

# The New Negro and the New South

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The devotion and loyalty of the old Negro to his master has been celebrated in song and story. This is but just, for when since the beginning of time had a slave race remained at home, caring for and protecting the women and children, planting the crops, and producing the supplies to maintain the master in a war waged for the perpetuation of the slavery of that very man who so faithfully remained at home?

This is a striking fact, believed to be unique in the history of nations and of races. For forty years laws of increasing severity had been enacted, court decisions of more sweeping application had been rendered, police powers of a drastic nature had been invoked to keep down the servile insurrection that was sure to come when the long-foreseen war should break out. When the war did come there was not only no insurrection, but whole districts were depopulated of able-bodied white men, while the wives and daughters, the old men and children, were left with the trusty Negroes for months at a time. It is, therefore, right and proper to yield hearty recognition of the faithfulness of the old Negro in the old South.

It may not be out of place to remind ourselves of what the careful student of history so well knows, that, before the war and during its fearful continuance, the public was freely informed that slavery was absolutely necessary to the very existence of both the white man and the Negro in the South; that if the strong arm of the white man were removed but for a short time, anarchy and bloodshed would be rampant in all this region; that the Negro could not or would not work in freedom; that the Negro was altogether bad, except as the dominant white man compelled him to be good. It is interesting to note that these opinions have been modified or swept away by the course of events, and that there is a generous loyalty to the memory of the old Negro, in many parts now known only as a memory. With these reflections, we are encouraged to think that perhaps, with the lapse of time, the period through which we are now passing will appear less menacing.

A year ago we heard a distinguished author and lecturer say: "It was a blunder, amounting to a crime, when the white man deprived the Negro of loyalty to his master, without putting something else in its place." As the speaker uttered this with great emphasis, and repeated it with some show of feeling, we could but raise the query, "Has the Negro been left without an object on which he can bestow his

sense of loyal devotion?" There are several objects of loyalty, as loyalty to the state, loyalty to the Church, loyalty to the home, loyalty to himself, not to speak of loyalty to his God.

## LOYALTY TO THE STATE

The first attempt at teaching loyalty to the state was, to say the least, not a brilliant success. There were many reasons for this, but easily chief was ignorance; not merely the ignorance of the Negro himself, but the ignorance of each section of the true interest and the deep patriotism of the other. As ignorance was a chief cause of the war, so it was a chief cause of the failure properly to reorganize society after the war. Closely following this, and in cooperation with it, was blind passion. Lust of place and power has always found ignorance a fertile soil into which the seeds of discord are sown. This is true of Russia today, ere the war in which that unfortunate country so blindly enlisted has closed.

## LOYALTY TO THE STATE

In the United States the Negro has shown himself loyal to his country and his flag. He has fought in every war when the honor and dignity of the country was at stake, and has shown himself patient and brave. We do not recall one who has ever proved himself a traitor to his country. He has not led in insurrections or plots against his country, neither has he followed the leadership of others. He is measuring up to his light in this as in other things. He will not be taught further loyalty by any system of neglect or degradation, but his truest loyalty will be taught by intelligent participation in both the privileges and the trials of nationality.

## LOYALTY TO THE CHURCH

To the Church the Negro has shown himself loyal beyond the dreams of his best friends. For every day since Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation, the Negro has gathered one thousand dollars in church, school, and parsonage property. Every twenty-four hours, on the average, this thousand dollars has been gathered by the hands of toil. The Negroes are a churchgoing people. Let it be admitted that the church does not always mean as much of regenerating or even of restraining effort as it should; yes, let it be admitted that some of the churches are positively bad; yet when the balance is struck it will be found that the Negro church, as a rule, has been the mightiest power in this land for holding in leash the forces of sin. In the Negro church the preacher has a

power little dreamed of in white churches. Would that this power were always wielded for truth and righteousness! Bad as some of the preachers are, ignorant as more of them are, the number of educated, devoted, Christlike ones is distinctly on the increase. Every such one stands for the home, for the purity of private life, for the upbuilding of the community, for the throttling of the forces of sin. Let the Negro be loyal to his church and make that church worthy of his loyalty.

