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THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CLUB WOMAN
IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

By
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The subject that I have been asked to discuss is indeed a challenging one, for no observer doubts that our society is changing and that it is changing very rapidly. ~~Some of the changes occur~~ ~~take place~~ almost overnight. What is legal today, may be illegal tomorrow. What concerns us today, may not concern us at all tomorrow. Wars, rapidity of communication and transportation, new scientific and technological inventions and discoveries and world organization are but some of the major determining factors of change.

Let us review a few of the changes of interest to us as club women here in the South. Our population is undergoing change. We lost approximately 3,000,000 people during the past two decades, most of them were Negroes. Rural communities are losing heavily to cities of the North, of the West as well as of the South. Our cities are becoming more crowded and our rural areas less populated. This out-migration has caused Negroes to drop from 26 percent to 23 percent of ~~the~~ ^{our} total population, ~~of the South.~~

The region is undergoing economic changes. Whereas previously it was predominantly agricultural, the trend is now toward industry and commerce. Practically every day new industries are moving into the region bringing new ideas, new techniques and more liberal employment views.

The region is undergoing great political changes. Most noted is the outlawing of the white primary and gradual but sure progress in eliminating the poll tax. The number of Negro electors has grown

from around 200,000 to approximately 1,100,000 in a relatively short time; and in a few ~~more~~ years, there will be many more.

While the holding of political office by Negroes is common in some of the other regions--the president of the most powerful borough in New York is a Negro--they have just begun to be elected, in our time, to political office in the South to a meaningful extent. There are Negro members on the city councils of Richmond, Virginia and Nashville, Tennessee; and on the councils of at least five cities in North Carolina. Kentucky and North Carolina have Negroes on their State Boards of Education and seven cities in the South have elected members of our group to school boards. We all know about the recent election of the President of Atlanta University, Dr. Rufus E. Clement, to the Atlanta School Board. We seem to be witnessing the beginning of the end of the practice of excluding the entire Negro population from representation on official boards. This beginning will soon reach other phases of government, on the policy making level. Our region is beginning to see that decisions made for all of the people by the members of one racial group, ^{only} but which are applied to everyone regardless of color, can hardly be called democratic. *We hope that Alabama will soon join the states of Va, Ky, Tenn, N.C., and Ga. in political liberation.* Significant changes are taking place in education. There are *at least* ^{two} thousands of Negro students attending southern white private and state institutions of higher learning. Before the NAACP and the Supreme Court stepped into bring this about, such attendance was unthinkable.

Until recently, no one took seriously the "separate but equal" aspect of public school education. Certainly not State, city or

county school boards. It was taken for granted and accepted as a part of the southern pattern that the schools and facilities for white children would be better than those for Negro children; that Negro teachers' salaries would be lower than those of white teachers. Negroes knew this was wrong, but they did not exert themselves too strenuously to change conditions.

All of this is ^{now} changing. We are most concerned; and, fearful that the United States Supreme Court will outlaw inequality in public school education, as it has in public higher education, a movement to lessen ⁱⁿ these inequalities has begun. Some fine school buildings have been erected for Negro children in a number of communities. Teachers' salaries have greatly increased in most places; and in some, they have been equalized. The whole problem of equalization, however, is another discussion--notice the dilemma of the state of Mississippi at the present time, regarding this whole problem.

The de-segregation of federally operated schools is also having its effect upon those communities adjacent to federal posts. The civilian population is having a practical demonstration of a workable, integrated school system.

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Tied in with these changes is improvement in race relations. We know that much of what has happened and is happening in race relations is due to ~~group pressure brought by organizations, particularly by the NAACP; and by the fearlessness of public school teachers, by students, by parents and other citizens in court cases of various types.~~ ^{a large degree to} ~~to~~ The fact remains, nevertheless, that they have taken place because liberal forces too are operating.

Through court action we have seen segregation in interstate transportation outlawed. Restrictive covenants limiting residence of Negroes are no longer recognized as legal; and soon, integration in the armed forces will have ~~been~~ ^{become} an accomplished fact. Some school systems have been unified; and, miracle of all miracles, we have seen the restaurants and public eating places ~~and~~ ^{and some of the hotels,} and moving picture houses opened to our people in the nation's capital.

