

THE NEW NEGRO AND THE OLD

By KELLY MILLER

There are two types of temperament in every race. They persist throughout all time and among all people. The conservative and the radical are the complementary components of human nature. They are indeed, essential to social well being. Without the radical

there could be no progress; without the progressive, progress would not be worth while. Try all things, says the apostle Paul, hold to what is good. If all were the conservatives, where were the radicals?; if all were radicals, where were the conservatives. The conservatives cannot say to the radicals—"I have no need of thee"; nor yet the radicals to the conservatives—"I have no need of thee." Each has its place and function in the equation of social well being.

We discover these two types in the Negro race from the earliest times. The good and faithful servant, ever ready to do his master's will and ever obedient to his master's decree represented the conservative type and temperament. He found that there was a certain degree of comfort and easy enjoyment to be secured by conforming to the requirements of his present environment. He was wholly devoid of initiative, courage or self assertion, but was satisfied with the crumbs that fell from his master's table. He found that the more obedient he became, the more abundantly did the crumbs fall. He did not dare dream of freedom, for such dreaming would lead to trouble and frustrate the entente cordiale between his lord and himself. The great bulk of the slaves were of this temperament. From this type were selected the household servants and trustees who were given petty overseership over the conduct of his fellow slaves. They came in closer touch and contact with the master class and absorbed much of the superficial culture and mimic manners of the ruling class.

On the other hand, there were those of unconquerable spirit. They could never be whipped. The prudent master always kept him as far removed as possible. He never became a house servant, but was always banished to the quarters as a field hand, and fed on meal and bacon. There were regular slave breakers, who were paid a price for breaking the spirit of these high spirited slaves. Often they lost their lives rather than surrender to the authority of the master's whip. They were often sold to the far South and subjected to the crude discipline of the pioneer plantations. Frederick Douglass was of this type. He tells us in his autobiography of the dual between himself and his overseer, who was determined to subject him to the discipline of the lash. Being the stronger of the two, he held his overseer's hands, but dared not strike him because of the dire penalty which a slave incurred by striking a white master or overseer.

One might well typify these two classes of Uncle Tom and Nat Turner. Uncle Tom was the creature of fiction, but was as real as if he had lived in the flesh. He was meek and lowly of spirit. He received all that the master bestowed upon him, whether of good or ill, with a bowed head and thankful heart. On the other hand, Nat Turner was determined to take up arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing, end them. We now condemn, even abhor his violent method and bloody procedure. But we must remember that he used the only weapon of protest available. There was no freedom of speech. He dared not openly complain against the iniquity of a cruel bondage. He could not mount the rostrum and air his grievances before the

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The term, New Negro, was an outcome of the World War, continues Dr. Miller, who sees this type of Negro embodied in the one who marched off to battle to make the world safe for democracy and returned to chagrin and disappointment when he found that same democracy for which he fought as a world principle denied him.

community or before the world. He must either bear the ills he had with fortitude and quiet submission, or do as he did. But there were few Nat Turners and many Uncle Toms. The great bulk of any race always belong to the conservative type. There are few restless spirits who are ever seeking to upset existing conditions, in quest of some better way.

A careful analysis would reveal these two types of Negroes today. They of course do not exhibit rawness and crudity of their ante types. The modern day Uncle Toms do not complacently yield to cruel usage as did the hero of Mrs. Stowe's story. But the millions of the race bear the burden of injustice, discrimination and harsh usage without murmur or complaint. The spiritual descendants of Nat Turner do not use the crude weapon of the Virginia insurrectionist in voicing their protest against the wrongs of their race. They utilize the more humane weapons of protest, such as the pen, the press and the platform to promote their propaganda.

On last Sunday I was addressing the Young Men's Christian Association on this theme, and narrowly escaped a heated controversy, when I stated that if Uncle Tom were alive today, he would be a member of the Y. M. C. A.; while Nat Turner, if alive would join the N. A. A. C. P. No analogy runs on all fours. These two organizations embody more fully than any others these two contrasted types of temperament. The one moves constructively along allowed lines for the betterment of the race; while the other clamors for the full measure of human rights, without reserve or delay. A Negro of avowed radical temperament would find himself ill at ease in the one, while the cautious, hesitant or timid spirit would find little room for comfort in the other. The race needs them both, and could not well spare either. They are both seeking the same objective by different methods of approach.

During the anti-slavery struggle, radical white men led the way for radical Negroes. No Negro during that struggle spoke a single radical word until some white man had spoken it first. During the reconstruction era all Negroes became radical, in the outward expression of their spirit. None were satisfied with the present status, but all fought for chance. Equality was the catch word. Fred Douglass still remains the Negro's foremost champion of equality. Besides

him there is none other with voice so clear and strong as his. He added to a natural disposition to radicalism the spirit of the age and time in which he lived.

I might stop here long enough to state that the current definition of a radical loses its accustomed significance when applied to Negro protestants.

The man who contends for the universal application of the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, the Sermon on the Mount, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, ought to be called the true conservative. It is only the man who stands against these standards that should be branded a trouble making radical. But it has ever been so. The ante bellum Negro who demanded freedom for himself and race was denounced to be a dangerous man, a bad Negro, one who by some means or other, must be done away with. Our terms then are used in this restricted sense. The radical Negro, in current parlance, is the Negro who stands and contends for equality; while the good conservative Negro is the one who expresses no dissatisfaction with inequality, and tries to find comfort and satisfaction, without remonstrance or protest.

After the overthrow of the reconstruction regime, the race became sharply divided into two camps. Booker Washington held the center of the stage. Radicals and conservatives arrayed themselves in hostile alignment, more intent on destroying one another, than on offering combat to the common enemy. Then came the World War which made all Negroes conservatives. The leading spokesman of the so-called radicals, urged upon the race to close ranks, forget grievances, past and present, and march in solid phalanx with white America on the understood and accepted basis of inequality. The spirit of war makes all citizens bow to the common judgment or places them behind prison bars. The conservation of the War was largely a conservatism of compulsion.

The term, New Negro, was the outcome of the World War. Negroes either forgot their grievances, or held them in abeyance and went across the seas to help spread the gospel of equality. They quite naturally expected to gain a much larger, if not a full measure of equality at home, as a result of their valiant participation to promote this doctrine among others. But great was his chagrin when, after helping to bring democracy to others, he returned home to find that he had been fighting for a hollow mockery instead of holy democracy.

I have laid a broader foundation that I had intended. The superstructure cannot be completed in one release, and will be continued in my next.