, it is equally true that the weak and unfit either were rejected by the buyer or else perished in the triple gauntlet of the march to the coast, the Middle Passage, and the breaking-in period on the plantations. Beyond doubt many slaves were harshly treated, but the treatment seems to have been more a part and parcel of the "crude and cruel times" than any particular cruelty to the slave as such. Moreover, the institution of slavery implies that the slave is a thing rather than a person. If one grants the institution to be justified, then the laws necessary to maintain it become both reasonable and right.

Throughout the colonial period education and religion were closely identified. It is not surprising, therefore, to



find that in the Sabbath schools for Negroes, slave or free, the pupil not only received religious instruction but also, except when such was forbidden, was taught to read and sometimes to write and cipher. Whatever education the slaves received was in large measure made available to them in the Sabbath schools, which often were the only means of education open to the free Negro, as well. Comments were not lacking on both the intelligence and the eagerness for learning of the Negroes, slave and free.

There is no way by which this generation, black or white, can understnad what freedom meant to the four million slaves who set their faces toward a new world. It was not that the slave had always been unkindly treated and unhappy, or even that he was constantly thinking of how he could get free. Only the most aggressive and least adjusted had any notion of breaking their own bonds in a world where slavery was considered the normal lot of black folk. The most of them looked on freedom as something passionately desired but far away, something miraculous, to be piously hoped for but scarcely expected--a sort of New Jerusalem.

To thousands of the slaves freedom came in the wake of the Union armies with all the privation, suffering and disorganization that war involved. To the great masses the good news came at the close of the war and was met with a burst of religious and hysterical fervor. It was "the coming of the Lord." "For the first time in their lives they could travel; they could see; they could change the dead level of their labor;...They could hunt in the swamps and fish in the rivers.



They need not fear the patrol. Some of them for the first time in their lives saw Town; some left the plantation and walked out into the world; some handled actual money...."

According to one writer, the freedmen "lurched into new day" with "a desire for land and a frenzy for schools." Aisappointed in the promise of "forty acres and a mule" and disillusioned by the loss of their savings in the Freedman's Bank, they more than ever turned to education as the magic key that would unlock all doors. Old and young, clever and stupid crowded with pathetic eagerness and faith into the makeshift schools. Hopeful youth who could scarcely read walked half the length of the state to present themselves, empty handed, at the door of some so-called college. Old persons who could not read a line made proud and sacrificial contributions toward the expenses of ambitious younger ones.

It was impossible, of course, to provide for the education of the children of four million people by soliciting private contributions, and it was recognized that any sort of decent opportunity for the Negro must rest on an adequate system of public schools. The Reconstruction legislatures had made a theoretical provision for schools for both white and colored children, but getting these theories into practice involved a great deal more than the white South's willingness or unwillingness to see the Negro educated.

The question of mixed schools was debated in all the Reconstruction legislatures and the resulting laws varied. The white South was emphatic in its opposition. Certain of the Negro leaders insisted on mixed schools but many others



felt that in view of the existing racial tension and the condition of the masses of the freedmen such schools would be neither possible nor desirable. Fairly early the separate schools were accepted as inevitable under the circumstances.

Without buildings, funds, or teachers, and with no on-going organization or system, it is easily seen that even apart from the presence of the freedmen the states would have had a staggering educational task on their hands. When over a million children were added to the school population, with no appreciable increase in revenue, it was clear that in the South neither the black child nor the white could possibly have an equal opportunity with the rest of the nation's children, at least for a long time to come.

For various reasons the black child got the little end of even this meager opportunity. The white people, once they were in control again, were primarily concerned with the education of their own children, which for some of them required "sacrifices almost incomprehensible." White communities were more vocal and better able to make provisions for schools. The majority of Negroes were in the rural areas where even white schools were poor or non-existent. In spite of the passion for education on the part of many Negroes, others were indifferent. Both poor white and colored children were kept at home to help gather the crops, to put out the washing, or to mind the baby. It was difficult to secure Negro teachers, and many who taught were utterly incompetent.

In spite of the difficulties almost every city of twenty



thousand or more had by 1890 established graded schools for both races. In the country areas, common schools of a sort had been set up. Thousands of Negroes born in slavery were now teaching their own people. Although many white people disapproved and there had been burning of school-houses, others lent their aid. The largest public school for colored children in South Carolina had over a thousand pupils and was taught by Southern-born white women, as were similar schools in Baltimore, Richmond, and New Orleans.

From 1874 to 1890 the sixteen Southern states had nearly doubled their common school enrolment of whites and had almost trebled that of the colored people. State teacher institutes were being held for both races, and every state had either established or laid plans for normal schools for both groups. There were at the end of the period twenty-five thousand colored teachers at work and more than a million colored children in school. Colored people themselves were paying thousands of dollars in tuition and of course as they began to accumulate property they paid taxes. In the closing decade of the century the South itself spent two hundred and sixteen million dollars on its schools, fifty millions of which were used for "the first experiment in human history in the universal education of five million (emancipated) slaves."

Slowly the Negro began to pull himself up. His handicaps were great, for the heritage of slavery was strong upon him. Slavery had left its imprint in more devastating ways. Initiative, independence and foresight were the last qualities



of which a slave had need. Now that he was left without the accustomed direction of the white man he too often showed up as careless, inefficient, and lazy. When he got money he often spent it promptly and, as often, foolishly.

Never having been permitted to ~~won~~ property as slaves, many Negroes brought into freedom rather hazy ideas of "mine and thine." The habit of feeding one's family from the master's kitchen or of foraging for food on the plantation was carried over, and the notion that all Negroes would "take things" grew into an accepted tradition that is still played up in stories of the Negro in the chicken house and the watermelon patch.

Other habits persisted from the time when the slave's day was closely supervised and it was to his interest to tell white men only the things that pleased them or that it was good for them to know. The exceptions to these habits as well as their origin were generally overlooked, and many white folks agreed that you never could depend on a Negro's word or be sure when he was telling the truth. Final damaging charges were that the Negroes changed partners without the formality of divorce or remarriage; that no colored woman was chaste; and that Negro men felt no sense of obligation to or responsibility for their wives and children.

Some of the charges were true of many Negroes, and all were true of some Negroes. Many of the habits had been directly fostered by the slave and plantation system. In some measure they were the faults to be found among any people who are poor, ignorant, and untrained. Almost every white family knew some Negro family that could be trusted, and



there were, of course, a large number of honest, decent, respectable, and industrious colored persons with whom the white people had no contact at all. Still the tradition grew that the frailties of the masses were racial characteristics, and thus the whole group was made to carry the stigma of its poorest and weakest members.

