The Fruits of Industrial Training

Booker T. Washington

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THE political, educational, social, and economic evolution through which the South passed during, say, the first fifteen or twenty years after the close of the civil war furnishes one of the most interesting periods that any country has passed through.

A large share of the thought and activity of the white South, of the black South, and of that section of the North especially interested in my race, was directed during the years of the Reconstruction period toward politics, or toward matters bearing upon what were termed civil or social rights. The work of education was rather slow, and covered a large section of the South; still I think I am justified in saying that in the public mind the Negro's relation to politics overshadowed nearly every other interest. The education of the race was conducted quietly, and attracted comparatively little attention, just as is true at the present time. The appointment of one Negro postmaster at a third or fourth rate post office will be given wider publicity through the daily press than the founding of a school, or some important discovery in science.

With reference to the black man's political relation to the state and Federal governments, I think I am safe in saying that for many years after the civil war there were sharp and antagonistic views between the North and the South, as well as between the white South and the black South. At practically every point where there was a political question to be decided in the South the blacks would array themselves on one side and the whites on the other. I remember that very soon after I began teaching school in Alabama an old colored man came to me just prior to an election. He said: "You can read de newspapers and most of us can't, but dar is one thing dat we knows dat you don't, and dat is how to vote down here; and we wants you to vote as we does." He added: "I tell you how we does. We watches de white man; we keeps watching de white man; de nearer it gits to election time de more we watches de white man. We watches him till we finds out which way he gwine to vote. After we finds out which way he gwine to vote, den we votes exactly de other way; den we knows we 's right."

Stories on the other side might be given showing that a certain class of white people, both at the polls and in the Legislatures, voted just as unreasonably in opposing politically what they thought the Negro or the North wanted, no matter how much benefit might ensue from a contrary action. Unfortunately such antagonism did not end with matters political, but in many cases affected the relation of the races in nearly every walk of life. Aside from political strife, there was naturally deep feeling between the North and the South on account of the war. On nearly every question growing out of the war, which was debated in Congress, or in political campaigns, there was the keenest difference and often the deepcal strife, there was naturally deep feeling between the North and the South on account of the war. On nearly every question growing out of the war, which was debated in Congress, or in political campaigns, there was the keenest difference and often the deepest feeling. There was almost no question of even a semi–political nature, or having a remote connection with the Negro, upon which there was not sharp and often bitter division between the North and South. It is needless to say that in many cases the Negro was the sufferer. He was being ground between the upper and nether millstones. Even to this day it is well–nigh impossible, largely by reason of the force of habit, in certain states to prevent state and even local campaigns from being centred in some form upon the black man. In states like Mississippi, for example, where the Negro ceased nearly a score of years ago, by operation of law, to be a determining factor in politics, he forms in some way the principal fuel for campaign discussion at nearly every election. The sad feature of this is, that it prevents the presentation before the masses of the people of matters pertaining to local and state improvement, and to great

national issues like finance, tariff, or foreign policies. It prevents the masses from receiving the broad and helpful education which every political campaign should furnish, and, what is equally unfortunate, it prevents the youth from seeing and hearing on the platform the great political leaders of the two national parties. During a national campaign few of the great Democratic leaders debate national questions in the South, because it is felt that the old antagonism to the Negro politically will keep the South voting one way. Few of the great Republican leaders appear on Southern platforms, because they feel that nothing will be gained.

One of the saddest instances of this situation that has come within my knowledge occurred some years ago in a certain Southern state where a white friend of mine was making the race for Congress on the Democratic ticket in a district that was overwhelmingly Democratic. I speak of this man as my friend, because there was no personal favor in reason which he would have refused me. He was equally friendly to the race, and was generous in giving for its education, and in helping individuals to buy land. His campaign took him into one of the "white" counties, where there were few colored people, and where the whites were unusually ignorant. I was surprised one morning to read in the daily papers of a bitter attack he had made on the Negro while speaking in this county. The next time I saw him I informed him of my surprise. He replied that he was ashamed of what he had said, and that he did not himself believe much that he had stated, but gave as a reason for his action that he had found himself before an audience which had heard little for thirty years in the way of political discussion that did not bear upon the Negro, and that he therefore knew it was almost impossible to interest them in any other subject.

