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Contributors

Coleridge A. Braithwaite, Professor of Fine Arts

Clyde W. Hall, Professor of Industrial Arts Education

Calvin L. Kiah, Professor of Education

Joan L. Gordon, Professor of Social Sciences

E. J. Josey, Librarian and Associate Professor

Walter A. Mercer, Associate Professor of Education

Charles Pratt, Professor of Chemistry

Forrest Oran Wiggins, Professor of Philosophy

E. K. Williams, Professor of Social Sciences

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373
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
The Critical Role of Motive in the American Educational Pattern Calvin L. Kiah	5
Comparative Academic Achievement of Students Ranking the Highest and the Lowest on the ACE Test E. K. Williams	10
A Review of Selected Research Pertaining to Problem Solving in the Elementary Grades W. A. Mercer	15
Development of Industrial Education for Negroes in the United States Prior to World War I Clyde W. Hall	25
Isolation of Apiose from Parsley Charles Pratt	37
Potassium Analysis of Soils on the Campus of Savannah State College Charles Pratt	39
Personality Joan L. Gordon	41
The Portrait of a Word Joan L. Gordon	42
Ideas and Ideals in the Philosophy of William James Forrest Oran Wiggins	43
The College Library and the Community E. J. Josey	61
The Life and Creative Activities of Harry Thacker Burleigh (1866-1949) Coleridge Alexander Braithwaite	67

Development of Industrial Education For Negroes in the United States Prior to World War I

by

Clyde W. Hall

Apprenticeship Training of Negroes During Slavery

Vocational training of Negro Americans in the various trades began shortly after the first slaves were sold to Jamestown colonists in 1619. During that time most English settlers wanted to become plantation owners; therefore, laws were passed forbidding artisans to leave their crafts and become farmers. If a carpenter or blacksmith became a planter, however, his trade was taught to some ambitious slave. By 1649, Negroes were being taught the occupations of spinning, weaving, shoemaking and carpentry. Each plantation was made as self-supporting as possible; therefore, slaves on every plantation were taught to do the work of a cooper, wheelwright, sawyer, carpenter, mason, blacksmith, miller, shoemaker, weaver, tanner, or butcher.

Many of the plantation owners encouraged their slaves to acquire as many different skills as possible, because a slave who possessed the knowledge of several trades was valued more than one who was unskilled. A skilled slave was worth perhaps \$1,500 compared to \$700 for an unskilled slave. From the slave's point of view, the acquisition of a trade gave him a larger measure of independence. Not infrequently he was hired out by his master to other planters for wages, and he was allowed to keep a portion of his earnings to buy his freedom. Often a highly skilled Negro craftsman would have several of his younger fellow slaves as his apprentices.

The movement to train Negro slaves to become artisans did not have universal support in the colonies. The skilled white workers opposed such a program, because they feared the slave competition. Some of the planters felt that a skilled slave was not as productive as an agricultural worker, although his resale value was higher. There were others who doubted the Negro's ability to acquire a trade that required a reasonably high degree of skill. There was also a sentiment among some planters that if slaves had access to tools they might fashion weapons which could be used to gain their freedom.

Before selecting slaves for industrial training, slave owners had to consider several factors, such as the economy of the area, the amount of work available, the number of slaves owned, and the amount of profit involved. Once a slave was selected for vocational training, he was placed under the supervision of an experienced craftsman. Motivated by the permanency of slavery and its rigorous discipline, a slave usually developed a fairly high degree of skill. Near the beginning

of the American Revolution virtually every trade known to colonial life was represented by Negro slave laborers. Slaves were taught several allied trades instead of only one, because with such training the demands for their services were greater. Advertisements for Negro slave apprentices frequently appeared in newspapers of the South. In Georgia, one blacksmith advertised that he would willingly receive three Negroes as apprentices and assured their owners that special attention would be given to their instruction.