The "school of slavery" story that the Negro learned in slavery regular work, the English language, and the Christian religion has been heavily overdone. What he learned was to look down on work, and he got a rather distorted notion of the Christian religion from what he both heard and saw. Still there were some gains. In addition to the free Negroes, many of whom could read and some of whom were well educated, there were a number of literate slaves. There were the many skilled workmen who almost monopolized the mechanical trades in the South at the close of the war and for nearly two decades afterwards. The Negroes were the leading builders in many communities and there were many small farmers and business men who had received their training on the plantations. The women who had been field hands were handicapped as servants and as housekeepers in their own homes, but those who had been trained as house servants had at least a fair start in the new life.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a curious mosaic insofar as Negro life was concerned. During this period the Negro lost the franchise in one state after another throughout the South. In this respect he definitely lost ground, since in most cases those with education and



ability were as definitely excluded as were the illiterate masses. Yet during this same period at least one Southern Negro, born a slave, rose to national and then to international prominence and was permitted in all sorts of ways to violate the accepted racial code.

Booker T. Washington knew all too well the low social and economic level on which the Negro masses lived. He knew also that these millions of black folk stood very little chance of rising to higher levels without the aid and good will of the better class of white people. He expected by lifting the masses of Negroes to more decent and responsible ways of living to compel the respect and good will of the white men, who would then give their colored brothers a fair chance in the national life.

In a most unusual degree this man became the acknowledged leader of his own race and at the same time held the admiration and good will of both Northern and Southern white people. His basic philosophy was summed up in an address delivered before an International Exposition held in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1895. He spoke with the vast Negro masses in mind and made a plea for a sort of working compromise by which the Negro would be given industrial and educational opportunities in return for which he would be careful not to ask for those privileges which it was all too evident a white world was not ready to grant.

Just a year after the Atlanta Exposition there met in the same city another group of people whose activities throw into sharp relief another side of the changing pattern of



Negro Life as the century neared its close. This was the first of a series of yearly conferences of Negro leaders held at Atlanta University under the guidance of a young Negro sociologist, W. E. Burghardt Du Bois. It represented the first serious attempt of Negro leaders to make an objective study of the condition of the race throughout the country.

Negroes seemed to be making serious efforts toward their own social betterment through their churches, secret societies, benevolent organizations, and cooperative enterprises of various types. As they were excluded from most of the activities in the larger world they found in these organizations an opportunity for group life and an outlet for emerging leadership. Their twenty-three thousand churches carried on a wide range of activities in the nature of social and community welfare. Cooperative enterprises included community associations, workingmen's building and loan associations, cooperative stores, and half a dozen banks all organized, owned, and operated by Negroes.

More than half of the Negroes employed were engaged in agriculture (which ~~were~~ included fishing and mining), and almost a third were in domestic or personal service. There were almost a hundred schools giving industrial training for Negroes. These were not, as white people often hoped, turning out trained domestic servants, but they were sending forth young people who would help raise the standard of living for the whole Negro group. There were fewer than thirty-five thousand Negroes in the professions.

The educational picture was encouraging from the stand-



point of progress made, discouraging in terms of the amount that still needed to be done. The census of 1890 showed twenty-five thousand colored teachers in whose hands almost the whole of Negro education in public schools rested. Many of these teachers were untrained. By the turn of the century there were a million and a half colored children in public schools, yet these were only a third of those of school age and most of the school terms lasted only a few months. There were scarcely more than twenty-five hundred living college graduates among Negroes and fewer than a thousand then doing college work. There were many colleges, normals, institutes and universities enrolling about twenty-five thousand students, but most of these pupils were doing elementary or secondary school work that should have been done in the public schools, and few were doing work above high school level.

The great upheaval of war and the complete reordering of the social and economic system in sixteen states had focussed the attention of the nation on the South as the center of Negro life and on the freedman as the symbol of the race. The little band of free persons in the North and East who had been the spokesmen of their people were more or less lost sight of during this period. In a sense they, as well as the freedmen in the South, and indeed the nation as a whole, needed a little time to recover from "the shock of freedom" and to realize that emancipation was only the beginning and not the end of their strivings. Yet these years were not unfruitful. While the masses in the South were learning



about baths and toothbrushes the "talented tenth," or more properly the "privileged tenth," were laying some broad foundations for the race.

Significant among the developments of the period was that of the Negro church. The African Methodists, the African Zion Methodists, and a few smaller bodies had made significant progress even in the ante-bellum period. Following the war there were added the Colored Methodists who, by common consent, separated from the Southern Methodists, the Colored Cumberland Presbyterians, and the African Union Methodist Protestants. In 1895 the various colored Baptists were organized into a National Baptist Convention in which were included more than sixteen thousand churches already set up in forty-three state conventions.

These various colored churches had a combined membership of more than three and a half million. They maintained schools and owned publishing houses where they produced Sunday school literature and issued monthly or weekly papers. They raised creditable sums for missions and maintained missionaries among Negro peoples in Africa, the West Indies, and South America. While among the masses much of the worship was crude and highly emotional and all too many ministers were called to preach because "the grass was high in the cotton and the sun was hot," there were churches of an entirely different order and among their leaders were many men of high moral character, intellectual training and statesman-like ability.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Congregationalists,



Episcopalians, the Presbyterians still kept certain Negro congregations in their ranks but these totaled less than three hundred thousand members. It was definitely a period when the Negro found in the separate colored church his one great opportunity to be himself and to exercise his growing powers of leadership without the hampering presence and supervision of the white man.

During these years the Negro Academy was set up with a membership limited to fifty teachers and professional men who planned to publish such occasional papers as would help Negro growth and development and vindicate the race against vicious attack. The National Association of Colored Women was organized for the purpose of elevating Negro womanhood. Just at the turn of the century the National Negro Business League was organized in Boston, with representatives from thirty different states.

It must be remembered that throughout this period, North and South, quite out of the path of most white people, there were an increasing number of substantial middle-class Negro homes with pianos and marble-topped center table holding photograph albums and family Bibles, the families taking Sunday walks in the woods and spending winter evenings with books around an aopen fire. In such homes were growing up men and women who have lived to add richness and distinction not only to their race but to American life as a whole.

In the year 1900, Booker T. Washington wrote the story of his life and called it "Up from Slavery." Shortly afterward W. E. Burghardt Du Bois published "The Souls of Black



Folk". Each book has become an American classic and each deserves a permanent place in the annals of American life. The two volumes represent more, however, than the stories of two men of different backgrounds and somewhat different ideas as to the best way to reach ultimate goals. One man looked back to a slave cabin and to the dark masses of his people and wonderingly said to the world, "See how far we have come." The other man, looking at the "talented tenth" of his people and at the barriers laid across their path, said with passionate conviction, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line--the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."

Perhaps very few people took the words of Dr. Du Bois seriously, for at that time the Western world still complacently accepted the notion that "only Anglo-Saxons can govern themselves." Everybody not a white man was a "white man's burden," a nuisance if close at hand, perhaps a "little brown brother" if far enough away for distance to lend enchantment. Since the "burdens" were, according to Mr. Kipling, "half devil and half child," nobody bothered to consult them regarding their preference in the matter.

It was a day when, with perfect seriousness, a senator could demand that the United States annex the Philippines on the basis that we were "trustees under God, of the civilization of the world...His chosen nation...to administer government among savage and senile peoples." Apparently nobody saw anything strange about this speech although, North and



South, in the preceding decade more than a thousand of the brown brothers within our own borders had been lynched. As far as the white world was concerned, the color line was neither an open question nor a problem. The line was already drawn and it was definitely a horizontal one, with the "burden" on the bottom.

