

Relation of Industrial Education to National Progress

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When the history of industrial education in this country comes to be written it will be found that, directly and indirectly, the Negro has had an important part, not only in defining its aims and shaping its methods, but in advertising its importance to the world. The first industrial school of any importance in the United States was Hampton Institute, a school founded for Negroes, at Hampton, Va. At the time this school was established, in 1868, the value of industrial education in preparing primitive people for European civilization had already been perceived by certain missionaries in Africa and elsewhere. The idea of introducing it in America, for the purpose of solving the problem which was created by the sudden liberation of nearly 4,000,000 slaves, was first clearly conceived and carried into effect by General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, although this application of the idea was not even at that time entirely new.

In 1853 Frederick Douglass drew up for Harriet Beecher Stowe a plan for "an industrial college, in which shall be taught several important branches of the mechanical arts." In this paper Mr. Douglass said:

The fact is, that the colored men must learn trades; must find new employments, new modes of usefulness to society; or they must decay under the pressing wants to which their condition is rapidly bringing them. . . . We must become mechanics; we must build as well as live in houses; we must make as well as use furniture; we must construct bridges as well as pass over them, before we can properly live or be respected by our fellowmen. We need mechanics as well as ministers. We need workers in iron, clay, and leather. We have orators, authors, and other professional men, but these reach only a certain class, and get respect for our race in certain select circles. To live here as we ought, we must fasten ourselves to our countrymen through their every-day cardinal wants.

I mention this statement of Frederick Douglass because it indicates that even before the war which liberated them had made the position of the Freedman in this country a problem of national

importance, the need of industrial education for the masses of his race had been recognized by this great leader of the Negro people.

I will perhaps be able to give a clearer notion of the methods of this school at Hampton and of the significance of its work if I say something about the conditions that existed directly after the war, and the character of the schools that were established for the Freedman at that time. From the very start Hampton Institute has been, in many vital respects, different in its aims as well as in its methods from the other schools for the Freedman then established. I think it is fair to say, for instance, that the first schools and colleges for Negroes were all of them more or less dominated by the notion that they were to continue and finish the work that had been incidentally begun by the Civil War. They felt it was their mission to free the slaves. The war had brought these slaves physical freedom; the schools were to give them moral and intellectual freedom. Calhoun had said that if the time ever came when a Negro could master the intricacies of the Greek language he would admit that he had been wrong in his notions

about slavery. The schools established directly after the war were eager, apparently, to take up that challenge. They wanted to prove the capacity of the Negro to study and learn everything that the white man had studied and learned.

It had been said of the Negro in slavery that he was intellectually inferior to the white man; that he was unable to learn the things that the white man had learned. To disprove this statement was to emancipate him. Consciously or unconsciously the desire to complete his emancipation, in the way I have indicated, influenced very largely the work of these other schools.

I do not wish to lessen or disparage in any way the importance of the work that was accomplished by these first Negro schools. The work was necessary. I am convinced that the most precious gift that freedom brought to the Negro, the thing that has helped him more than anything to realize that he was actually free, has been the opportunity given him to learn to read. All this, as I have said, was in the direction of emancipating the Negro; it gave him his moral and intellectual freedom; but it did not actually fit him to live in the new world which emancipation had brought him. This important task was first taken up in a practical way by industrial schools.

Let me illustrate a little farther some of the ways in which some of the schools and colleges founded directly after the war failed to prepare their students for the actual life that was before them. It was the idea of the men who founded the Negro colleges directly after the war that it was necessary and important to educate men and women to be the leaders and teachers of their race. No doubt it was important that the men and women who were to be the leaders of the race should have the very highest and best education that it was possible to give them, but there were a great many things, as we can see now, that they might have and should have learned that would have been more valuable than the little smattering of Greek and Latin that they obtained.

For instance, the men who became the political leaders of the race during the reconstruction period needed to know less the languages than they did the political history of Greece, of Rome, and of Europe. In all of these countries there had been slavery, and every state of Europe had, at some time in its history, been compelled to face the social, the political, and the economical problems that grew out of the transition of its laboring class from a condition of slavery, in some form or other, to a condition of freedom. But the Freedmen in the Negro colleges had no opportunity to study these things. They learned the outward form of the Greek and Latin language, but they learned very little of the history that was behind the language and behind the literature which they studied.

