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My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom

W.E. Burghardt Du Bois

ABSTRACT

This autobiographical essay, published in 1944, defines freedom for Negroes and identifies the paths taken by Du Bois to achieve this freedom.

My Midnight Classmate

Once upon a time, I found myself at midnight on one of the swaggering streetcars that used to roll out from Boston on its way to Cambridge. It must have been in the Spring of 1890, and quite accidentally I was sitting by a classmate who would graduate with me in June. As I dimly remember, he was a nice-looking young man, almost dapper; well-dressed, charming in manner. Probably he was rich or at least well-to-do, and doubtless belonged to an exclusive fraternity, although that I do not know. Indeed I have even forgotten his name. But one thing I shall never forget and that was his rather regretful admission (that slipped out as we gossiped) that he had no idea as to what his life work would be, because, as he added, "There's nothing which I am particularly interested in!"

I was more than astonished—I was almost outraged to meet any human being of the mature age of twenty-two who did not have his life all planned

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before him, at least in general outline; and who was not supremely, if not desperately, interested in what he planned to do.

Since then, my wonder has left my classmate, and been turned in and backward upon myself: how long had I been sure of my life-work and how had I come so confidently to survey and plan it? I now realize that most college seniors are by no means certain of what they want to do or can do with life; but stand rather upon a hesitating threshold, awaiting will, chance, or opportunity. Because I had not mingled intimately or understandingly with my Harvard classmates, I did not at the time realize this, but thought my rather unusual attitude was general. How had this attitude come to seem normal to me?

My Early Youth

The small western New England town where I was born, and several generations of my fathers before me, was a middle-class community of Americans of English and Dutch descent, with an Irish laboring class and a few remnants of Negro working folk of past centuries. Farmers and small merchants predominated, with a fringe of decadent Americans; with mill-hands, railroad laborers and domestics. A few manufacturers formed a small aristocracy of wealth. In the public schools of this town, I was trained from the age of six to sixteen, and in its schools, churches, and general social life I gained my patterns of living. I had almost no experience of segregation or color discrimination. My schoolmates were invariably white; I joined quite naturally all games, excursions, church festivals; recreations like coasting, skating, and ball-games. I was in and out of the homes of nearly all my mates, and ate and played with them. I was a boy unconscious of color discrimination in any obvious and specific way.

I knew nevertheless that I was exceptional in appearance and that this riveted attention upon me. Less clearly, I early realized that most of the colored persons I saw, including my own folk, were poorer than the well-to-do whites; lived in humbler houses, and did not own stores; this was not universally true: my cousins, the Crispels, in West Stockbridge, had one of the most beautiful homes in the village. Other cousins, in Lenox, were well-to-do. On the other hand, none of the colored folk I knew were so poor, drunken and sloven as some of the lower Americans and Irish. I did not then associate poverty or ignorance with color, but rather with lack of opportunity; or more often with lack of thrift, which was in strict accord with the philosophy of New England and of the Nineteenth Century.

On the other hand, much of my philosophy of the color line must have come from my family group and their friends' experience. My father dying early, my immediate family consisted of my mother and her brother and my

older half-brother most of the time. Near to us in space and intimacy were two married aunts with older children, and a number of cousins, in various degrees removed, living scattered through the county and state. Most of these had been small farmers, artisans, laborers and servants. With few exceptions all could read and write, but few had training beyond this. These talked of their work and experiences, of hindrances which colored people encountered, of better chances in other towns and cities. In this way I must have gotten indirectly a pretty clear outline of color bars which I myself did not experience. Moreover, it was easy enough for me to rationalize my own case, because I found it easy to excel most of my schoolmates in studies if not in games. The secret of life and the loosing of the color bar, then, lay in excellence, in accomplishment; if others of my family, of my colored kin, had stayed in school, instead of quitting early for small jobs, they could have risen to equal whites. On this my mother quietly insisted. There was no real discrimination on account of color—it was all a matter of ability and hard work.

This philosophy was saved from conceit and vainglory by rigorous self-testing, which doubtless cloaked some half-conscious misgivings on my part. If visitors to school saw and remarked my brown face, I waited in quite confidence. When my turn came, I recited glibly and usually correctly because I studied hard. Some of my mates did not care, some were stupid; but at any rate I gave the best a hard run, and then sat back complacently. Of course I was too honest with myself not to see things which desert and even hard work did not explain or solve: I recognized ingrained difference in gift; Art Gresham could draw caricatures for the *High School Howler*, published occasionally in manuscript, better than I; but I could express meanings in words better than he; Mike McCarthy was a perfect marble player, but dumb in Latin. I came to see and admit all this, but I hugged my own gifts and put them to test.

When preparation for college came up, the problem of poverty began to appear. Without conscious decision on my part, and probably because of continuous quiet suggestion from my High School principal, Frank Hosmer, I found myself planning to go to college; how or where, seemed an unimportant detail. A wife of one of the cotton mill owners, whose only son was a pal of mine, offered to see that I got lexicons and texts to take up the study of Greek in High School, without which college doors in that day would not open. I accepted the offer as something normal and right; only after many years did I realize how critical this gift was for my career. I am not yet sure how she came to do it; perhaps my wise principal suggested it. Comparatively few of my white classmates planned or cared to plan for college—perhaps two or three in a class of twelve.

I collected catalogues of colleges and over the claims of Williams and Amherst, nearest my home, I blithely picked Harvard, because it was oldest

and largest, and most widely known. My mother died a few months after my graduation, just as though, tired of the long worry and pull, she was leaving me alone at the post, with a certain characteristic faith that I would not give up. I was, then, an orphan, without a cent of property, and with no relative who could for a moment think of undertaking the burden of my further education. But the family could and did help out and the town in its quiet and unemotional way was satisfied with my record and silently began to plan. First, I must go to work at least for a season and get ready for college in clothes and maturity, as I was only sixteen. Then there was the question of where I could go and how the expenses could be met.

The working out of these problems by friends and relatives brought me face to face, for the first time, with matters of income and wealth. A place was secured for me as time-keeper, during the building of a mansion by a local millionaire, in whose family an ancestor of mine had once worked. My job brought me for the first time in close contact with organized work and wage. I followed the building and its planning: I watched the mechanics at their work; I knew what they earned, I gave them their weekly wage and carried the news of their dismissal. I saw the modern world at work, mostly with the hands, and with few machines.

Meantime in other quarters, a way was being made for me to go to college. The father of one of my schoolmates, the Reverend C. C. Painter, was once in the Indian Bureau. There and elsewhere he saw the problem of the reconstructed South, and conceived the idea that there was the place for me to be educated, and there lay my future field of work. My family and colored friends rather resented the idea. Their Northern Free Negro prejudice naturally revolted at the idea of sending me to the former land of slavery, either for education or for living. I am rather proud of myself that I did not agree with them. That I should always live and work in the South, I did not then stop to decide; that I would give up the idea of graduating from Harvard, did not occur to me. But I wanted to go to Fisk, not simply because it was at least a beginning of my dream of college, but also, I suspect, because I was beginning to feel lonesome in New England; because, unconsciously, I realized, that as I grew older, the close social intermingling with my white fellows would grow more restricted. There were meetings, parties, clubs, to which I was not invited. Especially in the case of strangers, visitors, newcomers to the town was my presence and friendship a matter of explanation or even embarrassment to my schoolmates. Similar discriminations and separations met the Irish youth, and the cleft between rich and poor widened.

On the other hand, the inner social group of my own relatives and colored friends always had furnished me as a boy most interesting and satisfying company; and now as I grew, it was augmented by visitors from other places. I

remember a lovely little plump and brown girl who appeared out of nowhere, and smiled at me demurely; I went to the East to visit my father's father in New Bedford, and on that trip saw well-to-do, well-mannered colored people; and once, at Rocky Point, Rhode Island, I viewed with astonishment 10,000 Negroes of every hue and bearing. I was transported with amazement and dreams; I apparently noted nothing of poverty or degradation, but only extraordinary beauty of skin-color and utter equality of mien, with absence so far as I could see of even the shadow of the line of race. Gladly and armed with a scholarship, I set out for Fisk.