In the meantime, other things besides lynchings had been happening at home. The mission schools for colored people were bearing fruit, and the leaders among Norther Negroes were reasserting themselves. Educated colored people were now asking why they should be shut off by the barrier of color from the free exercise of rights and privileges which other persons of their intellectual, social, and economic attainments were permitted as a matter of course. Already more than half of the Negroes could read and write, there were nearly fifty thousand of them in the professions, and almost half a million owned their own homes.

Most of the drama of race relations was being worked out in the South, due to the simple fact that most of the Negroes lived there. The whites of the economically and socially secure class often helped to maintain colored schools and tried to make secure the Negro's life and property. Those who needed his labor exploited him; those who feared his competition tried to disfranchise him; the ignorant were ever ready to abuse, to terrorize, and to lynch him. The emerging leaders of the race not only fought for their own rights but became also the champions of the rights of the whole Negro group. They asked persistently and insistently that the Negro



be granted at least three things: the right to vote, civic equality, and education according to ability. They recognized that the low social and economic level of the race was responsible for much of the discrimination against colored people, but they felt that prejudice was as much a cause as a result of the Negro's degradation. They insisted that the Negro could have a decent chance only when discrimination was based on condition and not on color.

There was, beyond question, cause for their deep concern. "Grandfather clauses" and other devices even less reputable were being used to eliminate the Negro voter while protecting illiterate whites. "Jim Crow" laws had appeared which rigidly separated the races in the use of public facilities. The North apparently had lost all enthusiasm for Negro rights and was largely indifferent to the whole problem. There was a bloody race riot in New York City in which innocent and unoffending colored people were killed and some of them were beaten by police to whom they had gone for protection. Atlanta had a brief reign of terror fanned into flame by sensational newspaper stories, and other cities, North and South, showed little disposition to protect Negro life and property. Lynchings continued at an average rate of over one hundred a year.

It was the World War that revealed the color line as the problem of the twentieth century not only for America but for the world. The first effects of the war, however, were felt in an entirely familiar way: the Negro became important because his labor was needed.



When war was declared in Europe the steady stream of immigrants to this country ceased and many of those already here returned home to render military service. With this foreign labor supply cut off and an increased production of goods demanded by the war, industry turned to the black worker. Labor agents went south and shipped colored laborers north by carloads. From cotton fields, coal mines, steel mills, dockyards and kitchens they poured into St. Louis, Cleveland, Cincinnati and Detroit. For those of the Southwest the real mecca was Chicago; from the Southeast they went to New York and soon made Harlem the most populous and most talked of Negro area in the world.

In the South low wages, an unsatisfactory tenant and cropsharing system, the boll weevil, crop failures, lynching, disfranchisement, segregation and poor schools all gave impetus to the migration north, though there was much movement from country to city within the South. When Negroes began writing back that they were making more in a day than in a week at home, that they could go where they pleased and "don't have to humble tonobody," the wave became an hysterical mass movement. For once the Negro was being asked to the table and offered a feast when he got there. Without more ado he headed for the Promised Land. Sometimes he barely had railroad fare; sometimes the railroads carried him free; sometimes he sold everything he had or practically gave it away. Old and young, single persons and families, vagrants and steady workers jostled each other in the exodus.

In New York, Harlem absorbed the incoming groups, there



was relatively little friction, and Negroes ultimately acquired millions of dollars' worth of property. In other cities the conditions were not so favorable. The housing problem became acute, schools were overcrowded, and the whole school system was upset by the influx of children who had been in the short-term rural schools of the South. White neighborhoods resisted the appearance of black families, labor difficulties arose, vice and crime increased, and many of the race problems thought to be peculiar to the South appeared in the North.

As soon as America entered the war the situation was complicated by the old question of the status of the Negro soldier. Although two hundred thousand colored men were sent to France--their full quota based on the proportion of Negroes in the total population--few of them were given opportunity for other than routine service. The French authorities received confidential information pointing out that it would be unwise to treat the Negro soldier in the same manner that the white men were treated. Yet one of the first units of the National Guard to go overseas was the Fifteenth Regiment of New York, made up of colored troops and this entire regiment was cited for exceptional valor.

Oddly enough, people who profess to follow the Prince of Peace are prone to make fighting a test of patriotism and loyalty. Knowing this, and knowing themselves to have fought honorably and well, the Negro soldiers had hopes of finding a changed attitude at home. They were bitterly disillusioned. There was a deliberate effort to belittle the Negro's war



service. His low scores on the army tests were misinterpreted and cited as proof of his lack of intelligence; individual acts of cowardice and stupidity were emphasized as characteristic of the race.

Moreover, with the usual collapse of idealism that follows war, there was a wave of fear that amounted almost to panic over the returning colored soldier. The Ku Klux Klan, no longer limited to the South, was once more appealing to the worst passions of men. On more than one occasion Negroes were chased through the streets, hunted like animals, beaten and shot, hanged and burned.

It is perhaps not too much to say that the new Negro was made during the war and its aftermath. Cynicism and defiance grew, and a fierce race consciousness came into play.

It was at this time that the new Negro definitely began to feel himself a part of the colored races of the world. The white world--particularly that part of it which thought of itself as Anglo-Saxon--had long lloed upon the darker peoples everywhere as "lesser breeds without the law," and therefore as having no rights which the white man was bound to respect. The war broke white solidarity, and white prestige tottered as black men and brown were brought into the war zone to kill Austrians and Germans. Then after the war the dark races, who had been charmed by the doctrine of the rights of small nations and the self-determination of peoples, found themselves meeting the same type of experiences that the American Negro was meeting here. The result was a drawing together of the darker peoples.



As we move on toward the middle of the twentieth century the accuracy of Dr. Du Bois's prophecy concerning the color line becomes increasingly apparent. Yet those who seek to define or interpret the point of division find themselves curiously baffled, for the color line is by its very nature a puzzle and a paradox. Persons who expect to see white and colored people of the South meanly glowering at each other often find not only much good-natured tolerance but a fair measure of genuine affection, confidence and good will, with an apparently easy relationship that is altogether mystifying to an outsider. It is this absence of open friction that makes the Southern white man feel that he "knows the Negro" and which, in spite of discrimination and injustice, gives the Negro peasant a relative sense of security.

In reality the color line is, as slavery itself was, an adjustment by which the members of two unlike groups can know what is expected of each other and can thus be relieved of the strain of deciding what to do in each situation in order to avoid conflicts and clashes. Laws do not have a great deal to do with the color line except that they make it a little more difficult to shift into a new set of relationships.

In one sense the color line is a sort of etiquette, a ritual of behavior between races, corresponding somewhat to that etiquette between the sexes which defines men's work and women's work, and the conduct considered proper for men and for women. Having once been accepted as customary, these forms of conduct, even though they may actually have no in-



herent value, become "right" and are therefore exceedingly difficult to change. After the etiquette is established a good deal of freedom is possible as long as appearances are kept up. It is a conspicuous fact that race riots occur most often when Negroes move into new territory or for some other reason the situation changes so that there are no recognized or accepted rules of behavior.

