



WHAT THE NEGRO HAS DONE
for the
UNITED STATES AND TEXAS

By W. E. B. DuBois

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THE meaning of America is the possibilities of the common man. It is a refutation of that widespread assumption that the real makers of the world must always be a small group of exceptional men, while most men are incapable of assisting civilization or achieving culture. The United States of America proves, if it proves anything, that the number of men who may be educated and may achieve is much larger than the world has hitherto assumed, and that out of the ranks of the lowly, up from peasants, laborers, and servants, can come effective participation in and support for a great and impressive civilization. And that what has thus been done in the past can be accomplished to an even larger degree in the future as opportunity is opened to the masses of men.

This is clearly shown in the history of the Negro race in America and this pamphlet is an attempt to tell in small space the nature of the contribution which the Negro has made to civilization in the United States.

1. Negro Labor and Exploration

THE most revealing commentary upon our modern attitude toward life is that we still regard hard human toil not as a contribution to civilization, but rather as an evil or even a degradation. In fact, labor is the beginning of civilization. As culture progresses much of the necessary hard toil can be transferred from the backs of human beings to beasts of burden, forces of nature, and to the machine. But the necessity of human labor can never be wholly done away with and the harder and more unlovely labor is at particular periods, the greater the contribution and sacrifice of those who do it.

The greatest gift of the Negro to America was this gift of toil. It was the prime reason for his presence in this country. The problem of America in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the problem of manual labor. It was settled by importing white bond servants from Europe, and black servants from Africa, and compelling the American Indians to work. Indian slavery failed to play any great part because the small number of Indians in the West Indies were rapidly killed off by the unaccustomed toil, and those on the continent long retained unimpaired a group organization for self-defense.

The supply of white labor was limited by the labor demands of Europe and by law. On the other hand, the systematic development of the black slave trade was facilitated by religion and by deliberately instigated inter-tribal wars in Africa and led to a vast and continuous supply of black labor. Differentiation, therefore, in the status of labor was based increasingly upon the cost of importing laborers and consequently upon race and color. The white laboring class became increasingly free, and the black laboring class became predominantly enslaved.

The result of this labor was an economic organization by which the middle-classes of the world were supplied with a cheap, sweetening material derived

from sugarcane; a cheap luxury, tobacco; and finally and above all, a cheap and universal material for clothing, cotton. These were things that all men wanted who had anything to offer in labor or materials for the satisfaction of their wants. The cost of raising them was primarily a labor cost since land in America at that time was almost limitless in fertility and extent. World commerce, therefore, changed from a trade chiefly in luxuries for the rich, and became a supply of necessities for the middle-class, with an enormously widened basis of demand. The slave trade became the beginning of modern international commerce. Invention was stimulated; the well-being of European workers increased; economic and political revolution followed to which America fell heir. New immigrants poured in; new conceptions of religion, government, and work arose. And at the bottom of this industrial and commercial pyramid, and industry's efficient foundation stone, was the toil of the increasing millions of black slaves in America.

As the value of this new raw material, especially sugar and cotton increased, it became increasingly difficult to maintain a double legal and social standard among the laborers whose exploitation made this investment of capital profitable. The rise of white laborers in political power and more insistent demand for high wages and better conditions of work had to result in breaking the fetters of black slaves who were their competitors and kept down wages.

The number of Negroes and of persons of Negro descent increased rapidly from 1,002,037 in 1800 to 8,833,994 in 1900, and 11,891,143 in 1930. Emancipation placed a population of nearly 5,000,000 black people in the field of work gradually to be transformed from a slave to a free labor basis. The Negro worker today is an indispensable part of American industry, furnishing nearly 12 percent of all American breadwinners; one-third of all servants, one-fifth of all farmers, one-tenth of those employed in transportation and communication, 8 percent of the miners and 7 percent of those in the professions.

