

A Social Plan for Minority Groups

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A SOCIAL PLAN FOR MINORITY GROUPS

(An Excerpt from a Letter of O.D. Richardson)

A minority group, racial or religious, never gets quite fair treatment. Unfair treatment causes hatred, and hatred causes more unfair treatment. This condition is dangerous to the United States for it is the negation of our religion and our democratic principles. It is dangerous to any minority for history is full of examples of minority groups who became "untouchable." But until a minority group decides to break the fatal circle with an intelligent plan, and find leaders who can persuade their people to follow that plan, there can be no remedy. Equality cannot be given or legislated. It must be won, and won by some careful plan, well conceived, and followed vigorously for at least a generation.

Axiom: People will trust you and accept you, in time, if you conform to the folk-pattern: that group of customs which make the Americans Americans, the Chinese Chinese, the Russians Russians, the Romans Romans. These customs often seem odd, but there is always a good reason for them in the life of that particular people.

Don'ts for Racial Minorities:

1. You must decide which of the customs of a country are merely a passing fashion, and which are the roots of its character. No one can become an American (though lots have tried) by learning to jitter-bug, drive a car, to neck in quiet lanes, drink ice cream sodas, heat a house with an automatic gas furnace or get a divorce.
2. You cannot become an American by imitating the habits of people who are not respected by the best of the Americans.
3. America has quite a reputation in Europe and Asia as a place where people are care only for making money. Some immigrants imagine they are fitting into the life of this country when they come here just to make money. They soon find that people who come here just to make money are very much disliked. America is something you must belong to, not something you purchase. People who try to make money without "belonging" soon find that other people make it hard for them to make money, and treat them with hostility. Sometimes the immigrant calls this racial discrimination. It is not racial discrimination. It will happen in any country and in any group where people get the idea that a stranger wants to share the best they have without being one of them, and by that I mean acting as they act, suffering when they suffer, giving when they give.
4. Do not earn your money here and plan to spend it abroad.
5. Live in as good a house as the older Americans who make what you do. If you live in a shack or hovel, the Americans will argue that you are trying to reduce the standard of living, or that you

are not sub-human and do not want to live decently, or that you are not living in America at all, but are saving your money to spend abroad in some foreign land. They will not like you for any of these.

6. Do not put off learning English.
7. Do not throw away your money, especially on cheap goods.
8. Never lose respect for the people of your ancestry and the things they have accomplished. The Americans have no use for people who act ashamed of their parentage, and who try to become Americans in six months. They believe that such persons are either dishonest or too shallow to be a credit to any nation. Becoming an American is a gradual, slow process. We are proud of our ancestors, and do not respect those who are not proud of theirs. We think too well of ourselves to believe that any person can become one of us by learning a few wise-cracks, sneering at his forbears, and buying a new suit of clothes.
9. As immigrants and the children of immigrants you will of ten live in poor districts, and the members of the majority race you meet will frequently be persons who are not very much respected by their own people. The failures of one race are always those who most resent a different race. You must make your friends among the better-educated and more successful people of the majority race.
10. Never act ashamed of your people, or try to escape their problems by deserting them.
11. Study the successful Americans, carefully, and find out what makes one American popular with other Americans. Then try to win good-will in the same manner.
12. If people are rude to you, and try to make it hard for you to make a living, keep your head. Remember what you want: fair treatment. You can never gain it by feeling sorry for yourself, or planning for the time when you can be rude and hateful back again.
13. The more you learn about America, its land, peoples, history, songs, books, heroes, the less of a stranger you will feel in it. True, many Americans do not know much of these things. Could you expect to be successful in any country by imitating the least successful of its peoples?
14. Never cover hurt feelings with a loud, contemptuous manner.