The young colored men who entered the colleges right after the war were not prepared to learn these things, even if the colleges had been prepared to teach them. They were not prepared because they knew at that time almost nothing about their own life; almost nothing about the problems which beset them on every hand. Not knowing these things they were not prepared to interpret the history and understand the significance of what they learned regarding other peoples who had passed through similar periods of transition. More pressing than all else for the masses of the Negro people directly after the war was the need of learning to work as free men for wages. As I have frequently said in my talks to the masses of my people, the Negro had been worked in slavery for two hundred and fifty years; it was necessary that he should learn to work in freedom. It has taken some time for the masses of the Negro people

to learn among other things, the necessity of saving and of thrift. The idea that these things could be taught directly and specifically in school had occurred to but few people when schools were opened for Negroes.

It is difficult for anyone who has not himself had the experience to understand how strange and new the world into which freedom introduced the Negro was. The reading of books, for instance, opened all at once to him a vast number of new ideas which it was not easy for him to understand, because he could not easily connect them with the ideas with which he had been familiar in his previous life. In this new world everything seemed at first strange and even fantastic, and it was inevitable that the Negro people should for a number of years be compelled to grope about and experiment. It was necessary to touch things and handle things, in order to learn their relative values. It was inevitable, too, that under such circumstances they should frequently mistake the shadow for the substance; that they should have to learn all over again, in some cases, what things were real and what things were unreal in this new world to which they had entered. It is this condition of things which accounts for the many incongruities which you could have observed and may still sometimes observe in the life of the Negro since emancipation. One of the most pathetic sights that I ever saw was a three-hundred-dollar rosewood piano in a little country school in the black belt, where four-fifths of the people own no land and where the majority of them live in rented one-room cabins and mortgage their crops and all their household goods every year for food on which to live from one harvest to another.

All this will illustrate how important it was and is that the Negro boy and girl should be made to feel that they are dealing in school with real things. For instance, the majority of the young men who come to our school at Tuskegee have lived for fourteen or fifteen years of their life in the country districts. Their whole mental horizon has been bounded by the little country community in which they lived. They have been surrounded by a people whose traditions go no further back than slavery. Their earliest years were spent sitting on a front doorstep holding a baby in their arms while their fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers were working in the field. As soon as they were able to handle a hoe

they were then set to work in a field. Perhaps they picked up something of reading and writing during the few months that the country schools opened and they learned something of the outside from the gossip of the old people gathered around the little country church on Sunday. The books they read in school told them nothing of their own life, nothing of the people about them. To them the world of books seemed something wholly different and far removed from anything they knew in real life.

To make education a permanent healthful influence in the lives of these young men it is absolutely necessary that what they learn in the school-room should be connected with what they do in the ordinary duties of their daily life. The first and most important advantage that industrial has over any other form of education is that it definitely makes this connection between the school and life. The boy who learns about rods and furlongs and acres in the classroom learns out on the farm to measure off actual furlongs and actual acres. The boy who learns something of botany and something of plant life and something of the chemistry of the soil in school puts all he has learned into practice when he goes out to work on the soil.

Where training in the industries is carried on, as it is in most industrial schools for the Negro, in connection with the teaching of the common school branches, an effort is made to connect everything that is learned in the classroom with some form of productive labor, either in the

field or in the shop. This correlation of the studies in the books with the practice in the industries has a double value. For instance, the boy who is studying about the iron industries of Pittsburg finds in the work of iron molding a practical illustration on a small scale of what is going on in a much larger scale in the great centers of that industry. At the same time the boy who is learning the iron molder's trade gets a new interest in his own work when he reads in his geography about similar industries carried on on a larger scale in a great many of these manufacturing cities. The knowledge that he is a part of a great and important industry gives a new dignity to the trade in which he is engaged, and gives him both a more intimate and a wider view of the industrial life of which he is preparing to make himself a part.

Industrial education sprang up in this country to meet a

national crisis brought about, as I have explained, by the liberation of the Negro slaves. It has had, and must in my opinion continue to have, for some time an important part in the industrial progress of the South. While the Negro was not allowed during slavery to learn to read, he was taught to labor. At the close of the war the Negro had a practical monopoly of the common and skilled labor in the Southern states. To a very large extent the economic progress of the South has been and still is dependent upon the degree to which the Negro preserves in freedom that skill in the trades which he learned in slavery. Not only must the Negro laborer preserve and hand down to his children the traditions of what he had already learned, but he must be encouraged constantly to improve and fit himself for the more difficult tasks of a more complicated civilization. The opportunity for learning a trade which the Negro had in slavery no longer existed after the war. There was and is a great danger that the younger generation of Negro men and women may grow up not only ignorant of the trades which their fathers and mothers knew, but despising them. I consider one of the most important achievements of the industrial schools to be the work they have done in teaching the masses of the Negro people the dignity of labor with the hands.

