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**Chapter XX: The Negro and Social Justice**

During the last quarter of a century the Negro has had some ground for hope in the forces which bid fair to bring about a social readjustment involving the leveling of society if not the elevation of the underman to rule over his hitherto so-called superiors. • All elements of our population during this period have been subject to change by these evolutionary movements at work among the masses. The laboring man is no longer a servile employee of serf-like tendencies, but a radical member of a dissatisfied group, demanding a proper division of the returns from his labor. He is made more potential in this position by a recent propaganda to the effect that, so far as the laboring man is concerned, political affiliation means little, since all parties have been under the influence of aristocratic leaders, who, taking advantage of the ignorance of their constituents, have been able to rule this country for the benefit of those that *have* rather than in the interest of those that *have not*. In conformity then with the cycles of government borne out by history, this country has passed through the stage of aristocracy to that of the white man's democracy and bids fair to be revolutionized--330--in the near future by the rule of the mob represented by so-called organized labor. In other words, the country has developed from aristocracy to frontier democracy, from frontier democracy to progressivism and from progressivism almost to socialism.

This has been all but true even in the South where this social upheaval has expressed itself politically in the rise of the poor white man. During the days of slavery the South and, to some extent, the whole country, continued under the domination of aristocratic slaveholders. The poor whites, driven to the uplands and the mountains where slavery was unprofitable, never accumulated sufficient wealth to attain political recognition enjoyed by those living near the coast, despite the fact that there were numerous clashes, urgent debates, charges, and counter-charges coming from discordant elements among the mountain whites requiring an equalization of political power. When, however, after 1850 and especially after the Civil War there resulted an extension of the franchise, making it universal free manhood suffrage, the poor whites did not long delay in realizing the power given them through the ballot. Under the leadership then of men like James K' Vardaman, Benjamin Tillman, and Cole Blease, these uplanders have come into their own. Lacking that sympathy for the Negroes found among the ex-slaveholders, these poor whites have in getting control of the southern governments, however, effected sufficient changes to deprive the blacks of their civil and political rights and even of some economic opportunities. Giving so much attention to the perpetuation of caste, then, the molders of public opinion in the South have not permitted the radically democratic movements to invade that section. There it was discovered that it would be impossible to live up to the principles set forth without giving the Negroes a larger share of social and--331--political privileges. In the North, where a smaller number of Negroes have been found, there has not been any serious handicap to such movements. So far as the Single Taxers, the Socialists, and the *Bolsheviki* are concerned, the Negro may share at their table the same blessings vouchsafed to others. The rank and file of the people, however, have hesitated to recognize the Negro. Leaders in the North are still trying to decide how large a share of social justice, how much of the world-wide democracy, the Negro should enjoy.

The Negro, however, has been loath to drift into anarchy. His claim for social justice is rightly based on his work as a conservative and constructive force in the country. Although the present day encroachment on the part of the degraded class of whites has forced many Negroes to take

up arms in self-defense, as in Houston, Washington, and Chicago, in Elaine, Arkansas, Knoxville, Tennessee, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, the blacks have not and do not desire to become radical. Increasing persecution, however, is gradually forcing Negroes on the defensive into the ranks of the Socialists and Radicals. Negro preachers, editors, and teachers, who have for years pleaded at the bar of public opinion for the recognition of the Negro as a man, now find--332--themselves unconsciously allied with the most radical forces in the United States. This, of course, if not arrested by a more sympathetic consideration of the Negro's rights, may increase the ranks of the malcontents to the extent of effecting a general upheaval in this country. It is well to note that there no longer exists a frontier with all of its opportunities for free arable land, where in the midst of so many changes, frontiersmen passed so rapidly through the various stages of the civilization of the backwoods, the farm, the town and the city that in a generation they became thoroughly Americanized. Since 1890 we have been confronted with the aftermath of the frontier the increase of restlessness, pessimism and revolutionary sentiment, aggravated by the presence of un-Americanized foreigners who, no longer able to go West, must remain in our large cities to wage war against the capitalists whom they now consider the source of all their evils.

