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Source: *Journal of Thought*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer 1981), pp. 39-55

Published by: Caddo Gap Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42588904>

Accessed: 04-01-2019 19:25 UTC

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The Conference for Education in the South: An Exercise in *Noblesse Oblige*

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In 1902 Georgia's Hoke Smith addressed the Conference for Education in the South, calling the leaders "big-hearted patriotic philanthropists."¹ The first generation of historians of the southern educational movement found no reason to reject that generalization. The reformers were, according to traditional historiography, in fact much as they pictured themselves to be: "men and women of culture, of wide experience, broad views devoid of selfishness, and hearts beating with sympathy for the needs of their fellowmen."² A generation of historians that has been challenged to reevaluate the traditional accounts of the common school crusade with the argument that earlier school reformers were engaged in reform by imposition, a sense of superiority, and a lack of compassion are, not surprisingly, uncomfortable with the older interpretations.³ This essay will analyze the Proceedings of the Conference for Education in the South in light of recent reinterpretations of the southern education movement.

The Conference was the propaganda arm of the movement. It grew out of a series of meetings, primarily of southern educators and northern ministers, at the Capon Springs Hotel in West Virginia from 1898 to 1900. Originally called the Conference for Christian Education in the South, in 1901 at a meeting in Winston-Salem, it broadened its membership and changed its name. The Southern Education Board and the General Education Board were formed to solicit and administer the large sums that flowed South from Yankee captains of industry and merchandising. In addition to supporting the annual Conferences, the Southern Education Board hired agents to work for public education in each of the southern states and established a Bureau of Information and Investigation at Knoxville.

The primary purpose of the Conference was much the same as that of the common school crusade of a half-century before in the North, to propagandize for free, tax-supported schools for all children.

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Edwin A. Alderman, President of Tulane, promised the Conference in 1902 that "this educational crusade shall not cease until every child in this nation, high or low, white or black, bond or free, shall be emancipated from the great, black empire of ignorance and of night."⁴ As was true of the earlier, northern crusade there were other aims related to the quality and substance of schools: consolidation, state financial aid for equalization, establishment of county high schools, better teacher training, and, of major consequence, the introduction of manual, industrial, and vocational education.⁵

The first years of the Conference, however, were primarily concerned with a missionary effort to convert the citizens of the southern states to a faith in public schools. The leaders understood the power of camp meeting revival techniques and made good use of them. Tennessee State Superintendent S. A. Mynders reported to the Conference in 1906 that for three years speakers for better, tax-supported schools had appeared at nearly all occasions when people came together.

Education and public schools have been preached from the pulpit, the bar, the stump; at picnics, barbecues, circuit and county courts, school commencements, county fairs, race tracks and even at a wedding ceremony.

Three years later at the Eleventh Conference, Philander P. Claxton of the University of Tennessee reported on his state-wide effort:

We began a campaign which lasted for ninety-six working days and . . . we went to every county in the State and appealed to more than 100,000 people. Frequently half the voters of the county were present. We had all-day meetings. The people in the Southern States were raised on camp meetings, and when they go and carry their dinner with them it is an offense to them to speak a half hour and dismiss them. The man who has come twenty miles to hear a speaking wants to hear a good deal of it.⁷

One of the techniques that Robert Ogden of New York, President of the Conference for thirteen years, used to keep the revival at a high pitch was to introduce every state superintendent of public instruction present at each conference, and ask him to come forward and testify on the success of the crusade in his state. There were few reports of backsliding. In 1907, after such testimony, the state superintendent of Mississippi, last on the program, jokingly reintroduced the panel of

superintendents to the audience as “the most monumental liars in the country.”⁸

Disregarding these hyperbolic reports, there was remarkable improvement in southern education between 1900 and 1914, the last year of the Conference. Illiteracy among white youths ages ten to twenty decreased by more than 50 percent, the average school term increased between 1900 and 1912 from 105 to 130 days, total school expenditures increased 256 percent, and the total value of school property grew by 337 percent in the southern states.⁹

The leaders of the southern education movement were politicians, journalists, clergymen, lawyers, businessmen, and educators. In this educational awakening as in the other successful ones in our history, leadership was shared by educators and laymen, and as was true of the antebellum educational crusaders or of the broader contemporary progressive movement, the leadership was largely upper-middle class, conservative, and waspish.

