

## Negro's Part in Southern Development

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When the first census was taken in 1790, there were 1,903,332 persons living in the southern states, of which 677,275, or 35.6 per cent, were colored. In 1850, the population in the seven southern states included in the original census had grown to 5,851,201, of which the colored portion numbered 2,034,015, or 34.8 per cent. In other words, the ratio of the colored population in these states was still very nearly the same in 1850 that it had been at the first census, sixty years before.

In the meantime, there had been added to the seven original southern states six others including western Georgia. In several of these new states, the proportion of colored people to white was much larger than it was in the older slave states. For example, the population of Alabama was 44.7 per cent colored in 1850, and 48.2 per cent colored in 1900. In Mississippi, in 1850, colored people represented 51.2 per cent of the whole population; in 1900, 58.5 per cent. In Louisiana, in the same year, the colored population was 50.7 per cent of the whole and in 1900, 47.1 per cent. In western Georgia, colored people made up 55.7 per cent of the population in 1850, and 43.9 per cent in 1900. Florida's population was 46.0 per cent colored.

What part has this large portion of the population had in the industrial and commercial development of the southern states? In answering this question, we should bear in mind that the Negro people did not come to this country of their own free will. On the contrary, they were brought here against their will and at a considerable expense, in response to an economic demand, -in other words, to furnish the labor necessary to perform the great and difficult task of settling a new country. What is true of the first Africans who were brought to this country is true to a very large degree of those who were born on this continent. The Negro did not emigrate from Virginia, Tennessee and the other border states

to the far South of his own free will. He went there because he was wanted.

The reason that there are ten millions of people of African descent in the United States to-day is because, at the time that the Negro was brought to this country there was no other people and no other race which, under the circumstances, was able to perform the work as well as the Negro.

Although the first Negro slaves were landed at Jamestown, Virginia, as early as 1619, it was half a century later before Negroes began to be seen in any large numbers in the southern colonies. In the meantime, Indian slavery and white servitude had been tried. The best efforts of the colonists do not seem to have been able to make a good laborer out of the Indian. In the West Indies, where numbers of Indian slaves were sold at different times, as a result of Indian wars in the English colonies, a Negro was worth four Indians in the slave market. For a long time, white servitude and Negro slavery existed side by side in Virginia and Maryland, but at the end of the seventeenth century, the white laborer, particularly in the harder and more difficult tasks of pioneer life, began to give way before the black man. This was not because the white employer preferred the black man to the white as a servant, but merely because, -for the work that was demanded at that time, -the black man was stronger, more enduring, and more easily managed.

In the southern states, like Alabama and Mississippi, which were settled after Negro slavery was established, the Negro was from the first an indispensable factor in the development of the country. It was the labor of the Negro that dug the ditches, cut down the forests, and later helped to build the railways and to open up the mines.

As the rough work of clearing the forests had, to some extent, been completed, there grew a demand in the cities and on the larger plantations for a class of trained mechanics, and in response to this demand, there soon appeared among the slaves a class of trained mechanics, men skilled in the trades, such as blacksmithing and carpentry and the like. Not infrequently it happened that these slave mechanics and laborers had their own secret processes for doing the work assigned to them. In such cases, they carefully guarded their craft secrets, and handed them down to their children,

or whoever followed them in the trade. For example, Lumsden Lane, who was a slave in Newberne, N. C., in the early part of the last century, learned from his father a secret method of curing tobacco. Having succeeded in purchasing his time from his master, he and his father took up the manufacture of this tobacco, and Lane made enough in this way and other ways to purchase his own freedom, together with that of his wife and five children.

There are traditions of a number of inventions made by slaves at different times. Among these, I recall the "Hemp Brake," a machine by which the fiber is separated by beating from the hemp stalk. It is also reported that a slave of Jefferson Davis invented a propeller for vessels which was finally made use of in the Confederate Navy.

