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Title: The Educated Negro and His Mission

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Release Date: February 11, 2010 [EBook #31255]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Suzanne Shell, Stephanie Eason, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>.

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE EDUCATED NEGRO AND HIS MISSION ***

The American Negro Academy.

OCCASIONAL PAPERS NO. 8.

The Educated Negro and His Mission.

By W. S. SCARBOROUGH.

PRICE FIFTEEN CENTS.

WASHINGTON, D. C.:
Published by the Academy,
1903

The Educated Negro and His Mission.

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HUMAN thought is like a pendulum. It sways from belief to belief, from theory to theory, from plan to plan, and the length of its vibrations is governed by a multitude of contending forces operating from both within and without. Two of these influences, in the present age, are all potential. One is the ardent desire to find the best ways and means by which the human race may hasten on its varied development, and the other is the strenuous determination to discover what may be styled the "Northwest" passage to that coveted result.

The consequence is that, in this determined reach for all that humanity craves for itself and for its civilization, the oscillations of thought and endeavor are oftentimes marked by notable extremes. Especially has this been true in lines of education. Again and again has it been sought to wheel the educational car upon new tracks where exaggerated views, revolutionary ideas, radical methods have caused the eyes of the world to be focused upon

the attempt, and no movement within the arc that the world's opinions have traversed has been unnoticed.

These changing sentiments in regard to education have been most noticeable in their bearing upon the Negro race. It is conceded that material tendencies are characteristic of the present age. Romance, sentiment, idealism in life and letters, struggle as they may, are swept aside by the vigorous commercialism that has taken possession of the nation at large. Meat has become more than life and raiment more than body. One question is being intensely pressed forward—*how to learn a living?* and the swing of the pendulum concerning the Negro's education has swept a degree beyond any heretofore measured.

That manual training is needful no one will deny for a moment; that some of all races must inevitably be sons of toil is readily admitted; and that such education has its share in the development of every race there is no contention. We all know that Learning and Labor traveled hand in hand, with the emphasis upon the former, when the Anglo Saxon first wrestled with the wilderness of America. We know too that when the desert wastes were changed to smiling plains the ways of the two drifted apart, and learning took the path for culture and high scholarship, untrammelled, while labor plodded on, gaining slowly comparative ease in its varied lines. It is only when limitation is placed upon a race that objection comes—when one race is selected for more than a fair share of experimentation in the exploitation of a theory. Then danger seems imminent. In this case the danger lies in the tendency to lose sight of Negro scholarship—of Negro higher learning. There are other questions of equal importance to that of how to earn a living, and that college president who expressed it in these words "How to live on what one earns—how to live higher lives," understood well their relative worth when pre-eminence was claimed for the latter, and pointed to a fact too largely ignored—that the lessons which teach these last mentioned come from a different training from that represented by industrial training alone.

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We repeat that the suggestions bearing upon the education of the Negro race have caused too decided a swing of the pendulum in many quarters and higher education is in danger of being swallowed up, if not to a great extent abandoned, in the extreme importance attached to that other education we denominate as Industrial.

The error arises in confounding race with the individual, which is not only radically unphilosophic, but morally wrong. The recognition of individual limitation is right and proper, and it is the individual that must be considered. As Dr. Ward has pertinently observed, "To the man who wants to lift a mass of people out of lower into higher conditions they are people, individual people, not races," and he adds further with just emphasis, "When it comes to nurture and education they are to be considered as individuals, each to be lifted up and their children surrounded by a superior environment." Now, this cannot be done if limitations are set which must by the very nature of things press heavily upon the individual. The race must be left free as air to take in higher learning.

Still, it is true that with a general change in ideas as to education—its use and end—higher education, pure scholarship, has everywhere been placed upon the defensive. President Hadley has felt compelled to say that it must be prepared to prove its usefulness. This being true, so much the more must Negro scholarship be prepared to prove its right to continuance, to support and to freedom of choice.

