

grounds. One suggestion is to require the person bringing a charge of plagiarism to file a bond to cover the defendant's costs should the latter be adjudged innocent; but this is opposed for the good reason that it would be a manifest injustice to *bona-fide* claimants without money to buy such a bond. Another plan is that authors contribute to a common defense fund or that they take out insurance similar to that issued by Lloyd's to members of the British Society of Authors. Both these suggestions are opposed on the ground that they would in no way diminish the number of unjust claims, which is the end aimed at, any more than automobile insurance has lessened the number of motor accidents. Furthermore, Lloyd's policy offers very limited protection. The only effective remedy suggested seems to be one that seeks the creation of a sort of grand jury, to include some men familiar with literature and literary practices, to pass upon cases of plagiarism before they are submitted for trial. Thus, suits brought by persons suffering from an imaginary grievance or by persons merely seeking easy money could be separated from just claims and

would never come to trial. If the plaintiff whose suit was rejected by such a jury still insisted on a trial, he could then be required to file a bond covering the defendant's costs. But if proper means were not provided for the selection of the right kind of jury, the trouble and expense would possibly be increased by two trials instead of the usual one.

Obviously the situation is not an easy one to settle, and there is, to be sure, no telling what the learned lawmakers at Washington are likely to do when the matter is presented to them for solution. In the meantime the law designed to protect authors against theft will continue to be the most effective means of stealing from them, and the present open season for those out gunning for literary successes will continue indefinitely. Not the least amusing feature of the plagiarism tangle is the fact that authors, who point with no little amount of pride to the reforms their pens have been able to influence, seem to remain almost totally unable to help themselves out of a situation in which their own interests are most deeply involved.



The Negro Grows Up

By EUGENE GORDON

The Negro becomes critical of himself, trusts his preachers less, takes less to white paternalism, studies more the history of the race, and is less distrustful of the whites; so says Eugene Gordon of his people. Mr. Gordon is a native of Florida, a graduate of Howard University, at present on the staff of the Boston Post.

WHEREAS THE American Negro used to whimper when hurt, he now sets his jaws. In those circumstances in which he once was patently childish he now is sophisticated and cynical. He used to smart under the mildest criticism, but now he critically dissects himself. In short, the American Negro has come of age.

There are involved at least six factors that tend to prove the truth of my assertion. The first is that the American Negro has become critical of himself and thereby tolerant of outside criticism. Second, he is less credulous of and also somewhat cynical toward what his preachers tell him about heaven and hell. Third, he has fewer inhibitions than formerly. Fourth, he is beginning to chafe under the patronage of paternalistic whites and to show evidence of desiring to propel his own craft. Fifth, he has begun a serious but enthusiastic study of Negro history. And, sixth, he is less distrustful of and bears less prejudice toward whites than was once the case.

The Negro's unbiased and unflattering criticism of himself had its genesis in Jean Toomer. When this brilliant young Negro wrote *Cane* he shocked a great many staid and respectable colored folk. So impersonally objective

yet so intimately understanding was it that scores of readers at first suspected its author of being a southern cracker. Never before had any American Negro dared tell so much about his folk.

His readers were uncomfortably sensitive. Here was a Negro writer exposing his race's most shameful weaknesses to the supercilious stare of the whites. He talked of black prostitutes and white men, and of white prostitutes and black men. While everybody admitted that what he said was true, they insisted that since nobody had discussed it before there seemed no reason for discussing it now. The subject was absolutely taboo.

The great mass of colored folk could not appreciate Toomer. The great mass still can not appreciate him. As a matter of fact, the great mass of colored folk can not now bear to be criticized, despite the continuous stream of criticism that is released upon them by their more intelligent leaders. Perhaps I should add here that it is not to the masses I refer in the discussion of this subject. It is, indeed, to the increasing number of educated colored folk, especially the intellectuals. The masses had been taught for years that pride of race consisted primarily in maintaining silence regarding their human weaknesses. For some unexplainable reason they

looked upon human frailty as Negro frailty, and the black man who exposed these frailties was considered a traitor. Thus, they came to suffer with chronic nice-nastiness and were perpetually miserable.

