

Negro Life and History of Our Schools

The study of the ethnology and the history of the Negro has not yet extended far beyond the limit of cold-blooded investigation. Prior to the Civil War few Americans thought seriously of studying the Negro in the sense of directing their efforts toward an acquisition of knowledge of the race as one of the human family; and this field was not more inviting to Europeans, for the reduction of the Negro to the status of a tool for exploitation began in Europe. The race did receive attention from pseudo-scientists, a few historians pointed out the possibilities of research in this field, and others brought forward certain interesting sketches of distinguished Negroes exhibiting evidences of the desirable qualities manifested by other races.

There was a new day for the Negro in history after the Civil War. This rending of the nation was such an upheaval that American historians eagerly applied themselves to the study of the ante-bellum period to account for the economic, social, and political causes leading up to this struggle. In their treatment of slavery and abolition, they had to give the Negro some attention. In some cases, therefore, the historians of that day occasionally departed from the scientific standard to give personal sketches of Negroes indicating to some extent the feeling, thought and the aspiration of the whole race. Writers deeply interested in the Negroes at that time wrote eulogistic biographies of distinguished Negroes and of white persons who had devoted their lives to the uplift of the despised race. The attitude in most cases was that the Negroes had been a very much oppressed people and that their enslavement was a disgrace of which the whole country should be made to feel ashamed. As it was the people of the South who

had to bear the onus of this criticism and they were not at that time sufficiently enlightened to produce historians like Hildreth, Bancroft, Prescott, Redpath and Parkman, the world largely accepted the opinions of those historians who sympathized with the formerly persecuted Negroes.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, there came about a change in the attitude of American scholarship effected largely by political movements. Because of the unpopularity and the blunders of the southern States reconstructed on the basis of universal suffrage and mainly under the dictation of white adventurers from the North, the majority of the influential men of the country reached the conclusion that the southern white man, in spite of his faults as a slaveholder, had not been properly treated. This unsatisfactory régime, therefore, was speedily overthrown and the freedman was gradually reduced to the status of the free Negro prior to the Civil War on the grounds that it had been proved that he was not a white man with a black skin.

Following immediately thereupon came a new day for education in the South. Many of its ambitious young men went North to study in the leading universities then devoting much attention to the preparation of scholars for scientific investigation. The investigators from the South directed their attention primarily toward the vindication of the slavery régime and the overthrow of the Reconstruction governments. As a result there have appeared a number of studies on slavery and the Reconstruction. All of this task was not done by southerners and was not altogether confined to the universities, but resulted no doubt largely from the impetus given it in these centers, especially at Johns Hopkins and Columbia. It was influenced to a great extent by the attitude of southern scholars. Ingle, Weeks, Bassett, Cooley, Steiner,

Munford, Trexler, Bracket, Ballagh, Tremain, McCrady, Henry, and Russell directed their attention to the study of slavery. With the works of Deane, Moore, Needles, Harris, Washburn, Dunn, Bettle,

Davidson, Hickok, Pelzer, Morgan, Northrop, Smith, Wright, and Turner dealing with slavery in the North, the study of the institution by States has been considered all but complete. In a general way the subject of slavery has been treated by A. B. Hart, H. E. von Holst, John W. Burgess, James Ford Rhodes, and U. B. Phillips.

The study of the Reconstruction has proceeded with renewed impetus and has finally been seemingly exhausted in a way peculiar to the recent investigators. Among these studies are those of Matthews, Garner, Ficklen, Eckenrode, Hollis, Flack, Woolley, Ramsdell, Davis, Hamilton, Thompson, Reynolds, Burgess, Pearson, and Hall, most of whom received their inspiration at Johns Hopkins University or Columbia. The same period has been treated in a general way by W. A. Dunning, John W. Burgess, James Schouler, J. B. MacMaster, James Ford Rhodes and W. L. Fleming. Most of these studies deal with social and economic causes as well as with the political and some of them are in their own way well done. Because of the bias in several of them, however, John R. Lynch and W. E. B. DuBois have endeavored to answer certain adverse criticisms on the record of the Negroes during the Reconstruction period.

