THE ROLE OF THE NORTHERN TEACHER IN THE LIFE OF THE NEGRO

On this Woman's Day, it seems very fitting, in this beautiful church, that as Negro women we should pay tribute to that host of Christian men and women who were the teachers and leaders of our people long before the Negro himself had received enough education and training to effectively direct his own destiny. For almost 250 years, since 1619, the Negro had been enslaved; and for the greater part of that time, forbidden to learn to read or write, especially in the South where the largest number of Negroes were located.

Even before the Emancipation Proclamation, these teachers, who were really missionaries, began to come South. Schools had been established by the Union army for those slaves who had been taken as contraband. The American Missionary Association, representing the Evangelical Congregational Church, as early as September 1861, opened its first school for displaced slaves at Hampton, Virginia. By 1862, schools were opened at Hilton Head and Beaufort, South Carolina. In March 1862, sixty teachers from New England were sent by missionary bodies to the Atlantic Coast from Boston and New York; and in June 1862, eighty-six more teachers were at work at various points between Hampton Roads and Hilton Head.

Such a vast crowd of Negroes from the slave states gathered near the armies of General Grant who was advancing upon Vicksburg in 1863, that he called the young chaplin of an Ohio regiment, the Rev. John Eaton, a native of New Hampshire and placed him in charge of teaching them.

By the close of the Civil War, missionary organizations of several church bodies had begun work of an educational nature;

namely, the American Missionary Association, as before mentioned, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Protestant Episcopal Freedman's Commission and the Presbyterian General Assembly. In addition, Freedmen's Aid Societies sprung up in the East, the Middle West and in the North. They, with the educational agency set up by the National Government, began the serious work of instructing the former slaves.

The New England Society in less than a month after organization in March 1862, sent 31 teachers to South Carolina. By July 1, 1868, 1,831 day and night schools were in operation.(1) This early work was almost wholly in the hands of white missionaries because only a handful of Negro teachers had been developed. They undertook the task of changing the culture of a whole race to fit them for citizenship.

To almost every center in the South they came, these New England Missonaries, to Atlanta and Savannah; to Charleston and Port Royal; to Tuscaloosa and Talladega and Jacksonville; to Baltimore and Washington; to Holly Springs and Tougaloo; to Concord and Greensboro; to Charlotte and Raleigh; to Nashville and Memphis, to Hampton, to Richmond, to Harpers Ferry, to New Orleans---wherever these church-related schools are now located, there you would have found in the early days, these consecrated people, teaching and preaching and guiding and leading because of their love of humanity and in the name of the Christ whom they served.

All of their work was not confined to classroom instruction. They worked in the churches and Sunday Schools. Being idealists,

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(1) See Charles S. Johnson, The Negro College Graduate. Chapel Hill, N. C., 1938. pp. 272-301.

with a strong attachment to moral as well as educational principles, their idealism included taking a hand in shaping the communities in which they had come to live.

The prejudice of the southern whites about them compelled close association with the Negroes and served to build up these school communities as virtually the only social expression these missionaries had. When these teachers first enter the South, they were not harmed, but were passed by and looked upon with contempt. They were not accepted socially and they received neither visits nor invitations. One North Carolina teacher wrote: "The men now and then lift their hats; while the ladies for variety almost invariably lift their noses. But we pay little or no attention to either, and the 'work goes marching on.'"

Often they were sneered and laughed at and cursed. Some found difficulty in purchasing food. One teacher dared not purchase food because the clerks in the stores, she said, would have been glad of an opportunity to have poisoned them.

Schools in which some worked were burned and the teachers driven out; as for example, in November, 1868, the school at Athens, Georgia was broken up and the teacher forced to leave the county. In 1870, a school at Oxford, under the supervision of the Methodist Aid Society was burned. Many teachers were visited by the Ku Klux Klan. Many were severly beaten, some tarred and covered with cotton.(2)

But in spite of opposition, they kept coming and became the steady elevating influence upon the whole mass of the Negro people.

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(2) Henry Lee Swint, The Northern Teacher in the South. Nashville, Tennessee, 1941. pp. 94-102.