But this is somewhat aside from my purpose, which is, I repeat, to make plain that in all political matters there was for years after the war no meeting ground of agreement for the two races, or for the North and South. Upon the question of the Negro's civil rights, as embodied in what was called the Civil Rights Bill, there was almost the same sharp line of division between the races, and, in theory at least, between the Northern and Southern whites, — largely because the former were supposed to be giving the blacks social recognition, and encouraging intermingling between the races. The white teachers, who came from the North to work in missionary schools, received for years little recognition or encouragement from the rank and file of their own race. The lines were so sharply drawn that in cities where native Southern white women taught Negro children in the public schools, they would have no dealings with Northern white women who, perhaps, taught Negro children from the same family in a missionary school.

I want to call attention here to a phase of Reconstruction policy which is often overlooked. All now agree that there was much in Reconstruction which was unwise and unfortunate. However we may regard that policy, and much as we may regret mistakes, the fact is too often overlooked that it was during the Reconstruction period that a public school system for the education of all the people of the South was first established in most of the states. Much that was done by those in charge of Reconstruction legislation has been overturned, but the public school system still remains. True, it has been modified and improved, but the system remains, and is every day growing in popularity and strength.

As to the difference of opinion between the North and the South regarding Negro education, I find that many people, especially in the North, have a wrong conception of the attitude of the Southern white people. It is and has been very generally thought that what is termed "higher education" of the Negro has been from the first opposed by the white South. This opinion is far from being correct. I remember that, in 1891, when I began the work of establishing the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, practically all of the white people who talked to me on the subject took it for granted that instruction in the Greek, Latin, and modern languages would be one of the main features of our curriculum. I heard no one oppose what he thought our course of study was to embrace. In fact, there are many white people in the South at the present time who do not know that instruction in the dead languages is not given at the Tuskegee Institute. In further proof of what I have stated, if one will go through the catalogue of the schools maintained by the states for Negro people, and managed by Southern white people, he will find in almost every case that instruction in the higher branches is given with the consent and approval of white officials. This was true as far back as 1880. It is not unusual to meet at this time Southern white people who are as emphatic in their belief in the value of classical education as a certain element of colored people themselves. In matters relating to civil and political rights, the breach was broad, and without apparent hope of being bridged; even in the matter of religion, practically all of the denominations had split on the subject of the Negro, though I should add that there is now, and always has been, a closer touch and more cooperation in matters of religion between the white and colored people in the South than is generally known. But the breach between the white churches in the

South and North remains.

In matters of education the difference was much less sharp. The truth is that a large element in the South had little faith in the efficacy of the higher or any other kind of education of the Negro. They were indifferent, but did not openly oppose; on the other hand, there has always been a potent element of white people in all of the Southern states who have stood out openly and bravely for the education of all the people, regardless of race. This element has thus far been successful in shaping and leading public opinion, and I think that it will continue to do so more and more. This statement must not be taken to mean that there is as yet an equitable division of the school funds, raised by common taxation, between the two races in many sections of the South, though the Southern states deserve much credit for what has been done. In discussing the small amount of direct taxes the Negro pays, the fact that he pays tremendous indirect taxes is often overlooked.

I wish, however, to emphasize the fact that while there was either open antagonism or indifference in the directions I have named, it was the introduction of industrial training into the Negro's education that seemed to furnish the first basis for anything like united and sympathetic interest and action between the two races in the South and between the whites in the North and those in the South. Aside from its direct benefit to the black race, industrial education has furnished a basis for mutual faith and cooperation, which has meant more to the South, and to the work of education, than has been realized.

This was, at the least, something in the way of construction. Many people, I think, fail to appreciate the difference between the problems now before us and those that existed previous to the civil war. Slavery presented a problem of destruction; freedom presents a problem of construction.

