

**AMERICAN
NEGROES,
A HANDBOOK**

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American Negroes, a Handbook by Edwin R. Embree

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AMERICAN NEGROES
A HANDBOOK

WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA is a rainbow: a blending of many colors and creeds and cultures; a promise that diverse peoples may live together happily and successfully with personal liberty and national solidarity. Some of us think of America as "owned" by a single racial stock or cultural group. Far from it, America is the home of all the many very different races and peoples who came here seeking freedom and opportunity and stayed here to build a great democracy.

A hardy, colorful race of Indians had lived on this continent for thousands of years before any of the present peoples came. While the early relations between European settlers and native Indians were turbulent and bloody, Indians have contributed one of the brightest strands in the American tradition. Vain moderns should remember that the only 100 per cent Americans are red men who were building happy and satisfying lives on this continent when the ancestors of many of us were crude nomads roaming the forests of Britain and Gaul.

During the past four hundred years the native Indians have been outnumbered and almost submerged by the great streams of people who have poured in from every land, having in common only their zest for freedom, their search for fresh opportunities. Spanish conquerors and priests, French and Dutch traders, and the great tides of English colonists were followed by people from every country of Europe: Irish, Germans, Italians, Scandinavians, Russians, Poles, Czechs, Serbs, Greeks,

Turks, Jews; and smaller numbers from the Orient: Chinese, Japanese, Malays, and men from the islands of the Pacific. All these are America.

One group, the African Negroes, came, not of their own will, but as slaves. Although slavery was a common practice at that time, it was strange to find it among the freedom-loving peoples of the New World. It bothered the founding fathers as they were declaring their independence from the Old World and the old dogmas on the principle that "all men are created free and equal." It continued to bother the new nation until, after violent disputes and a furious civil war, all men in America were declared free.

But no edict could in itself create a race of independent people. Nor could a decree change overnight traditions and attitudes of long standing. The essential marks of free men have had to be won slowly and painfully by the Negroes themselves: self-reliance, education, health, economic security, the respect of their neighbors. To an astonishing degree Negroes have won their independence in these essentials during the three short generations since emancipation.

This booklet gives in briefest outline the story of one of the new races that has grown up in this New World, the brown Americans. It pictures their struggles and their place today in various phases of American life. It tells some of the woes and the victories, some of the wails and the songs of this sector of the American rainbow, who chant in the words of Langston Hughes:

*I, too, sing America
I am the darker brother
I, too, am America.*

A NEW RACE, THE BROWN AMERICANS

A NEW RACE is growing up in America. Its skin is brown. It has in its veins the blood of the three principal branches of man—black, white, yellow-brown. The new race numbers thirteen million in the United States and many more millions in the West Indies and in Central and South America. It is a fresh biological mixture. In its culture it is also new, having been almost entirely cut off from the ancient African home and yet having developed somewhat differently from the white American pattern.

Black forefathers of the new race were among the first settlers of the New World. In 1619, according to John Smith's *Generale Historie*, there arrived in Jamestown "a Dutch man of warre, that sold us twenty Negars." So, just twelve years after the establishment in Virginia of the first permanent British colony in America and a few months before the Mayflower landed the Pilgrims at Plymouth, the beginnings of the new race were made.

These twenty Negars were followed by ever-increasing shipments from Africa over a period of two centuries. Into the American colonies they were brought for labor on the crops raised in these virgin territories: tobacco, rice, indigo, sugar, cotton. The wealth of the New World came largely by the sweat of this new race.

The slaves were not a single people. They came from tribes as different as the several nations of Europe. They were captured from provinces covering large parts of Central and Western Africa. Among them were Moors from the northerly coasts, the small yellow Hottentots from the south, Bantu tribesmen from the equatorial regions, the peoples of the Cameroons, the Congo, and the vast stretches of the Niger Valley, the large blacks from the region about the Gold Coast. The great commerce in slaves ranged over four thousand miles of African coast, from the Senegal River on the north to the southern limits of Angola, and reached hundreds of miles inland.

Contrary to popular belief, many of the African tribes were far above barbarism. Settled farming, exchange of goods and the use of money, organized governments, elaborate religious forms, beautiful arts and crafts were common over the wide area of Guinea, from which most of the slaves came. Their customs were very different from ours, and they lacked the science and mechanics which Europe was beginning to develop. But few of them were the crude savages we tend to picture in our minds.

Members of the different tribes were completely mixed in their distribution in the New World. They were first mingled in the African slave ports. Shipped to the transfer stations of the West Indies, they were further mixed and transhipped to various parts of America, including the region which is now the United States. Finally, on reaching the mainland, they were distributed through American slave marts and sold to all parts of the country. Members of tribes which in