

# BRAZIL AND THE NEGRO

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN THE SERIES ON SOUTH AMERICA

*It may be noted that in this article Mr. Roosevelt is not attempting either to justify or condemn the Brazilian attitude toward the Negro as contrasted with that of the United States, but simply to set forth clearly what the Brazilian attitude is in fact.—THE EDITORS.*

IF I were asked to name the one point in which there is complete difference between the Brazilians and ourselves, I should say that it was in the attitude toward the black man. As the Indian becomes civilized he is absorbed into the population, as is the case with us in Oklahoma, and whoever has Indian blood in him is proud of the fact. The President of Brazil is one of these men, and there are a number of others among the leaders whom I met. It is an entire mistake to speak as if the population of Brazil were so mixed as to be wholly unlike that of Europe or the United States. It is mixed only in the sense in which the populations of Italy and Spain are mixed, as the population of southern France is mixed, as the population is mixed in many parts of the United States. As regards the major part of the population, the "mixed race" is such only in the sense in which that is also true of the United States, and of most of the advanced nations of mankind. There is one real difference, however. This difference between the United States and Brazil is the tendency of Brazil to absorb the Negro. My observation leads me to believe that in "absorb" I have used exactly the right expression to describe this process. It is the Negro who is being absorbed and not the Negro who is absorbing the white man. The great majority of the men and women of high social position in Rio are of an un-

mixed white blood as the corresponding class in Paris or Madrid or Rome. The great majority of the political leaders are pure whites, with an occasional dash of Indian blood. But any Negro or mulatto who shows himself fit is without question given the place to which his abilities entitle him. I met one or two colored Deputies. At one military school I met a Negro professor. At one great laboratory I saw a colored doctor. All of these men were accepted quite simply on their worth, and apparently nobody had any idea of discriminating against them in any official or business relations because of their color. A very great majority of the Negroes, and most of the colored people—that is, the mulattoes and quadroons—do not make their way up to the highest positions, and they are proportionately most plentiful in the lower ranks. Among the working people, for instance, and among the enlisted men of the army and navy, I saw many Negroes, many colored men, working side by side in the same organizations with the whites, and apparently without any discrimination being made against them. In Bahia there is a very large Negro element among the working class. In parts of Brazil it is somewhat larger. In Rio it is noticeable, but far less so than in most of the cities of the Southern United States.

Brazil is most fortunate in the fact that its white working population has nothing of the

parasite about it. The whites do not endeavor to live on the labor of the blacks, the inevitable result of which, as shown in all other communities, is that ultimately the blacks crowd out of existence those who live on their labor. On the contrary, the bulk of the work, even in Rio, is done by white men. But these white men draw no line against the Negro, and in the lower ranks intermarriages are frequent, especially between the Negroes and the most numerous of the immigrant races of Europe. In the middle class these intermarriages are rare, and in the higher class almost unknown so far as concerns men and women in which the black strain is at all evident. But even in the higher ranks there is apparently no prejudice whatever against marrying a man or girl who is, say, seven-eighths white, the remaining quantity of black blood being treated as a negligible element. The men and women with whom I closely associated were in the very great majority of cases pure white, save in the comparatively rare instances where they had a dash of Indian blood. But they naturally and unconcernedly told me the facts as I have above related them.

Perhaps the attitude that the Brazilians, including the most intelligent among them, take is best symbolized by a picture we saw in the art museum in Rio. It portrayed a black grandfather, a mulatto son, and a white grandchild, the evident intention of the painter being to express both the hope and the belief that the Negro was being absorbed and transformed so that he would become a white man. It is idle to prophesy for any remote future, and it is a very doubtful thing to prophesy even about the immediate future, but my impression is that the guiding or ruling classes of Brazil will continue to be almost absolutely white, that in the classes immediately below them there will continue to be a certain small absorption of Negro blood, and that among the ordinary people this absorption will be larger—large enough to make a slight difference in the type.