From its first inception the white people of the South had faith in the theory of industrial education, because they had noted, what was not unnatural, that a large element of the colored people at first interpreted freedom to mean freedom from work with the hands. They naturally had not learned to appreciate the fact that they had been worked, and that one of the great lessons for freemen to learn is to work. They had not learned the vast difference between working and being worked. The white people saw in the movement to teach the Negro youth the dignity, beauty, and civilizing power of all honorable labor with the hands something that would lead the Negro into his new life of freedom gradually and sensibly, and prevent his going from one extreme of life to the other too suddenly. Furthermore, industrial education appealed directly to the individual and community interest of the white people. They saw at once that intelligence coupled with skill would add wealth to the community and to the state, in which both races would have an added share. Crude labor in the days of slavery, they believed, could be handled and made in a degree profitable, but ignorant and unskilled labor in a state of freedom could not be made so. Practically every white man in the South was interested in agricultural or in mechanical or in some form of manual labor; every white man was interested in all that related to the home life, — the cooking and serving of food, laundering, dairying, poultry–raising, and housekeeping in general. There was no family whose interest in intelligent and skillful nursing was not now and then quickened by the presence of a trained nurse. As already stated, there was general appreciation of the fact that the industrial education of the black people had direct, vital, and practical bearing upon the life of each white family in the South; while there was no such appreciation of the results of mere literary training. If a black man became a lawyer, a doctor, a minister, or an ordinary teacher, his professional duties would not ordinarily bring him in touch with the life of the white portion of the community, but rather confine him almost exclusively to his own race. While purely literary or professional education was not opposed by the white population, it was something in which they found little or no interest, beyond a confused hope that it would result in producing a higher and a better type of Negro manhood. The minute it was seen that through industrial education the Negro youth was not only studying chemistry, but also how to apply the knowledge of chemistry to the enrichment of the soil, or to cooking, or to dairying, and that the student was being taught not only geometry and physics, but their application to blacksmithing, brickmaking, farming, and what not, then there began to appear for the first time a common bond between the two races and cooperation between North and South.

One of the most interesting and valuable instances of the kind that I know of is presented in the case of Mr. George W. Carver, one of our instructors in agriculture at Tuskegee Institute. For some time it has been his custom to prepare articles containing information concerning the conditions of local crops, and warning the farmers against the ravages of certain insects and diseases. The local white papers are always glad to publish these articles, and they are read by white and colored farmers.

Some months ago a white land–holder in Montgomery County asked Mr. Carver to go through his farm with him for the purpose of inspecting it. While doing so Mr. Carver discovered traces of what he thought was a valuable mineral deposit, used in making a certain kind of paint. The interests of the land–owner and the agricultural instructor at once became mutual. Specimens of the deposits were taken to the laboratories of the Tuskegee Institute and analyzed by Mr. Carver. In due time the land–owner received a report of the analysis, together with a statement showing the commercial value and application of the mineral. I shall not go through the whole interesting story, except to say that a stock company, composed of some of the best white people in Alabama, has been organized, and is now preparing to build a factory for the purpose of putting their product on the market. I hardly need to add that Mr. Carver has been freely consulted at every step, and his services generously recognized in the organization of the concern. When the company was being formed the following testimonial, among others, was embodied in the printed copy of the circular: —

"George W. Carver, Director of the Department of Agriculture, Tuskegee, Alabama, says: —

"'The pigment is an ochreous clay. Its value as a paint is due to the presence of ferric oxide, of which it contains more than any of the French, Australian, American, Irish, or Welsh ochres. Ferric oxides have long been recognized as the essential constituents of such paints as Venetian red, Turkish red, oxide red, Indian red, and scarlet. They are most desirable, being quite permanent when exposed to light and air. As a stain they are most valuable.'"

In further proof of what I wish to emphasize, I think I am safe in saying that the work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, under the late General S. C. Armstrong, was the first to receive any kind of recognition and hearty sympathy from the Southern white people, and General Armstrong was perhaps the first Northern educator of Negroes who won the confidence and cooperation of the white South. The effects of General Armstrong's introduction of industrial education at Hampton, and its extension to the Tuskegee Institute in the far South, are now actively and helpfully apparent in the splendid work being accomplished for the whole South by the Southern Education Board, with Mr. Robert C. Ogden at its head, and by the General Education Board, with Mr. William H. Baldwin, Jr., as its president. Without the introduction of manual training it is doubtful whether such work as is now being wrought through these two boards for both races in the South could have been possible within a quarter of a century to come. Later on in the history of our country it will be recognized and appreciated that the far–reaching and statesman–like efforts of these two boards for general education in the South, under the guidance of the two gentlemen named, and with the cooperation and assistance of such men as Mr. George Foster Peabody, Dr. Wallace Buttrick, Mr. John D. Rockefeller, of the North, and Mr. Edgar Gardner Murphy, Chancellor Hill, Dr. Alderman, Dr. McIver, Dr. Dabney, and others of the South, will have furnished the material for one of the brightest and most encouraging chapters in the history of our country. The fact that we have reached the point where men and women who were so far apart twenty years ago can meet in the South and discuss freely from the same platform questions relating to the industrial, educational, political, moral, and religious development of the two races marks a great step in advance. It is true that as yet the Negro has not been invited to share in these discussions.