At Fisk University

Thus in the Fall of 1885 and at the age of seventeen, I was tossed boldly into the "Negro Problem." From a section and circumstances where the status of me and my folk could be rationalized as the result of poverty and limited training, and settled essentially by schooling and hard effort, I suddenly came to a region where the world was split into white and black halves, and where the darker half was held back by race prejudice and legal bonds, as well as by deep ignorance and dire poverty.

But facing this was not a little lost group, but a world in size and a civilization in potentiality. Into this world I leapt with provincial enthusiasm. A new loyalty and allegiance replaced my Americanism: henceforward I was a Negro.

To support and balance this, was the teaching and culture background of Fisk of the latter Nineteenth Century. All of its teachers but one were white, from New England or from the New Englandized Middle West. My own culture background thus suffered no change nor hiatus. Its application only was new. This *point d'appui* was not simply Tennessee, which was never a typical slave state, but Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, whence our students came; and whose mature men and women, for the most part from five to ten years older than I, could paint from their own experience a wide and vivid picture of the post-war South and of its black millions. There were men and women who had faced mobs and seen lynchings; who knew every phase of insult and repression; and too there were sons, daughters and clients of every class of white Southerner. A relative of a future president of the nation had his dark son driven to school each day.

The college curriculum of my day was limited but excellent. Adam Spence was a great Greek scholar by any comparison. Thomas Chase with his ridiculously small laboratory nevertheless taught us not only chemistry and physics but something of science and of life. In after years I used Bennett's German in Germany, and with the philosophy and ethics of Cravath, I later sat under William

James and George Palmer at Harvard. The excellent and earnest teaching, the small college classes; the absence of distractions, either in athletics or society, enabled me to re-arrange and re-build my program for freedom and progress among Negroes. I replaced my hitherto egocentric world by a world centering and whirling about my race in America. To this group I transferred my plan of study and accomplishment. Through the leadership of men like me and my fellows, we were going to have these enslaved Israelites out of the still enduring bondage in short order. It was a battle which might conceivably call for force, but I could think it confidently through mainly as a battle of wits; of knowledge and deed, which by sheer reason and desert, must eventually overwhelm the forces of hate, ignorance and reaction.

Always in my dreaming, a certain redeeming modicum of common sense has usually come to my rescue and brought fantasy down to the light of common day: I was not content to take the South entirely by hearsay; and while I had no funds to travel widely, I did, somewhat to the consternation of both teachers and fellow-students, determine to go out into the country and teach summer school. I was only eighteen and knew nothing of the South at first hand, save what little I had seen in Nashville. There to be sure I had stared curiously at the bullet holes in the door of the City Hall where an editor had been murdered in daylight and cold blood. It was the first evidence of such physical violence I had ever seen. I had once made the tragic mistake of raising my hat to a white woman, whom I had accidentally jostled on the public street. But I had not seen anything of the small Southern town and the countryside, which are the real South. If I could not explore Darkest Mississippi, at least I could see West Tennessee, which was not more than fifty miles from the college.

Needless to say the experience was invaluable. I traveled not only in space but in time. I touched the very shadow of slavery. I lived and taught school in log cabins built before the Civil War. My school was the second held in the district since emancipation. I touched intimately the lives of the commonest of mankind—people who ranged from bare-footed dwellers on dirt floors, with patched rags for clothes, to rough, hard-working farmers, with plain, clean plenty. I saw and talked with white people, noted now their unease, now their truculence and again their friendliness. I nearly fell from my horse when the first school commissioner whom I interviewed invited me to stay to dinner. Afterward I realized that he meant me to eat at the second, but quite as well-served, table.

The net result of the Fisk interlude was to broaden the scope of my program of life, not essentially to change it; to center it in a group of educated Negroes, who from their knowledge and experience would lead the mass. I never for a moment dreamed that such leadership could ever be for the sake of the educated group itself, but always for the mass. Nor did I pause to enquire in just what ways

and with what technique we would work—first, broad, exhaustive knowledge of the world; all other wisdom, all method and application would be added unto us.

In essence I combined a social program for a depressed group with the natural demand of youth for "Light, more Light." Fisk was a good college; I liked it; but it was small, it was limited in equipment, in laboratories, in books; it was not a university. I wanted the largest and best in organized learning. Nothing could be too big and thorough for training the leadership of the American Negro. There must remain no suspicion of part-knowledge, cheap equipment, for this mighty task. The necessity of earning a living scarcely occurred to me. I had no need for or desire for money.

I turned with increased determination to the idea of going to Harvard. There I was going to study the science of sciences—philosophy. Vainly did Chase point out, as James did later, that the world was not in the habit of paying philosophers. In vain did the president offer me a scholarship at Hartford Theological Seminary. I believed too little in Christian dogma to become a minister. I was not without Faith: I never stole material nor spiritual things; I not only never lied, but blurted out my conception of the truth on the most untoward occasions; I drank no alcohol and knew nothing of women, physically or psychically, to the incredulous amusement of most of my more experienced fellows: I above all believed in work—systematic and tireless. I went to Harvard. Small difference it made if Harvard would only admit me to standing as a college junior; I earned \$100 by summer work: I received Price Greenleaf Aid to the amount of \$250, which seemed a very large sum. Of the miracle of my getting anything, of the sheer luck of being able to keep on studying with neither friends nor money, I gave no thought.

The Enlargement at Harvard and Berlin

Fortunately I did not fall into the mistake of regarding Harvard as the beginning rather than the continuing of my college training. I did not find better teachers at Harvard, but teachers better known, with wider facilities and in broader atmosphere for approaching truth. Up to this time, I had been absorbing a general view of human knowledge: in ancient and modern literatures; in mathematics, physics and chemistry and history. It was all in vague and general terms—interpretations of what men who knew the facts at first hand, thought they might mean. With the addition of a course in chemistry in a Harvard laboratory under Hill, some geology under Shaler and history under Hart, I was in possession of the average educated man's concept of this world and its meaning. But now I wanted to go further: to know what man could know and how to collect and interpret facts face to face. And what "facts" were.

Here I revelled in the keen analysis of William James, Josiah Royce and young George Santayana. But it was James with his pragmatism and Albert Bushnell Hart with his research method, that turned me back from the lovely but sterile land of philosophic speculation, to the social sciences as the field for gathering and interpreting that body of fact which would apply to my program for the Negro.

I began with a bibliography of Nat Turner and ended with a history of the suppression of the African Slave Trade to America; neither needed to be done again at least in my day. Thus in my quest for basic knowledge with which to help guide the American Negro, I came to the study of sociology, by way of philosophy and history rather than by physics and biology, which was the current approach; moreover at that day, Harvard recognized no "science" of sociology and for my doctorate, after hesitating between history and economics, I chose history. On the other hand, psychology, hovering then at the threshold of experiment under Münsterberg, soon took a new orientation which I could understand from the beginning.

My human contacts at Harvard were narrow, and if I had not gone immediately to Europe, I was about to encase myself in a completely colored world, self-sufficient and provincial, and ignoring just as far as possible the white world which conditioned it. This was self-protective coloration, with perhaps an inferiority complex, but more of increasing belief in the ability and future of black folk. I sought at Harvard no acquaintanceship with white students and only such contacts which white teachers as lay directly in the line of my work. I joined certain clubs like the Philosophical Club; I was a member of the Foxcroft dining club because it was cheap. James and one or two other teachers had me at their homes at meal and reception.

Nevertheless my friends and companions were taken from the colored students of Harvard and neighboring institutions, and the colored folk of Boston and other cities. With them I led a happy and inspiring life. There were among them many educated and well-to-do folk; many young people studying or planning to study; many charming young women. We met and ate, danced and argued and planned a new world. I was exceptional among them, in my ideas on voluntary race segregation; they for the most part saw salvation only in integration at the earliest moment and on almost any terms in white culture; I was firm in my criticism of white folk and in my more or less complete dream of a Negro self-sufficient culture even in America.