From the above it will be seen that the ideals of the United States and of Brazil as regards the treatment of the Negroes are wholly different. The best men in the United States, not only among the whites but among the blacks also, believe in the complete separation of the races so far as marriage is concerned, while they also believe in treating each man of whatever color absolutely on his worth as a man, allowing him full oppor-

tunity to achieve the success warranted by his ability and integrity, and giving to him the full measure of respect to which that success entitles him. In Brazil, on the contrary, the idea looked forward to is the disappearance of the Negro question through the disappearance of the Negro himself—that is, through his gradual absorption into the white race.

This does not mean that Brazilians are or will become the "mongrel" people that they have been asserted to be by certain writers, not only French and English, but American. The Brazilians are a white people, belonging to the Mediterranean race, and differing from the northern stocks only as such great and civilized old races as the Spaniards and Italians, with their splendid historic past, differ from these northern stocks. The evident Indian admixture has added a good, and not a bad, element. The very large European immigration of itself tends, decade by decade, to make the Negro blood a smaller element of the blood of the whole community. The Brazilian of the future will be in blood more European than in the past, and he will differ in culture only as the American of the North differs.

The great majority of the men and women I met, the leaders in the world of political and industrial effort and of scientific accomplishment, showed little, if any, more trace of Negro blood than would be shown by the like number of similar men in a European capital. Yet not only is there in some classes a considerable infiltration of Negro blood, with a corresponding tendency of the pure Negro type to disappear, but this process is regarded with hearty approval by the most thoughtful statesmen of the country. Their view, so different from our own, can perhaps best be expressed in the words of one of these very statesmen, himself of pure white blood, who said to me substantially:

"Of course the presence of the Negro is the real problem, and a very serious problem, both in your country, the United States, and in mine, Brazil. Slavery was an intolerable method of solving the problem, and had to be abolished. But the problem itself remained, in the presence of the Negro. It was not the slave-owner who inherited his slaves who was responsible for the problem. The slave-trader who brought the slaves into the country was the man who inflicted the ghastly wrong, not only upon the blacks but upon the whites. We, like you, have merely inherited the problem.

" Now comes the necessity to devise some method of dealing with it. You of the United States are keeping the blacks as an entirely separate element, and you are not treating them in a way that fosters their self-respect. They will remain a menacing element in your civilization, permanent, and perhaps even after a while a growing element. With us the question tends to disappear, because the blacks themselves tend to disappear and become absorbed. You speak of Brazil as having a large Negro population. Well, in a century there will not be any Negroes in Brazil, whereas you will have twenty or thirty millions of them. Then for you there will be a real and very uncomfortable problem, while for us the problem in its most menacing phase will have disappeared. You say that this result will be accomplished only by an adulteration, and therefore a weakening, of the pure white blood. I grant that this will have happened as regards a portion, perhaps a third, of our population. I regret this, but it is the least objectionable of the alternatives. We treat the Negro with entire respect, and he responds to the treatment. If a Negro shows capacity and integrity, he receives the same reward that a white man would receive. He has therefore every incentive to rise. In the upper ranks of society there is no intermarriage with the Negro of pure or nearly pure blood; but such intermarriage is frequent in the lower ranks, espe-

cially between the Negro and many classes of immigrants.

" The pure Negro is constantly growing less and less in numbers, and after two or more crosses of the white blood the Negro blood tends to disappear, so far as the physical, mental, and moral traits of the race are concerned. When he has disappeared, his blood will remain as an appreciable, but in no way a dominant, element in perhaps a third of our people, while the remaining two-thirds will be pure whites. Granted that this strain will represent a slight weakening in one-third of our population, the result will be that in our country two-thirds of the population will have kept its full strength, with one-third slightly weakened, while the Negro problem will have entirely disappeared. In your country all the white population will have been kept in its original race strength, but the Negro will remain in increased numbers and with an increased and bitter sense of his isolation, so that the problem of his presence will be more menacing than at present. I do not say that ours is a perfect solution, but I regard it as a better solution than yours. We and you have to face two alternatives, neither of them without drawbacks. I believe that the one we Brazilians have chosen will in the long run, from the national standpoint, prove less disadvantageous and dangerous than the one you of the United States have chosen."