The color line is by no means limited to one section of the country, though it is drawn differently North and South. As a rule, Southern people have no objection to the most intimate sort of association with Negroes so long as the colored man "stays in his place," that is, conforms to the color-line behavior of deference and respect to white people. Naturally as Negroes achieve education and economic independence they are less inclined to yield this deference merely because of a white skin. Hence in the South, except for interracial cooperation between persons concerned with religious, educational or social problems, practically all contact between the races is either on the bottom levels of both groups or between the well-to-do whites and the Negro servants or laborers. This latter relationship is often a paternalistic hangover from the slavery era in which the colored servant looks to the white family for financial aid and legal protection and in return renders the loyalty, deference and homage expected.

Northern people as a rule are more willing to grant the Negro a theoretical equality, though there is usually little intimate or even friendly association between individuals of



the two groups. The South is still inclined to draw its color line on the horizontal. The North lifts its color line a little nearer the vertical but it is still there. The Negro in the North may sit where he pleases in public conveyances and he may use libraries, parks and playgrounds, though he may find himself excluded from some of the latter, particularly the bathing beaches and swimming pools.

Theoretically all Northern churches and schools are open to the Negro, but in practice he finds that white churches seldom want any great number of Negro members and residential segregation often places his children in a colored school. He finds difficulty in buying a house in certain areas and white apartment houses usually have no vacancies when he applies. If he is dark, certain sections of the theatre are likely to be sold out when he presents his money for a ticket, or, if a lighter friend has bought tickets, the usher may discover that there has been some mistake about the seats. Even in cities like New York and Chicago he knows perfectly well that there are certain restaurants where he will not be served and that most hotels will not have room for him.

In spite of these restrictions the Negro has a great deal more freedom in the North than in the South, partly because in the Northern cities he has developed a little world of his own and partly because the North lacks the possessive tradition which the South has concerning Negroes and is therefore likely to let him alone unless he gets in the way in one fashion or another.

Certain aspects of the color line take on the nature of



primitive taboos. They can't be talked about: they are subjects about which people "think with their feelings"--which means, of course, that they do not think at all. Fortunately America seems to be growing up in this respect, and among more intelligent groups, North and South, rational discussion of these tabooed subjects is more common than it once was.

These taboos are usually summed up in the vague and undefined term "social equality," which seems to be symbolized by shaking hands, using the title of "Mister," eating together, and intermarrying. Handshaking is, of course, merely a recognized form of greeting between Western peoples, but in this case it seems to carry a notion of status.

The use of the first name carries the idea of intimacy in ordinary relations but when used for Negroes there is often the implication of a real or potential servant status.

The taboo against eating together still persists strongly among many people and is not limited to the South. Most nation-wide religious bodies have developed a conscience on the question of segregation and they attempt to hold their gatherings in places where all delegates can be treated equally. They rarely succeed, for even in Northern cities almost no hotel large enough to care for such a body will open all its dining rooms to Negro guest.

There seems likewise to be an assumption that any recognition of the Negro will lead to intermarriage. "Would you want your sister to marry a Negro?" carries the curious implication that either a woman may be forced to marry against her will or else that, if given an opportunity, she would



deliberately choose a husband of a race different from her own.

People often confuse amalgamation or race mixture with interracial marriage. There has never been any appreciable number of Negro-white marriages in this country and yet race mixture has gone on to such a degree that a conservative estimate assigns at least half of the Negro population to the mulatto class.

There seems reason to believe that there is less actual race intermixture at the present than in times past. It appears to decrease as the Negro home becomes more stable, as the moral standards of the race improve, as race pride increases, and as colored parents are in a better position to protect their daughters from casual relationships with white men. It seems probable, therefore, that race purity is preserved rather than threatened as the Negro rises to higher social levels.

There is no one set of customs, practices, or proscriptions of which we can say: this constitutes the color line. Yet the line is as real as it is intangible. One striking aspect of the situation lies in what has been referred to as the Negro's "high visibility." In contrast to the white group among which he lives, his features, his hair, and his color mark him at once as different; they form a sort of racial badge that sets him off and identifies him. And since a whole complex of discriminations and associations has grown up around his racial group, he is more or less trapped by his



color.

From his earliest school days, the Negro child, whether in a segregated or a mixed school, lives in a world in which all glory and beauty, all heroism and worth, is measured by the white man's standard. He comes to associate his darker skin, his broader nose, and his krinkly hair not only with ugliness but with inferiority. The stories in his school readers are about the affairs of white folk. His geography is likely to picture Africa as a land of crude savages. It is never a land where black kings ruled, but the place from which black slaves were taken. His history books make no mention of the black empires of Songhoy and Melle or of the rich culture of his ancestors in Ashanti and Dahomey. He can read the stories of American wars and never suspect that black men fought courageously in all of them. In most schools he can go through every one of his textbooks and find never a word of Frederick Douglass or Booker T. Washington.

His normal pride in and respect for his parents may get a rude jolt when his father stands silent and defenseless before the curses of some white man or when the white plumber or delivery boy curtly addresses his mother by her first name. In some areas the white school superintendent may walk into the colored school without removing his hat and may fail to treat the teacher with ordinary courtesy.

When the colored child goes to a motion picture or a play he seldom sees any of his own people in any role but that of the servant, the roughneck, or the clown. He quickly learns that "Everybody Invited" does not mean quite what it



says even when it is on the door of a church. He is taught very early to make himself inconspicuous, to act with appropriate humility, to conceal his real feelings in the presence of white people. In short, he learns that this is a white man's country. The dose may be lightened if he goes North, but he never wholly escapes it.

What all this does to the personality of the child is not difficult to imagine. He may learn his lesson so well that he believes himself really to be inferior and accepts without question the role assigned him. He may meet the situation with fatalism or dull resentment. He may try passionately to make himself as much like white people as possible, in which case he will be criticized for "trying to imitate the white man."

Along with the extreme race consciousness growing out of this sense of difference there is the dead weight of the knowledge of an artificial limitation. The dark child learns very early that there are a great many doors completely closed to him. Moreover, he lacks the incentive that comes of the "collective expectation" of his world. Neither Negroes nor white people expect the colored child to make good in quite the same way that they expect the white child to achieve. It is not surprising when the Negro child does not expect much of himself.

Even if the Negro achieves in spite of his handicaps, he is nowhere free of the blight of the color line. It causes him to waste untold amounts of emotional energy in fear, uncertainty, humiliation and disgust. If he believes the worst



of every situation he grows bitter and cynical. If he tries to believe the best he lays himself open to deliberate insult.

The color line thus strikes out at the Negro in a thousand different ways and in the most unexpected places. It shuts countless doors in his face and keeps him forever conscious of his difference and of the white world's assumption of his inferiority. It isn't, as one Negro has said, that these things happen every day. Their devastating work is done because they happen so often that one never knows quite what to expect.



## THE BLACK MAN'S BURDEN

In order to understand more clearly the conditions confronting the colored people of American it may be useful to summarize briefly a few facts concerning the presentday Negro.

