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THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

RAYFORD W. LOGAN

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

There is definitely a crisis, perhaps something worse before this article begins to gather dust on a library shelf. There is also a Western Hemisphere even though its eastern limits seem to be expanding almost as rapidly as they did in the era of Manifest Destiny. Democracy, on the other hand, is neither definite nor expanding.

How, indeed, when we consider the history of the Western Hemisphere,¹ can there be any functional democracy? By functional democracy I mean a system of government and a way of life that definitely promote the opportunity for every one to develop and utilize to the best good of all

¹ The conclusions in this article are largely my own. Evidence can be adduced to show exceptions to these conclusions and, indeed, contrary interpretations. In place of specific documentation I subjoin a very brief bibliography for the colonial period as follows: James T. Adams, *Provincial Society, 1690-1763*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927; Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*. New Haven, etc.: Yale University Press, 1934-1938; James O. Ballagh, *White Servitude in the Colony of Virginia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1895; Marcus W. Jernegan, *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1607-1788*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931; Albert E. McKinley, *The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America*. Philadelphia: Press of the University of Pennsylvania, 1905; Herbert I. Priestley, *The Coming of the White Man, 1492-1848*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929. The following are helpful for the colonies of Latin America: Raymond Joseph de Pons, *Voyage à la partie orientale de la Terre-Ferme*. Paris, 1806; Thomas Gage, *A New Survey of the West Indies*. London, 1648; Friedrich Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*. Paris, 1811-1812; Jorge Juan y Santacilla and Antonio de Ulloa, *Noticias secretas de América*. London, 1826; Sir Arthur Helps, *The Spanish Conquest in America*. London, 1855-1861; Bernard Moses, *The Spanish Dependencies in South America*. New York and London, 1914; Robert Southey, *History of Brazil*. London, 1810-1819; M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'île Saint Domingue*. Philadelphia, 1797.

whatever abilities he may possess or acquire. There was little if any democracy among the pre-Columbian Indians. Consequently, even in those regions, like the Andean Republics, where Indians have survived in large numbers, there is no indigenous democracy upon which to build.

Nor was there democracy in fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe when white men began to settle in the Western World. Most Europeans did not come to America in the colonial period to create a democracy but rather to establish a new aristocracy. One may, therefore, search in vain for any substantial democracy in either the form of government or the daily life in the European colonies in America. If these newcomers had discovered uninhabited lands, they might, conceivably, have nevertheless achieved democracy. But this "dream of democracy" was frustrated by the presence of Indians and the introduction of Negro slaves.

From the every beginning, then, colonial government and society developed a definite nexus between race and class. I am far from subscribing to the *leyenda negra* which has made the treatment of Indians by Spaniards one of the great crimes of history. Dr. Lewis Hanke has revealed, for example, the bitter conflict between the two schools of Spanish thought which considered the Indians as either "noble savages" or "dirty dogs." But after some thirty years of experimentation,

the "dirty dog" school seems to have won the battle since the government decided that "nothing could be gained by further attempts to make the Indians live like 'Christian laborers in Castile.'"² In brief, the *encomienda* and *mita* systems of forced labor, or expulsion beyond the frontier, became the general pattern of life for the Indians who survived the Spanish conquest. The other European colonists pursued substantially similar policies. One would be very naïve if he sought to generalize as to the relative brutality of Anglo-Saxons and Latins, of Protestants and Catholics.

The Negro policy of the Europeans in the Western Hemisphere was, on the whole, worse than their Indian policy. While forced labor was usually the lot of the Indians, slavery was the fate of most of the Negroes. Slavery existed in all the colonies: in some like Argentina, Chile, and Massachusetts, there were only a few thousands; in Saint Domingue there were almost a half million. The forced migration of some ten millions of Africans has been a principal obstacle to the development of democracy in America.

On the eve of the revolutions in these European colonies a rather definite social structure had been established. It was not static, and it varied slightly in different colonies. But, by and large, colonial government and society consisted of well-defined groups. The ruling class was composed almost exclusively of whites who possessed also most of the wealth. Complete solidarity did not, of course, prevail among the whites. The contest was

bitter between the European-born Spaniard or Portuguese and the creole (European born in the colonies); between the men of the Tidewater and of the Piedmont in the English colonies; between the *grands blancs* and the *petits blancs*; between patroon and peasant. But, to use convenient terms, the white aristocracy and bourgeoisie practically monopolized the instruments of government, controlled most of the wealth, and enjoyed the social prerogatives.

