



The Negro in the South: His Economic Progress in Relation to His Moral and Religious Development Being the William Levi Bull Lectures for the Year 1907

Booker T. Washington

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WE are now, I think, far enough removed from the period of slavery to be able to study the influence of that institution objectively rather than subjectively. Surely if any Negro who was a part of the institution itself can do so, the remaining portion of the American people ought to be able to do so, whether they live at the North or at the South. My subject naturally leads me to a discussion of the Negro as he was in slavery. We must all acknowledge, whatever else resulted from slavery that, first of all, it was the economic element involved that brought the Negro to America, and it was largely this consideration that held the race in slavery for a period of about 245 years. But, in this discussion, I am not to consider the economic value of the Negro as a slave, as such, but only the influence of his industrial training while in slavery in the development of his moral and religious life. In my opinion, it requires no little effort on the part of a man who was once himself a slave to be able to admit this. If any Negro who was a part of the institution of slavery itself can so far rid himself of the prejudices of the same, it seems to me other people, living in whatever section, should be able to do so. I have been a slave once in my life--a slave in body. But I long since resolved that no inducement and no influence would ever make me a slave in soul, in my love for humanity, and in my search for truth. At the same time slaves were being brought to the shores of Virginia from their native land, Africa, the woods of Virginia were swarming with thousands of another dark-skinned race. The question naturally arises: Why did the importers of Negro slaves go to the trouble and expense of going thousands of miles for a dark-skinned people to hew wood and draw water for the whites, when they had right among them a people of another race who could have answered the purpose? The answer is that the Indian was tried and found wanting in the commercial qualities which the Negro seemed to possess. The Indian, as a race, would not submit to slavery and in those instances where he was tried, as a slave, his labor was not profitable and he was found unable to stand the physical strain of slavery. As a slave, the Indian died in large numbers. This was true in San Domingo and in other parts of the American continent.

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