Labor and capital now face each other in the cities in a restricted area, and each has to combine to protect its interests. The combination of capital was impossible when land was abundant and individualism was strong. To protect the weak we are now reduced to a new sort of radicalism which differs from that of the European Socialists in that while the latter are trying to build a democracy out of the remains of monarchial life, our malcontents are resorting to various political experiments to hold on to the ideals of the frontier which have been shattered by the concentration of the population in cities. There has followed, therefore, such assimilation of the black and white people to urban conditions as to mark an epoch in the making of our civilization, effecting a revolution not only in industry but in politics, society, and life itself. The rural society has been destroyed by commercialism, which has transformed the majority of the--333--American people into commercial beings. As more than half of the people of the United States now live in urban communities of over 5000 inhabitants, the problems of this country tomorrow will be the problems of the city. As the cities are now in control of the most radical elements in the United States, it is only a matter of time before the national policy will be dominated by radical thought, and men disposed to hold on to the best in republican government should think seriously of the danger of driving by persecution into the ranks of this unrestrained element the Negroes, who constitute the most conservative and the most constructive stock in America. With the migration of a large number of Negroes to northern cities, however, there have been tendencies indicating that wherever Negroes are numerous enough to impress themselves upon the community, disturbing race prejudice develops. We hear, therefore, of the agitation for separate schools in Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Columbus, Indianapolis, and Chicago. There is also a desire among certain whites, not necessarily to segregate the Negroes by special ordinances to that effect, but by a common understanding to restrict them to certain parts of the cities where they--334--may not come into such close contact with the so-called superior whites. Race prejudice in these parts then has become much more volcanic at times than it is in certain sections of the South, as was evidenced by the recent riots at Chester, Pennsylvania, Youngstown, Ohio, East St. Louis, and Chicago. Although it does not appear that any part of the North has, as in the case of the regions like that around Tyler, Texas, developed into what may be properly styled a criminal community, it has shown possibilities in that direction.

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The greatest difficulty of all which the Negroes have had in the North has been the problem of earning a living. When the North had few Negroes on its hands it was an unusually pleasant experience for a Negro to go to that section and spend his money without restriction, enjoying all of the social privileges usually denied the Negroes in the South. But until recently it had always been extremely difficult for the same persons of color permitted to worship in a white church or to attend a white school to earn a living among these same sympathetic persons. It is only since 1916, when the Negroes went North in such large numbers as to enable employers to hire enough of them to take over the entire operation of plants, that they have easily succeeded in finding employment.

This difficulty has seemed a problem impossible of solution for the reason that back of the protests against the employment of Negroes in higher pursuits have been the trades unions, wielding such power that in the economic world their will has been law. Several years ago the American Federation of Labor declared that its purpose was for the organization of all working people without regard to class, race, religion, or politics; that many organizations affiliated with the American Federation of Labor had within their membership Negro workmen with--335--all other workers of trades; and that the American Federation of Labor had made and was making every effort within its power for the organization of these workmen. This, however, was largely diplomacy; but a change of attitude was evident as early as 1910 when the national council of the American Federation of Labor unanimously passed a resolution inviting persons of all races to join, giving also instructions for making a special effort to organize Negroes, in 1913. It required the dearth of labor during the World War, however, to give the Negroes such a basis for economic freedom in the North as to secure actual consideration from the trades unions. Seeing that Negroes had to be employed and that they would be worth so much more to the trades unions than the latter would be to the Negroes, the American Federation of Labor feebly expressed a desire for the organization of Negro laborers as units of the various trades unions. In carrying out this program, however, the American Federation of Labor was taking high ground. In fact, it found itself far in advance of the sentiment favorable to the Negro in the rank and file of the local trades unions themselves. There was a tendency nominally to admit the Negroes to the union when it was found that their competition was such as to necessitate--336--their admission, and thereafter, by certain excuses and peculiar methods of evasion, to employ white men in preference to the Negroes, although the latter might be members of the union. During the migration, however, the American Federation of Labor had to take another stand. At the annual meeting of the American Federation in 1916, therefore, it was reported that the Negroes who were then being brought North were to fill the places of union men demanding better conditions and it was, therefore, felt necessary to take steps to organize these Negroes who were coming in rather large numbers to be checked by strikes and riots.