Rudolph Fisher followed Toomer. Among other things he exposed the Harlem "rent party". I have seen many a nice Boston colored girl blush with humiliation at the thought that whites would learn the dreadful truth that some colored folk gave "rent parties". One in particular, I recall, lost her appetite when, reading *The Promised Land* while she ate, she came across the detailed description of such a party. At the same time other young Negro writers were bandying such racial phrases as "high yaller", "high brown", "chocolate brown" and "stovepipe black".

Once the white man learned of these intimate pet designations, we were told, he would possess a most vital weapon of ridicule. But that was not all. These same writers told shamelessly how black boys and girls, under the natural urge of protective coloration in order to prevent their extinction, bleached their skin and straightened their hair. "What will the white people think?" wailed the staid and respectable. "Why give them all our most precious secrets? Aren't we supposed to keep any of our weaknesses to ourselves?"

They did not remember of course while protesting that whites in increasing numbers already knew more about these secrets than many colored folk knew. Many of the Negroes did not know even that it was the whites who manufactured, and advertised for sale, devices and decoctions for untangling kinky hair, bleaching dark skin, thinning thick lips and elevating flat noses, and that, therefore, black folk were not actually giving

and respectable colored folk were self-conscious and terribly mortified.

Later writers, among them Wallace Thurman and Langston Hughes, turned other tricks out of the black bag. Thurman discussed the Harlemite's home life, his social life and his church. Hughes in an article in the *Nation* ridiculed the "nice" people of Washington because they professed disgust of Toomer. In other places Hughes told of the American Negro's preferences in food, music, and entertainment, and dilated in his "blues" upon the dark brother's merits as a lover. Harlem was taken up, turned inside out, and shaken vigorously. The denizens thereof were studied like strange microscopic cultures. Nothing was omitted in the reports resulting from this study. Thus, a mysterious unknown black group came to be best-known of all the folk groups among us. Harlem, after all, was an excellent specimen.

Presently there came *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*, and *The Crisis: Record of the Darker Races*, offering prizes for poems, short stories, plays, essays and sketches about colored folk. There followed, naturally, more delving, scalpel-wielding, and probing; so that finally all who read at all knew the American Negro precisely for what he was. He no longer harbored dark secrets, from either the Caucasian or himself. At last the literate whites knew almost as much about the blacks as the literate and illiterate blacks knew about the whites—which was a great deal. For it is significant that Negro readers of the daily press have been for years infinitely better-informed of the Caucasians' secrets than the Caucasians have been about the Negroes'. All the whites needed to do, even before colored folk began to expose themselves, was to peruse the Negro press.

This literary movement, I say, was the beginning of the colored man's criticism of himself. When the first shock of the exposé diminished, Negro newspapers became bolder in the same direction. They criticized black folk for errors that previously had been condoned or overlooked. The Negro press had existed until now solely to propagandize the whites in the blacks' favor. Its news generally reflected to the discredit of the whites and to the credit of the colored folk. The black man was represented as a godly, long-suffering martyr. He had no fault, no blemish, no weakness—at least none that the white man was supposed to know about. Only the whites were vile.

This biased attitude was defended as necessary to combat the white man's cruelty and prejudice. It was said to foster race pride in colored folk. This it did, too, to an extent, but it also fostered silly prejudices.

Such was the old Negro press.

The colored writers already referred to, with some not yet mentioned, caused the change. It was not long, following the appearance of these writers, until editorials in the Negro press catechized black folk on their sins, Negro "leaders" were stood up in the glare of the press spotlight and scrutinized until they squirmed. Colored feature, editorial and special writers, men like J. A. Rogers, George S. Schuyler, A. Phillip Randolph, Chandler Owen, and Theophilus Lewis, of the *Messenger*; William Kelley and Edgar M. Grey of the *Amsterdam News*; and W. P. Dabney, editor of the *Cincinnati Union*, were characteristic of the newer order. Cold, passionless, objective in their point of view, impartial in their criticism of American life, these excellent writers discussed black men and white men alike. Very soon all who read at all were accustomed to the

method. They no longer sweated in embarrassment when white writers mentioned unpleasant facts, for black writers had already mentioned them. And now we approach a situation in which facts cease altogether to be unpleasant.