The second group consisted of freemen, composed largely of mulattoes and mestizos (cross between Indian and white), "poor whites," some Negroes, Indians and zambos (cross between Negro and Indian), and every conceivable mixing of these free groups. The mulattoes and mestizos frequently possessed more wealth and opportunity than did the others in this group. But there was this essential difference—the "poor whites" could hope to acquire enough wealth to join the whites at the top in power and eventually in social position. The mulattoes and mestizos, regardless of their wealth, were rarely admitted to equal participation in government or social position. They might reach the periphery but rarely the center. Señor Moises Saenz has aptly called the colonial mestizo "a man without a country."³ The same designation can be applied to the other members of this group. In this no-man's land, the full-blooded and the zambo freemen usually found advancement more difficult than did the free mixed bloods. There was no more unity among these in-between groups than there was among

² *The First Social Experiments in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935, pp. 19-20, 70-71.

³ "Indians are Americans," *Survey Graphic*, 30:176, Mr 1941.

the whites. At the bottom of the structure, forming the broad base of a pyramid, were the forced laborers and the slaves who were mostly full-blooded Indians, Negroes and zambos, and some mulattoes and mestizos.

There are perfectly understandable reasons for this general correlation between race and class. The whites had possessed the superior arms that had enabled them to conquer the Indians and enslave the Negroes. But, since the whites were generally outnumbered, they had to buttress their superior position by the ideologies of racial prestige and of religion. This minority domination, founded upon conquest, buttressed by racial and religious ideologies, was assured by the technique of divide and rule. The non-white free-men were not admitted to full membership in the ruling classes, but they were encouraged to hold themselves apart from and above the unfree. This last groveling mass in turn was taught to hate the group immediately above it.

One significant difference did exist, however, on the surface between the English and the other European colonies, namely, in the concept of race. It would be an obvious exaggeration to say that in the English colonies a single drop of Negro or Indian blood caused one to be considered a Negro or an Indian and that in the other colonies one drop of white blood caused the Negro or Indian to be considered white. The very fact that mixed bloods were regularly listed in the census or population estimates establishes conclusively that the latter contention was unfounded. It would be more accurate to say that the tendency in the Thirteen Colonies was to re-

strict rigidly admission to the white group while in the other colonies the tendency was in the direction of more liberality. If we may borrow terms from constitutional law, we may say that the Thirteen Colonies were strict constructionists and that the others were loose constructionists. I venture the guess that the presence of a white minority in the Thirteen Colonies was a controlling factor in the strict construction and that elsewhere the minority status, from the numerical point of view, dictated the necessity for the admission of new members to the top ranks. Whatever the reasons, race prejudice was stronger in the English colonies than in those of the Latin nations of Europe.

But the important point is this: in both instances the premium on being white was recognized. In the first case, the premium was so high that it could be accorded to only a few. In the second, the premium was so high that it was granted as a reward for extraordinary achievement, a kind of honorary degree if you please. The essential similarity between the two concepts may be better understood if we recall a favorite dictum about English and French colonial principles in Africa. The English, it is said, are convinced that their civilization is so superior that only a few can acquire it. (It is even doubted that most Americans can ever become real Englishmen.) The French, pre-Vichy of course, are sure that their civilization is so superior that mankind would be improved if it were extended widely. In both cases, the superiority is taken for granted. And so, in all the Western Hemisphere, as later in Africa and Asia, membership in the white race

meant the possession of most of the wealth, power, and the social prerogatives.

