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October 2017

## Equality of Races and The Democratic Movement 1945

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### Recommended Citation

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EQUALITY OF RACES

*And*

THE DEMOCRATIC  
MOVEMENT



By ANNA J. COOPER

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LES IDÉES EGALITAIRES  
ET LE MOUVEMENT  
DEMOCRATIQUE

Question proposed by Monsieur C. Bouglé at Soutenance of  
Thesis: L'Attitude de la France à l'égard de l'Esclavage pendant la  
Révolution. By Anna J. Cooper.

The Sorbonne University of Paris, March 23, 1925

Authors consulted:

C. Bouglé: L'Égalité, Thèse.

De Tocqueville: Démocratie en Amérique.

James Bryce: Modern Democracies.

*Translated from the French for her classes at Frelinghuysen  
University by Anna J. Cooper, August, 1945.*

Price \$1.00







In his Thesis, *Les Idées Egalitaires*, Monsieur Bouglé declares quite decisively that the notion of Equality manifests itself only in our Western Civilization. (p. 37). "It is only in two parts of the globe, Europe and America, at points where Latin, German and Anglo Saxon Races have developed a certain culture known as Occidental Civilization that we discover a general evolution towards Democracy."

Again p. 6: "Autant de problèmes moraux que les tendances égalitaires propose a notre conscience, l'aureole des idées morales éblouit. C'est avec un esprit méthodiquement désintéressé que nous devons aborder, comme s'il s'agissait de minéraux ou de végétaux quelconques, l'étude des idées égalitaires." And finally (p. 248)

"Si l'égalitarisme semble bien être aujourd'hui le moteur principal de notre civilisation c'est qu'il en est d'abord le produit naturel. Est-ce à dire qu'il soit juste ou réalisable? Nous avons prouvé que l'idée de l'égalité résulte logiquement des transformations réelles de nos sociétés; ce n'est pas prouver du même coup qu'elle doit moralement les commander."

[In a word Mr. Bouglé's Thesis holds that Human Equality is a man-made concept resulting as a natural product of the transformations in Nordic Society. That his method in tracing its origin and growth must be purely realistic and dissociated from moral sanctions as to whether it is either right or realizable.]

This decision is in my judgment as cold as the Russian Steppes and as bleak-barren as the peaks of the Himalayas. Can we—ought we to analyze human society as if it were a question of minerals or of vegetation? Perhaps. But even so it is necessary in every case to beware of arbitrary preconceptions, and especially is it necessary to note well the importance of every exception which may vitiate the argument or falsify the conclusion.

The subject which has been imposed upon me is, as worded, too vast and too vague for a thesis. To do it justice would require the life work of a Grote and another of a Gibbon, not to speak of the Modern Democracies to which James Bryce has devoted two big volumes of more than a thousand pages in treating only six examples of it; nor of the classic work of De Tocqueville who limits



himself quite simply to the U. S. A. ending with 1930: "Les dées Egalitaires et le Mouvement Democratique." The Concept of Equality and the Democratic Movement.

Where? and at what Epoch?

It is necessary to set up some sort of metes and bounds for the terrain even if the flight contemplates only the stratosphere.

I have read carefully and with deep and lively interest the learned and scientific work of Dr. Bouglé of the Sorbonne Faculté and I would like if I dared such a liberty to place beside it some facts in actual life from a single one of the nations who bear aloft with assurance the banner of Equality in Democracy—nay, who are privileged as the most advanced to carry the torch of civilization for the enlightenment of the "Backward" races but who, to the world's amazement, show up some deplorable lapses away from the formula proposed by the philosopher. And right here may be the danger spot.

If one approaches the subject by pure reason it becomes necessary to accept the conclusion in its entirety without personal or local bias and without exception taken to suit any embarrassing fact. If for example the conditions for equality as defined by the author are achieved by some nations not included in the term "occidental," we cannot imagine some factitious lines in order to exclude the ones or to include the others. A case in point may be noted in the Franco-Japanese Treaty of August 4, 1896, which affirms:

"Among the legislative enactments of countries of the Orient, a place apart, a place of honor must be conceded to that of the Empire of Japan. Its most recent monuments bear the imprint of Western civilization, the principles with which they are inspired are those of the most advanced codes of the Old Europe, and nowhere perhaps does this characteristic loom up more conspicuously than in the regulations which at the present moment govern the status in Japan of foreigners living there or who carry on business there. Equality of rights before the law between nationals and foreigners is openly and formally proclaimed, etc., etc."