Miami, Florida is fast becoming a convention city for our people, for it is not averse to housing in its hotel ² Negro delegations in conference. That Deep South city also has an appointed Negro judge. Golf links, swimming pools, parks, playgrounds, tennis courts and other public places of recreation are being provided in cities where none previously existed. In instances, the same facilities are being used by whites and Negroes, even though at different times. Such changes are by no means wide-spread, but ~~they indicate that change can take place.~~ ¹ And what has happened in one place, can surely take place in another.

No longer is there widespread approval or even tolerance of politicians who would seek an advantage, especially office holding, by capitalizing on racial prejudice. Indeed, the whole world is concerned with better human relations. People are insisting on the recognition of everyone's inherent dignity and worth. We see this spectacularly operating among the colored peoples of Africa and Asia, in their efforts to throw off the effect ⁵ of colonialism. ¹ American Indian is beginning to want to leave his reservation and to mingle more freely with other people. His isolated life is no

¹ knew the ¹

longer satisfactory; and he is demanding that his children be permitted to attend the regular public schools.

These are but a few of the significant changes that ~~has~~ ^{have} taken place and which we are witnessing. What then should be our responsibilities in this changing society?

The movement of people to ~~large~~ cities will pose old yet new problems. Welfare work, so long as part of the program of our clubs will have to be revised and extended. These new city dwellers ~~will~~ ^{do and} ~~and do~~ need decent homes to live in and guidance in health, employment, domestic and religious matters. The schools will be more crowded. There will be need for parks, playgrounds, recreation facilities, and youth group centers. More behavior problems will spring up--juvenile delinquency already a big problem, may be expected to increase.

In these and other areas, club women may be expected to assume a larger role of leadership. They must, if they have not already, become interested in public housing, in public recreation, and in public education. ^{for with increasing integration, club women accustomed} Our emphasis must not be on action after ~~as~~ ^{as they} ~~delinquency and crime occur~~ ^{anti-social behavior} but rather on reducing ~~anti-social behavior~~ ^{its occurrence} ~~patterns~~ ^{are to} to the minimum. ^{work, must be a stabilizing force in their communities and join hands with other stabilizing forces.}

While we have greatly emphasized work with youth, more and more attention will have to be given to the needs of the older population; for the number of persons 65 years and older is increasing and some consideration ~~should~~ ^{must} be given to their problems-- their health, their recreation, their housing, their occupations, their general happiness.

More and more women are joining the labor force. Approximately 2,250,000 Negro women are productive workers. Many of these workers

have small children who need care while their mothers are at work. More and standard day nurseries and nursery schools will ~~be needed~~ ^{have to be set up} to assist these working mothers.

In this changing society, government is stepping in and has begun to operate in areas formerly left entirely to charitable organizations. In our welfare work, we must know what the obligations of government are and work to see that government assumes these obligations. Where government services end, there ^{only} ours should begin.

The bringing of industry to the South and the mechanization of agriculture is calling for ~~better~~ ^{more} educated and more highly skilled people. ~~Only 12 to 15 percent of the Negro population has completed high school.~~ ^{in almost every field, including government workers.} ~~More young people must~~ ^{It is necessary for to} be guided into and through high school. For in the future, it will be difficult for any young person to qualify for a job requiring any type of skill unless he has completed at least a high school course. Education and income are closely linked together and the relative income of Negroes in the South is extremely low, only 36 percent of the national average. ~~While that of the South is 65 percent of the national average.~~

"The one thing the Negro needs above all else," says a noted social scientist, "is a chance to get into the whole range of employment according to his abilities and capacities." When that chance comes, the Negro must be prepared to step in and fill a job as capably as any one else, because he is prepared for it and deserves it. Thorough preparation in one's chosen field should be one of the watch-words for young people from club women. Even jobs in the agriculture of tomorrow will need skilled and ~~well-prepared~~ workers.