They introduced a measure of refinement into Negro home life, They set high standards of morality and students were carefully trained in general deportment, in manners, speech and carriage, as well as given direction in their thinking and opinions.

One of their jobs was to train Negro teachers so that they might assist in the common task of educating their people. Although there were some Negro teachers, it was a tremendous task to make literate 4,000,000 people just out of bondage, all wanting to go to school. Any kind of school was crowded to capacity. Men and women 50 and 75 and 80 were just as eager to learn as were the little children. Those who knew their days were numbered wanted at least to learn to read the Bible before they passed on.

Under the auspices of church societies, some of our leading private schools and colleges came into being with these New Englanders as Presidents. In 1865, Atlanta, Shaw, and Virginia Union were founded; in 1866, Edward Waters and Fisk; in 1867, Talladega, Howard, Storer, Morehouse, Morgan, Rust, Barber-Scotia, Johnson C. Smith; in 1868, Hampton; in 1869, Clark and Tougaloo.(3) It is said that by 1869 there were 9,503 teachers in freedmen's schools in the South, of whom 5,000 were natives of northern states, the others were southern whites and some Negroes.

The numbers of man and women that were trained in these schools are legion. Those who sat at the feet of these teachers were our parents and grandparents and many of us came along before all of them had been replaced by the very men and women whom they had prepared to take their jobs.

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(3) Negro Year Book 1947. pp. 85-89

The Negro's culture is fundamentally southern but it has also superimposed upon it the culture of the East that was brought by these New Englanders and transplanted into the lives of a people thirsting for knowledge.

Who were some of the men and women trained in the Christian way of life by these zealous crusaders? The most noted of them all, of course, is Booker T. Washington. We are all familiar with the story of his entrance examination at Hampton Institute as told in Up From Slavery. We know that Miss Mary F. Mackie, who had him to clean a room, placed character above all other attributes a student might have. "In all my career at Hampton, and ever since I have been out in the world," said Booker T. Washington, "Miss Mary F. Mackie, the head teacher...proved one of my strongest and most helpful friends. Her advice and encouragement were always helpful and strengthening to me in the darkest hour." She was a member of one of the oldest and most cultured families of the North, and yet for two weeks she worked by my side cleaning windows, dusting rooms, putting beds in order... She felt that things would not be in condition for the opening of school unless every window-pane was perfectly clean and she took the greatest satisfaction in helping to clean them. It was hard for me at this time to understand how a woman of her education and social standing could take such delight in performing such service, in order to assist in the elevation of an unfortunate race."

Of Samuel Chapman Armstrong, founder of Hampton, Dr. Washington pays this tribute: "It has been my fortune to meet personally

many of what are called great characters both in Europe and America, but I do not hesitate to say that I never met any man who, in my estimation, was the equal of General Armstrong. Fresh from the degrading influence of the slave plantation and the coal mines, it was a rare privilege for me to be permitted to come into direct contact with him.

"I shall always remember that the first time I went into his presence he made the impression upon me of being a perfect man. I was made to feel that there was something about him that was superhuman. It was my privilege to know the General personally from the time I entered Hampton till he died, and the more I saw of him the greater he grew in my estimation. One might have removed from Hampton all the buildings, class-rooms, teachers, and industries, and given the men and women there the opportunity of coming into daily contact with General Armstrong, and that alone would have been a liberal education."(4)

At Fisk University, W. E. B. DuBois came under the influence of these Christian people. Although born and bred in New England until he graduated from high school, of his stay at Fisk University, DuBois remarks: "The three years at Fisk were years of growth and development. I learned new things about the world...personal contact with my teachers was inspiring and beneficial...Adam Spence... first taught me to know what the Greek language meant. In a funny little basement room crowded with apparatus, Frederick Chase gave me insight into natural science and talked with me about future

(4) Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery. New York, 1945. pp. 54-72

(5) W. E. B. DuBois, Dusk of Dawn. New York, 1940. pp. 30-33

study. I knew the President, Eratus Cravath, to be honest and sincere." Our course in general philosophy under the serious and entirely lovable president opened new vistas. It made me determine to go further in probing for truth. Eventually it landed me squarely in the arms of William James of Harvard, for which God be praised."(5)

Edward Asa Ware, a Yale University graduate, came to Atlanta in 1865 when the city lay in ruins after the Civil War. There in a freight car on a railroad siding, on the very site of one of the Civil War's fiercest battles, he founded Atlanta University, for the free sons and daughter of those unlettered chattle around whom the war had been fought.