The Negro in America has not been simply an unskilled laborer; even in slavery days, there were considerable numbers of Negro artisans. Today, semiskilled and skilled Negro labor forms a large part of the black labor force. There have also been highly skilled mechanics and inventors, including men like Rillieux, who revolutionized the method of refining sugar; Matzeliger, who invented the machine for lasting shoes on which is based the monopoly of the United Shoe Company today; Elijah McCoy, the pioneer inventor of automatic lubrication, and Granville Woods, who patented fifty devices relating to electricity.

American Negroes from the beginning helped in the exploration of the country. There is widespread evidence of Negroes in America in the sixteenth century as servants, traders, and explorers. Negroes may have been instrumental in establishing the city of Mexico, and certainly Menendez had a company of trained Negro artisans and agriculturists when he founded St. Augustine in 1565. Perhaps the most romantic story of a Negro explorer is that of Stephen Dorantes, or as he is usually called, "Estevanico." As the slave of a Spaniard, Dorantes, he guided and rescued the three white survivors of the Narvaez Expedition of 1527, and led the expedition on the first overland journey from Florida to Mexico, passing through what is now the State of Texas. In Mexico, Estevanico became the servant of the Viceroy of Mexico, and was sent on a journey to the Northwest to discover the Seven Cities of Cibola. He entered what is now Arizona in 1539, and was eventually killed

by the Indians. He was thus the first person from the Old World to set foot on the southwestern part of the United States.

Negroes were with nearly all the Spanish explorers in Florida, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Kansas. One was with the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804 and another with Fremont in his California expedition in 1843. And among the early settlers of California were many Negroes and mulattoes. Beside this, it is interesting to remember that the only living human being today who has actually set foot on the North Pole is Matthew Henson, the Negro assistant of Commodore Peary.

2. Negro Music

“**L**ITTLE of beauty has America given the world save the rude grandeur God himself stamped on her bosom; the human spirit in this new world has expressed itself in vigor and ingenuity rather than in beauty. And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas.”

For many years, Negro music in the United States received little attention. Then these songs became the basis of many current tunes and were caricatured by minstrels. Stephen Foster and others built up folk songs on Negro themes. During the Civil War, the first serious study of Negro American music was made and the Fisk Jubilee Singers after the war carried the music of these songs around the world. Today it is recognized as real and beautiful folk music and on it as a basis has been evolved a body of modern music of growing importance, including the work of Dvorak, Dett, Rosamond Johnson, and Coleridge Taylor. New Negro composers are today bringing a new and higher development based on the themes of Negro folk songs: William Dawson, Shirley Graham, William Still, and others have had their music played by the best American orchestras before great audiences. Work songs, including the “blues” and “mellows” have been evolved and the Negro dance and rag-time orchestration has spread all over the world. This music is American and not directly African, although traces of African music may be found in its rhythm and scales. It has utilized and modified the music of white folk; but it is mainly a production of Negroes on American soil. There can be no doubt of the greatness of the musical contribution which the Negroes have thus made and of its essential and fundamental Negro character.

3. Negro Literature, Science, and Art

FROM the earliest times, the presence of black men in America has inspired American writers, and the Negro forms a central theme in white American literature.

Beside this, there is a distinct and continuous line of development in a literature written by Negroes. In this must be included the folk tales of Joel Chandler Harris, which though set down by a white man, were clearly of Negro invention and origin. There have been other interesting collections of Negro folk lore. The first colored writer of national importance was Phillis Wheatley, whose poems appeared in 1773, and who received flattering notice from George Washington and leading Englishmen. There came, then, a series of biographies, from the first bishop of the African Methodist Church down to Booker T. Washington. Many of the slave narratives and biogra-

phies were methods of appeal and propaganda. There were various essays and protests, like that of Paul Cuffe, and especially the first full-voiced, almost hysterical appeal of David Walker in 1829.

In 1840, came stronger writers, like Garnett and William Wells Brown, and especially Douglass' epoch-making autobiography. During the Civil War, there were additional slave narratives, history and travels, and after the war, amid a flood of lesser works, we may notice Still's "Underground Railroad", Simmons' biographical dictionary, and Williams' two-volume "History of the Negro Race." Since the beginning of the twentieth century, we have had the work of Chesnutt, Fauset, Fisher, and Hurston, the novelists; Dunbar, Cullen, McKay, Weldon Johnson, and Hughes, the poets; and many other writers of distinction.

