NEGRO EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH *

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Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have laws requiring separate schools for white people and for Negroes. They are: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Arizona and Kansas have mandates separating children in the elementary schools, and Kansas requires segregation on the secondary level in first-class cities. Surprisingly enough, until about a decade ago there was a law in New York permitting segregation.¹

The ratio of Negroes to the remainder of the population of the South varies in range from 6 per cent in Missouri to 50 per cent in Mississippi. The 9 million Negroes living in those states constitute about 23 per cent of the total population of the states and 81 per cent of all the Negroes living in the United States.

Public schools. According to the United States Bureau of the Census in 1942, there were 11,742,870 children between the ages of five and seventeen in the above Southern states and the District of Columbia. Of these, 8,915,305 were white and 2,827,565 were Negro. In the elementary schools there were 7,350,663 white and 2,386,476 Negro children. In secondary schools there were 1,745,881 or 23 per cent of the white children but only 11.4 per cent of the Negro children between the ages of five and seventeen were in the high schools.

Statistics show that there has been a greatly increased interest in education on the part of Negroes. From 1929 to 1940 the total

¹ The data used in this article are the latest available in view of intervening war years which have made revised data impossible to secure.

increase in the Negro population in the area studied was 7.2 per cent. The total enrollment in the above ages was enhanced only 6.4 per cent. The enrollment for the elementary grades increased only .2 per cent, but that of secondary pupils jumped 126.1 per cent. The average daily attendance of all Negro students improved 18.7 per cent. The per cent of the school population enrolled among the Negroes was 9.3 per cent better in 1940 than a decade earlier and that of high-school pupils was 114.3 per cent better. There were 33,784 high-school students graduated in 1942.

For the year 1941-1942, including the elementary and high schools, the length of the school year varied from 157 days for white and 138.6 days for Negro children in Alabama to 187.8 days for white and 186.7 days for Negro children in Maryland. The length of school terms has an average increase in all the states of 18.2 per cent, which is from 132 days in 1929 to 156 days in 1940.

The teacher situation has been greatly improved also. In the elementary school there were 16.5 per cent more men and 14.2 per cent more women in 1940 than ten years previously. However, in the high schools the percentage of men increased 139.5 and that of women 112.2.

Colleges. There are 23 state schools for the training of teachers for Negro pupils. Of these, North Carolina has five, and Georgia has three. Some of these were established under the Morrill Act which appropriated money for land-grant colleges for the teaching of agriculture and the industries. The act specified that the fund included Negro as well as white students, and in order to get the money the state had to establish colleges for Negroes. And now all of the Southern states have agricultural and mechanical colleges with normal departments for Negroes.

The first normal school established in the South was the Lincoln Normal University at Marion, Alabama, in 1873. In 1887 the school was moved to Montgomery and the name was changed to the State Normal School for Colored Students. It is the largest
college for the training of Negro teachers in the world. Yet its beginning was very humble. It was started by William Burns Patterson of Scotland, a descendant from the brother of Tommy Burns. He came to this country to work among the Negroes because he was thwarted in going to Africa as a missionary.

In 1941 the total enrollment of undergraduate Negro students in Negro colleges and universities was 34,453 and that of graduate students 1,790. The number for that year in the “white” colleges and universities is not available, but in 1943 there were 1,404 undergraduate and 39 graduate Negro students enrolled in those institutions.

Universities. There are only eleven colleges which offer graduate work for Negroes in the South. They are: Alabama State College; Xavier University in New Orleans; Howard University in Washington, D.C.; Fisk University in Nashville; Atlanta University in Atlanta; Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia; the North Carolina College for Negroes in Durham; the University of Missouri; Virginia State College for Negroes in Ettrick; and Prairie View University in Texas.

Only Meharry Medical College, on the campus adjacent to Fisk University in Nashville, and Howard University in Washington prepare students in medicine. Howard University and the North Carolina College for Negroes are the only reputable schools to offer degrees in law to Negroes only.

