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Urge every Negro to write us all he knows about his family
history

THE JOURNAL OF NEGRO HISTORY

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

Although no longer assisted by any of the large foundations the Association with its limited income has continued to grow and expand its sphere of influence. Throughout the past twenty years, the celebration of which takes place in Chicago on the ninth of September, the work has steadily developed. The Association has carried forward with meager means what it did during its early years when it depended almost altogether on the financial support of the founder and director of the organization. The financial statement of the Secretary-Treasurer herein given speaks for itself with respect to the fiscal year closing June 30, 1935.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT, JULY 1, 1934, TO JUNE 30, 1935

RECEIPTS		DISBURSEMENTS	
Subscriptions	\$1,219.50	Research	\$ 800.00
Memberships	552.75	Printing	2,005.37
Contributions	2,358.43	Stenographic Service	1,481.00
Publications	642.00	Traveling Expenses.....	123.20
Sundry Income	50.27	Rent	275.00
		History Prizes	225.00
		Postage	85.77
		Sundry Expenditures	105.54
	\$4,822.95		\$5,200.88
Balance on hand July 1, 1934	1,325.94	Balance on hand June 30	948.01
Grand Total	\$6,148.89		\$6,148.89

The total income of the Association for this period, amounting to less than seven thousand dollars, is much less than it was during the years when the foundations freely granted sums for research. Yet when it is taken

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF NEGRO
LIFE AND HISTORY: ITS CONTRIBUTION
TO OUR MODERN LIFE¹

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen: I count myself greatly privileged to greet you personally on this your Twentieth Anniversary. I stand tonight in the presence of truth seekers, truth seekers not only, but interpreters of truth and disseminators of truth. This, I believe, is the supreme contribution of this Association to our day and generation—the discovery, the interpretation and the dissemination of truth in the field of Negro life—truth, scientifically arrived at, critically interpreted and universally disseminated. In the presence of this audience, I am filled with respect and intellectual humility.

In the time that is mine this evening, I wish to amplify and to make more specific this which I think is the contribution of the Association to our modern life. In the first place, I wish to observe, "that the search for truth is not for timid souls. When we set out upon the search for truth we should not assume that we already know for certain what truth is or what the best way of life is; otherwise, why bother about a further search for truth? The search for truth may very well change our notion of what is good or best. The search for truth is a search for what is really true, not for what may be comfortable to believe, and so we dare not limit our search for truth by insisting that what we find in the search shall be something we should have thought good before we found it. The great thing is to learn to be unafraid of knowledge."

The problem of our generation is the problem of finding ways and means of harnessing science in the service of humanity. I am made happy in the thought that the promoters and the investigators of this organization bring to

¹ An address delivered on the occasion of the celebration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in Chicago, Illinois, September 9, 1935.

their task the scientific technique, that they are actuated by the scientific spirit, for truly do we live in the scientific age. The workers, the investigators, are pioneers, trail-blazers, adventurers in handling facts in this particular field. Theirs has been the task and the responsibility, to quote Father Fox, "of finding the facts, focussing the facts, of filtering the facts." They have separated the facts from the admixtures of prejudice, passion and selfish interest. They cannot afford to pre-judge, for they cannot fly in the face of the facts without courting ultimate disaster. Now, facts are not important for their own sake. They are important only as a basis for human action. The investigators, then, must focus upon the issues we face.

One outcome of scientific research and investigation in the field of Negro life and history is knowledge. A vast portion of social knowledge and information is shrouded in tradition, is not recorded in books and magazines; nevertheless it exists, and extends far back into the hoary past. As a result of the work of this Association we are securing knowledge and information that is characterized by its clarity—information that is objective and precise, information that is relevant in the field of Negro life and history. The life struggles of Negro men and women have been chronicled by the Association, and their achievements emphasized. The sweeping glance of these lives have helped us to see more clearly what is important and what is unimportant—what is essential and what is non-essential in our own lives. The struggles and victories of these men and women under adverse circumstances have stirred us to activity in a way that the exploits of fictitious characters could never have done.

