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AMERICA'S OBLIGATION TO ITS NEGRO CITIZENS

XVI

The flood behind him, Mark turned back with renewed enthusiasm to his regular newspaper duties and to filling speaking engagements. Mark was not an orator. *He spoke* Indeed with little change of tone or expression and he frequently swayed gently back and forth. But he had

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causes to expound and he expounded them thoroughly and earnestly.

In that flood year, 1937, he made a speech entitled, "America's Obligation to Its Negro Citizens," at the fourth South-wide Conference on Education and Race Relations at Blue Ridge, just outside Asheville, North Carolina. It was later published by the Conference and widely distributed. †

~~now have a yellowed copy of it. I find it most interesting because it shows what problems were agitating the social-conscious whites forty-two years ago and by contrast points up what has been ^{done} ~~done~~ in the intervening years. In some fields, much; in others, practically nothing.~~

In the beginning Mark talked about the woefully inadequate opportunities that Americans, especially Southerners, ^{offered} ~~provided~~ Negroes. We couldn't pretend, he said, even after we had imposed segregation--not integration--that we had done anything to make the Negro satisfied with it. In the segregation laws of Southern states it was provided there should be "separate, but equal accommodations"; yet it was the rarest exception when accommodations were anything like equal.

He cited statistics. A recent study had shown that in eleven Southern states the public school

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outlay averaged \$44^{a year} for the white child and \$12.50 for the Negro. ~~That was the average;~~ In Mississippi the figures were \$45 against \$5; ~~and~~ in South Carolina, \$60 against \$7. And ^{the} the county in Georgia from which came the ^{creator} ~~author~~ of Uncle Remus, who symbolizes the gentle, kindly Negro associated with the Old South, the public expenditure per white child was \$107.39 a year, and for the Negro child, \$4.62. The Negro child in the deep South had to get along with about one-fifteenth the education of the average white child in the nation.

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average? based on all figures?
 Show as Mark's figures

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^{Mark} He quoted Dr. Booker T. Washington, who said, "Of course a Negro child may be smart; but it's a pretty high compliment to expect him to learn in three months [the average Negro school year] what the white child learns in nine."

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^{Mark} He talked about lynching: "The Negro still does not have the minimum assurance, which is the right of every American citizen, the assurance that his person and his home will be free from the vengeance and the passion of an inflamed mob and that he will receive in the courts that equal justice under the law without which civilization is a mockery and the pretended practice of Christianity is a sham."

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"As a civilized country, America owes it to herself to make a declaration by law that henceforth there shall be no lynchings in America, and she owes herself the enforcement of this declaration. ~~I speak as a Southerner: if it requires federal marshals and federal deputies to prevent lynchings in America and she owes herself the enforcement of this declaration.~~ I speak as a Southerner: if it requires federal marshals and federal deputies to prevent lynchings ^{in America} and to punish lynchings in the South, then I'm for federal marshals and deputies doing it."

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Mark also ^{presented facts} ~~talked~~ about farm tenancy: "One of the strongest fundamentals of a democracy is that its citizens should be freeholders, that every man, as far as ^{it is} possible to achieve it, should own his own vine and fig tree. If that is actually an ideal of democracy, in what degree have we achieved it? Seven-eighths ^{of} of all Negro farmers are tenants, and a study of two [#] thousand Negro tenant families showed their average income is \$105 a year or \$1.75 a month per person. One out of every hundred of them has a telephone, and bathrooms are rarer than that. Seventy-three percent of all Negroes live in rented houses whose accommodations are below any normal standard of living set by the federal

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government. Whereas the government in its housing program has fixed upon a ~~three~~^{three}-thousand-dollar to four-thousand-dollar house as necessary for minimum accommodations for an American family, the average value of houses occupied by Negroes is about \$500."

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In fact, ~~he~~^{Mark revealed} talked about many ^{areas of} glaring inequalities between the living conditions of the whites and Blacks: wages, health and sanitation, opportunities for work; the distribution of public taxes, which, of course, impinged to a large degree on the distribution of public utilities, such as ~~sweet~~ sewer and water mains, street and sidewalk paving, parks and playgrounds, nursing and hospital facilities....

(Black boys in Negroes)

However, [↑] there was one aspect of the Negro's situation he ~~did not~~^{ed only} mention ~~except~~ briefly. That was the abolition of so-called "social equality." He did not dwell on it because, as he explained quite frankly, he had "nowhere found these steps to be among the Negro's aspirations." ~~He said~~

(This?)

"Upon the whole, ["] he is as proud of his race as we are of ours. As one of them said, he would rather have a card in a labor union that would guarantee him a job than a card in the most exclusive club in America. Nor is it certain that segregation is altogether bad for the Negro. Even if it were abolished, he would probably still live with and work

with his own group because it is human nature, for one thing, and because it would tend to his better development. But even if ^[Integration and social equality] these were his aspirations, I should consider him foolhardy if he pressed them because, friendly as I am, I would consider them against his own interest and against the general welfare and peace. What he ^[the Negro] wants, as far as I can gather, has been stated in a pamphlet issued by the Interracial Commission. He wants a tilting of the racial line from the horizontal to the vertical, so that he may have on his side the rights and privileges to which he is entitled, just as the white man on his side enjoys the rights and privileges of American civilization. To the full measure of that justice he is entitled."

^{Mark} He ended with a plea to the South: "We of the South have suffered long enough under the degradation of keeping the Negro degraded. We owe to our own self-respect the obligation of a changed attitude to him, and we who are in ^a position to reach or influence public opinion owe an obligation of unremitting effort to break down the prejudice and ignorance that form so big a barrier to that changed attitude."

Mark made many similar speeches, but he has never claimed he helped bring about the painfully slow upgrading of the Negro's lot.

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