The competition of Negro artisans was so keenly felt by the skilled white workers a few decades before the Civil War that legislation was passed in several Southern states restricting the apprenticing of Negroes in certain trades. The rivalry between skilled white and Negro mechanics became especially troublesome as the number of free Negro artisans increased. In 1845, the legislators of Georgia passed a law prohibiting the hiring of Negro mechanics. It was stated as follows:

That from and after the first day in February, next, each and every white person who shall hereafter contract or bargain with any slave mechanic or mason, or free person of color, being a mechanic or mason, shall be liable to be indicted for a misdemeanor; and on conviction to be fined at the discretion of the court, not exceeding two hundred dollars.¹

The presence of skilled slave labor in the South also had an effect upon the migration of skilled white workers to that section. They were discouraged, because the slave labor undercut wages.

Industrial Schools for Negroes in the North Founded Prior to the Civil War

Between 1830 and 1860 philanthropists aided a manual labor school movement for free Negroes in the North. The aims for this development were to give Negroes a common school education and at the same time train them to be artisans. About this time, since the slave apprenticeship programs of the plantations had begun to degenerate, these schools were established in an attempt to take over where the apprenticeship programs were failing. The industrial education programs of these schools also served to provide employment whereby students could support themselves by their own labor while attending school. Peterboro Manual Labor School, Philadelphia Institute, Wilberforce University, and Emlen Institute were some of the manual labor schools started in the North before the Civil War. Only Philadelphia Institute and Wilberforce University continued successfully for any period of time after 1917.

One of the reasons for the failure of these manual labor schools was their location, because they were usually established in small rural communities, and there were no immediate markets for the products the students produced. Students also were not able to work at a trade while in school and support themselves, and teachers of

¹S. D. Sepro and A. L. Harris, *The Black Worker*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1931, pp. 71-72.

these schools were not able to correlate successfully industrial and academic courses. Moreover, a supply of competent teachers was not available. It was unfortunate that the teachers who were chosen to teach in many of these manual labor schools lacked the necessary preparation to carry out their tasks successfully. Most of the teachers did not know how to unite industrial and academic instruction. Those who taught the academic courses knew little about industrial education, and cared still less for it; those that possessed the knowledge of a trade knew little about methods of teaching.

White mechanics of the North began to refuse Negro youth as apprentices, because their fellow workers refused to work with them on the same jobs. Because of this attitude, free Negroes of that section contemplated building industrial schools for the education of Negro mechanics. In 1831, a convention met in Philadelphia, representing Negroes from five states, accepted a proposal made by William T. Garrison, Arthur Tappan, and Reverend S. S. Jonelyn to build a manual labor school for Negro youth in New Haven. The purpose of this school was to educate Negroes for the mechanical and agricultural occupations. Inhabitants of New Haven so violently objected to this plan that it was abandoned. Since this convention had raised some money for this school, an attempt was made to transfer the project to Canaan, New Hampshire. The townspeople in Canaan, however, destroyed the building erected for that purpose.

Conflicting Philosophies of Negro Schools Founded After the Civil War

During slavery Negroes received most of their industrial training on the plantations under the apprenticeship system which was separately financed, operated and controlled by each plantation owner. The types of occupations that were taught to slaves varied from plantation to plantation, because the general idea behind giving slaves such training was to make each plantation or community as self-supporting as possible. The slaves themselves had very little to say concerning either the type of industries to be taught them or the persons who would receive the industrial training.

Immediately after the Civil War, when the movement for the education of Negro youth began, a great quarrel started as to whether Negroes should be given "classical education" or "industrial education." Although this difference of opinion was not expressed widely until after the slaves were freed, it had been expounded before the war by several persons who were interested in Negro education. The free Negroes of the South had hoped that the Southern whites would let them have industrial schools, and Frederick Douglass in 1853 advocated industrial schools for Negroes when Harriet Beecher Stowe offered some money for either a Negro industrial school or a classical school. Stowe wanted the industrial school to be a series of workshops where Negroes could learn some of the handicrafts, that is, learn to work in iron, wood and leather, and also be given a common English education.

