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Martha H. Patterson Name Date Aug. 12, 2019  
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Address 525 Turtle Creek Ct. State IL Zip Code 62269  
City O'Fallon Phone 618-447-3471 Email mhpatterson@mckendree.edu

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## THE NEW NEGRO & HIS WILL TO MANHOOD & ACHIEVEMENT

BY HODGE KIRNON.

Every generation or every century witnesses the birth of a new spirit or a new idea which dominates and underlies the thoughts and actions of the people of that time. Their behavior in general springs from the prevailing sentiment and idea, and around which it is centered.

In our day, the prevailing idea which runs through all of our philosophy and actions is the "Will" idea. This is the idea of laying the greatest emphasis upon the power of the will, the individual and collective will and initiative to bring success in life, or in other words to secure individual, racial or national emancipation.

The writings of most of the leading thinkers of the day are pervaded with this spirit. The Christian Science and the New Thought movements are founded upon this sentiment and idea. The nucleus of their teachings is that one's relief from pain, and other forms of disagreeable sensations are to be secured through the strong and persistent direction of the Will upon things agreeable and pleasant—thus reducing all concentration upon pains to naught, by which all ills will be banished.

In common every day language, this idea manifests itself in such forms of expression as one having "get up," "grit," "nerve," "push,"—all of which mean that the "Will to Achievement," is powerful in that person. This simply means that the secret of success is in one's strong and strenuous application of will, initiative and perseverance to the affairs of life and the surrounding conditions. In other words, it means that to succeed, one must put determination and will into life, or, as a writer differently states it: "Our failure establishes only this: that our determination to succeed was not strong enough."

The Negro has been seized by this spirit. He has taken a real change of attitude and conduct. So great has been the change that he has designated himself under the name of "The New Negro."

The new terminology, "New Negro" has recently come into vogue. It is obvious that this term does not imply any new physical differences. It has a psychological interpretation, which means that the younger Negroes have taken a different outlook in life—have adopted a somewhat different behavior and attitude towards conditions which affect them in general. It remains to be seen what will be the ultimate results of these characteristics of the New Negro; but one thing is certain and that is that the Negro of today has taken an entirely different outlook and has adopted a decidedly different method towards life conditions. His party affiliation, literature, business activities, etc., are evidences enough in justification of this. It is even to be noted that the Negro Church, the most static and reactionary of Negro institutions, is beginning to show a slight change of attitude; and this is a hopeful sign.

True enough, this phrase "New Negro" is becoming somewhat overworked. It is becoming a catch-word for every Negro, without any understanding or feeling of its true meaning and significance, just as the word "democracy" became the by-word during the war, without the slightest idea or thought given its deeper meaning. Still more so is the fact that there are thousands of Negroes who are masquerading under the name of "New Negro," who are undoubtedly more conservative and servile than the oldest of the Old Negro is in spirit. Our memories are still fresh with instances of pre-war radical internationalists and socialists

who, when the war broke out, exhibited more superficiality, mob-hysteria, nationalism and chauvinism than the most ardent nationalists and reactionaries.

Some of the outstanding differences between the Old Negro and the New Negro are that the Old Negro pleaded to the white man for mercy, whereas the New Negro demands justice; the Old Negro begged for help, the New Negro asks for an opportunity to help himself; the Old Negro appealed to the white man's sense of sympathy, the New Negro appeals to his sense of manhood and fairness; the Old Negro was servile and humble, the New Negro is aggressive and dignified; the Old Negro suppressed his manhood, the New Negro expresses his manhood; the Old Negro meekly asked for a chance to live, the New Negro demands the right and opportunity to live.

The Old Negro's actions and ways of thinking were more or less of a negative character, whilst the New Negro's are decidedly more positive and affirmative. Because of the long years of slavery and subjection under which the Negro was held, a broken manhood was the dominant trait with the large majority of Negroes. Any Negro who dared to manifest any degree of courage and aggressiveness in thought or action, was looked upon by the white man as a "nigger" out of his senses. Such a Negro was either openly or silently rebuked by his fellowmen of his race; hence it became the natural thing to look upon the Negro as a servile being. This servile, passive, yes-sah-boss attitude was interpreted by the white man as the natural psychology of the Negro race. He did not seem to comprehend the fact that this was nothing more than the result of several years of subjection, ill-treatment and ignorance, which the race was heavily subjected to. Even up to the present day, the white man, with but rare exceptions, seems incapable of understanding the New Negro. He is perplexed and puzzled over his radicalism in thought and action in every sphere of activity. Mental indolence and laziness,

combined with age-long habitual wrong thinking and conclusions have prevented him from seeing the New Negro in the light of modern times and conditions. It is for these reasons why his attitude is hostile and unfriendly rather than sympathetic and sensible. It might also be said that a number of older Negroes share this unfriendly and hostile spirit towards the awakening of the younger Negroes. These are they who have been schooled in the slave or semi-slave atmosphere, and are therefore out of harmony with the New Negro. They rightly belong to the class called the Old Negro and are to be more pitied than criticised.

