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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Gang Phenomenon and Juvenile Delinquency Among Adolescent Boys, <i>By William Jimmerson Holloway</i>	5
The Status of Audio-Visual Education Programs In Accredited Negro High Schools in Georgia, <i>By William H. M. Bowens</i>	17
A Study of the Community Services of the Libraries in the State-Supported Negro Colleges and Universities Approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, <i>By M. G. Harrison, L. Hawkins, and A. M. Williams</i>	37
Concepts of Chinese Culture (From Selected Works of Pearl Buck), <i>By Blanton E. Black</i>	52
The Relationship Between Mathematics and Communicative Skills As Shown by Classes in Functional Mathematics at Savannah State College During 1954-55, <i>By Sylvia E. Bowen</i>	61
The Soviet Foreign Policy and the German Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, <i>By Elson K. Williams</i>	72
George Gershwin: A study of his Style, <i>By L. Allen Pyke</i>	82
Some Reflections on the Contributions of the Negro to Education, <i>By Maurice S. Stokes</i>	88

Some Reflections on the Contributions of the Negro to Education

By Maurice S. Stokes

Admittedly, the Negro has made a contribution to education. The utilization of much time, effort, and finance has been a part of state action. Much educational progress has been made by non-governmental agencies. It is my purpose to discuss the development and advancement of education of governmental and non-governmental agencies as related to the contribution of the Negro. This is an integral part of our culture.

In the Ante-Bellum days before 1861, several forces were important in developing education. Among them is the plantation where Negroes were trained not only as farmers but as carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, brickmasons, chefs, and laundresses. There were isolated instances of individuals such as John Chavis, who had a positive influence on education. Mr. Chavis taught a Latin Grammar school which had a permanent effect for good on both Negroes and white people. Such conventions as the Negro National Convention in Philadelphia¹, 1930, and the State Convention of Ohio², 1849, adopted resolutions for the support of education and to aspire to mechanical, agricultural, and professional pursuits.

Our schools have had increasingly a larger and more complex enrollment³, which has made them more cosmopolitan. Current educational conditions indicate that for the United States as a whole there are 225,000 public schools with about 24,000 of them schools for Negroes. In the seventeen southern states and the District of Columbia, there are about 2,000,000 pupils enrolled today.⁴ In 1900, there were 92 public high schools for Negroes with about 9,000 pupils. By 1951 this number had grown to 2,500 public high schools for Negroes with an enrollment of about 300,000. Less than 1% of the High School enrollment is in schools of 2,500 or more.⁵ There are a few high schools for Negroes such as Sumner High School, St. Louis, in this class. Approximately seventy-five percent of all high schools

¹Herbert Apetheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People In The United States*, (New York: Citadel Press, 1950) p. 114.

²*Ibid*, p. 278.

³U. S. Office of Education, *Statistics of Education of Negroes, 1945-46*, Circular No. 239, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1948) p. 1-6.

⁴*Ibid*, p. 2.

⁵Alonzo F. Myers, and Clarence O. Williams, *Education In a Democracy*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954) p. 20.

enroll fewer than 300 pupils. Negroes share this characteristic of smallness with other groups.

About 2,624 students were enrolled in colleges for Negroes in the 1899-1900 school year; in 1951 there were 74,526 enrolled in 108 colleges with about 6,000 full-time instructors⁶ and an income of approximately \$55,000,000.⁷

The Negro has given social direction to education, not to the extent of imposition, but in accordance with "the objectives of the enterprise itself, the extent of its jurisdiction, its structural organization, the materials and personnel which may be necessary or useful in promoting its purposes."⁸ Our educational system deals directly with people. Negroes create, execute, and improve schools. Schools were established in the Social Order for its own protection and betterment; education's essential progress has been performed by Negroes and other articulate groups. This is suggestive of the fact that Negroes have influenced the educational system, and the educational systems has influenced their action. Reciprocal social interaction is obvious. Negroes, other racial and ethnic groups have developed a system of education which could be classified as general education, education for specific vocations, education for research and scholarship, education for the professions. Because of the limited space, I shall epitomize only one phase of education for the professions, which is "The Rise of Teacher Training for Negroes."⁹ After 1741, the Society for the Promotion of the Gospel to Foreign Parts established a school in Charleston. Minor Academy, Washington, D. C., was started in 1851. An agency for teacher training was the Freedman's Bureau. "In 1870 there were 2,677 day and night schools with 3,300 teachers, of whom 1,800 were Negroes, and 149,581 pupils in attendance."¹⁰ During the five years of existence of the Bureau, a good proportion of 6½ million dollars was spent for schools. Missionary and religious organizations were helpful. Several of them were the American Missionary Society of the Congregational Church, The Freeman's Bureau of the Methodist Church, the American Baptist Home Missionary Society. Private Philanthropy includes the Peabody Fund, 1867, the

