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# Opportunity

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*by Francis C. Holbrook*

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# Public Opinion and The Negro

By CHARLES S. JOHNSON

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In the study of the influence of public opinion on race relations we are dealing with three important and highly sensitive elements: the facts upon which this opinion rests, the theories about these facts, and most important of all, the actions based on the theories. There are certain physical facts that do not change. It is not the purpose here to deny or make apologies for the existence of them, whatever they are. But with respect to these there is a disposition to assume that the theories about the facts are as unchanging as the facts themselves; to deny the fact when it contradicts the theory; and to see facts when they do not exist because the theory demands them. There are again, generalizations and theories built upon these assumed and actual facts that do change as society develops, and as false statements are refuted and new facts come to light. It is on these theories that the layman is most frequently confounded. Yet upon these as a basis he is constantly acting.

Let us consider the nature of some of the beliefs commonly met in public opinion, and at the same time examine their origins and justifications. Although prejudice and matters of sentiment figure largely in race relations, it is not only possible but necessary to study the origins of these beliefs in a purely objective manner. The growth of feeling in the United States on the question of the Negro is a natural process. No one seriously believes that the conduct of the two races in relation to each other is inspired by moral depravity or mere calculating meanness. No other relations are to be expected on the present background of beliefs, the one race about the other. The greatest difficulty in objectively analyzing these beliefs lies in the fact that we quite generally and naturally regard our views and beliefs, whatever they are, as founded on eternal and unchanging principles. It is not often that we care to question the origin of our most firmly rooted convictions. As James Harvey Robinson points out: "We like to continue to believe what we have been accustomed to accept as true, and the resentment aroused when doubt is cast upon any of our assumptions, leads us to seek every manner of excuse for clinging to them. The result is that most of our so-called reasoning consists in finding arguments for going on believing as we already do." Only within recent years have we begun to study our own thinking processes, and the conditions and tendencies of our social life. Only recently have we ceased to bow down with unquestioning acquiescence to the locally familiar as the universal intention of nature and the ordinance of God. In his attack upon the particular justifications, theories, explanations, and philosophies which, wholly without substantiable reason, held women in subjection, John Stuart Mill makes an observation which applies without a single modification, to the question of the Negro:

"When there is feeling mixed with an opinion, it tends to gain rather than lose by having a preponderant weight of argument against it. If accepted as the result of argument, the refutation of the argument might shake its foundation; but when it rests on feeling the worse it fares in argumentative contact, the more persuaded its adherents are that their feeling must have some deeper ground which arguments do not reach, and while the feeling remains, it is always throwing up new entrenchments to repair the old."

The analogy between the struggle of women for status and that of the Negro population, is suspiciously close. Anatomically, mentally, and by an alleged special act of God, both have been arranged in the scheme of creation a little lower than supreme man of the particular race making the comparison. Less than seventy-five years ago women were held unfitted for college education. Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts thought such training would certainly induce insanity. Scientists are still saying, but with a perceptibly weakened sense of conviction, that women measure five ounces less brain matter than men and lack reasoning capacity. It is more than an historical accident that Negro suffrage and woman suffrage were proposed and fought for at the same time. The facts about woman, as for example, that she is different from man had not changed in 1920 when universal suffrage was granted. The theories about the fact, however, had undergone an almost complete revolution.

Some of the familiar and, perhaps, less serious stereotypes of the Negro will be quickly recognized. For example, that they are boisterous, over-assertive, lacking in civic consciousness, that they usually carry razors, shoot craps habitually, are inordinately fond of red, and of watermelon, are afraid of ghosts and graveyards. Mr. H. L. Mencken in "The American Credo" has caught up other points: a Negro's vote may always be readily bought for a dollar. Every colored cook has a lover who never works and she feeds him by stealing the best part of every dish she cooks. Every Negro who went to France with the army has a liaison with a white woman and won't look at a colored woman any more. All Negroes can sing. If one hits a Negro on the head with a cobblestone the cobblestone will break. All Negroes born South of the Potomac can play the banjo and are excellent dancers. Whenever a Negro is educated, he refuses to work and becomes a criminal. Every Negro servant girl spends at least half of her wages on preparation for taking the kink out of her hair. All Negro prize fighters marry white women and then afterwards beat them. All Negroes who show any intelligence are two-thirds white and the sons of United States Senators. The minute a Negro gets eight dollars he goes to a dentist and has one of his front teeth filled with gold. A Negro ball always ends up with a grand free-for-all fight in which several Negroes are mortally slashed with razors.

