

The Nature of It

As things stand now, such a service can not be rendered by a weekly newspaper. What we need is a monthly which will be in touch with colored writers in Asia, South Africa, West Africa, Egypt, Europe, America and the West Indies. Only so can it render effective aid in molding international consciousness of the darker races.

Such a journal will contain, first and foremost NEWS — not a mere reprint of newspaper articles and items, but well-digested summaries of the world's news of the month in so far as it has special significance for the darker races. These summaries will be at the same time presentation and interpretation — after the manner of *The Nation*. In short, *The New Negro* must be for Negro-America what *The Nation* is for white America.

It will carry every month special articles written mainly by colored men — articles giving information, and articles furnishing interpretation, simple, clear and enlightening. By this means its readers will receive all the different currents of ideas that flow into the sea of racial consciousness.



27. "Two Negro Radicalisms," *New Negro* n.s. 4 (October 1919): 4–5, reprinted with revisions and minus second and third last paragraphs as "The Negro's Own Radicalism" in *When Africa Awakes*, 76–79.

One of Harrison's most important *New Negro* editorials was his "Two Negro Radicalisms" in the October 1919 issue. It identified the cause of the New Negro radicalism not in socialism or Bolshevism, but in the theory and practice of the color line. In response, it put forth a plea for developing race-conscious radicalism. In addition, for the first time, Harrison publicly discussed Marcus Garvey and stated that the key to Garvey's success was that he effectively publicized that which had been advocated by *The Voice* and the Liberty League. This editorial, along with one on "Negro Culture and the Negro College" (selection 35), set the stage for the joint work that would take place between Garvey and Harrison beginning in January 1920.

Harrison's three most important paragraphs were the last three — the first two of which did not appear in later reprints of the editorial. In these last paragraphs he explained the dual nature of race consciousness, that Garvey's mass appeal was due to his Liberty League-like call to "racialism, race-consciousness, racial solidarity," and that the new awakening was due to race consciousness, not to the less appealing, more purely class radicalism of the Black socialists (such as A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen).

Twenty years ago all Negroes known to the white publicists of America could be classed as conservatives on all the great questions on which thinkers differ. In matters of industry, commerce, politics, religion, they could be trusted to take the backward view. Only on the question of the Negro's "rights" could a small handful be found bold enough to be tagged as "radicals" — and they were howled down by both the white and colored ad-

herents of the conservative point of view. Today Negroes differ on all those great questions on which white thinkers differ, and there are Negro radicals of every imaginable stripe — agnostics, atheists, I. W. W.'s, Socialists, Single Taxers, and even Bolsheviks.

In the good old days white people derived their knowledge of what Negroes were doing from those Negroes who were nearest to them, generally their own selected exponents of Negro activity or of their white point of view. A classic illustration of this kind of knowledge was afforded by the Republican Party; but the Episcopal Church, the Urban League, or the U.S. Government would serve as well. To-day the white world is vaguely, but disquietingly, aware that Negroes are awake, different and perplexingly uncertain. Yet the white world by which they are surrounded retains its traditional method of interpreting the mass by the Negro nearest to themselves in affiliation or contact. The Socialist party thinks that the "unrest" now apparent in the Negro masses is due to the propaganda which its adherents support, and believes that it will function largely along the lines of socialist political thought. The great dailies, concerned mainly with their chosen task of being the mental bellwethers of the mob, scream "Bolshevist propaganda" and flatter themselves that they have found the true cause; while the government's unreliable agents envisage it as "disloyalty." The truth, as usual, is to be found in the depths: but they are all prevented from going by mental laziness and that traditional off-handed, easy contempt with which white men in America, from scholars like Lester Ward to scavengers like [Archibald E.] Stevenson, deign to consider the colored population of 12 millions.

In the first place the cause of the "radicalism" among American Negroes is international. But it is necessary to cause clear distinctions at the outset. The function of the Christian church is international. So is art, war, the family, rum and exploitation of labor. But none of these is entitled to extend the mantle of its own peculiar "internationalism" to cover the present case of the Negro discontent — although this has been attempted. The international fact to which Negroes in America are now reacting is not the exploitation of laborers by capitalists; but the social, political and economic subjection of colored peoples by white. It is not the Class Line, but the Color Line, which is the incorrect but accepted expression for the Dead Line of racial inferiority. This fact is a fact of Negro consciousness as well as a fact of externals. The international Color Line is the practice and theory of that doctrine which holds that the best stocks of Africa, China, Egypt and the West Indies are inferior to the worst stocks of Belgium, England, and Italy, and must hold their lives, lands and liberties upon such terms and conditions as the white races may choose to grant them.