After the War those white Southerners who were in favor of permitting Negroes to get an education wanted it to be the type of education, which they called industrial education, that would make them better servants and laborers. The New England school teachers who did most of the teaching of Negroes after emancipation wanted to educate them as they themselves had been educated in the North; they favored the "three R's" at the elementary level, with such subjects as Latin, Greek, geometry and rhetoric coming in at the secondary and college levels. General Armstrong, the founder of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, wanted to see the skilled artisan traditions that existed among Negroes during slavery continued. He, therefore, advocated industrial education. Armstrong received financial support from the Northern white industrialists, because they felt that the teaching of Negroes industrial education would make them competent workers equipped with intelligence and skill such as were demanded of Northern industrial workers.

A struggle between the conservative and radical groups of Negro leaders became focused on the issue of "industrial education" versus "classical" education for Negroes. Booker T. Washington, the most famous pupil of Armstrong and the founder of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, became the champion for industrial education; for he was backed by Southern whites and the bulk of Northern philanthropists. W. E. B. DuBois, a graduate of Fisk and Harvard Universities, headed the group of Negro intellectuals who feared that most often the intention, and, in any case, the result of industrial education for Negroes would be to keep Negroes out of the higher and more general culture of America.

DuBois opposed what he viewed as the narrow educational program of Washington. . . . He accused Washington of preaching a "gospel of work and money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life.

". . . If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools—intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it—this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life."²

Other opponents of Armstrong's and Washington's philosophy of industrial education criticized it from the standpoint that the class of artisans they wanted to develop was being out-moded at the time they were enunciating it.

Those individuals who favored industrial education and founded industrial schools for Negroes after the Civil War based their actions upon several mixed incentives. These motives were (1) the giving of financial aid to those students who were working their way through school, which many considered an excellent moral tonic, (2) educat-

²J. H. Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1948, pp. 389-390.

ing Negro children according to the rank in life which they will in all probability occupy, (3) teaching youth trades for future self-support, and (4) learning by doing things to clarify ideas, to furnish physical exercises, and to aid the mental processes. Regardless of who had the correct opinion, if only one of them was correct concerning Negro education, this dispute was important in the development of Negro ideologies.

The industrial schools for Negroes were not only hampered by the opposition toward industrial education that prevailed during the time that most of them were founded, but also by the lack of funds to provide for adequate equipment and to secure properly trained teachers. Practically all apprenticeship programs were closed to Negroes after the Civil War. Therefore, the industrial schools had to have a longer and more extensive industrial education program than otherwise required in order for their graduates to be able to compete with other artisans, and this was a very expensive proposition.

Negro industrial schools' offerings varied according to their geographical locations. Bennett wrote:

The few northern schools for Negroes train principally for city occupations, but the southern schools are bending every effort to discourage their pupils from seeking city employment. The leaders of the race believe that the future welfare of the Negro depends upon his ownership of farm land and the intelligent cultivation of it. Thus the teaching of agriculture and rural trades is the leading feature of Negro vocational schools. Those students who intend to live on farms are given in addition to agriculture, instruction in the trades to the extent of making them independent of outside help in conducting their farms. Those who intend to follow a trade are given full instruction in that and allied trades, enabling them to go directly into the industry as journeymen without apprenticeship.³

Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes

The most influential of the industrial schools for Negroes before 1917 were Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia, and Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute at Tuskegee, Alabama. The influence of these institutions was not measured by the number of students, graduates, or teachers, but by their use as models throughout the South. These schools demonstrated to the country the value of the union of work and study, and the fact that manual schools could be operated successfully.

After the Civil War there were many important problems concerning the Negro in the South that had to be solved. There were many adjustments to be made between Southern whites and Negroes. The Freedman's Bureau was established to aid in these adjustments and to settle questions of law. The Bureau also took charge of the educational movement of Negroes that started soon after the War.

