

## POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES OF THE NEW NEGRO

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It is significant that in *The New Negro* symposium of 1925 there was no essay dealing primarily with the political activities of Negroes or with their relation to government. There were many interesting facets to the life of the New Negro a generation ago but, apparently, significant citizenship participation was not one. There were no students of government among the many scholars and creative writers who contributed to *The New Negro* volume of 1925.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, there were no Negro political scientists in 1925. The first serious and competent study of the Negro's role in twentieth century politics appeared in 1932. This was Lewinson's *Race, Class, and Party*. The over-all conclusion of this book was that since the beginning of the twentieth century the role of Negroes in American politics and government was not significant.<sup>2</sup>

However, during the 1920's within the Northern cities there was developing "a political resurgence on the part of Negroes" which was the effective beginning of the Negroes' reappearance in American politics.<sup>3</sup> Negroes were voting freely in several Northern states and their votes importantly influenced local conditions. But, as Myrdal stated, "because voting Negroes are concentrated in a half dozen Northern cities, they can exert little influence on the Federal government."<sup>4</sup> Government in the Southern states did not reflect the legitimate democratic interests and aspirations of the Negro *quasi-citizens*. On the contrary, a major function of Southern politics and government was the institutionalization of an inferior caste status for Negroes.<sup>5</sup>

The leaders of both major political parties were quite content with the Southern disposition of the Negro problem. Before the 1930's, neither the Republican nor the Democratic party seriously attempted effectively to ameliorate the legal and social disabilities of the Negro population.<sup>6</sup> Even the judiciary in the pre-New Deal days conspired to distort the American Creed and the national *ethos* as far as the Negro population was concerned. Tortured and strained interpretations of the federal Constitution issued from the United States Supreme Court. These doctrines served as means of permitting the Southern states to deprive the Negroes of many of the most essential rights of democratic citizenship.<sup>7</sup> Myrdal evaluated this development as follows:

It is generally held that the Supreme Court acted in agreement with, and actually expressed what was then the general sentiment even in the North. The North has gotten tired of the Negro problem and, anyhow, saw no immediate alternative other than to let the white Southerners have their own way with the Negroes. But it must not be forgotten that the decisions of the Court had themselves a substantial share in the responsibility for the solidification of the Northern apathy. This was also before the great Negro migration: the Negro vote in the North was still small and safely belonged to the Republican party without any particular political compensation.<sup>8</sup>

Negroes had little national political power or influence and virtually no



political power or influence in the South. Thus there remained only protest as the means of ameliorating their disabilities. The protest took the form of appealing to the conscience of the American public in terms of the ideals and value judgments of the American creed. Leadership among Negroes was determined by ability to beg, cajole, or adroitly coerce the wealthy or otherwise powerful white people. The business of appealing to the conscience of those in power or of cynically performing the chores of a comprador became a fine art.<sup>9</sup>

The other kind of protest available to Negroes was an appeal to the federal courts. The South was essentially lawless. White supremacy necessitated virtually vigilante government. When the South could not give its subversion of the federal Constitution a coloration of legality, the organic law was openly flaunted and disregarded. The South appeared determined to reduce Negroes to the status of helots. Negro groups and organizations desperately beseeched the Supreme Court to protect their constitutional civil rights. The appeal was to an ultraconservative federal bench. The United States Supreme Court with monotonous regularity outlawed state and federal social legislation designed to cope with the realities of twentieth century society.<sup>10</sup> This Supreme Court was not disposed to interpret the Reconstruction Amendments in accordance with the intent of their creators. It denounced only the most flagrant violations of the democratic and constitutional rights of Negroes. Until the 1930's the Supreme Court afforded little positive aid to the Negro in his struggle for full and equal citizenship.