Aside from the reasons I have given showing why the South favored industrial education, coupled with intellectual and moral training, many of the whites saw, for example, that the Negroes who were master carpenters and contractors, under the guidance of their owners, could become still greater factors in the development of the South if their children were not suddenly removed from the atmosphere and occupations of their fathers, and if they could be taught to use the thing in hand as a foundation for higher growth. Many of the white people were wise enough to see that such education would enable some of the Negro youths to become more skillful carpenters and contractors, and that if they laid an economic foundation in this way in their generation, they would be laying a foundation for a more abstract education of their children in the future.

Again, a large element of people at the South favored manual training for the Negro because they were wise enough to see that the South was largely free from the restrictive influences of the Northern trades unions, and that such organizations would secure little hold in the South so long as the Negro kept abreast in intelligence and skill with the same class of people elsewhere. Many realized that the South would be tying itself to a body of death if it did not help the Negro up. In this connection I want to call attention to the fact that the official records show that within one year about one million foreigners came into the United States. Notwithstanding this number, practically none went into the Southern states; to be more exact, the records show that in 1892 only 2278 all told

went into the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. One ship sometimes brings as many to New York. Various reasons are given to explain why these foreigners systematically avoid the South. One is that the climate is so hot; and another is that they do not like the restrictions thrown about the ballot; and still another is the presence of the Negro is so large numbers. Whatever the true reason is, the fact remains that foreigners avoid the South, and the South is more and more realizing that it cannot keep pace with the progress being made in other parts of the country if a third of its population is ignorant and without skill.

The South must frankly face this truth, that for a long period it must depend upon the black man to do for it what the foreigner is now doing for the great West. If, by reason of his skill and knowledge, one man in Iowa learns to produce as much corn in a season as four men can produce in Alabama, it requires little reasoning to see that Alabama will buy most of her corn from Iowa.

Another interesting result of the introduction of industrial education for the Negro has been its influence upon the white people of the South, and, I believe, upon the whites of the North as well. This phase of it has proved of interest in making hand training a conciliatory element between the races.

In 1883 I was delivering an address on industrial education before the colored State Teachers' Association of one of our Southern states. When I had finished, some of the teachers began to ask the State Superintendent of Education, who was on the programme, some questions about the subject. He politely but firmly stopped the questions by stating that he knew absolutely nothing about industrial training, and had never heard it discussed before. At that time there was no such education being given at any white institution in that state. With one or two exceptions this case will illustrate what was true of all the Southern states. A careful investigation of the subject will show that it was not until after industrial education was started among the colored people, and its value proved, that it was taken up by the Southern white people.

Manual training or industrial and technical schools for the whites have, for the most part, been established under state auspices, and are at this time chiefly maintained by the states. An investigation would also show that in securing money from the state legislatures for the purpose of introducing hand work, one of the main arguments used was the existence and success of industrial training among the Negroes. It was often argued that the white boys and girls would be left behind unless they had the opportunities for securing the same kind of training that was being given the colored people. Although it is, I think, not generally known, it is a fact that since the idea of industrial or technical education for white people took root within the last few years, much more money is spent annually for such education for the whites than for the colored people. Any one who has not looked into the subject will be surprised to find how thorough and high grade the work is. Take, for example, the state of Georgia, and it will be found that several times as much is being spent at the Industrial College for white girls at Milledgeville, and at the technical school for whites at Atlanta, as is being spent in the whole state for the industrial education of Negro youths. I have met no Southern white educators who have not been generous in their praise of the Negro schools for taking the initiative in hand training. This fact has again served to create in matters relating to education a bond of sympathy between the two races in the South. Referring again to the influence of industrial training for the Negro in education, in the Northern states I find, while writing this article, the following announcement in the advertisement of what is perhaps the most high–priced and exclusive girls' seminary in Massachusetts: —

"In planning a system of education for young ladies, with the view of fitting them for the greatest usefulness in life, the idea was conceived of supplementing the purely intellectual work by a practical training in the art of home management and its related subjects.

