**The Debate on Black Progress in the United States**

**The background to Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man**



Two great leaders of the black community in the late 19th and 20th century were W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. However, they sharply disagreed on strategies for black social and economic progress. Their opposing philosophies can be found in much of today's discussions over how to end class and racial injustice, what is the role of black leadership, and what do the 'haves' owe the 'have-nots' in the black community.

Booker T. Washington, educator, reformer and the most influential black leader of his time (1856-1915) preached a philosophy of self-help, racial solidarity and accommodation. He urged blacks to accept discrimination for the time being and concentrate on elevating themselves through hard work and material prosperity. He believed in education in the crafts, industrial and farming skills and the cultivation of the virtues of patience, enterprise and thrift. This, he said, would win the respect of whites and lead to African Americans being fully accepted as citizens and integrated into all strata of society.

W.E.B. Du Bois, a towering black intellectual, scholar and political thinker (1868-1963) said no--Washington's strategy would serve only to perpetuate white oppression. Du Bois advocated political action and a civil rights agenda (he helped found the NAACP). In addition, he argued that social change could be accomplished by developing the small group of college-educated blacks he called "the Talented Tenth:"

**"The Negro Race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education then, among Negroes, must first of all deal with the "Talented Tenth." It is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the worst.**"

At the time, the Washington/Du Bois dispute polarized African American leaders into two wings--the 'conservative' supporters of Washington and his 'radical' critics. The Du Bois philosophy of agitation and protest for civil rights flowed directly into the Civil Rights movement which began to develop in the 1950's and exploded in the 1960's. Booker T. today is associated, perhaps unfairly, with the self-help/colorblind/Republican/Clarence Thomas/Thomas Sowell wing of the black community and its leaders. The Nation of Islam and Maulana Karenga's Afrocentrism derive too from this strand out of Booker T.'s philosophy. However, the latter advocated withdrawal from the mainstream in the name of economic advancement.

**Washington, Booker T. "Signs of Progress among the Negroes."
*Century Magazine* 59 (1900): 472-478.**

   IN addition to the problem of educating eight million negroes in our Southern States and ingrafting them into American citizenship, we now have the additional responsibility, either directly or indirectly, of educating and elevating about eight hundred thousand others of African descent in Cuba and Porto Rico, to say nothing of the white people of these islands, many of whom are in a condition about as deplorable as that of the negroes. We have, however, one advantage in approaching the question of the education of our new neighbors.

   The experience that we have passed through in the Southern States during the last thirty years in the education of my race, whose history and needs are not very different from the history and needs of the Cubans and Porto Ricans, will prove most valuable in elevating the blacks of the West Indian Islands. To tell what has already been accomplished in the South under most difficult circumstances is to tell what may be done in Cuba and Porto Rico.

   To this end let me tell a story.

   In what is known as the black belt of the South -- that is, where the negroes outnumber the whites -- there lived before the Civil War a white man who owned some two hundred slaves, and was prosperous. At the close of the war he found his fortune gone, except that which was represented in land, of which he owned several thousand acres. Of the two hundred slaves a large proportion decided, after their freedom, to continue on the plantation of their former owner.

   Some years after the war a young black boy, who seemed to have "rained down," was discovered on the plantation by Mr. S -- -- -, the owner. In daily rides through the plantation Mr. S -- -- -saw this boy sitting by the roadside, and his condition awakened his pity, for, from want of care, he was covered from head to foot with sores, and Mr. S -- -- -soon grew into the habit of tossing him a nickel or a dime as he rode by. In some way this boy heard of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, and of the advantages which it offered poor but deserving colored men and women to secure an education through their own labor while taking the course of study. This boy, whose name was William, made known to the plantation hands his wish to go to the Tuskegee school. By each one "chipping in," and through the efforts of the boy himself, a few decent pieces of clothing were secured, and a little money, but not enough to pay his railroad fare, so the boy resolved to walk to Tuskegee, a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles. Strange to say, he made the long distance with an expenditure of only twenty cents in cash. He frankly told every one with whom he came in contact where he was going and what he was seeking. Both white and colored people along the route gave him food and a place to sleep free of cost, and even the usually exacting ferrymen were so impressed with the young negro's desire for an education that, except in one case, he was given free ferriage across the creeks and rivers.

   One can easily imagine his appearance when he first arrived at Tuskegee, with his blistered feet and small white bundle, which contained all the clothing he possessed.

   On being shown into my office his first words were: "I's come. S'pose you been lookin' for me, but I didn't come on de railroad." Looking up the records, it was found that this young man had been given permission to come several months ago, but the correspondence had long since been forgotten.

   After being sent to the bath-room and provided with a tooth-brush, -- for the tooth-brush at Tuskegee is the emblem of civilization, -- William was assigned to a room, and was given work on the school farm of fourteen hundred acres, seven hundred of which are cultivated by student labor. During his first year at Tuskegee William worked on the farm during the day, where he soon learned to take a deep interest in all that the school was doing to teach the students the best and most improved methods of farming, and studied for two hours at night in the class-room after his hard day's work was over. At first he seemed drowsy and dull in the night-school, and would now and then fall asleep while trying to study; but he did not grow discouraged. The new machinery that he was compelled to use on the farm interested him because it taught him that the farm work could be stripped of much of the old-time drudgery and toil, and seemed to awaken his sleeping intellect. Soon he began asking the farm-instructors such questions as where the Jersey and Holstein cattle came from, and why they produced more milk and butter than the common long-tailed and long-horned cows that he had seen at home.

   His night-school teachers found that he ceased to sleep in school, and began asking questions about his lessons, and was soon able to calculate the number of square yards in an acre and to tell the number of peach-trees required to plant an acre of land. After he had been at Tuskegee two or three months the farm-manager came into my office on a cold, rainy day, and said that William was virtually barefooted, the soles of his shoes having separated from the uppers, though William had fastened them together as best he could with bits of wire. In this condition the farm-instructor found him plowing without a word of complaint. A pair of second-hand shoes was secured for him, and he was soon very happy.

