

A Haitian Looks At His American Brother

BY
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*A Former Diplomat Who
 Has Lived Among Us Tells
 Why He Broke With Tradition
 After Arriving In Washington*

The following article which appeared recently in "La Phalange" a powerful daily newspaper in Port au Prince was written by Dantes Bellegarde, former Haitian minister to the United States. It is of special current interest because Mr. Bellegarde, for the present semester is now a visiting professor at Atlanta university. It was translated for the Society of the American Friends of Haiti, of which Dr. H. Binga Dismond is president, by Eugene Georges, a young Haitian educator who has been sent by his government to take post-graduate work at Columbia university, New York City.

UPON MY ARRIVAL AT WASHINGTON in 1931, as Haitian minister, I broke away from the traditional custom of my predecessors, who practically ignored the colored Americans.

It seemed to me scandalous that Haitians—for what reason of personal prestige or for fear of what hypothetical official disapproval, I do not know—could assume such an insulting attitude towards members of their own race. To this obvious evidence of inferiority complex I refused to subscribe.

I endeavored as a foreign official to refrain from participating in any kind of political activity of the American Negroes. My position as a member of the diplomatic corps made such a decision obligatory.

But how could I ignore their daily struggle to attain their natural rights and their pleas for social justice so systematically refused?

L'Institut de Droit International holding office at Briarcliff, near New York voted on October 12, 1929, its memorable "Declaration of International Rights of Man."

In that declaration we read this article: "No motive can be drawn directly or indirectly from difference of sex, race, language, nationality or religion, whereby states are authorized to refuse to their citizens the practice of their private and public rights, especially their admission to public educational institutions and the exercise of their professional and industrial activities;" and the declaration added: "The aforesaid equality must not be theoretical, but actual; it excludes all kinds of discriminations direct or indirect."

It is common knowledge that such principles of rights are not generally applied in the United States, as regards the Negro. Especially in the Southern States their situation is most critical, morally, as well as economically.

One must travel through these states as I myself have done to obtain any idea of the horrible racial discrimination, and the humiliating segregation suffered by people of color.

SYMPATHIZED WITH FIGHT OF AMERICANS

I could not therefore refuse my sympathy to these men in their fight for recognition of rights that universal conscience realizes to be attributes to every man. Such rights have just been defined by Pope Pius XII so eloquently in his en-

cyclical address of Nov. 11, 1939.

The colored people of America do not ask any special favors from the communities to which they belong. They request rights to which they are entitled because of important services rendered, and which are, continuously being rendered to their country.

They belong to a great country—the greatest country in the world today. They have shed their blood for its independence. At the dawn of American history, the name of Crispus Attucks is as brilliant as the sun. They have contributed with the works of their writers, their artists, their painters, and their musicians in the spreading of American culture. It would be impossible in this article to mention statistics and names.

A huge book would be necessary to point out their achievements in every field; viz: industry, agriculture, commerce, and in professional activities, or to show the American Negroes to the best advantage who have given proof of their outstanding abilities if proof is still necessary of their aptitude for assimilation of the black race in all the higher branches of human activity.

In a very interesting work published by the American Library Association of Chicago, my dear friend, Dr. Alain Locke, professor of philosophy of Howard university, enumerates some books containing indispensable information for those who wish to know the American Negro.

These books are: "Brown America," by Edwin R. Embree; "What the Negro Thinks," by Robert R. Moton; "The Negro in our History," by Carter G. Woodson; "The Negro in American Civilization," by Charles S. Johnson; "The Negro," edited by Alain Locke.

There are many others, to be added to this forcibly incomplete list; for example, the two most re-

cent books by my eminent friend, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, "Black Reconstruction," and "Black Folks—Then and Now." And how can I forget that fine book by James Weldon Johnson, "Along This Way," in which a whole chapter is devoted to Haiti.

JOHNSON PENALIZED BECAUSE OF RACE

Carl van Doren, in an excellent article published in the New York Herald Tribune, relates how James Weldon Johnson formerly an American Consul to Brazil (Editor's note—Mr. Bellagrade evidently means Venezuela), and Nicaragua who attained high intellectual eminence, might have aspired to the highest rank as a "career man" in the diplomatic service—an Ambassador for example, had not the color of his skin constituted an insurmountable obstacle to his ascension. This holds true as well for many other black Americans.

Why does not a Dubois hold with honor and dignity a seat in the House of Representatives? Why not a high Department of State Official like Eugene Kinkle Jones? George Edward Hayes or Ambrose Caliver could perfectly be placed at the head of a Federal Bureau.

Who knowing them would be surprised to find Dr. Just—professor of biology at Cornell university, Dr. Locke as professor of history at Howard, Carter Woodson or Charles Wesley as professor of economics at Columbia; in the department of research at Yale that ex-slave, that admirable scientist—George Washington Carver?

To those who know these men, it seems natural that they should occupy positions to which their abilities entitle them. But do not forget that they are black; color prejudice imposes an impossible barrier upon them. We must admire in that question the courage of President Franklin Roosevelt and the generous enthusiasm displayed by his active wife in their fights against color prejudice.

We remember her attitude when the Daughters of American Revolution attempted to boycott our great Marian Anderson whose talents and performances should be considered a glory for all Americans—white or black.

No foreigner as a student of American society as a whole, can fail to be interested in the problem constituted by the presence in the United States of a population of 12,000,000 men, women and children who not very long ago were deprived of all rights, but are now climbing against all obstacles to the highest summits of intellectual culture and national well-being.

PLEAS FOR BETTER RELATIONS WITH US

The sociological experiment they are making is an interesting course of study for any observer but singularly thrilling for any member of the Black Race.

Edward de Laboulaye expressed in 1870 his admiration for the progress achieved by American Negroes. He considered their rapid social transformation as a "Miracle of Modern Democracy."

What would be his reaction could he but come back to life and study the present Black American Social Life? He would discover certainly many things shocking to his democratic conscience, but his admiration would be unlimited to behold the achievement in all fields of these sons of slaves.

There is a fact also we must recognize to be just—it is realized, thanks to the fraternal collaboration of a few white men who breaking away with all kinds of racial discrimination that they consider offensive to Christian faith and detrimental to the principles of sciences.

Unfortunately many foreign Negroes know the American Negroes only through jazz music and Negro "spirituals." I wish that every Haitian could have a better knowledge of American literature, sculpture, music and civilization.

It is also my last wish that Americans could have more contacts with us and by so doing go deeper into our soul—through books, where we have put the treasury of our sensibility and our intelligence—to that aim I attempted to contribute a little to a small way during the three years I spent as Minister of Haiti to Washington—and this I have related in my book "Un Haitien Parle."