But the Negro's self-criticism has not ended with his person. It has included Christianity, the Negro church and the Negro preacher. It is only recently that the American Negro church and its minister have been held less than sacrosanct. Hitherto both have been hedged about by a picket fence of taboos. The colored minister, like a few colored editors, has exercised unlimited license to attack whom he would, but he himself has been inviolate. Well, that day has passed. There is now seldom a gathering of intelligent colored folk in which soon or later there is not wholesome and exhaustive discussion of religion, church and ministry. The newspapers themselves are often scornful in their attitude toward brothers of the cloth and are generous with space in publishing their falls from grace. They criticize the parson's illiteracy, his ignorance of human impulses, his inefficiency as a leader, his ineptitude as a businessman, and his monkeyshines in the pulpit. On the other hand, those preachers who deserve credit are not overlooked.

But if the newspapers are generous with criticism, the youth of the race are prodigal. Especially is this true of college youth, who go beyond questioning the church and its ministry. They let it be known that they accept nothing without first subjecting it to close and careful scrutiny. It must meet their standard, which is to say the standard of modern civilization.

The most conspicuous movement is the middle-class Negro's disposition to lay aside color prejudices within the race. Criticism of this inhibition by his

own writers has helped the black man to see the folly of it. Thus, its almost total collapse has been brought about by the colored Americans themselves. There are black men and women in the group who are a living refutation of the fiction that only mixed bloods are worthy. And although this prejudice is not totally dissipated, there are signs of its approaching dissipation.

One of the most significant of the phases indicating full growth is the black man's desire to help himself. "Not alms but opportunity!" he cries, and he means it. College young men and women of colored America are more bitter today because of lack of opportunity than for any other reason. "Only give me a chance to show what I can do," they cry, "and you won't have to speculate whether to retain my service; you will retain it, if you like good work."

It was not many years ago that the Negro "leader" trembled with dread lest he actually be called upon to lead. Take Howard University, for instance. Founded more than a half-century ago, it was not until the last year or so past that Negroes favored a black president. Why?

"Really, the black man isn't yet ready to head an institution like Howard."

"Why not?"

"Well, because he couldn't command the respect of the student body. You see, the students have been used to seeing a white man over them, and we fear that the change might work to the detriment of discipline. Besides, a white man has more influence with Congress and with philanthropists. Howard needs money; how could a Negro, lacking influence, get it?"

Despite these objections, the younger element of the Howard alumni won. And although the man to whom they gave the presidency is a clergyman, with the colored clergyman's characteristic weaknesses in his position, he is far su-

perior to the lot of white ministers who formerly headed the institution. Certainly, he has vindicated those who insisted that he could not be worse than former white heads of Howard University.

The Kansas City *Call* published recently an excellent editorial titled "Still Carrying the Tin Cup." It candidly deplored the average Negro's willingness to accept gratuities from white men and women for Negro institutions, causes and enterprises, while the black folk themselves spent recklessly for their own pleasure. The editorial said in part:

Of course, 60 years is a short time in which to rid ourselves of the tin-cup habit, but, even so, some little progress has been made, and the begging should decrease in proportion to the progress. By no means is the race self-sustaining, nor is it wealthy, but stages of independence have been reached and we should now be looking about our business.

As evidence that this sort of scolding is becoming general I might cite the fact that the *Call's* editorial was republished generally throughout the Negro press. A similar attitude is illustrated by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League. These excellent organizations have both white and colored officials and members, but the masses of the membership are Negroes. And the masses of the membership support these organizations with their own hard-earned money.

The National Negro Business League, with headquarters at Tuskegee Institute, wages a continuous campaign among colored folk to support their own enterprises rather than those of the whites. While, taken by and large, this doctrine is not wholly sound, yet it is giving the black folk keener appreciation of their own efforts.

Edgar P. Benjamin is a colored law-

yer of Boston. Not long since he gave his people \$10,000 toward establishing Resthaven, a home for aged men and women of both races. A year or so ago, Mrs. Aaron Malone, head of Poro College, a business enterprise in St. Louis, gave \$20,000 to Howard University. Casper Holstein of New York was the colored man who made possible the literary contests that have been held by *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*. The *Crisis* contests also have been financed chiefly by Negro business men.

These contributions have all been comparatively small but have indicated nevertheless the colored man's determination to help himself.