Their public utterances forthrightly and unselfconsciously revealed their conventional value system. They were moralists. President Ogden inspired the Conference year after year in his annual addresses with the message: “this conference exists for a holy cause—holy in the highest sense. Its creed reflects the divine love, broad and beneficent as the universal sunshine and expressed in the simple dogma that every child in this broad land possesses the natural right to a good English Education.”¹⁰ The Southern Education Board wanted no misunderstanding of their aims. They were “fighting the cause of the children and of posterity!”¹¹

The businessmen assured each other that they were a small minority of their species who used their time and money for good causes and that they were not drawn together for money or profit. They were good Christians, grateful not only to spend their own money but also to tax others in order to heed the admonition: “bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”¹²

Like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard before them, they saw character education as a chief aim of the school—“bad education and illiteracy” were common foes.¹³ They were not interested in “any worship of mere brain culture,” the Rt. Rev. Davis Sessums assured the Conference, “apart from the development of manhood and character.”¹⁴ A resolution of the 1911 Conference characteristically set forth the legitimate ends of education: “habits of thrift, love of home

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and the land, manual skill, obedience to law, respect for one's neighbor, in a word, clean and effective living.''¹⁵

Cleanliness was next to godliness for blacks and whites alike. In one of the most praised talks given before any of the Conferences, Martha Berry spoke of her work with the children at Possum Trot:

they were white children; they were poor; they were ragged. Their childish faces appealed to me. . . . I opened a little day school in the cabin. I got a microscope and then I used it to teach them—to teach them to keep their hands clean. I used the microscope in showing the difference between clean finger nails and dirty ones.¹⁶

Soon a basin was included in the furniture of the cabin, and they all washed hands together.

The school was to protect the society by saving the individual. Who could question, the Conference was asked, the right of the State, "to carry the child to the school house to save him from the reformatory or the jail, and to train him to benefit society?" Charles Dabney used Knox County, Tennessee, as an example of the result of a short-sighted view of not providing adequate schooling for children. He reviewed the statistics on crime in the county, the number of criminal cases, the cost of prosecutions and of supporting the convicted in prison. There was, in his view, a clear moral:

Among the people in our jails are eight illiterates to one who can read and write. In our penitentiaries there are six illiterates to one who can read and write. Now one-half of the people prosecuted in Knox County were of school age. One-half the cost of prosecuting these cases would have sent nearly 10,000 children to school for the full annual Tennessee term. Can we doubt that if this money had been expended for the education of the people we should not have had to send them to jails and penitentiaries?¹⁷

Bishop Gailor of Memphis before the Eleventh Conference sorrowfully pointed out that there were 100,000 voters in Tennessee who were illiterate, a majority of them "native whites." They were dangerous to the society not only because of their own criminal behavior, he argued, but also because they were the foundation "for graft, dishonesty, and fraud" by unscrupulous politicians.¹⁸ The leaders of the southern education movement were in accord that American citizenship was "too high and too noble a thing to be intrusted to the hands of the ignorant and the incompetent."¹⁹

Schooling was not, however, only to produce citizens who were less criminal and more clean; it was to pay off in dollars and cents, not of course to line the pockets of men such as the leaders of the movement but in prosperity for the the South and individual southerners. "The great truth" we must "teach and preach," Clarence Poe, editor of *The Progressive Farmer*, told the Conference in 1908 is "that your untrained, inefficient man is a poverty breeder—not only for himself, but that contagion of it curses every man in the community guilty of leaving him untrained."²⁰ Three years later, he returned to the argument in a paper titled, "Asia's Greatest Lesson for the South."²¹ Every individual in the community, he declared, will "feel and register the pulling down power" of the ignorant and backward "as inevitable as the thermometer records the temperature of the air."²² The economic viewpoint of the leadership of the movement was powerfully revealed by Walter Hines Page:

The proper standard to judge men by is an economic standard, not an academic one. . . . One untrained worthless white man or one untrained worthless negro may cause trouble throughout a whole county. For this reason it is important to train the child of every hill-billy, of every politician, of every negro in Alabama. In every case it is an economic reason, not a merely personal reason, not a race reason, not a class reason. In an ideal economic state, if we were to construct it as ruthlessly as Plato constructed his ideal Republic, we should kill every untrained man; for he is in the way. He is a burden, and he brings down the level of the economic efficiency of the whole community.²³

Promises of prosperity through education were, of course, part of the strategy of the campaign. Southern politicians and voters needed to be convinced that there was a tangible payoff for dollars spent on schools. Furthermore, the leaders of the movement unabashedly accepted the protestant ethic; they were convinced that hard work, morality, good government, and economic prosperity were closely related. And they matter-of-factly recognized that the economic well-being of their class was tied to the general prosperity.

Recent historical treatments of the southern education movement have accented its role in supporting industrial education for blacks, an education both caste-biased and exploitive. The work of Clarence Karier, Henry Allen Bullock, and James Anderson exemplify contemporary interpretations. Karier has taken the position that the southern educational reformers were bent on using the schools for

social control and repression. It was in the economic interest of the philanthropists who supplied much of the money for the educational crusade, Karier insisted, "to use the school as a vehicle to control and manage Black labor in the South."²⁴ He quoted William Baldwin of the Southern Education Board on the necessity of increasing cotton production for the economic well-being of the South and the need for maximum use of "the negro and the mule" to perform the heavy labor to produce it. Karier concluded that the educational crusaders intended the blacks to have a "natural" education for their place in society—"the fields and mines."²⁵

In his Bancroft award-winning history of black education in the south, Bullock wrote that the Conference on Education in the South recognized the black "in the exact proportion to his economic value."²⁶ The Conference leaders believed, according to Bullock, that only manual or industrial education for blacks was acceptable to southern whites, and that the final result of the work of the conference was to make "education universal for the whites and special [industrial] for the blacks."²⁷ His interpretation of the northern philanthropists was much kinder than Karier's. Rather than being motivated chiefly by economic self interest, he argued, they feared that blacks would be deprived of any share of public funds for schooling. They supported white supremacy and black industrial schooling in order to salvage some education for blacks.

Anderson, while acknowledging that the reformers "transcended concerns" for their own economic welfare with a mixture of sentimental, humanitarian, and sociopolitical motives, concluded that they were particularly interested in "training efficient and contented black laborers for the Southern agricultural economy" and, at the same time, thwarting the development of white organized labor.²⁸

A preoccupation with black industrial education in recent studies of the movement is understandable because of contemporary concerns with the history of black education and because of the blatant racism which pervaded the Conference. Northern and southern leaders of the Conference alike accepted the doctrine of black racial inferiority. Blacks, a southern college president reminded the Conference in a typical comment, are a child race "... grown up in body and physical passions," they are "weak in judgement, foresight, self-control, and character."²⁹ There was a consensus among the leadership that the black was part of the white man's burden. Justice in educational

opportunities for them was assured because as Claxton observed, southerners “with their blue eyes and soft hearts, can be moved.”³⁰ Because of their racial inferiority, educating blacks could present no danger to whites, the Chancellor of the University of Georgia, Walter Hill, assured the Sixth Conference. It would be unworthy of “the blood in his veins” he said, for a white to fear that blacks “can so overcome social characteristics and the advantage of a start of at least two thousand years as to endanger the supremacy” of his race.³¹ Indeed, they agreed, without white tutelage and control the black quickly reverted to savagery. Slavery was, after all, he insisted, the first and most fruitful chapter in the history of black education.³² Mrs. George Barnum of Savannah carried that argument to its extreme by arguing that slave owners (“may they rest in peace, for they earned it, and never got any credit for their labors”) by their patience, industry, and Christianity “had metamorphosed African cannibals into useful men and women.”³³ The president of North Carolina A and M agreed; without slavery and a new generation of blacks—“untrained, unrestrained, vicious and demi-savage”—had developed.³⁴ “This vicious and degraded class,” he emphasized, “has perpetrated in one generation of freedom more horrible crimes against helpless women and children of the white race than were committed during two centuries of slavery.”³⁵ He decried the forces that were “forbidding the whites to use authority, discipline, and sympathy in training the blacks.”³⁶ They, he insisted, could rise only “by white aid, through docility, obedience, zeal, and fidelity.”³⁷ Social control by whites was necessary until blacks had developed proper moral and economic habits. John Graham Brooks of Massachusetts joined the dialogue and dignified the stereotype by quoting an anonymous southern educator: “the negro would continue to steal chickens until he had acquired habits that come from owning his own fowls and . . . the extreme moral looseness with other negroes’ wives would receive little check until this property instinct of mine and thine had become rooted in him.”³⁸