⁶U. S. Office of Education, *Statistics of Negro Colleges and Universities: Students, Staff, and Finances, 1900-1950*, Circular 293, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1951) p. 1.

⁷Jessie P. Guzman, and others, *Negro Yearbook: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life*, (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., Inc., 1952) p. 221.

⁸Nelson Henry, "Contributions of Research In Public Administration To Educational Administration," *Educational Administration: A Survey of Progress, Problems, and Needs*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946) p. 76.

⁹Reid E. Jackson, "Rise of Teacher Training For Negroes," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. VII (October, 1938) p. 540-48.

¹⁰Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States*, (Chicago: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1934) p. 439.

John F. Slater Fund, 1882, The General Education Fund, 1903, Phelps-Stokes Fund of 1908, and the Rosenwald Fund, 1915, together with other funds.¹¹

City Normals were established in Louisville, St. Louis, Richmond, and Little Rock. Rapid expansion of the Land Grant College¹² and other colleges is the last factor that will be mentioned. All of the Negro Land Grant Colleges have their predominant emphasis upon teacher education.¹³ Most of the students in these colleges take their majors in the Arts and Sciences or in Education. In the areas of Agriculture, Mechanical Arts and Home Economics, the principal emphasis is the preparation of teachers in these fields. At Atlanta University in 1869, pedagogy was offered and by 1885 they had granted 41 Bachelor's degrees and 106 normal certificates.¹⁴

General awards, honors and distinctions have been numerous for the Negro in education when the following are considered:¹⁵ A Nobel Peace Prize, Sculpture and Sports awards, appointment to the National Housing Research Advisory Commission, elections to local Boards of Education, and sharing the international teacher exchange. Other activities include surveying foreign educational systems, teaching in large biracial universities, becoming a diplomat of the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery, and a fellowship in the International College of Surgeons.

Negroes have excelled in the development of Extra-legal or Non-Governmental agencies for the creation and control of education. The term extra legal is not to be confused with illegal. In many instances, these agencies are created by educators themselves. Again, reciprocity seems to be the rule for their relationship with the educational system. They fulfill a useful purpose and need, interpret the policy of the school to citizens, give scholarships, exhibit mutual trust, sincerity, and responsibility. The classification includes Professional organizations, school-home associations, non-academic organizations, endowed foundations, denominational boards, and accrediting associations.¹⁶ Professional organizations would include: The Conference of Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges,

¹¹*Ibid*, 437 ff.

¹²U. S. Office of Education, *Statistics of the Land Grant Colleges and Universities: year ending June 30, 1953*, Bulletin No. 8, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1954) p. 1-49.

¹³Doxey Wilkerson, *Special Problems of Negro Education, Prepared for the Advisory Committee on Education*, (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1939) p. 73.

¹⁴Willard Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865-1949*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951) p. 31.

¹⁵Jessie P. Guzman, and others, *Op. cit.*, p. 362 ff.

¹⁶J. D. Russell, and C. H. Judd, *The American Educational System*, (Chicago: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940) p. 147 ff.

State Teachers Association, the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Associations, the American Teachers Association.

