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MICROFILMED

INDUSTRIAL TRAINING

For The NEGRO

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By

Booker T. Washington

Principal Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute Tuskegee Institute, Alabama

Reprinted from New York Independent

### Industrial Training for the Negro

Since the war no one object has been more misunderstood than that of the object and value of industrial education for the Negro. To begin with, it must be borne in mind that the condition that existed in the South immediately after the war, and that now exists, is a peculiar one, without a parallel in history. This being true, it seems to me that the wise and honest thing is to make a study of the actual condition and environment of the Negro, and do that which is best for him, regardless of whether the same thing has been done for another race in exactly the same way. There are those among our friends of the white race, and those among my own race, who assert with a good deal of earnestness, that there is no difference between the white man and the black man in this country. This sounds very pleasant and tickles the fancy, but when we apply the test of hard, cold logic to it, we must acknowledge that there is a difference; not an inherent one, not a racial one, but a difference growing out of unequal opportunities in the past.

If I might be permitted to even seem to criticise some of the educational work that has been done in the South, I would say that the weak point has been in a failure to recognize this difference.

Negro education, immediately after the war, in most cases, was begun too nearly at the point where New England education had ended. Let me illustrate: One of the saddest sights I ever saw was the placing of a \$300 rosewood piano in a country school in the South that was located in the midst of the "Black Belt." Am I arguing against the teaching of instrumental music to the Negroes in that community? Not at all; only I should have deferred those music lessons about twenty-five years. There are numbers of such pianos in thousands of New England homes, but behind the piano in the New England home, there were one hundred years of toil, sacrifice and economy; there was the small manufacturing industry, started several years ago by hand power, now grown into a great business; there was the ownership in land, a comfortable home free from debt, and a bank account. In this "Black Belt" community where this piano went, four-fifths of the people owned no land, many lived in rented one-room cabins, many were in debt for food supplies, many mortgaged their crops for food on which to live, and not one had a bank account. In this case how much wiser it would have been to have taught the

girls in this community how to do their own sewing, how to cook intelligently and economically, housekeeping, something of dairying and horticulture; the boys something of farming in connection with their common school education, instead of awakening in these people a desire for a musical instrument, which resulted in their parents going in debt for a third-rate piano or organ before a home was purchased. These industrial lessons should have awakened in this community a desire for homes, and would have given the people the ability to free themselves from industrial slavery, to the extent that most of them would soon have purchased homes. After the home and the necessaries of life were supplied, could come the piano -one piano lesson in a home is worth twenty in a rented log cabin.

Only a few days ago I saw a colored minister preparing his Sunday sermon just as the New England minister prepares his sermon. But this colored minister was in a broken-down, leaky, rented log cabin, with weeds in the yard, surrounded by evidences of poverty, filth and want of thrift. This minister had spent some time in school studying theology. How much better would it have been to have had this minister taught the dignity of labor, theoretical and practical farming in connection with his theology, so that he could have added to his meagre salary, and set an example to his people in the matter of living in a decent house and correct farming -in a word, this minister should have been taught that his condition, and that of his people, was not that of a New England community, and he should have been so trained as to meet the actual needs and condition of the colored people in this community.

God, for 250 years, was preparing the way for the redemption of the Negro through industrial development. First, He made the Southern white man do business with the Negro for 250 years in a way that no one else has done business with him. If a Southern white man wanted a house or a bridge built, he consulted a Negro mechanic about the plan, about the building of the house or the bridge. If he wanted a suit of clothes or a pair of shoes made, it was the Negro tailor or shoemaker that he talked to. Secondly, every large slave plantation in the South was in a limited sense an industrial school. On these plantations there were scores of young colored men and women who were constantly being trained, not alone as common farmers, but as carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, plasterers, brickmasons, engineers, bridgebuilders, cooks, dressmakers, housekeepers, etc., more in one country than now in the whole city of Atlanta. I would be the last to apologize for the curse of slavery, but I am simply stating facts. This training was crude and was given for selfish purposes, and did not answer the highest purpose, because there

was an absence of literary training in connection with that of the hand. Nevertheless, this business contact with the Southern white man and the industrial training received on these plantations, put us at the close of the war in possession of all the common and skilled labor in the South. For nearly twenty years after the war, except in one or two cases, the value of the industrial training given by the Negro's former masters on the plantation and elsewhere, was overlooked. Negro men and women were educated in literature, mathematics, and the sciences, with no thought of what had taken place on these plantations for two and a half centuries. After twenty years, those who were trained as mechanics, etc., during slavery, began to disappear by death, and gradually we awoke to the fact that we had no one to take their places. We had trained scores of young men in Greek, but few in carpentry, or mechanical or architectural drawing; we had trained many in Latin, but almost none as engineers, bridge-builders and machinists. Numbers were taken from the farm and educated, but were educated in everything except agriculture; hence, they had no sympathy with farm life and did not return to it.