Is it not reasonable to grant that if our theory regarding the elite of nations is not sufficiently comprehensive to include a nation with such a creditable recommendation, that we should either enlarge

*Four*



our definition to harmonize with the facts or else treat the subject of Equality not as an abstraction but as it manifests itself uniquely in Europe and in America. A better hypothesis it seems to me, would be the postulate that progress in the democratic sense is an inborn human endowment—a shadow mark of the Creator's image, or if you will an urge-cell the universal and unmistakable hall-mark traceable to the Father of all.

That "In the mud and scum of things

There always, always something sings"  
and it is that "Something"—that *Singing* Something, which distinguishes the first Man from the last ape, which in a subtle way tagged him with the picturesque Greek title *anthropos*, the *upward face*, and which justifies the claim to equality by birthright to the inheritance from a common Father for the "Backward" no less than the "Advanced" among his varying but undeniable progeny. The sense of "belonging" may seem to slumber more or less indefinitely here or there for racial groups and it may be blatantly denied and successfully ignored by aggressive usurpers who assert with conviction: "We are *the people!* beside us there is none other." But the divine Spark is capable of awakening at the most unexpected moment and it never is wholly smothered or stamped out. Therefore the racial group or nation that undertakes the role to play God and dominate the earth, has an awful, a terrific responsibility.

To assume that the ideas inherent in social progress descend by divine favor upon the Nordic people, a Superior Race chosen to dominate the Earth, assuredly pampers the pride of those believing themselves the Elect of God. But one may as well anticipate Surprises. For example note the situation in Russia today [1925] little dreamed of 20 years ago, likewise in China, Turkey, in Egypt, the Ghandi movement in India.

"There are some instants," says Bryce, "when it would be wiser to bestow free institutions even if they are liable to be misused than to foment discontent by withholding them."

Might we not go so far as to say *à priori* that we ought to admit for all peoples the possibility of establishing these institutions without withholding them from any.



I trust my audacity may be pardoned in daring to take exception to certain conclusions of one of my judges, the learned Dr. Bouglé whose thesis Egalité has been assigned me for questioning.

[My ideas as a matter of course are not scientifically buttressed and no time has been allowed for adequate research, weighing and comparing of authorities on so vast and so important a theme. My own thesis: "L'Attitude de la France à l'égard de l'Esclavage pendant La Revolution" on which I had spent a full year of research both in the Archives at Paris and the Library of Congress at Washington, had to be accepted by Sagnac, chairman of the bench of judges, then printed by Maretheux and placed in the hands of the three judges: Sagnac, Cestre and Bouglé before the Soutenance was granted for March 23, 1925. It was then that two subsidiary topics were unleashed for extempore reaction:

a) Les Mesures législatives concernant l'Esclavage aux Etats Unis de 1789 à 1850 by Dr. C. Cestre. b) Les Idées Egalitaires et le Mouvement Democratique by Dr. C. Bouglé.]

It is necessary, whatever the conditions to speak the truth as one sees it even if from a somewhat blurred viewpoint one is not able to follow exactly the shining pathway of the Master.

At page 44 the author demands: "Would any one dare assert that in a given modern society there exist at the same time two different standards of justice fixing for the same act a heavy penalty if it has been committed by an artisan, a light penalty if it has been committed by a property holder?"

Two different laws inscribed as statutes? No. But custom which defies the law and makes of it a scrap of paper is so notorious that even for the nation where we love to picture the foyer of democracy, equality and justice, it is a common saying in advance of trials: "You can't put a million dollars in jail, or free a poor devil without a cent, particularly if the latter happens to be of a race proscribed."

In such circumstances Law, in the abstract founded on the unalienable Rights of Man and the indestructible value of Humanity makes sheer mockery of Equality. Lynching or the summary execution by a mob without judge or jury and often in a manner atrocious and barbarous, proclaimed at the start as necessary in order



to forestall a horrible crime against women, has extended itself step by step from black men to black women and boys of 15 and 14 years of age and then, so contagious is the fever that one counts some white men and even quite recently a white woman among the victims of this travesty of Law. Defying the Law in certain states also is Peonage, a system under which prisoners from the State Penitentiary are farmed out to private landlords into worse than slavery and exploited without remedy. But lynching and peonage both are ugly excrescences on the body politic, a blot on the Scutcheon causing shame and embarrassment to intelligent patriots in all sections of a democratic country. A negation of Law thro unbridled passion and greed of individuals which let us hope with all true lovers of progress, is now on its way out.