What is perhaps the most significant of these indications of adulthood is the Negro's increasing pride in his own history. Led by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, director of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, of Washington, D. C., Negro newspapers, magazines, fraternal bodies, sororities, and women's clubs annually hold "Negro History Week". During this period the newspapers and magazines publish little-known facts about great men of the race, and organizations hold essay contests and public symposiums, inviting noted Negroes to address them.

Dr. Woodson's association has done more than any other body to make Negro history popular. It has been instrumental in getting authentic histories of Negro achievement into high schools and colleges, while lately it has begun a "Home Study Department", which gives colored folk (or any other persons) a correspondence course in Negro history. The instruction staff, all Negroes, includes some of the best-educated men in the country.

Some of the country's best libraries now keep files of Negro newspapers and magazines. In these publications is set down the very essence of the Negro's pride in himself. It is unmistakably

evident even to the most casual reader. And the very consciousness of the fact that white patrons of college and public libraries read his history strengthens the black man's self-esteem. However, long before the white man began curiously to delve into the black man's printed records of himself the Negro was lifting his chest with pride.

Finally—incontrovertible evidence of approaching maturity — the colored American is casting out fear and distrust of the white American. Among the masses of colored folk even today, "I ain't got no use for no white man" is a common-place expression. Why? Because "you can't trust none of them"; because "all white folks are mean, onery, hypocritical, and unjust".

The civilized reader will readily comprehend the reason for this attitude. It is not necessary to remind him that the "meanness", "oneryness", hypocrisy and injustice long practised against blacks by large numbers of whites are the causes. But the civilized minority of Negroes, in this instance as in others, is leading the masses of blacks out of the morass. Men like W. P. Dabney and George S. Schuyler are too intelligent to accept the white man as more than an ordinary human being like themselves. On the other hand, they are wearied of the asinine chatter about the "untrustworthiness" of all whites.

"We condemn this wholesale damning of the masses for the faults of the few," Mr. Dabney declares editorially in his newspaper, the *Union*. "We see the injustice of a similar attitude on the part of many white people toward us. . . . We gain nothing by being unjust simply because we are, and have been, victims of injustice."

Mr. Dabney further points out that "among the teeming millions of this country there are many of the opposite

race who are friendly toward us". He adds: "Were this not so, America would be a hell."

"Dabney is perfectly right," Schuyler applauds, and goes on:

For some years it has been apparent to me that Aframericans whoop entirely too much about black this and black that, and Negro this and Negro that, while singing a hymn of hate against all people who happen to be of the group that is conveniently termed white. Some of our editors particularly are offenders in this direction. Take the words Negro and black out of the conversations and writings of some of our folks and substitute the words white and Caucasian, and their expressions would sound like the bel-lowlings from some member of the Ku Klux Klan . . . In our endeavor to get away from the sickening attitude of the Uncle-Tom Negro, who slavishly eulogizes and trusts white people indiscriminately, some of us are going to the other extreme.

But white faces, most colored folk have long believed, are masks behind which lurk cruelty, hatred, and deceit.

They forget that white men freed them, helped them to educate themselves, passed laws to protect their political rights, and even today give lavishly of their wealth to Negro needs. Of course this does not include *all* whites, but it includes a sufficiently large number to show men like Dabney and Schuyler that indiscriminate hurling of bricks into the ranks of the whites is certain eventually to strike and injure friends.

Yes, the American Negro has just about grown up. Naturally, he will continue to develop for some time, for he has not yet reached full growth. We are proud, however, to present him in all the promise of his fresh young manhood: a vigorous, stalwart, broad-shouldered, carefree and somewhat arrogant youth, yet one who soberly realizes the significance of a man's responsibilities.

Transcendent

By BILL GERRY

*Let others mutter cold disparagement;
To her he was the sun and moon and earth,
And to him, joyfully, her knee she bent,
That all might know her measure of his worth.
And if in him she found a spot grown bare,
She poured out living waters from her heart
To grow again the vital greenness there,
That none might ever mark the place apart.*

*Why pity her? She would not understand,
Or if she did, would pity more the soul
That has for the dear gifts within its hand
Not known a mecca, or for love a goal,
She only cries against that force perverse
Which stole the ruler of her universe.*