The following year, the American Federation of Labor, after giving more attention than ever to the situation of labor conditions among the blacks, found itself somewhat handicapped because of the fact that not only was there an antipathy of the Negro toward the labor unions, but they were not informed as to their operations and their benefits. It was, therefore, urged that a Negro organizer be appointed to extend the work of these trades unions among them. Many of the delegates assembled thought it advisable to suggest that at the peace table closing up the World War the American people should endeavor to influence the nations participating in this conference to agree upon a plan of turning over the continent of Africa or certain parts thereof to the African race and those descendants of the same residing in this country.



At the meeting of the American Federation of Labor in Atlantic City in 1919, there was reached the decision to admit Negroes indiscriminately into the various trades unions, enjoying the same privileges as the whites. Proclaiming thus so boldly the abolition of race distinction in the labor organizations, the American Federation of Labor has at least laid the foundation--337--for the economic advancement of the blacks. This declaration, however, must be accepted merely as a basis upon which the Negro may take his stand for the economic struggle before him. Broad as the decision may seem, it must, like any other law or constitution, be carried out by persons who, if not sympathetically disposed, may give this decision such an interpretation as to make it mean nothing. Liberal as the American Federation of Labor may now be, moreover, the Negroes to come into their own, enjoying economic liberty, must still bring about such changes in the laws and constitutions of the labor locals as to permit the carrying out of the purpose of the national body. As the matter now stands, then, the victory has been won in the national council, but the battle is yet to be waged in the locals.

A number of Negroes, not content with the efforts for their economic advancement made from without, have endeavored to remedy their own evils through agencies either established by Negroes or by white persons closely coöperating with them. One of the factors in effecting the proper distribution of labor during the World War and in securing for them justice in many communities where they would have otherwise been imposed upon, was the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes. This is an organization with eighteen branches dealing with the Negro laboring, dependent, and delinquent classes in the various large cities. The Negroes have organized also in New York a Negro labor union largely intended to find employment for Negroes rather than to secure an increase in their wages. In the Southwest, there has been organized the Inter-State Association of Negro Trainmen of America, intended to perfect the union of all unorganized railway employees of color. During the World War there have been several such organizations following in the wake of this, and recently an--338--effort has been made to effect the organization of a national body which will be for the Negroes just what the American Federation of Labor has been for the whites.

The Negroes have sought justice, too, not by trying to force themselves socially on the whites, but by certain improvements in the situations in which they now are. One of their attacks is directed against the poor railroad accommodations in the separate cars and stations assigned Negroes in the South. They complain also of the inadequate school facilities, contending that it is poor logic to insist that the Negroes must be denied certain privileges because of their undeveloped state and at the same time be refused those opportunities for improvement necessary to make themselves worthy of those privileges which they are denied. They have insisted that certain recreational facilities be given the Negroes in the interest of their contentment and health, which are essential to the maintenance of that physical strength necessary to efficient labor. They have wisely contended also that if the white man is the superior of the two, the Negro must be brought into sufficiently close contact with the whites so as to learn by example. Segregation will tend to keep one part of a community backward while the other is hopelessly struggling to go forward.--339—

In spite of this, however, the South has spoken out more boldly than ever for a more radical segregation of the race, with a view to preventing miscegenation. Southern leaders believe that if you permit Negroes to be elevated to positions of importance, it will be only a matter of a few



generations before they will be sufficiently attractive to white persons to promote the intermarriage of the races. Inalterably attached to their own ideal and believing in their superiority as the chosen people of God in line of succession with the Jews, the whites have insisted upon all sorts of social and political proscription, in fact, every measure necessary to discourage the recrudescence of the miscegenation of the races. There has been, therefore, among those southerners who have endeavored to fall in line with the radical democratic and social movement, a tendency to accept the program so far as it does not include the Negroes. As a natural consequence, then, they have brought around to their way of thinking a large number of southern men who have gradually gained control of the northern press, idealizing the institutions of the South, pitying that section because of being handicapped by the presence of the Negro and demanding for the freedman exemption from unusual cruelties and persecution only, while ignoring the clamor for recognition as a real citizen of the United States.