Jokes about Negroes, news stories, anecdotes, gossip, the stage, the motion pictures, the Octavus Roy Cohen, Hugh Wiley and Irvin S. Cobb type of humorous fiction repeated with unvarying outline, have helped to build up and crystallize a fictitious being unlike any Negro. Usually one of two things happens when a Negro fails to reflect the type: Either he is considered an exception, or he is "out of his place." The sources of information covering this group that might be useful in dispelling many of these notions are most unfortunate. Few white people read Negro periodicals, and they come in contact with only a few Negroes, usually their servants, whom they often seem to regard as omniscient on the aims, individuals and incidents of the race.

It is this mass of ideas about the Negro, accumulated through experience, passed on through tradition, embedded in the mores and absorbed even without conscious attention, with which this paper deals. These are the background of recognition, of classification, and of behavior itself. This body of ideas, compounded of time-saving generalizations, stereotypes, myths, conventions, dogma—what Walter Lippman in his excellent volume on PUBLIC OPINION calls "the picture within our heads"—determine our attitudes, our way of interpreting facts, our way even of seeing facts. To quote this author: "Except where we deliberately keep prejudice in suspense, we do not study a man and judge him to be bad," . . . "We see a bad man."

False notions, if believed, false preconceptions, may control conduct as effectively as true ones. The moral eruptions observed in the reckless unrestraint of the mob mind, are from one point of view merely an acute phase of the same opinion held by those who condone even while not actually participating in the unpleasant work of the mobs. The "hoodlums", those members of the public least able to sublimate their impulses or restrain their resentments, however acquired, are merely the executioners of prevailing sentiment. The judgment is passed by the community. The riots in Washington, Atlanta, Chicago, East St. Louis, and Omaha are striking examples of the accumulated resentments, unchallenged mutual beliefs, the one race about the other. If these beliefs can be made accessible for examination, there is hope that many of them may be corrected.

There are three cardinal beliefs that may be said to control in one form or another most of the thinking about Negroes: first, that they are mentally inferior; second, that they are immoral; and third, that they are criminal. The alleged innate mental inferiority of the Negro was once held to be due to a difference in species, then again to a more recent emergence from primitive life, and finally to backwardness in ascending the scale of civilization. A natural deduction follows: the mind of the Negro cannot be improved beyond a given level, so quite logically adapting his education to his capacities, he is taught mainly to use his hands. It is most common to hear it advanced as an argument against the entrance of Negro workmen to skilled trades that they are not capable of performing tasks which require sustained mental activity.

On this same theory a Chicago school principal,

finding that "colored children are restive and incapable of abstract thought and must be continually fed with novel interests and given things to do with their hands," altered her curriculum to teach them handicraft instead of arithmetic and singing instead of grammar. Again, this theory provides one of the strongest objections to expenditures for Negro education in states where there are separate schools for Negroes—they are uneducable.

Tracing the origin of this theory we find that the first Negroes brought to this country were bond servants on the same footing with indentured white servants, but it soon developed that permanent servitude and the slave traffic were highly profitable. The holding of slaves by a Christian nation demanded some kind of justification—a conscience balm. If it were ethically wrong for one human being to enslave another conscience could best be eased by proving that these slaves were less than human. Accordingly, Biblical arguments founded on Noah and the ark and his three sons, one of whom was cursed, have conveniently supplied support for the unscientific. Charles Carroll wrote a book to establish from Biblical texts the fact that man was created in the image of God, and since God, as everybody knows, is not a Negro, it follows that the Negro is not a man. John C. Calhoun, at a time when Negro slaves were everywhere by intention deprived of the elements of education, with most unbecoming illogic for a statesman, ventured that if he could find a Negro capable of giving the syntax of a Greek verb, he would be disposed to call him human. Thomas Jefferson served that a Negro could scarcely be found who was capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid. This was probably true, but does this justify the formulation of theories that would place this limitation upon Negroes for all time.