#### RENAISSANCE IN NEGRO POLITICAL INTEREST AND PARTICIPATION

During the last decade there has occurred a remarkable and significant revival of interest by Negroes in politics and government. Negroes are now participating in politics, in both the North and the South, to a degree which is startling in view of the bleak picture of the first forty years of this century. Ralph J. Bunche estimated that in 1940 there were within the eleven Southern states some 203,500 Negroes registered to vote in the 1940 national elections.<sup>11</sup> In 1952, Henry L. Moon of the NAACP estimated that the Negro registrants within these states numbered some 1,207,000.<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Martin observes that though

the number of eligible Negro electors in the South is still considerably less than one-third of their total potential vote, highly significant progress has been made. Though smaller in some areas than in others, this progress is southwise in extent and is one of the most important factors at work fundamentally reshaping the southern political process.<sup>13</sup>

The reappearance of Negroes in Southern politics has been most immediately effective in the urban districts. By 1950, about 47 per cent of Southern Negroes were urban residents.<sup>14</sup> This urbanization of the Negro population has continued at an accelerated pace both in the North and the South. Several Negroes have been elected to Southern city councils. In the metropolitan Southern communities candidates now must bid for the Negro vote. In some of these cities, such as Savannah and Atlanta, "the Negro vote has represented the

balance of victory in close municipal elections." Samuel Lubell states that because of this large urban Negro vote the Negro population in these Southern cities has

been able to use this fact to gain local improvements long overdue them, like a new playground or school, the hiring of more Negro policemen, or paving the road to the Negro cemetery. The fact that Negroes vote also results in more respectful treatment generally at the hands of the police and in the courts, and even in obtaining some government posts.

Lubell, however, notes that:

If competition for the Negro vote has tended to dampen the race-baiting in local contests in the larger cities, on state and national issues the political play is still to the anti-Negro galleries. Nor is this likely to change while the struggle for Democratic control nationally rages as fiercely as it does now. Until the Southern political leaders have resolved their dilemma of whether to remain in or bolt from the Democratic party, the race issue is bound to be kept militantly alive, since it is obviously the best "cover" for any departure from Democratic regularity.<sup>15</sup>

Negro political influence in the South does not as yet reach to state officials or to members of Congress. However, this is the determined objective of the ever increasing propaganda and organizational activities of Southern Negroes. Alexander Heard's careful and comprehensive study of Southern politics, completed in 1952, suggests that the impact registered by the new Negro and white voters in the South will result in Southern Democratic politics becoming increasingly New Dealish. This would mean basic political party realignment. The old conservative Democratic elements would be driven into the Republican fold. Heard concludes his study with the statement that his prognosis of basic party realignment and the appearance of an effective Southern liberal party

rests on the conviction that the relative decline in the southern Negro population and the increased education of all southerners will continue to moderate ancient prejudices. In part, the suggestion of a liberal Democratic politics in the South depends also on the assumption that lower income groups, white and black, will vote in increasingly large proportions, with a fair degree of political unity, in response to sustained exertions in political education.

Heard continues his concluding statement with the observation that:

If some of these things come to pass, they will surely come in fragments, with strife, and perhaps in unforeseen ways. Yet there can be little doubt that much of the South is moving closer to competitive party politics. The changes that occur will contribute to more representative and more responsive, state and local government; and all citizens in the South will have a more straightforward—and more effective—means of influence in national politics.<sup>16</sup>

As suggested above, for nearly a half-century Negroes in the Northern states and cities have been permitted freely to vote. From the information available, it would appear that Northern Negroes vote in a larger proportion than the whites of the same educational and economic status.<sup>17</sup> In some cities,



notably Chicago, the non-voting rate for Negroes is much below that for whites.<sup>19</sup> Negro voting in the North and West is predominantly within the cities. The Negro population in these areas is over 80 per cent urbanized.<sup>19</sup> During the 1940's, "the number of Negroes outside the South leaped almost 60 per cent from 2,900,000 to 4,600,000." And, "in almost all of this migration, the number of non-whites, predominantly Negroes, has risen five to ten times as rapidly as the white population."<sup>20</sup> This exodus of Negroes from the South to the great cities of the North and West is continuing during the present decade.