THE EFFECTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WARS

The revolutionary wars that brought independence eventually to twenty-one American nations shook this structure but did not shatter it. The Spanish- and Portuguese-born Europeans and the Loyalists in the United States lost power to another group of whites. Only the black republic of Haiti cast an unmistakable and ominous shadow across this white supremacy. But Anglo-Saxon and Latin America long ostracized this racial Bolshevik from the family of nations. The Dominican Republic sought to avoid the ostracism by basing its claim to recognition by the United States upon the fiction that it was white—even the Negroes had a “white interest” or a “white heart.”⁴ One of the reasons why Cuban independence was so long delayed was the fear that a revolution there might create another Haiti.⁵

Internally, as well as internationally, the socio-economic structure wobbled but eventually regained its equilibrium. Slavery was gradually abolished throughout the Western Hemisphere. But, it should be noted, in three of the countries in which slavery was last abolished, namely, the United States, 1865, Cuba, 1886, and Brazil, 1888, there were considerable numbers of slaves whereas Central America, where slavery was first abolished by national legislation (1824),

had only a small number. It would be contrary to all historical development if freedmen, regardless of race, could remove completely, in a short period of time, the incubus of slavery or if those who were already free could entirely destroy the stigma attached to the slave status of other members of their race.⁶ The Indians similarly gained liberation, on paper, from forced labor. But they likewise could not in a brief time overcome, in any considerable numbers, the inevitable results of historical processes.

This equilibrium of the social and economic classes was maintained or restored in spite of the frequent “revolutions” which were the inevitable result of the *caudillismo* consequent to the long wars for independence. But these so-called revolutions were rarely social. Except in infrequent cases, like that of Juárez and the War of Reform in Mexico, opposing groups of whites or near-whites commanding dark-skinned fighters fought each other to determine which group of European descendants should gain temporary control.

Democracy could not exist, of course, in the European possessions that remained colonies. Colonialism and democracy are necessarily incompatible. The racial-economic situation in these colonies was substantially similar to that in the independent nations with the added burden of remote control from a European capital. In Canada the problem has been somewhat different. The Negro and Indian questions have been relatively unimportant while that of the French Cath-

⁴ Rayford W. Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776-1891*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941, pp. 237-248.

⁵ See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 224.

⁶ Charles S. Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934.

pathetic and authoritative students of the Indian problem in Latin America, recently wrote:

José Carlos Mariátegui coined an exact phrase: "The Indians," he accused, "form an extra-social class." He was speaking of the Indians in Peru, but to a greater or less extent, the description fits the rest of Indo-America.¹²

Not so much study has been given to the Negro in Latin America as to the Indian.¹³ A school headed by Nina Rodrigues, Arthur Ramos, and Gilberto Freyre emphasizes the fusion of the Negro into Brazilian life and culture.¹⁴ An American Negro journalist recently, however, gave a very gloomy picture of the Negro in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁵ Rufino Blanco Fombona, the author of *The Man of Gold*, which is considered such a brilliant example of Venezuelan belles-lettres that it has been translated into English, penned this classic which Hitler and Goebbels have probably never surpassed:

Andres Rata was, physically, an ill-shaped youth of blackish skin—an agile, bony, undersized mulatto with a hanging blubber-lip and yellowish eyes. One seeks instinctively in such a person a tail, for it is hard to tell at first sight whether this is the metamorphosis of a monkey turned man, or the degeneration of man who has reverted to the ape. At all events, one's eyes look for a tail, thinking that the regular life of such a hominoid must be arboreal. Morally he was even worse; filthy, as infectious as the saliva of a consumptive and more vile than villainess itself.¹⁶

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹³ Even the special issue of *Survey Graphic*, 30: Mr 1941, has special articles on women, labor, immigrants, labor and Indians, but no special article on Negroes.

¹⁴ See, for example, Ramos, *The Negro in Brazil* (transl. by Richard Patee). Washington: The Associated Publishers, 1939.

¹⁵ See the series of articles by Ollie Stewart in the Baltimore *Afro-American*, August 10, 17, 24, 1940.

¹⁶ Transl. by Isaac Goldberg. New York: Brentano's, 1920, p. 114.

When I went to Mexico in 1936, I had to get special permission from the Department of *Gobernación* because, as my tourist card said, I am of the Negro race.

On the other hand, Nilo Peçanha, former President of Brazil, was one of only a few Negroes who gained distinction in that country.¹⁷ President Batista of Cuba is commonly said to have Negro blood. It would seem that Mexico has removed the humiliating requirements for Negroes who wish to visit the country. But, it should be noted, the diplomatic, military, naval, and intellectual representatives of Latin American nations, with the exception of Haiti, belong predominantly to the white group. At most, they are, as Hanke has said, only "part Indian."

