

SOME CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE NEGRO IN AMERICA  
TO HIS OWN HISTORY

The accomplishments of a people may be measured in terms of their exposure to the main streams of culture. It is only through training and contact that groups achieve. When given opportunity, the Negro has proved he has within him the same potentialities for individual and group development as have other races. When brought into contact with modern civilization, his needs and wants become the same as those with whom his lot is cast.

Progressively, the Negro in America has moved forward with the general advancement of the American people. During slavery, his progress was slow due to the inherent nature of the slave system. With emancipation, his pace was quickened. Breaking of his bonds freed not only his body, but his mind--his body to move freely from place to place, his mind to draw from the vast reservoirs of the world's techniques and knowledge.

However, it should be pointed out that the history of the Negro in America, contrary to the belief of many people, did not begin ~~with slavery~~ on that hot day in August 1619, more than 340 years ago when a Dutch vessel brought twenty Negroes to be

*Sold*

into servitude. There were many Negroes in the Americas who never became slaves. Some of them came to the Western World as explorers, and assisted in opening it up for <sup>future</sup> settlement.

When Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean in 1513, his expedition included about thirty Negroes, who helped to clear the first highway from the Atlantic <sup>Ocean</sup> to the Pacific across what is now the Isthmus of Panama. Hernandez Cortes, the conqueror of Mexico, was accompanied into that country by ~~negroes~~ <sup>a number</sup> Negroes and one of them planted and harvested the first wheat crop in the new world. Negroes accompanied other Spanish conquistadores down into South America and were useful in helping to fight off the Indians.

included about thirty Negroes, including Nuflo de Olano, who helped to clear the first highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific across what is now the Isthmus of Panama. <sup>Hernandez</sup> Cortes, the conqueror of Mexico, was accompanied <sup>into that country</sup> by Negroes and one of them planted and harvested the first wheat crop in the new world. Negroes accompanied other Spanish conquistadores down into South America and were useful in helping to fight off the Indians.

Negroes assisted in the conquest of New Mexico. An African, Estevanico, <sup>is</sup> known as Little Stephen, connected with the earliest written history of America's Southwest. He came to the New World with a group of Spaniards who were shipwrecked on the coast of Florida. All but four of the party were drowned. These remaining four, including Estevanico, wandered for eight years among the Indians and eventually traveled as far South as Mexico City. From there, with a Catholic <sup>friend</sup> priest,

in 1539 he set out on an adventurous trek toward the North in search of ~~the cities of gold~~ of the seven cities of Cibola, fabled <sup>for</sup> cities

<sup>They</sup> of gold. But shortly after Estevanico entered the cities, <sup>treasures</sup> found <sup>this Negro explorer</sup> not to <sup>which he found</sup> be ~~fabulous~~ after all, the Indians killed him, believing him to be an <sup>not fabulous</sup> ~~imposter~~ <sup>but ordinary bones</sup> ~~imposter~~ <sup>for gold</sup> ~~imposter~~ <sup>but only a group of ordinary Indian</sup> ~~imposter~~ <sup>deceitful</sup>

imposter, when he said he was the emissary of two whitemen. Although he was murdered, Estevanico prepared the way for the conquest of the Southwest. In fact, he discovered and opened up to European settlers

what is now the rich area of Arizona. His discovery occurred eighty years before ~~the~~ that Dutch ship arrived at Jamestown and the custom of selling human beings was established in North America. ] End

While it is true that the lives of all Negroes in America for nearly 250 years were affected by slavery; and the majority of Negroes was freed without land, or money or education, ~~and~~ the history of the Negro in America has been <sup>a</sup> ~~one~~ continuous climb upward; <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ despite <sup>numerous</sup> handicaps, this group ~~has~~ contributed tremendously to American culture. ~~and~~

*it is fitting*  
During Negro History Week, ~~we like~~ to chronicle the deeds ~~and~~ *of a few* ~~and~~ *the outstanding individuals* accomplishments of such persons as Phillis Wheatley, the slave girl, who before she became twenty-one years old was famous throughout the colonies and even in England for her poems <sup>who</sup> and grew up to become one of the best known poets of her time. ] During the siege of Boston, Phillis wrote a poem about George Washington, terming him "first in peace," ~~its~~ *and part in the* closing lines: ~~and~~

"Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,  
Thy every action let the goddess guide.  
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,  
With gold unfading, Washington! ~~be~~ be thine."

This group of ~~Negro~~ Negroes may be said to have set the ~~pace~~ the pace for the accomplishments of ~~the Negro~~ <sup>this race</sup> in the New World every since .

