

BOOKS

-By HOWARD D. GOULD-

Negroes in Brazil by Donald Pierson
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Sociological Study

WHILE MANY PEOPLE have heard that there isn't any race prejudice in Brazil there are only a few who are well acquainted with the details of race relations in this great South American nation. This book published as one of the University of Chicago's Sociological Series is an excellent study of relations between people of different racial and national backgrounds and affords interesting reading for anyone who is interested in the race problem in the U.S.

The late Professor Robert E. Park emphasizes the value of this study by pointing out that "Brazil is one of the more conspicuous melting-pots of races and cultures around the world where miscegenation and acculturation are obviously going on and that a comparative study of the problematic aspects of race and culture is likely to have a special importance at this time when the structure of the existing world order seems to be crumbling with the dissolution of the distances, physical and social, upon which that order seems to rest.

One thing that makes the racial situation in Brazil interesting is the fact that, having a Negro population proportionally larger than the United States, Brazil has no race problem. This attitude manifests itself in the fact that in Brazil any Negro who shows himself fit is without question given the place to which his abilities entitle him.

However, the most conspicuous difference — the "one real difference" — is the tendency of Brazil to absorb the Negro. This tendency is however not merely a historical and biological fact; it is rather an expression of a national policy, in so far as Brazil can be said to have a policy with respect to the Negro.

The policy of the United States, on the other hand, from the Brazilian point of view, particularly in so far as it counts every man a Negro who, to use the census definition, "is known to be a Negro in the community in which he lives" tends to perpetuate a "menacing element" — menacing not to the

racial purity of the dominant race but to the political and cultural solidarity of the nation."

Centers On Bahai

The book deals primarily with conditions in Bahia, for as the author points out, "in this picturesque old seaport . . . the processes of racial adjustment have perhaps gone on longest and most persistently." In the city of Bahia itself the people are largely of mixed European-African origin, individuals of either pure European or pure African descent being clearly in the minority."

In describing the mixing of the races and its effect upon the elimination of race description the author points out that although just as in the United States, Negroes were introduced as slaves; the conviction had been crystallizing in the minds of Brazilian intellectuals that the Negroes, whose strong arms and backs had long furnished the country's labor supply were to a considerable extent the actual builders of Brazil. In prose and poetry not only the toil of the slaves but also the creative energies of free people of color came to be exalted.

"This appreciation of the African contribution to Brazilian civilization increased with the progress of the abolition campaign."

Although the author does not present the book as an exhaustive study of race relations in Brazil, he has none the less gone extensively into the many phases of life in Bahia. The reader may be certain that many of his questions about race prejudice will be answered. Although as the author says he does not imply that there are no social distinctions in Brazil; for such are common to all societies, one thing or another serving as a basis.

Neither does it mean that there is no discrimination or that the blacks or mixed bloods are completely satisfied with their lot, but it does mean that a man of color may by reason of merit or favorable circumstance improve his status and achieve position in the upper levels of society, and that "his position will then be with reference not merely to the darker group whose color he shares, but to the total community.