Not so with the legalized inequalities such as the widely unequal provision for the education of youth, denial of the franchise in shameless contravention of the fundamental law of the land, the systematic exclusion from public libraries, recreation grounds and sources of amusement and mental improvement.

Mr. Bryce in his work *Modern Democracies* discusses the new problem of *Democracy Today* caused by the presence of races slightly advanced in close proximity with races advanced and impassioned with the ideology of Equality. He says:

"The passion for Equality, civil and political, economic and social which having grown strong among the Advanced people, has not only spread among the more educated part—everywhere a tiny part—of the Backward peoples, but has disposed the Advanced to favor its sudden extension to the Backward thro the creation of institutions similar to those which had slowly developed themselves among the Advanced. This love of equality is not found in Europeans who live among colored races, who so far from treating the latter as equals, generally contemn and exploit them."

Again in discussing the tendency of the white race to exclude the black or yellow races from large portions of the earth, he says: "There is in Australia a general agreement that the continent must be strictly reserved for the white European races, excluding persons of East Asiatic or South Asiatic or African origin. The watchword, 'A White Australia,' is proclaimed by all parties alike. The philan-



thropic and cosmopolitan philosophers of the 19th century would have been shocked by the notion of keeping these races perpetually apart and warning black or yellow peoples off from large parts of the earth's surface. Even now most large hearted Europeans dislike what seems an attitude of unfriendliness to men of a different color and a selfishness in debarring the more backward races from opportunities of learning from the more advanced, and in refusing to all non-European races, advanced and backward, the chance of expansion in lands whose torrid climate they can support better than white men can. Nevertheless, there is another side to the matter. Whoever studies the phenomena that attend the contact of whites with civilized East Asiatics in Pacific North America, not to speak of those more serious difficulties that arise between whites and colored people in large regions of America and in South Africa, perceives that there are other grounds, besides the desire of working men to prevent the competition of cheap Asiatic labor, which may justify exclusion. The admixture of blood, which is sure ultimately to come wherever races, however different, dwell close together, raises grave questions not only for white men, but for the world at large. Scientific enquiries have not so far warranted the assumption that a mixed race is necessarily superior to the less advanced of the two races whence it springs. It may be inferior to either or the gain to the less advanced may be slighter than the loss of the more advanced."

And here is the horrible catastrophe! As if men and societies reacted like chemical atoms forming instantly a dreaded compound as soon as molecular action becomes possible. Human affinities and alliances are affairs of individual free will. Philosophic reasoning may overexcite but cannot obliterate either their attractions or repulsions. Surely we are intelligent enough to ride in common buses without flying into one another's arms for a mongrel progeny. Why not preach self control and practice the principles of the Christian Religion? Especially is it difficult to comprehend by what secret weapon these philosophers hope that they can hold back on coming tidal waves by wholesale persecution, inflicting vexation and humiliation on innocent individuals of their own generation. Besides, where, in their opinion, where on the terrestrial globe are the non-white races to go?

*Eight*



The white race of our day has a voracious appetite for the One World. It must have room—more room to expand and carry forward its good deeds.

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof! and again: Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Right! We are the meek! Bryce pretends that humility is an extinct virtue, but anyhow, we are the chosen of the Lord! His own children fore-ordained to inherit the earth, and so we enter Africa and forbid the natives to walk except in the middle of the road. We have preempted America—and Lo, the poor Indian! In Australia we say kindly but firmly to the aborigines: "I need the land. Here is abundance of it. But I am allergic to irritants in my sight. I do not like your complexion. It does not go well with my own. If you are submissive I can serve myself with your labor as a slave. If not, yonder is the exit. You will find spacious tombs over the mountains. Pity, really. But I am extremely apprehensive about my posterity. I have to keep the land "White" for them!