<sup>First,</sup> let us examine some of the records of the achievements of the Negro in education. The acquisition of literacy in the general Negro population has been phenomenal. Of an estimated 4,441, 830 freedmen at the end of the Civil War, less than five per cent could read and write; that is, 4,219,739 were illiterate. ~~In 1900, thirty-five years later, 55.5 per cent could read and write or 4,902 out of a total of 8,833,994. The percentage had risen in 1910 to 65.5 per cent out of a total of 9,828,294.~~ In 1950, something less than ten per cent out of a total Negro population of 14,894,000 <sup>did</sup> ~~does~~ not have knowledge of the fundamental educational tools, reading and writing. With the 1960 census, it is expected that ~~the~~ illiteracy among Negroes will have dropped much lower. In fact, illiteracy has all but disappeared among Negroes between the ages of 14 and 24.

Some idea of the effectiveness of the Negro's education in the higher branches of learning may be seen when we consider that back in 1912 no Negroes were listed ~~in them~~ as teaching in white universities and colleges in this country. Between 1940 and 1950, there were over 148 teaching in as many as 78 such colleges in 13 states, with

some holding full professorships. Today, it is a common thing for Negroes to become teachers in the large universities; and even in the South, there ~~is a~~ Negro with a full professorship teaching at the University of Kentucky.

*are hundreds of Negro students in white Univ. and Univ.*

During the sixty-year period 1876-1936, the Doctor of Philosophy degree had been conferred on approximately 132 Negroes. In the period 1937-1950 approximately 350 persons had received this degree. In fact, the conferring of this highest degree upon Negroes is becoming so usual that where formerly it was not too difficult to record them with some degree of accuracy, it is now becoming more and more difficult to do so.

#### Unyi Contributions to His Own History.

Until about the early 1900, the history, progress and achievements of the Negro were just so many bits of scattered information which few American scholars thought significant enough to collect and place @@@@ in the books containing the history of the American people. With the attainment of education, the Negro himself began to study this neglected phase of American history, so that at the present time an over-all view of the Negro's history and accomplishments through all the years may be obtained from the general works of leading Negro

educators, historians and ~~and~~ sociologist and from ~~white~~ <sup>other</sup> scholars who have recently ~~been~~ published works in this field.

Thus if all the books, reports, pamphlets, brochures and other writings on all subjects could be counted and shelved from the issuance in 1773 of that first volume of poems by Phillis Wheatley, the slave girl, to the most recent scholarly publications by Negroes their number would run into many thousands and few if any field would be neglected.

If time permitted I would like to review the accomplishments of Negroes in the many specific fields of American endeavors all through the years--in art, business, government and diplomacy, labor, law, literature, medicine, music, politics, the press, religion science, sports, social sciences, social welfare, the theatre and others too numerous to mention. This I cannot do. But I do wish to pay tribute to the contributions ~~of the thousands~~ have made within these areas, led by many individuals but especially <sup>by a few</sup> ~~by three~~ persons which tower above all others.

We are proud of a man like Richard Allen, founder of the First African Methodist Church, who purchased his own freedom at the age of twenty-six, became one of Negro America's first great ministers,

and the forerunner of most of the outstanding Negro denominations in America today. Becoming, the first Bishop of ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> church which he ~~founded~~, long before his death, Allen was recognized as one of the most distinguished citizens of Philadelphia. ~~This~~ <sup>The</sup> denomination which he established now has well over a million members, owns hundreds of beautiful churches, has established a number of accredited colleges, controls a ~~great~~ <sup>large</sup> publishing house, and is a national force, <sup>for good</sup> like all of the other denominations, throughout America and even abroad where its missionaries have gone as teachers and preachers.



It is also appropriate also that that great fighter for freedom, Frederick Douglass, also born a slave in the back woods of Maryland should be remembered on an occasion such as this. From the age of twenty-four until his death, Douglass spoke and wrote through his paper, the North Star on behalf of the welfare of the Negro in America. He often said, the only school from which he graduated was the school of slavery. His diploma was the scars upon his back. He had about him a wit and wisdom that many a better educated person did not possess. His speeches moved thousands to action on behalf of freeing the slaves. As a writer, he left behind him his Life and Times, an autobiography that is an American classic. His simple but effective use of words <sup>other</sup> ~~was~~ more useful to his cause than any ~~other~~ means he could have used.

Douglass spoke on platforms with many of the distinguished men and women of his times--Wendell Phillips, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charles Sumner and Lucretia Mott. He counselled with President Lincoln and recruited troops for the Union Army. More than two hundred thousand Negro soldiers fought in the/W

War for Freedom and the preservation of the Union. Many were inspired to do so by the brilliant speeches of Frederick Douglass. When the war was over he became one of the leaders of the Republican Party, was a United States Marchall, became Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia, was confirmed as United States Minister to the Republic Haiti and was active in most of the movements for social betterment including the right of women for the ballot equally with men.