It would be possible to continue interminably in this vein, balancing evidences of prejudice and discrimination in Latin American against evidences of progress and extraordinary achievements by the dark-skinned peoples of Latin America. My own conclusion is that which was voiced by Professor Rupert Emerson at the 1941 Conference of the Division of Social Sciences of Howard University. After a careful first-hand study of Puerto Rico he pointed out that at the base of the pyramid there is so much misery and poverty that it is impossible to confine it to any one racial group. But at the top it is very rare, indeed, to find any but "whites." This point of view seems to be substantiated by Whitaker's estimate that eighty-five per cent of Brazilians are in poverty. This number would necessarily include many of all racial groups. My own observations in Cuba in 1933 from Ha-

¹⁷ Ramos, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

vana to Santiago and in Mexico in 1936 from the American border as far South as Acapulco support this interpretation although the mestizo is forging ahead rather rapidly in Mexico.

There is less deviation from democracy in the United States than there is in Latin America and there is probably a causal connection between this fact and the fact that the population of the United States is about ninety per cent white whereas that of Latin America is perhaps twenty per cent white. It has become a commonplace to state that the Negro is the acid test of Democracy in the United States. There is some anti-Catholicism and a strong undercurrent of anti-Semitism. The poll tax in eight Southern states disfranchises tens of thousands of white men and women. The title *Sharecroppers All*¹⁸ aptly portrays the economic plight of large numbers of whites. The unemployment problem is a long way from solution. But it remains nonetheless true that all of these disabilities fall with special incidence upon the Negro.

The discrimination against the Negro, is, in fact, so strong that some American Negro leaders have gone so far as to say that we could be no worse off under Hitler.¹⁹ In my opinion this is a great exaggeration. Even so, the denial of equal opportunity is so gross and so notorious that there is no need to retail the sorry story.

THE REAL CRISIS TODAY

It would have been possible to interpret the subject of this paper in an entirely different way. Many writers

would probably have considered at great length such topics as the possibility that totalitarian ideologies may be voluntarily adopted in the Western Hemisphere or be imposed as a result of the necessity of preparing for war. Another favorite subject of discussion is the danger of military conquest of the Western Hemisphere by the Axis powers. The answer to all of these questions lies within the domain of speculation. The reader may answer them to his own satisfaction by consulting his favorite expert or by using his own expert knowledge.

The real and unmistakable crisis of democracy as I see it lies in the failure to recognize the facts that there never has been a democracy here, there is none now and in the ascertainable future there will be none. For example, it is becoming a commonplace to assert that the world can not survive half totalitarian and half democratic, that it must become one or the other. It would be more exact to inquire whether the half-democratic (notice carefully the hyphen, please) Western Hemisphere can survive the contest with the totalitarian powers. Some writers have not failed to call attention to the shortcomings of this so-called democracy. It is very significant that among this number is a leading isolationist and alleged Fascist, Lawrence Dennis. He recently roundly declared: "To say that Anglo-American supremacy would amount to the supremacy of justice for all people is the rankest hypocrisy in view of our record with the Indians and the Negroes or the British record in Ireland and India."²⁰ Although Dennis was

¹⁸ Arthur Raper and Ira de A. Reid. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941.

¹⁹ See, for example, an editorial in *The Crisis*, 43:151. My 1941.

²⁰ "The Eighth Fortune Round Table," Supplement to *Fortune*, Ap 1941, p. 20.

speaking of only the United States in "America," his comment is applicable to the entire Western Hemisphere.

Thus far, the totalitarian nations have gained the ascendancy. How can they be finally defeated? Mrs. Vera Micheles Dean of the Foreign Policy Association gave the best answer to this question in a radio address on June 1 when she urged that the people of America be given something to fight for. That something is the "dream of

democracy," the high ideals that are all too frequently interred in Declarations of Independence, in national holiday orations, and in challenges hurled at the totalitarian ideologies. Unless the American people believe sincerely that they are fighting for real democracy instead of merely against authoritarian principles, the half-democratic nations of the Western world may be doomed to a defeat which they would well deserve.