   I will not take this part of the story further except to say that at the end of his first year at Tuskegee this young man, having made a start in his books, and having saved a small sum of money above the cost of his board, which was credited to his account, entered the next year our regular day-classes, though still dividing his time between the class-room and work on the farm.

   Toward the end of the year he found himself in need of money with which to buy books, clothing, etc., and so wrote a carefully worded letter to Mr. S -- -- -, the white man on whose plantation he had lived, and who had been, in slavery, the owner of his mother.

   In the letter he told Mr. S -- -- -how he got to Tuskegee, what he was doing, and what his needs were, and asked Mr. S -- -- -to lend him fifteen dollars. Before receiving this letter Mr. S -- -- -had not thought once about the boy during his two years' absence; in fact, did not know that he had left the plantation.

   Mr. S -- -- -was a good deal shocked, as well as amused, over such a request from such a source. The letter went to the wastebasket without being answered. A few weeks later William sent a second letter, in which he took it for granted that the first letter had not been received. The second letter shared the same fate as the first. A third letter reached Mr. S -- -- -in a few weeks, making the same request. In answer to the third letter Mr. S -- -- -told me that, moved by some impulse which he himself never understood, he sent William the fifteen dollars.

   Two or three years passed, and Mr. S -- -- -had about forgotten William and the fifteen dollars; but one morning while sitting upon his porch a bright young colored man walked up and introduced himself as William, the boy to whom he used to toss small pieces of money, and the one to whom he had sent fifteen dollars.

   William paid Mr. S -- -- -the fifteen dollars with interest, which he had earned while teaching school after leaving Tuskegee.

   This simple experience with this young colored man made a new and different person of Mr. S -- -- -, so far as the negro was concerned.

   He began to think. He thought of the long past, but he thought most of the future, and of his duty toward the hundreds of colored people on his plantation and in his community. After careful thought he asked William Edwards to open a school on his plantation in a vacant log cabin. That was seven years ago. On this same plantation at Snow Hill, Wilcox county, Alabama, a county where, according to the last census, there are twenty-four thousand colored people and about six thousand whites, there is now a school with two hundred pupils, five teachers from Tuskegee, and three school buildings. The school has forty acres of land. In addition to the text-book lessons, the boys are taught farming and carpentry, and the girls sewing and general house-keeping, and the school is now in the act of starting a blacksmith and wheelwright department. This school owes its existence almost wholly to Mr. S -- -- -, who gave to the trustees the forty acres of land, and has contributed liberally to the building fund, as well as to the pay of the teachers. Gifts from a few friends in the North have been received, and the colored people have given their labor and small sums in cash. When the people cannot find money to give, they have often given corn, chickens, and eggs. The school has grown so popular that almost every leading white man in the community is willing to make a small gift toward its maintenance.

   In addition to the work done directly in the school for the children, the teachers in the Snow Hill school have organized a kind of university extension movement. The farmers are organized into conferences, which hold meetings each month. In these meetings they are taught better methods of agriculture, how to buy land, how to economize and keep out of debt, how to stop mortgaging, how to build school-houses and dwelling-houses with more than one room, how to bring about a higher moral and religious standing, and are warned against buying cheap jewelry, snuff, and whisky.

   No one is a more interested visitor at these meetings than Mr. S -- -- -himself. The matter does not end in mere talk and advice. The women teachers go right into the cabins of the people and show them how to keep them clean, how to dust, sweep, and cook.

   When William Edwards left this community a few years ago for the Tuskegee school, he left the larger proportion in debt, mortgaging their crops every year for the food on which to live. Most of them were living on rented land in small one-room log cabins, and attempting to pay an enormous rate of interest on the value of their food advances. As one old colored man expressed it, "I ain't got but six feet of land, and I is got to die to git dat." The little school taught in a cabin lasted only three or four months in the year. The religion was largely a matter of the emotions, with almost no practical ideas of morality. It was the white man for himself and the negro for himself, each in too many cases trying to take advantage of the other. The situation was pretty well described by a black man who said to me: "I tells you how we votes. We always watches de white man, and we keeps watchin' de white man. De nearer it gits to 'lection-time de more we watches de white man. We keeps watchin' de white man till we find out which way he gwine to vote; den we votes 'zactly de odder way. Den we knows we is right."

   Now how changed is all at Snow Hill, and how it is gradually changing each year! Instead of the hopelessness and dejection that were there a few years ago, there are now light and buoyancy in the countenances and movements of the people. The negroes are getting out of debt and buying land, ceasing to mortgage their crops, building houses with two or three rooms, and a higher moral and religious standard has been established.

   Last May, on the day that the school had its closing exercises, there were present, besides the hundreds of colored-people, about fifty of the leading white men and women of the county, and these white people seemed as much interested in the work of the school as the people of my own race.

   Only a few years ago in the State of Alabama the law in reference to the education of the negro read as follows: "Any person or persons who shall attempt to teach any free person of color or slave to spell, read, or write shall, upon conviction thereof by indictment, be fined in a sum not less than two hundred and fifty dollars nor more than five hundred dollars."

   Within half a dozen years I have heard Dr. J. L. M. Curry, a brave, honest ex-Confederate officer, in addressing both the Alabama and Georgia State legislatures, say to those bodies in the most emphatic manner that it was as much the duty of the State to educate the negro children as the white children, and in each case Dr. Curry's words were cheered.

   Here at Snow Hill is the foundation for the solution of the legal and political difficulties that exist in the South, and the improvement of the industrial condition of the negro in Cuba and Porto Rico. This solution will not come all at once, but gradually. The foundation must exist in the commercial and industrial development of the people of my race in the South and in the West Indian Islands.