Non-academic organizations are the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the National Urban League, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, American Council on Human Rights, the National Negro Business League, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, National Banking Association, religious organizations, and the National Negro Insurance Association.¹⁷ Endowed foundations, such as the Slater Fund, have been mentioned in connection with Teacher Training. Parent-Teachers Associations for Negroes have functioned on a local, state, regional, and national basis. In addition to performing a major role in higher education, Denominational Boards have contributed much to private elementary and secondary schools. Private boards control over fifty percent of the colleges for Negroes.¹⁸ Many of these are denominational. Meharry Medical College is privately controlled. Negroes have participated in the accrediting associations for the last few decades in either a direct or indirect way. Especially is this true for the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States. Accreditation for Negroes as well as other groups has attempted to develop criteria that determine the quality of education of a given school. Their attention has been focused upon the staff, instruction, community relationship, physical features, and other factors.

Again, because of the limited space, I should like to mention the work of only one of the extra-legal or non-governmental agencies with a few details. This is a professional agency. The American Teachers Association "Joint Action Toward Unity," N.E.A. Journal, November, 1952, indicates that 80,000 Negro Teachers constitute a potential membership increase for the N.E.A.¹⁹ Many northern and western Negro teachers have been members. Since 1904 there has been the agency of the American Teachers Association, formerly the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools. Equality of educational opportunity and equal professional status for every teacher are advocated. Since 1926, a joint N.E.A. and American Teachers Association Committee has existed, which has discussed textbooks, minority treatment in films and audio-visual media, federal aid, equalization programs, minority group representatives on the N.E.A. program; intercultural with the N.E.A., office of education, and the American Teachers Association; also, cooperation with bi-racial institutions. The official periodi-

¹⁷Jessie P. Guzman, and others, *Op., cit.*, p. 375 ff.

¹⁸*Ibid*, p. 224.

¹⁹Walter Ridley, "Joint Action Towards Unity," N.E.A. Journal, (November, 1952 p. 511-512.

cal of the American Teachers Association, *The Bulletin*, Part I, May, 1954, discussed the Legal Status of segregated schools.²⁰ Recent court decisions, when compared with legal bi-racial school policies around 1800 in many sections of the United States, are more liberalized and indicate that educational barriers are being eliminated. Other periodicals,²¹ with a national rating, have discussed 1954 court decisions and public opinion²² which have denounced the time honored maxim "separate but equal" for units in education. These declarations have been mentioned as the most important social decision since 1860.

Problems of the population, urbanization, industrialization, commercial and economical importance have demanded attention. More specific issues which have required leadership and group dynamics include numerous inventions, changes in family life, the passing of the frontier, governmental issues, the creation of wealth, migration of Negroes, religious and ethical questions. These and other problems have been shared in common, and they have had a certain uniqueness for the Negro. I should like to mention only one of these, migration, with its direct relationship to education.

The migration of the Negro is a social force that has affected education.²³ In 1890 more than 90% of all Negroes lived in the South; this number was 68% in 1950. In 1910 the Negro constituted 30% of the population of the South; by 1950 they constituted 22%. From 1910 to 1950 the proportion of the northern population of Negroes increased from 2 to 5% or from over a million to 4 million. During the decade of the forties, the population increased 234.4% in the far west.²⁴ Of the 15 million Negroes living in the United States in 1950, about 62% were in Urban areas; 17% in non-rural areas and 21% in rural areas. This issue has been considered by educators in the Negro race and of necessity must continue to claim their attention. A partial answer is education in the public schools for those who remain in rural areas, education for those who filter into business and industry or education for those who are going to college. At the college level, general education appears to be relevant and vocational education which is diversified in application.

²⁰American Teachers Association, "The Legal Status of Segregated Schools", *The Bulletin*, Part I, (May, 1954) p. 1-20.

²¹C. A. McKnight, "The Desegregation Ruling," *School Executive*, Vol. LXXIV, (January, 1955) p. 82-85.

²²Charles Thompson, "Reargument of Educational Segregation Cases," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. XXIII (Fall, 1954) p. 453-454.

²³C. A. Chick, "Recent Southern Industrialization and Its Complications for Negroes In the South," *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. XXII (Fall, 1953) p. 476-483.

²⁴Newton Edwards, "Educational News and Editorial Comment," *Elementary School Journal*, Vol. LIV (January, 1954) p. 255-56.

From the statements that have been made, it can be seen that the educational contribution of the Negro has been made in enrollment, different types of schools, Teacher Training, and various agencies. Education of the Negro is a factor that should be considered in understanding the well-being of the state. If it is neglected the state suffers.