The urbanization of the Negro has changed the nature of the Negro problem. Special urgency has been given to the civil rights issue. The still prevailing code of Negro-white relations was a product of the paternalistic relationship of master and near-serf on the plantation. This caste status is now patently anomalous and inadequate for the impersonal relationship of urban living. Discrimination irks Negroes much more forcefully in the new economic and social relationships of the urban economy. Urban Negroes must seek aid from trade unions and above all from government. A Fair Employment Practices Commission<sup>21</sup> becomes a basic security measure—indeed, an aspect of civil rights. Government must afford better educational facilities, better and cheaper housing, more and better health services, and recreational facilities. The importance and effectiveness of the traditional type of Negro leader is declining. Bargaining with and appealing to the sympathies of the leading white people are no longer adequate techniques, nor, indeed, are they very relevant ones for the pressing institutional needs of the new urban Negro population.

The Negro masses know that basic institutionalized relationships must be changed. Negroes must have greater job opportunities, and law and trade unions can more effectively perform this task than can an Urban League. Opportunity in government employment is increased much more by means of power within local political organizations than by the machinations of Negro national Republican leaders and pensioners. Even judges are more responsive to Negroes' interests when Negroes represent real political power. Lubell writes interestingly about the changed relationship of Negroes to government. He says:

The more complex society becomes the more the relations of groups and individuals become a matter of regulation by law. The color problem is no different. As a large proportion of the Negro population is drawn into industrialized life, it becomes ever more important for Negroes to have their rights defined by law.

And, further:

The displacement of the Negro from the agricultural South has transformed the Negro problem in still another way. What was once the peculiar concern of the South has become a national problem.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE NEW POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF NEGROES

When government in the United States first began genuinely to reflect the interests of the working people, poor people, consumers, and the minorities,

Negroes abandoned their sentimental attachment to the Republican party. Since the 1936 elections, Negroes have been the most vigorous advocates and defenders of the American variant of the welfare state which is the ideology and policies of the Democratic New Deal.<sup>23</sup> Despite some defections in 1948 and 1952 from the other elements of the Roosevelt coalition, the Negroes' attachment to the Democratic party has been increasing.<sup>24</sup> The NAACP reports that in the 1952 presidential election the vote of Negroes in the 47 largest cities of the country was 73 per cent for Stevenson and 27 per cent for Eisenhower.<sup>25</sup> A CIO-PAC "study of the 1954 returns in those wards and precincts in which the colored population is dominant, indicates that the Negro vote was high and Democratic majorities equalled or surpassed the 1952 figures in Chicago, Toledo, Detroit, and throughout Pennsylvania." In the six predominantly Negro wards of Chicago, "the Democratic vote was higher in 1954 than in 1950, or even in 1948. The Republican vote showed a corresponding drop and the Democratic percentage rose from 64% in 1948 and 63.4% in 1950 to 75.8% in 1954." Except in the case of state and local Democratic candidates who advocated anti-Negro policies and sentiments, the Negro voters have been the most faithful supporters of the old Roosevelt coalition.<sup>26</sup>

This phenomenon of mass political activity by Negroes is producing a new type of leader. The effectiveness and relevance of the traditional leadership is receding. The new leaders are emerging from the trade unions and the new party politics. No longer does any leader speak "for the race" or for any significant percentage thereof. Leadership is becoming more functional and local, and as integration deepens Negroes look more to the white leaders of groups of which they are a part. As integration progresses and the caste stigma of Negroes lessens, more of the "best brains" among the Negro population will abandon the traditional "leader business." The Negro elite of intellect and talent is becoming less preoccupied with the race problem. And authentically distinguished Negroes like Ralph J. Bunche and William Hastie will compete with other Americans for eminence in fields of endeavor which do not directly relate to the Negro problem.

Negroes are no longer content merely to vote *against* discriminatory measures; they now can and do vote *for* progressive measures. There is a closer relationship between economic status and voting habits among Negroes than characterizes the relationship between these activities among other segments of the population. The recent general trend in American politics away from horizontal or sectionalistic politics toward vertical or class politics is accentuated most among Negroes.<sup>27</sup>

The contemporary Negro believes strongly in the underlying presuppositions of the democratic social philosophy. His political philosophy is predicated upon the concepts of respect for personality; the supreme worth of the individual; the dignity of man without regard to social, economic, and religious stations; and an anti-authoritarianism which stresses a protest against authority maintained primarily on grounds of religious, social, economic, or organizational position without regard to individual claims. Negroes possibly more than others in the American society emphasize the individuality of man



by focusing upon the importance of increasing every man's area of meaningful choices. The liberalism to which Negroes appeal is at heart humanitarian and seeks to redirect the flow of society's benefits into the hands of the many. This kind of liberty is the creed of the common man, of the majority of the insurgents, of those who endeavor to bring the inheritance of the past into accord with present inclinations. This type of liberalism in a philosophical sense emphasizes the equality of man. In a sociological sense the new pragmatic liberalism which Negroes support emphasizes the claims of the class which is next below the present possessors of power.

