

## The Negro Question without Propaganda (1950)

*In 1950 Schuyler was invited to serve as a U.S. delegate to the Congress of Cultural Freedom in Berlin. As Schuyler remarks in his autobiography, Black and Conservative (1966), "This conference was to be the largest and most important of its kind in the long history of anti-Communism." In this speech Schuyler focused on the numerous possibilities for individual advancement inherent to capitalism and the ways in which African Americans have flourished, racism notwithstanding, in this context. For Schuyler's liberal critics, these kind of remarks were troubling, because, in their view, they reflected a perspective that failed to address the moral injustices of American democracy. This speech, in various forms, appeared in the Freeman, Christian Science Monitor, and Reader's Digest. This version appeared in the Congressional Quarterly, Thursday, August 31, 1950.*

In the vicious propaganda campaign of lies and distortions to which ungrateful totalitarian slave states have subjected the United States of America (which saved them from Hitler), the treatment of its Negro citizens has been held up as a horrible illustration of the weakness and failure of democracy.

The prostitute press and radio of the Communist camorra [an Italian secret society organized ostensibly for political purposes] have presented a picture of Negro existence in America so fantastic, so false, so contrary to the facts of his everyday life in the 48 states as to be unrecognizable by anyone familiar with the Nation. This stereotype is so grotesque as to be at once amusing and deplorable. One must question the intelligence and integrity of those who so readily believe it.

Actually, the progressive improvement of interracial relations in the United States is the most flattering of the many examples of the superiority of the free American civilization over the soul-shackling reactionism of totalitarian regimes. It is this capacity for change and adjustment inherent in the system of individual initiative and decentralized authority to which we must attribute the unprecedented economic, social, and educational progress of the Negroes of the United States.

The chattel slave system, or any slave system, is not inherent in capitalism which for growth directly depends upon pleasing the consumer and increasing

his purchasing power: whatever its flaws, the history of capitalism is one of constant mass improvement that everyone can see.

During America's 225 years of legalized chattel slavery 10,000,000 Africans were brought to the plantations of the Western Hemisphere. Because they represented economic value to their masters, every effort was made to preserve their health and productivity as long as possible. This should be contrasted with the slave system of Soviet Russia which from 1930 onward continually has held from fifteen to twenty million victims in servitude under conditions so savage and heartless that millions have died from mistreatment. Having no individual economic value, these unfortunates have been and are being worked to death with calculated ruthlessness. Whereas today the slave system of Soviet Russia has become so essential to its economy that it grows more extensive year by year, the chattel slave system of capitalism has been long since abolished. Soviet Russia after 30 years has twice as many slaves as were brought to all the Americas in 225 years. Even war prisoners have been forced into slavery and so many have died in Soviet labor camps that 1,000,000 Germans and 400,000 Japanese are "missing"; and up-to-date the Soviet government, unable to produce them, has been forced into the ridiculous denial that they ever existed! By contrast, the United States has repatriated all of its war prisoners and the prisons of America contain only 141,000 inmates—among them no political prisoners.

From 1861 to 1865 the United States fought a bloody civil war in which 200,000 Negroes joined to settle the issue of chattel slavery. By the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution, 5,000,000 Negro slaves were emancipated. By the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, they became full-fledged citizens of the Republic, along with the half-million already free. During the Civil War, there was no uprising of the Negro slaves nor molestation of the white women and children left behind by their men. One can well imagine what conditions would be in Soviet Russia and its satellites if their enslaved millions were suddenly free.

In 1865 over ninety per cent of the Negroes were totally illiterate. Today practically all can read and write except in remote rural areas. In some places, like New York City, the percentage of Negro literates is higher than that of whites.

In 1865, not over a score of Negroes had graduated from colleges and universities. Today over 7,000 Negroes graduate from colleges and universities each year. The total graduated since 1912 is 80,000. The total which has attended college is 650,000.

All of the private institutions of higher learning for Negroes in the States of the former Confederacy were established by white people who taught in them and financially supported them. Alongside these are the colleges and universities controlled and supported by public taxation. It is inconceivable that this could have happened in the South if the racial hatred which has been represented as characteristic there had obtained in any marked degree.

Today there are 70,000 Negroes in American colleges, or proportionately a greater number than in the United Kingdom which has 82,500 out of the population of 50,000,000.

Fifty years ago it was almost hopefully prophesied that the American Negro would soon become extinct because of disease. In 1950 the life expectancy is 60 years, or only seven years less than the whites. This amazing health progress would not have been possible had race hatred been as prevalent as reported.