Less than seventy-five years have gone by since the slaves were freed. The four million freedmen, plus fewer than half a million who were already free, now have twelve million descendants representing the second and third, and sometimes the fourth generation. These persons are to be found in every state in the Union. There are more than a million in Georgia and there are another million in Mississippi. There are fewer than five hundred in North Dakota, and four other states have fewer than a thousand each. Only Mississippi now has as much as half her population colored, though South Carolina doesn't miss it far and in every Southern state except Tennessee and Texas at least one of every three or four persons is a Negro. On the other hand, in sixteen states the Negro population averages less than one for each hundred white persons.

There are numerous counties in which Negroes outnumber the whites. There are white towns where by chance no Negroes live and other white towns where a Negro is not even permitted to pass the night. There are also black towns where Negroes return the compliment and ask white people to stay away. Three out of four Negroes today live in the South, and of these the majority are in rural areas. Yet New York City and Chicago together claim more than half a million, and a total of almost three millions live in the North, where most of them are in



cities.

The 1920 Census indicated that twenty per cent of American Negroes were of mixed blood. Melville Herskovits, on the basis of recent studies, believes that eighty per cent is more nearly correct figure. He also believes that there is in this group perhaps a new race in the making, a race aptly referred to as Brown America. At least it seems safe to say that fully half of the American Negroes of today have white blood in their veins, with often an added Indian strain. Even if there is no additional white mixture the increase of mulattoes and the intermarriage of Negroes and mulattoes seems likely to create a race in which the pure black will cease to exist.

Within this group of twelve million there is already the widest possible divergence of physical types, color, and cultural status. There are "typical" Negroes as distinctive in appearance as any who came out of Africa. There are others so light that no person of either group could possibly guess the presence of Negro blood. There are cultural differences as wide as the range from the illiterate, shuffling, lazy, and sometimes dull-witted toiler on an obscure plantation to Rhodes scholars, holders of Phi Beta Kappa keys, and doctors of philosophy. There are thugs, murderers, thieves and prostitutes, and there are humble, honest, hard-working peasants. There are ordinary middle-class American working folk; there are the "climbers"; there are those who are ashamed of their race and those who are proud of it. There are poets, actors, playwrights, editors, doctors, lawyers, teachers, preachers, scientists, and business men, as well as porters, day laborers, sharecroppers, cooks and washer-women. And in every



class from the lowest to the highest may be found the good, the bad, and the indifferent.

There are still curiously contradictory assumptions regarding the Negroes of mixed blood. A person will affirm that race mixture produces an inferior hybrid and in the next breath will credit some mulatto's achievement to the fact that he has white blood. A color class has grown up within the Negro group itself and in some cases the line between the mulattoes and the darker Negroes is almost as rigid as the line between white and colored.

While a majority, though by no means all, of the outstanding Negroes seem to have some degree of white blood, the evidence increasingly points to wider opportunity rather than to race mixture as a cause. Even in slavery days the mulatto was likely to be favored above his darker brother. He still finds many doors opened to him because he approximates the white man's notion of an attractive appearance. The very fact that people believe mulattoes to be superior gives them some advantage, for what a group thinks of itself has an important bearing on its achievement. Moreover, proportionately the least amount of race mixture goes on in the Black Belt, where most of the Negroes are. This is also the area where the Negro has least opportunity. The greatest race mixture has taken place in towns, and in towns Negroes have found wider cultural advantages. It thus seems that biological mixture and cultural opportunity grow out of the same situations but do not necessarily have any cause and effect relation.

Recent intelligence tests showed colored children in Northern cities to rate higher than colored children in Southern areas, but they showed no measurable difference in ability between



dark and light children. Lighter-skinned Negroes, on the whole, have had more opportunities and advantages than their darker brothers, but there does not seem to be any conclusive evidence that indicates that a lighter color means more brains.

For the most part, white America lumps all Negro people together and makes few, if any, allowances for class distinctions. Prejudice and the rigid drawing of the color line are the unifying factors. Yet it is only when they face the white world that American Negroes can be thought of as a composite. The strains to which they are subjected vary enormously between the Black Belt and Chicago or Harlem. But one thing they all hold in common: nowhere in the United States of American is any person who is obviously a Negro free in the same sense of the word that white persons are free. Rich and poor, light and dark, educated and ignorant, all bear in greater or less degree some measure of the black man's burden.

There is perhaps no other subject about which the whole of Negro American feels so keenly as that of lynching. It is the terror of the black peasant in the South and the theme of stories, novels, poems, and essays by the most sophisticated Harlemites. Obviously there is something deeper here than the annual toll of fifteen or twenty colored persons, usually poor and ignorant, who die at the hands of "Parties unknown."

It is perfectly true that, taking the South as a whole, the better class of white people do not participate in lynchings. But too often they stand by consenting to these deeds, and they are inclined to hush them up afterward rather than prosecute their neighbors.



Moreover, there is a sense in which the better class of people in the North as well as those in the South are responsible for the lynchings in America. After all, there are two fundamental aspects of the lynching problem. One is mob behavior, a bad habit of expressing one's boredom, fear, wrath, or insecurity by taking it out on a helpless victim. There are probably a number of complex factors involved in this type of behavior, but it is essentially one that does not appeal to the more intelligent, educated, thoughtful, and enlightened element in the social order. Therefore the dirty work of lynching is usually done by the class of white people who are economically or socially insecure.

Mob behavior, however, is only one aspect of lynching--the crude outward expression of an attitude. Occasionally white people are lynched, but by far the greatest number of victims are Negroes, and at bottom the greatest number of offenses grow out of something connected with the relative status of Negroes and white people. Such lynchings are possible because the victim is "only a nigger," and prevailing opinion in the United States considers Negroes to be of less value than white people and less value than white people and hence the death of a Negro of less consequence than the death of a white person.

So long as the Negro is deprived of the vote, forcibly segregated, and discriminated against as he is in some degree in every state in the Union--so long as these things exist by the consent of the best people, North and South, the same feeling and judgment will express itself in cruder and more barbaric form by the cruder and less refined folk. The man who argues



that a Negro should have fewer rights than a white man of the same ability and the man who lights the faggots at a lynching party are using two widely different means of expressing the same fundamental notion: that Negroes do not count in the same way that white people count. Until white America faces this fact and reckons with it, the whole nation, North and South, stands shamed and guilty before the world, and colored America rightly feels that as a group they still have no rights which the white man is bound to respect.

It is generally conceded that the Negro group furnishes more than its share of vice, crime, illegitimacy, and juvenile delinquency. It is assumed that the whole moral tone of the life among Negroes is low; they are supposed to be particularly prone to sex crimes, to fighting with knives and razors, and to petty theft. There are many people who insist that Negro women are never virtuous and that the Negro family is a wholly unstable institution. This indictment would be a heavy burden for any group to carry. Unfortunately the load is often made heavier by the assumption that the Negro is by nature criminal; that is, that these things are the inevitable expression of inborn racial traits that are a part of his African heritage. Many Negroes themselves have accepted this thesis and it has served as a generally inhibiting factor in the Negro's effort for his own betterment as well as an excuse for a laissez faire attitude toward Negroes on the part of white people.