   The most intelligent whites are beginning to realize that they cannot go much higher than they lift the negro at the same time. When a black man owns and cultivates the best farm to be found in his county he will have the confidence and respect of most of the white people in that county. When a black man is the largest taxpayer in his community his white neighbor will not object very long to his voting, and having that vote honestly counted. Even now a black man who has five hundred dollars to lend has no trouble in finding a white man who is willing to borrow his money. The negro who is a large stockholder in a railroad company will always be treated with justice on that railroad.

   Many of the most intelligent colored people are learning that while there are many bad white men in the South, there are Southern whites who have the highest interests of the negro just as closely at heart as have any other people in any part of the country. Many of the negroes are learning that it is folly not to cultivate in every honorable way the friendship of the white man who is their next-door neighbor.

   To describe the work being done in connection with the public schools by graduates of Tuskegee and other institutions in the South, at such places as Mount Meigs, under Miss Cornelia Bowen; Denmark, South Carolina; Abbeville and Newville, Alabama; Christiansburg, Virginia, and numbers of other places in the Gulf States, would be only to repeat in a larger or smaller degree what I have said of Snow Hill.

   Not very long after the last national election I visited a town in the South, to speak at a meeting which had for its object the raising of money to complete the school-house. The audience was about equally divided between white men and women and black men and women. When the time for the collection came it was intensely satisfactory to observe that the white side of the audience was just as eager to make its small contributions as were the members of my own race. But I was anxious to see how the late election had been conducted in that community. I soon found out that the Republican party, composed almost wholly of the black people, was represented by an election officer in the person of one of the best-educated colored men in the town, that both the Democratic and Populist parties were equally well represented, and that there was no suspicion of unfairness.

   But I wished to go a little deeper, and I soon found that one of the leading stores in this community was owned by a colored man; that a cotton-gin was owned by a colored man; that the sawmill was owned by another colored man. Colored men had mortgages on white men's crops, and vice versa, and colored people not only owned land, but in several cases were renting land to white men. Black men were in debt to white men, and white men were in debt to black men. In a word, the industrial and commercial relations of the races were interwoven just as if all had been of one race.

   An object-lesson in civilization is more potent in compelling people to act right than a law compelling them to do so. Some years ago a colored woman who had graduated at Tuskegee began her life-work in a Southern community where the force of white public sentiment was opposed to the starting of what was termed a "nigger school." At first this girl was tempted to abuse her white sister, but she remembered that perhaps the white woman had been taught from her earliest childhood, through reading and conversation, that education was not good for the negro, that it would result only in trouble to the community, and that no amount of abuse could change this prejudice.

   After a while this colored teacher was married to an educated colored man, and they built a little cottage, which, in connection with her husband's farm, was a model. One morning one of the white women who had been most intense in her feelings was passing this cottage, and her attention was attracted to the colored woman who was at work in her beautiful flower-garden. A conversation took place concerning the flowers. At another time this same white woman was so attracted by this flower-garden that she came inside the yard, and from the yard she went into the sitting-room and examined the books and papers.

   This acquaintance has now ripened and broadened, so that to-day there are few people in that community more highly respected than this colored family. What did it all? This object-lesson. No one could explain that away. One such object-lesson in every community in the South is more powerful than all the laws Congress can pass in the direction of bringing about right relations between blacks and whites.

   A few months ago an agricultural county fair, the first ever held in that county, was organized and held at Calhoun, Alabama, by the teachers in the Calhoun School, which is an offshoot of the Hampton Institute. Both the colored people and numbers of white visitors were astonished at the creditable exhibits made by the colored people. Most of these white people saw the school work at Calhoun for the first time. Perhaps no amount of abstract talk or advice could have brought them to this school, but the best hog, the largest pumpkin, or the most valuable bale of cotton possessed a common interest, and it has been a comparatively easy thing to extend their interest from the best hog to the work being done in the school-room. Further, this fair convinced these white people, as almost nothing else could have done, that education was making the negroes better citizens rather than worse; that the people were not being educated away from themselves, but with their elevation the conditions about them were being lifted in a manner that possessed an interest and value for both races.

   It was after speaking, not long ago, to the colored people at such a county fair in North Carolina that I was asked the next morning to speak to the white students at their college, who gave me as hearty a greeting as I have ever received at Northern colleges.

   But such forces as I have described -- forces that are gradually regenerating the entire South and will regenerate Cuba and Porto Rico -- are not started and kept in motion without a central plant -- a power-house, where the power is generated. I cannot describe all these places of power. Perhaps the whole South and the whole country are most indebted to the Hampton Institute in Virginia. Then there is Fisk University at Nashville, Tennessee; Talladega College at Talladega, Alabama; Spelman Seminary, Atlanta University, and Atlanta Baptist College at Atlanta; Biddle University in North Carolina; Claflin University at Orangeburg, South Carolina; and Knoxville College at Knoxville, Tennessee. Some of these do a different grade of work, but one much needed.

   At Tuskegee, Alabama, starting fifteen years ago in a little shanty with one teacher and thirty students, with no property, there has grown up an industrial and educational village where the ideas that I have referred to are put into the heads, hearts, and hands of an army of colored men and women, with the purpose of having them become centers of light and civilization in every part of the South. One visiting the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute to-day will find eight hundred and fifty students gathered from twenty-four States, with eighty-eight teachers and officers training these students in literary, religious, and industrial work.

   Counting the students and the families of the instructors, the visitor will find a black village of about twelve hundred people. Instead of the old, worn-out plantation that was there fifteen years ago, there is a modern farm of seven hundred acres cultivated by student labor. There are Jersey and Holstein cows and Berkshire pigs, and the butter used is made by the most modern process.

   Aside from the dozens of neat, comfortable cottages owned by individual teachers and other persons, who have settled in this village for the purpose of educating their children, he will find thirty-six buildings of various kinds and sizes, owned and built by the school, property valued at three hundred thousand dollars. Perhaps the most interesting thing in connection with these buildings is that, with the exception of three, they have been built by student labor. The friends of the school have furnished money to pay the teachers and for material.