³ C. A. Bennett, ed., *Vocational Education*, The Manual Arts Press, Peoria, 1913, Vol. II. p. 343.

The Bureau had eight agents in charge of its work in Virginia, and one of these agents was General Samuel Chapman Armstrong.

While Armstrong was stationed near the town of Hampton, Virginia, as an agent of the Freedman's Bureau, his ideas for the future of the Negro began to take shape. In this section of Virginia were congregated thousands of Negroes who had flocked here and were living as contrabands of war under the protection of General Butler of the United States Army. Armstrong believed that this section would be an excellent place for a beginning and to work out some of his educational ideas.

Armstrong was sent to Hampton, Virginia by the Freedman's Bureau in March, 1866, as superintendent of all Negro schools in ten counties. Shortly after coming to Hampton, he began to work upon his plan of developing an industrial school for Negro youth where students paid their expenses by working in such trades as carpentry, housework, and gardening. Armstrong's dreams of a school for Negroes, assisted by hardwork, materialized into Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute.

Hampton was opened under the auspices of American Missionary Association on April 1, 1868, with a matron, a teacher, and fifteen pupils. On the 26th day of the same month the enrollment had increased to thirty pupils, who did manual work in the morning and attended classes in the afternoon. The boys did farm work and the girls did housework. The pupils worked in groups; each group worked two days in the week and attended classes the other four. Students were given credit for their work toward the payment of their school expenses.

Manual labor was a vital part of this new institution. From the beginning of Hampton, Armstrong viewed labor in the school as a triple force:

- (1) In its moral aspect; strengthening the will and thus inculcating a sense of self-reliance and independence, relieving labor from the odium which slavery had cast upon it in the minds of the Negroes, keeping strongly sensual temperaments out of mischief, and giving habits of regularity. . . .

- (2) As a means whereby the pupils might earn the education that should fit them to be teachers and leaders and earn it so far as possible by their own work.

- (3) As a means whereby the student might learn while in the school how to support himself after graduation by the work of his hands as well as by his brains, thus affording an example of industry to his people.⁴

Blacksmithing, bricklaying and plastering, carpentry, harness-making, machine work, painting, shoemaking, steamfitting and plumbing, tailoring, tinsmithing, upholstering, and wheelwrighting were the

⁴ E. A. Talbot, *Samuel Chapman Armstrong: A Biographical Study*, Doubleday, Page and Co., New York, 1904, pp. 156-157.

vocational industrial courses offered at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. Every trade was taught in systematic steps from beginning to end in a school course of three years. Business principles and drawing were taught in connection with each trade. Students devoted eight hours a day to the study of a trade. At least four thousand hours of actual tool practice was required for every trade.

A certificate was awarded after the completion of a trade course, and after the first two years of the academic course. A diploma was awarded if a student finished a trade course and the four-year academic course.

The financial history of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute was an outstanding achievement, a feat which encouraged similar Negro institutions throughout the United States to do as well. This institution, on the 4th day of July 1881, was started by Booker T. Washington without a dollar except an annual appropriation of \$2,000 from the State of Alabama for the tuition of state students. During the first thirteen years of existence, this institution received \$421,956 in cash derived from the following sources: (1) State of Alabama; (2) Peabody Fund; (3) John F. Slater Fund; (4) students, and (5) gifts.

Writing in 1903, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois said,

“Easily the most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington.” The ascendancy of this man is one of the most dramatic and significant episodes in the history of American education and of race relations.⁵

Washington was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia in a typical log cabin amid the most miserable desolated and discouraging surroundings. As a boy on the plantation he had no schooling whatever, and his early boyhood was spent in drudgery with the hands. These early impressions remained with him through life and taught him that education did not mean emancipation from work.