Generally, the northerners neither engaged in or challenged the stereotypes and the bigoted language of many southern Conference speakers. There were rare exceptions. Following a paper full of extreme rhetoric on black inferiority and lawlessness, Lyman Abbott retorted, “if that is true, the fault is with the schools and not with the negro.”³⁹ Whatever their personal views may have been the northern

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leadership accepted, for the most part, the view that the educational crusade in the South to be successful had to court southern support in public utterances and in symbolic action. The Fifth Conference attended Confederate Memorial Day services as a body. Between papers in the Thirteenth Conference, Ogden announced: "We will rise and sing the first two verses of Dixie!"⁴⁰

Concomitant with the acceptance of black racial inferiority was a consensus on the evils of Congressional Reconstruction and the necessity for segregated schooling. Dabney argued that looting by the "spoilers" during reconstruction was largely responsible for southern opinion against public programs, including education.⁴¹ The Rt. Rev. Charles Galloway of South Carolina agreed that it was the source of a bitter hostility that made the crusade for education more difficult. "It poisoned the spirit of one race," he declared, "and aroused the fierce antagonism of the other."⁴² Josephus Daniels, Raleigh newspaper editor, indignantly stormed against those "zealous women from the North, with the missionary instinct to uplift the negro, who came South and themselves taught the negroes and, in some cases, mingled with them upon terms of social equality."⁴³ Northern members of the Conference were quick to assure their southern brethren that they were of a far different, much more enlightened generation. Fulton Cutting of New York praised the responsibility and generosity of the South towards the black despite "the ill-considered action of Northern legislators that thrust upon you the solution of this tremendous problem."⁴⁴ "We want you to come to the North and teach us," he concluded.⁴⁵ Ambassador James Bryce, in 1908, gave an international flavor to the accord. He assured the Conference that racial "integrity is obedience of God's own creation," and that the doctrine of racial equality was "an anachronism belonging to the medieval period of reconstruction history."⁴⁶

That southern society was to be strictly segregated was never openly questioned by members of the Conference. The issue was settled at Capon Springs by the venerable old Confederate J. L. M. Curry and never thereafter challenged: "The white people are to be the leaders, to take the initiative, to have the directive control in all matters pertaining to civilization and the highest interest of our beloved land. History demonstrates that the Caucasian will rule."⁴⁷ In a fashion that was to become typical, he assured his listeners that white supremacy did "not mean hostility to the negro, but friendship

for him.’’⁴⁸ The relationship between blacks and whites was outlined most explicitly by Bishop Galloway in 1904:

In the study of this momentous question some things may be considered as definitely and finally settled:

First—In the South there will never be any social mingling of the races. Whether it be prejudice or pride of race, there is a middle wall of partition which will not be broken down.

Second—They will worship in separate churches and be educated in separate schools. This is desired alike by both races, and is for the good of each.

Third—The political power of this section will remain in present hands. Here, as elsewhere, intelligence and wealth will and should control the administration of governmental affairs.