Seven Southern states provide graduate scholarships. These states are Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Libraries. Libraries constitute a worthy part of an educational program, and this is another area where there is discrimination. In a survey conducted by Louis R. Wilson and Edward A. Wright in 1935 as related in the article, “County Library Service in the South,” public libraries were reported in 13 Southern states, but only 94, or 18 per cent, of these served Negroes. ² Forty-eight

of these were found in Kentucky, Texas, and West Virginia, whose populations are 9 per cent, 15 per cent, and 7 per cent Negro, respectively, and taken together include but 14 per cent of the Negroes in all of the 13 states. North Carolina has 12 libraries serving Negroes, and these bring the total in the 4 of the 13 states to 60 of the 94 public libraries, but they serve only 24 per cent of the total Negro population of the states surveyed. The whole library picture for the South is bad, as attested to by a study reported by Tommie Dora Barker in an article, "Libraries of the South." She stated that 66 per cent of the total white and Negro population in the South had no public libraries in their communities.

The Rosenwald Fund has done and is doing a great deal to stimulate library service in 11 counties of 7 Southern states. The money is provided on a matching basis, but most of the service is carried on through the public schools as branch libraries.

A state law in West Virginia requires all libraries receiving public funds to give service to Negroes. And a law in Texas states that proper provision for library service to Negroes be made through branches of the county free library. Thus, it is easily seen why these two states in 1935 provided over one third of the public libraries servicing the Negroes of these 13 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Discrimination. For the past few years there has been a gradual closing of the vast differential in the per capita expenditure for the white and Negro child in the Southern area, but there is still a great deal of discrimination. In North Carolina, as in a few other states, single salary schedules for elementary and secondary teachers as well as for white and Negro teachers are in practice.

According to the Negro Handbook, the figures for 1940 show that Mississippi spent $52.01 for each white child and $7.36 for

each Negro child. Separate per capita expenditure figures for white and Negro children were not available for Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, but of all the other states in the region, Oklahoma showed to the best advantage in the equalization with $42.22 being expended for each white and $40.38 for each Negro child.

The South is poor. The South has tremendous handicaps which it can do little about. It has only 15 per cent of the nation's wealth but about 35 per cent of the nation's children. In 1938 the national per capita wealth was $2,327; in the South it was $1,500 (this does not include the District of Columbia). The national income per inhabitant was $480, but that of the seventeen states was only $339.

Let us look at the picture still more realistically. The South, although highly industrial in certain areas, is still primarily rural. And not only is it rural, but the majority of the people are tenants. In the twelve states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, the average per cent of tenants in the entire population is 58.4. There are more Negro tenants where the Negro population is greatest, of course, but the revealing fact is that there are more white tenants than Negro tenants in the South, and they are increasing every year according to Charles William Dabney.4

This increase in tenancy poses a great problem. It is an obvious fact that to be the most efficient and useful citizen one must have roots so deeply planted that one feels a great deal of security in belonging. Therefore, just so long as the existing situation remains, the South must lag. A few must bear the brunt of the cost of what progress is made. Your answer is that this is true anywhere, and I agree; but the differential is too great for the

South to bring its educational advantages abreast of the East regardless of how much it should try.

Mr. Dabney takes a typical case of a white tenant in Alabama and says that a one-plow tenant farmer earns from $70 to $80 a year. If he is a two-plow tenant he earns about twice the amount. And from this must come his clothes, groceries, and general expenses. Many landlords permit gardens, which help considerably, but some tenants are so void of vision that they do little about them and, as a result, almost starve to death. This is particularly true among the Negroes.

In the past twenty-five years many Negroes have moved North and to urban areas of the South, but about one half of the total Negro population of the country is still on Southern farms. And when they move to urban areas it does not mean that they are any more able to finance their education than when they were on a farm. Often they are in a worse condition. The same is true of itinerant white people.

Many of the financial leaders say they should not have to bear the burden of educating the Negro and the poor white. You say the Negro and the poor white make his money for him. Granting that, one must admit that the burden is great. The average per capita wealth in the Southern states is about one half of that of the remainder of the country. Only eleven states have a per capita wealth of less than $2,000 and all of those are in the South, according to a report from the Rosenwald Fund.

Benefit from foundations. The movement to help raise the standard of education of the people in the South began in 1898 at Capon Springs, West Virginia, when thirty-six representatives, white and Negro men from both the North and South, met in response to a request from Dr. Edward Abbott, an Episcopal clergyman of Cambridge, Massachusetts. That was the notable beginning of many similar meetings from which emerged many foundations for the promotion of education. But despite the fact
that the South has benefited from many of the educational foundations in this country and has done much on its own accord, it is still far short of the desired objective as compared with the rest of the country. And too frequently the type of education provided has not been wisely selected for those who will not go beyond the high school.