In Germany, on the other hand, where after a stiff fight for recognition of my academic work, I went on fellowship in 1892, the situation was quite different. I found myself on the outside of the American world, looking in. With me were white folk—students, acquaintances, teachers—who viewed the scene with me. They did not pause to regard me as a curiosity, or something

sub-human; I was just a man of the somewhat privileged student rank, with whom they were glad to meet and talk over the world; particularly, the part of the world whence I came. I found to my gratification that they with me did not regard America as the last word in civilization. Indeed I derived a certain satisfaction in learning that the University of Berlin did not recognize a degree even from Harvard University, no more than from Fisk. Even I was a little startled to realize how much that I had regarded as white American, was white European and not American at all: America's music is German, the Germans said; the Americans have no art, said the Italians; and their literature, remarked the English, is English; all agreed that Americans could make money but did not care how they made it. And the like. Sometimes their criticism got under even my anti-American skin, but it was refreshing on the whole to hear voiced my own attitude toward so much that America had meant to me.

In my study, I came in contact with several of the great leaders of the developing social sciences: with Schmoller in economic sociology; Adolf Wagner, in social history; with Max Weber and the Germanophile, von Treitschke. I gained ready admittance to the rather exclusive seminars, and my horizon in the social sciences was broadened not only by teachers, but by students from France, Belgium, Russia, Italy and Poland. I traveled, on foot and third-class railway, to all parts of Germany and most of Central Europe. I got a bird's eye glimpse of modern western culture at the turn of the century.

But of greater importance, was the opportunity which my *Wanderjahre* in Europe gave of looking at the world as a man and not simply from a narrow racial and provincial outlook. This was primarily the result not so much of my study, as of my human companionship, unveiled by the accident of color. From the days of my later youth to my boarding a Rhine passenger steamer at Rotterdam in August, 1891, I had not regarded white folk as human in quite the same way that I was. I had reached the habit of expecting color prejudice so universally, that I found it even when it was not there. So when I saw on this little steamer a Dutch lady with two grown daughters and one of twelve, I proceeded to put as much space between us as the small vessel allowed. But it did not allow much, and the lady's innate breeding allowed less. Before we reached the end of our trip, we were happy companions, laughing, eating and singing together, talking English, French and German, visiting in couples, as the steamer stopped, the lovely castled German towns, and acting like normal, well-bred human beings. I waved them all good-bye, in the solemn arched aisles of the Köln cathedral, with tears in my eyes.

So too in brave old Eisenach, beneath the shadow of Luther's Wartburg, I spent a happy holiday with French and English boys, and German girls, in a home where university training and German home-making left no room for American color prejudice, although one American woman did what she could

to introduce it. She thought that I was far too popular with the German girls and secretly warned the house-mother. I was popular, but there was no danger in the American sense. I was quite wedded to my task in America. When blue-eyed Dora confessed her readiness to marry me "*gleich!*" I told her frankly and gravely that it would be unfair to himself and cruel to her for a colored man to take a white bride to America. She could not understand.

From this unhampered social intermingling with Europeans of education and manners, I emerged from the extremes of my racial provincialism. I became more human; learned the place in life of "Wine, Women, and Song"; I ceased to hate or suspect people simply because they belonged to one race or color; and above all I began to understand the real meaning of scientific research and the dim outline of methods of employing its technique and its results in the new social sciences for the settlement of the Negro problems in America

Prelude to Practice

I returned to the United States, traveling steerage, in July, 1894. I was twenty-six years of age and had obtained an education such as few young Americans, white or black, had had opportunity to receive. Probably, looking back after the event, I have rationalized my life into a planned, coherent unity which was not as true to fact as it now seems; probably there were hesitations, gropings, and half-essayed bypaths, now forgotten or unconsciously ignored. But my first quarter-century of life seems to me at this distance as singularly well-aimed at a certain goal, along a clearly planned path. I returned ready and eager to begin a life-work, leading to the emancipation of the American Negro. History and the other social sciences were to be my weapons, to be sharpened and applied by research and writing. Where and how, was the question in 1894.

I began a systematic mail campaign for a job. I wrote one public school in West Tennessee, not far from where I had taught school. The board hesitated, but finally indicated that I had rather too much education for their use. I applied to Howard University, Hampton Institute and my own Fisk. They had no openings. Tuskegee, late in the Fall, offered me a chance to teach mathematics, mentioning no salary; the offer came too late, for in August, I had accepted an offer from Wilberforce to teach Latin and Greek at \$750 a year.

Probably Wilberforce was about the least likely of all Negro colleges to adopt me and my program. First of all I was cocky and self-satisfied; I wore invariably the cane and gloves of a German student. I doubtless strutted and I certainly knew what I wanted. My redeeming feature was infinite capacity for work and terrible earnestness, with appalling and tactless frankness. But not all was discouragement and frustration at Wilberforce. Of importance that

exceeded everything, was the group of students whom I met and taught; most of the student body was in high school grades and poorly equipped for study. But filtering into the small college department were a few men and women of first-class intelligence, able and eager to work. As working companions, we made excursions into Greek literature; I gathered a class in German which talked German from the first day; I guided the writing of English themes and did a bit of modern history. Try as I might, however, the institution would have no sociology, even though I offered to teach it on my own time.

I became uneasy about my life program. I was doing nothing directly in the social sciences and saw no immediate prospect. Then the door of opportunity opened: just a crack, to be sure, but a distinct opening. In the Fall of 1896, I went to the University of Pennsylvania as "Assistant Instructor" in Sociology. It all happened this way: Philadelphia, then and still one of the worst governed of America's badly governed cities, was having one of its periodic spasms of reform. A thorough study of causes was called for. Not but what the underlying cause was evident to most white Philadelphians: the corrupt, semi-criminal vote of the Negro Seventh Ward. Every one agreed that here lay the cancer; but would it not be well to elucidate the known causes by a scientific investigation, with the imprimatur of the University? It certainly would, answered Samuel McCune Lindsay of the Department of Sociology. And he put his finger on me for the task.

There must have been some opposition, for the invitation was not particularly cordial. I was offered a salary of \$800 for a period limited to one year. I was given no real academic standing, no office at the University, no official recognition of any kind; my name was even eventually omitted from the catalogue; I had no contact with students, and very little with members of the faculty, even in my department. With my bride of three months, I settled in one room over a cafeteria run by a College Settlement, in the worst part of the Seventh Ward. We lived there a year, in the midst of an atmosphere of dirt, drunkenness, poverty and crime. Murder sat on our doorsteps, police were our government, and philanthropy dropped in with periodic advice.

I counted my task here as simple and clear-cut: I proposed to find out what was the matter with this area and why. I started with no "research methods" and I asked little advice as to procedure. The problem lay before me. Study it. I studied it personally and not by proxy. I set out no canvassers. I went myself. Personally I visited and talked with 5000 persons. What I could I set down in orderly sequence on schedules which I made out and submitted to the University for criticism. Other information I stored in my memory or wrote out as memoranda. I went through the Philadelphia libraries for data, gained access in many instances to private libraries of colored folk and got individual

information. I mapped the district, classifying it by condition; I compiled two centuries of the history of the Negro in Philadelphia and in the Seventh Ward.

It was a hard job, but I completed it by the Spring of 1898 and published it a year later, under the auspices of the University, as *The Philadelphia Negro*; a formidable tome of nearly a thousand pages. But the greatest import to me was the fact, that after years, I had at last learned just what I wanted to do, in this life program of mine, and how to do it. First of all I became painfully aware that merely being born in a group, does not necessarily make one possessed of complete knowledge concerning it. I had learned far more from Philadelphia Negroes than I had taught them concerning the Negro Problem. Before the American Academy, affiliated with the University, I laid down in public session in 1899, a broad program of scientific attack on this problem, by systematic and continuous study; and I appealed to Harvard, Columbia and Pennsylvania, to take up the work.

Needless to say, they paid not the slightest attention to this challenge and for twenty-five years thereafter not a single first-grade college in America undertook to give any considerable scientific attention to the American Negro. There was no thought or suggestion even of keeping me at the University of Pennsylvania. Before I had finished my work in Philadelphia, however, a Negro college, Atlanta University, had asked me to develop my program in Georgia. The days of the years of my apprenticeship were over. I entered on my life plan in the Fall of 1897.