Fourth—the great body of the negroes are here to stay. Their coerced colonization would be a crime, and their deportation a physical impossibility. And the white people are less anxious for them to go than the negroes are to leave. They are natives and not intruders.⁴⁹

What were the blacks to receive in return for accepting the lowest position in a stratified society? First, they were, once they ceased agitation for political and social rights, to be granted equal protection of the laws, including protection from the lynch mob. “There should be no aristocracy in crime” Galloway told the Conference, and “a white fiend is as much to be feared as a ‘black brute.’”⁵⁰ In the same spirit, Curry condemned “Ku-kluxism” and other vigilante activities. He did not resist observing, however, that such offenses were not just southern, and were “as censurable in Ohio and Illinois as in Kentucky or Georgia.”⁵¹

The blacks’ second reward for “good behavior” was aid in becoming more effective workers in the cotton fields. The result would not only be growth economically and in self-esteem but would endear them to whites as well. “The Old South strove to retain the inefficient negro because it owned him, pitied him, liked him and even loved him,” George Winston, President of the North Carolina A and M, assured his listeners, but he went on to warn that:

the New South will not long endure the inefficient negro freeman. Ownership and love are gone, pity and like are rapidly passing. The only hope for the negro is to become more efficient as a laborer. In this way alone can he regain the old friendship and affection of the South, and secure for himself political and social status. If he cannot, or will

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not, do this, the South will seek to be rid of him as speedily as possible.⁵²

The State Superintendent of Education of Georgia agreed that the right place for blacks was as laborers on the farm where they would have no competition. He forecasted that “for the next fifty years that will be the only safe place for him.”⁵³

Finally, the leaders of the southern education movement promised blacks an education appropriate for their perch on the bottom rail of the fence. “The real practical question is not shall the negro be educated?” Alderman told the Conference, “but *how* shall the negro be educated.”⁵⁴ He knew the answer was to be found at Hampton and Tuskegee for they had “something to teach to the whole world in the way of training for freedom a backward, child race.”⁵⁵ Walter Hill agreed: “they are the pioneers blazing out the path and pointing the way.”⁵⁶ “From Hampton came a Moses, and Tuskegee was born,” wrote a charter member of the Southern Education Board.⁵⁷ Manual or vocational education was not the proper schooling for just the farmer or laborer but for all blacks. Yankee John Graham Brooks asked: “Does any one doubt that if every colored clergyman who is to labor in country districts had been trained, as a part of his clerical equipment, in the new agricultural science, his moral usefulness would be greatly enhanced?”⁵⁸

In the earlier years of the Conference a few voices were raised in support of higher education for blacks. In the first Conference, the President of Gammon Theological Seminary suggested the necessity of training black teachers, lawyers, and physicians for service in a segregated society. However, his argument that the black was capable of higher education was pure racist: “the negro race has a large infusion of Anglo-Saxon blood. He now shares in our Anglo-Saxon civilization.”⁵⁹ More enlightened was President Horace Bumstead of black Atlanta University. He was indignant that anyone could “shout ‘Eureka,’ and proclaim the race problem solved by any one method of training.”⁶⁰ Presenting the familiar argument of DuBois, he insisted that the salvation of the black laid “with the exceptional” man of the race.⁶¹ He pleaded for educational opportunity based on individual ability, and argued that the talents of blacks seemed limited because “as a slave the negro was trained not to think. The thinking Negro was a dangerous negro.”⁶² His arguments fell on deaf ears. Some schooling in the basic skills was, of course, needed to make the black

economically useful. A Georgian argued that teaching the 3 R's was as necessary as manual training so that field hands could read "a written, inquiry or direction" and return a written, "intelligent response."⁶³

In evaluating the work of the Conference in providing a limited, special education for blacks, one must keep in mind the opposition among many southerners to publicly supported schooling of any type for either race. Schooling for blacks was, of course, considered particularly dangerous. There was a continuing debate in the Conference, as an example, on whether the crime rate was higher for literate than for illiterate blacks.⁶⁴

From today's perspective the leaders appear tainted by compromise and spoiled by expediency. At best, on the race issue, they were timid rather than bold, and by their conservative position, they resigned themselves to the development of segregated and inferior schools for blacks.⁶⁵ Looking back at their work after nearly forty years, Dabney insisted that the men who organized the Conference and the Southern Education Board were neither prejudiced nor narrow, and measured by most of their contemporaries they probably were not.⁶⁶ In the later years of the Conference, much less attention was given to blacks and their education and that given was often more hostile. The change was most likely a result of changes in the make-up of the leadership with southern businessmen and elected officials becoming more prominent, and finally dominant, in the work of the organization.