Washington arrived at Tuskegee in 1881, but did not find any equipment with which to develop an educational institution. He, therefore, set about the task of securing the necessary resources with which to conduct a school. He organized a program at Tuskegee that was somewhat of a departure from the educational programs then in vogue in most schools in the country. Washington based the Tuskegee program upon his philosophy of education, which included the following four principles: (1) educate students for the conditions of their immediate surroundings; (2) correlate the different branches of education; (3) teach students the value of working with the hands; and (4) to learn by doing.

⁵ J. H. Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1948, p. 384.

In the arranging and offering of courses in the department of mechanical industries at Tuskegee, four things were kept in mind:

1. To inculcate the dignity of labor.
2. To teach every student a vocation.
3. To supply the demand for trained industrial leaders.
4. To assist the students in paying all or part of their expenses.

The vocational industrial courses of the department of mechanical industries were foundry, electricity, machine shop and stationary engineering, painting, plumbing and steamfitting, printing, tailoring, carpentry, blacksmithing, basket making, harness making, bricklaying, brick making, carriage trimming, sawmilling, shoemaking, wheelwrighting, and tinsmithing. The electrical and sawmilling courses were one year in length; foundry, machine shop, and stationary engineering were two years; basket making, broom making, and upholstering were four years; and the remaining courses were three years in length. Tuskegee Institute offered more trade courses than any other industrial school for Negroes and had the largest enrollment, physical plant, and faculty until 1917.

Manual Training in Institutions of Higher Education

There was a manual training movement in Negro liberal arts colleges about 1883, spurred by the popularity of the Saint Louis Manual Training School operated by Calvin M. Woodward and aided primarily by a New England industrialist, John F. Slater, who gave a million dollars to Negro education to be used mostly to promote industrial education. Practically every Negro liberal arts institution put some form of manual training in its curriculum. Up to this time most of the schools offered only vocational industrial courses for individuals who desired to become skilled workers, and very little attention was given to industrial training for general education purposes. At this time schools started requiring all male students to take manual training regardless of their occupational aspirations.

Atlanta University was the first Negro school to offer a manual training program which was introduced by Clarence Tucker in 1883. Tucker remained at Atlanta several years before he was enticed by Armstrong to establish a manual training program at Hampton Institute. The manual training program set up at Hampton was the most unique and distinct program of all. Many of the schools mixed manual training and trade education, because the administration and teachers did not have a clear concept of the difference between the two programs. The schools that had the most successful pure manual training programs were Hampton Institute, Tougaloo University, Atlanta University, and Talladega College.

Land-Grant Colleges

The Second Morrill Act of 1890 gave new life to land-grant college education for Negroes. Until the passage of this act there were very few Negro land-grant colleges, and they had received very little financial support from the funds coming from the Morrill Act of 1862. The Act of 1890 made it mandatory that land-grant colleges for Negroes be established in states that maintained segregated schools, and that an equal share of the funds coming to these states must be given to Negro institutions. All states that segregated the races in public education established Negro land-grant institutions in one form or another. Some of these colleges came into being as land-grant colleges, while others started as agricultural and mechanical departments of private institutions and later developed into separate institutions. The most pronounced agricultural and mechanical departments attached to private institutions were those at Shaw University, Claflin University, and Knoxville College.

Before 1910 very few Negro land-grant colleges had made any progress in obtaining adequate physical facilities and competent teachers for the teaching of industrial occupations. It was very evident up to this time that the best equipped of these schools were under private and denominational control. It should be noted, however, that some Southern states had begun to provide these institutions with modern buildings and suitable equipment.

Industrial Secondary Schools

About 1900 there was a movement to establish secondary industrial schools for Negroes. Most of these schools were organized as private institutions. Their aims, offerings, and means of support were similar to those of Hampton and Tuskegee. Since more of Tuskegee Institute's graduates tended to establish schools than those of Hampton Institute, the programs of these schools followed more closely that of Tuskegee.