Speaking generally, however, one does not find in most of these works anything more than the records of scientific investigators as to facts which in themselves do not give the general reader much insight as to what the Negro was, how the Negro developed from period to period, and the reaction of the race on what was going on around it. There is little effort to set forth what the race has thought and felt and done as a contribution to the world's accumulation of knowledge and the welfare of mankind. While what most of these writers say may, in many respects, be true, they are interested in emphasizing primarily the effect of this movement on the white man, whose attitude toward the Negro was that of a merchant or manufacturer toward the materials he handled and unfortunately whose attitude is

that of many of these gentlemen writing the history in which the Negroes played a part as men rather than as coal and iron.

The multiplication of these works adversely critical of the Negro race soon had the desired result. Since one white man easily influences another to change his attitude toward the Negro, northern teachers of history and correlated subjects have during the last generation accepted the southern white man's opinion of the Negro and endeavor to instill the same into the minds of their students. Their position seems to be that because the American Negro has not in fifty years accomplished what the master class achieved in fifty centuries the race cannot be expected to perform satisfactorily the functions of citizenship and must, therefore, be treated exceptionally in some such manner as devised by the commonwealths of the South. This change of sentiment has been accelerated too by southern teachers, who have established themselves in northern schools and who have gained partial control of the northern press. Coming at the time when many Negroes have been rushing to the North, this heresy has had the general effect of promoting the increase of race prejudice to the extent that the North has become about as lawless as the South in its treatment of the Negro.

Following the multiplication of Reconstruction studies, there appeared a number of others of a controversial nature. Among these may be mentioned the works of A. H. Stone and Thomas Pierce Bailey adversely criticizing the Negro and those of a milder form produced by Edgar Gardner Murphy, and Walter Hines Page. Then there are the writings of William Pickens, and

W. E. B. DuBois. These works are generally included among those for reference in classes studying Negro life, but they throw very little light on the Negro in the United States or abroad. In fact, instead of clearing up the situation they deeply muddle it. The chief value of such literature is to furnish facts as to sentiment of the people, which in years to come will be of use to an investigator when the country will have sufficiently removed itself from race prejudice to seek after the truth as to all phases of the situation.

The Negro, therefore, has unfortunately been for some time a negligible factor in the thought of most historians, except to be mentioned only to be condemned. So far as the history of the Negro is concerned, moreover, the field has been for some time left largely to those sympathetically inclined and lacking scientific training. Not only have historians of our day failed to write books on the Negro, but this history has not been generally dignified with certain brief sketches as constitute the articles appearing in the historical magazines. For example, the *American Historical Review*, the leading magazine of its kind in the United States, published quarterly since 1895, has had very little material in this field. Running over the files one finds Jernagan's *Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies*, Siebert's *Underground Railway*, Stevenson's *The Question of Arming the Slaves*, DuBois's *Reconstruction and its Benefits*, and several economic studies of the plantation and the black belt by A. H. Stone and U. B. Phillips. It has been announced, however, that the Carnegie Institution for Historical Research will in the future direct attention to this neglected field.

In schools of today the same condition unfortunately obtains. The higher institutions of the Southern States, proceeding doubtless on the basis that they know too much about the Negro already, have not heretofore done much to convert the whites to the belief that the one race should know more about the other. Their curricula, therefore, as a general thing carry no courses bearing on Negro life and history.