   When a building is to be erected, the teacher in charge of the mechanical and architectural drawing department gives to the class in drawing a general description of the building desired, and then there is a competition to see whose plan will be accepted. These same students in most cases help do the practical work of putting up the building -- some at the sawmill, the brick-yard, or in the carpentry, brickmaking, plastering, painting, and tinsmithing departments. At the same time care is taken to see not only that the building goes up properly, but that the students, who are under intelligent instructors in their special branch, are taught at the same time the principles as well as the practical part of the trade.

   The school has the building in the end, and the students have the knowledge of the trade. This same principle applies, whether in the laundry, where the washing for seven or eight hundred people is done, or in the sewing-room, where a large part of the clothing for this colony is made and repaired, or in the wheelwright and blacksmith departments, where all the wagons and buggies used by the school, besides a large number for the outside public, are manufactured, or in the printing-office, where a large part of the printing for the white and colored people in this region is done. Twenty-six different industries are here in constant operation.

   When the student is through with his course of training he goes out feeling that it is just as honorable to labor with the hand as with the head, and instead of his having to look for a place, the place usually seeks him, because he has to give that which the South wants. One other thing should not be overlooked in our efforts to develop the black man. As bad as slavery was, almost every large plantation in the South during that time was, in a measure, an industrial school. It had its farming department, its blacksmith, wheelwright, brickmaking, carpentry, and sewing departments. Thus at the close of the war our people were in possession of all the common and skilled labor in the South. For nearly twenty years after the war we overlooked the value of the ante-bellum training, and no one was trained to replace these skilled men and women who were soon to pass away; and now, as skilled laborers from foreign countries, with not only educated hands but trained brains, begin to come into the South and take these positions once held by us, we are gradually waking up to the fact that we must compete with the white man in the industrial world if we would hold our own. No one understands his value in the labor world better than the old colored man. Recently, when a convention was held in the South by the white people for the purpose of inducing white settlers from the North and West to settle in the South, one of these colored men said to the president of the convention: "'Fore de Lord, boss, we's got as many white people down here now as we niggers can support."

   The negro in the South has another advantage. While there is prejudice against him along certain lines, -- in the matter of business in general, and the trades especially, -- there is virtually no prejudice so far as the native Southern white man is concerned. White men and black men work at the same carpenter's bench and on the same brick wall. Sometimes the white man is the "boss," sometimes the black man is the boss.

   Some one chaffed a colored man recently because, when he got through with a contract for building a house, he cleared just ten cents; but he said: "All right, boss; it was worth ten cents to be de boss of dem white men." If a Southern white man has a contract to let for the building of a house, he prefers the black contractor, because he has been used to doing business of this character with a negro rather than with a white man.

   The negro will find his way up as a man just in proportion as he makes himself valuable, possesses something that a white man wants, can do something as well as, or better than, a white man.

   I would not have my readers get the thought that the problem in the South is settled, that there is nothing else to be done; far from this. Long years of patient, hard work will be required for the betterment of the condition of the negro in the South, as well as for the betterment of the condition of the negro in the West Indies.

   There are bright spots here and there that point the way. Perhaps the most that we have accomplished in the last thirty years is to show the North and the South how the fourteen slaves landed a few hundred years ago at Jamestown, Virginia, -- now nearly eight millions of freemen in the South alone, -- are to be made a safe and useful part of our democratic and Christian institutions.

   The main thing that is now needed to bring about a solution of the difficulties in the South is money in large sums, to be used largely for Christian, technical, and industrial education.

   For more than thirty years we have been trying to solve one of the most serious problems in the history of the world largely by passing around a hat in the North. Out of their poverty the Southern States have done well in assisting; many more millions are needed, and these millions will have to come before the question as to the negro in the South is settled.

   There never was a greater opportunity for men of wealth to place a few million dollars where they could be used in lifting up and regenerating a whole race; and let it always be borne in mind that every dollar given for the proper education of the negro in the South is almost as much help to the Southern white man as to the negro himself. So long as the whites in the South are surrounded by a race that is, in a large measure, in ignorance and poverty, so long will this ignorance and poverty of the negro in a score of ways prevent the highest development of the white man.

   The problem of lifting up the negro in Cuba and Porto Rico is an easier one in one respect, even if it proves more difficult in others. It will be less difficult, because there is the absence of that higher degree of race feeling which exists in many parts of the United States. Both the white Cuban and the white Spaniard have treated the people of African descent, in civil, political, military, and business matters, very much as they have treated others of their own race. Oppression has not cowed and unmanned the Cuban negro in certain respects as it has the American negro.

   In only a few instances is the color-line drawn. How Americans will treat the negro Cuban, and what will be the tendency of American influences in the matter of the relation of the races, remains an interesting and open question. Certainly it will place this country in an awkward position to have gone to war to free a people from Spanish cruelty, and then as soon as it gets them within its power to treat a large proportion of the population worse than did even Spain herself, simply on account of color.

   While in the matter of the relation of the races the problem before us in the West Indies is easier, in respect to the industrial, moral, and religious sides it is more difficult. The negroes on these islands are largely an agricultural people, and for this reason, in addition to a higher degree of mental and religious training, they need the same agricultural, mechanical, and domestic training that is fast helping the negroes in our Southern States. Industrial training will not only help them to the ownership of property, habits of thrift and economy, but the acquiring of these elements of strength will go further than anything else in improving the moral and religious condition of the masses, just as has been and is true of my people in the Southern States.

   With the idea of getting the methods of industrial education pursued at Hampton and Tuskegee permanently and rightly started in Cuba and Porto Rico, a few of the most promising men and women from these islands have been brought to the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, and educated with the view of having them return and take the lead in affording industrial training on these islands, where the training can best be given to the masses.

