

THE PROBLEM

Since the beginnings of wide-spread public education in America, textbooks and supplemental readers have tended to portray ours as a "white society"—often, in fact, one with the Protestant Anglo-Saxon element heavily emphasized. The selection of individuals and incidents to exemplify our history and culture, the use of illustrations, the choice of proper names in fictional readings—all have reinforced the traditional theme.

Some years ago schoolbooks began to introduce, with serious and constructive treatment, South Europeans, Jews, Orientals, and other ethnic groups on the American scene. But just as in so many other fields the American Negro has been the last to win full acceptance from his countrymen, so too he has been the last to break through the "textbook barrier." Of course he could hardly be left out of any discussion of slavery and Reconstruction, but on these subjects few of the history texts commonly used in southern schools have gained the approval of leading scholars.*

In more recent years, books have appeared showing the Negro in new situations, breaking through the "happy southern ducky" stereotype. This has been partly in response to economic demand, partly because many of the most creative authors, illustrators and editors have felt the challenge of the current social revolution. In some of the very best books now being published the subject is handled in a natural and straightforward way, but few such books find their way into southern schools. In some textbooks new multi-ethnic or inter-cultural material has been provided for some school systems but not others. The nationally-distributed version of a certain American history, for example, describes the contributions of the noted Negro mathematician, Benjamin Banneker, who helped L'Enfant lay out the new District of Columbia and whose talents did much to raise Thomas Jefferson's estimate of Negro capacities. In the regional (southern) version the same space is given over to a familiar New England Revolutionary figure, a worthy individual but one more in a large cast of patriots of similar background. In the

To give just one example, *Cavalier Commonwealth*, the Virginia history text currently prescribed for use in 11th & 12th grade classes, paints a rosy picture of slavery which suggests that the many fugitive and rebellious slaves must not have been informed of its benefits: "The slave's condition had its advantages. He usually worked the accepted work week of the colony—from sunrise to sundown daily except Sunday. But he enjoyed long holidays especially at Christmas. He did not work as hard as the average free laborer, since he did not have to worry about losing his job. In fact the slave enjoyed what might be called comprehensive social security. Generally speaking, his food was plentiful, his clothing adequate, his cabin warm, his health protected, his leisure carefree. He did not have to worry about hard times, unemployment or old age."