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# THE NEW NEGRO

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IN the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro and the three norns who have traditionally presided over the Negro problem have a changeling in their laps. The Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formulæ. For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life.

Could such a metamorphosis have taken place as suddenly as it has appeared to? The answer is no; not because the New Negro is not here, but because the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy. His has been a stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism. The Negro himself has contributed his share to this through a sort of protective social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence. So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being—a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be “kept down,” or “in his place,” or “helped up,” to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden. The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude,

to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself in the distorted perspective of a social problem. His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality. Through having had to appeal from the unjust stereotypes of his oppressors and traducers to those of his liberators, friends and benefactors he has had to subscribe to the traditional positions from which his case has been viewed. Little true social or self-understanding has or could come from such a situation.

But while the minds of most of us, black and white, have thus burrowed in the trenches of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the actual march of development has simply flanked these positions, necessitating a sudden reorientation of view. We have not been watching in the right direction; set North and South on a sectional axis, we have not noticed the East till the sun has us blinking.

Recall how suddenly the Negro spirituals revealed themselves; suppressed for generations under the stereotypes of Wesleyan hymn harmony, secretive, half-ashamed, until the courage of being natural brought them out—and behold, there was folk-music. Similarly the mind of the Negro seems suddenly to have slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation and to be shaking off the psychology of imitation and implied inferiority. By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem we are achieving something like a spiritual emancipation. Until recently, lacking self-understanding, we have been almost as much of a problem to ourselves as we still are to others. But the decade that found us with a problem has left us with only a task. The multitude perhaps feels as yet only a strange relief and a new vague urge, but the thinking few know that in the reaction the vital inner grip of prejudice has been broken.

With this renewed self-respect and self-dependence, the life of the Negro community is bound to enter a new dynamic phase, the buoyancy from within compensating for whatever pressure there may be of conditions from without. The migrant masses, shifting from countryside to city, hurdle several generations of experience at a leap, but more important, the same thing happens spiritually in the life-attitudes and

self-expression of the Young Negro education and his new outlook, with of course, of the poise and greater it is all about. From this comes a new leadership. As one of them

We have tomorrow  
Bright before us  
Like a flame.

Yesterday, a night-gone  
A sun-down name.

And dawn today  
Broad arch above the road  
We march!

This is what, even more than any fifty years of freedom," requires be seen through other than the dusty versy. The day of "aunties," "Uncle Tom and S" equally gone. Uncle Tom and S even the "Colonel" and "George" which they escape with relief when The popular melodrama has about time to scrap the fictions, garret the a realistic facing of facts.

First we must observe some of the traditional lines of opinion were quite obsolete. A main change shifting of the Negro population v problem no longer exclusively Southern. Why should our mi when the problem itself no longer migration has not only been to Central Midwest, but city-ward an industry—the problems of adjustment local and not peculiarly racial. R part of the large industrial and social day democracy. And finally, with the

of class differentiation, if it ever was warrantable to regard and treat the Negro *en masse* it is becoming with every day less possible, more unjust and more ridiculous.

In the very process of being transplanted, the Negro is becoming transformed.

The tide of Negro migration, northward and city-ward, is not to be fully explained as a blind flood started by the demands of war industry coupled with the shutting off of foreign migration, or by the pressure of poor crops coupled with increased social terrorism in certain sections of the South and Southwest. Neither labor demand, the boll-weevil nor the Ku Klux Klan is a basic factor, however contributory any or all of them may have been. The wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions. With each successive wave of it, the movement of the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward the larger and the more democratic chance—in the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern.

Take Harlem as an instance of this. Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another. Proscription and prejudice have thrown these dissimilar elements into a common area of contact and interaction. Within this area, race sympathy and unity have determined a further fusing of sentiment

and experience. So what began in ten more and more, as its elements mix a great race-welding. Hitherto, American Negroes have been a race fact, or to be exact, more in sentiment than in fact. The chief bond between them has been a common condition rather than a common consciousness, a common life rather than a life in common. It is seizing upon its first chances for self-determination. It is—or promises to be—that is why our comparison is taken of folk-expression and self-determination as a creative part in the world to-day. In political significance, Harlem has the New Negro as Dublin has had for the for the New Czechoslovakia.

