

GENERAL SCIENCE

# Negroes in Science

Negroes seeking professional employment without discrimination can turn to the sciences, where the emphasis has shifted from color to qualifications.

By JUDITH VIORST

► SCIENCE OFFERS the Negro his best possible opportunity for professional employment without discrimination within the white community.

During the last decade industry's rising demands for trained scientific personnel have combined with the civil rights momentum to sweep a significant number of don't-bother-to-knock signs from laboratory doors.

At Washington's Howard University, which serves as a reliable yardstick of Negro achievement, recruiters from more than 300 industries, businesses, institutes and government agencies came graduate-hunting last year, at least three-fourths of them seeking people in the sciences. No other campus in this multi-college area was so heavily visited.

Prior to 1951, reported Mrs. Marion Coombs, director of Howard's student placement office, there were no recruiters at all. And even as late as 1959, she said, the university received fewer recruitment visits than the 60 or so it had to reject this year.

Information from Plans for Progress, a voluntary industry program working with the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, shows that at least 95% of its membership (229 of the largest corporations in the country) use scientists and are willing to put Negroes in the jobs. In a recent report, 86 member companies announced the hiring of 11,700 new non-white salaried personnel, a large proportion of whom are scientists.

## Engineers Wanted

Recently the greatest job opportunities for Howard graduates have been in engineering, a field that was virtually closed to Negroes before 1950. Of the 86 engineers turned out by the university last June, all who registered for placement have had one or more offers.

Young Negro physicists holding bachelor degrees are being snapped up by the aerospace industries. Starting salaries are \$6,000 to \$8,000 yearly, with the company often paying for graduate school training as well.

White schools, from the elementary to the university level, now lag behind private industry in taking on Negro scientists. A Negro science professor at a university of all white students is still a rarity, said Dr. Montague Cobb, head of Howard Medical School's department of anatomy.

He added, however, that some New England schools are now looking around for qualified Negroes to offer them jobs.

As the doors swing open, they admit not only the recent graduate, but the Negro scientist who earned his degree in the days

long before the Supreme Court's school integration decision.

"In those years prior to 1954," said Dr. Harold Finley, head of Howard's zoology department, "the top Negro minds were driven from the South, where they would have received inferior science education, to northern and western universities, where their teachers gave them the best possible education and interest and support."

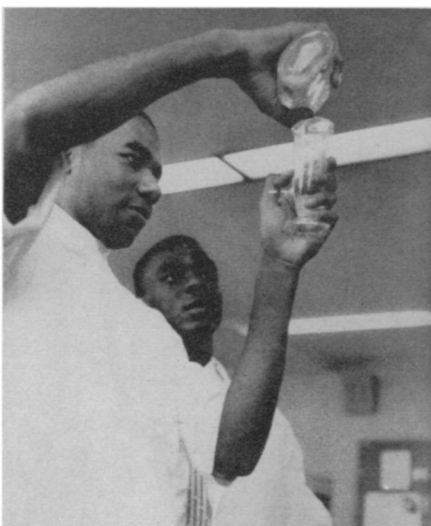
These Negro scientists of earlier generations, said Dr. Finley, today form "an experienced corps, prepared and ready for the opening up of jobs."

Despite this experienced corps, Dr. Finley pointed out, Negroes are not now equipped to take advantage of all available scientific jobs. Past exclusionary practices, he said, have discouraged the study of such disciplines as the earth sciences.

But with improved employment opportunities, a young Negro can prepare for a career in geology or meteorology today without fear of winding up as a highly-educated short-order cook.

## Recent Color Blindness

The recent symptoms of color blindness in the sciences have been ascribed, in large measure, to the simple economic principle of supply and demand. The extraordinary need for scientists has made Negroes acceptable



Howard University

**STUDENTS OF PHARMACY—**  
*When these young men complete their schooling at Howard University's College of Pharmacy, they can look forward to entering a field where there are more jobs than graduates.*

to white employers who might never have dreamed of hiring them in the past.

Said Dr. Cobb: "This country is using up its manpower reserves. The old Ivy League sources aren't providing it with enough trained personnel in the sciences. It needs everybody it can get."

The historic U. S. Supreme Court decision of 1954 is also credited with changing the status of the Negro scientist. So is the late President Kennedy's Executive Order of 1961, prohibiting discrimination by any company working under government contract.

Pressures exerted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, religious organizations and direct-action groups with their boycotts and sit-ins have had considerable effect.

## Companies Alert

"The companies are sensitive now," Dr. Finley said. "They have to be prepared to say, 'We hire Negroes; don't pick on us.'"

Mrs. Coombs, who believes that "industry is beginning to recognize the militancy of the Negro," made this comment to someone who asked whether Howard graduates were grateful for the opportunities now open to them.

"Not at all," she said. "No one is doing them a favor. This is what they've been working for, and this is what they expect."

Back in 1939 the story was different. "Going into science then was almost a joke," said a Negro biologist who graduated from college that year.