The Program of 100 Years

The main significance of my work at Atlanta University, during the years 1897 to 1910 was the development at an American institution of learning, of a program of study on the problems affecting the American Negroes, covering a progressively widening and deepening effort designed to stretch over the span of a century. This program was grafted on an attempt by George Bradford of Boston, one of the trustees, to open for Atlanta University a field of usefulness, comparable to what Hampton and Tuskegee were doing for rural districts in agriculture and industry. At the Hampton and Tuskegee conferences, there came together annually and in increasing numbers, workers, experts and observers to encourage by speeches and interchange of experience the Negro farmers and laborers of adjoining areas. Visitors, white and colored, from North and South, joined to advise and learn. Mr. Bradford's idea was to establish at Atlanta a similar conference, devoted especially to problems of city Negroes. Such a conference, emphasizing particularly Negro health problems, was held in 1896. Immediately the University looked about for a man to teach history and political science, and take charge of future conferences. I was chosen.

When I took charge of the Atlanta Conference, I did not pause to consider how far my developed plans agreed or disagreed with the ideas of the already launched project. It made little essential difference, since only one conference had been held and a second planned. These followed the Hampton and Tuskegee model of being primarily meetings of inspiration, directed toward specific efforts at social reform and aimed at propaganda for social uplift in certain preconceived lines. This program at Atlanta, I sought to swing as on a pivot to one of scientific investigation into social conditions, primarily for scientific ends: I put no especial emphasis on specific reform effort, but increasing and widening emphasis on the collection of a basic body of fact concerning the social condition of American Negroes, endeavoring to reduce that condition to exact measurement whenever or wherever occasion permitted. As time passed, it happened that many uplift efforts were in fact based on our studies: the kindergarten system of the city of Atlanta, white as well as black; the Negro Business League, and various projects to better health and combat crime. We came to be however, as I had intended, increasingly, a source of general information and a basis for further study, rather than an organ of social reform.

The proverbial visitor from Mars would have assumed as elemental a study in America of American Negroes—as physical specimens; as biological growths; as a field of investigation in economic development from slave to free labor; as a psychological laboratory in human reaction toward caste and discrimination; as an unique case of physical and cultural intermingling. These and a dozen other subjects of scientific interest, would have struck the man from Mars as eager lines of investigation for American social scientists. He would have been astounded to learn that the only institution in America in 1900 with any such program of study was Atlanta University, where on a budget of \$5000 a year, including salaries, cost of publication, investigation and annual meetings, we were essaying this pioneer work.

My program for the succession of conference studies was modified by many considerations: cost, availability of suitable data, tested methods of investigation; moreover I could not plunge too soon into such controversial subjects as politics or miscegenation. Within these limitations, I finished a ten-year cycle study as follows:

- 1896, *Mortality among Negroes in Cities*
- 1897, *Social and Physical Condition of Negroes in Cities*
- 1898, *Some Efforts of Negroes for Social Betterment*
- 1899, *Negro in Business*
- 1900, *The College-bred Negro*
- 1901, *The Negro Common School*

- 1902, *The Negro Artisan*
- 1903, *The Negro Church*
- 1904, *Notes on Negro Crime*
- 1905, *A Select Bibliography of the American Negro*

I then essayed for the second decade a broader program, more logical, more inclusive, and designed to bring the whole subject matter into a better integrated whole. But continued lack of funds, and outside demands (like the request of the Carnegie Institution of 1907 for a study of co-operation) kept even the second decade from the complete logic of arrangement which I desired; finally, my leaving Atlanta in 1910 and at last the severing of my connection with the conference in 1914, left the full form of my program still unfinished. I did, however, publish the following studies:

- 1906, *Health and Physique of the Negro American*
- 1907, *Economic Co-operation among Negro Americans*
- 1908, *The Negro American Family*
- 1909, *Efforts for Social betterment among Negro Americans*
- 1910, *The College-bred Negro American*
- 1911, *The Common School and the Negro American*
- 1912, *The Negro American Artisan*
- 1914, *Morals and Manners among Negro Americans*

With the publication of 1914, my connection with Atlanta ceased for twenty years. Although studies and publications were prepared by others at the University in 1915 and 1918, the war finally stopped the enterprise. What I was laboriously but steadily approaching in this effort was a recurring cycle of ten studies in succeeding decades; with repetition of each subject or some modification of it in each decade, upon a progressively broader and more exact basis and with better method; until gradually a foundation of carefully ascertained fact would build a basis of knowledge, broad and sound enough to be called scientific in the best sense of that term. Just what form this dream would eventually have taken, I do not know. So far as actually forecast, it had assumed in 1914, some such form as this:

1. Population: Distribution and Growth
2. Biology: Health and Physique
3. Socialization: Family, Group and Class
4. Cultural Patterns: Morals and Manners
5. Education
6. Religion and the Church
7. Crime

8. Law and Government
9. Literature and Art
10. Summary and Bibliography

I proposed as I have said, to repeat each of these every ten years, basing the studies on ever broader and more carefully gathered data. Eventually I hoped to keep all the inquiries going simultaneously, only emphasizing and reporting on one particular subject each year. This would have allowed some necessary shifting or combination of subjects as time and developments might suggest; and adjustments to new scientific advance in fields like anthropology and psychology. The plan would have called in time for a large and well-paid staff of experts and a study of method and testing of results such as no group of Americans were engaged in at the time; beginning with a definite, circumscribed group, but ending with the human race. If it could have been carried out even imperfectly and with limitations, who can doubt its value today, not only to the Negro, but to America and to the still troubled science of sociology?

It was of course crazy for me to dream that America, in the dawn of the Twentieth Century, with Colonial Imperialism, based on the suppression of colored folk, at its zenith, would encourage, much less adequately finance, such a program at a Negro college under Negro scholars. My faith in its success was based on the firm belief that race prejudice was based on widespread ignorance. My long-term remedy was Truth: carefully gathered scientific proof that neither color nor race determined the limits of a man's capacity or desert. I was not at the time sufficiently Freudian to understand how little human action is based on reason; nor did I know Karl Marx well enough to appreciate the economic foundations of human history.

I was therefore astonished and infinitely disappointed, gradually to realize that our work in the Atlanta conferences was not getting support; that, far from being able to command increased revenue for better methods of investigation and wider fields, it was with increasing difficulty that the aging and overworked President, with his deep earnestness and untiring devotion to principle, could collect enough to maintain even our present activities. The conference had not been without a measure of success. Our reports were widely read and commented upon. We could truthfully say that between 1900 and 1925, no work on the Negro and no study of the South was published which was not indebted in some respect to the studies at Atlanta University. The United States Census Bureau and the Federal Labor Bureau asked our help and co-operation; institutions and philanthropies; authors, students and individuals in all walks of life, and in Europe, Asia and Africa, wrote us for information and advice. On the other hand, so far as the American world of science and letters was concerned, we never "belonged"; we remained unrecognized in learned societies and academic

groups. We rated merely as Negroes studying Negroes, and after all, what had Negroes to do with America or Science?

Gradually and with deep disappointment I began to realize, as early as 1906, that my program for studying the Negro problems must soon end, unless it received unforeseen support.

The Closing and Opening Decades, 1900

For the American Negro, the last decade of the 19th, and the first decade of the 20th Centuries were more critical than the Reconstruction years of 1868 to 1876. Yet they have received but slight attention from historians and social students. They are usually interpreted in terms of personalities, and without regard to the great social forces that were developing. This was the age of triumph for Big Business, for Industry, consolidated and organized on a world-wide scale, and run by white capital with colored labor. The southern United States was one of the most promising fields for this development, with invaluable staple crops, with a mass of cheap and potentially efficient labor, with unlimited natural power and use of unequalled technique, and with a transportation system reaching all the markets of the world.

The profit promised by the exploitation of this quasi-colonial empire was facing labor difficulties, threatening to flare into race war. The relations of the poor-white and Negro working classes were becoming increasingly embittered. In the year when I undertook the study of the Philadelphia Negro, lynching of Negroes by mobs reached a crimson climax in the United States, at the astounding figure of nearly five a week. Government throughout the former slave states was conducted by fraud and intimidation, with open violation of state and federal law. Reason seemed to have reached an impasse: white demagogues, like Tillman and Vaardman, attacked Negroes with every insulting epithet and accusation that the English language could afford, and got wide hearing. On the other hand Negro colleges and others were graduating colored men and women, few in the aggregate, but of increasing influence, who demanded the full rights of American citizens; and even if their threatening surroundings compelled silence or whispers, they were none the less convinced that this attitude was their only way of salvation. Supporting Negro education were the descendants of those Northerners who founded the first Negro institutions and had since contributed to their upkeep. But these same Northerners were also investors and workers in the new industrial organization of the world. Toward them now turned the leaders of the white South, who were at once apprehensive of race war and desirous of a new, orderly industrial South.