   The emphasis that I have placed upon an industrial education does not mean that the negro is to be excluded from the higher interests of life, but it does mean that in proportion as the negro gets the foundation, -- the useful before the ornamental, -- in the same proportion will he accelerate his progress in acquiring those elements which do not pertain so directly to the utilitarian.

   Phillips Brooks once said, "One generation gathers the material, and the next builds the palaces." Very largely this must be the material-gathering generation of black people, but in due time the palaces will come if we are patient.

As originally published in

The Atlantic Monthly

September 1902

**Of the Training of Black Men**

by W. E. B. Du Bois

FROM the shimmering swirl of waters where many, many thoughts ago the slave-ship first saw the square tower of Jamestown have flowed down to our day three streams of thinking: one from the larger world here and over-seas, saying, the multiplying of human wants in culture lands calls for the world-wide cooperation of men in satisfying them. Hence arises a new human unity, pulling the ends of the earth nearer, and all men, black, yellow, and white. The larger humanity strives to feel in this contact of living nations and sleeping hordes a thrill of new life in the world, crying, If the contact of Life and Sleep be Death, shame on such Life. To be sure, behind this thought lurks the afterthought of force and dominion, -- the making of brown men to delve when the temptation of beads and red calico cloys.

The second thought streaming from the death-ship and the curving river is the thought of the older South: the sincere and passionate belief that somewhere between men and cattle God created a tertium quid, and called it a Negro, -- a clownish, simple creature, at times even lovable within its limitations, but straitly foreordained to walk within the Veil. To be sure, behind the thought lurks the afterthought, -- some of them with favoring chance might become men, but in sheer self-defense we dare not let them, and build about them walls so high, and hang between them and the light a veil so thick, that they shall not even think of breaking through.

And last of all there trickles down that third and darker thought, the thought of the things themselves, the confused half-conscious mutter of men who are black and whitened, crying Liberty, Freedom, Opportunity -- vouchsafe to us, O boastful World, the chance of living men! To be sure, behind the thought lurks the afterthought: suppose, after all, the World is right and we are less than men? Suppose this mad impulse within is all wrong, some mock mirage from the untrue?

So here we stand among thoughts of human unity, even through conquest and slavery; the inferiority of black men, even if forced by fraud; a shriek in the night for the freedom of men who themselves are not yet sure of their right to demand it. This is the tangle of thought and afterthought wherein we are called to solve the problem of training men for life.

Behind all its curiousness, so attractive alike to sage and dilettante, lie its dim dangers, throwing across us shadows at once grotesque and awful. Plain it is to us that what the world seeks through desert and wild we have within our threshold, -- a stalwart laboring force, suited to the semi-tropics; if, deaf to the voice of the Zeitgeist, we refuse to use and develop these men, we risk poverty and loss. If, on the other hand, seized by the brutal afterthought, we debauch the race thus caught in our talons, selfishly sucking their blood and brains in the future as in the past, what shall save us from national decadence? Only that saner selfishness which, Education teaches men, can find the rights of all the whirl of work.

Again, we may decry the color prejudice of the South, yet it remains a heavy fact. Such curious kinks of the human mind exist and must be reckoned with soberly. They cannot be laughed away, nor always successfully stormed at, nor easily abolished by act of legislature. And yet they cannot be encouraged by being let alone. They must be recognized as facts, but unpleasant facts; things that stand in the way of civilization and religion and common decency. They can be met in but one way: by the breadth and broadening of human reason, by catholicity of taste and culture. And so, too, the native ambition and aspiration of men, even though they be black, backward, and ungraceful, must not lightly be dealt with. To stimulate wildly weak and untrained minds is to play with mighty fires; to flout their striving idly is to welcome a harvest of brutish crime and shameless lethargy in our very laps. The guiding of thought and the deft coordination of deed is at once the path of honor and humanity.

And so, in this great question of reconciling three vast and partially contradictory streams of thought, the one panacea of Education leaps to the lips of all: such human training as will best use the labor of all men without enslaving or brutalizing; such training as will give us poise to encourage the prejudices that bulwark society, and stamp out those that in sheer barbarity deafen us to the wail of prisoned souls within the Veil, and the mounting fury of shackled men.

But when we have vaguely said Education will set this tangle straight, what have we uttered but a truism? Training for life teaches living; but what training for the profitable living together of black men and white? Two hundred years ago our task would have seemed easier. Then Dr. Johnson blandly assured us that education was needful solely for the embellishments of life, and was useless for ordinary vermin. To-day we have climbed to heights where we would open at least the outer courts of knowledge to all, display its treasures to many, and select the few to whom its mystery of Truth is revealed, not wholly by truth or the accidents of the stock market, but at least in part according to deftness and aim, talent and character. This programme, however, we are sorely puzzled in carrying out through that part of the land where the blight of slavery fell hardest, and where we are dealing with two backward peoples. To make here in human education that ever necessary combination of the permanent and the contingent -- of the ideal and the practical in workable equilibrium -- has been there, as it ever must in every age and place, a matter of infinite experiment and frequent mistakes.

In rough approximation we may point out four varying decades of work in Southern education since the Civil War. From the close of the war until 1876 was the period of uncertain groping and temporary relief. There were army schools, mission schools, and schools of the Freedman's Bureau in chaotic disarrangement, seeking system and cooperation. Then followed ten years of constructive definite effort toward the building of complete school systems in the South. Normal schools and colleges were founded for the freedmen, and teachers trained there to man the public schools. There was the inevitable tendency of war to underestimate the prejudices of the master and the ignorance of the slave, and all seemed clear sailing out of the wreckage of the storm. Meantime, starting in this decade yet especially developing from 1885 to 1895, began the industrial revolution of the South. The land saw glimpses of a new destiny and the stirring of new ideals. The educational system striving to complete itself saw new obstacles and a field of work ever broader and deeper. The Negro colleges, hurriedly founded, were inadequately equipped, illogically distributed, and of varying efficiency and grade; the normal and high schools were doing little more than common school work, and the common schools were training but a third of the children who ought to be in them, and training these too often poorly. At the same time the white South, by reason of its sudden conversion from the slavery ideal, by so much the more became set and strengthened in its racial prejudice, and crystallized it into harsh law and harsher custom; while the marvelous pushing forward of the poor white daily threatened to take even bread and butter from the mouths of the heavily handicapped sons of the freedmen. In the midst, then, of the larger problem of Negro education sprang up the more practical question of work, the inevitable economic quandary that faces a people in the transition from slavery to freedom, and especially those who make that change amid hate and prejudice, lawlessness and ruthless competition.

