

KANSAS CITY EDUCATOR SURVEYS FIELD OF NEGRO EDUCATION

Finds Defects In Negro Education Also Exist In Our American System

Says "Crying Need Is to Turn Out Boys and Girls Educated For Life"

(Editor's Note: The following article by Mr. Armstrong, a school teacher at Kansas City, was written in reply to an article by J. Victor (white) in a recent issue of the Educational Review. The Review declined to publish the article. It is said to be anti-Negro. Mr. Armstrong was born in Westfield, Ind., in 1892, attended Howard University 1908-10; A. B. Indiana University, 1913; A. M. Columbia University, 1914, and took graduate study at Columbia and the University of Chicago. He taught three years in the State School of Florida and Oklahoma and has been special agent of the United States Department of Labor. He will contribute other articles on general subjects to The Courier.)

By B. K. ARMSTRONG
KANSAS CITY, Mo., Sept. 29.—The age of armchair analysis in education is past. Experimentation is the only means by which men may arrive at the truths within this field. The writer was very much interested in a recent article in the Educational Review which stated that Negro education had failed because it did not produce the classic at the expense of training in the creative industrial. Sweeping generalities such as these are not possible in this age of scientific procedure. Every law and every dictum must be established by means of the most painstaking scientific technique. When I read the article I wondered against what criteria of success the writer of the previously mentioned article had correlated Negro education. This wonderment led to further inquiries. What variables were utilized in making up

the regression equation which determined the degree of success or failure of Negro education? I am sure that every profound student of the question will agree with me that some such technique as the regression equation would be necessary to fully determine whether or not Negro education had failed. If we are permitted to philosophize on the question, it appears to the writer that such a question as the relative failure or success of this or that type of education is far from being answered at the present time, because of the many variables in education, and because it is now im-

possible at the present time to set up reliable and consistent criteria of success.

The writer's definition of "Standard of Living" is as loose and as meaningless as his other generalities. The standard of living may be expressed and measured in terms of units of cost of living. All goods, cultural and economic, are purchased in cost of living units. While readers of this article may disagree in a measure with this understanding of the connection between the standard of living and the cost of living, it is nevertheless true that statistically the only way to measure the standard of living is through the cost of living. The cost of living is contingent upon income; for it is a known fact that the correlation between the cost of living and income is nearly unity. Thus, it is seen that as the income increases the cost of living goes up, and, consequently, the standard of living; and as the income decreases, the cost of living falls and also the standard of living. It is very true that a group which has a low income has a low purchasing power of economic goods and, consequently, a low standard of living.

However, there are many more variables than the skill of the Negro worker which enter in as casual factors in determining the relatively high or low incomes of Negro men and women. The various ramifications and manifestations of race prejudice and caste taboos, the law of supply and demand for labor, trade union practices, and inability to get training in certain occupations, all tend to increase or decrease the amount of money which the Negro worker is able to make. In our economic system, therefore, high salaries and wages are the results of a complex of interdependent variables. Thus, it is seen that the Negro might have an abundance of skilled artisans, and yet his income would not be increased in direct proportion to the number of skilled artisans. There are many illustrations of this fact. During the war many skilled Negroes reported for work at the various shipyards on the eastern seaboard, and yet, in the majority of instances, they were turned away for various reasons. Thus, it is seen it would be erroneous to argue that a high income is absolutely contingent in all cases upon skill and efficiency.

Many avenues or channels may be opened to the black youth for training him to be a skilled artisan, but until such factors as prejudice, supply and demand, caste, taboos, trade union practices, etc., are swept aside, there is no assurance that the income of the American Negro will be increased.

The writer of the afore-mentioned article states that Negro schools, with two notable exceptions, Hampton and Tuskegee, are merely preparatory agencies for the professional schools—for such work as teaching, ministry, law, dentistry, etc. I am sure that the writer was not aware of the fact that fully 75 per cent of the graduates of Hampton enter the teaching profession, and that a very large proportion of the graduates of both of these schools do not follow industrial pursuits. In a study made by the Bureau of Negro Economics in New York City a few years ago, it was shown that a large proportion of the Negroes trained in the technical and trade schools did not follow in subsequent life the trades for which they had been trained. The reasons for this have been pointed out in

the above discussion. Furthermore, a boy may be trained for a trade, and yet there is no assurance that he will be efficient in his trade, or that he will have any desire to follow the trade. This is true in particular because there is a vast difference in the trade situation in life and the training which a youth receives in school. The Negro has selected the professional courses for a number of obvious reasons. The professions offer him the only occupational opportunity. By entering the professions he is endeavoring to escape from the clutches of class and racial industrial discrimination. The cut-throat competition which exists in the skilled trades affects the Negro to such extent that entrance into these pursuits in many instances is an impossibility. The Negro parent, in his desire to better the condition of his child in the mazes of American racial complexes, has tended to look upon the professions as the only means of escape and as the only means of enjoying an economic status along with other American groups.

It is true that Negro institutions of higher learning are, in many instances, turning out misfits. However, this is due to the fact that the principles of vocational and educational guidance are still little understood. Then, too, there are no larger percentages of misfits coming out of Negro institutions of higher learning than there are coming out of other institutions of higher learning. The Negro college, along with the white college, will have to await the coming of a better understood guidance technique before it can hope to attain one hundred per cent of success in preparing its students for life.

The crying need in American education today is experimentation technique which will enable the school to turn out boys and girls who have been educated for life. There is no question in the mind of the writer but that the ills of the Negro educational system are also the ills of the American educational system in general. The time is at hand when we will have to reconstruct our curricula so that we will have a high degree of assurance that boys and girls will be fitted for life in school.

In so far as the Negro has been able—due to the complexity of the situation in which he finds himself—he has advanced, and the only reason that he has not the same income today as other racial groups in America is because his situation is far more complicated by a large number of uncontrollable factors. During the war, studies by the Department of Labor into the comparative cost of living and income of Negro and white workers showed conclusively that when given an opportunity the Negro worker had as high an income as other workers, and that he spent the same proportion of his income for the various factors which enter into the standard of living as other racial groups. Hence, it must be borne in mind that a remedy which will effect an increase in the income of the Negro lies not only in a scientific transformation of his educational program, but also in transformations which must take place all down the line in the political, social and economic maelstrom in which he struggles.