Negroes want positive government which protects and assists the weak and curbs the strong. Negroes are vigorous proponents of the welfare-state concept of government. This political theory holds that government must assume responsibility for social and economic disorder. Government must regulate powerful economic groups—through the broadening legal concept of public utility and the widening social concept of the public interest—and promotion of lesser economic groups. The welfare staters assert that such programs give greater meaning to the American ideal of equality and liberty, understood in a pragmatic sense. For the interpretation of liberty the welfare staters ask the following question: Whose liberties to do what and with what consequences? Such liberty is thus not the economic freedom associated with nineteenth century *laissez-faire*, in which the sphere of liberty connoted that sphere of activity not interfered with by government. Rather it is recognized that a man's liberty is interfered with by many powerful institutions, many of which are less responsive and responsible than a democratic government. Therefore, where, of necessity, liberty is restricted, the new pragmatic liberalism seeks to make such restrictions publicly responsible and socially purposeful. Thus Negroes support all of the social gains of the New Deal. They seek even more social, ameliorative legislation. A compulsory national FEPC, Negroes presently believe to be a requirement of an authentically democratic government.

Despite the Communists' preaching and practice of social equality, the Communists failed to attract any appreciable following among American Negroes.<sup>28</sup> A basic reason for the failure of Communism among Negroes, in the words of Myrdal, is that:

Negroes are discriminated against in practically all spheres of life, but in their fight for equal opportunity *they have on their side the law of the land and the religion of the nation*. And they know it, all the way down to the poorest stratum. They know that this is their strategic hold. *No social Utopia can compete with the promises of the American Constitution and with the American Creed which it embodies*. Democracy and lawful government mean so much more to a Negro, just because he enjoys so comparatively little of it in this country. Merely by giving him the solemn promises of equality and liberty, American society has tied the Negroes' faith to itself.<sup>29</sup>

However, Wilson Record, an authority on the Negro and Communism, finds that Negroes are far from complacent about the *status quo*. Record, writing in 1951, believed that Negroes constitute a significant and powerful actual

and potential element for progressive politics and government.<sup>30</sup> And Record concludes his study with the following judgment:

Negroes in the United States have had plenty of provocation to revolt. But they have chosen to protest within the constitutional framework. They have not succumbed, as a group, to any siren song "sung in bass". And because the aspirations of the American Negro are essentially egalitarian, a "bourgeois" document like the American Constitution has a liberating potential in the Black Belt of Alabama and in the ghetto of Harlem that the *Communist Manifesto* could never hope to have.<sup>31</sup>

Negroes believe "that the objective of national policy should be full equality for all citizens." The temper of the contemporary Negro appears to reflect a determination that significant progress toward this goal be made now. He demands of government, the labor movement, and of all of his allies that they, as Henry L. Moon puts it, "take a clear, consistent, and unequivocal line against racial discrimination and segregation." The Negro realizes that his struggle for civil rights is suspended in the context of the social progress of the nation as a whole. Thus those people who strive to improve the lot of the common man are his natural allies. And, further, in order to attain the objective of complete and full equality "and invest it with significance, we must have an economy of abundance—a society with jobs for all, decent housing available to the masses, plenty of food, and adequate educational, health, and recreational facilities."<sup>32</sup> The social purpose and aspirations of the Negro imply the ideology and politics of the welfare state.

<sup>28</sup> Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York, 1925).

<sup>29</sup> Paul Lewinson, *Race, Class, and Party* (New York, 1932), pp. 100-101.