Science helped to bolster up the theories. In 1870, Dr. Jeffries Wyman of Harvard discovered that the Negro afforded the point "where man and brute most nearly approached each other." A. H. Keene, author of an anthropology still used, found that the black and white human types had no sanguinary affiliation, and that the black was inferior because it registered a lower cranial capacity. Dr. Vogt, an eminent German scientist, deduced the inferiority of the Negro race from the examination of a single Hottentot woman. In 1906, Dr. Bean, who is quoted in most discussions on the intelligence of Negroes, seized upon a theory advanced by Spitzka that brain weights determined genius, and applied it to 150 white and 150 Negro brains. He announced that he had found constant and important variations according to race. Under remarkable circumstances, the accuracy of his findings was tested by Dr. Franklin P. Mall, an associate, who used the same brains, more precise instruments, and concealed the racial labels until the measurements were made. Dr. Mall announced that almost invariably the Negro brains had been underweighed by Dr. Bean, and the white brains overweighed. His final result showed no such "differences" as Dr. Bean reported.

Sir Francis Galton, scientist and the father of Eugenics, based a rather remarkable conclusion

concerning the mentality of Negroes upon accounts he had read and heard of the stupidity of Negro servants in America. Such an unscientific basis would have been rejected for any of his other conclusions. E. B. Tyler, author of a text-book on anthropology, assumed from the accounts of European teachers of children of backward races, that after the age of 12 the mentality of colored children is arrested; G. Stanley Hall fixed 14 as the age at which it comes to a partial standstill. Another queer assumption connects their arrested mentality with sexual over-development, thus combining two popularly accepted traits. A few months ago, before a meeting of the Eugenics Education Society in England, Dr. A. F. Tredgold, M.D., F.R.S., Edinburgh, in an address on the inheritance of mental qualities cited as his sole proof of the racial difference in potentiality for development along educational lines, a comparative racial study made by Dr. M. J. Mayo in the public schools of New York City. This study was taken as a fair test because the black and white races were educated side by side. This study has also been quoted in most discussions of Negro intelligence. Whatever the facts are, Dr. Mayo's study could not possibly have discovered them. In the first place, his study was made from records which had to be classified according to race by the memory of the teachers extending back as much as four years. The gradings by which they were measured were largely subjective with the teachers and admitted by the investigator himself to be unscientific. Many of the Negro children were from immigrant families from grossly inferior Southern schools, which might as reasonably be offered as an explanation of their retardation. And finally, as evidence of the subjective character of the gradings, the Negro children made their lowest scores in English and their highest in Mathematics where biased grades are less possible. In spite of all this the difference between Negro and white children finally amounted to no more than four per cent.

Then came the army intelligence tests, which a new school is insisting are a measure of innate intelligence. Again the Negroes have been consigned to their familiar station. They were needed in largest numbers as laborers and fewest in the higher branches of the service; and by admitted design the lowest classes among whites were freely eliminated. The Surgeon General's instructions to the Psychology Division explicitly state that "in the examination of Negro recruits camp procedure should be determined by the practical needs of the army, and the collection of scientific data always incidental to this main purpose." Yet the results are being used by some as the primarily scientific.

