

The New Negro Begins to Exhibit Much Pride In His Racial Identity

Youth Is Losing Its Former Distaste Of Things Negroid

By CARTER G. WOODSON

YOU KNOW we got tired of these Negro plays," said a miseducated, highly educated Negro of Washington to me the other day. "Our troupe, originally organized for this very purpose, finally reached the decision that there was not anything in it and took up plays bearing upon the life of other people."

These players, like others of old, went back to the flesh pots of Egypt rather than press forward to the promised land; but we have heard nothing of their striking achievements since that time. They occasionally present a play worked out as a poor imitation of what they see others doing; and there follow such comments as, "That was fine, for it made you think that you were at a real theatre; and that girl playing the leading role reminds you of Julia Marlowe or Maude Adams."

And this is about as far as the miseducated, highly educated Negro's mental development enables him to go. What he says and does reminds you of what someone else has said or done so much better. The Negro thus misguided does not show much originality. It is not his fault, however, for he is merely the slave of the modern tradition of keeping the Negro blindfolded. For three centuries, the Negro has been taught that the race to which he belongs does not amount to anything, and that the only thing he can do in educating himself is to imitate the traducers of the race. Having studied in this school of thought for all these years, most Negroes have learned this lesson too well.

As the result of such efforts as the celebration of Negro History Week and the scientific study of the race, however, the youth of African blood is gradually breaking away from these traditions of slavery. These younger people are beginning to see virtue in persons whose faces are black; or, as a writer said in a recent article entitled "The White God Cracks," they have found as great possibilities in themselves as in others; and they are determined to feast upon the good things of the world rather than be content with the crumbs falling from the table.

A teacher of Washington with a vision of these things to come in the development of a new race expressed this thought the other day in urging me to come to see her pupils in the pageant, "Ethiopia at the Bar of Justice." "The preparation of this play for Negro History Week," said she, "has worked a transformation of my pupils. A few years ago it was difficult to find a boy or girl willing to take the part of a Negro in anything, but now it is equally as difficult to find one who will not gladly as-

sume such a role. Almost every girl in the school wanted to be Ethiopia; and in the assignments I had much trouble from incurring the displeasure of those who felt disappointed."

This is the rise of the new Negro; not that of the Negro who would join with the reds to destroy the present economic order. It should be changed, but the Negroes with the little common sense which most of us now have would not profit by the revolution if it came. The new Negro would dramatize the life of the race and thus inspire it to develop from within through a radicalism of its own.

In other words, this new Negro will do for the race what Horace did for the stupid Romans in teaching them not to despise the life of the lowly, the pride of the country. Instead of going to others to find something to admire, begin to appreciate yourselves. "When a man," said he, "learns how far that which he has excels that which he seeks let him return home in time to enjoy his present possessions."

What, then, in the life of the Negro should we dramatize? That will be an easy problem when the Negro learns to think. The Negro in the modern world is its most dramatic figure. This was the thought of Frederika Bremer, a foreign woman traveling in this country about 1850, when someone asked her what she thought of the future of America. She replied, "The romance of your history is the fate of the Negro." Therein lies the real American drama. As soon as we turn away from the whitewashing our exploiters and oppressors, and learn to appreciate the virtues of this despised race we shall be able to see and understand life.