Conference began between whites of the North and the South, including industrialists as well as teachers, business men rather than preachers. At Capon

Springs, on the Robert Ogden trips to Hampton and Tuskegee, in the organization of the Southern Education Board, and finally in the founding of the General Education Board, a new racial philosophy for the South was evolved. This philosophy seemed to say that the attempt to over-educate a "child race" by furnishing chiefly college training to its promising young people, must be discouraged; the Negro must be taught to accept what the whites were willing to offer him; in a world ruled by white people and destined so to be ruled, the place of Negroes must be that of an humble, patient, hard-working group of laborers, whose ultimate destiny would be determined by their white employers. Meantime, the South must have education on a broad and increasing basis, but primarily for whites; for Negroes, education, for the present, should be confined increasingly to elementary instruction, and more especially to training in farming and industry, calculated to make the mass of Negroes laborers contented with their lot and tractable.

White and Negro labor must, so far as possible, be taken out of active competition, by segregation in work: to the whites the bulk of well-paid skilled labor and management; to the Negro, farm labor, unskilled labor in industry and domestic service. Exceptions to this general pattern would occur especially in some sorts of skills like building and repairs; but in general the "white" and "Negro" job would be kept separate and superimposed.

Finally, Northern philanthropy, especially in education, must be organized and incorporated, and its dole distributed according to this program; thus a number of inefficient and even dishonest attempts to conduct private Negro schools and low-grade colleges would be eliminated; smaller and competing instructions would be combined; above all, less and less total support would be given higher training for Negroes. This program was rigorously carried out until after the first World War.

To the support of this program, came Booker T. Washington in 1893. The white South was jubilant; public opinion was studiously organized to make Booker Washington the one nationally recognized leader of his race, and the South went quickly to work to translate this program into law. Disfranchisement laws were passed between 1890 and 1910, by all the former slave states, and quickly declared constitutional by the courts, before contests could be effectively organized; Jim-Crow legislation, for travel on railroads and street-cars, and race separation in many other walks of life, were rapidly put on the statute books.

By the second decade of the Twentieth Century, a legal caste system based on race and color, had been openly grafted on the democratic constitution of the United States. This explains why, in 1910, I gave up my position at Atlanta University and become Director of Publications and Research for the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, of which I was one of the incorporators in 1911.

The First Re-adaptation of My Program

Very early in my work in Atlanta, I began to feel, on the one hand, pressure being put upon me to modify my work; and on the other hand an inner emotional reaction at the things taking place about me. To note the latter first: as a scientist, I sought the traditional detachment and calm of the seeker for truth. I had deliberately chosen to work in the South, although I knew that there I must face discrimination and insult. But on the other hand I was a normal human being with strong feelings and pronounced likes and dislikes, and a flair for expression; these I could not wholly suppress, nor did I try. I was on the other hand willing to endure and as my dear friend, Henry Hunt, said to me in after years, I could keep still in seven different languages. But, if I did speak I did not intend to lie.

A characteristic happening that seared my soul took place in Georgia in 1899. A Negro farm laborer, Sam Hose, tried to collect his wages from his employer; an altercation ensued and Hose killed the white farmer. Several days passed and Hose was not found. Then it was alleged that he had been guilty of murder, and also of rape on the farmer's wife. A mob started after him.

The whole story was characteristic and to me the truth seemed clear: the habit of exploiting Negro workers by refusing for trivial reasons to pay them; the resultant quarrel ending usually in the beating or even killing of the overbold black laborer; but sometimes it was the employer who got whipped or killed. If punishment did not immediately follow, then the mob was aroused by the convenient tale of rape. I sat down and wrote a letter to the *Atlanta Constitution*, setting down briefly the danger of this kind of needless race row, and the necessity of taking it firmly in hand in the very beginning. I had a letter of introduction to "Uncle Remus," Joel Chandler Harris, the editor, which I had never delivered. I took letter and article and started down town. On the way I learned that Hose had been caught and lynched; and I was also told that some of his fingers were on exhibit at a butcher shop which I would pass on my way to town. I turned about and went home. I never met Joel Chandler Harris. Something died in me that day.

The pressure which I began to feel came from white Northern friends, who I believed appreciated my work and on the whole wished me and my race well. But I think they were apprehensive; fearful because as perhaps the most conspicuously trained young Negro of my day, and, quite apart from any question of ability, my reaction toward the new understanding between North and South, and especially my attitude toward Mr. Washington, were bound to influence Negroes. As a matter of fact, at that time I was not over-critical of Booker Washington. I regarded his Atlanta speech as a statesmanlike effort to

reach understanding with the white South; I hoped the South would respond with equal generosity and thus the nation could come to understanding for both races. When, however, the South responded with "Jim-Crow" legislation, I became uneasy. Still I believed that my program of investigation and study was just what was needed to bring understanding in the long run, based on truth. I tried to make this clear. I attended the conferences at Hampton for several years, to attest my interest in industrial training. There I was approached with tentative offers to come to Hampton and edit a magazine. But I could not be certain that I was to be allowed to express my own opinions or only the opinions of the school. Of those Hampton opinions, I became increasingly critical. In all the deliberations to which I listened, and resolutions, which were passed at Hampton, never once was the work at Atlanta University nor college work anywhere for Negroes, commended or approved. I ceased regular attendance at the conferences; but when later I was invited back I delivered a defense of higher training for Negroes and a scathing criticism of the "Hampton Idea." I was not asked to return to Hampton for twenty-five years.

About 1902, there came a series of attempts to induce me to leave my work at Atlanta and go to Tuskegee. I had several interviews with Mr. Washington and was offered more salary than I was getting. I was not averse to work with Mr. Washington, but I could get no clear idea what my duties would be. If I had been offered a chance at Tuskegee to pursue my program of investigation, with larger funds and opportunity, I would doubtless have accepted, because by that time, despite my liking for Atlanta, I saw that the university would not long be able to finance my work. But my wife and many friends warned me that all this eagerness for my services might conceal a plan to stop my work and prevent me from expressing in the future any criticism of the current Hampton-Tuskegee plan. I hesitated. Finally, in 1903, I published "The Souls of Black Folk" with its chapter, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and others." This was no attack on Mr. Washington but it was a straightforward criticism and a statement of my own aims. I received no further invitation to come to Tuskegee.

Events now moved fast. Opposition among Negroes to what now came to be called the Washington program grew. I took no active part in it, until Trotter was jailed in Boston for trying to heckle Washington. Then, in 1906, I called the Niagara Movement to meet at Niagara Falls and deliberate on our future course as leaders of the Negro intelligentsia. The manifesto which we sent out fixed my status as a radical, opposed to segregation and caste; and made retention of my position at Atlanta more difficult.

The presidents of Negro colleges, mostly white men, who began service with Reconstruction, were now beginning to retire or die of old age. Dr. Bumstead died in 1919. He was particularly disliked in the South because his white teachers and colored students ate together and because he gave up state aid rather than

bar white students from his institution. He had been succeeded by a young man, son of Edmund Asa Ware, our first president. Young Edmund Ware was a good friend of mine and started his work with enthusiasm. But in raising funds he found himself against a stone wall; I do not know that he was actually advised to get rid of me, but I sensed his burden. I accepted the offer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1910 to join their new organization in New York, as Director of Publications and Research.

My new title showed that I had modified my program of research, but by no means abandoned it. First, I directed and edited my Atlanta study of 1912, *in absentia*, with the help of my colleague, Augustus Dill, my student and successor as teacher in Atlanta. Then in our study of 1913, I secured the promise of Dr. Dillard, of the Slater Board, to join Atlanta University in keeping up the work of the conferences. The work of research was to be carried on in New York, with a conference and annual publication at Atlanta. I was jubilant at the projected survival of my work. But on advice of President Ware, this arrangement was not accepted by the trustees. Ware was probably warned that this tie with a radical movement would continue to hamper the university. In August, 1910, I reported at my new office and new work at 20 Vesey Street, New York.