In the North, however, the situation is not so discouraging. Some years ago classes in history in northern colleges and universities made a detailed study of slavery and abolition in connection with the regular courses in American history. There has been much neglect in this field

Slavery Struggles in the United States Negro Problem under Slavery and Freedom

This study in the northern universities receives some attention in the department of sociology. Leland Stanford University offers a course on *Immigration and the Race Problems*, the University of Oklahoma another known as *Modern Race Problems*. The University of Missouri and the University of Chicago offer *The Negro in America*; the University of Minnesota, *The American Negro*; and Harvard University, *American Population Problems: Immigration and the Negro*. This study of the race problem, however, has in many cases been unproductive of desirable results for the reason that instead of trying to arrive at some understanding as to how the Negro may be improved, the work has often degenerated into a discussion of the race as a menace and the justification of preventative measures inaugurated by the whites.

A few Negro schools sufficiently advanced to prosecute seriously the study of social sciences have had courses in sociology and history bearing on the Negro. Tuskegee, Atlanta, Fiske, Wilberforce and Howard have undertaken serious work in this field. They have been handicapped, however, by the lack of teachers trained to do advanced work and by the dearth of unbiased literature adequate to the desired illumination. The work under these circumstances, therefore, has been in danger of becoming such a discussion of the race

problem as would be expected of laymen expressing opinions without data to support them. In the reconstruction which these schools are now undergoing, history and sociology are given a conspicuous place and

the tendency is to assign this work to well-informed and scientifically trained instructors. These schools, moreover, are now not only studying what has been written but have undertaken the preparation of scholars to carry on research in this neglected field.

The need for this work is likewise a concern to the enlightened class of southern whites. Seeing that a better understanding of the races is now necessary to maintain that conservatism to prevent this country from being torn asunder by Socialism and Bolshevism, they are now making an effort to effect a closer relation between the blacks and whites by making an intensive study of the Negro. Fortunately too this is earnestly urged by the group of rising scholars of the new South. To carry out this work a number of professors from various southern universities have organized what is called the University Commission on Southern Race Questions. They are calling the attention of the South to the world-wide reconstruction following in the wake of the World War, which will necessarily affect the country in a peculiar way. They point to the fact that almost 400,000 Negroes were called into the military service and thousands of others to industrial centers of the North. Knowing too that the demobilization of the Negroes and whites in the army will bring home a large number of remade men who must be adapted anew to life, they are asking for a general coöperation of the whites throughout the South in the interest of the Negro and the welfare of the land.

These gentlemen are directing this study toward the need of making the South realize the value of the Negro to the community, to inculcate a sympathy for the Negro and to enable the whites to understand that the race cannot be judged by the shortcomings of a few of the group. They are appealing to the country and especially to the scholarly men of the South for more justice and fair play for the Negroes in view of the fact that, in spite of the radical aliens who set to work among the Negroes to undermine

their loyalty, the Negroes maintained their morale and supported the war. Men of thought then are boldly urged to engage in this movement for a large measure of thoughtfulness and consideration, for the control of "careless habits of speech which give needless offense and for the practice of just relations. To seek by all practicable means to cultivate a more tolerant spirit, a more generous sympathy, and a wider degree of coöperation between the best elements of both races, to emphasize the best rather than the worst features of interracial relations, to secure greater publicity for those whose views are based on reason rather than prejudice -these, they believe are essential parts of the Reconstruction program by which it is hoped to bring into the world a new era of peace and democracy. Because college men are rightly expected to be molders of opinion, the Commission earnestly appeals to them to contribute of their talents and energy in bringing this program to its consummation."

Among these are James J. Doster, Professor of Education, University of Alabama; David Y. Thomas, Professor of Political Science and History, University of Arkansas; James M. Farr, Professor of English, University of Florida; R. P. Brooks, Professor of History, University of Georgia; William O. Scroggs, Professor of Economics and Sociology, Louisiana State University; William L. Kennon, Professor of Physics, University of Mississippi; E. C. Branson, Professor of Rural Economics, University of North Carolina; Josiah Morse, Professor of

Philosophy, University of South Carolina; James D. Hoskins, Dean of the University of Tennessee; William S. Sutton, Professor of Education, University of Texas; and William M. Hunley, Professor of Economics and Political Science, Virginia Military Institute.

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