To justify this position there have come forward a number of writers disguised as scientific investigators to prove by psychology and ethnology that the Negro is a sort of inferior being. They disregard the contention of the world's best scientists that no race is essentially inferior to any other race and that differences in civilization have resulted from varying opportunities and environments. Loath to give up this theory of superiority, however, they have devised various schemes to make a case for the natural superiority of the white man.--340--Among these methods have been the collection of data intended to show that the Negro is naturally a criminal. Some have made psychological measurements of various types of humanity with a view to proving that the Negro is mentally weaker than other peoples. Others are busy writing history of the countries outside of Africa to prove that the Negroes in Africa are inferior to races without. A passing remark as to these methods may be worth while. In almost all of the investigations as to the crime of the Negroes the evidence is *ex parte*. No man should be condemned as a criminal merely on the testimony of his enemies. In the matter of criminal statistics of the Negro the evidence is always questionable, for the white man is the sole judge. He makes the arrest, determines the guilt of the Negro, and applies the penalty. Just as during the days of slavery prejudiced masters spoke of the crimes of their slaves and branded free Negroes as pariahs of society, so now we hear the same concerning the Negroes. In other words, all of this evidence is from those persons who, making desire the father of thought, have issued statements without evidence to support them. Such so-called statistics of the whites adversely critical of the Negroes, against whom they are intensely prejudiced and to whom they have denied the rights and privileges of men, are worthless in seeking the truth.

In making some of the psychological measurements the experiments have been very interesting. One man found in a white school a Negro who showed more mental capacity than any other member of the institution. To explain this away in keeping with his theory that the Negro is inferior, he contended that the Negro far off in the North among the white people by himself was better selected than the whites. In another case, in which the purpose of the experiment was to prove that the--341--Negro was inferior both to the Indian and white man, it was discovered that the Negro stood between the Indian and the white man. Adhering to the contention that the Negro was still inferior even to the Indian, the biased writer attributed the Negro's superior mental capacity to his closer contact with the white man.

Until the students of the white race give the same attention to the study of Africa which they have given to the study of the history of Europe and Asia, they will be unprepared to reach any

conclusions as to the sort of civilization which the Negro race has produced and its relative value. The fact is that the white man is still ignorant as to what has taken place in Africa. His knowledge is confined largely to the countries on the border and the reports of sporadic explorations into the interior. Because the whites of modern times succeeded in finding in Africa slaves for exploitation at the time when the country was torn to pieces by wars of migrating hordes, they have concluded that these weak captives in war, whom they enslaved and debased, must be taken as a sample of what the Negro is capable of. Yet if the Negroes of this country are to serve as an indication of the capabilities of the race, it is both unscientific and unjust to expect the Negroes to pass through two hundred and fifty years of slavery and in three generations achieve as much as the whites have during many centuries. If they could, instead of thereby showing that they are equal to the whites, they would demonstrate their superiority.

To disabuse the public mind of this slander proceeding from ill-designing investigators, C. G. Woodson organized the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in Chicago in 1915, hoping to save and publish the records of the Negro, that the race may not become a negligible factor in the thought of the--342--world. The work of this Association is to collect sociological and historical data, to publish books on Negro life and history, to promote studies in this field through schools and clubs with a view to bringing about harmony between the races by interpreting the one to the other. The supporters of the movement have been well known philanthropists like Moorefield Storey, Julius Rosenwald and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., writers like Roland G. Usher, John M. Mecklin, Justice W. R. Riddell, Jerome Dowd, J. Franklin Jameson, and Charles H. Wesley, and publicists like Frederick L. Hoffman, Talcott Williams, and Oswald Garrison Villard. For several years the Association has published works bearing on all phases of the Negro and also *The Journal of Negro History*, a quarterly scientific magazine which now circulates throughout the civilized world as a valuable help to students and investigators. \*

A new note in the progress of the Negro has been sounded in the appeals of the churches and the civic organizations in behalf of a square deal for the Negro, as the murder of Negroes has led to the murder of white men and the whites, therefore, call for a halt all along the line. Citizens of both races have been appointed by mayors, governors and the like to effect an agreement by which both races may live together for the greatest good of the greatest number. An effort also has been made to bridle the radical press which, during the last two generations, by playing up in bright headlines the crimes of Negroes and suppressing the similar crimes of whites, has inflamed the public mind against the Negroes as a naturally criminal class. A new day is dawning.