"It was the first school of high literary grade to introduce courses in Domestic Science into the regular curriculum.

"The results were so gratifying as to lead to the equipment of Experiment Hall, a special building, fitted for the purpose of studying the principles of Applied Housekeeping. Here the girls do the actual work of cooking, marketing, arranging menus, and attend to all the affairs of a well–arranged household.

"Courses are arranged also in sewing, dressmaking, and millinery; they are conducted on a similarly practical basis, and equip the student with a thorough knowledge of the subject."

A dozen years ago I do not believe that any such announcement would have been made.

Beginning with the year 1877, the Negro in the South lost practically all political control; that is to say, as

early as 1885 the Negro scarcely had any members of his race in the national Congress or state legislatures, and long before this date had ceased to hold state offices. This was true, notwithstanding the protests and fervent oratory of such strong race leaders as Frederick Douglass, B. K. Bruce, John R. Lynch, P. B. S. Pinchback, and John M. Langston, with a host of others. When Frederick Douglass, the greatest man that the race has produced, died in 1895, it is safe to say that the Negro in the Southern states, with here and there a few exceptions, had practically no political control or political influence, except in sending delegates to national conventions, or in holding a few Federal positions by appointment. It became evident to many of the wise Negroes that the race would have to depend for its success in the future less upon political agitations and the opportunity of holding office, and more upon something more tangible and substantial. It was at this period in the Negro's development, when the distance between the races was greatest, and the spirit and ambition of the colored people most depressed, that the idea of industrial or business development was introduced and began to be made prominent. It did not take the more level–headed members of the race long to see that while the Negro in the South was surrounded by many difficulties, there was practically no line drawn and little race discrimination in the world of commerce, banking, storekeeping, manufacturing, and the skilled trades, and in agriculture, and that in this lay his great opportunity. They understood that, while the whites might object to a Negro's being a postmaster, they would not object to his being the president of a bank, and in the latter occupation they would give him assistance and encouragement. The colored people were quick to see that while the negro would not be invited as a rule to attend the white man's prayer–meeting, he would be invited every time to attend the stockholders' meeting of a business concern in which he had an interest and that he could buy property in practically any portion of the South where the white man could buy it. The white citizens were all the more willing to encourage the Negro in this economic or industrial development, because they saw that the prosperity of the Negro meant also the prosperity of the white man. They saw, too, that when a Negro became the owner of a home and was a taxpayer, having a regular trade or other occupation, he at once became a conservative and safe citizen and voter; one who would consider the interests of his whole community before casting his ballot; and, further, one whose ballot could not be purchased.

One case in point is that of the twenty–eight teachers at our school in Tuskegee who applied for life–voting certificates under the new constitution of Alabama, not one was refused registration; and if I may be forgiven a personal reference, in my own case, the Board of Registers were kind enough to send me a special request to the effect that they wished me not to fail to register as a life voter. I do not wish to convey the impression that all worthy colored people have been registered in Alabama, because there have been many inexcusable and unlawful omissions; but, with few exceptions, the 2700 who have been registered represent the best Negroes in the state.

Though in some parts of the country he is now misunderstood, I believe that the time is going to come when matters can be weighed soberly, and when the whole people are going to see that president Roosevelt is, and has been from the first, in line with this policy, — that of encouraging the colored people who by industry and economy have won their way into the confidence and respect of their neighbors. Both before and since he became President I have had many conversations with him, and at all times I have found him enthusiastic over the plan that I have described.