While the Negro in the South is increasingly participating in political affairs, it is important ^{for} ~~that~~ this process ^{to} be speeded up. Club women can do a great deal in getting our people to register and vote. We realize there are Boards of Registrars who deliberately discourage Negro citizens in their efforts to participate in civic affairs. Citizens must know this, but it must not be allowed to deter them from their purpose. Particularly must every club woman herself become a register^d voter and influence each eligible member of her family and circle of friends to do likewise. All of our troubles do not come from without the Negro group. Many of them come from within. Knowing the disadvantages under which we live, we must be doubly careful and meticulous in everything we do. As an illustration, the only way one can become a registered voter is to be properly certified by the Board of Registrars, and by paying whatever poll tax is required. Since there are some Boards that require every "i" to be dotted and every "t" crossed, ^{by the process} when an application form is filled out, we should see that we dot these "i's" and cross these "ts", and that every question is fully and correctly answered, in the order they appear. And while it is very tiring and wearying to have to wait all day and sometimes several days before the Board finally reaches you, our people must be encouraged to do this until we can convince such Boards that their undemocratic practices are wrong or until we can elect to office persons who believe so deeply in the democratic process themselves that they will not tolerate such behavior, ~~by the Boards.~~ A fine job of civic education can be performed by club women in getting our people to have an appreciation for the power of the ballot and to use it effectively.

It is the civic duty of the club woman to speak out boldly on issues of public interest and to act boldly on them. Mrs. Mary Church Terrell of Washington, D. C., the first president of the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and a vital, inspiring leader now, even at the age of 91, is perhaps our most noted example of the civic-minded club woman.

All of her life she has been interested in civic affairs; and, she will not be satisfied until every legal discriminatory barrier in the nation's capital, where she resides, is removed; and we hope that she will live that long. But we do not need to live in Washington. We must do the things that have to be done, where we are. Our first efforts may or may not be successful. But eventually they will succeed.

Negro women in other parts of the country, because they ventured into new fields, are occupying places of importance in government. Women of color are members of the State Legislatures of Michigan, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. They sit on the city councils of Canton and Cleveland, Ohio. They are members of the School Boards of Homestead, Pa., of Jersey City and Newark, New Jersey, of Springfield, Mass., and of Washington, D. C. They also hold appointive positions in many places.

Here in Alabama, white women have been in politics for a long time. There is no reason at all why our qualified women should not also offer themselves for public office. A woman candidate for ~~the~~ ^{our} State Legislature ~~recently offered~~ ^{gives} some very good advice, I think, to women would-be office holders: She ~~said~~ ^{says}, "Examine your qualifications; study the functions of the job you would

seek; gain organization support; build a personal following and make your voice heard as you see ^{to} endorsements."

Although change is taking place in race relations, we will continue to live in a society that is conditioned by the race to which we belong for a long time. ^{When} When legal barriers are removed, we will still have to deal with antiquated attitudes, ^{and} values, and behavior. How to help our people, especially our young people, adjust to such a society is very nicely stated by Dr. Charles H. Thompson of Howard University. ~~He says,~~ ^{he says,} We should assist young people to develop a "dynamic and realistic philosophy of race relations which will aid them in living with a maximum of dignity and self-respect and with a minimum of frustration and self-d-esteem." ^{he continues,} What they need "is a philosophy based upon a world perspective of man's inhumanity to man, which will lift them out of their narrow personal group frame of reference to a level of genuine concern for universal human rights, irrespective of race, creed or geography."

The times are indeed challenging. We as club women have a dual role. One relates to our duties and obligations as American citizens and the other relates to our special role as members of the least respected of America's minority groups. But we have one great big advantage. ~~We~~ ^{we} know better than any other American group the real possibilities of democracy, for no other group has had as much of an opportunity to find this out as we have. So, it is our patriotic, even sacred duty, while we are improving our own status, to win all of America over for democracy, in order that we can hold our heads high in our pride in American citizenship, and ^{so} that America herself can face the world without a guilty conscience.