

THE NEGRO IN THE SOCIAL SCALE

By Frank Crosswaith

NEGRO--NATIONAL ASSET OR LIABILITY, by Dr. John Louis Hill. New York: Literary Associates, Inc., 1931. \$2.00.

"Negroes as such, for the present are only a part of the ever-changing, dying, living, mortal-immortal-human family. The human race itself is a unit. And not until this fact is realized, and not until it is accepted as such, can the world experience the peace that passeth understanding." With these words of truism, is brought to a more or less pleasant ending 233 pages devoted to finding the answer to the question: Negro-National Asset or Liability? The book is Volume One of a series to be published dealing with each principal racial and national group represented in American population.

A careful reading of "NEGRO" impresses one with the belief that the author is exceptionally warm and sympathetic to his subject; and that he partially recognizes the underlying economic factors involved in the so-called race problem in America. Dr. Hill does not hesitate to unsheath his sword and use it, tho somewhat feebly, against the ignorant whites who hate the Negro because of his "colored blood" (whatever that is) but who at the same time gloat about their alleged lineal relationship to the Indians. The reason: "Negroes were subjected to the indignity and humiliation of human slavery" the author correctly points out.

Nor does he permit to escape "the over-zealous and misled white friends of the Negro" whom he rightly considers equally a danger to the Negro as those who hate him. Dr. Hill is eminently sound when he says that "to idealize, pet and pamper the Negro and make him believe that he is better and greater than he is..... is just as fatal to his future as are all the handicaps his enemies are able to place upon him. The author evidently had in mind those richly endowed institutions dedicated to saving the Negro, as well as those individuals who insist upon the Negro blowing his brains out on God's trombone and crooning the spirituals.

However, like most Southern whites who write about the Negro historically (Dr. Hill is a Tennessean) he ignores the fact that long before the slave trade up-rooted the Negro from his ancestral home, he had established in Africa a great civilization which was the marvel of the then less civilized Europeans. As far back as the closing years of the Eighteenth Century, the renowned French historian and explorer, Volney, paid to the genius and achievements of the African and his civilization, as glowing and eloquent a tribute as few races or nations before or since have been paid.

Because of his failure adequately to study the Negro's past, the author falls into the common error of so many other writers who begin a study of the Negro with slavery as the background. This is evident when he says: "Had they (Negroes) not been completely isolated from all the civilizing forces of humanity thru the long centuries before European nations put Africa upon the map by their divisions and possessions of the Dark Continent.....Negroes would not have been less intelligent than the descendants of Shem and Japeth".

Obviously also Dr. Hill is a Fundamentalist in religion and believes that "Ham" upon finding his father drunk, laughed at the old souse and was thereupon cursed and made black by a white Christian God.

In spite of the increasing acceptance of the notion that Abraham Lincoln, out of the goodness of his heart freed the slaves, the author points out that, "the inevitable progress of civilization in which no outstanding evil can always endure, rendered necessary the abolition of Negro slavery in America". In discussing this phase of Negro life in America the author missed a golden opportunity to aid in destroying a myth, which, next to the one about George Washington and the Cherry tree, has now a strangle-hold upon both Negroes and whites; i.e., the one about Abraham Lincoln and Negro slavery.

While on the whole Dr. Hill makes out a pretty fair claim for justice to the Negro, every now and then he permits his emotions and his early background to influence his cooler judgment. For instance, on page 74 he says: "morally speaking, the Negro of today takes front rank in sustaining the highest standards and loftiest ideals of our so-called Christian civilization". Yet on the succeeding page (75) he speaks thus: "It is true, of course, that there is no human being lower in the scale of brutal conduct than the depraved Negro who so far loses his self-control, that he will attack a white woman". Surely Dr. Hill must know that every time the finger of rape is pointed at a Negro is no proof that he is guilty. It is general knowledge today that raping has become in the South the last refuge of lost virginity. Besides the record shows many cases of whites who have raped Negro women.

Notwithstanding a few such unfortunate passages in the book, "NEGRO", "National Asset or Liability?" deserves to be widely read. In the opinion of this reviewer, the book is additional evidence of the sincere efforts of a growing number of enlightened white Americans, to find a solution to the so-called race problem.

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"The masters do not draw the color line, or the religious line, or any lines of nationality. The masters of labor in all ages have acted the same way. The real division of humanity is between mastery and slavery. Color, religion and nationality are mere incidents. Masters will use the color line, or religious differences, or differences of nationality, to divide workers. They will stir these prejudices for this purpose. But masters themselves do not divide along these lines when they face the toilers in a struggle.

"The great fact for both white and Negro workers to understand is that as wage workers they have common interests. WAGE LABOR unites them in the same class. Both sell their labor power for wages. Both must sell it to capitalist owners of mills, factories and mines. Masters want to purchase it at a low price, and workers want to sell it at a high price." ---

James Oneal.