Not less conspicuous is the fact that the Old Negro was a careless, happy-go-lucky, childish optimistic sort of a creature. He never seemed to have taken his problems seriously to heart for any length of time. He never seemed to have interested himself seriously with any of the gigantic problems which confronted his race. Optimistic and hopeful as he was, his optimism was seldom, if ever, directed towards an earthly paradise, towards the day when justice would be applicable to him as to any other man. He was of the opinion, and this opinion was strengthened by blatantly ignorant clergymen, that his era and place of social justice would be after death and in heaven; and for this reason the oppression and injustice meted out to him in this world he considered providential and were therefore for his own good. He was also deeply imbued with the primitive Christian sentiment that God possessed some special benignant love for him, not necessarily for any acts of virtue on his part, but simply because he belonged to the oppressed classes, or was either too weak or ignorant to defend himself. His God was a lover of classes, not necessarily a lover of righteous conduct.

The New Negro is just the opposite in sentiment and thought. He is facing life with its realism. He is understanding that his problems are serious and must be treated seriously; and that they are to be solved in this world and

must be done through perseverance and the will to conquest and achievement.

Concomitant with the radical changes in the younger Negroes are the similar changes in the new race leadership—men who are now beginning to be regarded by the masses of wide-awake Negroes as the leaders of the race. These potential leaders differ from the leaders of the Old Negro in the same manner and degree that the New Negro differs from the Old Negro. They are men who, whether they possess as much academic and classical education as the leaders and spokesmen of the Old Negro, do not lay stress on this acquirement. They are for the most part better informed on modern questions than the old type of Negro leaders. They possess a more extensive knowledge and a deeper grasp of the relations of the economic life of the Negro with the economic problems of the day. They seem to have a deeper realization of the significant part economics feature in modern life and in our civilization and progress in general—a force which our older speakers and writers seemed to have been but very partially acquainted with, or had but very little understanding of its bearings upon modern life. If they had the knowledge concerning it, they have signally failed to show it in their writings.

The leaders of the Old Negro were compromising to a degree of disgust, the new leaders are showing an uncompromising attitude to a point that overreaches prudence. Social progress is in many respects a series of compromises, but there are vital questions upon which no compromise ought to be made. Compromise upon such questions is nothing short of base cowardice and treason. A slave should show no compromise with his master; the ridden with the rider. They should exclaim with Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death."

In the field of commercial endeavor, the New Negro is making himself a big factor. He is manifesting a wonderful and astonishing degree of business activity. He has decided that the unbuilding of his commercial power must be

done through his own initiative and business intelligence and industry. He knows that in his endeavors, his goal is to be attained fundamentally through his own efforts, with assistance if needs be by the white man—not through the efforts of the white man, and if needs be, assistance from him.

With this era of the awakening of the race, comes to life a new-born racial self-realization and personality, a resurrection of a long dormant and slumbering manhood and initiative. We have been so long in the throes of servitude that we have lost all of our creativeness and originality. We have simply become imitators. But now that we have ventured out for ourselves, we are in a position to bring our originality and initiative into play. No teaching of the past history of our race could serve to emulate race pride as the successful results of our practical experience and endeavors.

No less forcible is the spirit of the New Negro in journalism and other miscellaneous efforts. New Negro publications are not only expressive of the new spirit which has seized the race, but they are exerting a tremendous influence in inspiring the people with the highest racial ideals and aspirations. They are inculcating into every Negro a sense of race pride and determination which is without parallel in the history of the race. They breathe defiance, tenacious opposition and revolt against the existing wrongs inflicted upon the race. They are for the most part edited by men who have absorbed the radical tendencies of the age. These are expressed in their writings and are fast becoming the common property of every Negro.

These publications join in the common agitation and protest for the betterment of conditions for the working classes and all who suffer from unjust laws and regulations. They are working in conjunction with the liberal and radical white press in the demand for higher wages and better working conditions for the working man and woman, and are also taking an active part in bringing about the unity of the

workers. Upon all these matters the older Negro publications were either silent or entirely too weak, compromising and palliating.

The resolute and defiant spirit which is now the leading characteristic of the New Negro press is giving the white man cause for much anxiety. He views this change from a dog-like fealty to a tiger-like ferocity with awe and consternation. To him the Negro was so devoid of sense and feeling that it was deemed impossible for him to be affected by the World War and the frequent and fervid mouthings of democracy during that time. It was not thought that he would join the proletariat of the world in demanding the fulfillment of the pledges and promises made by the spokesmen of democracy.