The educated Negro is an absolute fact. The day is past when his ability to learn is scoffed at. But on the other hand is born that fear that he may go too far—excel or equal the Anglo-Saxon,—and that fear is a prime motive in the minds of many who seek to hedge the onward path of the race. But this path will not be hedged. This educated class, though few in number, has been keeping for years the torch aloft for the race. It must be with us for the future. It has a mission in the world and it is working in a brave endeavor to fulfill that mission. For the good of the whole country this class must multiply, not decrease in number.

There are no two definitions of a scholar to be applied to different races. The Negro scholar must be the same as any other—endowed as Milton would have him "with that complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." And he should have, in order to meet this requirement, what Emerson has emphasised as necessary—"the knowledge that comes from three great fields—from nature, from books and from action."

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The Negro like any other scholar is not the man who has simply been through college, but the one "through whom the college has been"—the one who has not only gathered from contact with college life varied stores of knowledge, but who has grown in strength of character and breadth of culture; one who has become imbued with the spirit of high ideals; one who does not scorn the old-fashioned virtues of truth, honesty and virtue; one who has views crystalized into definite aims; one who has a settled purpose in life; one who is strenuously determined to realize a worthy ambition; one who has both microscopic and telescopic capacity, able to look into the minutest details and sweep a broad range with clear vision; and one (slightly changing a potent phrase) whose "reach upward is ever exceeding his grasp." Added to this the Negro scholar above all must be one who makes himself a reforming force for the world's betterment. Here is the Negro's opportunity—to combine in himself those characteristics Mr. Austin mentioned not long ago—the purely scholarly qualities of the German, the statesmanlike qualities of the English and then to be a *propagandist*.

The Negro who is an educated man must be a practical man, and zealous in getting to work to show that thinking and doing go together. If the world needs such men from the white race, so much the more are educated Negroes needed. Educated men are the ones to take a place in affairs, national and municipal, aiding to solve great problems, cure great evils and guide the destinies of a people. What else can it mean when we see such a scholar as President Seth Low step from the administration of college affairs to the administration of the affairs of a great city in a righteous endeavor to help cleanse a corrupt government? Again, President Roosevelt takes up the reins for the entire nation after active service in literature, in camp, on field and in the executive chair of a great state. Still again we instance Dr. Gladden who has shown in the west what a scholar's service may and should be to his city, when he chose to sit in its council. These examples can be multiplied many times to show that the educated man has taken for his motto that highest one—"Ich dien"—I serve—a service by leading and made both necessary and fitting by attainments and worth.

This idea of service to the race is peculiarly the mission of the educated Negro. In no other way can higher education be justified for the race; and Dr. Mayo has well denominated the field before him as a "high plateau of opportunity."

It is a part of his mission to take up the leadership of the race. The day for ignorant Negro leaders is rapidly passing. One of the first services to be rendered along this line is to insist that *seeming* shall no longer be allowed to pass for *being*. No matter where it strikes or whom it strikes, he must help strip away pretense from the vain and shallow, unveil those who masquerade under borrowed, empty, high-sounding titles—those whose vociferous tones, glib tongues and unlimited audacity seek to pose their owners as learned ones under the thinnest veneer. This uncovering of shams, exposure of frauds will save the race many a gibe and sneer.

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When there is more of genuine scholarship among members of the race there will be a different attitude assumed towards it. But as long as the Negro prefers to construe owlish looks as wisdom, to bow down to clam like silence as profound philosophy, to stand agape over blatant mouthings as eloquence, and to measure mental calibre by bodily avoirdupois, he not only gives evidence of weakness in a lack of sound discrimination, but he subjects the entire race to consequent criticism and contempt.

It is to our shame, however, that we are forced to admit that just such shams are so often on "dress parade" before the world that by them the race is too frequently largely judged, and to its detriment. The day has come when the brain of the race must both direct its brawn and expose its brass. Ignorance and charlatanism will seek enlightenment or retreat only when intelligence and learning make a masterly array for leadership.

