

What Co-Operation Can Accomplish

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BY BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

THE Negro Organization Society is so unique and at the same time so practical in its objects and results that it commands the respect, confidence, and support of all the best people of both races throughout Virginia. Not the least important part of the work of this society consists in teaching colored people to work together; and in showing them that they can accomplish more through union than through dissension. It is not only teaching our race to co-operate, but it is furnishing an object lesson in showing how white people can help black people; how we can be and are separate in strictly social matters, but one in all that concerns the fundamental things of life in the South.

The Negro Organization Society of Virginia is showing us that in the great big fundamental things of life, there is no one who can help us except ourselves, that no law of Congress or of the state legislature can help us as much, in the last analysis, as we can help ourselves. There are things that we can do, and the things that we can do are being emphasized through this practical and far-reaching organization, which is bringing religious denominations, educational movements, secret and fraternal organizations, business leagues, and civic organizations together for the purpose of seeing that throughout the State of Virginia better educational facilities are provided, better sanitary and moral conditions brought about, crime reduced, and friendly relations between the two races maintained.

Another thing that the Negro Organization Society is teaching is that we have advantages right here in the South in the way of soil and climate and white people who understand us and whom we understand, which are not accorded to any similar group of our people anywhere in the world. True, we sometimes have evidence of racial friction, but when we consider the large number of black people and the large number of white people scattered over an immense territory, such as we have in the South, the wonder is that there is not more racial friction instead of less. We must remember, too, that when a large territory is

occupied by people who are white, that they sometimes have trouble. This is manifest in what is now going on in Europe.

The mere fact that the Negro race is in the South in large numbers does not mean that we can always remain here in our present state of prosperity unless we prove to the people in every community where we live that we can get as much out of the soil, and as much out of the natural resources of the community, as any other race can. This places upon us a tremendous obligation.

The great bulk of our people are going to live, in my opinion, here in the South, where they are better off in proportion to their numbers than anywhere else in the world. We are going to live here because we do not want to leave and because the white man does not want us to leave.

I am glad that this organization is emphasizing the matter of health, the matter of cleanliness, the matter of better sanitary conditions throughout Virginia. In this work for better health both races can co-operate. When food is being prepared, the Negro touches the white man's life; when food is being served, the Negro woman touches the the white man's life; when children are being nursed, the Negro woman touches the white man's life; when clothes are being

laundered, the Negro woman touches the white man's life. It is mighty important, in the interest of our race as well as in the interest of the white race, that the Negro woman be taught cleanliness and the laws of health. Disease draws no color line.

If by reason of filth and unsanitary conditions in Norfolk, growing out of ignorance, there comes to the black community, consumption, smallpox, or any other contagious disease, it is likely to reach, through the Negro community, the mansion of the richest white person in the city. In Alabama, a few years ago, an ignorant Negro woman was employed as cook in an aristocratic white college for girls. Little attention was given to the health or cleanliness of this colored woman. Little attention was given to the place where she slept or the way she lived. In the end a deadly contagious disease took hold of her body and from her spread among the white girls in the college. The result was that four of the most promising of these white girls were taken away by death and the college was disbanded for the year.

The entire South is dependent upon the Negro, in a large measure, for certain kinds of work. A weak body, a sickly body, is costly to the whole community and to the whole state, from an economic point of view. The average length of a Negro's life in the South is at present thirty-five years. It should be fifty years, and the Negro Organization Society of Virginia can prolong the life of the average Negro working man to fifty years. In

India, the average length of life is twenty-five years; in Massachusetts, where they have good public schools, it is forty-five years; in Denmark and Sweden, fifty years.

In the City of Norfolk there are practically 35,000 black people. Statistics show that 1800 of these people are sick all the time: \$65,000 are spent every year in Norfolk for Negro funerals alone. All this, in the way of sickness and death, means a net loss to the City of Norfolk of at least \$1,370,000. In the State of Virginia, statistics show that there are 41,000 black people who are sick all the time. This means a net loss to the white and black people of Virginia in the way of earning power of at least \$23,000,000.

There are 450,000 Negroes sick in the South every day in the year. The average black man loses 18 working days in the year because of sickness. The sickness and death of so large a proportion of its population means an annual loss to the South of over \$300,000,000. At least \$150,000,000 of this amount could be saved by taking measures to prevent disease by the simple precautions which the Negro Organization Society in every way emphasizes. This \$150,000,000, saved, would furnish six months of schooling for every white and black child in the South and, besides, would build good schoolhouses for every child in the South.