As I have said elsewhere, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People "proved between 1910 and the World War, one of the most effective organizations of the liberal spirit and the fight for social progress which the Negro race in America has known." It fought frankly to make Negroes "politically free from disfranchisement; legally free from caste and socially free from insult." It established the validity of the Fifteenth Amendment, the unconstitutionality of the "Grandfather Clause," and the illegality of residential segregation. It reduced lynching from two hundred and thirty-five victims a year to a half dozen. But it did not and could not settle the "Negro Problem."

This new field of endeavor represented a distinct break from my previous purely scientific program. While "research" was still among my duties, there were in fact no funds for such work. My chief efforts were devoted to editing and publishing the *Crisis*, which I founded on my own responsibility, and over the protests of many of my associates. With the *Crisis*, I essayed a new role of interpreting to the world the hindrances and aspirations of American Negroes. My older program appeared only as I supported my contentions with facts from current reports and observation or historic reference; my writing was reinforced by lecturing, and my facts increased by travel.

On the other hand, gradually and with increasing clarity, my whole attitude toward the social sciences began to change: in the study of human beings and their actions, there could be no such rift between theory and practice, between pure and applied science; as was possible in the study of sticks and stones. The "studies" which I had been conducting at Atlanta I saw as fatally handicapped

because they represented so small a part of the total sum of occurrences; were so far removed in time and space as to lose the hot reality of real life; and because the continuous, kaleidoscopic change of conditions made their story old already before it was analyzed and told.

If, of course, they had had time to grow in breadth and accuracy, this difficulty would have been met, or at least approached. Now in contrast I suddenly saw life, full and face to face; I began to know the problem of Negroes in the United States as a present startling reality; and moreover (and this was most upsetting) I faced situations that called—shrieked—for action, even before any detailed, scientific study could possibly be prepared. It was as though, as a bridge-builder, I was compelled to throw a bridge across a stream without waiting for the careful mathematical testing of materials. Such testing was indispensable, but it had to be done so often in the midst of building or even after construction, and not in the calm and leisure long before. I saw before me a problem that could not and would not await the last word of science, but demanded immediate action to prevent social death. I was continually the surgeon probing blindly, yet with what knowledge and skill I could muster, for unknown ill, bound to be fatal if I hesitated, but possibly effective, if I persisted.

I realized that evidently the social scientist could not sit apart and study *in vacuo*; neither on the other hand, could he work fast and furiously simply by intuition and emotion, without seeking in the midst of action, the ordered knowledge which research and tireless observation might give him. I tried therefore in my new work, not to pause when remedy was needed; on the other hand I sought to make each incident and item in my program of social uplift, part of a wider and vaster structure of real scientific knowledge of the race problem in America.

Facts, in social science, I realized, were elusive things: emotions, loves, hates, were facts; and they were facts in the souls and minds of the scientific student, as well as in the persons studied. Their measurement, then, was doubly difficult and intricate. If I could see and feel this in East St. Louis, where I investigated a bloody race riot, I knew all the more definitely, that in the cold, bare facts of history, so much was omitted from the complete picture that it could only be recovered as complete scientific knowledge if we could read back into the past enough to piece out the reality. I knew also that even in the ugly picture which I actually saw, there was so much of decisive truth missing that any story I told would be woefully incomplete.

Then, too, for what Law was I searching? In accord with what unchangeable scientific law of action was the world of interracial discord about me working? I fell back upon my Royce and James and deserted Schmoller and Weber. I saw the action of physical law in the actions of men; but I saw more than that: I saw rhythms and tendencies; coincidences and probabilities; and I saw that,

which for want of any other word, I must in accord with the strict tenets of Science, call Chance. I went forward to build a sociology, which I conceived of as the attempt to measure the element of Chance in human conduct. This was the Jamesian pragmatism, applied not simply to ethics, but to all human action, beyond what seemed to me, increasingly, the distinct limits of physical law.

My work assumed from now on a certain tingling challenge of risk; what the "Captain of Industry" of that day was experiencing in "kick," from money changing, railway consolidation and corporation floating, I was, in what appeared to me on a larger scale, essaying in the relations of men of daily life. My field of effort began to broaden in concept. In 1911, I attended a Races Congress in London. Had not the First World War so swept the mind of man clear of its pre-war thought, this meeting would have marked an epoch and might easily have made this Second World War unnecessary, and a Third, impossible. It was a great meeting of the diverse peoples of the earth; scarce any considerable group was omitted; and amid a bewildering diversity, a distinct pattern of human unity stood out.

I returned to America with a broad tolerance of race and a determination to work for the Internation, which I saw forming; it was, I conceived, not the ideal of the American Negroes to become simply American; but the ideal of America to build an interracial culture, broader and more catholic than ours. Before I had implemented this program in more than fugitive writing, World War fell on civilization and obliterated all dreams.

The Second Re-adaptation of My Program

I was forthwith engulfed in a mad fight to make Negroes Americans; a program I was already about to discard for something wider. The struggle was bitter: I was fighting to let the Negroes fight; I, who for a generation had been a professional pacifist; I was fighting for a separate training camp for Negro officers; I, who was devoting a career to opposing race segregation; I was seeing the Germany which taught me the human brotherhood of white and black, pitted against America which was for me the essence of Jim Crow; and yet I was "rooting" for America; and I had to, even before my own conscience, so utterly crazy had the whole world become and I with it.

I came again to a sort of mental balance, when after the armistice, I landed in France, in December, 1918, charged with two duties: to investigate the stories of cruelty and mistreatment of Negro soldiers by the American army; and to sound some faint rallying cry to unite the colored world, and more especially the Negroes of three continents, against the future aggressions of the whites. For now there was no doubt in my mind: Western European civilization had nearly

caused the death of modern culture in jealous effort to control the wealth and work of colored people.

The Pan-African congresses which I called in 1919, 1921 and 1923, were chiefly memorable for the excitement and opposition which they caused among the colonial imperialists. Scarcely a prominent newspaper in Europe but used them as a text of warning, and persisted in coupling them with the demagogic "Garvey Movement," then in its prime, as a warning for colonial governments to clamp down on colonial unrest. My only important action in this time, was a first trip to Africa, almost by accident, and a vaster conception of the role of black men in the future of civilization.

But here I was going too fast for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The board was not interested in Africa. Following post-war reaction it shrank back to its narrowest program: to make Negroes American citizens, forgetting that if the white European world persisted in upholding and strengthening the color bar, America would follow dumbly in its wake.

From 1910 to 1920, I had followed the path of sociology as an inseparable part of social reform, and social uplift as a method of scientific social investigation; then, in practice, I had conceived an interracial culture as superseding as our goal, a purely American culture; before I had conceived a program for this path, and after throes of bitter racial strife, I had emerged with a program of Pan-Africanism, as organized protection of the Negro world led by American Negroes. But American Negroes were not interested.

Abruptly, I had a beam of new light. Karl Marx was scarcely mentioned at Harvard and entirely unknown at Fisk. At Berlin, he was a living influence, but chiefly in the modifications of his theories then dominant in the Social Democratic Party. I was attracted by the rise of this party and attended its meetings. I began to consider myself a socialist. After my work in Atlanta and my advent in New York, I followed some of my white colleagues—Charles Edward Russell, Mary Ovington, and William English Walling into the Socialist Party. Then came the Russian Revolution and the fight of England, France and the United States against the Bolsheviks. I began to read Karl Marx. I was astounded and wondered what other lands of learning had been roped off from my mind in the days of my "broad" education. I did not however jump to the conclusion that the new Russia had achieved the ideal of Marx. And when I was offered a chance to visit Russia in 1928, with expenses paid, I carefully stipulated in writing that the visit would not bind me in any way to set conclusions.

