

The Rise of the Black Internationale (1938)

The three generations since Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation (which a quarter million black Union soldiers rescued from oblivion as a mere scrap of paper) have been the most momentous in the history of the world. They have seen unprecedented shifts and incredible alignments. They have seen miraculous inventions fantastic in their potentialities. They have seen such cruelty, such conquests, such persecution and oppression, such exploitation as humanity never dreamed before.

More important to colored people, these 75 years have seen the steady decline in the power and prestige of people of color the world over, thanks to the improvement in European firearms, the amazing technological advance of the West and the shattering of distance and isolation by modern transportation and communication. And most important of all, these years have seen the resultant rise of the White Internationale and the gradual rise of the Black Internationale in opposition; not powerful opposition as yet, perhaps, but containing vast potentialities of which the white world is all too painfully cognizant.

So far as the colored world is concerned, one might refer to these three generations as the period of fluctuating inferiority complexes. The decline in the fortunes of the darker races was quickly reflected in the attitude of the white world toward them and the colored people's attitude toward themselves. An important factor in the racial equation, this self-opinion, for there is a human tendency to become what we *think* we are. Status largely determines hope or hopelessness. Coupled with white control of colored education through control of government and missionary schools, the colored races were put on the defensive psychologically and so remained until the World War. It is important to trace the politico-economic changes that altered the world *without* and so altered the world *within*.

In 1863 Africa, with the exception of South Africa, Sierra Leone, Senegal, the Boer Republics, various stations and forts on the West Coast, and the Barbary States on the fringes of the South Mediterranean, was virtually unknown territory to Europeans. Europe had not yet been sufficiently prodded by circumstances or implemented by armaments to effect the conquest of Africa.

In the seventh-century the dusky Mosiems had conquered all northern Africa. They had planted colonies at Mombasa, Malindi, and Sofala which developed into powerful commercial states. They had swept into Spain and Portugal, ruled the former for 700 years and threatened the freedom of white Europe. In 1453 the Turks had conquered Constantinople. From 1517 to 1551 they extended their rule over Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli, and at one time rolled up to the gates of Vienna. Beginning with the European "Age of Discovery" in the fifteenth-century the fortunes of the darker races began to decline, but the trend was slow until 1875. As late as the beginning of the nineteenth-century the dusky Barbary States held tens of thousands of whites captive and flaunted their banners in the faces of Europe's navies.

While the slave trade had undermined the excellent monarcho-communistic economy of Africa, black men still ruled it (and often profited from the traffic). Europe had first to defeat the "Infidel," to end its disastrous nationalistic wars, to down Napoleon, and to start the age of steam before it could know Africa. Prior to that it was only interested in slaves and tall stories from the Dark Continent.

Interest in Africa revived with the explorations beginning in 1788. Interestingly enough this was also the age of Watt and Eli Whitney, of the Declaration of Independence and the Rights of Man. France occupied Egypt in 1798–1803 and Britain followed her. But an almost independent state was formed there under Mehemet Ali

which extended its rule deep into the Sudan from 1820 onward. The first recorded crossing of Africa was accomplished between the years 1802 and 1811 by two Portuguese Negro traders, Pedro Baptista and A. José, who passed from Angola eastward to Zambezi. In 1814 England formally annexed Cape Colony, over 150 years after the first permanent white settlement by the Dutch on April 6, 1652.

Waterloo for Africa

Waterloo in Europe spelled Waterloo for Africa. But the end was still a long way off. There was still the ages old struggle between Christianity and Mohammedanism for trade rights and political supremacy disguised as Holy War and suppression of slavery. The Moslems were accused of continuing the slave trade and stripping Africa of manpower. The Christians with their developing power economy needed raw materials furnished by enslaved black workers at the source of supply. So the rush of "Christian" explorers, traders, and missionaries descended upon Africa.

In 1863 Livingstone was exploring the Zambezi and Lake Nyasa, and making mulattoes the while. Speke was "solving the riddle of the Nile," Baker was "discovering" Lake Albert Nyanza, Stanley was yet to "find" Livingstone and solve the "mysteries" of Victoria Nyanza, Tanganyika, and the Congo River. It was the age of Schweinfurth and du Chaillu, of stirring tales of rich and powerful black kingdoms with swarms of stalwart black warriors, of mysterious cities like Timbuktu, of strange religious rites deep in the heart of steaming jungles.