On the dramatic stage, Negroes have found entrance with difficulty. The first great Negro actor was Ira Aldridge, who had to go to Europe to find his opportunity, but was there honored and decorated by the kings of four countries. In the United States, there arose comedians, like Bert Williams, and actors like Gilpin, Robeson, and Richard Harrison. Negroes have done creditable work in painting and sculpture. Henry O. Tanner is recognized as the leading American painter resident in Europe; Edmonia Lewis worked during the Civil War; Meta Warrick Fuller during the World War; and Elizabeth Prophet stands high today among American sculptors of any color.

The work of Negroes in science has been handicapped by their difficulties in securing entrance into laboratories and institutions of research. And yet, we have had Benjamin Banneker, who was a pioneer among American scientists, and helped lay out the city of Washington; Carver, the chemist; Just, the biologist, Fuller, the psychiatrist, and Hinton in syphilology.

Between 1874 and 1930, 116 Negroes have been elected to the Phi Beta Kappa in white Northern colleges; 97 Negroes were mentioned in "Who's Who in America", 1929-1930; and over 60 Negroes have received the degree of Ph. D. from leading American institutions.

4. The Emancipation of Democracy

DRAMATICALLY, the Negro is the central thread of American history. The whole story turns on him whether we think of the dark and flying slave ship in the sixteenth century, the expanding plantations of the seventeenth, the swelling commerce of the eighteenth, or the fight for freedom in the nineteenth. It was the black man that raised a vision of democracy in America such as neither Americans nor Europeans conceived in the eighteenth century and such as they have not even accepted in the twentieth century; and yet a conception which every clear-sighted man knows is true and inevitable.

Democracy in the United States as elsewhere in the world has been a slow development and not a sudden and complete realization. At first, the right to vote was limited by possession of property and then later, the color line was established to limit the franchise of the black worker. Nevertheless, from the beginning, Negroes have voted in the United States. In every colony, North and South, a free Negro with requisite qualifications had the legal right to vote at some time before 1787. Probably few actually voted, but we know that Negroes did vote in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North

and South Carolina, and Louisiana; and in the North, many Negroes voted for the acceptance of the Federal Constitution.

The influence of Negroes on American democracy has been continuous. First, the appeal of their degraded position and lack of opportunity greatly influenced the earlier writers and thinkers, like Jefferson, Garrison, and John Brown. Then there was the active efforts of Negroes themselves toward insurrection. The slave trade itself was war. It cost Negro Africa 60 million souls to land 10 million slaves in America. The history of the West Indies, where American slavery was incubated, was a history of continuous insurrection, from 1522 on the sugar plantation of Diego Columbus, down to the great Haitian revolt. The history of the Maroons in Jamaica, from 1565 to 1795, reads like a saga. In the United States, there were revolts from Colonial times down to the Civil War, but for the most part, they were small and unsuccessful because of the careful organization of the whites to prevent revolt and especially because of the fugitive slave.

Along the Great Black Way stretched swamps and rivers and the forests and crests of the Alleghanies. A widening, hurrying stream of fugitives swept to the havens of refuge, taking the restless, the criminal, and the unconquered—the natural leaders of the more timid mass. These men saved slavery and killed it. They saved it by leaving it to a false dream of peace and the eternal subjugation of the laboring class. They destroyed it by presenting themselves before the eyes of the North and the world as living specimens of the real meaning of slavery.

The fugitive slaves, by the help of whites and Negroes, organized and systematized their work under the Underground Railroad and in this way thousands of Negroes escaped to freedom in the North and in Canada. After emancipation, Negroes by the use of their political power, by appeal and agitation, kept up a continual fight for full inclusion in American democracy.

Negroes received the ballot after the Civil War for the part they took as soldiers and laborers, and more especially because only in this way could the North readmit the Southern States immediately to full power and yet not fear the reestablishment of slavery, or an attack upon the fiscal and commercial policies of the North. The Negro voters helped to establish the public school system in the South and tried to distribute land and strengthen labor laws. They lacked intelligent leadership, but they did start the mass of the slaves well on the road toward free labor and land ownership. When their vote was nullified in 1876, they retained their political power in the North, and their power as laborers and consumers in the South.

