

THE OVER-SENSITIVE NEGRO

UTTERANCES OF BOOKER T. WASHINGTON GROWING UNPOPULAR

With the Race—The Reason Why—Vast Difference in the Old and New Negro—Comment on the Books Written by Negroes.

There exists no book written by an Afro-American in which the questions affecting the actual welfare of the race are discussed in an impartial manner and from a scientific standpoint. The only prominent Negroes of the past who have reached an elevation of thought sufficiently above the clouds of race prejudice to be able to see the race and study it with the candor of an outsider are the late Fred Douglass and the scholarly Prof. R. T. Greener. These gentlemen have never been perfectly candid in their utterance but here and there they have unwittingly let words escape which show that they appreciated truths concerning the Negro to which the eyes of the Negro, himself, are blind.

It has been the habit of the Negro to regard every word said about him by the other race with suspicion; and to instantly stigmatize each unfavorable comment as "abuse." This unfortunate mental tendency is easily explained to an outsider but it cannot be brought to the apprehension of any but the most intelligent of Negroes even at the present day. The Negro is not only unable to appreciate and study the candid utterances of others concerning him but is also unable to see himself in the true light. He does not believe that any person having a white skin can be free from prejudice and is irritated by any unfavorable opinion which a white person may express. Even those white philanthropists who live with the blacks are always kept under surveillance by the people whose cruel wrongs have made them morbidly sensitive.

This disposition of the blacks is recognized by all white persons who have close dealings with them and is also keenly appreciated by the fair colored people who dare not make a slight reference to "straight hair," good features" etc, without the fear of giving offence. The black man is so extremely sensitive that no person who is not black can say a word about the defects of the Negro and obtain a candid hearing.

The utterances of Prof. Booker T. Washington are unpopular with the Negroes, not because they have been pondered over and adjudged as unsound, but simply because they are approved by the whites and are uttered by a man who is not black. The average black man can be approached through his feelings alone when the matter relates to himself as a Negro. He cannot be reasoned with and he cannot reason on such questions. Not an utterance from the platform or through the magazines has ever for a moment found a lodgement in the mind of the average Negro unless it rang with praise of him.

A highly educated Negro who has been educated out of himself and become a reasonable being is as far removed from the mental life of his people as is a white man. He can lift none of his fellows up to his visual level and can arouse in them no thoughts responding to his own. The Negro who becomes intellectually free has to choose between one of three courses in life, viz., to live apart from his race, to live among them and be constantly misunderstood, or to push his own thoughts aside and come down to the people. This latter course, sad to say, is the one most generally followed.

All of this applies to the Negro of the passing generation but is qualified in its application to the New Negro. The New Negro thinks of himself first as a man and by a comparison between himself and other men forms his opinion of "what kind of a man" he, himself, is. The Old Negro thinks of himself first and last as a Negro and rejects all comparisons. The tendencies of the Old Negro are all toward the isolation of himself from the whites, the tendencies of the New Negro are directly opposite to this.

The New Negro feels sympathy with the material life of the whites and is more and more conscious of just such material wants as the whites maintain a ceaseless endeavor to satisfy. The New Negro is not content with a cabin; he wants a home. That home needs carpets, furniture and adornment. To supply these new wants requires greater effort than what was needed to sustain the cabin life and for this reason the New Negro has a motive for greater industry and greater frugality. The New Negro ardently desires to take part in making and administering laws. He is not content simply to vote, he wants his vote to count for something. He honestly seeks to discover the cause that has lead to certain past injustices concerning the exercise of his rights as a citizen and seeks to remove them. The Old Negro regards every criticism of his ascendancy to power in the days of reconstruction as unjust and as due to race prejudice. The New Negro understands the actual reasons which influenced the conduct of the whites. The Old Negro is so encased in prejudice and so unreasonable that the only method of dealing with him is to restrain and suppress him within certain limits. The New Negro is open to reason, and responds to training and is to be dealt with as a man full of possibilities. The New Negro comprises less than a majority the Afro-American class of citizens. His progress in public favor is terribly retarded by the Old Negro whose persistent isolation from the motives of American life render him an alien and a menace. The Old Negro is not without many good traits and is progressive along certain lines, but there is no place for race or caste in America.

J. M. HENDERSON, M. D.,

82 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.