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PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF  
THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF  
NEGRO LIFE AND HISTORY HELD IN  
NEW YORK CITY NOVEMBER  
11, 12, and 13, 1938

Most persons who treat scientifically the past and present status of the Negro look forward to the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History as a conference of considerable stimulus. Certainly the recent assembly in New York gave further evidence of such valuable service to scholars in this field. It was well attended by representatives from various parts of the country and highly appreciated by the people of the New York area. A number of persons not hitherto reached with this effort became so impressed with the exercises of these three days that they have voluntarily offered assistance in financing the undertaking to document the history of the Negro.

The success of the conference was due to the cordial cooperation of certain citizens of New York with the national staff. In the first place, the preparation was planned early in the year, and the few workers who have long represented the Association in New York City organized to carry out the program with systematic detail. Credit for this service is due to a large number of citizens, but especially to Mr. Harcourt A. Tynes, chairman of the general committee sponsoring the annual meeting and to such

## THE ADAPTATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE NEGRO TO THE CAPACITY OF THE CHILD<sup>1</sup>

We are living in a day when much attention is being given in educational circles to the adaptation of the materials of education to the life and experiences of the child. Great efforts are being made to provide materials for the consumption of the masses of the people in order that there may be a larger knowledge of and greater appreciation for the background and contribution the races have made to the cultures of the world. All races need this material in the language of the young. Youth needs this story in its own language.

The entire school of progressive education guided by the great American philosopher John Dewey, whose immortal words, "Education is Life," have brought us to the realization of "translating" the materials of history and biography, science and literature into the language and experiences of the child. It is important to give to all children a true picture of races. We are living in an age when peace is based on international understanding and good will.

The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History has seen twenty-three years of searching for truth about the Negro; not only has the truth been found, but we have attempted to interpret and spread the truth. Our publications have reached the libraries of the world. Our materials have been accepted by the society of scholars, and now one does not question the fact as to whether the Negro has a history or is able to write history supported by documentary evidence.

Even before Emancipation William C. Nell, writing in 1855, *Colored Patriots of Revolution*, said, "There is however a historical propriety in setting forth the ser-

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in New York City, November 11, 1938.

vices of those colored Americans, who in the day of small things have labored earnestly for the welfare of humanity. If others fail to appreciate the merit of the colored man, let us cherish the deserted shrine. The names which others neglect should only be the more sacredly in our care. Let us keep them for the hoped-for day of full emancipation, when in the possession of all our rights, and redeemed from the long Night of ignorance that has rested over us, we may recall them to memory, recollecting with gratitude, that the stars which shone in our horizon have ushered in a glorious dawn."

Such a beautiful expression coming from one of our earliest historians does challenge us in 1938 to discover the *dawn* and to bring this material within the understanding of the child and the masses of our people. We are living in a great age of science and invention, but we need not remind ourselves that the machine has conquered man and not man the machine. We still have the human problem of the distribution of natural resources and of seeing that the fruits of science and invention come within the reach of the masses who need it most. This is the present challenge of our Association. The ideals, character and attitudes of races are born within the minds of children; most prejudices are born with youth and it is our duty to see that the great researches of Negro History are placed in the language and story of the child. Not only the Negro child but children of all races should read and know of the achievements, accomplishments and deeds of the Negro. World peace and brotherhood are based on a common understanding of the contributions and cultures of all races and creeds.

George Washington Williams whose "History of the Negro Race in America," published in two volumes in 1882, which was the first serious effort to treat the past of the Negro from Africa into America, said in the introduction, "I became convinced that a history of the colored people

in America, from the time of its discovery down to the present day was required; because that in every attempt upon the life of the Nation, whether by foes from without or within, the colored people have always displayed a matchless patriotism and an incomparable heroism in the cause of Americans; and because such a history would give the world more correct ideas of the colored people and incite the latter to greater effort in the struggle of citizenship and manhood. The single reason that there was no history of the Negro race would have been sufficient reason for writing one."

Could Williams live today and be present at this meeting and review with us the various types of History of the Negro which have been written, he could appreciate the magnitude of his beginning. In the development of our history there have been different approaches; there was the problem-solving group including Kelly Miller, DuBois, Pickens and others, where an attempt was made to apply the technique of scientific research to the solving of the race problem. Then there have been sociologists like R. R. Wright and Charles S. Johnson; economists like George Haynes. One should not fail to remember the work of Booker T. Washington in his *Story of the Negro*; the social histories of Johnson and Brawley; the contribution of Charles Williams and Emmett J. Scott and their stories of the Negro in the World War.

All of this history has been supported by the literary achievements of our early poets, Dunbar and Campbell, who were forerunners of Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown and a host of others in the field of contemporary Negro Literature, telling the story of the Negro in rhythm and song, in poetry and beauty and pathos.

There is still room for research and study. We are just half way in telling the story of the Negro; half the truth only has been told. The story of the Negro on the isles

of the seas, in Africa, in Latin America, and in other parts of the world still needs to be unearthed in order that we as Negroes in America may feel the kinship and common bond with all other colored peoples of the universe. The exploits and achievements of a Dias in Brazil and of a Maceo in Cuba will rank with those of Jean Christophe in Haiti when the full story is written, and recorded, and popularized.

May I call your attention to the great progress which has been made. I would not have you believe that some progress has not been made in having the story of the Negro brought down to the capacity of the child. Our own self-sacrificing, pioneering Dr. Carter G. Woodson's *Negro Makers of History*, was the first serious attempt in this connection, followed by *African Myths* and the more recent works of Helen A. Whiting, of Atlanta, including *Negro Folk Tales, Negro Music, Art and Rhyme*, and the *Child's Story of the Negro*, by Jane Dabney Shackelford.

In all of this we are bringing Negro History to the level of the child and the masses; we must continue to pay our respect to searchers and interpreters of truth with a hope that that which is found may continue to give us that courage, race pride and ambition to face social and economic handicaps, to stimulate the Negro children to keep their chins up and their faces to the rising sun—"The son shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free indeed."

This to me represents the next forward step, to see that the fruits of scholarship are placed in the language of the great host of children the masses of whom Lincoln spoke when he said "God must have loved the common people because he made so many of them." We should also make a very serious attempt to contact the public school authorities since I find, through my extensive traveling all over America, that among all the people there is a great thirst for general facts regarding Negro life,

particularly those of the white race.

What H. G. Wells has done for general history, Durant for philosophy, Drinkwater for literature, and Hendrik Van Loon for art, we must do for Negro history. We must see to it that our masses through the influence of the *Negro History Bulletin* and all other available means get the story and tell the story again and again so that Negro youth who come along this way may rejoice in that story to make a new history by accomplishments founded on the work of the pioneers and trail blazers in History.

MARY McLEOD BETHUNE