The growth of the race in industrial and business directions within the last few years cannot perhaps be better illustrated than by the fact that what is now the largest secular national organization among the colored people is the National Negro Business League. This organization brings together annually hundreds of men and women who have worked their way up from the bottom to the point where they are now in some cases bankers, merchants, manufacturers, planters, etc. The sight of this body of men and women would surprise a large part of American citizens who do not really know the better side of the Negro's life.

It ought to be stated frankly here that at first, and for several years after the introduction of industrial training at such educational centres as Hampton and Tuskegee, there was opposition from colored people, and from portions of those Northern white people engaged in educational and missionary work among the colored people in the South. Most of those who manifested such opposition were actuated by the highest and most honest motives. From the first the rank and file of the blacks were quick to see the advantages of industrial training, as is shown by the fact that industrial schools have always been overcrowded. Opposition to industrial training was based largely on the old and narrow ground that it was something that the Southern white people favored, and therefore must be against the interests of the Negro. Again, others opposed it because they feared that it meant the

abandonment of all political privileges, and the higher or classical education of the race. They feared that the final outcome would be the materialization of the Negro, and the smothering of his spiritual and aesthetic nature. Others felt that industrial education had for its object the limitation of the Negro's development, and the branding him for all time as a special hand−working class.

Now that enough time has elapsed for those who opposed it to see that it meant none of these things, opposition, except from a very few of the colored people living in Boston and Washington, has ceased, and this system has the enthusiastic support of the Negroes and of most of the whites who formerly opposed it. All are beginning to see that it was never meant that all Negro youths should secure industrial education, any more than it is meant that all white youths should pass through the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, or the Amherst Agricultural College, to the exclusion of such training as is given at Harvard, Yale, or Dartmouth; but that in a peculiar sense a large proportion of the Negro youths needed to have that education which would enable them to secure an economic foundation, without which no people can succeed in any of the higher walks of life.

It is because of the fact that the Tuskegee Institute began at the bottom, with work in the soil, in wood, in iron, in leather, that it has now developed to the point where it is able to furnish employment as teachers to twenty−eight Negro graduates of the best colleges in the country. This is about three times as many Negro college graduates as any other institution in the United States for the education of colored people employs, the total number of officers and instructors at Tuskegee being about one hundred and ten.

Those who once opposed this see now that while the Negro youth who becomes skilled in agriculture and a successful farmer may not be able himself to pass through a purely literary college, he is laying the foundation for his children and grandchildren to do it if desirable. Industrial education in this generation is contributing in the highest degree to make what is called higher education a success. It is now realized that in so far as the race has intelligent and skillful producers, the greater will be the success of the minister, lawyer, doctor, and teacher. Opposition has melted away, too, because all men now see that it will take a long time to "materialize" a race, millions of which hold neither houses nor railroads, nor bank stocks, nor factories, nor coal and gold mines.

Another reason for the growth of a better understanding of the objects and influence of industrial training is the fact, as before stated, that it has been taken up with such interest and activity by the Southern whites, and that it has been established at such universities as Cornell in the East, and in practically all of the state colleges of the great West.

It is now seen that the result of such education will be to help the black man to make for himself an independent place in our great American life. It was largely the poverty of the Negro that made him the prey of designing politicians immediately after the war; and wherever poverty and lack of industry exist to−day, one does not find in him that deep spiritual life which the race must in the future possess in a higher degree.

To those who still express the fear that perhaps too much stress is put upon industrial education for the Negro I would add that I should emphasize the same kind of training for any people, whether black or white, in the same stage of development as the masses of the colored people.

For a number of years this country has looked to Germany for much in the way of education, and a large number of our brightest men and women are sent there each year. The official reports show that in Saxony, Germany, alone, there are 287 industrial schools, or one such school to every 14,641 people. This is true of a people who have back of them centuries of wealth and culture. In the South I am safe in saying that there is not more than one effective industrial school for every 400,000 colored people.

A recent dispatch from Germany says that the German Emperor has had a kitchen fitted up in the palace for the single purpose of having his daughter taught cooking. If all classes and nationalities, who are in most cases thousands of years ahead of the Negro in the arts of civilization, continue their interest in industrial training, I cannot understand how any reasonable person can object to such education for a large part of a people who are in the poverty−stricken condition that is true of a large element of my race, especially when such hand training is combined, as it should be, with the best education of head and heart. Booker T. Washington.