

Negro as ours seems at present destined to become. If we are not to blunder on in the dark, it is well to learn what forecasts of the future can be made by asking scientific questions of the present.

The fourth Negro movement I shall note is that of growing political power due to developing race consciousness and purposeful organization for political action.

August 19, 1920, the newly elected president of the Universal Negro Improvement Association is quoted in the press as saying, "The day is not far distant when the Negro will be a power in politics." In the October, 1920, number of *The Journal of Negro History* an article by Norman B. Andrews entitled "The Negro in Politics," closes with these words:

In several of the cities of the North there is such a large Negro population and so much appreciation among the Negroes of their political power that they are now launching a movement to nominate and elect members of their race to represent them in Congress. It is likely that this may soon be effected in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People says that in 1913 it defeated bills in eleven states out of twelve which aimed to prevent Negro-white intermarriage.<sup>10</sup> When an organization in the interest of one race in America, a race which numbers one tenth of our total population, can control legislation in eleven out of twelve states as far separated as New York on the Atlantic and Washington on the Pacific, it is very evident that that race is rapidly becoming an important political factor in the life of our nation.

A few years ago one of the foremost administrators of research funds in the United States said the American Negroes could not be researched by his institution because they were a political factor in America. Is this not the all-sufficient reason why we should have all possible scientific data and knowledge concerning the Negro? The Negroes and

<sup>10</sup> Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the National Negro Protective Association.

whites in America have become too dynamic for national disaster longer to be trusted to adjust their differences mainly on the basis of race prejudice on the one hand, or unthoughtful sentimentality on the other.

I have endeavored to show in this paper that our nation should make large use of definite and specific anthropological knowledge to help insure her national development. I am as interested as any anthropologist in all research into the development of man. I am interested in the development of culture. I prize as one of my very richest experiences my intimate contacts with primitive peoples, but, as an American believing in America and her possibilities, I am to-day first of all anxious that anthropologists use their scientific knowledge to assist America in the solution of her momentous problems.

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#### A BRIEF HISTORICAL CONSIDERATION OF THE METRIC SYSTEM<sup>1</sup>

THE World Metric Standardization Council wishes briefly to present to the Mathematical Association of America the desirability of enrolling actively in support of the adoption of the metric system in the United States. This organization is an advisory organization, unifying the efforts of all who are urging the adoption of the metric units of weights and measures throughout the United States, the British commonwealths and the world. There are no decimal dues, but contributions to the cause are welcome.

Whatever theoretical advantages a duodecimal or sixty system might have, the fact remains that man is ten-fingered and learns to count and reckon with these mechanical aids assisting in the process of computation, either consciously or unconsciously. Among civilizations reaching any high degree of culture, only two have carried to any extent any other than a decimal system. The sixty system of the Babylonians and the twenty system of the

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented before the Mathematical Association of America, Chicago, Dec. 28, 1920.

Mayas of Yucatan are exceptions. However, even in these systems, the ten (or five) forms a subsidiary system, apparently developed first. The further important fact should be noted that with the development of these numerical systems, both these civilizations included their systems of weights and measures. We may even say that it appears probable that the system of weights and measures was first brought to the sixty system among the Babylonians, and weights and measures to the twenty system among the Mayans, and from this carried over to the number system. Note that this reduction took place in Babylon as much as four thousand years ago. These ancient civilizations found it necessary, then, to make their number systems conform to their systems of weights and measures, including time.

The first systematic treatise on decimal fractions was printed in 1585, first in Flemish and then in French, by Simon Stevin, of Bruges. This work is addressed to astronomers, surveyors, masters of money (of the mint), and to all merchants. Stevin says, of this work, that it treats of "something so simple, that it hardly merits the name of invention." He adds:

We will speak freely of the great utility of this invention; I say great, much greater than I judge any of you will suspect, and this without at all exalting my own opinion. . . . For the astronomer knows, . . . the difficult multiplications and divisions which proceed from the progression with degrees, minutes, seconds and thirds . . . the surveyor, he will recognize the great benefit which the world would receive from this science, to avoid . . . the tiresome multiplications in Verges, feet and often inches, which are notably awkward, and often the cause of error. The same of the masters of the mint, merchants, and others. . . . But the more that these things mentioned are worth while, and the ways to achieve them more laborious, the greater still is this discovery *disme*, which removes all these difficulties. But how? It teaches (to tell much in one word) to compute easily, without fractions, all computations which are encountered in the affairs of human beings, in such a way that the four principles of arithmetic which are called addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, are able to achieve this end, causing also similar facility to those who use the casting-board (*jetons*). Now if

by this means will be gained precious time; . . . if by this means labor, annoyance, error, damage and other accidents commonly joined with these computations, be avoided, then I submit this plan voluntarily to your judgment.

What can one add to these words of the first writer on the subject, and an independent discoverer of decimal fractions? All that Stevin says applies to-day, hardly with the change of a letter. The genius of Stevin is evident in the comprehensive grasp which he had of the universal application of decimal fractions to affairs. Much of the benefit of this invention is lost to us in America, because we persist in using non-decimal weights and measures.

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### SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

#### THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

A REPORT of the nature and scope of the past year's work of The American Museum of Natural History was made on the evening of February 7 by President Henry Fairfield Osborn, at the annual meeting of the board of trustees, which was held at the home of Dr. Walter B. James. The president regards the year 1920 as one of the greatest years in the history of the museum, inasmuch as the institution's educational value has for the first time been fully recognized by the present city administration, and gifts, collections and funds for expeditions presented to the museum represent a total of \$500,000.

Commenting on the financial condition of the museum, it was announced that the year's work had been concluded without the necessity of requesting the trustees to make their usual personal contributions to supplement the budget. This was due to the enforcement of the most rigid economy and to the fact that the city authorities, after a searching investigation of its affairs, recognizing the importance of the institution as a vital and ever developing adjunct to the city's educational system, had increased the annual maintenance allowance by \$150,000 over the appropriation