

Kelly Miller Says

Can the new Negro arouse the masses to the vital importance of functioning in the formation and control of the government under which it lives and by which it will be controlled? This is the primary test of its capacity to cope with the situation by which it is confronted.

For government is the controlling agency in society. Those who do not participate in formulating and directing the government will always be at the mercy of those who do.

Into The Second Generation

My recent release on the second generation of college-bred Negroes has caused widespread comment. The destiny of the race is in their hands. Those of the old generation must decrease; they must increase. We can only occupy till they come. We must shortly hand over to them the great racial estates bequeathed by our more illiterate forebears. It is of highest racial concern that they appreciate the high responsibility that devolves upon them. I have said that they are afflicted with the eleemosynary complex. They must free themselves from the apron strings of philanthropy. A generation and a half is long enough to rely upon outside help.

The great political estate of formal equality has been vouchsafed as a bequest, and not achieved as a conquest. The passing generation has not been able to maintain it. We relied upon the Republican party to uphold us in our guaranteed rights. The party has failed us utterly.

There is no human likelihood that the race will regain its pristine political prestige through the benevolence of the Republican party. The generation now functioning has all but given up the ghost. The estate is about to be lost. Will the new generation now preparing for the stage of action possess the courage, the acumen and wise diplomacy to restore this rapidly vanishing political power?

Negro Politically Indifferent

Under the federal Constitution, the Negro has every right of any other American citizen. Even the revised constitution, on their face, are without racial discrimination. It will boot nothing to denounce the Southern oligarchy for its high-handed ruthlessness in frustrating the constitution purpose. The plain fact remains that the Negro is politically indifferent.

Senator Blease stated the other day on the floor of the Senate that Negroes in South Carolina do not vote because they have no political interest. This is practically true of the Negroes in Harlem.

Notwithstanding the numerous modes of persuasion, so well known to the politician, not more than one legal voter in five in Harlem can be persuaded to qualify for that exalted function. Can this new Negro arouse the masses to the vital importance of functioning in the formation and control of the government under which it lives and by which it will be controlled? This is the primary test of its capacity to cope with the situation by which it is confronted. For government is the controlling agency in society. Those who do not participate in formulating and directing the government will always be at the mercy of those who do.

Quarter Of A Million Farms

The fathers have built up and handed down a considerable property estate, mainly in the ownership of farm and city homes. Of the two the farm home is by far of greater importance. The farm home is of the nature of productive capital; the city home is but dead, inert, unproductive wealth.

The only real worthwhile capital which the race has yet accumulated consists of the quarter of a million farms, out of which more than a million Negroes direct their own activities and earn an independent living. Otherwise they are but hired hands receiving the pittance and doing the bidding of the white lord and master.

There is grave danger that under the prevalent tendency of the newer generation, the race is losing its grip on this great agricultural estate, in its mad rush after the glare and glammer of city life. What is gained in the city by means offsets the loss sustained in the country.

Several months ago, I contributed an article to the Baltimore Manufacturers Record, entitled, "The Farm—the Negro's Best Chance". If we take a comprehensive view of this wild rush cityward, we shall gain less racial comfort and satisfaction than we derive from first glance.

We look in vain for the assuring indications that the race will reach the stage of economic and industrial self-sufficiency. It looks more likely that its permanent abiding place will be in the shade. The farm furnishes a place in the sun.

Industrial And Economic Life

It is up to the incoming generation to command the industrial and economic life of the race as well as its political fortune. Will the graduates of Hampton and Tuskegee as well as the output of the industrial departments of our colleges and universities furnish wise industrial and economic leadership?

Our fathers built up a vast religious estate, comprising thirty thousand churches and four million members. This is the most marvelous achievement recorded to the credit of the race. This vast religious estate was built up by comparatively illiterate men. But here it stands a monument to their zeal and consecration. Be it said to the utter condemnation of the second generation that they are abandoning this great religious estate.

The great religious denominations form the only type of organization which Negro genius has built up and which holds vast numbers of the race to permanent adherence and persistent procedure. The race has developed a political organization that has the binding force of a rope of sand or a coil of smoke. The industrial organizations function but feebly in the economic equation of racial life.

Benevolent and fraternal organizations whose main concern is with the sick and the dead thrive more flourishingly. But after all that has been said that can be said, and all has been done that can be done, the outstanding fact remains that the Negro church is the one conspicuous concrete achievement on this continent.

Half Million Dollar Churches

There are no Negro institutions in New York, or Washington or Baltimore that stand out through the generations except the churches. There are several Negro churches in Harlem which cost a half million dollars. One searches the city in vain for any competitive individual or social properties. The Y. M. C. A. and the Y. W. C. A., benefactions of philanthropy are the nearest approach.

Thirty thousand pulpits must be filled during the next generation. The leading places in all of these denominations must be recruited. The college-bred Negro of this generation is neglecting his superlative opportunity for serving his day and generation. Last June thirteen hundred Negroes were graduated from colleges and universities. I seriously doubt whether half a hundred of them sought the high places of moral and spiritual guidance of the masses.

Not Uttering Words Of Despair

I am not uttering a word of despair. Somehow or other, God always finds a way to look after his own. I have gone up this country from the Eastern and Western as well as from the Northern to the Southern waters. I have spoken in Negro churches, and attended ministers' meetings, in all parts of the land. I have been gratified beyond expectations to find that the greater pulpits are filled by men of native intelligence, innate leadership and resourcefulness acquired in the main from the formance of their ministerial duties rather than from formal schooling.

They that do shall know, is a social as well as a sacred law. But this does not excuse the college Negro of the rising generation. For the most part they are seeking the sheltered and prepared places. The education of the race is mainly under control of the white race. They make the positions and set the pay.

The Negro teacher needs mainly to fit into the program. This is a very necessary and essential function. No discredit can be attached to those educated women and men who render this important racial service. But they are sheltered and shaded. They can do only what the white over-lord authorizes them to do and say what he permits them to say. They cannot lead and direct the general life of the race. This must devolve upon men in independent positions who derive their support and authority from the people whom they serve.

The minister speaks with the power and voice of the multitude whom he leads in righteousness. The voice of the Negro is expressed through the pulpit and the press; the two conspicuous organs of public opinion growing out of and resting upon the people for whom they speak.

Gayety And Frivolity

I suggest in our Greek Letter Fraternities and sororities too, in their local and grand assemblies to give serious consideration to the claims of the ministry upon educated men.

I wish to also caution the new college generation that it is devoting too great a fraction of its energies to gayety and frivolity. I have noticed the Negro's doctors convention, and from observation could not make certain whether it was a serious scientific gathering or an automobile show. The women in their merry frocks gather from all parts of the land enraptured with the social festivities which all but drown the serious purpose of the gathering.

Our fraternities and sororities are heading in the same direction. I believe in play, in its proper place and proportion. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy and Jenny a stupid girl. But excessive frivolity in the midst of the grave responsibilities impending upon the rising generation might indicate a lack of serious comprehension of the duty to their race at this critical hour.

No, I am not a pessimist, nor a calamity howler. I would not discourage the young by belittling their achievements and attainments. But I deem it a solemn duty which the older brother owes the younger to warn them against the danger of self-complaisant satisfaction.