The story is told that in the hey-day of the Roman Empire the highways of the Romans were literally studded with the statues of their illustrious men—their men of achievement. These statues were erected that the Roman youth, gazing upon their faces, might be stimulated to greater achievement and accomplishment. I like to think

of the service of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in a similar vein. Who knows but that as Negro boys and girls have, through their study of accomplishments and achievements by Negro men and women, been pushed forward toward their destinies? This, then, it appears to me is one field in which the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History has made a distinct and constructive contribution to our modern Twentieth Century life—in the field of research and investigation, in the advancement of knowledge, in the accumulation of racial information and facts, in the discovery of truth as it relates primarily to the Negro and to Negro life.

But knowledge or information in and of itself is not power, is not progress. Progress in the knowledge of Negro life and history is in the hands of the interpreter as well as in the hands of the investigator or discoverer. Already we have an ample supply of investigators, but it appears to me that there is a shortage of readable and responsible interpreters, men and women who can effectively play the role of mediator between the trained investigator and the masses.

“We do not live by bread alone,” by facts; our spirits must be fed by sustaining truths. Some truths are merely true; they inform our minds. Other truths are nourishing; they feed our spirits. The great adventure of life lies in finding the truths we can live by, the gleams that we can safely follow, the goals that are worth working toward. What are the meanings of the knowledge discovered? What are the implications of the facts brought to light? Whither do they lead? What is their significance? Of what value are they? What is their place in our very complex social and economic order? What use can be made of them in assisting initially, ill-adapted individuals to a harmonious and beneficial adjustment? These are questions that should challenge the action and thought of our leaders.

This is the work of the philosopher, the interpreter, the crusading critic. It is in this field of interpretation, I think, that the major work of this Association lies for the next few years. The task of interpreting Negro thought, Negro achievement, Negro accomplishment, Negro culture patterns to the great masses of Negroes themselves, first, and ultimately, to their white brethren.

We ourselves as laymen have fixed and definite responsibilities. The findings of our trained investigators must be faced. It is sometimes hard for us to look a fact in the face without blinking, but sooner or later we shall all learn that the energy spent in trying to get around, under or over the facts is wasted energy. Facts have a ruthless way of winning the day sooner or later.

Again, facts to be really useful for us must be followed. We must say of them as Job said of God: Though they slay us, yet we shall trust them. If the facts threaten to cherish our beliefs or plans it will pay us to re-examine them. This way lies realism, and realism is ultimate progress and good. This, then, is another contribution that the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History has made and can make; namely, that of sitting in judgment on the findings of the investigators in the field of Negro life, of evaluating these findings, of setting up useful goals, of indicating traits and attitudes, of establishing points of view; in short, of interpreting to the Negro himself primarily, and to the world, the significance and the meaning of Negro achievements and accomplishments.

The temptation of the scholar is to keep the new truth he finds stacked in the warehouse. It shocks his sense of scholarly dignity to see his discoveries hawked in the market place by the popularizer. But the social usefulness of scholarship and its findings depends upon its translation into the common tongue. A dozen fields of thought are today confused with knowledge that the physical and social sciences have unearthed, and the whole tenor and temper of American life can be lifted by putting this knowledge

into general circulation. Similarly is this true in its application to the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. We must have the popularizer to stand between the masses whose knowledge of things is indefinite and the research worker whose knowledge is authoritative. Persons who can do for Negro life and history what Will Durant has done for philosophy and Edwin Slosson for science.

I have attempted in this brief paper to say that the contribution of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to our modern day has been first that of investigation, investigation in a virgin field, investigation that has brought to light a wealth of material pertaining to Negro life and culture, past and present; second, that it has contributed in the way of interpreting the Negro to himself and to the white race, and that in this field for some years to come is its immediate task. In the third place, this Association has functioned as a channel of communication. It is making possible the dissemination of information and knowledge concerning Negro life and history in increasing proportions. In brief, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History has pioneered in advancing knowledge in field of Negro history accumulating a fund of factual material, useful as a basis for thinking and action, useful as an integrating and synthesizing agency in promoting racial solidarity and cohesiveness, useful in helping to mould viewpoints, wholesome personal and social philosophies—national goodwill.

MARY McLEOD BETHUNE