It should not be necessary to point out that among middle and upper class Negroes there is no more vice, crime, delinquency, and family disorganization than among corresponding groups of



whites. However, Negroes on these cultural levels are seldom known to the white world. The whole race, in respect to crime as in so many other matters, is judged by the behavior of its weaker members.

Today practically eighty-five per cent of the Negro people are counted as literate and the college enrolment has jumped from a little more than two thousand, twenty years ago, to more than twenty-five thousand today. Yet in spite of this progress the Negro carries a heavy educational handicap in comparison with the white world in which he must live and work and by whose standards he is ultimately judged. The South as a whole has poorer educational facilities than the rest of the nation, and rural schools are seriously handicapped in relation to town and city schools. When we remember that three-fourths of the Negroes live in the South, and of this number over half are in rural areas, some idea may be gained of the difficulties in the way of the Negro's education. To this already dark picture must be added the fact that in sixteen states and the District of Columbia separate schools for Negroes are maintained. This increases the total cost of education and of course the Negro school usually gets the poor end of the bargain.

While there are today many Negroes in the professions and in various business enterprises, the great masses of the colored people remain in the ranks of unskilled labor, held to the bottom of the economic pile by prejudices against them as well as by their own ignorance, inefficiency, and lack of initiative. A large percentage of the Negroes are in personal or domestic service in the South, where they carry over to a great extent the



slave habits of servility and economic dependence.

More than half the Negroes living in the South are engaged in farming and a larger percentage of these are tenants known as sharecroppers. In most cases the tenant owns nothing. The planter supplies the land, house, team, tools, seed, and credit at the local store for food and other necessities with perhaps occasional cash advances. In any event the planter sets the price, keeps the books, sells the cotton, and makes the accounting. For a Negro to dispute a planter's word or ask for a written account when none is offered is to invite disaster.

In Northern areas the Negro workers are to be found primarily in the cities. Many of those who pushed North during the war years at the urgent invitation of industry now find themselves without work and with little opportunity to better their condition. The Negro shares all the hardships of other low-income groups, with the added disadvantages that certain jobs are closed to him, that white workers are given preference in many fields, and that residential segregation creates problems of transportation and family disorganization. Negroes now furnish twice as many unemployed in proportion to their number as white people. As Negroes fall out in the struggle and increasing numbers are pushed to the bottom levels, the status of the whole race will suffer and once more there will be thrown upon the group the burden of proof that the explanation is not to be found in racial habits.

The Negro generally lacks the help that other labor groups get through their labor organizations. When the Negroes first went North in large numbers their entrance into the industrial world was opposed by organized labor. The colored worker had



no tradition of organization and his accustomed attitude was one of loyalty to the boss to whom he looked for help and not to fellow workers opposed to the owners. He was refused entrance to most unions, and this fact, combined with his traditional habits, led him into the role of scab and strikebreaker. Certain Unions have been more liberal than others in accepting Negroes, and in some cases he has worked out separate organizations. On the whole, however, the colored worker is outside the ranks of organized labor.

The Negro people as a group carry an abnormally heavy health handicap. Though the health rating has been slowly rising during the past two decades, the mortality rate for colored people is still from forty-five to fifty per cent higher than that for whites, and the white man has a life expectancy of fifteen years longer than that of the Negro.

It was once thought that the Negro was racially disposed to certain diseases and that these would ultimately cause the race to die out. It now appears much more probable that most, if not all, of the Negro's peculiar health problems are to be explained by the conditions under which he lives. His death rate drops and the expectation of life increases in proportion as his financial and cultural status is advanced. Certainly a large percentage of the deaths among Negroes can be traced to such poverty, bad housing, overcrowding, malnutrition, ignorance of sanitation and health measures, inadequate health facilities, and inability to secure medical care.

In the matter of housing the Negro suffers the difficulties of other low-income groups plus those added by enforced segrega-



tion. In rural areas he is better off than in the cities, but even in the open country his poor diet may leave him a victim to pellagra, his water supply may be polluted, and his house often unscreened. In the cities he is herded into squalid flats with inadequate water supply and heating, insufficient sanitary arrangements, and shameless overcrowding. An absence of parks and playgrounds adds to the bad effects of insufficient air and sunlight in the home. In smaller cities and towns where conditions are less crowded, sewerage, paving, street cleaning, and garbage removal frequently stop where the Negro quarter begins.

Even the better class of Negroes suffer a serious handicap in the lack of hospital facilities available to members of their race. Under our almost completely segregated system of hospitalization there is one hospital bed available for every two thousand Negroes as compared to one bed for each one hundred and fifty of the white population. For the patient with tuberculosis--one of the diseases ranking among the first in the Negro death rate--the Negro has about one twenty-fifth the opportunity for sanitarium care that the white person has.

Tragic cases are on record of desperately injured Negroes who have been refused admittance to hospitals and even denied ambulance service because the institution made no provision for colored patients. In some of the thickly populated colored sections of the South there are no hospital facilities available to Negroes without their going such a distance as to make use of them practically impossible. It is true, of course, that many white people in rural areas are far removed from hospitals, but here, as in so many other areas of his life, the Negro carries



the usual handicap of the poor and the extra burden of color discrimination.

It would not be fair to say that the black man's burden is all of the white man's making. Negroes themselves often have been too ready to slip into ways of dependence and to follow the paths of least resistance. Many Negro leaders, along with thoughtful white persons, have been baffled and disheartened at the black man's willingness to let sleeping dogs lie, at his easy acceptance of injustice, at his readiness to get along by flattery the white world about him, and at his tendency to blame his failures on the prejudice of white men instead of placing it at the door of his own inefficiency, where it sometimes belongs. He has too often sat waiting for the white world to give him rights and recognition which men come by after another fashion. He has too readily assumed a hat-in-hand attitude. He has often distrusted his own people and has meekly accepted the dominant world's judgment that anything white is better than anything black.

Yet in recognizing all the loads which black men themselves lay on the shoulders of their race, one must not minimize the sins which the white man must answer for. Flattery and clowning sometimes have been the white man's price and the Negro must pay it if he hopes to survive at all. All too often he has been confronted with the choice of submitting to humiliating discriminations or doing without those things necessary to a normal development. Whichever way he chose there was exacted a heavy toll.

Confronted with the task of trying to change an undesirable and unjust system the Negro finds himself curiously trapped. He cannot get wholly within American life nor can he wholly withdraw



himself from it. He is blamed for the ignorance of his people but given neither voice nor justice in the expenditure of school funds. He is reproached with the crimes of his people but in the states where most of his people live he has no vote, no voice in making laws, no power in helping enforce them. Segregation and discrimination help to keep him poor and ignorant, while his poverty and ignorance are used to justify the differential treatment given him.

The Negro forever faces the temptation of feeling sorry for himself and thus of slipping into shoddy living. If he makes demands that are too radical for the community in which he lives he runs the risk of arousing antagonism which may rob his group of hard won gains necessary to their very existence. If he meekly accepts injustice and discrimination he finds himself less than a man not only in his own eyes but also in the eyes of the world that most vehemently demands that he "stay in his place." This problem constitutes the black men's dilemma and his heaviest burden as well.