The Third Modification of My Program

My visit to Germany and the Soviet Union in 1928, and then to Turkey and Italy on return, marked another change in my thought and action. The

marks of war were all over Russia—of the war of France and England to turn back the clock of revolution. Wild children were in the sewers of Moscow; food was scarce, clothes in rags, and the fear of renewed Western aggression hung like a pall. Yet Russia was and still is to my mind, the most hopeful land in the modern world. Never before had I seen a suppressed mass of poor, working people—people as ignorant, poor, superstitious and cowed as my own American Negroes—so lifted in hope and starry-eyed with new determination, as the peasants and workers of Russia, from Leningrad and Moscow to Gorki and from Kiev to Odessa; the art galleries were jammed, the theatres crowded, the schools opening to new places and new programs each day; and work was joy. Their whole life was renewed and filled with vigor and ideal, as Youth Day in the Red Square proclaimed.

I saw of course but little of Russia in one short month. I came to no conclusions as to whether the particular form of the Russian state was permanent or a passing phase. I met but few of their great leaders; only Radek did I know well, and he died in the subsequent purge. I do not judge Russia in the matter of war and murder, no more than I judge England. But of one thing I am certain: I believe in the dictum of Karl Marx, that the economic foundation of a nation is widely decisive for its politics, its art and its culture. I saw clearly, when I left Russia, that our American Negro belief that the right to vote would give us work and decent wage; would abolish our illiteracy and decrease our sickness and crime, was justified only in part; that on the contrary, until we were able to earn a decent, independent living, we would never be allowed to cast a free ballot; that poverty caused our ignorance, sickness and crime; and that poverty was not our fault but our misfortune, the result and aim of our segregation and color caste; that the solution of letting a few of our capitalists share with whites in the exploitation of our masses, would never be a solution of our problem, but the forging of eternal chains, as Modern India knows to its sorrow.

Immediately, I modified my program again: I did not believe that the Communism of the Russias was the program for America; least of all for a minority group like the Negroes; I saw that the program of the American Communist party was suicidal. But I did believe that a people where the differentiation in classes because of wealth had only begun, could be so guided by intelligent leaders that they would develop into a consumer-conscious people, producing for use and not primarily for profit, and working into the surrounding industrial organization so as to reinforce the economic revolution bound to develop in the United States and all over Europe and Asia sooner or later. I believed that revolution in the production and distribution of wealth could be a slow, reasoned development and not necessarily a blood bath. I believed that 13 millions of people, increasing, albeit slowly in intelligence, could so concentrate their thought and action on the abolition of their poverty, as to work in conjunction with the

most intelligent body of American thought; and that in the future as in the past, out of the mass of American Negroes would arise a far-seeing leadership in lines of economic reform.

If it had not been for the depression, I think that through the *Crisis*, the little monthly which I had founded in 1910, and carried on with almost no financial assistance for twenty years, I could have started this program on the way to adoption by American Negroes. But the depression made the survival of the *Crisis* dependent on the charity of persons who feared this thought and forced it under the control of influences to whom such a program was Greek. In a program of mere agitation for "rights," without clear conception of constructive effort to achieve those rights, I was not interested, because I saw its fatal weakness.

My Present Program

About 1925, the General Education Board adopted a new program. It had become clear that the studied neglect of the Negro college was going too far; and that the Hampton-Tuskegee program was inadequate even for its own objects. A plan was adopted which envisaged, by consolidation and endowment, the establishment in the South of five centers of University education for Negroes. Atlanta had to be one of these centers, and in 1929, Atlanta University became the graduate school of an affiliated system of colleges which promised a new era in higher education for Negroes. My life-long friend, John Hope, became president, and immediately began to sound me out on returning to Atlanta to help him in this great enterprise. He promised me leisure for thought and writing, and freedom of expression, so far, of course, as Georgia could stand it.

It seemed to me that a return to Atlanta would not only have a certain poetic justification, but would relieve the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People from financial burden during the depression, as well as from the greater effort of re-considering its essential program.

With the unexpected coming of a Second World War, this move of mine has proved a relief. However it only postpones the inevitable decision as to what American Negroes are striving for, and how eventually they are going to get it.

The untimely death of John Hope in 1936 marred the full fruition of our plans, following my return to Atlanta, in 1933. Those plans in my mind fell into three categories; first with leisure to write, I wanted to fill in the background of certain historical studies concerning the Negro race; secondly I wanted to establish at Atlanta University a scholarly journal of comment and research on race problems; finally, I wanted to restore in some form at Atlanta, the systematic study of the Negro problems.

Between 1935 and 1941, I wrote and published three volumes: a study of the Negro in Reconstruction; a study of the black race in history and an

autobiographical sketch of my concept of the American race problem. To these I was anxious to add an Encyclopaedia of the Negro. I had been chosen in 1934 to act as editor-in-chief of the project of the Phelps-Stokes Fund to prepare and publish such a work. I spent nearly ten years of intermittent effort on this project and secured co-operation from many scholars, white and black, in America, Europe and Africa. But the necessary funds could not be secured. Perhaps again it was too soon to expect large aid for so ambitious a project, built mainly on Negro scholarship. Nevertheless, a preliminary volume summarizing this effort will be published in 1944.

In 1940, there was established at Atlanta, a quarterly magazine, *Phylon*, the "Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture." It is now finishing its fifth volume.

In the attempt to restore at Atlanta the study of the Negro problem in a broad and inclusive way, we faced the fact that in the twenty-three years which had passed since their discontinuance, the scientific study of the American Negro had spread widely and efficiently. Especially in the white institutions of the South had intelligent interest been aroused. There was, however, still need of systematic, comprehensive study and measurement, bringing to bear the indispensable point of view and inner knowledge of Negroes themselves. Something of this was being done at Fisk University, but for the widest efficiency, large funds were required for South-wide study.

The solution of this problem, without needless duplication of good work, or for mere pride of institution, came to me from W. R. Banks, principal of the Prairie View State College, Texas. He had been a student at Atlanta University during the days of the conferences. He took the idea with him to Texas, and conducted studies and conferences there for twenty years. He suggested that Atlanta University unite the seventeen Negro Land-Grant colleges in the South in a joint co-operative study, to be carried on continuously. I laid before the annual meeting of the presidents of these colleges in 1941, such a plan. I proposed the strengthening of their departments of the social sciences; that each institution take its own state as its field of study; that an annual conference be held where representatives of the colleges came into consultation with the best sociologists of the land, and decide on methods of work and subjects of study. A volume giving the more important results would be published annually.

This plan was inaugurated in the Spring of 1943, with all seventeen of the Land-Grant colleges represented, and eight leading American sociologists in attendance. The first annual report appeared in the Fall of 1943. Thus, after a quarter century, the Atlanta conferences live again.

To complete this idea, there is need to include a similar study of the vitally important Northern Negro group. The leading Negro universities like Howard,

Fisk, Wilberforce, Lincoln of Pennsylvania and of Missouri, and others might with Northern universities jointly carry out this part of the scheme.

This program came to full fruition in 1944, when a report of the first conference was published as *Atlanta University Publication No. 22*. Then, without warning, the University retired me from work and gave up this renewed project.

Summary

Finally and in summation, what is it that in sixty years of purposive endeavor, I have wanted for my people? Just what do I mean by "Freedom"?

Proceeding from the vague and general plans of youth, through the more particular program of active middle life, and on to the general and at the same time more specific plans of the days of reflexion, I can see, with overlappings and contradictions, these things:

By "Freedom" for Negroes, I meant and still mean, *full economic, political and social equality with American citizens, in thought, expression and action, with no discrimination based on race or color.*

A statement such as this challenges immediate criticism. Economic equality is today widely advocated as the basis for real political power: men are beginning to demand for all persons, the right to work at a wage which will maintain a decent standard of living. Beyond that the right to vote is the demand that all persons governed should have some voice in government. Beyond these two demands, so widely admitted, what does one mean by a demand for "social equality"?

The phrase is unhappy because of the vague meaning of both "social" and "equality." Yet it is in too common use to be discarded, and it stands especially for an attitude toward the Negro. "Social" is used to refer not only to the intimate contacts of the family group and of personal companions, but also and increasingly to the whole vast complex of human relationships through which we carry out our cultural patterns.