All the teaching of slavery tended to make the Negro regard labor with the hand as a curse. When freedom came his first notion was that he was to cease, to a very large extent, to work. It has been necessary to teach the masses of the Negro people in the South that freedom means harder, more earnest, and more persistent labor than they ever knew in slavery. In teaching this the industrial schools in the South have contributed directly and indirectly a great deal more than can be actually measured to the industrial progress of the Southern States and, in this way, to the progress of the nation.

In his report upon the conditions of the South made directly after the war the late Carl Shurz said that conditions in the South, as far as concerned the social and the legal status of the Negro, would either tend downward, until the Negro was in a position very close to that of the former slave, or they would tend upward, until the Negro became a full-fledged, independent citizen. I think anyone who has observed the course of events in the Southern states since the war has seen both tendencies at work there. In this

connection I would lay less stress upon the disfranchisement laws than upon certain other, as they seem to me, more fundamental things.

For instance, there have been in recent years complaints from some parts of the country that Negroes would not work. It has been said that frequently when Negro laborers were given higher wages they were inclined to work less regularly than when they were given lower wages. Where such conditions have existed there has been frequently a tendency, either by force of law or by custom, to bind the Negro in some way to the soil. For example, a very large proportion of

the Negro tenant farmers are dependent upon the man upon whose plantation they are employed for provisions to carry them through the season until the cotton is sold. When there comes a bad season they are not able, as they say, to "pay out." In many parts of the country there is a tacit understanding among plantation owners that they will not accept a tenant who is in debt, for the reason that the tenant's labor is often the only security he can give for the payment of the debt. If a tenant in such a case wishes to remove from one plantation to another he has to get some one "to buy him out of debt." Usually this person is the owner of the plantation to which he intends to remove. In such cases there is a mutual understanding that the tenant must remain on the plantation until the money advanced him is entirely paid. The effect of this is to reduce him to a position that is so near peonage that it is difficult to draw the line between the two. This is the tendency downward to which I have referred.

It is perhaps natural enough that such a condition as I have described should arise. It was hardly to be expected that the South should make the transition from slave labor to free labor in a single step. It is not possible to effect a revolution in men's thoughts and actions by a mere stroke of the pen. It took Europe a thousand years to pass from the slavery of Rome to the era of free labor of modern Europe. The intervening period was occupied by a modified form of slavery which was called serfdom. The condition of the Negro I have described as existing in some parts of the South today is similar in many respects to the condition of serfdom in certain parts of Europe a hundred years ago. Not only is the situation of the Negro farmers in some respects like that of the European peasant before he had broken off the restrictions and restraints of serfdom, but the two things have come into existence as a result of similar causes and in much the same manner.

Should the condition of incipient peonage I have described become permanent in the South it would, in my opinion, put back the economic development of the Southern states for an indefinite length of time.

The movement begun by the Negro industrial schools has done much to remove the danger that these conditions may become permanent. Industrial education has not succeeded, until recent years, in teaching and improving the laborer on the plantation to any great extent, but it has done much to stimulate the buying of land by Negro farmers, and in this way has indirectly touched and inspired the tenant farmer with desire and ambition. It is undoubtedly true that the next census in 1910 will show a much larger increase in the amount of land owned by Negroes than in any previous ten years' period. But in 1890, when the last census was taken, the Negro farmers owned, almost wholly in the Southern states, 14,964,214 acres of land -an area nearly as large as Holland and Belgium combined -and this was 35.8 of all the land operated by colored farmers. This represents the movement upward to which I have referred.

During the last three years there has been introduced in some of the Southern states what are known as "demonstration farms." These farms are carried on under the direction of the Agricultural Department at Washington, D. C., but they are supported by funds from the General Education Board in New York City. By means of these "demonstration farms," the "short courses" in agriculture, farmers' institutes and other devices of what are sometimes called "agricultural extension" work, the benefits of industrial education are now being extended to the man on the soil. If this work can be continued and extended, I look for greater changes in the next ten years than in the past.

I have written at some length concerning the relation of industrial education to the Negro not merely because that is a subject that I know most about, but because I do not know where else the far-reaching effects of industrial education are so open to observation and study. Perhaps I should say, before leaving this part of the subject, that it seems to me, in the effort to solve the Negro problem by means of industrial education, we have succeeded in

working out in this country a practical and useful method of dealing with other primitive races, who are now coming for the first time into close and intimate contact with our civilization. For instance, I am convinced that industrial education will be found just as valuable in the solution of our colonial problems in Porto Rico and in the Philippines as it has been in solving some of our social and economic problems in the Southern states.

When industrial education was first started it was generally believed throughout the Southern states that it was a form of education especially adapted to the Negro. As the Negro constituted the larger portion of the laboring class, it was assumed by many persons that industrial education would teach him to be contented, to occupy a menial position, and to be forever "a hewer of wood and a drawer of water."