On the part of the whites, the motive was originally economic; but it is no longer purely so. All the available facts go to prove that, whether in the United States or in Africa or China, the economic subjection is without exception keener and more brutal when the exploited are black, brown and yellow, than when they are white. And the fact

that black, brown, and yellow also exploit each other brutally whenever Capitalism has created the economic classes of plutocrat and proletarian should suffice to put purely economic subjection out of court as the prime cause of racial unrest. For the similarity of suffering has produced in all lands where whites rule colored races a certain similarity of sentiment, viz.: a racial revulsion of racial feeling. The peoples of those lands begin to feel and realize that they are so subjected because they are members of races condemned as "inferior" by their Caucasian overlords. The fact presented to their minds is one of race, and in terms of race do they react to it. Put the case to any Negro by way of test and the answer will make this clear.

The great World War, by virtue of its great advertising campaign for democracy and the promises which were held out to subject peoples, fertilized the Race Consciousness of the Negro people into the stage of conflict with the dominant white idea of the Color Line. They took democracy at its face value — which is — Equality. So did the Hindus, Egyptians, and West Indians. This is what the hypocritical advertisers of democracy had not bargained for. The American Negroes, like the other darker peoples, are presenting their cheques and trying to "cash in," and delays in that process, however unavoidable to the paying tellers, are bound to beget a plentiful lack of belief in either their intention or in their ability to pay. Hence the run on Democracy's bank — "the Negro unrest" of the newspaper paragraphers.

This Race Consciousness takes many forms, some negative, others positive. On the one hand we balk at Jim Crow, object to educational starvation, refuse to accept goodwill for good deeds, and scornfully reject our conservative leaders. On the other hand, we are seeking racial independence in business and reaching out into new fields of endeavor. One of the most taking enterprises at present is the Black Star Line, a steamship enterprise being floated by Mr. Marcus Garvey of New York. Garvey's project (whatever may be its ultimate fate) has attracted tens of thousands of Negroes. Where Negro "radicals" of the type known to white radicals can scarce get a handful of people, Garvey fills the largest halls and the Negro people rain money on him. This is not to be explained by the argument of "superior brains," for this man's education and intelligence are markedly inferior to those of the brilliant "radicals" whose "internationalism" is drawn from other than racial sources. But this man holds up to the Negro masses those things which bloom in their hearts — racialism, race-consciousness, racial solidarity — things taught first in 1917 by *THE VOICE* and The Liberty League. That is the secret of his success so far.

All over this land and in the West Indies Negroes are responding to the call of battle against the white man's Color Line. And, so long as this remains, the international dogma of the white race, so long will the new Negro war against it. This is the very Ethiopianism which England has been combatting from Cairo to the Cape.

Undoubtedly some of these newly-awakened Negroes will take to Socialism and Bol-

shevism. But here again the reason is racial. Since they suffer racially from the world as at present organized by the white race, some of their ablest hold that it is "good play" to encourage and give aid to every subversive movement within that white world which makes for its destruction "as it is." For by its subversion they have much to gain and nothing to lose. But they build on their own foundations. Parallel with the dogma of Class-Consciousness they run the dogma of Race-Consciousness. And they dig deeper. For the roots of Class-consciousness inhere in a temporary economic order; whereas the roots of Race-consciousness must of necessity survive any and all changes in the economic order. Accepting biology as a fact, their view is the more fundamental. At any rate, it is that view with which the white world will have to deal.



28. "The Women of Our Race," *New Negro* 4 (October 1919): 6-7; reprinted in *When Africa Awakes*, 89-91.

In the October 1919 *New Negro*, Harrison wrote about Black women, and praised their "native grace," "greater beauty," "fire and passion," and "charm." Though the tone is one of laudatory "esthetic appreciation," the article appears to be addressed primarily to men. At times Harrison accepted a double standard—viewing, studying, thinking, and writing being viewed as men's work and home responsibilities and beauty as women's concerns.¹⁹

America owes much to the foreigner and the Negro in America owes even more. For it was the white foreigner who first proclaimed that the only music which America had produced that was worthy of the name was Negro music. It naturally took some time for this truth to sink in, and, in the meantime, the younger element of Negroes, in their weird worship of everything that was white, neglected and despised their own race-music. More than one college class has walked out, highly insulted, when their white teachers had asked them to sing "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" and "My Lord, What a Morning." It is to be hoped that they now know better.

But the real subject of this editorial is not Negro music, but Negro women. If any foreigner should come here from Europe, Asia or Africa and be privileged to pass in review the various kinds of women who live in our America he would pick out as the superior of them all—the Negro woman. It seems a great pity that it should be left to the foreigner to "discover" the Negro-American woman. For her own mankind has been seeing her for centuries. And yet, outside of the vague rhetoric of the brethren in church and lodge when they want her to turn their functions into financial successes, and outside of Paul Dunbar and perhaps two other poets, no proper amount of esthetic appreciation of her has been forthcoming from their side.

Consider the facts of the case. The white women of America are charming to look at—in the upper social classes. But even the Negro laundress, cook or elevator girl far surpasses her mistress in the matter of feminine charms. No white woman has a color as