<sup>30</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom, A History of American Negroes* (New York, 1947), p. 512. See also Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York, 1944), I, 491-497.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 502.

<sup>32</sup> Lewinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-109; Myrdal, *op. cit.*, I, 479-486. See also Bertram Wilbur Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South* (Chicago, 1937), pp. 136-172 and V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, 1949), pp. 633-643.

<sup>33</sup> Henry L. Moon, *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* (Garden City, N. Y., 1948), pp. 87, 103-113. See also Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York, 1954).

<sup>34</sup> Robert E. Martin, "The Relative Political Status of the Negro in the United States," *Journal of Negro Education*, XXII (Summer, 1953), 368.

<sup>35</sup> Myrdal, *op. cit.*, I, 516.

<sup>36</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York, 1949), pp. 544-563; Harry J. Walker, "Changes in the Structure of Race Relations in the South," *American Sociological Review*, XIV (June, 1949), 379-380; Myrdal, *op. cit.*, II, 720-378.

<sup>37</sup> Robert H. Jackson, *The Struggle for Judicial Supremacy, A Study of a Crisis in American Power Politics* (New York, 1941).

<sup>38</sup> Myrdal, *op. cit.*, I, 486-488.

<sup>39</sup> Henry L. Moon, "The Negro Vote in the South: 1952," *Nation*, CLXXV (September 27, 1952), 248.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 367.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (New York, 1952), pp. 90-94, 121-122.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander Heard, *A Two-Party South* (Chapel Hill, 1952), pp. 248-249.

<sup>44</sup> Louis Harris, an associate of Elmo Roper, found in a recent study that the approximately 3,000,000 Northern Negro voters are twice as politically active as low income white voters. See 163-164.

<sup>45</sup> Myrdal, *op. cit.*, I, 493.

<sup>46</sup> Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

<sup>47</sup> Lubell, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>48</sup> For the effectiveness of an FEPC, see Elmer A. Carter, "Practical Considerations of Anti-Discrimination Legislation: Experience under the New York Law Against Discrimination," *Cornell Law Quarterly*, XL (Fall, 1954), 40-57. As of January 1, 1955 eleven states and some two dozen



cities have FEPC laws and ordinances. Over one-fourth of the total population is covered by such laws. The pressure for greater coverage is continuing.

The argument is frequently advanced that for law to be effective, it must follow a program of education which has created a favorable climate of public opinion. However, the way by which social reform is effected is for law, court decisions, and education simultaneously to be brought to bear upon festering social problems. Carey McWilliams, a penetrating student of the process of social reform, analyzes the problem of the improvement of the position of the Negroes as follows:

Social progress against bigotry depends largely upon education and legislation. These are the keenest tools a democracy provides its citizens and are, in effect, the two legs on which the Negro has moved forward. . . . For the past fifty years, education through the schools and the press has prepared the public mind for progress. Laws, court decisions, and other social action consolidate this change in attitude in concrete measures. At times, the legislation and the public discussion leading up to it have come first and have been powerful tools of public education. Thus, where a legal structure is static, little progress is achieved.—"The Negro in American Life," *The United States Information Service* (Washington, n.d.), pp. 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Lubell, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> Emmett E. Dorsey, "The Evolution of the Concept of the Welfare State in the United States since 1890." (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation. The American University, Washington, 1958), pp. 1-124.

<sup>24</sup> Lubell, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>25</sup> NAACP pamphlet, "Survey of the Negro Vote in the 1952 Presidential Election," (New York, December, 1952), p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> CIO-PAC, "Report on 1954 Elections," *CIO-PAC* (Washington, January 21, 1955), p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Robert E. Martin, "Recent Political Trends Among Negroes." Paper presented to the Government Section of the Southwestern Social Science Association, Dallas, Texas, April 8, 1954, pp. 10-12.

<sup>28</sup> The history of the Communist attempt to enlist the support of Negroes is well documented by Wilson Record in his *The Negro and the Communist Party* (Chapel Hill, 1951).

<sup>29</sup> Myrdal, *op. cit.*, I, 510. Emphases as in the original.

<sup>30</sup> Record, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>32</sup> Moon, *Balance of Power*, pp. 218-219.