Harlem, I grant you, isn't typical is prophetic. No sane observer, however, new trend, would contend that the Negro as yet, but they stir, they move, they are restless. The challenge of the new is clear enough—the "race radicals" broken with the old epoch of philanthropic mental appeal and protest. But are into the stirrings of a sleeping giant? The answer is in the migrating peasant "down" who is most active in getting characteristic symptoms of this is the migrating to recapture his constituent maintain in some Southern corner where an established living and clientele. His errant flock, the physician or lawyer, ply the true clues. In a real sense they are leading, and the leaders who are following and transforming psychology permeate. When the racial leaders of twenty developing race-pride and stimulating the desirability of race solidarity, they

degree have anticipated the abrupt feeling that has surged up and now pervades the awakened centers. Some of the recognized Negro leaders and a powerful section of white opinion identified with "race work" of the older order have indeed attempted to discount this feeling as a "passing phase," an attack of "race nerves" so to speak, an "aftermath of the war," and the like. It has not abated, however, if we are to gauge by the present tone and temper of the Negro press, or by the shift in popular support from the officially recognized and orthodox spokesmen to those of the independent, popular, and often radical type who are unmistakable symptoms of a new order. It is a social disservice to blunt the fact that the Negro of the Northern centers has reached a stage where tutelage, even of the most interested and well-intentioned sort, must give place to new relationships, where positive self-direction must be reckoned with in ever increasing measure. The American mind must reckon with a fundamentally changed Negro.

The Negro too, for his part, has idols of the tribe to smash. If on the one hand the white man has erred in making the Negro appear to be that which would excuse or extenuate his treatment of him, the Negro, in turn, has too often unnecessarily excused himself because of the way he has been treated. The intelligent Negro of to-day is resolved not to make discrimination an extenuation for his shortcomings in performance, individual or collective; he is trying to hold himself at par, neither inflated by sentimental allowances nor depreciated by current social discounts. For this he must know himself and be known for precisely what he is, and for that reason he welcomes the new scientific rather than the old sentimental interest. Sentimental interest in the Negro has ebbed. We used to lament this as the falling off of our friends; now we rejoice and pray to be delivered both from self-pity and condescension. The mind of each racial group has had a bitter weaning, apathy or hatred on one side matching disillusionment or resentment on the other; but they face each other to-day with the possibility at least of entirely new mutual attitudes.

It does not follow that if the Negro were better known, he would be better liked or better treated. But mutual under-

standing is basic for any subsequent development. The effort toward this is remedying in large part what has been a feature of our present stage of development, namely the fact that the more important elements of the two race group have been quite out of vital touch with one another.

The fiction is that the life of the Negro is increasingly so. The fact is that the Negro is at the unfavorable and too light end of the scale.

While inter-racial councils have been drawing on forward elements of both races, cities manual laborers may be brought into work, but the community and business life has no such interplay or far too little to achieve contact or the race situation to cooperate. Fortunately this is happening, a realization that in social effort there is no plant long-distance philanthropy for mass relations in the future, but fully maintained contacts of the two race groups. In the intellectual life curiosity is replacing the recent indifference, carefully studied, not just talked about, and letters, instead of being written, are seriously portrayed and painted.

To all of this the New Negro is the augury of a new democracy in America, contributing his share to the new social order. The desire to be understood would not be content to have opened so completely the minds of the thinking Negro's mind to the possibility of being snubbed or rather the necessity for fuller, truer recognition of the unwisdom of allowing segregation to segregate him mentally, and a new life to fetter his own living—and so the new intellectuals built over the "color-line."

down. Much of this reopening of intellectual contacts has centered in New York and has been richly fruitful not merely in the enlarging of personal experience, but in the definite enrichment of American art and letters and in the clarifying of our common vision of the social tasks ahead.