This mission of leadership has many phases. The educated Negro leads by making himself felt, unconsciously, in many ways. Dr. Angell of Michigan University has truly declared that a man who has any claims to scholarship or learning cannot hoard its blessings as a miser hoards gold, that he can hardly enjoy it without in some degree sharing its blessings with others, that its very nature is to be outgoing and effusive. Because of this truth the Negro scholar is an inspiration to his own people who need just such an object lesson as himself. The race gains self-respect as it sees one of its own on higher planes. It gathers higher aims by the respect it instinctively accords him and its pride is stimulated along higher levels. It is thus that colored men of learning—men of high ideals—are far more influential through the simple contact of their presence than are those of another race.

It is admitted that the race is cursed with not only pretenders but with idlers. So is every other race, but the Negro can least afford it just now. It may be true that some of these hold diplomas indicating completion of courses of higher studies, but they are not really the educated ones, and the fact of their existence does not prove the uselessness of the educated Negro or the failure of higher education for the race. It is to our credit that comparatively few, who have struggled through the long years that lead to culture and scholarship, can be found to give enemies of the race an opportunity for assault from that quarter. Figures will not lie, though they sometimes may stagger one; and statistics show us that the college-bred Negro is far from giving a record for uselessness.

I have said that the educated Negro (and I include both sexes) leads by the inspiration that is radiated. Much as we regret it we cannot refuse to face the fact that grows upon us daily—the fact that there are too many Negro youths to-day, who seem lacking in ambition, in aspiration, in either fixedness or firmness of purpose. We have too many dudes whose ideal does not rise above the possession of a new suit, a cane, a silk hat, patent leather shoes, a cigarette and a good time—too many in every sense the "sport of the gods." It is the mission of the educated Negro to help change this—to see that thoughtlessness gives place to seriousness. Ruskin spoke a basic truth when he said that youth is no time for thoughtlessness; and it is especially applicable to the youth of a race that has its future to make. The Negro who stands on the higher rounds of the ladder of education is pre-eminently fitted for this work of inspiration—helping to mold and refine, "working out the beast" and seeing that the "ape and tiger die," rescuing from vice and all that the term implies.

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He will help to form classes of society where culture and refinement, high thinking and high living, in its proper sense, draw the line—classes made up of what one denominates an

“aristocracy of intelligence and character that protects the masses from their foes without and from their own folly and unrighteousness.”

This same influence is to be exercised over those young men and women fresh from college who have two things to learn—that the knowledge they possess is neither altogether new, nor is it patented by them, and further, that one great danger lies ever before those of any race who have won great distinction in college halls—that of total extinction out in the world.

Nothing but true scholarship can lead these young people to take proper measure of self and estimate the things about them at their true value as they stand at that precarious place, the beginning of a career. There they need the warning of Omar emphasized to “waste not their hour.” There is plenty of active leadership for this Afro-American scholar as a part of his mission. There are books to be written; experiments to be made; conditions to be analyzed; ways and means invented to reach ends; and we need Negro specialists in all these fields. Great economic results will never come to us, nor will a truly great standing be ours as long as we are content to leave our affairs to the sole direction, however wise or kindly intended, of another race.

So scientists, historians, linguists, sociologists, professional men in all lines are needed, not only that the life and history of the race may be properly presented to the world, but in order that another mission may be fulfilled—that of keeping before the world the fact that the Negro possesses intellect; that he is both able and capable, and that through this possession and training the race purposes to develop its civilization.

The Negro scholar must not be so wrapped up in his own achievements that he cannot see the possibilities in those about him. In this way also he is to help keep the victories of the race at the fore. As a teacher he has a fine opportunity to note and encourage talent, as a writer or journalist he can give credit where credit is due. Petty jealousy is out of place and fear of rivalry is but an evidence of mediocrity. As a specialist in any line he will be able to stand where he can call this talent to his aid and foster its growth.