In the cities, like Baltimore, Md., and Charleston, S. C., many slave mechanics obtained practical freedom by being allowed to buy their own time. This was the case of Frederick Douglass, who worked as a ship-calker in the shipyard of Baltimore. Most of the slaves who bought their own time did so for the purpose of saving enough money to purchase their freedom. An indication of the number of slaves who purchased their own freedom in this way is given in a census of the colored people that was taken in Cincinnati in 1835. It appears from this census that of the sixty-nine heads of families, who had been former slaves, thirty-six had purchased their own freedom.

It will, perhaps, indicate the part which the Negro has had in the material development of the South if we compare the Negro with the Indian. At the time the Negro was first brought to America, the Indian and the white man had already made each other's acquaintance to some extent, but practically it may be said that the black man, the red man, and the white man met at the same time on the soil of America.

The difference between the Indian and the Negro is that while the red man fled from the white man's civilization, the black man was attracted by it. The red man clung to his old tribal life and customs, but the Negro adapted himself to his new conditions and eagerly sought to learn all that the white man could teach him. The result was that when emancipation came thousands of Negroes, by their industry and frugality, had purchased their own freedom and that of their families, while free Negroes, in spite of the limitations

that were imposed upon them, had accumulated property to the value, as near as I have been able to estimate, of something like twenty-five million dollars.

At the opening of the civil war, the slaves in the United States represented a capital of a billion and a half dollars. It is perhaps safe to say that the annual value of the productive labor of the slaves, over and above the cost of their keep, was something like twenty per cent of that

amount. In other words, the Negro slaves of the United States, during the period just previous to the war, contributed annually to the wealth of the southern states something like \$30,000,000. When it is considered that slaves ordinarily rented in Virginia from one hundred to two hundred dollars a year, and that mechanics, who were buying their freedom, frequently paid a dollar a day and sometimes more for their own time, it seems probable that this is a conservative estimate.

How is it, on the contrary, with the Indian? Until within the past few years, the Indian, far from contributing to the wealth of this country has been an expense to the government of more than ten million dollars a year. From July, 1776, to June 30, 1890, the civil expenditures of the government on account of the Indians aggregated more than \$250,000,000, and if we take into account the sums it has cost the government in policing the different reservations, the whole will amount to considerably more than a billion dollars.

As a result of his long apprenticeship in slavery, the American Negro entered freedom with a capital represented in his own body and in his ability to work of something like a billion and half dollars. Having a practical monopoly of all the common and field labor and a very large hold upon the trades, the Negro laborer, so far as industrial competition is concerned, has found himself, since freedom, in an easier situation than other laborers in the world. As the freedman's wants were few and as the demand for labor was constant and increasing, there was no force inside or outside of him that drove him to the hard, severe, and intense labor, which the free laborers in other countries and other parts of this country perform.

Before emancipation, it was frequently said that as soon as the Negro became free he would stop work altogether, or that he would work so irregularly that his labor would be of no economic value,

and eventually he would be driven to the wall by competition with white laborers from the North. None of these predictions have been fulfilled. At the present time, in the coal mines of Alabama, where the Negro has come into direct competition with the imported white labor, Negroes mine about fifty per cent of the coal. When the iron mines were first opened in Alabama, all the miners were white. Negroes were employed simply as helpers. At the present time, about ninety per cent of the miners of iron ore are Negroes. Negro miners from the southern states have very largely invaded the mining regions of the middle western states. In Iowa, for instance, there is a Negro town called Buxton, which is almost wholly made up of Negro miners employed by the Consolidated Coal Company.

One reason the Negro did not immediately cease to work after freedom was that during slavery days, from his association with the white man, he had learned to feel a passionate desire for knowledge. During the first years of freedom, the whole Negro race became absorbed in the task of securing an education. To get an education, under the conditions then existing, involved a considerable amount of sacrifice on the part of teachers and pupils alike. Parents, who had themselves not been able to learn to read, willingly worked and saved in order that their children might have that opportunity.

With the growth of education there came a demand for trained teachers, and after that, for an educated ministry. Following this, there grew up a demand for a trained class of professional men, -lawyers, physicians and druggists. To build up within a few generations an educated professional class from men who had been for the most part slaves, required thrift, industry, and a sacrifice of the present for the future.

