

## World Perspective

# Racial Equality Wins Wider Formal Acceptance

This is the second of a series of articles on the Conference on Race Relations in World Perspective, held recently in Honolulu. Forty social scientists from all over the world attended the month-long conference at the University of Hawaii.

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"The idea of racial equality is winning formal acceptance over most of the world; almost everywhere, the idea of white racial superiority is in full retreat. But its legacy remains and still plays an important part in world affairs."

This theme—the historical development of the idea of white supremacy, its decline, and the problems left in its wake—forms the core of a report on "Race Relations in World Perspective" just submitted to an international conference of social scientists here.

More thought and discussion went into this one paper than into any other single project at the conference. The report was drafted by a commission on race relations in world perspective and was representative of the thinking of most of the 40 scholars who came from all parts of the world for a new, global look at race relations.

### New Approach Proposed

The report suggested to the conference a new approach to the study of race relations.

What is the world perspective on race relations?

The commission assigned to this question looked particularly into European history for the development of the idea of "race supremacy." For several hundred years, the commission said, western man dominated the world; and as his domination grew, the idea also grew that separate human races exist—roughly differentiated by color, and that the white race for a variety of reasons was superior to the others, or was at least unique.

This domination took many forms; indirect control by economic and other means, political control without European settlement, political control leading to European settlement, and the establishment in the New World of multiracial states with groups of European origin

dominant over other groups of immigrants or emancipated slaves.

The establishment and maintenance of control led to a certain separation between the dominant group and others, because of the necessities of power and because of differences in culture and standards of living.

### Group Consciousness

Along with this control, various ideas of white superiority arose, which served to explain and justify that control. These ideas were molded first by the fact that white peoples had power and that they could not have had power unless they possessed certain kinds of superiority. First, in technical mastery and the arts of domination; second, by the context of ideas in which they emerged—by such ideas as those of "Christendom," "civilized mission," "progress" and the "survival of the fittest."

The first effect of western expansion was to shake the existing social and economic systems in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, and to weaken the power of resistance among their peoples. Many of them acquiesced in European power for a time, but not forever. As the new forces released by European rule reshaped their economic and social life, they became ever more unwilling to accept the position of inferiority to which the western organization of the world consigned them; and the idea of white superiority, with all its effects on the behavior of indi-

viduals and groups, offended their sense of human dignity.

Thus took place a re-creation of group consciousness among the subject peoples, which expressed itself in forms adopted from Europe and America.

### Solidarity Develops

Against the racial ideas of the white peoples there developed in some regions a sense of racial solidarity and self-assertion among the nonwhites. But the movement of revolt adopted other ideas as well. For the idea of a white racial superiority never gathered to itself the totality of beliefs and attitudes which make up western civilization. In fact, it was in direct contradiction to such doctrines as those of equality, liberty, and the rule of law which the West has derived from its Greek, Roman and Christian heritage and which have deeply influenced the ways of life and thought of the western peoples.

Europe sent out its ideas as well as its goods and its armies; simply by belonging to a world dominated by the West, the subject peoples eventually became aware of its basic principles. Thus their movement of revolt drew power from ideas which the western world itself recognized as valid; at the same time, they looked for inspiration to their own inherited cultures, in some of which, as in those of Islam and Hinduism, similar doctrines were embedded.

The commission, having observed that "the age of European supremacy is passing," noted that a change in concep-

tions and methods of rule followed the withdrawal of western powers from countries which they previously governed. In other countries, the nature of the control they still retain is being modified; for example, the Commonwealth is taking shape as the British Empire disappears.

### Gradual Modification

In the United States alone, the pattern of race relations established after the emancipation of the slaves is being transformed by the accelerated working out, under the rule of law, of the ideas of liberty and equality. This process of withdrawal and change gradually modifies the social system established by European power and the ideas elaborated to justify it.

Some of the problems of the present arise from the speed with which colonial peoples have achieved political freedom and the slowness with which the ideas and attitudes of western man adjusted to the new situation.

In some places, racial ideas are being strengthened rather than weakened. As European power ebbs, it leaves behind it, in different parts of Africa, "islands" of settlers, some of them long established in their regions of settlement, who cling, to their ideas of difference and habits of separation. Among the once subject peoples, resentment against their former rulers still tends to take a "racial" color. Moreover, since the end of European dominance, new tensions have emerged between and within the newly independent states, and these, too, may be colored by racial ideas, the legacies of western rule, or, as in Asia, some still earlier historical experience, such as the periodic expansion of China.

There is a time lag not only when power declines but also when it grows. Some of these peoples find themselves in a position of leadership almost before they are aware of it; and some of them have nothing in their political philosophy which prepares them for their position of world influence.

### Challenge for U.S.

Marxism did not foresee the growth of Soviet and Communist empires; Indians influenced by the ideas of Gandhi now are facing the responsibilities of a new position in the world; the

ideas and attitudes of the American people have not yet adapted themselves to the new role of the United States in world affairs.

Americans are, in effect, the residual legatees of European world power; and they have not yet quite emerged from the racial tension which has been one of the central themes of their history.

The commission concludes with this challenging question for Americans: "How far will these factors influence the changes that are likely to come in American ways of thought and life now that the ideas of democracy are confronted by the fact of power?"

Two other reports demonstrated that race situations are not static but are dynamic.

1. The worldwide process of urbanization and industrialization produces basic changes in racial patterns and attitudes, modifies customs, and influences the distribution of political and economic power.

2. As changes in race patterns and attitudes occur, there inevitably follow changes in the governing policies and institutions. For example: The transition period in British West Africa with Africans emerging as the dominant political force, with an African Prime Minister and a largely African Cabinet, will result in modifications of the western parliamentary model implanted by the British.