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There are other fields of activity that need the presence and kindly penetrative interest of the educated ones of the race. The slums call for this influence. The growing problems in our northern cities especially call for work at the hands of the intelligent, scholarly men and women. Vice must be checked in the race, and a transformation be effected in the manner of life in the dark portions of the cities. Here we have a problem of our own—to separate poverty from viciousness and encourage the people to better morals and industrious, clean lives. No one knows better than the thoughtful members of the race the difficulties to be faced here where a people is segregated in certain portions—where the good and the bad must perforce live elbow to elbow, in constant contact and often consequent contamination. It needs settlement work of the most earnest kind, and only those who have standing and education will be able to do the desired good.

It is so often said to-day that the Negro should let politics alone that many have come to the conclusion that this is a field to be entirely abandoned. But the Negro has his public duties as a citizen to perform unless he proposes to drop out of sight, and in this field he has a duty. Here the man of education should do as it has seemed good for some of the Anglo-Saxon race—lend his help toward purifying the corrupt atmosphere, standing for what is upright and just. It is an incontrovertible fact that the standing one gains demonstrates the capabilities and worth of the race. To be clean-handed in all political dealings, to guard both honor and responsibility in matters of business—in short to quit oneself like a man in all things—must be preached daily as of the utmost advantage to the race. The present attitude of the outside world places the Negro scholar in a most responsible position, for every movement on his part is noticed, criticized, and if he falters or fails higher education receives another blow. Not for one second can the educated Negro men and women afford to be indifferent to an iota of their action or conduct.

With all these spheres calling especially for education and culture there is still another of the most importance, for it holds so much for the future of the race. This is the improvement of domestic life. We want no upper classes where evils are glossed over because there are money and position to be respected. We must work for the ideal family life. Home is the social center for a race, the real center of race improvement, and we want better homes. For this we must have better fathers, better mothers, better husbands, better wives, better sons and daughters. Industry alone does not make for morality. As one has said, “A strict labor diet does not strengthen morals, it only suppresses passions.” In the home and for home building is needed that ethical, philosophical, and esthetical training that belongs to the higher education. This training is the great instrument for the present upbuilding of the race which is to do so much in laying foundations for the fine heredity every race covets. I repeat that the seeds of culture are to be sown by the educated Negro and in the home they are never wholly without fruit.

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The artisan, the laborer have their niches, but they must work with and not against the educated classes. That the strong working brain must be the guide of the strong working hand, I have ever contended. The masses must move, but it must be the classes that move them if progress upward is to be the order. We must build up an honest, thrifty yeomanry, but we must multiply rapidly our educated men to lead and work and influence in these various fields.

The fact that the Negro scholar is needed for this work shows the demand. We have not enough of them to-day. If Dr. Angell of Michigan University does not consider, when speaking of the Anglo-Saxon, that one college bred person in a thousand in his state "is unwise or inexpedient," why should friend or foe of the Negro consider less than 3000 college bred men and women out of an entire population of nearly 10,000,000, "unwise or inexpedient?" It would be laughable if it were not so pitiful to think of the hue and cry about too much learning for the Negro. The trouble with the race is not too much learning but not enough. A little learning is surely a dangerous thing. Short cuts are too many and do not really educate. They utterly fail to give drill and discipline absolutely necessary to that culture, which comes only after hard labor of years. All honor to Dr. Curry when he so bravely declared that the talk of the hopelessness of education or of too much education, or of the inappropriateness of academic education is vain, adding emphatically, "The Negro wants all he can get, and all he gets he profits by."

No; the race is in no danger of going "college mad." Although the early schools for it were generally established upon the broad university plan, yet their work has been largely basic; and they have done far more in laying foundations than in producing a surplus of graduates from higher courses. It is an absurdity to claim there can be too many of the race with learning enough and discipline enough to make themselves useful leaders.

There is room for all kinds of work. There is need of the practical, the industrial, and it is honorable to work with the hands. It will help in weeding out idleness. But at the same time it is easy to ignore and crush higher aspirations. The quiet shaft of ridicule oft-times does more than argument, and many things that are very desirable and necessary are often overshadowed by the skilful juxtaposition that shifts them where they are but dimly seen, while other things stand forth in a strong light and are thus looked upon as all important. So the merry quip and jest at the Latin and Greek studied by the Negro bring far more than a passing laugh—they *really bring discredit upon the whole higher training where none is actually intended*. It causes the old friends of higher learning to pause, and take it far too literally, and then determine that it is after all better to abandon the support of institutions for higher education. The pity of it all is that it is next to impossible to undo the wrong. Like the sped arrow and the lost opportunity such words and their effect cannot be recalled. Even assurance that it is largely jest comes too late. The jest has been all too convincing and the converts have at once arrayed their philanthropy against forwarding the efforts of those who seek the higher courses.