Through this organization, the Negro can do his part in ridding the state of the idle and loafing class. We must let our people everywhere understand that we will not hide crime, that the black loafer is a great burden, and that he gives our race a reputation which hinders its progress. Our white people, too, can help us in this matter of better moral conditions by encouraging the colored people who live upright, industrious, economical, and frugal lives by not advertising Negro crime quite so much in the newspapers, and by advertising, instead, more evidences of Negro thrift and Negro morality. While we are trying to do our part in bringing about a higher moral condition, the white people can help us by seeing that the Negro everywhere gets absolute justice in the courts, that throughout the South we get rid of the crime of lynching human beings, and that every man charged with a crime has an opportunity to come before a court of justice where his guilt or innocence can be proved.

The two races in Virginia can co-operate in encouraging the Negro wherever he lives to have a clean, sanitary, healthy community. I do not believe that this can be brought about by any laws meant to segregate the Negro in any certain part of a community or city. Wherever the Negro is segregated it usually means that he will have poor streets, poor lighting, poor sidewalks, poor sewerage, and poor sanitary conditions generally. These conditions are reflected in many ways in the life of the race to its disadvantage and to the disadvantage of the white race. Happily the Negro here in the South has pretty good common sense and he is not likely to thrust himself on any community where conditions are not congenial, where he is not happy, and where he is not wanted. Segregation is not only unnecessary, but, in most cases, it is unjust.

I am glad to note that in Virginia, as in most of the states of the South, there is a spirit of co-operation between the two races, which has never existed before in like degree, in helping our race to get education. For a good many years after the civil war white people were afraid to educate the Negro because they did not know what it was going to lead to, but just in proportion as the white people throughout the South see that education is used by our people in a way to make them simple, modest, earnest, never afraid to work on the farm, or in the shop, or in the house; in proportion as they see that education makes a better citizen, millions of dollars are going to be poured out throughout the South for the education of our race.

We must not deceive ourselves, however. The problem of educating the Negro, as well as the white child in the South, is just beginning to be solved. We have scarcely begun to educate. In the State of Louisiana, at the present time, each black child receives \$1.59 a year for his education; in Georgia, only \$1.42. Fifty-two per cent of all the Negro children in the South of school age entered no school last year. By reason of the poor salaries paid teachers and the short length of the school term, it would require 20 years for a Negro child, under present conditions, to complete a public-school education. In several of our Southern states, first-class Negro convicts earn \$40 per month for 12 months in the year, while Negro school-teachers receive about \$25 per month for teaching 4 or 5 months in the year. All of these conditions must be faced frankly in the interest of both races, in the interest of a higher and better civilization in the South. In proportion as we face them, both races are going to be happier and more prosperous. Ignorance cures nothing. We must all unite to blot out ignorance from the South by placing good, first-class schoolhouses for both races in every community in our beloved and beautiful Southland.

We must not become discouraged. Tremendous progress, in all the directions to which I have referred, has been made and is being made. When we consider all the struggles, all the difficulties through which both races have passed during the last fifty years, the wonder is, not that we have accomplished so little, but that we have accomplished so much. Both races are going to

live here in the South together. Year by year we are going to understand each other better. There is going to be more racial co-operation, more friendship, more peace, more harmony, more prosperity. Despite evidences of racial friction which crop out here and there, when you get to the bottom of conditions in any Southern community it is found that each individual Negro has his or her white friend; and each white man has his individual Negro friend. The relations which exist between the individual Negro and the individual white man are often closer and better understood and more sympathetic than those obtaining in any community

outside of the South. In the matter of facing the trying conditions in the cotton-growing states brought about by the European War, there is a racial co-operation and sympathy which I have never seen before in the South.

Our race is improving in the matter of health. Some ten or fifteen years ago the death rate was about thirty per thousand; at the present time, through such organizations as the Negro Organization Society and others, the death rate has been decreased. It is now from twenty-four to twenty per thousand.

The Negro began life fifty years ago with practically no property. He owns now in the South 20,000,000 acres of land. Fifty years ago only 5 per cent of the Negroes could read or write. At present 70 per cent can read and write. Twenty years ago, there were in one year 250 cases of lynching; during the past ten months, there have been only 33 cases of lynching. This reduction has been brought about through racial co-operation and a better understanding. For these evidences of progress our race deserves great credit: and the white man by whose side we live in the South deserves equal credit for the encouragement and the practical help which he has given us in all these fundamental matters.

We of the black race and the white race here in the South are going to present to the world a great object lesson, showing how two races, different in history, different in color, can live side by side on the same soil in peace and in harmony, neither hindering the other but each helping the other towards a higher and more useful civilization.

1 Excerpts from an address before the Negro Organization Society in Norfolk, Virginia, November 12, 1914