It is a curious fact that the nations calling themselves Christian under the banner of the Prince of Peace, devoted ostensibly to the progress of civilization, proudly named Christian civilization, Nations who adore the principles of Democracy, of Equality, of fraternity, who, among their congeners practice the noblest philanthropies, statesmen, philosophers, litterati, preachers, teachers of the finest, most exalted ideas, have to arraign themselves stoically against the simplest amenities of the Gospel, such as "a cup of cold water in the name of a Disciple," as soon as the question of color presents itself.

What is the trouble?

Is it that the Hand of the Potter has slipt? Must we blame God because He made of one blood all peoples that dwell on earth but went to sleep during the firing when some millions were tanned yellow, some brown and some even black. Or rather may we not rejoice that our civilization is to learn and finally apply this last and noblest lesson, the most difficult of all taught by the Master and so sacred that it should be studied, marked, learned and inwardly digested till graven on the hearts of men and emblazoned on the suffering pathway of the Cross:



"By *this* shall men know that ye are my disciples, *that ye love one another*," and that so much the more because on receiving the least of my brethren ye are receiving Me.

The concept of Equality as it is the genuine product of the idea of inherent value in the individual derived from the essential worth of Humanity must be before all else unquestionably of universal application. It operates not between such and such races,—such or such shape of the cranium, such or such theories of civilization. In my opinion, which makes no pretensions to scientific sanctions on either sociological or psychological grounds, instead of being the Special product of any unique cult, the idea of human equality is the result of the final equilibrium of all the human forces of the entire world.

So far the civilization called occidental has attained partial equilibrium only of the physical and perhaps of the intellectual forces. The banner today is borne by the man or the nation who invents the most marvelous project of destruction, the most powerful and irresistible instrument of War. The Death Ray (1925) [the Atomic Bomb (1945)] is tops. But unless I am greatly mistaken, this poor world has need of a second incarnation of Divine Love to teach compassion, to erect anew the ideal already so ancient but so little comprehended even by the most advanced of today: To love mercy to practice justice and to walk humbly before God. Then equality will become no longer the equilibrium of the jungle where one concedes the equality of another only when he cannot crush or exploit him. For equality, as I understand it, is objective, not subjective. It is not for the little fellow who swells up with the idea I am as good as the other fellow; but for the big fellow with all the power and all the controls to stop and consider: The other fellow is as good as I am. Both human, both mortal, both entitled to a place in the sun. The veritable equality will then be the harmony of a well tuned orchestra where each from the greatest to the smallest contributes at his best according to the part assigned by the conductor who can do no wrong, each player striving no longer to destroy but to serve the music of the spheres; and I have the assurance to believe that the contribution of the brother in black may be considerable in a normal world. He has the Heart Talent which perhaps the civilization "called occidental" might take on



to advantage; and let not our world despise the one-talent man, and let him not despise himself and hide his lord's gift because he knows the Master is an austere man: Each at his best, reverencing the Self in the All. *The Master hath need of Thee!* Here you have my religion and my philosophy.

Mr. Bryce proves conclusively that a truly democratic government exists nowhere. Efficiency of performance requires that the ablest direct. The benevolent oligarchy in a democratic framework therefore is Bryce's ideal, and such is acknowledged to be the White Man's Burden wherever the two or the three races find themselves on the same terrain, and I accept it. But let the Ruler bear in mind that the Right to Rule entails the duty and the inescapable responsibility to Rule Right. Let him recognize the differences among men, in the Races of different pigment in epidermal cells, curl of hair and color of eye, length and breadth of cranium and facial angle not as obstacles to fulfilment of destiny of any so long as each can say: I am a man and no human impulse is foreign to me, these differences indicating precisely the providential contribution to that heterogeneity which offers the final test of our civilization, harmony in variety.

If the Christ who was despised and rejected of men nearly 2000 years ago, were making a second attempt to come to His own among the very men who build temples in His Name and magnify their civilization to give Him lip service, would He find Himself again rejected for choosing the humble of earth to confound the pride of the mighty?

Occidental Civilization in its Middle Age thrilled thro and thro in Crusades to deliver the tomb of its Lord from the hands of unbelievers. Today we see his living presence in some of the least of his children rejected, repressed and forced outside the pale for no better reason than that a certain pigment is not preferred by those who make up the books.

Inasmuch as ye have done these things to the least of these my brethren ye have done it to Me.