We may list the activities called "social," roughly as follows:

A. Private social intercourse (marriage, friendships, home entertainment).

B. Public services (residence areas, travel, recreation and information, hotels and restaurants).

C. Social uplift (education, religion, science and art).

Here are three categories of social activities calling for three interpretations of equality. In the matter of purely personal contacts like marriage, intimate friendships and sociable gatherings, "equality" means the right to select one's own mates and close companions. The basis of choice may be cultured taste or vagrant whim, but it is an unquestionable right so long as my free choice

does not deny equal freedom on the part of others. No one can for a moment question the preference of a white man to marry a white woman or invite only white friends to dinner. But by the same token if a white Desdemona prefers a black Othello; or if Theodore Roosevelt includes among his dinner guests Booker T. Washington, their right also is undeniable and its restriction by law or custom an inadmissible infringement of civil rights.

Naturally, if an individual choice like intermarriage is proven to be a social injury, society must forbid it. It has been the contention of the white South that the social body always suffers from miscegenation, and that miscegenation is always possible where there is friendship and often where there is mere courtesy.

This belief, modern science has effectively answered. There is no scientific reason why there should not be intermarriage between two human beings who happen to be of different race or color. This does mean any forcible limitation of individual preference based on race, color, or any other reason; it does limit any compulsion of persons who do not accept the validity of such reasons not to follow their own choices.

The marriage of Frederick Douglass to a white woman did not injure society. The marriage of the Negro Greek scholar, William Scarborough, to Sarah Bierce, principal of the Wilberforce Normal School, was not a social catastrophe. The mulatto descendants of Louise Dumas and the Marquis de le Pailleterie were a great gift to mankind. The determination of any white person not to have children with Negro, Chinese, or Irish blood is a desire which demands every respect. In like manner, the tastes of others, no matter how few or many, who disagree, demand equal respect.

In the second category of public services and opportunities, one's right to exercise personal taste and discrimination is limited not only by the free choice of others, but by the fact that the whole social body is joint owner and purveyor of many of the facilities and rights offered. A person has a right to seek a home in healthy and beautiful surroundings and among friends and associates. But such rights cannot be exclusively enjoyed if they involve confining others to the slums. Social equality here denies the right of any discrimination and segregation which compels citizens to lose their rights of enjoyment and accommodation in the common wealth. If without injustice, separation in travel, eating and lodging can be carried out, any community or individual has a right to practise it in accord with his taste or desire. But this is rarely possible and in such case the demand of an individual or even an overwhelming majority, to discriminate at the cost of inconvenience, disease and suffering on the part of the minority is unfair, unjust and undemocratic.

In matters connected with these groups of social activity, the usage in the United States, and especially in the South, constitutes the sorest and bitterest

points of controversy in the racial situation; especially in the life of those individuals and classes among Negroes whose social progress is at once the proof and measure of the capabilities of the race.

That the denial of the right to exclude Negroes from residential areas and public accommodations may involve counter costs on the part of the majority, by unpleasant contacts and even dangerous experiences, is often true. That fact has been the basis of wide opposition to the democratization of modern society and of deep-seated fear that democracy necessarily involves social leveling and degeneration.

On the whole, however, modern thought and experience have tended to convince mankind that the evils of caste discrimination against the depressed elements of the mass are greater and more dangerous to progress than the affront to natural tastes and the recoil from unpleasant contacts involved in the just sharing of public conveniences with all citizens. This conviction is the meaning of America, and it has had wide and increasing success in incorporating Irish, and German peasants, Slavic laborers and even Negro slaves into a new, virile and progressive American Culture.

At the incorporation of the Negro freedman into the social and political body, the white South has naturally balked and impeded it by law, custom, and race philosophy. This is historically explicable. No group of privileged slave-owners is easily and willingly going to recognize their former slaves as men. But just as truly this caste leveling downward must be definitely, openly, and determinedly opposed or civilization suffers. What was once a local and parochial problem, now looms as a world threat! If caste and segregation is the correct answer to the race problem in America, it is the answer to the race contacts of the world. This the Atlantic Charter and the Cairo conference denied, and to back this denial lies the threat of Japan and all Asia, and of Africa.

What shall we, what can we, do about it in the United States? We must first attack Jim-Crow legislation: the freezing in law of discrimination based solely on race and color—in voting, in work, in travel, in public service.

To the third category of social activity, concerned with social uplift, one would say at first that not only should everyone be admitted but all even urged to join. It happens, however, that many of these organizations are private efforts toward public ends. In so far as their membership is private and based on taste and compatibility, they fall under the immunities of private social intercourse, with its limitation of equal freedom to all.

But such organizations have no right to arrogate to themselves exclusive rights of public service. If a church is a social clique, it is not a public center of religion; if a school is private and for a selected clientele, it must not assume the functions and privileges of public schools. The underlying philosophy of our public school system is that the education of all children together at public

expense is the best and surest path to democracy. Those who exclude the public or any part of it from the schools, have no right to use public funds for private purposes. Separate Negro public schools or separate girl's schools or separate Catholic schools are not inadmissible simply because of separation; but only when such separation hinders the development of democratic ideals and gives to the separated, poor schools or no schools at all.

Beyond all this, and when legal inequalities pass from the statute books, a rock wall of social discrimination between human beings will long persist in human intercourse. So far as such discrimination is a method of social selection, by means of which the worst is slowly weeded and the best protected and encouraged, such discrimination has justification. But the danger has always been and still persists, that what is weeded out is the Different and not the Dangerous; and what is preserved is the Powerful and not the Best. The only defense against this is the widest human contacts and acquaintanceships compatible with social safety.

So far as human friendship and intermingling are based on broad and catholic reasoning and ignore petty and inconsequential prejudices, the happier will be the individual and the richer the general social life. In this realm lies the real freedom, toward which the soul of man has always striven: the right to be different, to be individual and pursue personal aims and ideals. Here lies the real answer to the leveling compulsions and equalitarianisms of that democracy which first provides food, shelter and organized security for man.

Once the problem of subsistence is met and order is secured, there comes the great moment of civilization: the development of individual personality; the right of variation; the richness of a culture that lies in differentiation. In the activities of such a world, men are not compelled to be white in order to be free: they can be black, yellow or red; they can mingle or stay separate. The free mind, the untrammelled taste can revel. In only a section and a small section of total life is discrimination inadmissible and that is where my freedom stops yours or your taste hurts me. Gradually such a free world will learn that not in exclusiveness and isolation lies inspiration and joy, but that the very variety is the reservoir of invaluable experience and emotion. This crowning of equalitarian democracy in artistic freedom of difference is the real next step of culture.

The hope of civilization lies not in exclusion, but in inclusion of all human elements; we find the richness of humanity not in the Social Register, but in the City Directory; not in great aristocracies, chosen people and superior races, but in the throngs of disinherited and underfed men. Not the lifting of the lowly, but the unchaining of the unawakened mighty, will reveal the possibilities of genius, gift and miracle, in mountainous treasure-trove, which hitherto civilization has scarcely touched; and yet boasted blatantly and even glorified in its poverty. In

world-wide equality of human development is the answer to every meticulous taste and each rare personality.

To achieve this freedom, I have essayed these main paths:

1. 1885-1910

"The Truth shall make ye free."

This plan was directed toward the majority of white Americans, and rested on the assumption that once they realized the scientifically attested truth concerning Negroes and race relations, they would take action to correct all wrong.

2. 1900-1930

United action on the part of thinking Americans, white and black, to force the truth concerning Negroes to the attention of the nation.

This plan assumed that the majority of Americans would rush to the defence of democracy, if they realized how race prejudice was threatening it, not only for Negroes but for whites; not only in America but in the world.

3. 1928-to the present

Scientific investigation and organized action among Negroes, in close co-operation, to secure the survival of the Negro race, until the cultural development of America and the world is willing to recognize Negro freedom.

This plan realizes that the majority of men do not usually act in accord with reason, but follow social pressures, inherited customs and long-established, often sub-conscious, patterns of action. Consequently, race prejudice in America will linger long and may even increase. It is the duty of the black race to maintain its cultural advance, not for itself alone, but for the emancipation of mankind, the realization of democracy and the progress of civilization.*

* After this book had gone to the press, Dr. Du Bois was appointed Director of Special Research of the NAACP. (Editor's note.)