The political power thus indicated is not always effectively used. But, on the other hand, it has been able to protect the essential rights of Negroes so that even in the South there is increasing difficulty in making the disfranchisement of Negroes effective, and most Southerners realize that the restoration of the Negroes to political rights in the South is simply a matter of time.

One-fifth of the Negro population now lives in the North. Negroes are members of the legislature in 12 States and members of city councils in a large number of cities. Three or more States today have had black judges on the bench. Twenty-two Negroes have sat in Congress and there is one Member at present. As democracy in industry increases, the power of the Negro as a worker and consumer is bound to increase. Negroes, therefore,

must be reckoned with as a great force in the future development of democracy throughout the United States.

5. The Black Soldier

THE world is coming to realize the futility and evil of war. But this does not deny that many of the soldiers who are compelled to fight are brave and conscientious and struggling for the highest ideals. This is the tragedy of war, and particularly the tragedy of the American Negro soldier.

In only one of the great American wars did he have any direct interest, and that was in the Civil War. He fought in the Colonial and Revolutionary wars, and the War of 1812, in order to vindicate his right to be regarded as an American citizen.

It was a Negro, Crispus Attucks, who in a sense first began the actual fighting in the Revolutionary War, and our first national holiday commemorated the day of his death. Seven hundred Haitian soldiers saved the American Army at the Siege of Savannah in 1779, and the War of 1812 was based largely upon complaints about the impressment of American sailors who were of Negro descent. It was after the Battle of New Orleans that Andrew Jackson thanked the Negro regiment for helping him.

"I invited you to share in the perils and divide the glory of your white countrymen. * * * I have found in you that noble enthusiasm which impels to great deeds. * * *"

In these wars, the Negro fought to prove his right to be considered an American citizen. In the Civil War, he fought directly for freedom. His services were at first refused, but eventually both North and South sought his aid, and 200,000 soldiers and at least 300,000 servants and laborers aided the Union cause. Abraham Lincoln said that without the help of Negroes the war could not have been won. In the Spanish-American War, Negro regular troops took a part, and in the World War the Negroes, forming only one-tenth of the population, furnished 13 percent of the draftees. In this war, 367,710 Negroes were drafted and 150,000 eventually went to France.

6. The Spirit of Religion

THE Negro has projected a peculiar spiritual quality into American life. It consists of a joyousness, a tropical love of living, and an intense sensitiveness to spiritual values. America early became a refuge for religion, and all sorts of men and sects came hither searching for truth and freedom in the wilderness. With them came the Negro, and his presence was a concrete test of the sincerity of those who professed religion in America. Great missionary movements arose. The first native bishop of the Catholic Church, Francisco Xavier de Luna Victoria, was a Negro and became bishop of Panama in the middle of the seventeenth century.

However, in the confines of the present United States, with the exception of Louisiana and Maryland, the Catholic Church did little proselyting among Negroes, being held back by the economic rivalry of its Irish members. In the twentieth century, the zeal and money of Katherine Drexel has started a new movement to spread the Catholic Church among Negroes.

The Protestant churches, and especially the Methodist and Baptist, have been the chief churches to receive the Negro; and in these churches the Negro has not been a passive convert but has taken an active part, assuming

largely the responsibility for his own church organizations and led by the Negro priest, whose authority dates back to Africa.

We must think of the transplanting of the Negro as transplanting to the United States a certain spiritual entity, and an unbreakable set of world-old beliefs, manners, morals, superstitions, and religious observances. The religion of Africa is the universal animism or fetishism of primitive peoples, rising to polytheism and approaching monotheism chiefly, but not wholly, as a result of Christian and Islamic missions.