The industrial school springing to notice in this decade, but coming to full recognition in the decade beginning with 1895, was the proffered answer to this combined educational and economic crisis, and an answer of singular wisdom and timeliness. From the very first in nearly all the schools some attention had been given to training in handiwork, but now this training first raised to a dignity that brought it in direct touch with the South's magnificent industrial development, and given an emphasis which reminded black folk that before the Temple of Knowledge swing the Gates of Toil.

Yet after all they are but gates, and when turning our eyes from the temporary and contingent in the Negro problem to the broader question of the permanent uplifting and civilization of black men in America, we have a right to inquire, as this enthusiasm for material advancement mounts to its height, if after all the industrial school is the final and sufficient answer in the training of the Negro race; and to ask gently, but in all sincerity, the ever recurring query of the ages, Is not life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? And men ask this to-day all the more eagerly because of the sinister signs in recent educational movements. The tendency is here, born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings as among the material resources of a land to be trained with an eye single to future dividends. Race prejudices, which keep brown and black men in their "places," we are coming to regard as useful allies with such a theory, no matter how much they may dull the ambition and sicken the hearts of struggling human beings. And above all, we daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than bread-winning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black.

Especially has criticism been directed against the former educational efforts to aid the Negro. In the four periods I have mentioned, we find first, boundless, planless enthusiasm and sacrifice; then the preparation of teachers for a vast public school system; then the launching and expansion of that school system amid increasing difficulties; finally the training of workmen for the new and growing industries. This development has been sharply ridiculed as a logical anomaly and flat reversal of nature. Soothly we have been told that first industrial and manual training should have taught the Negro to work, then simple schools should have taught him to read and write, and finally, after years, high and normal schools could have completed the system, as intelligence and wealth demanded.

That a system logically so complete was historically impossible, it needs but a little thought to prove. Progress in human affairs is more often a pull than a push, surging forward of the exceptional man, and the lifting of his duller brethren slowly and painfully to his vantage ground. Thus it was no accident that gave birth to universities centuries before the common schools, that made fair Harvard the first flower of our wilderness. So in the South: the mass of the freedmen at the end of the war lacked the intelligence so necessary to modern workingmen. They must first have the common school to teach them to read, write, and cipher. The white teachers who flocked South went to establish such a common school system. They had no idea of founding colleges; they themselves at first would have laughed at the idea. But they faced, as all men since them have faced, that central paradox of the South, the social separation of the races. Then it was the sudden volcanic rupture of nearly all relations between black and white, in work and government and family life. Since then a new adjustment of relations in economic and political affairs has grown up -- an adjustment subtle and difficult to grasp, yet singularly ingenious, which leaves still that frightful chasm at the color line across which men pass at their peril. Thus, then and now, there stand in the South two separate worlds; and separate not simply in the higher realms of social intercourse, but also in church and school, on railway and street car, in hotels and theatres, in streets and city sections, in books and newspapers, in asylums and jails, in hospitals and graveyards. There is still enough of contact for large economic and group cooperation, but the separation is so thorough and deep, that it absolutely precludes for the present between the races anything like that sympathetic and effective group training and leadership of the one by the other, such as the American Negro and all backward peoples must have for effectual progress.

This the missionaries of '68 soon saw; and if effective industrial and trade schools were impractical before the establishment of a common school system, just as certainly no adequate common schools could be founded until there were teachers to teach them. Southern whites would not teach them; Northern whites in sufficient numbers could not be had. If the Negro was to learn, he must teach himself, and the most effective help that could be given him was the establishment of schools to train Negro teachers. This conclusion was slowly but surely reached by every student of the situation until simultaneously, in widely separated regions, without consultation or systematic plan, there arose a series of institutions designed to furnish teachers for the untaught. Above the sneers of critics at the obvious defects of this procedure must ever stand its one crushing rejoinder: in a single generation they put thirty thousand black teachers in the South; they wiped out the illiteracy of the majority of the black people of the land, and they made Tuskegee possible.

Such higher training schools tended naturally to deepen broader development: at first they were common and grammar schools, then some became high schools. And finally, by 1900, some thirty-four had one year or more of studies of college grade. This development was reached with different degrees of speed in different institutions: Hampton is still a high school, while Fisk University started her college in 1871, and Spelman Seminary about 1896. In all cases the aim was identical: to maintain the standards of the lower training by giving teachers and leaders the best practicable training; and above all to furnish the black world with adequate standards of human culture and lofty ideals of life. It was not enough that the teachers of teachers should be trained in technical normal method; they must also, so far as possible, be broad-minded, cultured men and women, to scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of letters, but of life itself.

It can thus be seen that the work of education in the South began with higher institutions of training, which threw off as their foliage common schools, and later industrial schools, and at the same time strove to shoot their roots ever deeper toward college and university training. That this was an inevitable and necessary development, sooner or later, goes without saying; but there has been, and still is, a question in many minds if the natural growth was not forced, and if the higher training was not either overdone or done with cheap and unsound methods. Among white Southerners this feeling is widespread and positive. A prominent Southern journal voiced this in a recent editorial:

The experiment that has been made to give the colored students classical training has not been satisfactory. Even though many were able to pursue the course, most of them did so in a parrotlike way, learning what was taught, but not seeming to appropriate the truth and import of their instruction, and graduating without sensible aim or valuable occupation for their future. The whole scheme has proved a waste of time, efforts, and money of the state.