The place made vacant by old "Uncle Jim," who was trained as a carpenter during slavery, and who, since the war, had been the leading contractor and builder in the Southern town, had to be filled. No young colored carpenter capable of filling Uncle Jim's place could be found. The result was that his place was filled by a white mechanic from the North, or from Europe or from else-where. What is true of carpentry and house-building in this case, is true, in a degree, of every line of skilled labor, and is becoming true of common labor. I do not mean to say that all of the skilled labor has been taken out of the Negro's hands, but I do mean to say that in no part of the South is he so strong in the matter of skilled labor as he was twenty years ago, except, possibly, in the country districts and the smaller towns. In the more Northern of the Southern cities, such as Richmond and Baltimore, the change is most apparent, and it is being felt in every Southern city. Wherever the Negro has lost ground industrially in the South, it is not because there is a prejudice against him as a skilled laborer on the part of the native Southern white man, for the Southern white man generally prefers to do business with the Negro mechanic rather than with the white one; for he accustomed to doing business with the Negro in this respect. There is almost no prejudice against the Negro in the South in matters of business, so far as the native whites are concerned, and here is the entering wedge for the solution of the race problem. Where the white mechanic or the factory operative gets a hold, the trades union soon follows and the Negro is crowded to the wall.

But what is the remedy for this condition? First, it is most important that the Negro and our white friends honestly face the facts as they are; otherwise the time will not be far distant when the Negro in the South will be crowded to the ragged edge of industrial life, as he is in the North. There is still time to repair the damage and to reclaim what we have lost.

I stated in the beginning that the industrial education for the Negro had been misunderstood. This has been chiefly because some have gotten the idea that industrial development was opposed to the Negro's higher mental development. This has little or nothing to do with the subject under discussion; and we should no longer permit such an idea to aid in depriving the Negro of the legacy in the form of skilled labor, that was purchased by his forefathers at the price of 250 years in slavery. I would say to the black boy what I would say to the white boy: get all the mental development that your time and pocketbook will afford -the more the better; but the time has come when a larger proportion, not all, for we need professional men and women, of the educated colored men and women, should give themselves to industrial or business life. The professional class will be helped in proportion as the rank and file have an industrial foundation so that they can pay for professional services. Whether they receive the training of the hand while pursuing their academic training or after their academic training is finished, or whether they will get their literary training in an industrial school or college, is a question which each individual must decide for himself; but no matter how or where educated, the educated men and women must come to the rescue of the race in the effort to get and hold its industrial footing. I would not have the standard of mental development lowered one whit; for with the Negro, as with all races, mental strength is the basis of all progress; but I would have a larger proportion of this mental strength reach the Negro's actual needs through the medium of the hand. Just now the need is not so much for common carpenters, brickmasons, farmers and laundry-women, as for industrial leaders; men who, in addition to their practical knowledge, can draw plans, make estimates, take contracts; those who understand the latest methods of truck-gardening and the science underlying practical agriculture; those who understand machinery to the extent that they can operate steam and electric laundries, so that our women can hold on to the laundry work in the South, that is so fast drifting into the hands of others in the large cities and towns.

It is possible for a race or an individual to have mental development and yet be so handicapped by custom, prejudice and lack of employment, as to dwarf and discourage the whole life, and this is the condition that prevails among my race in most of the large cities of the North, and it is to prevent this same condition in the South that I plead with all the earnestness of my heart. Mental development alone will not give us what we want, but mental development tied to hand and heart training, will be the salvation of the Negro.

In many respects, the next twenty years are going to be the most serious in the history of the race. Within this period it will be largely decided whether the Negro is going to be able to retain the hold which he now has upon the industries of the South, or whether his place will be filled by white people from a distance. The only way that we can prevent the industries slipping from the Negro in all parts of the South, as they have already in certain parts of the South, is for all the educators, ministers, and friends of the Negro to unite to push forward, in a whole-souled manner, the industrial or business development of the Negro, either in school or out of school, or both. Four times as many young men and women of my race should be receiving industrial training. Just now the Negro is in a position to feel and appreciate the need of this in a way that no one else can. No one can fully appreciate what I am saying who has not walked the streets of a Northern city day after day, seeking employment, only to find every door closed against him on account of his color, except along certain lines of menial service. It is to prevent the same thing taking place in the South that I plead. We may argue that mental development will take care of this. Mental development is a good thing. Gold is also a good thing, but gold is worthless without opportunity to make it touch the world of trade. Education increases an individual's wants many fold. It is cruel in many cases to increase the wants of the black youth by mental development alone, without at the same time increasing his ability to supply these increased wants along the lines at which he can find employment. I repeat that the value and object of industrial education have been misunderstood by many. Many have had the thought that industrial training was meant to make the Negro work, much as he worked during the days of slavery. This is far from my idea of it. If this training has any value for the Negro, as it has for the white man, it consists in teaching the Negro how rather not to work, but how to make the forces of nature -air, water, horse power, steam and electric power work for him, how to lift labor up out of toil and drudgery, into that which is dignified and beautiful. The Negro in the South works, and works hard; but his lack of skill, coupled with ignorance, causes him to do his work in the most costly and shiftless manner, and this keeps him near the bottom of the ladder in the business world. I repeat that industrial education