#### LOYALTY TO THE HOME

Then, the Negro has been given a loyalty to the home. It is true that many men of the old regime, slaveholders, taught their slaves to respect the family tie. Unfortunately not all did so. In large areas the slave was bred for the market, because it was profitable. This system shattered all ties of family life. Said a gentleman to the writer only a few weeks ago: "My father was a slave owner, but, thank God, he never sold a slave." This was said with so much warmth and emphasis that the writer asked if slave selling was general in the part of Virginia from which this gentleman came. He replied that on the quiet it was very common. An owner would send two or three slaves to some distant point with a trusted agent, and often the slaves never came back.

This background of a breeding place, rather than a home, is the gloomy setting of the Negro family in many parts of the South. Dark as this setting is, there are gleams of light in the foreground. The United States Census for 1900 (vol. 2, page 207) shows that of these black men 255,156 own their homes free of debt, while 372,414 own their homes in full or in part. This number is steadily growing. At the same time the one-room cabin is giving place to the two-room cabin, and the cabin to the cottage, in many parts of this charming land of the sunny South. Not only has home come to mean a place to live in, but it has come to mean a definite moral center. That so few white people know this fact or appreciate its meaning is one of the depressing things in this great problem.

#### LOYALTY TO HIMSELF

Then, the black man is learning to be loyal to himself. This is partly implied in the foregoing statements, but more in particular he has been or is becoming loyal to his own best interest in the saving of property. It is estimated that the Negro in the United States pays taxes on \$700,000,000 worth of property. Some part of this was accumulated by free Negroes, North and South, before emancipation, but by far the larger part has been accumulated since that time. Since valuations for taxing purposes are not usually too high, it is thought by some that the real value of the property—personal and real—in the United States owned by Negroes is not far from one billion dollars. At any rate, he owns and operates one hundred and sixty drug-stores, nine banks, thirteen building and loan associations, two street railways, one being electric. There are not wanting signs that the depression of eight and ten years ago in the industrial and commercial enterprises of Negroes is passing.

In the region of intellectual pursuits he has shown a loyalty quite remarkable. Since 1870 illiteracy has been reduced from

over eighty-five per cent to something less than forty-five per cent. There are nearly forty thousand colored teachers in the United States, and some twenty-three thousand have had either high or normal school training. It is a most astonishing fact that there are three hundred and sixty-nine Negro students in special courses in the universities of England and Europe. It is fair to all concerned to throw in a word of caution concerning the figures for illiteracy. Many who can read a little and can write less are counted "educated" in the statistical columns. In every true sense they are uneducated and should be so classed. The paradoxical statement, that a man becomes more criminal as he becomes better, could find no place in our reasoning if the term "educated" were used with accuracy and discretion. Certainly the quality and quantity of education that many are receiving or have received in the beautiful Southland can have no salutary effect on the life and conduct. When we know that the average school year in all the states south of the Potomac is about eighty-seven days, the average school life three school years of eighty-seven days each, the average annual salary of the country school teacher less than one hundred dollars, the average value of the country schoolhouse less than two hundred and fifty dollars, and the average equipment practically nothing at all, is it any wonder that this "education" has not transformed society? But lest these words may seem to be reflections on the intelligence and loyalty of the South, let us hasten to say that we have the highest admiration for those parts of the South that so nobly and unselfishly began the training of all the boys and girls, even in the face of wrecked fortunes and almost desert fields. They have given something like \$125,000,000 for the education of the Negro. Would that all the South had done as well!

#### MR. PAGE ON THE NEGRO

While discussing this subject it is well to call attention to some statements of Mr. Thomas Nelson Page in his recent book, *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem*. Mr. Page has said so many good things, so many true ones, and as he in the end lands right side up on this question, notwithstanding the essential absurdity of the title of his book, it is a pity that he should make some wild and misleading statements.