## BROWN AMERICA

Many Americans have had a fair amount of contact with Negro servants and workmen. They have read the stories of Octavus Roy Cohen and Irvin Cobb; they have listened to Amos and Andy; they have heard Negroes sing spirituals; and they many have seen "The Green Pastures." A smaller number of persons have had some long-distance contact with the Negro intellectual or artist. They perhaps have heard Roland Hayes sing, have seen Paul Robeson act, or have listened to James Weldon Johnson read his poetry. Out of such several and varied experiences and from chance hearsay white Americans have built up their notions about colored people, notions that usually take the form of stereotypes which have little relation to reality or are representative of only a small group. Very little is known about the ever growing company which includes the more prosperous farm owners, the better class of skilled workers, and the business and professional folk.

In 1930 Negroes were credited with an accumulated wealth of more than two and a half billion dollars, they conducted more than seventy thousand business enterprises, and three quarters of a million heads of families owned their homes. Something like a hundred and fifty thousand Negroes were in the professions, and more than twenty thousand had college degrees. There were fifty thousand school teachers, perhaps thirty thousand preachers, three or four thousand doctors, and a thousand or so persons listed as artists, librarians, actors, authors and editors.

Either of necessity or for comfort's sake, these people live in a world of their own. The Negro business man normally



serves a colored neighborhood. The Negro doctor, dentist, or lawyer only rarely finds himself with other than colored patients or clients. The colored teacher usually has pupils of her own race; the Negro preacher is never pastor of a white church and only rarely sees a white visitor in his congregation. To escape the unpleasantness and humiliation of Jim Crow practices most Negroes of this class avoid street-cars, railroads, hotels, and restaurants. They travel in their own automobiles, they eat at home or with friends, they entertain each other when business or pleasure takes them from home. Even in Northern cities like New York and Chicago this mode of living varies only to a degree, chiefly because there have developed Negro populations capable of maintaining a completely separate life.

Negro business enterprises include life insurance companies, banks, building concerns, taxicab companies, and practically every type of retail selling. In recent years a particularly successful business venture has been the manufacture of hair and skin preparations and the establishment of the beauty parlor and of training schools for beauty parlor operators. There are those who are inclined to smile at this profitable undertaking as one more evidence of the Negro's effort to be like white people. It is more reasonably interpreted as a normal desire to conform to the prevailing conception of beauty in the Western culture of which they are a part. A great deal of what was thought to be the Negro's uncouth and naturally rough appearance has been remedied by the present generation's attention to good grooming--an effective aid to poise and self-respect in people of any race.

The Negro press is a little known but flourishing enterprise.



In recent years there have been four or five hundred periodicals edited and published by Negroes. While the greatest number of these are in the South, they are to be found in practically every state in the Union. Practically all of these publications deal more or less exclusively with matters of special interest to the Negro and are a result of the dual world in which the Negro lives.

Negroes have been particularly successful in the world of sports and as entertainers. Colored and white boys alike, together with many of their elders, had a whold new set of thrills when Eddie Tolan smashed one track record after another in this country, and when, more recently, Jesse Owens and Joe Louis took championship status in track and the prize ring.

The Negro appeared as an entertainer first on the minstrel stage and later in musical comedy. He is only beginning to get a chance at serious acting. The tradition still holds that any portrayal of Negro life must be either pathetic or funny, that a Negro must not play in the same cast with white people except as a servant or clown, and that Negroes must play only colored roles. These taboos are gradually weakening, however, and the success of "The Green Pastures," "Porgy," "The Emperor Jones," and of certain motion picture productions in which Negroes play serious roles perhaps predicts a changing attitude in this realm.

Music and laughter the Negro undoubtedly has brought, and America owes much to the picturesque speech and the cleverly turned phrases of her folk population. Certainly the Negro has given America the only geniune folk music she has. This music is by no means all of a single type. There are the almost ritualistic prayer songs, the sorrow songs in which, often in



Biblical terms, the oppressed slave found escape and release from harsh reality. There are the freer evangelical or camp meeting songs resembling the revival songs of the whites, but with a distinct imagery of their own. There are the folk ballads, the "blues" and the work songs that eased the burden of the day and allowed a sort of indirect and sublimated back-talk to the "boss man." This is not African music, nor is it European. It seems rather to be the creation of gifted Africans in their reaction to a western environment. One has only to hear such songs to realize that here is richness, imagery, and a folk art that is one of the few original and significant contributions to American life.

It is easy to overlook the contribution to the building of the nation that lay in the Negro's daily and often enforced toil. Yet the Negro worker, whether as Mississippi roustabout, cotton picker, or craftsman who laid floors and set panels in old Southern manors, has given his brawn and often his skill to the weaving of the complex fabric of civilization in the Western world.

There has been a significant turn in the Negro poet's psychology comparable to the change in attitude toward the spirituals that occurred some years ago. The present-day poet no longer feels that he must write with one eye on the white gallery, that he must beg favors, put the race's best foot forward, or assume an air of sophistication. Instead, he frankly recognizes the rich vein of Negro folk material and makes wide use of it. This is not the folk material of the plantation long ago done to death, but that of the lusty, rowdy roustabout, the deck hand, the blues



singer, the cabaret dancer, the porter or bellhop, the illiterate but eloquent preacher.

The Negro has been less successful in fiction than in poetry, but the various novels and short stories that have appeared throw an interesting light not only on present-day Negro life but on race psychology as well. Some of the books deal with the problem of the new Negro in the South. Others are of the upper class group in the North, and more recently there have been portrayed the less sophisticated of the Harlemites. They all touch the color line in one fashion or another and several of them deal with the ever present notion of "passing."

Outside the field of literature individual Negroes have made names for themselves in various lines, which are too numerous to mention.

The Negro is always confronted with the implication that he belongs to an inferior race. Quite often he believes this to be true, accepts as fact that he cannot compete with a white world, and settles down to mediocrity. Sometimes he is afraid it is true and he enters into passionate and absurd attempts to build up for his race a fictitious past of glory and grandeur. Even when he is wise enough to know that he and his people are neither better nor worse than others with like opportunities and incentives, he is annoyed and harassed by a white world's agitation about him. Sentimental friends of the race say actually or by implication, "Isn't that good for a Negro?" He is seldom given the opportunity for normal competition with his fellows. There are either peculiar difficulties on the one hand or special concessions on the other.



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It should not be necessary to add that there is at present no evidence that justifies classifying the major races of the world in any order of inferiority or superiority. In every comparison, from brain weight to intelligence tests, there is much overlapping between Negro and white groups; although in total scores whites may average slightly higher than Negroes, the difference is seldom significant and there are always many Negroes who outrank many whites.

Nevertheless the belief persists that the Negroes are an inferior racial group, and this belief profoundly affects the attitude of the Negro toward himself as well as the attitude of the white world toward him. The Negro always feels that whatever he does will not only be used against him, so to speak, but also against his whole race. This feeling does diverse things. It affects the kind of poetry the Negro writes and it may make a Negro woman sensitive about indulging a purely personal taste for red dresses. It has helped to make of the educated Negro and particularly of the educated mulatto what one sociologist has aptly called a "marginal man."