Surpassing all of the foregoing in educational effectiveness, the New Negro press has shown a still wider contrast in its scope over the Old Negro press in its international spirit. The Old Negro press was nationalistic to the extreme, even at times manifesting antipathy and scorn for foreign born Negroes. One widely circulated paper went as far as to cast sarcasm and slur upon the dress, dialect, etc., of the West Indian Negro, and even advised their migration and deportation back to their native lands—a people who are in every way law abiding, thrifty and industrious. The new publications have eliminated all of this narrow national sentimental stupidity. They have advanced above this. They have recognized the oneness of interests and the kindredship between all Negro peoples the world over. As was said some time ago by a writer in one of our leading daily papers, "the same journal will advertise a delegation of Basuto chiefs to the British Government and the Jim-Crow car in Alabama. Between the British Empire and the United States, therefore, the Negro furnishes a new point of contact." This is nothing short of proof of the international spirit which is taking possession of the New Negro.

Another additional service which the New Negro press is rendering the Ne-

gro public is its explanation to its readers of the economic reasons for the silence and indifference of the leading white press on racial questions of vital importance. It is also bringing to light the economic reasons for the passiveness and the cringing attitude of our so-called leaders and the reactionary and conservative Negro press. Of course, everything cannot be explained in terms of economics. Other factors are to be taken into consideration, but it must be remembered that the power of the economic factor is in no way to be under-estimated.

One other notable distinguishing feature between the conservative press of the Old Negro and the new radical publications is that the new publications consistently and regularly keep before the eyes of the Negro workmen how closely allied are their interests with white workers. They are shown as forcibly and as clearly as possible the necessity of the union with white workers for securing higher wages and better working conditions, just as the white workers are being shown by the radical white press.

The Negro is now getting more accurate, reliable and broader information upon matters of interest to the working classes through his press. Through this, his ignorant and sheepish following of the capitalist press will be greatly changed. He is not to be so easily duped nowadays. Professor Kerlin, in an article contributed to "Reedy's Mirror," said that the Negro is now disbelieving the ordinary newspapers on matters pertaining to the race question, and that he is going to his own press for trustworthy reports on any question concerning the race.

The New Negro journalism is strongly accentuating the common interests that Negroes all over the world have in common; also the identity of interests with the white workers. One of the ways in which this is done is by giving prominent publicity to news matter, editorial comments, etc., contained in the leading white press of progressive thought. Through these and other means, the Negro is now seeing and un-

derstanding that wars waged on weaker peoples which he has been instrumental in pushing to a success are really carried out in the direct interest of the big business interests of the capitalists. The Negro is now just beginning to realize what all liberal and progressive thinking white men have fully realized long ago.

The Negro World has made a notable contribution in bringing before its readers some valuable and interesting reading matter appearing in the white press. The Messenger Magazine has done more than any other monthly publication in educating our people on the race question in its economic phase, and upon throwing light on important social and political issues as they affect the race. This publication is undoubtedly truly expressive of the New Negro—bold, resolute, radical and uncompromising in its attitude.

The radical forerunner writer and speaker of these two representative Negro journals was Hubert Harrison now associate editor of the Negro World. Harrison was the first Negro who boldly preached Racialism and all forms of Radicalism in New York. He preached them continuously and consistently. He was the first Negro whose Radicalism was comprehensive enough to include racialism, science, politics, sociology and education, in a thorough-going scientific manner. But Harrison's attitude and teachings did not receive the proper interest and hearing they deserved. The Negro was indifferent and unconcerned about radical questions and radical organizations. The writer recalls that about seven years ago he attended a course of lectures given by Emma Goldman in Harlem and with but a single exception he never saw another

Negro present. But such would be impossible today; because Negroes are interested in progressive ideas, and are in attendance at nearly every important radical meeting or organization. Furthermore, the New Negro papers are devoting their columns to such affairs, and are giving them conspicuous announcements.

The St. Louis riot demonstrated to every Negro that the lackey, cringing and conservative spirit was not a help to him, but a decided hindrance. It was this event more than anything else which gave rise to the publication of the "Voice," a weekly paper—radical, fearless and outspoken, published and edited by Harrison. It was this paper that really crystallized the radicalism of the Negro in New York and its environs. What the race now needs is a weekly paper to fill the place of the "Voice," a paper containing news of general interest and editorials touching upon radical social, educational and labor questions connected directly or indirectly with the race. The Emancipator, edited by W. A. Domingo, now ceased publication some weeks ago, gave promise of filling such a need.

From every quarter can it be seen that the New Negro, unlike the Old Negro, is taking a bold, resolute and determined stand for his rights in the fullest sense of the word. He is working unflinchingly for the betterment of his conditions and the right to the opportunity to improve himself as is commensurate with his ability.

The New Negro has come to recognize the great truth that Life and Progress are positive forces—that nothing but the application of the principle of the Will to Manhood and Achievement will bring him into his own.

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