teaches the Negro how not to work. Let him who doubts this, contrast the Negro in the South, toiling through a field of oats with an old-fashioned reaper, with the white man on a modern farm in the West, sitting upon a modern "harvester" behind two spirited horses, with an umbrella over him, using a machine that cuts and binds the oats at the same time -doing four times as much work as the black man with one-half the labor. Let us give the black man so much skill and brains that he can cut oats like the white man, then he can compete with him. The Negro works in cotton, and has no trouble so long as his labor is confined to the lower forms of work -the planting, the picking and the ginning; but when the Negro attempts to follow the bale of cotton up through the higher stages, through the mill where it is made into the finer fabrics, where the larger profit appears, he is told that he is not wanted. The Negro can work in wood and iron, and no one objects, so long as he confines his work to the felling of trees and the sawing of boards, to the digging of iron ore and the making of pig iron; but when the Negro attempts to follow his tree into the factory, where it is made into chairs and desks

and railway coaches, or when he attempts to follow the pig iron into the factory, where it is made into knife blades and watch springs, the Negro trouble begins. And what is the objection? Simply that the Negro lacks skill, coupled with brains, to the extent that he can compete with the white man, or that when white men refuse to work with colored men, enough skilled and educated colored men can not be found able to superintend and manage every part of any large industry, and hence, for these reasons, we are constantly being barred out. The Negro must become in a larger measure, an intelligent producer, as well as consumer. There should be more vital connection between the Negro's educated brain and his opportunity of earning his daily living. Without more attention being given to industrial development, we are likely to have an over-production of educated politicians -men who are bent on living by their wits. As we get farther away from the war period, the Negro will not find himself held to the Republican party by feelings of gratitude. He will feel himself free to vote for any party; and we are in danger of having the vote or "influence" of a large proportion of the educated black men in the market for the highest bidder, unless attention is given to the education of the hand, or to industrial development.

A very weak argument often used against pushing industrial training for the Negro, is that the Southern white man favors it and, therefore, it is not best for the Negro. Although I was born a slave, I am thankful that I am able to so far rid myself of prejudice as to be able to accept a good thing, whether it comes from

a black man or from a white man, a Southern man or a Northern man. Industrial education will not only help the Negro directly in the matter of industrial development, but it will help in bringing about more satisfactory relations between him and the Southern white man. For the sake of the Negro and the Southern white man, there are many things in the relations of the two races that must soon be changed. We cannot depend wholly upon abuse or condemnation of the Southern white man to bring about these changes. Each race must be educated to see matters in a broad, high, generous, Christian spirit; we must bring the two races together, not estrange them. The Negro must live for all time by the side of the Southern white man. The man is unwise who does not cultivate in every manly way the friendship and good will of his next door neighbor, whether he is black or white. I repeat that industrial training will help cement the friendship of the two races. The history of the world proves that trade, commerce, is the forerunner of peace and civilization as between races and nations. We are interested in the political welfare of Cuba and the Sandwich Islands, because we have business interests with these islands. The Jew, who was once in about the same position that the Negro is to-day, has now complete recognition, because he has entwined himself about America in a business or industrial sense. Say or think what we will, it is the tangible or visible element that is going to tell largely during the next twenty years in the solution of the race problem. Every white man will respect the Negro who owns a two-story brick business block in the center of town and has \$5,000 in the bank. When a black man is the largest taxpayer and owns and cultivates the most successful farm in his county, his white neighbors will not object very long to his voting and to having his vote honestly counted. The black man, who is the largest contractor in his town and lives in a two-story brick house, is is not very liable to be lynched. The black man that holds a mortgage on a white man's house, which he can foreclose at will, is not likely to be driven away from the ballot-box by the white man.

I know that what I have said will likely suggest the idea that I have put stress upon the lower things of life -the material; that I have overlooked the higher side, the ethical and religious. I do not overlook nor undervalue the higher. All that I advocate in this article is not as an end, but

as a means. I know as a race, we have got to be patient in the laying of a firm foundation; that our tendency is too often to get the shadow instead of the substance, the appearance rather than the reality. I believe, further, that in a large measure, he who would make the statesmen, the men of letters, the men for the professions for

the Negro race of the future, must, to-day, in a large measure, make the intelligent artisans, the manufacturers, the contractors, the real estate dealers, the land-owners, the successful farmers, the merchants, those skilled in domestic economy. Further, I know that it is not an easy thing to make a good Christian of a hungry man. I mean that just in proportion as the race gets a proper industrial foundation -gets habits of industry, thrift, economy, land, homes, profitable work, in the same proportion will its moral and religious life be improved. I have written with a heart full of gratitude to all religious organizations and individuals for what they have done for us as a race, and I speak as plainly as I do because I feel that I have had opportunity, in a measure, to come face to face with the enormous amount of work that must still be done by the generous men and women of this country before there will be in reality, as well as in name, high Christian civilization among both races in the South.

To accomplish this, every agency now at work in the South needs reinforcement.