As late as 1875 Great Britain controlled but 250,000 square miles, France 170,000 square miles. Portugal 40,000 square miles, Spain 1,000 square miles, and the Dutch Republics of Transvaal and Orange Free but 150,000 square miles of Africa. Turkey held sway very loosely over Egypt, the Egyptian Sudan, Tripoli, and Tunis. Morocco, Abyssinia, Zanzibar, and Liberia were independent. The great kingdoms of Ashanti, Dahomey, Benin, Uganda, Cazembe, Mustá Yanvo, and countless other Moham-

medan sultanates and pagan countries still enjoyed their freedom. The Boers paid yearly tribute to the warlike Zulus and it was not until England's successful campaign against the Ethiopians in 1867-68 that that mountain kingdom learned what to expect from the white world.

In 1869 the richest diamond fields on earth were discovered in the Vaal River valley and the Suez Canal was opened to traffic: two events that focused added attention on Africa. Two years later England completed acquisition of the Gold Coast littoral. Already France had grabbed Senegal (1854) and Obok (1862) at the entrance to the Red Sea. In 1873 England worsted the Ashantis and two years later lifted the Union Jack over Delagoa Bay. Events were happening faster than anyone imagined, and yet on the eve of the biggest land-grab in history a House of Commons committee considering West Africa affairs could recommend "that all further extension of territory or assumption of government, or new treaty offering any protection to native tribes, would be inexpedient." Thick-witted Britons!

Now economic rivalry, political necessity, and rapid flow of invention were forcing the issue. The South beaten, the U. S. government forced withdrawal of France from Mexico and compelled other European powers to relinquish hopes of snatching territory in South America. Prussia defeated France in 1870 and the land-hungry German Empire was born late on the colonial scene. Italy became a nation instead of a conglomeration of Caribbean-like dukedoms and baronies and began looking for real estate abroad to add to her prestige.

Defeated France perforce switched her ambitions from Europe to Africa. The ambitions of young Germany and the grasping Leopold of Belgium set the pace for the imperialistic-minded world. These two countries had only Africa and the South Seas in which to seek exploitable territory. England, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal had grabbed everything else. Leopold's 1876 conference grew into the International African Association which afterward snatched the rich Congo "Free" State, with the United States the first to recognize the

robbery. In 1879 the Zulu military power was broken. The Germans called the 1884–85 imperialistic conference for the “proper” regulation of all stolen lands in Africa, but even while the criminals were conferring German agents planted the Kaiser’s emblem in Southwest Africa, Togoland, Cameroons, and Southeast Africa. Alarmed by these precipitous and typically Teutonic methods, the British, French, and Portuguese redoubled their efforts. By means of bullets, chicanery, gin, and Christianity the white nations by 1900 had conquered or annexed all the rest of Africa and native kings who opposed them were either in exile or gathered to their fathers.

The Americas

The period from 1863 to 1876 which saw the African kingdoms drop into the European sack, also saw the emancipated Americans rise to the full promise of Appomatox, the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments and the political power inaugurated by Reconstruction. There was hope in their breasts that the darkest era was behind them; that they were on the threshold of full citizenship rights and privileges in the Union, and destined to march arm in arm with their white fellow men to the creation of a truly great civilization.

Southward in Mexico chaos reigned. In Spanish America dictator followed dictator and black men played their part in nation-building. In Brazil and Cuba slavery still obtained. Unhappy Haiti was torn with the usual strife and tyranny. In the Orient, Britain had just emerged from a serious Indian rebellion. The Malay peninsula, Indo-China, and the spice islands asleep in the azure seas, were still under their native rulers. China was still powerful, despite the aggressions of Britain, Russia, and France, and lording it over Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, Formosa, and adjacent lands. Little Japan, forced out of her voluntary isolation by Admiral Perry, was hastening to make up for lost time with the classic policy stated by one of her diplomats as “We adopt, we adapt, and so we become adept.”