The particular significance in the re-establishment of contact between the more advanced and representative classes is that it promises to offset some of the unfavorable reactions of the past, or at least to re-surface race contacts somewhat for the future. Subtly the conditions that are molding a New Negro are molding a new American attitude.

However, this new phase of things is delicate; it will call for less charity but more justice; less help, but infinitely closer understanding. This is indeed a critical stage of race relationships because of the likelihood, if the new temper is not understood, of engendering sharp group antagonism and a second crop of more calculated prejudice. In some quarters, it has already done so. Having weaned the Negro, public opinion cannot continue to paternalize. The Negro to-day is inevitably moving forward under the control largely of his own objectives. What are these objectives? Those of his outer life are happily already well and finally formulated, for they are none other than the ideals of American institutions and democracy. Those of his inner life are yet in process of formation, for the new psychology at present is more of a consensus of feeling than of opinion, of attitude rather than of program. Still some points seem to have crystallized.

Up to the present one may adequately describe the Negro's "inner objectives" as an attempt to repair a damaged group psychology and reshape a warped social perspective. Their realization has required a new mentality for the American Negro. And as it matures we begin to see its effects; at first, negative, iconoclastic, and then positive and constructive. In this new group psychology we note the lapse of sentimental appeal, then the development of a more positive self-respect and self-reliance; the repudiation of social dependence, and then the gradual recovery from hyper-sensitiveness and "touchy" nerves, the repudiation of the double standard of

judgment with its special philia. the sturdier desire for objective finally the rise from social disill the sense of social debt to the r bution, and offsetting the necessa acceptance of restricted conditions and recognition. Therefore the known for what he is, even in and scorns a craven and precarious ing to be what he is not. He social ward or minor, even by hi a chronic patient for the sociolo American Democracy. For the through with those social nostrum "solutions" of his "problem," w have been so liberally dosed in education, money—in turn, he ha cularly trusted these things; he in blind trust that they alone wi

Each generation, however, wi the present is the belief in the race co-operation. This deep fe mainspring of Negro life. It se reaction to proscription and prej cessful on the whole, to convert position, a handicap into an inc but not in purpose and only the tion, misunderstanding or persec Of course, the thinking Negro le left with the world-trend, and th affiliate with radical and liberal tally for the present the Negro i servative on others, in other wor protestant rather than a genuin pressure and injustice iconoclasti evitably increase. Harlem's qui ounce of democracy to-day lest to

The Negro mind reaches out a

wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions. There should be no delusion about this. American nerves in sections unstrung with race hysteria are often fed the opiate that the trend of Negro advance is wholly separatist, and that the effect of its operation will be to encyst the Negro as a benign foreign body in the body politic. This cannot be—even if it were desirable. The racialism of the Negro is no limitation or reservation with respect to American life; it is only a constructive effort to build the obstructions in the stream of his progress into an efficient dam of social energy and power. Democracy itself is obstructed and stagnated to the extent that any of its channels are closed. Indeed they cannot be selectively closed. So the choice is not between one way for the Negro and another way for the rest, but between American institutions frustrated on the one hand and American ideals progressively fulfilled and realized on the other.

There is, of course, a warrantably comfortable feeling in being on the right side of the country's professed ideals. We realize that we cannot be undone without America's undoing. It is within the gamut of this attitude that the thinking Negro faces America, but with variations of mood that are if anything more significant than the attitude itself. Sometimes we have it taken with the defiant ironic challenge of McKay:

Mine is the future grinding down to-day  
Like a great landslip moving to the sea,  
Bearing its freight of débris far away  
Where the green hungry waters restlessly  
Heave mammoth pyramids, and break and roar  
Their eerie challenge to the crumbling shore.