For years the capstone of Negro education in the South, no better tribute could have been paid to the efforts of these consectated people than that message given by Richard Wright, Sr., then a student at Atlanta University, to General O. O. Howard, the founder of Howard University, when asked what message he should take back to northern youth. Wright, only a boy, burst out; "Tell them, we're rising."(6) This incident has been immortalized by the poet, John Greenleaf Whittier in his poem, "Howard at Atlanta." (See attached poem.)

I could tell the story of Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder of Bethune Cookman College and of the National Council of Negro Women; of Martha Drummer and Annie Hall, African missionaries; of Robert R. Moton, first President of Tuskegee Institute and his great work in the South, and of Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., retired, the highest ranking Negro officer in the United States Army. Example after example could be cited of the influence of these New England teachers on the lives of our leaders. But these suffice.

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(6) Ridgely Torrence, The Story of John Hope. New York, 1948. pp. 57-58, 127, 302.

What would Negro history be without the work of Booker T. Washington, one single man, brought up under this New England culture? What would the Negro race do without Fisk, and Howard and Hampton and the other colleges founded in the New England tradition, to say nothing about the private high schools and academies? These, for the greater part, have trained our ministers and teachers, our doctors and dentists, our lawyers, scientists, engineers and social workers.

The Negro race has a debt to pay these noble men and women. "The history of the world fails to show a higher, purer, and more unselfish class of men and women than they."(7) Although they are no more, their spirits remain with us. Their descendants must be proud of the progress made by the people that were taken under their ancestors' wings when slavery ended. Their grandchildren and great grandchildren must look with pride upon the beauty and number of Negro churches and homes; at the growth and development of the thousands of schools and colleges for our people, many built by Negroes themselves. They must be inspired when they hear Marian Anderson, Dorothy Maynor or Roland Hayes sing, or Ralph Bunche presiding at the mediation table of two hostile nations; or Thurgood Marshall or William Hastie pleading a case before the United States Supreme Court, the highest in the land. They must smile with great satisfaction to know that William L. Dawson is a highly respected and influential member of the Congress of the United States, that Mrs. Edith Sampson can hold her own as a delegate of the United States Government to the United Nation General Assembly with representatives of any nation. They must be very happy with the efforts made by such organizations as the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and all the civic, educational

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(7) Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery. New York, 1945. p. 57

Christian, and other community organizations that have grown up to remove the barriers to full citizenship, in order that Negroes may be taken in as real participants of American democracy.

Their pride must indeed have been unbounded to have witnessed the outlawing of the white primary, segregation in inter-state travel, and the beginning of the complete removal of racial barriers in higher education in the South, and in many other phases of American life as concerns Negroes. How their pulses must beat with excitement to think of Mordecai Johnson as President of Howard University, or Charles S. Johnson at the head of Fisk and of President Alonzo G. Moron as the executive officer of Hampton Institute---places prepared for them long ago by zealous Christian patriots.

But are we satisfied? Are we as individuals doing our share or just one little thing, like exerting ourselves to register and vote or simply becoming a member of the NAACP, at the coast of only $2.00 per year, $3.50 with the Crisis, so that we may add our personal efforts to that movement started long ago by persons not even of our own race? This is as much a Christian duty as attendance at church services.

These early missionaries to the Negro people believed in our capabilities to develop to our fullest extent, if given the opportunity to do so. Much has been done, but there is so much more to be accomplished that the effort of every single person is important.

If it were possible for us to talk with Ware of Atlanta or Cravath of Fisk, with Patton of Howard, with Andrews of Talladega, with Mattor of Johnson C. Smith or Hovey and King of Virginia Union, and others too numerous to mention, what would we be able to tell them--these builders of the foundation for a whole people? Could we, each one of us, say with a clear conscience, because I appreciate so very much what you have done for me and my people, I am doing my Christian duty in extending your work?