Railroads and steamships were in their infancy. Electric lights, telephones, bicycles, automobiles, the airplane, motion pictures, vulcanizing rubber, the phonograph, the radio, television, at countless other inventions and processes that have revolutionized industry and commerce and are now taken for granted were still in the future. The use of oil was confined to kerosene lamps and lubrication. Production and distribution of foodstuffs was yet to be revolutionized. Neither the repeating rifle, the machine gun, or the submarine had made its appearance. The new world economic that, by a combination of purely fortuitous circumstances, was already making the white nations the world rulers of colored nations was still in its infancy and the needs of national industry could still be served by the nation.

The scramble for colonies was not only a scramble for robber prestige but also a scramble for raw materials (or war materials) necessary to meet the essential demands of the new power economy without which no nation could or can become or remain a great power. The astounding technological mutation in the West in the century preceding and the years following 1875 also firmly established the international color line which until recently was only challenged by the sturdy and canny Nipponese. Black, brown, and yellow alike were maligned and Jim-crowed on every side and in every place. Everywhere white people took precedence over darker people. “Science” justified the stealing exploitation, and oppression by “proving” to white satisfaction the “inferiority” of colored folk. History was rewritten in the light of the Aryan race theory. The so-called social sciences were yoked to the chariot of imperialism. The whole thing was blessed by the Church which undermined the psychology of colored peoples under the guise of teaching “morality.”

American Negroes Groping

Betrayed by the Great Compromise of 1876 when Northern Republicans blessed their virtual re-enslavement in exchange for white Southern recognition of the crooked Hayes election, the

colored freeman progressively lost power and prestige in the face of Ku Klux Klan persecution and public indifference. By 1900 only one Negro's voice was heard in the halls of Congress and he was soon gone. The loudly-hailed rapprochement between the white South and the white North was well under way.

Nevertheless there was a tremendous store of hopefulness, optimism and naïveté in colored America. All you needed was education, religion, and thrift to succeed. You must pioneer and build something. Let down your bucket where you are. The Republican Party is the ship, all else the sea. The name of Lincoln made hearts leap under dusky hides and whatever white folks said was gospel.

Perhaps there *was* something to what they said about our having no history! Perhaps, after all, colored folks were inferior. Where, pray, *was* our background? What *had* our forefathers done except hew wood and haul water for Marse John? Mightn't it be true that we had never built a civilization? Wasn't that what our "education" taught us? Was there anything for us to be proud of—even our smooth dark skins and soft krinkly hair? Wasn't there some logic to the white contention that the lighter we were, the better we were? Didn't that put us nearer to perfection? So let's ridicule anything and everything Negro and eulogise everything white per se. Let's insist that black be comic and yellow refined *but of course not as refined as no color at all!* Let's make wall flowers out of our dusky-hued maidens and yell "Did you order any coal?" when a black man appeared. True, Negroes had ruled during Reconstruction, but weren't they corrupt like the white folks said and too ignorant to be entrusted with responsibility of office?

Thus some of the gropings of the Aframerican mind: fearful, uncertain, ignorant, and yet hopeful withal. Elsewhere, in India, China, Malaya, and Africa the products of mission training were similarly groping.

Then something else happened. World population, especially in Europe, was taking a tremendous spurt as forecast by Malthus. World area had not expanded an inch. Indeed, excessive and ignorant cultivation had contracted

the arable surface. As competition in international trade grew, capitalism turned to more intensive exploitation of home lands and there also competition grew more fierce. Panics came, unemployment grew, talk of a workers' revolution grew. There were insufficient markets for the goods produced in an ever endless stream. Fewer markets means fewer jobs. Fewer jobs made emigration imperative. The United States became the great labor market for white alien workers. The lower middle class of the white colonial powers sent their sons to Africa and Asia as clerks, army officers, and petty administrators. In America the growing emigration pushed Negroes farther and farther out to the economic fringes.

The period of 1900–1920 saw the social consequences of the politico-economic imperialism. Color discrimination and segregation grew apace as job competition intensified and imperialism became solidified. The lynching wave reached its peak. The Grandfather Clauses and the Springfield Race Riot were straws in the wind. Then the triumph of Japan over Russia in 1904 roused hope among colored people that the balance of power might again shift to their side. The Pan-African Conference in Paris in 1899, the Niagara Movement in 1904 and the organization of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909 marked a turning point in the mentality of the Negro. Elsewhere brown, black, and yellow men and women were coldly appraising this enforced white ideology and inaugurating a renaissance in opinion of self.