The marginal man really stands between two worlds. In economic and intellectual achievements and in social habits he has moved beyond the masses of the subordinate group and finds himself culturally more at one with the dominant group than with the majority of his own race. Yet because he still bears the visible marks of his origin, the white world refuses to accept him. He thus fits into neither world. Such a divided relationship tends to produce a highly disorganized personality that is restless, sensitive, unadjusted, and often bitter or cynical.



It is sometimes thought that these characteristics are the result of race mixture, but they seem rather to be a product of the situation, though the fact of race mixture accentuates the problem by creating a third and intermediate physical type. The pure black who has had educational and cultural opportunities may, however, be as much a marginalman as his mulatto neighbor.

Among the dilemmas confronting the marginal man is that of voluntary, or what one writer calls compensatory, segregation. Negroes have argued the question for years. There is no answer, for whatever the choice, a penalty follows. The question of schools furnishes perhaps the most obvious illustration. The largest professional group of Negroes are the teachers--more than fifty thousand of them--who, with an insignificant number of exceptions, teach in segregated schools. A number of public teachers and a few principals in the city school systems of the North are colored, but not one Negro holds an outstanding position, and for a colored man to hold a full professorship in anything but a Negro college or university is practically unknown. Negro doctors generally find themselves limited to Negro hospitals, and there are few non-Negro business concerns in which a colored man stands any chance at all of rising to an executive position, particularly if authority over white persons is involved.

The Negro feels that in the long run a segregated institution of any kind tends to perpetuate a dual system in which the "separate but equal accommodation" is usually pure myth. To make a complete world within a world is impossible, and the segregated group finds itself either with the leftovers or with nothing at all. The Negro thus feels bound to fight segregation,



and yet if he is consistent he finds himself doubly cheated. He is thus in the curious position of asking for complete acceptance into American life and in the next breath of appealing to his people to support a Negro newspaper or raising funds for a colored hospital.

This inconsistency is not a willful one; it is an element in the struggle for existence in a bi-racial world where the alternatives are compromise or die--sometimes literally as well as figuratively. This unending battle, this balancing of values, the humiliation of compromise, the frustration of being forced to choose between two evils, uses up a vast amount of time and emotional energy that the Negro should be free to pour into more constructive channels.

A second result of the educated Negro's marginal position is an extreme sensitiveness which sometimes puzzles his friends and puts added weapons into the hands of his enemies. Having had his toes stepped on so many times the Negro is peculiarly conscious of the presence of hob-nailed boots. The situation is complicated by the American habit of classifying all Negroes according to stereotypes, as, for instance, criminals, brutes, shiftless loafers, or laughing, good-natured, banjo-strumming, watermelon-eating "darkies."

While the Negro peasant usually accepts his lot along with other things not to be questioned, the marginal man, particularly one who is only emerging from the peasant ranks, may make almost frantic efforts to conform to the dominant world's pattern. Mention has been made of a color class within the Negro group. Of course, the "passing" into the white group and the desire to marry



a lighter person than oneself is sometimes due to the simple fact that a dark skin in America is inconvenient, but a part of it roots back into an upbringing in a dominant white world that despises everything black.

The really emancipated Negro is the one who has sufficient historical perspective and balanced sense of values to be able to detach himself from the situation and view it objectively. He finds American color prejudice inconvenient and annoying but he does not burn up more energy over it than he does over other unpleasantness. He fights racial injustice but in no different fashion from that in which he opposes economic injustice. Such objectivity is not easily achieved by persons of any race, and not many Negroes have attained it. It thus comes about that the really sophisticated folk at the top and the completely unsophisticated folk at the bottom are the least race conscious. They are the two groups who can most enjoy the Negro spirituals and other genuine folk material, one because it is still a part of his life and the other because he is far enough away from it to see it apart from himself.

A part of this racial self-consciousness expresses itself in an extreme personal sensitiveness to certain terms that are associated with the slave status or that have come to have contemptuous connotations. Among the terms producing the most violent reactions are "nigger," "darkey," "pickaninny," and "negress." Almost as much in disrepute is the pronouncing of "Negro" as if it were spelled "Niggra." Negroes have not been able to agree on a term by which they would like to have the racial group designated. "Colored people" is preferred by many,



even though it has different meanings in different parts of the world. While some people have objections to the word "Negro" it seems to be the most generally accepted term.

There are two kinds of people who use terms offensive to Negroes. One kind is unaware that the terms are objectionable and the efforts of both white and colored writers and speakers are changing the habits of these folk. The other folk mean to be contemptuous and the fact that the Negro makes a "fighting fury" reaction to certain words merely plays into their hand.

People once assumed that the Negro was different from other folk, that certain characteristics and habits were "born in him," and therefore nothing could be done about the situation. Moreover, it was assumed that white people were born with prejudice toward colored races. It is now known that most of the so-called racial traits and the prejudice are largely, if not altogether, the result of what is called cultural conditioning; that is, they are learned from one's surroundings. Behavior that is learned can be unlearned or changed, and the conditions causing such behavior can be modified so that at least some of the causes of conflict and prejudice may be removed.

There have been numerous methods proposed as solutions to the race problem. The suggestions made by Negroes themselves at one time or another include an exodus, the forming of a forty-ninth state, the creation of a black government in the area in which the Negroes form the largest per cent of the population, an attempt to gain their rights by force, and complete voluntary segregation--that is, the creating of a duplicate set of economic and social machinery. When these proposals are examined in the



light of a realistic situation each one appears to be practically impossible. James Weldon Johnson in summarizing these proposed solutions points out the fact that the Negro, to achieve anything like full manhood and womanhood, must ultimately become a normal part of our national life so that his opportunities will be determined by his personal worth and not on the basis of his race or color.

Increasingly present-day Negroes are deciding that they want neither handicaps nor special concessions; that they want merely a chance on the same basis that other folks have; and that it is probably up to them to go after it themselves. At the same time there is a growing realization that the Negro's welfare is bound up with problems which white man and colored men must solve together. Even white and colored sharecroppers are beginning to see that their common economic injustices are of more importance than their differences in color.

During the past twenty-five or more years a number of organizations have developed which are serving as channels for Negro-white cooperation in the field of economic justice and race adjustment.

It would be the height of folly to suppose that such brief stirrings represent any long strides toward the elimination of prejudice and discrimination. There are still lynchings and the lynchings still go unpunished. There are the Scottsboro cases and the chain-gang horrors, the peonage of sharecroppers and "legal lynchings." There are still doors closed in the Negro's face in every state in the Union. Yet when viewed over the years the march has been upward. As history goes, it has been a swift-



moving pageant, and while the struggle still goes on and will go on for a long time to come, at least it is on a different level from that of twenty years ago, or ten, or five. Perhaps then, in spite of existing conditions, the Negro poet is justified in writing:

We have tomorrow  
Bright before us  
Like a flame  
Yesterday, a night gone thing  
A sun-down name  
And dawn today  
Broad arch above the road we came,  
We march!



THE END \*



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