On page 275 he says: "The laws were so adapted that there is not now (1892) a Negro forty years old who has not had the opportunity to receive a public school education." Mr. Page certainly knows, or has every opportunity to know, that there are not now and never have been schoolhouses, sittings, or teachers enough for the children of school age, either white or black, in the South. (See report of Commissioner of Education. See also Murphy, *The Present South*, page 228.)

Moreover, the average expenditure for each pupil, both white and black, is something less than five cents per day for each school day of the year. The average annual per capita expenditure of public money for the black boy or girl, based on the number of school age, is about \$1.50. What becomes of the statement that "there is not now a Negro forty years old who has not had the opportunity to receive a public school education"?

Further, Mr. Page says (page 297), speaking of the efforts to educate the Negroes, "Expending upon them, out of taxes levied by the whites on property of the whites, over \$110,000,000, though over a fifth of the whites were left in ignorance." Dealing with the last part of the statement first, it may be remarked that if the whites were left in ignorance it was either from lack of personal interest or from lack of facilities. As the same or better facilities were given them than were given to the blacks, it is not astonishing that either should have been left in ignorance. They were left in ignorance in both cases for both reasons, some from lack of interest and some from lack of facilities. But as to taxation Mr. Page makes no direct reference to the taxes paid by the Negroes. (It is found in an appendix, but not in the body of the work.) But aside from the *direct* taxes paid by the Negroes it is evident that *indirectly* they have paid much more. They are largely tenants, and it requires only a very elementary knowledge of economics to be able to understand that the tenant pays the taxes. If the land did not yield enough in rent for taxes and a moderate interest, it would go out of cultivation and the capital invested would seek more profitable channels, if not immediately, at least ultimately. Besides this taxation on real property, there are in most cities several forms of taxation on personal property or business—such as a vehicle tax, a market or huckster tax, and all over the country a poll tax. It is a fact that in some counties of the South the Negro pays more school tax than is expended on colored schools, and a part of his taxes goes to white schools. This is right if based on valuations. If this were not so it would not invalidate the claim that the Negro has to an education at public expense. In New York city the vast majority of the school children come from homes that pay little or no direct school taxes.

#### THE NEGRO FARMER

Turning for a moment to the Negro as a farmer, it is worth noting that 732,362 farms are operated by Negroes; 150,000 Southern Negroes own their farms, and 28,000 more are part owners. In some counties of Virginia the Negroes own or operate over eighty per cent of the farms, and in more than half the counties they own or operate seventy per cent of the farms. These figures and more that might be given show a loyalty to the soil on the part of the Negro. Yet it must be confessed that the labor supply of the South is altogether inadequate to its growing industries. The welfare of the Negro is bound up in the welfare of the whole country, but particularly of the South. Here he is most at home, and here he will make his greatest progress in manhood. Here the educational and religious forces must be developed to meet his growing and expanding needs.

At present the "New Issue" is spoken of with derision by those who have no dealings with the better classes, who do not know their hopes, their aspirations, their longings, their struggles. Such people never visit the homes of the better classes of Negroes, seldom hold converse with them, and except from public speech and print know nothing of them. Their chief reliance for information is observation, con-

lined largely to the serving classes of various degrees of efficiency or inefficiency, and to the loafer on the streets. Under such circumstances it is not at all remarkable that the "New Issue" should be considered altogether bad, as it really is in part.

#### SOME STRUGGLES OF THE NEW NEGRO

Yet it should be known that there are young men and women struggling upward into the light. By ceaseless toil and endeavor, by sacrifice of the heroic sort, in poverty and in weakness, some are laying deep and strong the foundations of character that shall tell in later years. If ever efficient leadership is to be given to this race it will be through the church, the school, the machine shop, the farm. Slowly

but surely this is being accomplished. From Morgan College and branches some four thousand have gone with more or less education. We are unable to find the record of even one who has been convicted of crime. The patronizing territory of this school is larger than Great Britain, and contains a Negro population that numbers one sixth of the entire black race in the United States. This school stands a mighty fortress for truth, intelligence, and righteousness.

All thoughtful investigators are agreed that the highest achievement of the new Negro in the new South will be wrought out by toil and patience through the home, the school, the shop, the farm, the church.

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