

# BLACK AND WHITE IN THE SOUTH

## SCHOOLS FOR NEGROES

BY BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

*In last week's issue of The Outlook "A Southern Woman" considered another phase of the question of "Black and White in the South" under the title "The Basis of Adjustment."—THE EDITORS*

FOR a number of years I have had the feeling that the more liberal and advanced thinkers of the South among the white people do not know the poor school facilities that are provided for members of my race in certain sections of the South. Often when I have been traveling through the South upon educational campaigns I have reminded white people in my audiences of the poor school facilities that existed right in their own town or county for the education of the Negro. Frequently these white people have not only expressed surprise but have thanked me for my frankness in letting them know about these bad conditions, and then they have taken hold of matters and have greatly changed conditions. In many cases the white people are so busy about their own affairs that they do not take time to find out how the Negro is faring in the matter of education.

When speaking to the white people in the South from the platform I always try to speak with perfect frankness, but in a spirit of friendship and sympathy. I intend to pursue that policy in this article. I have seldom encountered any direct or stubborn opposition to Negro education among the white population, but what I have found is indifference growing out of ignorance of conditions. Certainly we must have truth and facts as a basis for any progress that both races are to make.

A few weeks ago three of the most prominent white men in Mississippi were shot and killed by two colored boys. Investigation brought to light that the two boys were rough and crude, that they had never been to school, hence that they were densely ignorant. While no one had taught these boys the use of books, some one had taught them, as mere children, the use of cocaine and whisky. In a mad fit, when their minds and bodies were filled with cheap whisky and cocaine, these two ignorant boys created a

"reign of murder," in the course of which three white men, four colored men, and one colored woman met death. As soon as the shooting was over a crazed mob shot the two boys full of bullet-holes and then burned their bodies in the public streets.

Now, this is the kind of thing, more or less varied in form, that takes place too often in our country. Why? The answer is simple. It is dense ignorance on the part of the Negro, and indifference arising out of a lack of knowledge of conditions on the part of the white people.

Let me not mince matters, but state facts as they are; since it is only through knowledge of actual facts that progress for both races can be made. It is true that in a few sections of the South there is little to complain of with reference to Negro education either in city or country districts. In other sections of the South, however, the opportunities for Negro education are deplorable, and so long as there is little or no opportunity for Negro youths in these sections of the South to get the education which will teach them to keep their bodies clean, to know the law, to exercise self-control, to labor for its own sake, so long will there be crime, so long will the lives of the best white people and the best black people in the South be in danger from ignorant colored people and ignorant white people.

Take, for example, the State of Mississippi, the State in which this crime was committed. By the last enumeration in that State the school population was 712,000; of this number 400 were Indians, 302,000 whites, and 410,000 colored. During the year 1912 244,000 colored children were enrolled in the public schools; this is just a little over fifty per cent. The average attendance, however, in the public schools was 143,000, or about thirty-five per cent of the total number of colored children in Mississippi. In other words, sixty-four per cent of the colored

children in Mississippi attended no public school during the year 1912. In Hinds County the average salary of colored teachers during that year was about \$16 a month for five months.

South Carolina is another Southern State which is backward in Negro education. According to official reports, in district 9, Beaufort County, of this State, there was expended on the white children enrolled in the public school in 1911 \$127.30 per capita, and on the colored children enrolled in the same district \$2.74 per capita, or forty-six times as much on the white children as on the colored children.

In district 10, Charleston County, there was expended \$202 for each white child, \$3.12 for the colored; in district 39, Abbeville County, \$11.17 for the white, 69 cents for the colored; in district 3, Edgefield County, \$7.45 for the white, 48 cents for the colored; in district 5 of this same county, \$23.12 for the white, 58 cents for the colored; in district 9, Fairfield County, \$13.67 for the white, 48 cents for the colored; in district 12, same county, \$11.50 for the white, 29 cents for the colored.

Under these conditions, let us see how long the colored children are in school during the year in certain typical districts of South Carolina, then we may get further light as to the cause of crime and idleness in portions of the South.

In district 28, Edgefield County, the public school for colored children was kept open by public funds about two and one-half months, and the teacher was paid at the rate of \$15 per month. In Anderson County, district 40, the colored public school was open two months and closed ten months. In Barnwell County, district 31, the public school was in session one month and closed eleven months. In South Carolina the average length of the school term for the colored people, outside the cities and large towns, is from two to four months.