He sent out, he recalled, more than 75 job applications, all unsuccessful, and spent the next seven years on the fringes of his profession—as hospital mess attendant, orderly and guard.

The brilliant and versatile Ernest Everett Just (1883-1941), a member of the Howard faculty throughout his entire postgraduate career, received a more tragic rebuff from the white scientific community. Acknowledged to be one of the outstanding zoologists of his day, he was never offered a position at any other major American university.

His teacher and collaborator, the late Dr. Frank Lillie, said of Dr. Just:

"An element of tragedy ran through all Just's scientific career due to limitations imposed by being a Negro in America. . . . That a man of his ability, scientific devotion and such strong personal loyalties as he gave and received should have been warped in the land of his birth must remain a matter for regret."

Dr. Cobb, who believes that "any able Negro can get a good post in the biological sciences today," recalled a time when graduate schools were reluctant to admit Negro scientists unless they planned to stay away from the white professional community.

"As fast as a bright Negro would show

promise," he said, "he was directed, practically forced, back to the Negro academic world."

In the medical sciences discrimination showed itself in the refusal of white hospitals to admit Negroes as residents or interns until the 1940s. Negro doctors could not obtain affiliation with white hospitals until the mid-1950s.

Even today, the color line in medicine is most tenacious. While Negro patients will seek out white physicians, the reverse almost never occurs in urban areas.

A rare exception is Dr. Theodore K.

Lawless, an outstanding Chicago dermatologist. His extraordinary reputation in diseases of the skin—which seems to have the same problems whatever its color—has won him an enormous bi-racial clientele. "There are a lot of bright Negroes out doing some brilliant things. What they require is exposure and attention," said Dr. Finley.

He believes that they are beginning to receive that necessary exposure and attention today, as the white society moves over respectfully to make room for the Negro in science.

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#### GENERAL SCIENCE

## 'Kept' Science Ruinous

► FEDERAL DOMINATION of science may lead the United States down the primrose path.

The nation could face rule by a mediocre scientific clique that persists in error to the point of final catastrophe.

This possibility was advanced by Dr. Hans Morgenthau, University of Chicago political scientist, in an address prepared for the Washington Colloquium on Science and Society at American University, Washington, D.C.

Dr. Morgenthau stated that the nuclear age has strengthened the power of the government over the people and has also brought to the fore a new kind of ruler, "the scientific elite."

This elite is gaining more power because its members have knowledge the layman does not. Therefore, scientific advice to political leaders is becoming the gospel.

Along with a rise in power of scientists could come a stifling of their creativity by "commitment to the purposes of state." Money—lots of it—is the bait, drawing science into selected channels.

Should the avenue the Government has opened turn out to be a blind alley, Dr. Morgenthau warned, then science will suffer because "it cannot be easy for the scientists and administrators who have committed large human and material resources and their scientific reputations (to) admit they were wrong and all these resources were wasted."

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration was cited as a prime example of large scale and virtually irrevocable public commitment.

Such commitments, he said, "may well make for persistence in error, rationalized and justified by the expectation that all that is needed for success is just another major effort."

"Therefore, major effort may well follow major effort in futility—until catastrophe takes the place of timely retreat."

Not only does this threat exist but it is magnified by the artificial barriers of secrecy.

Dr. Morgenthau charged that new scientific knowledge development under Government auspices is kept not only from the public but also from other scientists in other branches of the elite corps.

How then is the nation to survive and overcome the obstacles raised? Dr. Morgenthau told SCIENCE SERVICE he has no pat

answers but "scientific education of the layman" is one solution.

"The politically aware scientist has no advantage over the scientifically informed layman; and if the former is not politically aware, he is even inferior to the latter. They both try to anticipate the future by guessing.

"The scientist's monopoly of the answers to the questions of the future is a myth."

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## National Museum Act Could Increase Status

► THE PRESTIGE and authority of the U.S. National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., may be enhanced by a bill recently introduced in the Senate.

In an effort to preserve and coordinate inherited treasures in museums throughout the country, the "National Museum Act of 1965" would empower the director of the National Museum, Frank A. Taylor, to report on U.S. museums and their activities each year. He would also advise and cooperate with the U.S. Government in aiding these museums, cooperate with them in solving their problems and training programs, prepare publications and help improve museum techniques.

The National Museum is a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution, whose Secretary is now S. Dillon Ripley. The Smithsonian originated with the bequest of wealthy British chemist James Smithson. Mr. Smithson died in 1829, leaving an estate of \$500,000 to the United States of America, "to found at Washington under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men."

Starting as a library and museum, the Institution now encompasses some 59 million objects, including Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis, fine gem collections and John Glenn's space capsule, in various bureaus such as the Museum of Natural History, Museum of History and Technology, National Air Museum, U.S. National Museum, National Zoological Park, Freer Gallery, and National Gallery of Art.

The bill, introduced by Sen. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), was referred to the Committee on Rules and Administration.

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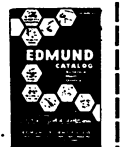
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