Too narrow a focus on blacks, however, distorts the work of the philanthropist-reformers. The paramount goal of the leaders of the Conference was a utilitarian, universal schooling for all children in the South. Black education was just one problem, if an extremely serious one, that they had to face. Indeed, Dabney as Director of the Bureau of Information and Integration was criticized by some members of the Southern Education Board for ignoring blacks entirely in his propaganda efforts.⁶⁷ Contrary to Bullock's contention, vocational, particularly agricultural education, was not a special education for blacks—it was in the minds of the Conference leaders, the most desirable type for white children in the South as well. James Russell, Dean of the new Teachers College, not only outlined the virtues of Hampton and Tuskegee in 1901, but raised an issue that would become paramount in later Conferences: "Most of us are ready to say

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that the educational principles of General Armstrong are good enough for black men, but you will find a mighty small minority to accept these principles in the education of white men.”⁶⁸ That mighty small minority soon became a majority of the Conference. Two years after Russell’s paper, the President of Georgia Tech complained that there was not a southern school where white boys could learn the practical trades whereas there were many good industrial schools for blacks. He raised a frightful specter: “When the colored race all become skilled bricklayers, somebody will have to carry the mortar. When they all become plumbers, who are going to be the helpers, the men who carry the tools? When they become scientific farmers, who are going to be the laborers? We Southerners, we Southern whites?”⁶⁹ No. He didn’t believe that would happen; but he did fear that whites would “have to carry the mortar for somebody,” even if they had to migrate to do it.⁷⁰ Dabney warned that the vast economic resources of the South were going to be exploited, and that if white children failed to receive an industrial education, “the skilled men of other states will come in . . . and make our native white population the ‘hewers of the wood and drawers of water’ in their industries.”⁷¹

Not only were the white children to be taught useful trades so the South could prosper, they were to be indoctrinated in the dignity of work. The difficulty was, according to the principal of one of the South’s first industrial training secondary schools for whites, that “the negro looked upon all manual labor as slave work, from which he had been liberated, while the white man regarded manual labor as the peculiar occupation of the negro, and therefore beneath him.”⁷² The great problem before the Conference was to make the practical pursuits “rank in importance with the philosophy of Plato, the army of Caesar, the odes of Horace, or the antiquity of the pyramids,” the Mississippi State Superintendent of Schools told the Conference in 1912.⁷³ The “humblest vocation” had to be given the same dignity as the “highest and most exalted profession.”⁷⁴ That meant that manual training had to be taught to all social classes in order to do away with the prejudice against work done with the hands. “We must,” agreed the Georgia Superintendent, “educate the children of the rich as well as the poor through manual training.”⁷⁵

The vast majority of the speakers before the Conference had little patience for educators who defended the traditional curriculum for its “cultural” value. President Ogden, at the Third Capon Springs

Conference, laid the basically anti-intellectual foundation for the movement:

Art for art's sake is a heresy. Learning for its own sake debases, does not lift. Intellectual development that makes man superior in his own esteem elevates the mind at the sacrifice of character . . . of all the sham aristocracies, the meanest is the intellectual.⁷⁶

His friend, Walter Hines Page, at the Seventh Conference forthrightly stated the position of the leadership on the kind of schooling they wanted for southern youth. "Education," he said, "is one confusing work. . . . Let us call it plain 'training.' " Training had "vindicated democracy" and "opened the door for opportunities."⁷⁷ Conference leaders pictured classical education as aristocratic and vocational training as democratic. And they insisted that they were propagandizing for democratic schools for southern youth.

There were, as in the case of manual training for blacks, a few minority voices. As an example in 1906, Brown Ayres, the President of The University of Tennessee, decried the downgrading of the values of a "broader culture." He complained that "the refined, cultivated clergyman or other scholar," as a teacher had given way to "the active hustler—the man in contact with the outside world."⁷⁸ The result was that "higher ideals" were less important than the "processes and operations of the commercial world."⁷⁹ One of the last and one of the best attempts to argue for a broader education before the Conference was made by an outsider, J. C. Branner of Stanford University, in 1910. He was given the topic Education for Economic Efficiency. Taking the bull by the horns, he said that he was possibly expected to speak in behalf of manual or industrial education, and that he would say that it was necessary in order to help poor people to immediately support themselves, but was of limited value in the long run. Continuing prosperity, he insisted, depended on a much more thorough and intellectual schooling. "So-called practical education," he contended, "may make good workmen, good manual laborers, but it can never make leaders in thought or action in any large sense."⁸⁰ Students "need above all to take their attention off the everlasting dollar."⁸¹ Too often, he argued, a practical education meant simply something with money in it. He was sadly out of step with the Conference; by then the battle had long been lost. In the last several years of the Conference, propaganda for vocational, particularly agricultural, education was more and more replaced by

papers containing specific information on conducting such schools; its value no longer had to be sold.