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Dr. VanDyke has said that true manhood and womanhood cannot exist without an ideal side; that these are the finer feelings which have no market value but which must be kept alive. Why should we endeavor to keep them alive? Simply because the world at large recognizes that this means development in the highest sense, and we claim that this is an especial need of the Negro race. Then we ask, How are these finer feelings kept alive? and the answer comes that this stimulation must proceed from culture and scholarship.

With our needs pressing upon us we see as no other people the importance of all this to bring about a change in the environment of the race. It has a bearing upon this desired change that the virtues resulting from manual labor alone cannot exert. Industrial training is needed too to teach how to earn a living, but, as intimated in this paper, something else—the higher education—must be counted upon to teach *how to live better lives, how to get the most and best out of life*.

There is much involved in the attempt of the educated Negro to fulfil his mission. The fact that there is such a swing of the pendulum away from higher training for the race, makes it more difficult for those who possess it to-day to carry out the mission. The Negro scholar who sets out to pursue the paths pointed out does it at a great amount of self-sacrifice. He must expect to meet rebuff, discouragement, misinterpretation, lack of recognition, hardships, and these do not by any means come alone from the Anglo-Saxon. The foes are often of his own race. It will take all the philosophy he can summon to contend with the opposition that comes from ignorance, from coarseness, from the unthinking and the malicious. It will need all his self-control and forbearance to move along under grasping, bullying ignorance that seeks to ride rough shod over superior knowledge and breeding; it will demand all his logic to meet the arguments from without that the Negro has no time now for scholarship—that he must get money and get land first; that learning possesses little mercantile value now; that the way to advancement along scholarly lines is barred; that the cook, the carpenter, the shoemaker, are all better paid than the scholar for the use of the sum of their knowledge which costs far less than his. He must face the facts no matter how unjust or inconsistent such things are and meet the final question—*Is it worth striving for?—Is it worth while to put ambitions and longings on the altar, to work unceasingly, uncomplainingly amidst stolid indifference, absolute contempt and often open hostility?*

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We are face to face here with the question whether scholarship pays, whether the educated Negro is to be encouraged to multiply and push forward determinedly on his mission. If there was but the present moment to contemplate, the race might be excused for pausing, for acquiescing in the limitations set for its education, and for saying the game is not worth the candle. But to-day does not end all. There is a *future* and that Negro is lacking in proper manhood who does not determine to help on that future. The future is always bound up in the present and if this future is to make men and women out of the race in coming

generations the question is answered. Negro scholarship is worth striving for, because the educated Negro is to lead for that future. Education, learning, scholarship will make the undying lustre of a people—will prove their greatest glory. Thinkers will give an immortality to a people that neither wealth, nor industry, nor strength of arm, nor even virtue can procure for it.

So the educated Negro must keep this in view, must see his mission clearly and stand courageously ready to undertake it—

“Cleansed of servile panic,
Slow to dread or despise,
Humble because of knowledge,
Mighty by sacrifice.”

But there must be united effort among the leaders of the race along all lines to this end. Advocates of higher learning and of industrial education must accord respect to each other's opinions and work unitedly, in order that neither may fall a sacrifice to the “Nemesis of Neglect.” And the race must sustain its leaders of thought and action. There is no time to lose, none to waste in eternal strife. The field is large enough for all to glean and work in. The race must make a common cause, meet a common enemy and win common friends.

W. S. SCARBOROUGH.

Wilberforce, Ohio.

Transcriber's Note: Printer's inconsistencies in hyphenation usage have been retained.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE EDUCATED NEGRO AND HIS MISSION ***

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