Moreover, before judgment can safely be passed upon the finality of the army intelligence tests in determining the inherent mental inferiority of Negroes, the following seldom mentioned facts must be accounted for: (1) The Negroes in most camps were marched in a body to the Beta tests designed principally for non-English speaking recruits; this was done in spite of the objection of practically all the camps that these tests unnaturally limited Negroes. Specifically 65.6 per cent.

of the Negroes as compared with 24.7 per cent. of the whites were given the Beta tests. (2) Discrimination was further shown when it came to re-examination; only 20 per cent. of the Negro failures were re-examined, in spite of the fact that 86.9 per cent. of these improved their score anywhere from 3 to 30 per cent. (3) The intelligence gap between Southern Negroes with practically no schools and Negroes living in the North with better educational facilities is eight points greater than the difference between native whites and Negroes. (4) When the native white population of Northern and Southern states, presumably of the same stock, are compared, a similar difference is found: for instance, Connecticut with only a 35 per cent. native white population, registers 30 points higher for white recruits than North Carolina with a 99 per cent. native-born white population. This is a difference greater by 50 per cent. than that shown between the native whites and Negroes. (5) When the factors of bad schools, mass handling, and to a large extent, examiners with a prescience concerning Negro mentality are eliminated, as in the case of Camp Lewis, in a Northwestern section, Negroes register a median score superior to the white recruits in Camp Gordon in the South. And finally, (6) the Negroes recruited from New Mexico registered a score equivalent to the highest rank of whites—the officers.

During slavery when it was the policy to keep Negroes ignorant, and for a period after emancipation when over 90 per cent. of the Negro population was illiterate, it could easily be believed that their illiteracy was unescapable and eternal. But now educability has been demonstrated: illiteracy has been reduced to 25 per cent.; thousands have graduated from standard universities; and thousands have entered the professions. In spite of such facts as these and in spite of its questionable support, the belief in the innate mental inferiority of the Negro persists. It tends to crush the Negro's hope of improvement through education; it insists that Negro education is useless; it distorts honest ambition into a desire to avoid hard work, all effort at honest thinking into impertinence and radicalism, and poise into arrogance and smartness.

The second cardinal belief to be considered concerns the constitutional immorality of Negroes. They are sometimes in charity called unmoral. Frederick L. Hoffman, after a pretentious array of figures concluded that "all his facts proved that education, philanthropy, and religion have failed to develop (among the Negroes) an appreciation of the stern and uncompromising virtues of the Aryan race." A prominent member of this Conference, in a volume published in 1910, gave the stamp of his authority to the belief that "their minds are filled with that which is carnal, their thoughts are most filthy and their morals generally beyond description." He had made his observation in the most disadvantaged sections of the South, among a group of Negroes living in enforced ignorance, whose lack of standards, assuming the accuracy of his observations, could be explained by the same circumstances of environment that account for this lack among

mountain whites and among mill workers of certain sections.

Not long ago, a professor in an Eastern college made the statement that less than 3 per cent. of the Negro women are virtuous. It got credence in spite of the fact that it is as impossible of proof as a similar statement about any other race. A writer in a prominent sociological magazine a few months ago, after a study of sixteen cases of desertion in Negro families, deduced a philosophy about the family life of 12,000,000 Negroes.

The statistical evidence of immorality consists largely of figures on illegitimacy. Records here are meagre and when found tend to shield those with greater means of secrecy and knowledge of birth control—the number of illegitimate mulattoes and the prevalence of venereal diseases, however, point to a lack of restraint not wholly Negroid. Pure blacks do not propagate mixed breed and venereal diseases were unknown among the Negroes imported to this country. But there is a theory to explain the mulatto population in what is called the "biological urge" of females of inferior races to mate with males of the superior race. This places the latter quite innocently on the defensive. There can be no honest objection to the statement that there are immoral Negroes, in fact, many such. The rub and the real danger come in the assumption that this immorality is the result of a constitutional laxity which is peculiar to Negroes as a race. Here, again, a belief whose foundation is uncertain, tends to cut off all hope of improvement, and place a scarlet letter upon those Negroes who *are* moral when measured by the sternest code. Here, again, revision of theory will reduce the passionate hatred, suspicion and jealousy entertained in many sections by white wives and mothers toward Negro women, and lessen the hazards and actual insults endured in silence and fear by Negro girls who are lumped together in the assumption against their morals.