The effect of these new desires and ambitions has been to keep the masses of the Negro people at work. An indication of what the Negro, impelled by the motives I have described, has accomplished, are the figures showing the advance of the Negro land owner. Until the census figures for 1910 are available, what this advance has been during the past ten years cannot be definitely known for all the southern states. Estimates made up from a comparison of the former census figures with those obtained from the annual reports of the different states, confirmed by observation and

special studies made in different parts of the South, show that Negroes own at the present time something like 19,057,377 acres, or 30,000 square miles of land in the southern states alone. This is an area equal to that of Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut combined. Negroes own or are paying for more than 375,000 homes. In 1866, Negroes in the southern states owned about \$20,000,000 worth of property. Now they own close to \$550,000,000.

In Georgia, where the Comptroller's report shows by races the assessed value of the property of the state, Negroes owned in 1880 land and other taxable property to the amount of \$5,764,293. In 1908 the Negroes of Georgia were assessed on property valued at \$27,042,672, an increase in twenty-eight years of \$21,278,379, or 370 per cent. During this same period, the tax value of property held by whites has increased from \$245,660,358 to \$678,339,783, a gain of 175 per cent. In 1891 the Negroes of North Carolina listed \$8,018,446 worth of property for taxation. Seventeen years later, in 1908, the tax value of Negro property amounted to \$21,716,922, an increase of 171 per cent. In the meantime, the property listed for taxation by the white population had increased but eighty-nine per cent.

Forty years ago, there were almost no Negroes engaged in business of any kind. At the present time, there are at least 15,000 Negroes in the southern states engaged in operating dry goods and grocery stores, and various other kinds of business. There are at present probably more than two hundred drug stores owned and operated by colored men. In the little city of Jackson, Miss., for instance, which in 1900 had a population of 7,816, of which 4,447 were colored, there were, according to an investigation made in 1908, more than one hundred business enterprises carried on by Negroes. Of these, forty-four specially studied, did an annual business of \$383,000. Negroes in 1908 owned taxable property in the city of Jackson to the value of \$581,580. One-half of the Negro families of Jackson owned their own homes and two-thirds of the population lived in houses that were owned by colored people. Careful estimates, based upon reports of white bankers, indicated that Negroes had on deposit more than \$200,000 in the different banks of the city.

There are at the present time not less than eighty-five colored

insurance companies of various kinds doing business in the United States. Most of these are local organizations whose operations are confined to a single city and contiguous territory. A considerable number of these, however, are national in character and do business in all the southern states. In Mississippi, where these companies receive strict supervision, and an accurate record of the amount of their business is preserved, there were forty-two societies which had certificates in force to the amount of \$24,728,709. These societies, during the year 1907, collected from their members \$709,670, and paid over in losses \$522,757.96.

Up to 1900 when the first meeting of the National Negro Business League was held in Boston, there were but two banks in the United States. One of these was the True Reformers' Bank in Richmond, Va., founded in 1881, and the other was the Alabama Penny Savings and Loan

Company, which was established in 1889. In all, there have been established something like fifty-five Negro banks in the United States. Some of them have failed. Others have gone out of business, so that, at the present time, there are forty-seven Negro banks doing business in the United States. In 1906, there was formed at Atlanta, in connection with the National Negro Business League, a National Negro Bankers' Association, in which about half the banks in the United States are represented. While the capital of these banks is, for the most part, small, amounting only in the cases of the oldest banks to \$100,000 each, the resources of Negro banks are rapidly increasing, as the habit of saving grows among the masses of the people.

These banks and the building and loan associations which preceded them in popularity among the Negro people, in so far as they have encouraged thrift, saving and home building among the masses of the people, have played an important part in the national development of the southern states. They have induced the masses of the colored people to settle down and acquire property, and the desire for property has made them more persistent and reliable in respect to their labor. Altogether, these influences and others are doing much to make the Negro in America a more contented and more useful man than he is, at the present time, in any other portion of the world.

One thing that has given impetus to the economic progress of the Negro in the South, is the fact that in many branches of industry,

the Negro has, or is getting, a monopoly of trade with Negroes, while in many other branches he has special advantages over the white man in dealing with the members of his own race. For example, Negro schools and Negro churches are, to a very large extent, in the hands of Negroes in the Southern States. The white people of the South have become convinced that, in most cases, both races are better off when Negroes have their own teachers and preachers, and that in church matters, and very largely in school matters, Negroes should manage their own affairs.