During the 1930s the Federal Government constructed 150,000 dwelling units; and although Negroes were only 10 percent of the population, they got 50,000 of these units.

In 1900 only 17 percent of Negro non-farm homes were owned. In 1947, the figure was over 34 percent. In 1940, Negroes dwelling in cities (half their population) owned over 500,000 homes. In 1930 these homes had a median value of \$6,377.

Over 2,500 Negro dwellings in New York, Chicago, and Washington alone were worth from \$10,000 to \$15,000; while 850 were valued from \$15,000 to \$20,000 or over. Such well-being could scarcely obtain in an atmosphere of terror.

Evidence of the eagerness of the American nation to bring the Negro population up to the national level of enlightenment was the establishment in 1867 of the Freedman's Bureau which soon had 623 schools with 15,248 Negro pupils. By 1900, there were 1,539,507 Negro pupils in public elementary schools—51.4 percent of the total Negro population of school-age. By 1920, this enrollment was 2,000,000 and today it is two and one-quarter million.

In 1910 there were 5000 Negro high school students; in 1950 there are 300,000, and the annual total of Negro high school graduates is 40,000. In 1910 there were 42 public high schools in the South and by 1950 this had grown to 2,500.

In 1900 daily attendance was 33 percent, where today it is 80 percent.

A Jewish philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, established the Julius Rosenwald Fund in 1912. By 1932 this fund had spent a total of \$28,500,000 and helped erect 5,000 school buildings in the South. Negroes themselves contributed \$4,725,871.

The total value of Negro school property in the South was, in 1940, \$79,250. The total value in 1948 was 129,000,000.

In 1900 total expenditure per pupil was \$4.50 for whites and \$1.50 for Negroes; in 1948 it was \$139.49 for whites and \$76.45 for Negroes. In 1904 for each dollar whites received, Negroes got 50 cents. In 1948 for each dollar whites received Negroes got 71 cents.

While southern Negro teachers generally do not get as much pay as Southern white teachers, salaries have been equalized in very many states and communities, thanks to legal action on the part of the Negroes and to the unprejudiced attitude of the courts.

In 1947 13 percent of all Negroes in the United States had completed secondary school while 5 percent or 650,000 had attended college.

Much of the stimulus for the drive to educate the American Negro came from white capitalists like the aforementioned Julius Rosenwald. Following

the end of the Civil War there were few Negroes capable of teaching school so northern white missionaries and officers of the victorious Union Army set up schools and did the teaching.

The Slater fund was established by capitalists and from 1910 to 1930 contributed \$250,000 for salaries for teachers in county training schools in the Southern states. This fund was administered by James H. Dillard, a Southern white man.

The Jeannes Fund was established by American capitalists and was also used to pay Negro teachers in southern rural areas beginning in 1908. It was also aided by a Southern white man, Dr. Jackson Davis of Virginia. This pattern of rural education was later copied for white rural schools and for similar schools in foreign lands. There are now 800 teachers in as many counties. Since 1908, a total of 12,407 Jeannes teachers have served in 808 counties. In 1937 these teachers started a fund as an expression of appreciation to Miss Virginia Randolph, the first Jeannes teacher. It now totals \$50,000. Here, too, we have evidence of the progress of liberalism of America in the fact that in 1912 the Jeannes fund paid 92 percent of the Jeannes teachers whereas 95 percent are now paid out of the public treasuries.

Further evidence of the interest of much maligned whites in aiding these backward people, was the establishment in 1898 of the Conference for Education in the South. Then in 1902 the Rockefellers set up the General Education Board which has expended 40 percent of its money to advance Negro education.

Following that, in 1915 to 1916, came the Phelps Stokes Fund headed by Thomas Jesse Jones. Many other organizations have been extremely helpful, such as the Southern Sociological Congress, the Southern University Race Commission, the Carnegie Corporation which provides libraries, the YMCA and the YWCA, and for the last quarter century the United States Office of Education. Without the help of all these groups it would not have been possible for us to make the progress that has been made in Negro education.