At first sight, it would seem that slavery completely destroyed every vestige of spontaneous social movement among the Negroes; the home had deteriorated; political authority and economic initiative was in the hands of the masters; property, as a social institution, did not exist on the plantation; and, indeed, it is usually assumed by historians and sociologists that every vestige of internal development disappeared, leaving the slaves no means of expression for their common life, thought, and striving. This is not strictly true; the vast power of the priest in the African state still survived; his realm alone—the province of religion and medicine—remained largely unaffected by the plantation system in many important particulars. The Negro priest, therefore, early became an important figure on the plantation and found his function as the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowing, and as the one who expressed, rudely, but picturesquely, the longing and disappointment and resentment of a stolen people. From such beginnings arose and spread with marvelous rapidity the Negro church, the first distinctively Negro American social institution. This church today has 42,585 organizations with 5,203,487 members, owning \$205,782,628 worth of property and spending \$43,000,000 a year.

This, then, is the gift of Black Folk to the New World. Thus in singular and fine sense the slave became master, the bond servant became free, and the meek not only inherited the earth, but made the heritage a thing of questing for eternal youth, of fruitful labor, of joy and music, of the free spirit and of the ministering hand, of wide and poignant sympathy with men in their struggle to live and love, which is, after all, the end of being.

7. Texas

AS this pamphlet commemorates the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Texas in 1836, it cannot close without a word concerning the relation of the Negro to this great State.

The Negro has from the beginning occupied a central place in Texas history. The organization and growth of this section was due to the Negro. Here was a rich country that of itself would have attracted settlers, but the settlers came much earlier and in larger numbers because of cheap slave labor that was made available in Texas through the slave trade, and because of the rich land, especially adapted to cotton culture.

It began with Aury's slave market on Galveston Island early in the nineteenth century, where slaves pirated from the regular traders were gathered and smuggled into the United States. By 1818 the traffic became large and prosperous, and a slave who would cost \$1,000 in the United States could be bought here for \$140.

A natural expansion of vigorous pioneers into a new, rich country became suddenly transformed into a determined attempt to extend the slave system.

There were dreams of a slave empire which would reach from the Mississippi Valley to Central America. Even when Texas began the fight for independence in 1836, three blacks helped defend the Alamo.

The grants made by the Spanish Government to American settlers, between 1821 and 1830, brought 20,000 whites and 5,000 Negroes, and by 1850, there were 154,000 whites and 58,000 Negroes. Cotton kept pace with the slaves. Fifty-eight thousand slaves raised fifty-eight thousand bales of cotton in 1850, and in 1860, one hundred and eighty-two thousand slaves raised one hundred and eighty-two thousand bales of cotton. The slave population was confined mainly to northeast, east, and central Texas along the rich river bottoms. And here it still stays. It has not gone into the West, but it is moving slowly but surely from the farms to the great cities. This rush of the slave barons precipitated the Mexican War and resulted in the annexation of Texas to the United States.

With the vast territory of Texas, and with the large numbers of slaves which had been taken there during the Civil War, Texas seemed, and in a sense was, the impregnable outpost of the Confederacy. But her mission was changed because, after all, an increasing majority of the people of Texas were not slaveholders and were not interested in slavery as such. Before and after the Civil War, real farmers began to pour into Texas. They began to raise cotton. They began to establish industries and to build a modern State.

During Reconstruction, the Negro became a part of this new development and new organization. He played his part bravely and well. His leadership during Reconstruction was notable; J. T. Ruby, a colored man from Philadelphia, represented the white district from Galveston, and for 15 years did an effective and courageous piece of work. After Reconstruction, Norris Wright Cuney became a leader of both whites and blacks. He was instrumental in perfecting the school system and gave the races equal accommodation. He ran for mayor of Galveston in 1875 and even his opponent attested to his honesty. For many years Cuney continued to be the incorruptible and intelligent leader of the Negroes of Texas.

There live today in Texas 4,284,000 whites, 855,000 Negroes, and nearly 684,000 Mexicans and Indians. They form a center for racial cooperation and understanding. They are in the midst of a vast and rich country. The bounty of nature in its land fertility, its oils and minerals, has endowed their people with a great gift which may be the basis of enduring prosperity. All that is necessary is justice and freedom and understanding between men.



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