The year Frederick Douglass died, was the year Booker T. Washington made his famous Atlanta Exposition address-- in 1895. This was the occasion which elevated Tuskegee Institute's founder to unquestioned leadership in the matter of Negro-white relations in the United States. But before that occasion, Booker T. Washington, born on a Virginia plantation, about eight years before the Civil War began, had worked in the West Virginia salt mines as well as in the coal mines of the same state, had found his way to Hampton Institute, passed his entrance examination by showing how well he could sweep floors and dust furniture and had been graduated from that institution with a good education and the

bricklayers' trade. To those of us who live within the shadow of Tuskegee Institute, the brain-child of Booker T. Washington, it would be <sup>almost</sup> superfluous for me to tell you what Tuskegee Institute stands for, <sup>but</sup> This was a barren land when the twenty-five year old Washington came to Macon County in 1881. This great hospital, of course, was not here. The thriving communities which surround the school and the hospital were non-existent. And of course, the schools, the churches, the homes, the shops and all of the other community activities may well be said to have stemmed from the endeavors which Booker T. Washington began in this area, just then emerging from the aftermath of Civil War and the period of Reconstruction.

Booker Washington became internationally famous, knew well the outstanding personalities of his day, among whom were presidents of the United States and the Queen of England. But he never lost the common touch. No leader before Booker Washington's time <sup>or</sup> ~~nor~~ since had <sup>A</sup> had the influence which this leader possessed. Many honors came to his, but one of the

highest was his election to the New York University Hall of Fame for great Americans, the only Negro so honored.

But I doubt whether this means any more to America than the Keck monument that stands in the middle of the campus of the institution that he founded. Surely Booker T. Washington as symbolized by this monument, presented by the Negro people of the United States, helped to unveil ~~the~~ ignorance from the minds of uneducated people.

I would like to also to pay especial to George Washington Carver, the Agricultural ~~Chemist~~ scientist whom Booker Washington, brought to Tuskegee Institute and where the influence of his presence still remains; and to W. E. B. DuBois, that intellectual giant among Negroes in America and to all of the valient men and women in the forefront of American life adding to the already glorious history of our people. But I must stop here to place emphasis on and to express appreciation for the great mass of Negroes, the nameless millions who under their leaders have sought to make a place for themselves and for their race in America.

First I would like to pay tributed to all of the unnamed

and unknown persons who supported the anti-slavery movement as well as the abolition movement which led to the freeing of the slaves; then I would like to pay homage to all of the brave Negro soldiers who fought in defense of their country from its earliest period down through the Korean War and even now are defending democracy in far away places.

Then I would like to mention the great masses of ordinary people who supported and still support the Negro churches building up a membership of more than 5 million communicants @@@@ erecting churches that number between 35 and 50 thousand and property valued ~~at more than \$200,000,000.~~ *into the multi-millions*

This is a time for us to ~~pay~~ express gratitude to the groups who have made possible an estimated 53 life insurance companies among Negro people with insurance in force of more than a billion dollars. To the supporters of the 102 or more credit unions, the 14 banks and ~~the~~ *other* businesses *to* *the* *business growth* *of the* *who* *made* *positive* *the* *es* of all kinds.

And last of all, @@@@ but not least, for no tribute is too great for Negro organizations, ~~generally~~ to all of the religious, social, political and economic groups working ~~for~~ *to continue the Negro's progress.*

~~of Negro life and history started in 1915 under Carter G. Woodson~~

Negro History Week, started by Carter G. Woodson, was conceived  
 as a period in which the contributions of the Negro to the development  
 of civilization would be sufficiently emphasized to impress Negroes  
 as well as whites, American life would indeed ~~have~~ suffered  
 a loss without this movement as well as <sup>without</sup> the Association for the  
 Study of Negro Life and History, <sup>which Woodson also founded,</sup> ~~as~~ a medium through which Negro  
 as well as white scholars might chronicle the achievements of  
~~the~~ America's largest minority group.

~~Certainly no paper would be complete without mentioning  
 the NAACP and all of the civil groups which are supported by  
 Negroes as well as others, which the desegregation movement. It  
 has been effectively assisted by numerous other groups in various  
 parts of the country, all pledged to work for the abolition of all  
 forced segregation, for equal education, for Negro as well as white  
 children, the complete enfranchisement of the Negro and the enforce-  
 ment of the 15th Amendments.- In, fact for full citizenship.~~