Great changes have taken place in public opinion since that time. The Negro no longer has a monopoly of the occupations that were once called "menial," and not only has the opposition to industrial education that formerly existed among the Negro people disappeared, but in recent years the white people of the South have become enthusiastic for exactly the same kind of education that was formerly thought fit only for the members of the Negro race. Not only in the South, but in the North, there is a growing and increasing demand for just the sort of industrial education that was once looked down upon as "degrading."

It is now pretty generally recognized that manual training does not meet the needs of the situation. Any form of schooling that merely provides discipline and culture is not sufficient. Young men and young women must from the first be taught the importance of making themselves useful to the community in which they live; they must be taught to fit themselves for some definite vocation.

It used to be thought that when a young man went to college and secured a doctor's diploma, or when he entered a trade as an apprentice, and after a course of years graduated as a journeyman, that his education, so far as his vocation was concerned, was finished. The usual program for a boy in those days was to spend some years in school learning to read, write, and cipher; then, after leaving school to spend some time learning a trade or a profession. After that his education, so far as books were concerned, was complete. This is, however, no longer true, either in the trades or in the professions.

The engineer, the brickmason, the barber, all now have learned that in order to keep up with the changes which inventions and the constant application of science to daily life are making in the trades, it is necessary for them to continue to study and to learn. Each one of the trades, just as each one of the higher professions, now has its text-books, magazines and newspapers, which any man who wishes to keep up with his trade or his profession must read and study.

To meet the demand for specially trained men in the trades a large number of correspondence and continuation schools have come into existence. Night schools have been established in many parts of the country, where young men and women may learn the trades. Most of these schools have come into existence to meet the demand for higher training of those who are already working in some one or other of the trades. Many of the large manufacturing companies have established trade schools in order to fit young men and women to perform

work that requires skill and special training. All this is industrial education, and the fact that these schools have grown up to such an extent spontaneously and independently of the common school system is an indication of the extent of the need.

There is one other phase of industrial education which I should like to touch upon before I conclude this paper. In recent years I have observed that from time to time there has been considerable complaint to the effect that in the schools the moral and religious training of the pupils was not what it should be. A great many suggestions have been made as to how this fault, if it exists, may be remedied. It has long seemed to me that the ordinary training that boys and girls get in the school puts too much emphasis on the merely intellectual side of education. More than once it has happened at Tuskegee, for example, that pupils to whom we have not felt justified in granting diplomas have gone out into the world and proven by their actions that, in all the practical qualifications of life, they were better equipped than many of their other classmates whose standing was higher in the purely academic studies. Several of them have undertaken, either as teachers or leaders of their race, to perform a kind of service that was of the very highest importance. I have felt at such times that in placing as much emphasis as we did upon the merely academic training we had made

a mistake. In several such cases we have sought to rectify this error by granting diplomas to these students some years after they had permanently left school.

My experience is that the best way to keep a man from doing something bad is to set him to work doing something good. Mr. Rudyard Kipling tells a story somewhere of a little kingdom he discovered in India in which there was one unruly subject. This unruly subject, as it turned out, was a native who had some Irish blood in his veins. The ruler of this little kingdom had found this man so valuable in many ways that he did not want to part with him, but he was anxious that he should not be continually in a state of insurrection. When Kipling visited the kingdom the king, regarding him as a very wise man, put the case before him for his advice. Kipling went to see the man, and after talking with him sometime, learning something of his history and his ancestry, he went back to the king and advised him to make his insubordinate subject commander-in-chief of his army. The king took this advice, and not only was he no longer troubled by insubordination on the part of his new commander-in-chief, but perfect peace and order were maintained throughout his whole realm.

The trouble with most of our moral teaching, I fear, is that we are constantly impressing upon our pupils the importance of not doing something. Human nature is so constituted that when you tell anyone not to do a thing that is usually precisely the thing that he or she is most disposed to do.

I have always thought one reason why we have had comparatively so little difficulty in controlling the raw material that comes to us at Tuskegee is due to the fact that when they come here we set them to work. Under the direction of their teachers they plough and plant the land, milk the cows, care for the mules, saw the lumber, make the brick, and erect the buildings. All this time they are co-operating with each other, with their teachers and with the institution in the building up of the school and, in so far, actively sharing all that it represents to them and to their people. They get in this way a sense of proprietorship both in the buildings and the ideas for which the school stands. In some respects, it seems to me, that it is the most valuable part of their education.

In considering the relation of industrial education to the nation, therefore, we should not leave out a consideration of its importance