*Misplaced emphasis in education.* It is a pretty well determined fact that not more than 10 per cent of the Negro high-school graduates will go to college for some years yet. The same applies to the tenant class of white people. In spite of that fact, almost all of them want a classical high-school education. That is not what is needed, and the attention and interest of the Southern educators will have to be caught by the motivating impulse that inspired Colonel Samuel C. Armstrong, President of Hampton Institute, and his protege, Booker T. Washington who believed that vocational education was the saving factor for the Negro in the South. That belief is becoming more popular with the thinking educators of the country, but in actual practice there seems to be rather slow progress. Very few rural schools, comparatively, have vocational departments such as automobile mechanics, industrial arts, printing, woodworking, and carpentry. And so far as the Negro schools are concerned, only a few have agricultural departments. Many of them do have home-economics departments for the girls, but not even that is universally true. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, providing for vocational education, and the Smith-Lever Act which came soon after, providing for farm demonstration, have helped the rural South a great deal to bring the practical to the knowledge of those most in need.

The Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School at St. Helena Island, South Carolina, is a great example of what can be done for rural boys and girls. It was established in 1862 as the first Negro secondary school in the South. It is intensely utilized by the student teachers from the Negro colleges in South Carolina,
and realizing that more schools of that type are needed, there is a movement through the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes to try out vocational experiments in other secondary schools of the South.

**Supervision.** There was no supervision of Negro schools before 1906. Its inception was rather incidental. Miss Virginia Randolph, a Negro teacher in a rural school in Enrico County, Virginia, was a splendid instructor. And she had an excellent superintendent from 1906 to 1910 in the person of Jackson Davis. When he visited her he always found the school neat and clean and something new added each time. On one visit, when he and she were discussing the Negro-school situation, she asked him if she might visit other Negro schools to help them start some work in industrial arts and show them how to improve their work in general. He agreed and provided a substitute for her every Friday while she visited schools. In that way Negro supervision of schools began in the United States, and in 1944 there were 452 Jeanes supervisors in the elementary schools of the South. Even then in the 150 counties where one third of the Negroes live there were no supervisors, and in 150 other counties where there were only a few Negro teachers there were no Jeanes people. However, the Southern Education Foundation plans to place 150 more in supervision as soon as possible.

**Effort to finance education.** Probably the fairest basis for judging a state on its educational effort is the amount of the tax dollar expended for education. The average state in the Union spends 40 per cent of all tax collections for education. The average for the Southern states is about 2 per cent more. Only eight states spend more than 50 per cent of their collected taxes for education, New York pays less than 35 per cent of its tax dollar because of its riches. Georgia and Florida pay less than 35 per cent because of their poverty.

**Inequalities elsewhere.** One does not have to go to the Southern
states to find inequalities of educational opportunities, however. They are all around us. In the state of New Jersey, school tax rates in Bergen County in 1941 ran from 3 cents on the $100 assessed wealth in Bendix to $3.94 on the $100 assessed wealth in Northvale. And yet Bendix received $140.39 to spend for each of its children while Northvale had only $121.22 with more than a hundred times the effort. Medford Lakes in New Jersey spent $304.33 per year for each of its children in 1941, while Berlin Township in Camden County spent only $56.29 per child. And at that, Berlin Township paid $3.36 for every $100 of taxable wealth while Medford Lakes paid only $1.43. Situations throughout the state are consistently unequal in both costs and provisions.

Is poverty in one part of New Jersey a responsibility of the remainder of the state? I think so. Are economic conditions of the South a responsibility of the nation? I think so. Why do I? The Southern states are still a part of the United States—believe it or not. Many of the people from the South migrate to other sections of the country—as I have done. The South is poor but it sends millions of dollars to other parts of the nation, not only in its trade but also in taxes paid to the Federal Government. North Carolina, for instance, which stands about fifth from the top among states in the nation in this respect, pays more than twenty times what it receives in return.

Recommendation. I can see only one possible solution for an equalization of education opportunity and that is for the Federal Government to take into consideration the per capita wealth and income of the different states and then, where necessary, to provide funds through the state departments of education to bring up the differential to the national average, or to whatever is necessary to assure an adequate program of education commensurate with desirable standards.

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