The seriousness of this can be understood when it is kept in mind that there are almost a million colored people in South Carolina and that eighty per cent of them live in rural districts. Thus in one State of our great free country 200,000 colored children are provided with public education for but three or four months in the year. Under these conditions it would require twenty-eight years for a child to complete the eight grades of the public school.

Of course any one knows that a two months' or a three months' school, with a mere pittance of a salary for a teacher, means almost no school. The buildings in which these schools are conducted, as a former State Superintendent of Education in South Carolina said some time ago, are in many cases not fit for stables. But South Carolina is by no means the only State that has these breeding-spots for ignorance, crime, and filth which the Nation will, sooner or later, have to reckon with. In Alabama, my own State, we have one of the finest and most liberal Governors of any State in the Union. The Superintendent of Education, as is true of many county superintendents of education, is also generous in the matter of Negro education; and yet in Alabama we have counties where conditions are almost as bad as those in South Carolina.

Take, for example, Wilcox County, Alabama. Here there are 6,200 white people and 27,600 black people. There are 1,884 white children of school age and 10,667 black children of school age. For the education of these white children there was spent in 1912 \$33,000, or \$17 per capita; for the education of the 10,000 black children there was spent \$3,750, or 37 cents per capita. According to the report of the State Superintendent of Education of Alabama, there are 328,024 colored children in Alabama. Of this number 190,000 did not enter any school at all during the last year, and 90,000 of those entering were in school only from two to three months. Thus it is seen that in the single State of Alabama there are almost 200,000 colored children who apparently are growing up in ignorance, notwithstanding all that has been done and is being done. In Alabama, as in other States, some are being educated in the elementary departments of the industrial schools and colleges, but their number in proportion to the total is very small.

Some of the more touching and heart-reaching letters that I receive regarding accommodations for colored children come from Southern white people of both sexes. The following is one example of many. A Southern white lady, the wife of a former official in Alabama, in a letter speaking of the rural schools in her county, says:

*"Dr. Washington:*

*"Since being elected President of the School Improvement Association of this*

county, I find conditions gloomy enough for both races, but it is strictly relative to the colored race that I am writing this.

"There was some irregularity in the application to Dr. Dillard, of New Orleans, for the fund for the supervisor of the colored schools, and this leaves me absolutely without means with which to supply this crying need.

"Now I am asking you to send me one of your best teachers—I mean most conscientious teachers—to visit each colored school in this county in the capacity of supervisor. If once a quarter would be too much to ask, then let them come at least twice during the scholastic year. The county superintendent has promised to appoint me a president of the School Improvement Association, and I shall personally undertake the direction of her work. If only you could see the heart-breaking need as I see it!

"You have been called the 'Moses' of your race; then this call is to you to help lead your people out of the wilderness of ignorance and inefficiency. This is one of the opportunities to prove your sincerity.

"Allow me to recall to your remembrance the liberal and sympathetic attitude held toward the Negro race by my husband, not only during his incumbency as a State officer but in all his dealings with them in private as well as in public life. The matter of improving the schools of this county has become a question of conscience, and *something must be done*. This appeal goes to you in the name of our Christ in behalf of his needy little ones. Yours for betterment, etc.

"P. S.—We have only sixteen colored schools. After I had determined on this step, I consulted my superintendent, and he heartily sanctioned it."

In a letter to the Montgomery "Advertiser," December 29, 1910, explaining why the black counties of Alabama, Macon County excepted, had lost population from 1900 to 1910, I said: "I do not believe that the leading people, and especially land-owners, of the 'Black Belt' counties know how little money some Negro schools receive. More money is paid for Negro convicts than for Negro teachers in Alabama. About \$46 per month is now being paid for first-class, able-bodied Negro convicts, \$36 for the second class, and \$26 for the third class for the twelve months in the year, while in some

counties Negro teachers get from \$15 to \$17 a month for a period of three or four months in the year."

While I have dwelt a great deal upon conditions in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Alabama, I do not mean to imply that these are the only States where such conditions exist. I have used them merely as examples of conditions existing in some portions, at least, of practically all of the States of the lower South.