Beginning of Revolt

The World War came. The migration of black Southerners to the industrial North, the transportation of millions of brown and yellow and black workers and soldiers to the docks and battlefields of Europe gave new impetus to Negro thought; brought up new ideas of solidarity in the world of color. A quarter million dusky Americans in uniform went to France to be insulted and maligned and returned to be shot down. Millions of others made big

money at home. The Wilsonian slogans stirred the hearts and minds of the oppressed Africa and Asia. Dark colonial emigres schemed and planned in the salons and cellars of London, New York, Paris, Bombay, Batavia, Singapore, and Cairo. Mahatma Gandhi electrified the world with Non-cooperation. White people were *not* united, the colored world learned, and there were flaws in the armor of imperialism. Spengler and Stoddard wrote gloomily of the decline of the West and the rising tide of color. Soviet Russia, emerging from the slime of Czarism, tossed her bloodstained cap into the international arena professing love for all the oppressed the better to win concessions from their oppressors. Race riots swept over America and occurred elsewhere. American Negroes fought back with the white man's weapons in Chicago, Washington, Longview, and Tulsa. Thousands of Indians defied the British Raj and went to jail. In South Africa Clements Kadalie threw down the challenge of organized black workers to the brutal Boers. Four Pan-African Congresses under Du Bois brought together many bright minds of the Negro world.

Black scholars turned to piecing together the Negro's background. Negro newspapers, once mere pamphlets, challenged the best in America and unified the thinking of their people as never before. Black magazines seriously discussed the Negro's place in the world and his relation to other colored peoples. Black lawyers thundered at the bar of white justice. Marcus Garvey stirred the imagination of the ignorant and romantic; fostered pride of color where before there had too often been shame. Dusky surgeons headed hospitals. Businesses sprang up throughout Aframerica attesting to Negroes increasing belief in themselves, if nothing more. Again men of color sat in a dozen state legislatures and even returned to the halls of Congress. Black agitators spouted the jargon of socialism and communism and openly plotted the overthrow of the capitalist system.

In America, in Asia, in the islands of the sea the darker men became critical and condemnatory of white civilization where once they had

been worshipful and almost grateful for shoddy castoffs. Today the colored worker strikes in Trinidad and Jamaica, in Bathurst and Cape Town, in Nigeria and the Gold Coast. He sits down in Detroit and Chicago and pickets in New York and Pittsburgh. He sees whites relinquishing extraterritoriality in China and Egypt and giving Burma and India self-government. He sees erstwhile haughty whites cowering in the shellholes of Shanghai, a British ambassador machine gunned on the road to Nanking, and an American gunboat bombed to the bottom of the Yangste River without reprisal from a Caucasia become panic-stricken and paralyzed.

The New Negro Arrives

The New Negro is here. Perhaps no more courageous than the Old Negro who dropped his shackles in 1863, and fought against ignorance, propaganda lethargy, and persecution, but better informed, privy to his past, understanding of the present, unafraid of the future. No longer blindly worshipful of his rulers, he yet has learned to respect and study the intelligence and accumulation of power that has put them where they are. He has less illusions about his world.

He is aware that the balance of power is shifting in the world and so are his cousins in Africa, in India, in Malaysia, the Caribbean, and China. He is rightly suspicious of white labor even when it is sincere. He has seen white labor forget the Marxian divisions of proletariat and bourgeoisie and join the White Internationale with the capitalists. He has seen both the second and third Internationales abandon the colored peoples to the tender mercies of their masters in order to perpetuate the industrial system of Europe, which is based on colonial slave labor. He sees Russia abandon its announced revolutionary role and with French and British workingmen back Deladier and Chamberlain. And, as crowning infamy, he has seen the ruthless rape of defenseless Ethiopia with the pope applauding on the sidelines.

He knows that the fear of losing the colonial peoples and their resources is all that prevents another World War. He believes that to combat this White Internationale of oppression a Black Internationale of liberation is necessary. He sees and welcomes a community of interest

of all colored peoples. No longer ignorant, terrorized, or lacking confidence, he waits, and schemes and plans. He is the Damoclean sword dangling over the white world. Everywhere he is on the march, he cannot be stopped, and he knows it.