Biennial Report of The Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina: 1900-1901 and 1901-1902

North Carolina. Dept. of Public Instruction
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the right of every child to have a chance to make the most possible of himself through the development of his God-given faculties by education, and the duty of the State and of the community to give him this chance by providing adequate means for his education. It is the divine right of every child to have this chance, a right as inherent as his right to breathe God's free air and enjoy God's glad sunshine. It is the civic, moral and religious duty of every State, every community, every individual, to help to give to every child this chance, a duty as binding as the duty of self-protection, as the duty of service to God and humanity. The duty of the community to give it follows logically from the right of the child to have it. No child is responsible for coming into the world, nor for his environment when he gets here. Every child has a right to have a chance to develop the power through education to break the iron bonds of the hardest environment by which he finds himself surrounded. The State, the community, the individual that dares to deny this right to the least of these little ones, that the Master himself while on earth took into his loving arms and blessed and committed to his followers as a sacred charge, shall answer sometime, somewhere for this neglect of duty.

The fundamental truths as to education admitted by the white race, so far as their own race are concerned, have accepted these truths as to the power, the necessity, the blessings of education, the danger and the curse of ignorance, the right of the child to have an education, and the duty of the community to provide it. But there are those who deny these truths in their application to the negro race, who are unwilling for the white race that pays the greatest part of the taxes to assume the burden of the education of the negro. The recognition of the right to withhold from the negro his just and needed part of the public school fund because he fails to pay his part of the public school tax would strike at the very foundation of the entire public school system. By the same reasoning, why should not the taxes of the rich, because they pay more taxes, be used for the education of the children of the rich only, and the taxes of the poor be used for the education of the children of the poor only? The weaker and more helpless the race, the louder the call to the strong to help. The humbler and more hopeless the child, the more binding the duty to elevate. Duty may begin at home, duty may begin with our own race, but it does not end there. So long as there dwells among us a weaker, a child-race, placed here in the providence of God through no desire of their own and without their consent, our stronger race owes this race a duty which it dare not fail to discharge, if it would escape the retribution of neglected duty, the penalty of violated law. We must do justice to this weaker race. In the light of the manifest meaning of the golden rule, of the manifest teachings of the Man of Galilee, I can see it in no other way. I shall declare it as I believe it.

We have made many and grievous mistakes in the education of the negro. We may expect to make more. We can correct these mistakes not by decreasing the quantity of his education, but rather by improving the quality of it—not by destroying the means of his education, but rather by directing it in proper channels. We have too often flung him the part of the money that the Constitution required us to give, and then left him without direction to waste it at his will. All too often has his education been the tragedy of the blind leading the blind. What wonder if they have fallen into the ditch together? All too often has it been but a weak imitation of ours, the merest smattering of things absolutely useless to him, the flimsiest veneering of real culture. What wonder if his head has often been filled with false notions and the results have been unsatisfactory to him and discouraging to us?
Miseducation is a bad thing for any race. We have had much of it with our own race, we have had more of it with the negro race. We shall continue to have much of it with both races until our schools are made adequate in houses and teachers and supervision and length of term, in character of instruction and course of study, to the demands of the age; until our education of each race is vitally connected with the life that the race must lead and wisely adapted to the sphere that the race and the individual must fill. This is a mighty problem that we can not hope to solve for either race in a day, or a year, or a generation. We must work it out experimentally. We can work it out only through the long, slow years, only through the exercise of infinite patience and wisdom and justice and courage and mercy and love.

Fundamental truths that must not be ignored in working out the problem of negro education.

1. That all over the face of nature and of the universe it has been written in no unmistakable language that education of the right sort is a good thing for the plants of the field, for the beasts of the forest, for all created things. It needs must be a good thing, then, for man, God's highest creation, fashioned in his own image, endowed with his own faculties, with infinite capacity for good or evil.

2. That this unalterable law of God can not be changed by the color of a man's skin or by racial differences or natural endowments.

3. That differences in natural endowments and racial traits are manifest and require an adaptation of the character and methods of education to them. Have we not grossly violated this law and sadly erred in trying to force upon the negro race, but one generation removed from bondage and ten generations from savagery, with essentially different racial traits and endowments, the same sort of education that our own race, with its different endowments and its thousand years of freedom and education, has been preparing itself for?

4. That there is danger in ignorance, whether it be wrapped in a white skin or a black skin. Nearly one-third of the population of North Carolina are negroes. Who can estimate the danger that lurks in such a mass of ignorance, if these negroes are left uneducated? The rapidity with which any race will lapse into a state of savagery and brutality through ignorance depends upon the years and generations of education and civilization that lie behind that race, and upon its native and inherited strength. If this be true, does it not follow that the decline of the negro race into a state of savagery and brutality through ignorance would be more rapid than that of the white race, and that there is even more danger in black ignorance than there is in white ignorance. Ignorance in chains is dangerous enough, but it is safer than ignorance in liberty. It is my deliberate conviction that in a few generations, without education, the great mass of the negro race would sink to a state of animal brutality. Turn such a wild horde loose among our people, endowed with the rights of freedom without the knowledge to use it, controlled by the passions of animals without the power to restrain them that comes alone from proper education, and our only safety will lie in extermination. With the negro it must be elevation through proper education or extermination.

5. That education is a growth and not a creation; that it can develop to the fullest what God has created, but can never supply what He has not created; that there is but one creative power in the
6. That the education that fails to fit for greater usefulness and happiness in the sphere of life which one must fill is miscalled education, is indeed miseducation. In the South, the sphere which the negro must fill is industrial and agricultural, and, therefore, his education must be largely industrial and agricultural. He must be educated to work and not away from work. By directing his education into these channels, we may be able to save him from idleness and the vices that follow in its train, and to make of him a potent factor in the industrial and agricultural development of the State, and a happier, more prosperous and useful citizen. It must be remembered, however, that an ability to read and write, and a reasonable degree of intelligence is absolutely necessary to the effectiveness of even this sort of education.

7. That it is absolutely impossible for any race to remain in this great republic in the twentieth century uneducated. It is not, therefore, a question of whether the negro shall be educated or not, but rather of who shall do it and how it shall be done. If we fail to direct his education, those from other sections some of whom are not in sympathy with our civiliza-

tion, because they do not understand our social structure, who are ignorant of the nature and needs of the negro, and may have false notions of his relation to the white race in the South, will take charge of it. Our safety, then, lies in taking charge of it ourselves, and directing it along lines that shall be helpful to him and to us, and in harmony with our civilization and society and with his nature.

An injustice that would outrage the conscience of the civilized world, to deprive the negro of the right of suffrage on account of unfitness to exercise it, and then virtually deprive that race by constitutional amendment of the means of ever acquiring fitness for the exercise of this right, would do violence to the conscience of the civilized world, and would be an act of injustice unworthy of a great and generous race.

No man can see the end of this vexatious race problem, but I have an abiding faith that this great, just and generous Anglo-Saxon race that dwells on North Carolina soil, will undertake with manly courage to work out this problem in a spirit of equity to both races, and will in the future as in the past command the admiration of the world by its magnanimous treatment of a weaker race.

The question will not down until it is settled, and settled right. We cannot brush it aside—we cannot postpone it till to-morrow—we must deal with it in the present. We must face our duty and do it as we see it to-day, and leave the result in the hands of the God of the nations and the Ruler of the races.

Above all things, we must not allow the negro to stand in the way of the education of our own children. We must not permit the enemies of public education to use him to re-