The third cardinal belief is closely allied with the foregoing, that Negroes are criminal by nature. An alleged peculiar emotional instability predisposes them to crimes of violence, particularly sex crimes, and a constitutional character weakness addicts them to petty thefts. In practically every city with a large Negro population their crime rate exceeds their proportion in the population. There *are* Negro criminals and they are condemned without apology or excuse. But the bugaboo of the *criminal nature of Negroes* is unnecessarily severe. A constitutional criminal nature would most certainly have shown itself during the Civil War when the protective hand of the master was withdrawn from his family and the Negro slave stood guard. Yet not a single case is recorded of the betrayal of that trust. Figures on Negro crime rarely escape factors completely vitiating for comparative purposes. Thus, judges, prosecuting attorneys and jury foremen testified before the Chicago Commission on Race Relations that in Chicago, a northern city, the unvarying tendency was to arrest and convict Negroes more readily and on less evidence than whites and give them longer sentences. The police officers, jurors and court officials are

members of the public and hold the common beliefs about Negro traits. These Negroes, further, have less money to fight their cases, to escape detection, to pay fines or even, so far as records go, to bribe officials.

In one part of New York City, to take one example, there were in one year, 9 more white persons *indicted* for rape in the first degree than there were Negroes even *accused* of the crime throughout the United States in four years—and more evidence is required by a New York jury than by a lynching mob. Or put it this way: a predilection for sex crimes can scarcely in fairness be assigned to a race with an average population of eight million, of which number six hundred and seventy-five have been charged with the crime in a period of thirty years. Yet this belief, deepened by its association with the most elemental of human passions, prompts constant and innumerable perversions and absurdities of conduct. A woman screams and a race riot brews; a lurid story in the press even when the criminal is in jail, and the nation's capitol is in the hands of a mob, murder bent. This sex motif ran with more or less prominence through each of the riots.

Although these three cardinal beliefs are the most dangerous—there are others, less important, but worth questioning at least: (a) That the Negro race is physically repulsive—one encyclopedia states that they "emit an odor similar to that of a goat." This is entertained less by those whose children were reared by Negro "mammies" than by those who read about Negroes or are expecting this peculiarity. (b) That they are constitutionally incapable of resisting the ravages of white man's diseases—dying out irredeemably from tuberculosis and venereal diseases—thus making programs of health improvement hopeless, although by a little effort their mortality has been reduced 21 per cent. in 11 years. (c) That they are "happy-go-lucky" and "thriftless" although they own farm lands valued at more than two and a half billion, nearly two million are insured in one large insurance company alone, and one of every four families owns its home.

Now, what of the Negroes themselves? What are the effects of all these beliefs upon them? They cannot escape being assailed on every hand from early childhood to the end of their lives, with a pervading intimation of their own inferiority. From the beginning they are "saturated in a tradition of their own incompetence." This is a poison, as one writer puts it, at the very centers of growth. They grow up in the system inferior not only to the other race, but to their potential selves. They are in the midst of an advanced social system, of definite cultural influences, but denied full participation. They may never escape the insistent implications of their status and race. Attention and interest are centered upon themselves. They gradually become race conscious. Opinions and feelings on general questions must always be filtered through this narrow screen that separates them from their neighbors. Their opinions are therefore largely a negative product—either disparagement of difficulties or protest. This enforced

self-consciousness has developed strange distortions of conduct, in many, increasing sensitiveness to sights and fabricating compensations for their inferior station. Natural impulses and desires are balked. Their conduct becomes unintelligible. The processes of thought by which opinions are reached and translated into action are as a result of their isolation, concealed from outsiders. It has been observed for example, that the "old-time darky" is passing. This is probably but another way of putting the very real fact that rapidly developing industrialism, increased literacy, mobility, and means of communication, and the irresistible trend of present-day forces that are upsetting the old order and creating new desires generally, has affected the Negro as they have all others. A writer in the *Century* magazine makes an apt observation when he says that the "peaceful co-existence of ruler and ruled is possible only where relations between classes remain static for long periods of time." This condition is favorable to the growth of traditions, the love of common things and the manifestations of kindness and loyalty. This country's static conditions were broken up by the Civil War. Those who picture the Negro of that regime forget that he is being swept along by the same tide that wrecked the institution of slavery and increased the tempo of our whole national life. He is, indeed, not the same and it is inconsistent to expect him to be. The World War brought about another jolt of traditions, and simultaneously a different outlook on life from Negroes. Their new desires and behavior are regarded as peculiar and dangerous. The only reaction is increased measures of restraint which neither destroy nor change the attitudes.