The effect of this segregation of the races in this and in other directions has frequently been to create for the Negro a special business opportunity. For example, one of the biggest business enterprises conducted by a colored man, is the National Baptist Publishing Company of Nashville, which publishes the greater portion of the church and Sunday-school literature used by the Negro Baptists in the United States. This concern, which does a business at the present time amounting to nearly \$200,000 a year was started in 1896, by an energetic Baptist preacher with almost no capital and very little experience. This business, started in this humble way, has increased from year to year until now it is one of the largest and best established denominational publishing houses in the South. Not only does its founder, Rev. R. H. Boyd, print a great part of the books and periodicals used by the more than a million and a half Negro Baptists in the United States, but recently he has taken up the manufacture of church furniture, and has established a thriving and increasing business in this line.

Another illustration of the way in which Negroes have succeeded in doing for their own race what other people have failed to do, is the success of the Negro Calendar Company of Louisville, Kentucky, and of the Negro Doll Company of Nashville, Tenn. As Negroes have become better educated and more self-reliant, and especially as they have begun to feel a pride in the progress of their own people, there has come a demand from Negro business men for calendars and other advertising matter, which set before the Negro people Negro rather than Anglo-Saxon models.

In the same way colored people have begun to see the wisdom of giving to their children dolls that have their own color and features, and which will have the effect of instilling in Negro girls and in Negro women a feeling of respect for their own race.

In all these directions, the colored people have been encouraged by the better class of white people, especially by Southern white women, who realize that if the Negro girl is to grow up pure and wholesome, she must be taught from the first to have a feeling of respect for her own kind.

I mention these two enterprises because they are typical of the directions along which Negro business enterprises have developed in the past and likely to increase in the future. Just as the Negro race has now its teachers and preachers, more and more every year, it is beginning to have its own physicians, its own dentists, its own pharmacists and drug stores. The Negro physician very naturally has a greater interest than the physician of any other race can have in the welfare of his own people.

Knowing them more intimately than any white man can, the Negro physician, as he grows more competent, is better able to advise and direct them in matters of their health. In doing this he performs a peculiar service, not only to the members of his own race, but to the community as a whole. In doing this he is making an opportunity for the Negro drug store. In other lines of business, the Negro has certain advantages which grow out of the fact that he meets his customers in their homes and in the churches, and that he knows the wants and the standing of the members of his own race better than any one else is able to do. For this reason, I am inclined to believe that, as the Negro gains confidence in himself and his people, Negro business enterprises are going to enlarge and expand more rapidly in the future than they have in the past.

In the industries and the trades, I do not believe that the Negro is going to have the same monopoly in the future that he has had in the past. Manufactures of various kinds are growing up and will continue to grow up in the South. New forms of labor are coming into existence and trades are multiplying. It is impossible that the Negro should furnish, in so large a proportion, in the future as he has in the past, labor for all these new and diversified industries. On the other hand, the Negro is rapidly becoming an employer of labor himself. Negroes are being employed in banks, in drug stores, insurance companies, as typewriters, reporters, clerks, agents, in all the various and multiplying kinds of business which modern life brings with it.

It is inevitable, therefore, that there should be a great redistribution

of labor among the trades and professions in the South. The result is that the Negro will be engaged, in the future, in less numbers in certain trades, but will be engaged in a great many and different trades from those in which he has hitherto been employed.

I feel certain, too, that the southern people have determined, in the future as well as in the past, as far as the matter of labor is concerned, to keep the gate of opportunity wider open to the Negro than it is in any other part of the United States or of the world.

More and more, southern white people are beginning to realize that the South can only go forward and prosper when all the people are brought to the highest level of efficiency in their labor, and when all the people are successful and contented. More and more also, the southern people are beginning to realize, that in the matter of law and order, in the matter of health, and in the matter of upright moral living, the welfare of the whole community is more or less dependent upon that of its most humble citizen.