The leaders of the movement did advocate vocational training as the proper education for blacks, some for economic reasons, some for racist reasons, some in order to preserve any schooling for blacks at all—Bullock was partly right. He was mistaken, however, in viewing their aims too narrowly, for they were not only often racist but frequently class-biased as well. Training schools, from their perspective, represented a “natural” education for underclasses—all blacks and poor whites.

Anderson concluded that the General Education Board, which grew out of the Conference, and its associate foundations “were primarily motivated by practical interests in the relationship of black industrial education to the development of southern agriculture and national industrial life.”⁸² Admittedly, the philanthropist-businessmen were vitally concerned with the nation’s prosperity and consciously supported the type of education for the South that they believed would enhance prosperity. Anderson’s generalization was based primarily on an examination of the activities of the General Education Board between 1902 and 1935. Regardless of its accuracy for that board during that period if applied to the leadership of the southern education movement generally, it is too limited. An important point ignored by Anderson and Bullock was that the advocates of vocational education were a major wing of the contemporary reform movement in education. The only politically feasible choice for black schools, according to Conference leaders, was also, happily, the type of education being touted by educational reformers nationally.

In the sense that they saw character building as a chief function of the schools, the leaders attempted to use education for social control. Karier’s use of the term repression—except in the sense that schools are always repressive—was too strong. Michael Katz’s recent use of David Brion Davis’s concept of ideology is appropriate here, particularly the idea that a charge that the prosperous and powerful imposed their education ideology on a larger society “does not imply conspiracy or malevolence.”⁸³ Their ideology, like that of reformers examined by Davis, was “not the product of conscious choice” and rarely involved “insincerity or deliberate deception.”⁸⁴ They were upper class paternalists with a variety of motives including Christian idealism and the wealthy’s sense of *noblesse oblige*; born and nur-

tured in the nineteenth century, they accepted the conventional wisdom of their class and time.

Notes

¹Hoke Smith, "Popular Education as the Primary Policy of the South," *Proceedings of the Fifth Conference for Education in the South*, (1902), p. 43.

²T. G. Bush, *Proceedings of the Seventh Conference for Education in the South*, (1904), p. 10.

³Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform* (Boston, 1968).

⁴Edwin A. Alderman, "The Child and the State," *Proceedings of the Fifth Conference for Education in the South*, (1902), p. 75.

⁵"Educational Conditions in Tennessee," *Bulletin of the Southern Education Board*, I (December, 1902), p. 16.

⁶S. A. Mynders, "Tennessee," *Proceedings of the Ninth Conference for Education in the South*, (1906), p. 68.

⁷P. P. Claxton, *Proceedings of the Eleventh Conference for Education in the South*, (1908), p. 79.

⁸J. Y. Joyner, *Ibid.* pp. 45 and 50.

⁹"Address by P. P. Claxton," *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Conference for Education in the South*, (1914), pp. 3 and 4.

¹⁰Robert C. Ogden, "Annual Address of the President," *Proceedings of the Fifth Conference for Education in the South*, (1902), p. 10.

¹¹*Southern Education*, I (April 9, 1903), p. 43.

¹²James W. Robertson, "Education for Rural Life in Canada," *Proceedings of the Ninth Conference for Education in the South*, (1906), p. 107.

¹³Bush, p. 20.

¹⁴*Proceedings of the Seventh Conference for Education in the South*, (1904), p. 173. See also S. P. Brooks, "Education and Civic Righteousness," *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Conference for Education in the South*, (1911).

¹⁵"Resolutions," *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Conference for Education in the South*, (1911), p. 203.

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