On my visits to the country schools in these and other States I have seen some very pathetic sights. In some of the so-called school buildings the roofs leak, the winds blow up through the cracks of the floors and down through the ceilings. I have seen in many of these schools five little boys and girls trying to study out of the same book. In some cases two children would occupy the front seat with the book between them, with two others peeping over their shoulders, and a fifth trying to peep over the shoulders of the four.

The ignorance and stupidity that control in some of the schools are almost beyond belief. I have seen scores of little children sitting for hours on a rough bench with no back to it and their feet dangling in the air six or seven inches from the floor. In other cases I have seen, during the very cold, windy, winter weather, schools conducted in malarial districts where there was no provision made on the inside of the houses for warming the room. A fire would be built on the outside of the school-house, and teachers and pupils would study on the inside for a few minutes until they got so cold that they were compelled to go outside to warm their fingers and feet, and then, after a few minutes, return to their studies on the inside. When these conditions exist in a school with a term of only three or four months, conducted by a poorly paid teacher, it is wonderful that any progress at all has been made in such places in the matter of public education.

Now, as I often say when speaking in the South—and I never say anything out of the South that I do not say in the South—in those counties and districts in which this color line is drawn in the matter of fitting these people for the duties of life under free conditions, no color line is drawn in the payment of taxes or in the punishment of crime. The colored boy who has \$1.50 a year spent on him for his education is punished by the same court under the same rules of evidence

as the white boy who resides in the county and has \$15 a year spent on him for his education. Aside from other results of this kind of short-sightedness and injustice, this lack of school facilities is fast driving some of the best colored farmers from the farms, where they are of best service to the white people and to themselves, to the large cities, where, in spite of certain disadvantages, they are reasonably sure of finding some kind of school for their children.

Any one living outside of the South cannot realize how heavily the Southern States have taxed themselves within the last quarter of a century for education and what tremendous sacrifices they have made. It is hard to put in words a true or adequate description of the awakening that is now spreading all through the South in educational matters. While all this is true, we must not fail, however, to look facts in the face, even though they be disagreeable and discouraging facts. The best friend of the South is he who will tell the truth.

It would for this reason be manifestly unfair, while calling attention to the deplorable conditions that exist in some sections of the South, to ignore the many counties and cities in which the public authorities have vision enough and such a high sense of justice that good opportunities are furnished, in length of terms, salaries of teachers, and in the kind of school-houses, for the education of Negro children. This is notably true in the State of Texas.

Outside the large cities and towns in the Southern States the opportunities of Negro education are generally poor, but there are rural districts in which good schools are furnished for the Negro people, almost as good in some cases as those for white children. This is true of both Virginia and Texas. In fact, I think Texas is ahead of all the Southern States in its wisdom, generosity, and far-sightedness in the distribution of the public school money. And I am sure that the State of Texas has not lost anything, but has

gained, in having a high and useful type of Negro citizen.

I was born in the South, have lived in the South, and am just as proud of the South as any white man could be. For this very reason I want to see it get to the point where it will cease to be continually held up to the civilized world as the most criminal section of our country. But we can get rid of this reputation only in proportion as education replaces ignorance, as thrift and industry replace idleness and laziness, as high moral character replaces immorality.

These bad and unhealthy conditions exist in many parts of the South, I repeat, because liberal and thoughtful white people too often do not actually know what is going on with reference to Negro education. These white people are so absorbed with their own personal business, or in matters that concern white people, that they do not have time, or take time, to find out the actual conditions in which colored people live. This leads me to hope that what I have said in this article may impress the leading white people in the South with the importance of looking into and making known the facts in regard to Negro education.

In some parts of the country public attention has already been directed to the importance of this matter. In Russell County, Alabama, for example, where I have recently been, the white people are pleading for more Negro schools, more Negro teachers, and they are not ashamed to let the world know that they are in favor of Negro education. The same is true of many counties and cities in the South; but, when all this is said, we must face the fact, disagreeable as it may be, that when we consider the growth in population among the colored people in the rural districts of the South, where eighty-five per cent of the Negro population lives, the Nation still has a serious problem which we must meet in a spirit of generosity and handle with wisdom, and, above all things, with courage.

