



KELLY MILLER

Says:

THE NEGRO COLLEGIANS.

The last issue of the Amsterdam News comments gravely upon a remark of Dean Lucy Slowe, of Howard University, to the effect that Negro college men and women especially of the present generation, have shown very little interest in matters pertaining to the race and to public affairs. The editorial goes on to contrast the former with the present generation of collegians with reference to their altruistic devotion to the discredit of the new issue. Although the plain facts in the case require analysis they are too obvious to elicit adguement.

Some two years ago, I delivered the annual address before one of our fraternities in general session at Howard University. I took the liberty to deviate from the expected platitudes of such occasions, and stressed attention upon the lamentable failure of the present day collegians to appreciate the requirement of race leadership and direction. The address caused wide comment and commotion throughout the Negro college world. I deemed it more advantageous to the cause of education to set the young people to thinking deeply than to flatter them with honied ecomiums about their wonderful achievements which are usually extolled on such occasions. Self-analysis is a better discipline than vain glorious self-boasting.

ELDERS INTERESTED IN RACE

The Negro college world today is in a most serious predicament. Our higher institutions are keeping school and marking time. The zeal and incentive of the earlier days has departed. Rendall of Lincoln, Gravath of Flisk, Tucker of Shaw, Ware of Atlanta and Howard of Howard, came down from the North with the love of God and man in their heart. Here was a new race to be Christianized, civilized and redeemed. They felt that they were sent from God to this vineyard, already white unto the harvest. Appeal never met with a more spontaneous and enthusiastic response. Their enthusiasm for humanity leaped across the color line, and pupil responded to pupil as disciple to master. Every Negro boy and girl who felt the urgency of spirit rushed into the newly established school and college with the joy and expectancy of the Greek youth who felt impelled—"To make a great journey to Athens." There they expected to find learning and light. The newly awakened Negro youth caught a full measure of the spirit of their preceptors. The disciples kept even step with the master in zeal and ardor for racial uplift and reclamation. No other thought entered their mind. The Grinkes of Lincoln, Gregory and Simmons of Howard, George Moore and wife of Flisk, Wright and Croghan of Atlanta, Booker Washington of Hampton had no other aim but this. Even the interlinking generation caught a double measure of their spirit. Proctor and DuBois, James Weldon Johnson and Walter White, J. C. Price and Bishop Caldwell, Major Moton and Bishop Gregg, fall little whit behind their elders in their racial zeal and ardor.

OLD SPIRIT DEAD.

But alas, nothing lasts forever. The Northern missionaries have passed from labor to reward. The spirit which impelled them has all but died with the generation which produced it. The founders of these schools and colleges can never be duplicated. Even these same individuals, if now alive, could not function today as they did in their time. The spirit of the age has changed. The Negro can no longer derive incentive and zeal from racial weal from this higher source. The light which lighted the imagination of the earlier generation of Negro collegians has gone out forever. A new source and new incentive must be sought. It has not yet been found. The present day Negro collegian can gain only such idealism as he finds in his environment. It is not his fault, merely his misfortune. The Negro colleges have been greatly enlarged, the faculties and facilities have been improved beyond comparison. Technical and exact scholarship has grown with the increasing standards of the times. A Negro Freshman now may think he knows more than the Senior did a generation ago, and may be justified in the thinking. But here as elsewhere, the letter killeth, the spirit maketh a life. It is not learning, but love that uplifts the world and reclaims humanity. Unless learning

becomes the handmaiden of love, it will prove to be vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit. Love of God, love for country and love for race were the dominant stimuli in the older generation of collegians, which is greatly and generally wanting in the rising generation. I must not allow myself to indulge in wholesale condemnation. Every generation has its quota which refuses to bow to Baal. Mordecai Johnson, George E. Haynes, Nannie Burroughs, Lucy Slowe and Gilbert Jones are college products of the present century who yield the first place to none in racial consecration and devotion. There are also a number of younger men, fresh from college who are willing to place their gifts upon the altar. I am speaking of the dominant tendency and spirit.

LOSING RELIGION

The present generation is unfortunate in that it comes into affairs at a time of great transltion of social ideals. The change must needs come, but woe be to that generation in which it cometh. We are now in the midst of shifting our religious conception from the doctrine of Moses to the doctrine of Darwin. The scientific spirit is rife. Higher criticism weakens the older foundation of faith. Modernism jeopardizes ancient belief. This unfortunate generation which must sustain such racial transformations will all but lose its religion. Authority is being so far weakened, that it has all but lost its sanction over conduct. The family fabric is being torn down. The old is destroyed before the new is ready to take its place. In the next generation or so the newer idealism will doubtless have become so soundly established as to meet the requirements of the coming time. But in the mean time the existing generation must bear the brunt of transition.

For the Negro race this is doubly unfortunate. Before the race has had time to become rooted and grounded in the doctrinal basis of the old belief, its very foundation is shaken by critical scrutiny. While the race is forming itself into family relations under sanction of religion and law the integrity of the family is being destroyed by pressing industrial and economic demands and lowered ethical standards. At a time when the Negro should be gaining an intimate understanding of the deeper meaning of patriotism, the Constitution is being made into a scrap of paper and his rights ruthlessly overridden. His patriotism is best with almost impossible difficulties. The one dominant aim of our day and time is the accumulation of wealth and the riot in the pleasures and luxuries thereof. The race has not yet been able to secure the requisite quantum of wealth to meet the requirements of a well ordered and decent living. We are thus plunged into the midst of the abuse of wealth before learning to make the normal and proper use of it. Our whole civilization may be likened unto a bark on a sea of uncertainty without any definite destination. But the Negro has neither starting point nor destination. The function of the college is to furnish the youth with a compass to guide his way. But a compass is wholly inutile without a point of departure and a fixed objective. The Negro lacks both.

NEEDS NEW DIRECTION.

What the Negro collegian needs today is a fixed ideal which is sufficiently clear and well formulated as to seem to be easily realizable. Take any class of Negro college men and women and ask them collectively or individually what is their philosophy of life or what is their chief aim and ambition and the answer would be a maze of doubt, uncertainty and indefiniteness. Let me propose this question as a test of my meaning: "What is the chief aim of life, Mr. Young Collegian? Is it to serve God, country, race or self?" The response, if genuine would probably be in reverse order of the above arrangement.

Until our colleges themselves can find an ideal for these young collegians, upon which the board of governors, faculty, alumni and sustaining public unite and agree, it is too much to expect these young people to find the right objective by their unaided effort. I might go further and say that it is not specifically incumbent upon the college to formulate and proclaim the racial ideal. It is the responsibility of united race statesmanship and patriotism.