The stereotype of the poverty-stricken American Negro is also paraded by totalitarian propagandists as an illustration of the failure of democracy. The facts are so at variance with this fiction as to be laughable. There are, it is true, millions of poor Negroes as there are millions of poor whites, but what is regarded as poverty in the United States is called prosperity by workers elsewhere. Steadily, for the last 50 years, the educational, cultural, and economic gulf between the Negroes and whites has been narrowing. While white Americans generally have greater income than their colored brethren, it is cause for reflection that 12.9 percent of whites and 14 percent of Negroes make from \$1000 to \$1,500 a year: that 1.1 percent of whites and 0.2 percent of the Negroes make from \$5,000 to \$6,000 a year, while only 0.8 percent of the whites and 0.2 percent of the Negroes make from \$6,000 to \$10,000 annually. It is not only a tribute to the Negroes that they have in such a short space of time achieved such economic well-being but it also indicates a willingness on the part of the white majority to

enable them to do so. Compared to the economic condition of minorities elsewhere in the world, that of the American Negro is enviable. It is worth noting that 1,000,000 are members of American labor unions, receive identical wages, allowances, work conditions, job security, and paid vacations with their white fellow workers, depending on skill and seniority. Two-thirds of the American Negroes being agricultural and domestic workers, this is a very high percentage of Negro workers in industry. It is lamentably true that a score of prominent labor unions in the United States still exclude Negroes or in several ways discriminate against them. However, it is also true that in the last three years six of these unions have adjusted their attitude and admit colored workers to their membership. This is just another example of the growing racial liberalism.

Wherever Negro and white workers belong to the same unions, they meet together, strike together, whether North or South, and this occasion is no surprise whatever to those familiar with American life. Many of these unions, predominantly white, have elected Negro officers. This could scarcely happen in an atmosphere of terror and repression. Parenthetically, only in democratic countries are labor unions free. Despite the horrors to which workers in the Soviet Union are subjected no one ever hears of a strike there or even a public disagreement, which is certainly ominous.

American Negroes own 13 banks, 74 credit unions, and scores of cooperative societies. They own over 50,000 retail business establishments, 20 savings and loans associations, and 204 insurance companies. In 1947, 52 leading Negro insurance companies had total assets of \$94,639,376 and about \$1,000,000,000 in 27 states and the District of Columbia.

In addition to this, American Negroes (mostly in the Southern states where the overwhelming majority resides) own 12,336,794 acres of farmland which represents 19,000 square miles or an area much larger than the Netherlands. There are 180,215 Negro farm owners, the farms averaging 78.3 acres. Last year some Negro farmers in the South grossed as much as \$175,000.

As of today, American Negroes own nearly 800,000 homes and this proportion of homeowners approximates that of the American whites. Indeed, American Negroes themselves through their own builders, architects, and financial institutions have erected over 25,000 housing units.

In a free federation such as the United States, with 48 separate and independent sovereignties, communication and travel have been so easy that the population has been extremely mobile. The mobility of the Negroes has equaled that of the whites, and today the Negro population is scattered over the entire country, although 77 percent still live in the 16 Southern states. It is commentary on the reported terrorism prevailing in the South that the proportion of the Negro population living there has undergone no change.

There is no desire to minimize the segregational and discriminatory laws in the Southern states which are indeed a disgrace to American civilization. However, the Negroes have always been free to move where they chose

without asking anyone's permission. Thus between 1930 and 1940 the Negro population increased 15.8 percent in the north, 41.8 percent in the West, and 5.8 percent in the South. The figures on white mobility are similar.

Because of this ability to move from one state to another within the nation, no Negroes have emigrated from the United States to nearby lands. As a matter of fact, there are more Negroes in the South than ever, although there are less in the rural areas than the cities, which is also true of the whites.

A commentary on the American system and what the Negroes think of it is the fact that they have born arms in every war in which the nation has been engaged. They were nearly 4,000 Negroes serving in the War for Independence, and in World War II over 1,150,000 enrolled. One-fourth of a million served in the Civil War and one-half a million in World War I. There is no evidence that any of these men or women ever deserted to the enemy or were convicted of treason. This is in contrast to the desertion of the whole First Ukrainian Army under General Vlasov, to the Germans, plus the wholesale desertion from numerous other units of the Russian armies. The attitude of the Negroes in this regard is conclusive evidence that they do not regard America as the propagandists would have us to believe.

The changes that have taken place in the structure of the American Armed Forces is further evidence of the progressive improvement of race relations. Where 30 years ago complete racial segregation prevailed in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, command orders from above and their implementation have resulted in wide-agreed mixing of Negro and white personnel in all branches, notably the United States Navy and to a lesser extent the Air Corp. Today, Negroes are serving in all branches of the American Armed Forces and the remaining segregation is being rapidly broken down.

Contrary to the propaganda from totalitarian slave states, American Negroes not only move freely, worship freely, and work freely, but they also speak freely. For example, where there is only one Jewish newspaper in Russia and that one controlled by the government, the Negro minority in the United States operates over 200 newspapers and has boasted a press since 1827. The majority of these newspapers are published in the "terror-stricken" South. They are individually owned; they have a combined weekly circulation of 3,000,000 copies and the value of their printing plants runs into the millions of dollars. It is largely through these newspapers and organizations which they support and publicize that the Negro population has been welded into a militant force against reactionary racism. Not a single Negro newspaper has been suppressed, North or South, although they have been unsparing in their criticism of the Jim Crow system. Obviously such oppression can only exist in an atmosphere of freedom.

