

The Negro's Dilemma

Negro Social and Political Thought: 1850-1920; edited by Howard Brotz, *New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1967.* lx + 593 pp. \$12.50.

Freedom—When? by James Farmer; introduction by Jacob Cohen, *New York: Random House, 1966.* xxiv + 179 pp. \$4.95.

LONG BEFORE the Negroes in America became articulate they pondered the perplexities of their condition and wondered if and when there was to be a way out of them. When freedom came to many after the War of Independence there was hope of a change, but the position of the emancipated minority proved to be little better than that of the enslaved majority. In both the North and the South, where nearly a half million of them existed as a sort of halfmen, free Negroes were asking themselves whether there would ever be a time when they would share all the rights and privileges enjoyed by white Americans.

In Philadelphia, just after American independence had been won with some aid from several thousand Negro soldiers and sailors, the free Negro Christians resolved not to endure the humiliations imposed on them by the segregated white churches, and formed a church of their own headed by Richard Allen. This was the beginning of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1797 the separate A. M. E. Zion Mother Church was established in New York City. As their churches multiplied the free Negroes could worship God without the unchristian indignity of jimcrow, but the problem of their place in the future of America remained unsolved.

White men of good will, Northern and Southern, recognized the problem of the colored freeman, sympathized with it, but could foresee no future that would permit

him to achieve full manhood here. In 1817 they founded the American Colonization Society to send to the West Coast of Africa those free Negroes who were willing to become pioneers. Out of this effort Liberia was born, and some ten thousand free Negroes emigrated there, enduring great hardships even after the country became independent in 1847.

Free in name only, without job opportunity or security because of the competition of increasing European immigration, deprived of the ballot and having only a tenuous right of residence, the black freeman was called on to decide whether to accept these disadvantages or to move to other and presumably more hospitable shores. The Negro community was divided on the question which gave rise to a furious debate. The controversy became the rock on which *Freedom's Journal*, the first American newspaper owned and edited by Negroes, foundered after only a few weeks' publication. The editor, John S. Russwurm, sided with the emigrationists, while the publisher, Samuel Cornish, took his place with those free Negroes—and they were the great majority—who elected to stay at home. In view of the circumstances that developed with the expansion of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century it seemed a hard enough decision, so that the able thinkers of the Negro community devoted themselves to discussion of the accommodations or alternatives that seemed necessary to the progress of the race. What the ablest of them thought and wrote has been collected by Howard Brotz, professor of sociology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

Some of the men whose writings have been assembled by Professor Brotz are better known than others. It was to be expected that Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey would be included, but it is refreshing to find also the work of Martin R. Delany, Edward Wilmot Blyden, James T. Holly, Alexander Crummell, Henry Highland Garnett, T. Thomas Fortune

and Archibald Grimke. One great name, however, is missing—that of Kelly Miller, the dean of Howard University, whose writings instructed an entire generation of Negroes.

Delany favored the emigration of free Negroes to Central America or Africa, Blyden was a confirmed Africanist, Holly wanted American Negroes to settle in Haiti. The others were of necessity for some accommodation with the whites that would enable Negroes to survive and prosper. These men argued the Negro's cause with brilliance, for most of them were well educated and had the courage of their convictions. Their writings are shown here to be equal or superior to those of many white contemporaries.

Unlike Delany and Holly, Henry Highland Garnett saw greater opportunities for Negro development in America than in Africa. In contrast to the more recent DuBois, he spoke for the elevation of the Ne-

gro masses rather than the creation of a "Talented Tenth," or elite. This was likewise the view of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, realists both and men of common sense. Washington saw the Negro problem in terms beyond mere civil rights and always within a national perspective. Where DuBois was a man of theories and doctrines, Washington was a man of practicalities. Where DuBois whined and complained about the Negro's woes, Washington insisted that "what remains to be shown is that a Negro can go as far as a white man in using his education, of whatever kind it may be, to make himself a more useful and valuable member of society," rather than just proving that he is able like the white man to learn from books. As for Marcus Garvey, he was a racist in reverse and his approach to the problem was too ignorant, too simplistic and polemical to bring any results of value to the Negro people.

All in all this selection from some of the greatest Negro minds over a period of seventy years is a revelation and an education.

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MR. JAMES FARMER, sometimes head of the Congress of Racial Equality, is a young Negro activist who favors the sort of agitational and political tactics made familiar by the Young Communist Leagues and by Hitler's street fighters. He describes and in many instances defends these tactics and seems astonished and impatient because there is a white backlash, as if it were something unexpected. He tells us of CORE's ambitious plans for improving life in the Negro residential communities, or as he prefers to call them, "ghettos," which is a gross misrepresentation. There is in his book, as one might expect from the author's background of agitation, a great deal of wishful thinking which usually favors the CORE program, and a great deal of naiveté reflecting simple ignorance. For example he underestimates the American Negro's knowledge and understanding of Africa before the United Nations was in-

flicted on us, and he overestimates the importance of Africa and the Africans. Much of what he has to say on that subject is propaganda reflecting the views of the recent black nationalist movement.

Mr. Farmer writes with clarity, but not always with adherence to reality. He does not measure up to the Negro intellectual leaders of yesteryear represented in Mr. Brotz' anthology, nor is it at all strange in the circumstances that he does not.

Reviewed by GEORGE S. SCHUYLER