Sometimes, perhaps more frequently as yet, it is taken in the fervent and almost filial appeal and counsel of Weldon Johnson's:

O Southland, dear Southland!  
Then why do you still cling  
To an idle age and a musty page,  
To a dead and useless thing?

But between defiance and ap-  
cism and hope, the prevailing  
same author's *To America*,  
stoical challenge:

How would you  
Or sinking 'ne  
Our eyes fixed fo  
Or gazing emp

Rising or falling  
With dragging  
Strong, willing si  
Or tightening

More and more, however,  
great discrepancy between the  
American social practice forc  
the moral advantage that i  
sobering effect of a truly c  
prevents the rapid rise of a c  
and a defiant superiority feeli  
be, the majority still deprec  
see it forestalled by the speed  
wish our race pride to be a he  
than a feeling based upon a  
of others. But all paths to  
social attitude have been di  
lightened minds have been a  
above" prejudice. The ord  
only a hard choice between  
humiliating submission and  
prejudice. Fortunately from  
fulness has recently sprung u  
prejudice by mental passive r  
to ignore it. For the few, th  
but the masses cannot thrive

Fortunately there are cons

which the balked social feelings of the American Negro can flow freely.

Without them there would be much more pressure and danger than there is. These compensating interests are racial but in a new and enlarged way. One is the consciousness of acting as the advance-guard of the African peoples in their contact with Twentieth Century civilization; the other, the sense of a mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible. Harlem, as we shall see, is the center of both these movements; she is the home of the Negro's "Zionism." The pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem. A Negro newspaper carrying news material in English, French and Spanish, gathered from all quarters of America, the West Indies and Africa has maintained itself in Harlem for over five years. Two important magazines, both edited from New York, maintain their news and circulation consistently on a cosmopolitan scale. Under American auspices and backing, three pan-African congresses have been held abroad for the discussion of common interests, colonial questions and the future co-operative development of Africa. In terms of the race question as a world problem, the Negro mind has leapt, so to speak, upon the parapets of prejudice and extended its cramped horizons. In so doing it has linked up with the growing group consciousness of the dark-peoples and is gradually learning their common interests. As one of our writers has recently put it: "It is imperative that we understand the white world in its relations to the non-white world." As with the Jew, persecution is making the Negro international.

As a world phenomenon this wider race consciousness is a different thing from the much asserted rising tide of color. Its inevitable causes are not of our making. The consequences are not necessarily damaging to the best interests of civilization. Whether it actually brings into being new Armadas of conflict or argosies of cultural exchange and enlightenment can only be decided by the attitude of the dominant races in an era of critical change. With the American Negro, his new inter-

nationalism is primarily an effort to unite the scattered peoples of African descent into a permanent, if spectacular, phenomenon. For the American Negro in the future is one of the most constructive and powerful that any modern people can lay claim to.

Constructive participation in the world is the Negro's valuable group inheritance. He is recognized at home and abroad. Our future will possibly come through such channels. His immediate hope rests in the recognition of the Negro in terms of his individual and cultural contributions, past and present. Increasingly recognized that the world owes substantial contributions, not only of a technical, but especially, which has always found its expression in a more humble and less acknowledged form, though humbler and less acknowledged, the Negro has been the peace-maker of America which has most underappreciated his contributions not only materially but spiritually as well. The social recognition of the gift of his folk-temperament and his individuality it will be easier to recognize that a leaven of humor, sentimentality, and nonchalance has gone into the world. The humble, unacknowledged source of his gifts promises still more largely to be recognized and contributor and lays aside the shadow of the for that of a collaborator and participant. The great social gain in the recognition of the Negro is the integration of the Negro into the productive fields of creative activity. The cultural recognition they win should be that revaluation of the Negro which will accompany any considerable further progress. But whatever the general effect, the Negro has added the motives of self-interest to the old and still unfilled

headway and progress. No one who understandingly faces the situation with its substantial accomplishment or views the new scene with its still more abundant promise can be entirely without hope. And certainly, if in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least, on the warrant of these things, celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age.





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