Similarly, the Negro church whose 40,000 structures serve as meeting places for the colored people could not have carried on or grown except in a tolerant environment. Serving nearly one-half of the Negro population, the total of value of these church properties is around \$250,000,000. It spends well over \$30,000,000 annually. There are few instances in modern times of Negroes

having been prevented from asserting their spiritual rights even in the most backward rural areas. These churches have been in the forefront of all movements for the economic, political, and social benefit of their people, especially in the support of the racially radical programs for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people. The memberships of certain individual Negro churches are the largest in the United States. Many have thousands of members and budgets ranging from \$25,000 to \$60,000 a year. Clearly no such extensive organization can exist except in a free country. This is in contrast to the treatment of the church behind the iron curtain.

All fair-minded Americans admit that the disenfranchisement of the Negroes in the South was a crime. For 10 years, the Negro minority in the Southern states, protected by the bayonets of the Union Army, exercised full rights of citizenship including the ballot, but progressively from 1876 onward they were disenfranchised by various legal devices and by force until by 1900 they had almost completely lost the right to vote. It might be added, however, that Negroes have voted since the Civil War in the 33 states outside the south, and in some places they voted even before the Civil War. In many of these states today, the Negroes are an increasingly important factor in elections.

But the greatest development which illustrates the ability of a free society to change is evidenced by the increasing number of Negro voters in the south in the last decade. In many Southern states, where 10 years ago a Negro did not dare to approach the polls, they are now voting in the scores of thousands, and soon will be voting in the hundreds of thousands. This remarkable change has been brought about solely through legal action and instances in which force has been used to prevent the exercise of the right to vote have been rare. There is no single state in the South today where some Negroes are not voting, and less than one-half of these states require payment of poll tax as a qualification to exercise the right to exercise the right of suffrage.

Of course the greatest blots on the American record have been mob murder, usually called lynching and race riots. The record is most grim, and yet inexcusable though these crimes be, it is gratifying to point out that the problem has been practically solved. Whereas in 1900 there were 115 lynchings, in 1949 there were three; and this was more than in the two previous years. From 1934 to 1949, inclusive, the total number of mob murders was less than in the single year of 1900. Along with this decrease in lynchings, there has been a marked increase in the alertness of police which prevented these crimes. There was a time when so-called officers of the law rarely interfered, but today it is quite different.

This gratifying evidence of increasing law and order in the United States simply indicates that the country which was still largely frontier 50 years ago and had only recently emerged from a long and sanguinary Civil War over the Negro is becoming more settled and tolerant.

In essence the Negro problem (which has been as much white as Negro) has been one of integrating a previously enslaved and ostracized group of divergent

color and culture into the national social structure with due respect for, and with the acquiescence of, the white majority and in accordance with the principles of American federalism, local sovereignty, and majority rule. The speed with which this revolution developed was too slow for some and too fast for many more: too fast indeed, for the Southern states where the white majority was smallest, and where there were deep-seated fears, tensions, and resentments on both sides arising from slavery and its aftermath. The intrasectional racial adjustment was attended often by physical violence and repression, social ostracism and legal proscription which still obtain, although markedly lessening. The record of these inhumanities while deplorable and regrettable, is amazing not by virtue of these occurrences but because, in spite of them there has been such unprecedented progress toward social homogeneity and justice in every direction, and within the memory of living man.

Progressively the color bar has been lowered here and there, either voluntarily by general agreement in the localities or through legal action in the courts. Although much maligned by malicious propaganda, these American courts have almost invariably decided in favor of full citizenship rights for Negro citizens in education, housing, transportation, suffrage, and legal defense: but always and necessarily with due respect for the principles of American Republicanism as laid down in the federal Constitution. Overruling lagging justice within the forty-eight sovereign states, the Supreme Court of the nation has removed one obstacle after another from the Negro's path.

The cumulative effect of these broad, continued, and statesmen like efforts has been improvement of racial relations in geometrical progression. Thus the gains in the past 10 years have far surpassed those made in previous decades. This explains not only the social, economic, and educational well-being of the colored minority, but the latter's continued and unsurpassed loyalty. American Negroes understand, far better than Soviet propagandists, that in the American system lies the hope of all submerged peoples who have the ability and determination to rise to the full stature of free men.