While most fair-minded men would recognize this as extreme and overdrawn, still without doubt many are asking, Are there a sufficient number of Negroes ready for college training to warrant the undertaking? Are not too many students prematurely forced into this work? Does it not have the effect of dissatisfying the young Negro with his environment? And do these graduates succeed in real life? Such natural questions cannot be evaded, nor on the other hand must a nation naturally skeptical as to Negro ability assume an unfavorable answer without careful inquiry and patient openness to conviction. We must not forget that most Americans answer all queries regarding the Negro a priori, and that the least that human courtesy can do is to listen to evidence.

The advocates of the higher education of the Negro would be the last to deny the incompleteness and glaring defects of the present system: too many institutions have attempted to do college work, the work in some cases has not been thoroughly done, and quantity rather than quality has sometimes been sought. But all this can be said of higher education throughout the land: it is the almost inevitable incident of educational growth, and leaves the deeper question of the legitimate demand for the higher training of Negroes untouched. And this latter question can be settled in but one way -- by a first-hand study of the facts. If we leave out of view all institutions which have not actually graduated students from a course higher than that of a New England high school, even though they be called colleges; if then we take the thirty-four remaining institutions, we may clear up many misapprehensions by asking searchingly, What kind of institutions are they, what do they teach, and what sort of men do they graduate?

And first we may say that this type of college, including Atlanta, Fisk and Howard, Shaw, and the rest, is peculiar, almost unique. Through the shining trees that whisper before me as I write, I catch glimpses of a boulder of New England granite, covering a grave, which graduates of Atlanta University have placed there: --

IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF THEIR FORMER TEACHER AND FRIEND AND OF THE UNSELFISH LIFE HE LIVED, AND THE NOBLE WORK HE WROUGHT; THAT THEY, THEIR CHILDREN, AND THEIR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN MIGHT BE BLESSED.

This was the gift of New England to the freed Negro: not alms, but a friend; not cash, but character. It was not and is not money these seething millions want, but love and sympathy, the pulse of hearts beating with red blood; a gift which to-day only their own kindred and race can bring to the masses, but which once saintly souls brought to their favored children in the crusade of the sixties, that finest thing in American history, and one of the few things untainted by sordid greed and cheap vainglory. The teachers in these institutions came not to keep the Negroes in their place, but to raise them out of their places where the filth of slavery had wallowed them. The colleges they founded were social settlements; homes where the best of the sons of the freedmen came in close and sympathetic touch with the best traditions of New England. They lived and ate together, studied and worked, hoped and harkened in the dawning light. In actual formal content their curriculum was doubtless old-fashioned, but in educational power it was supreme, for it was the contact of living souls.

From such schools about two thousand Negroes have gone forth with the bachelor's degree. The number in itself is enough to put at rest the argument that too large a proportion of Negroes are receiving higher training. If the ratio to population of all Negro students throughout the land, in both college and secondary training, be counted, Commissioner Harris assures us "it must be increased to five times it present average" to equal the average of the land.

Fifty years ago the ability of Negro students in any appreciable numbers to master a modern college course would have been difficult to prove. To-day it is proved by the fact that four hundred Negroes, many of whom have been reported as brilliant students, have received the bachelor's degree from Harvard, Yale, Oberlin, and seventy other leading colleges. Here we have, then nearly twenty-five hundred Negro graduates, of whom the crucial query must be made, How far did their training fit them for life? It is of course extremely difficult to collect satisfactory data on such a point, -- difficult to reach the men, to get trustworthy testimony, and to gauge that testimony by any generally acceptable criterion of success. In 1900, the Conference at Atlanta University undertook to study these graduates, and published the results. First they sought to know what these graduates were doing, and succeeded in getting answers from nearly two thirds of the living. The direct testimony was in almost all cases corroborated by the reports of the colleges where they graduated, so that in the main the reports were worthy of credence. Fifty-three per cent of these graduates were teachers, -- presidents of institutions, heads of normal schools, principals of city school systems, and the like. Seventeen per cent were clergymen; another seventeen per cent were in the professions, chiefly as physicians. over six per cent were merchants, farmers, and artisans, and four per cent were in the government civil service. Granting even that a considerable proportion of the third unheard from are unsuccessful, this is a record of usefulness. Personally I know many hundreds of these graduates, and have corresponded with more than a thousand; through others I have followed carefully the life-work of scores; I have taught some of them and some of the pupils whom they have taught, lived in homes which they have builded, and looked at life through their eyes. Comparing them as a class with my fellow students in New England and in Europe, I cannot hesitate in saying that nowhere have I met men and women with a broader spirit of helpfulness, with deeper devotion to their life-work, or with more consecrated determination to succeed in the face of bitter difficulties than among Negro college-bred men. They have, to be sure, their proportion of ne'er-do-weels, their pedants and lettered fools, but they have a surprisingly small proportion of them; they have not that culture of manner which we instinctively associate with university men, forgetting that in reality it is the heritage from cultured homes, and that no people a generation removed from slavery can escape a certain unpleasant rawness and gaucherie, despite the best of training.

With all their larger vision and deeper sensibility, these men have usually been conservative, careful leaders. They have seldom been agitators, have withstood the temptation to head the mob, and have worked steadily and faithfully in a thousand communities in the South. As teachers they have given the South a commendable system of city schools and large numbers of private normal schools and academies. Colored college-bred men have worked side by side with white college graduates at Hampton; almost from the beginning the backbone of Tuskegee's teaching force has been formed of graduates from Fisk and Atlanta. And to-day the institute is filled with college graduates, from the energetic wife of the principal down to the teacher of agriculture, including nearly half of the executive council and a majority of the heads of departments. In the professions, college men are slowly but surely leavening the Negro church, are healing and preventing the devastations of disease, and beginning to furnish legal protection for the liberty and property of the toiling masses. All this is needful work. Who would do it if Negroes did not? How could Negroes do it if they were not trained carefully for it? If white people need colleges to furnish teachers, ministers, lawyers, and doctors, do black people need nothing of the sort?