Calhoun Colored School in Calhoun, Alabama, typified the lateral influence of Hampton and Tuskegee upon the establishment of industrial secondary schools. This institution was incorporated in January, 1892 as an industrial school. The special need leading to its establishment was the lack of industrial education opportunities available to Negro children in that section of Alabama. This school was organized through the efforts of two women, Miss C. R. Thorn and Miss Mabel W. Willingham.

Miss Thorn was a native of New Haven, Connecticut, and Armstrong had won her services for Hampton Institute; but later Booker T. Washington wanted her to leave her pleasant work in Virginia to come to Alabama to start the Calhoun School. She was wholeheartedly encouraged to do this by Armstrong, and Miss Willingham, a friend of hers at Hampton, was also enticed to assist in the organizing of this institution. To aid the school, Washington had previously enlisted the financial support of the Negroes of the community. They pledged

\$700 for the project, and a local white merchant gave ten acres of land for the new school site.

In all the school's work the major goal was to prepare the pupils for living in Loundes County, Alabama. The majority of the industrial education offerings, therefore, were intended to be somewhat in the nature of industrial arts, a part of general education, rather than an attempt to teach trades. Nevertheless, several simple occupations were thoroughly taught on account of the desires of the students. Wood-working, sewing, cooking, and laundry work made up the offerings of the vocational department. The aim of this department was to start at the foundation of the various occupations and advance with the people of the locality and try to make the work fit their daily desires. It was hoped by the authorities of the school that it would also improve the only occupation of the community, farming, and would also improve the home life and moral tone of the people by causing them to build better and more attractive homes.

Armstrong Manual Training School, Washington, D. C. was considered by many industrial educators to be one of the most pronounced and progressive public industrial secondary schools established for Negroes near the early part of the century. Although this institution was founded as a high school to provide manual training in the city public school system, the work was very intensive, and more nearly approached trade training than did that of the usual school of its type. Graduates from the trade courses of this school were able to hold their own in their respective trades as skilled finished workmen.

Trade subjects taught were cabinet making and joinery, pattern-making and wood turning, forging, machine shop, electrical work, and automobile mechanics. The selection of these trade courses was based upon the employment opportunities for Negro youth in Washington. These vocational industrial courses were opened to two classes of pupils: (1) those who had finished the eighth grade or its equivalent, and (2) any Negro youth sixteen years of age or older who desire trade training.

The number of years that a pupil devoted to a specific trade depended upon the course followed in the school. For special trade pupils, the length of a course in any trade was indeterminate, and certificates were given at any time the pupils showed that they were able to do the required work. In most trades, depending largely upon the pupil's selection and ability, a pupil had from one to four years to complete a prescribed course of study. Some trades, such as machine shop and electrical work, were limited to two years.

SUMMARY

The education of American Negroes for industrial occupations took on many forms between 1619 and World War I. Negroes were initially trained as artisans under a slave apprenticeship system in a cotton economy, and later in industrial schools which were established exclusively for this purpose. After the Civil War, the sources of funds for industrial training somewhat dictated the type, nature, and scope

of programs offered. Many industrial schools were established, but a large number of these failed to develop into reputable vocational institutions; nevertheless, some became internationally famous.

Since the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915 and the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act by U. S. Congress in 1917, numerous changes have taken place in institutions offering industrial education primarily for Negroes. There has been somewhat of a shift from privately supported and controlled industrial programs to publicly supported and controlled ones. Many institutions that were outstanding in this area have given way to new schools and regenerated old ones. These changes have been many and far-reaching in their effects.

Problems of interest beyond the confines of this article which need investigating to complete the picture of industrial education for Negroes are the following:

1. A study of vocational industrial education programs in colleges and secondary schools for Negroes that were financed with Federal and State funds.
2. A study of industrial education programs in Rosenwald schools.
3. The development of industrial arts education in Negro public schools.

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