The back to Africa movement among Negroes is a dramatic demonstration of their attitude towards their status. This rather absurd dream, to which more than a million Negroes are contributing funds, is more than a gesture to escape America. It is a movement of the class lowest down to fabricate a background and a racial self-respect, to compensate for the prestige and power they have habitually lacked. The extravagant titles of the movement like those of the K. K. K. help to clothe little men with the importance and prestige they otherwise would not have.

The movement is significant further not because of any possibilities of realization, but because it provides at least a mental relaxation for hundreds of thousands of Negroes in the picturing of a complete escape from the constant and unrelenting embarrassments under which they must live and while living present the air of contentment and of happiness.

A second effect registers in the mass movements of Negroes from south to north. Over a half million have moved within the last six years. Probably 100,000 have moved in the last year. The motives have been both economic and sentimental. Both desires are evidences of dissatisfaction and unrest, and these dissatisfactions are in large part the result of changing standards among the Negroes.

A third effect is flight of quite a different sort. It is that of leaving the Negro race entirely—"crossing over" it is called. When a person of

partial Negro descent who is to all appearances indistinguishable, elects to class himself as a Negro, he voluntarily assumes all of the limitations placed upon that group. But he is an equal and an eligible to all forms of association with whites so long as he forgets the black twig on his family tree. Dr. Hornell Hart estimates this forgetfulness to be occurring in about 25,000 new cases each year. The subject does not yield itself readily to statistical treatment and the estimate is probably overstated, but it is a fact that as the ring around the Negroes grows tighter it is squeezing out many who can easily escape, and thus beginning a process which the most zealous upholders of the American dogma have declared could never occur and which they are most anxious to prevent.

Now it is important to recognize that the most serious clashes of interest come in that vague and intangible world of feeling where reason ceases to function. Attitude and opinions have been set and ground into tradition. Demand for reasons is absurd and infuriating, because they are perhaps the least important and least convincing factors in a confirmed attitude. Where there is general agreement on the premises they are unnecessary but where, as in the case of a less prejudiced person, the premise is questioned and it is necessary to support one's attitude, there is a temptation, rarely avoided, to compensate for deficiency in fact by embellishing it to fit the feeling. A Negro becomes a "burly Negro." Objection to their presence in public meetings is based on smell. Instead of smiling they "grin" or "expose a gleaming row of ivory from ear to ear." The French Military Mission stationed with the American Expeditionary Army circulated and withdrew under protest of the French government a clear-cut example of this disposition. It read in part:

"American opinion is unanimous on this (the Negro question) and permits no discussion of the matter. The kindly spirit which exists in France for the Negro profoundly wounds Americans who consider it an infringement of their national dogmas. . . . We should not sit at the table with them and they should not be too warmly praised, especially in the presence of Americans. . . . The vices of the Negro are a constant menace to the American who has to repress them sternly. The black American troops in France have by themselves given rise to as many complaints for attempted rape as all the rest of the Army. The black is constantly being censored for his lack of intelligence and discretion, his lack of civic and professional conscience. . . ."

Here is a classic example of the effort, rather becomingly covert, to do something obviously difficult in the absence of a similar cultural inheritance.

Added to this situation which makes exaggeration necessary is the fact that this intangible world of feeling holds subjects in which there is a most pronounced taboo. This not only powerfully intensifies the feeling itself, but protects it from the assaults of reason and contradictory fact. When the president of a Woman's State Federation of Clubs says, "you all know what we have to fear from Negro men," no one questions her. Each is more likely to think of the worst possible cause of fear. And it does her women hearers perhaps a very little injustice to say that with such a presupposition against these

men, they could neither interpret nor relate accurately their conduct of any description. Thus goes the vicious circle.