If it be true that there are an appreciable number of Negro youth in the land capable by character and talent to receive that higher training, the end of which is culture, and if the two and a half thousand who have had something of this training in the past have in the main proved themselves useful to their race and generation, the question then comes, What place in the future development of the South ought the Negro college and college-bred man to occupy? That the present social separation and acute race sensitiveness must eventually yield to the influences of culture as the South grows civilized is clear. But such transformation calls for singular wisdom and patience. If, while the healing of this vast sore is progressing, the races are to live for many years side by side, united in economic effort, obeying a common government, sensitive to mutual thought and feeling, yet subtly and silently separate in many matters of deeper human intimacy -- if this unusual and dangerous development is to progress amid peace and order, mutual respect and growing intelligence, it will call for social surgery at once the delicatest and nicest in modern history. It will demand broad-minded, upright men both white and black, and in its final accomplishment American civilization will triumph. So far as white men are concerned, this fact is to-day being recognized in the South, and a happy renaissance of university education seems imminent. But the very voices that cry Hail! to this good work are, strange to relate, largely silent or antagonistic to the higher education of the Negro.

Strange to relate! for this is certain, no secure civilization can be built in the South with the Negro as an ignorant, turbulent proletariat. Suppose we seek to remedy this by making them laborers and nothing more: they are not fools, they have tasted of the Tree of Life, and they will not cease to think, will not cease attempting to read the riddle of the world. By taking away their best equipped teachers and leaders, by slamming the door of opportunity in the faces of their bolder and brighter minds, will you make them satisfied with their lot? or will you not rather transfer their leading from the hands of men taught to think to the hands of untrained demagogues? We ought not to forget that despite the pressure of poverty, and despite the active discouragement and even ridicule of friends, the demand for higher training steadily increases among Negro youth: there were in the years from 1875 to 1880, twenty-two Negro graduates from Northern colleges; from 1885 to 1890 there were forty-three, and from 1895 to 1900, nearly 100 graduates. Here, then, is the plain thirst for training; by refusing to give this Talented Tenth the key to knowledge can any sane man imagine that they will lightly lay aside their yearning and contentedly become hewers of wood and drawers of water?

No. The dangerously clear logic of the Negro's position will more and more loudly assert itself in that day when increasing wealth and more intricate social organization preclude the South from being, as it so largely is, simply an armed camp for intimidating black folk. Such waste of energy cannot be spared if the South is to catch up with civilization. And as the black third of the land grows in thrift and skill, unless skillfully guided in its larger philosophy, it must more and more brood over the red past and the creeping, crooked present, until it grasps a gospel of revolt and revenge and throws its new-found energies athwart the current of advance. Even to-day the masses of the Negroes see all too clearly the anomalies of their position and the moral crookedness of yours. You may marshal strong indictments against them, but their counter-cries, lacking though they be in formal logic, have burning truths within them which you may not wholly ignore, O Southern Gentlemen! If you deplore their presence here, they ask, Who brought us? When you shriek, Deliver us from the vision of intermarriage, they answer, that legal marriage is infinitely better than systematic concubinage and prostitution. And if in just fury you accuse their vagabonds of violating women, they also in fury quite as just may wail: the rape which your gentlemen have done against helpless black women in defiance of your own laws is written on the foreheads of two millions of mulattoes, and written in in-effaceable blood. And finally, when you fasten crime upon this race as its peculiar train, they answer that slavery was the arch-crime, and lynching and lawlessness its twin abortion; that color and race are not crimes, and yet they it is which in this land receive most unceasing condemnation, North, East, South, and West.

I will not say such arguments are wholly justified -- I will not insist that there is no other side to the shield; but I do say that of the nine millions of Negroes in this nation, there is scarcely one out of the cradle to whom these arguments do not daily present themselves in the guise of terrible truth. I insist that the question of the future is how best to keep these millions from brooding over the wrongs of the past and the difficulties of the present, so that all their energies may be bent toward a cheerful striving and cooperation with their white neighbors toward a larger, juster, and fuller future. That one wise method of doing this lies in the closer knitting of the Negro to the great industrial possibilities of the South is a great truth. And this the common schools and the manual training and trade schools are working to accomplish. But these alone are not enough. The foundations of knowledge in this race, as in others, must be sunk deep in the college and university if we would build a solid, permanent structure. Internal problems of social advance must inevitably come, -- problems of work and wages, of families and homes, of morals and the true valuing of the things of life; and all these and other inevitable problems of civilization the Negro must meet and solve largely for himself, by reason of his isolation; and can there be any possible solution other than by study and thought and an appeal to the rich experience of the past? Is there not, with such a group and in such a crisis, infinitely more danger to be apprehended from half-trained minds and shallow thinking than from over-education and over-refinement? Surely we have wit enough to found a Negro college so manned and equipped as to steer successfully between the dilettante and the fool. We shall hardly induce black men to believe that if their bellies be full it matters little about their brains. They already dimly perceive that the paths of peace winding between honest toil and dignified manhood call for the guidance of skilled thinkers, the loving, reverent comradeship between the black lowly and black men emancipated by training and culture.

The function of the Negro college then is clear: it must maintain the standards of popular education, it must seek the social regeneration of the Negro, and it must help in the solution of problems of race contact and cooperation. And finally, beyond all this, it must develop men. Above our modern socialism, and out of the worship of the mass, must persist and evolve that higher individualism which the centres of culture protect; there must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human souls that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammeled alike by old and new. Such souls aforetime have inspired and guided worlds, and if we be not wholly bewitched by our Rhine-gold, they shall again. Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts. And to themselves in these the days that try their souls the chance to soar in the dim blue air above the smoke is to their finer spirits boon and guerdon for what they lose on earth by being black.

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of Evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what souls I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgrah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?