There are just two instances of the peculiar working of opinion upon the Negro to which attention will be drawn because while most pervading and subtle in their effect, they are most frequently overlooked. Negroes have no more historical continuity than the millions of American whites who have blended into the American stock from an uncertain origin. This is the only culture they know or have ever been exposed to. The circumstances of their lives make it necessary for them to share it and contribute to it. They know no other in spite of the theories concerning survivals of African traits. They read the same papers and books, and in many instances, attend the same schools. They are familiar with the professed ideals of our nation. It is decidedly difficult on the background of the same mental content to avoid having the same or at least similar habits of thinking and similar desires. They have no such autonomy as makes possible the development of a special culture. It cannot be improper to inquire how it can ever be possible for them to follow the advice of many of their friends and advisers to develop here in America a "culture of their own", "to be the best possible Negro rather than an imitation of the white man," however delightful the expression sounds as a solution of the problem. Their culture must be the same or its chances of survival will be small. The state of affairs in our democracy that would follow the independent development of a special culture by each racial group in our population can be well imagined. Where evidences of it have appeared they have been put down with a stern hand. The program of Americanization was designed to prevent just such tendencies as are recommended for the Negroes.

Another is just a different shade of the same problem from the point of view of the Negroes. In the measurement of genius and attainment in which the Negro population so frequently is

pointed out as deficient, the fact is often ignored that the standards of comparison are set by the dominant group and at the same time the Negro group is definitely restricted to a narrower circle of effort. There are few Negro captains of industry because they may not often break out of the rank of unskilled labor, and are definitely excluded from supervisory positions. There are no Negro Napoleons because they may not in the first place be generals.

On the basis of prevailing beliefs race discriminations are faultlessly logical. When the practices vary it is because the beliefs vary. No sensible person would insist that morons should be accorded by society the liberties of normal individuals. But the fact that it has been found of temporary convenience to attribute to Negroes the mental and moral qualities of morons is no warrant for permitting the belief to go unchallenged.

This paper has no intention of denying any clearly demonstrable fact concerning the Negro population; the questions raised are solely upon the theories about existing fact which, questionable in themselves, have blinded the eyes of observers to factual contradictions and prompted hallucinations of fact to support the theory.

This body of beliefs compounded of this mixture of truth and fiction, self-interest and passion, forms the structure of public opinion on the question of the Negro. These beliefs unchallenged not only magnify themselves and breed others, but react upon the Negro group, distorting its conduct. This distortion provokes in turn a sterner application of these beliefs and so on indefinitely, and with each step the isolation increases, each group building up its own myths and stiffening its own group morale. If the myths can be dissolved, if indeed the beliefs, can be honestly questioned, many of our inhibitions to normal, rational and ethical conduct will be removed.

*An address delivered at the National Conference of Social Work in Washington, D. C., May 23, 1923*

## A Librarian in Harlem

BY ERNESTINE ROSE

To all eyes except God's we must appear as fixed in our stubborn racial attitude of yesterday as seem the stars in their places. And yet it is well to remember that all social as all natural changes, though they seem cataclysmic, are only the result of long periods of apparent inertia during which the forces of man or of nature have been slowly and imperceptibly gathering themselves together. We are now in such a cataclysm of readjusting nationalities. Any day may see a similar catastrophe, with races as the readjusting units.

Or to use another figure which is calculated to give us more comfort and hope, librarians may consider themselves as human chemists. A scientist who changes the relationship of atoms though he is dealing with the infinitesimal, may yet be preparing stupendous physical changes.

We deal with individuals as the chemist with atoms, and for us to change the relationship of a few human atoms one to another is a tremendous and thrilling experiment. Such recurring readjustments will lead some day to a shift in the body politic, and so we need to exercise both thought and courage in our efforts at racial readjustment. To a person who thinks thus, each tiny shift in racial position is of deep import.

So I have to offer you today a few examples of this racial drift. Perhaps that incident in New York which seems to me most significant is the acceptance by our Library School of a colored applicant on precisely the same terms as the white, and the following fact that all facilities offered by the school have been at her command. Before the practice trip to other libraries was taken, all hotels on the route were asked if they had any