

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWENTIETH ANNUAL
CONVENTION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
COLLEGES AND PREPARATORY SCHOOLS OF
THE MIDDLE STATES AND MARYLAND, UNDER
THE AUSPICES OF THE HIGHER PUBLIC
SCHOOLS OF PHILADELPHIA, FRIDAY AND
SATURDAY, NOV. 30TH AND DEC. 1ST, 1906**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649488605

Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Convention of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Middle States and Maryland, Under the Auspices of the Higher Public Schools of Philadelphia, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 30th and Dec. 1st, 1906 by Various

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Professor E. C. Branson, of the University of North Carolina; to Mr. Jackson Davis, field agent of the General Education Board; and to my colleagues, Dr. A. A. Kern and Dr. J. M. Burton, of Millsaps College, for reading the manuscript and offering suggestions for its improvement.

S. G. N.

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CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SETTING, 1870-1871

Introductory. In its legal status the public school system of Mississippi is not, nor has it ever been, a dual system. There is a single school system which provides educational advantages for the children of both races. If there were a legal provision which specifically prohibited the children of one race from enjoying the school privileges extended to the other, such a provision would be rendered null and void by the Federal Constitution, as a discrimination based upon "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The history of the public schools is therefore not the history of the schools which the state has provided for the instruction of the white youth, but the history of schools provided for the instruction of both races. Despite, however, the equal status before the law of white and colored schools, educational facilities for the colored race have not run parallel with those provided for the whites. Recognizing this difference the author, although he is particularly interested in tracing the development of education for Negroes, is forced to give a comprehensive treatment of the public school system with respect to the education of both races, in order to give a faithful account of the Negro schools.

Economic and social conditions that have tended to promote the growth and efficiency of the public school system have in large measure affected the trend of Negro education. In like manner, efficiency, or lack of efficiency, in the administration of education has been felt in both white and colored schools. At the beginning of this study, therefore, it would be well to give an account not only of the organization of the public school system, but to take into consideration the social and economic conditions which attended its birth.

Density of Population. Density of population is an important factor in determining the growth and efficiency of school systems. To what extent this factor was influential at this period in Mississippi, we may learn from a study of the census reports of 1870.

There were then, according to the census returns, 382,896 whites and 444,201 Negroes, distributed over an area of 46,810 square miles, or 17.9 persons to the square mile. An idea of the relative density of the state may be had if we consider that the density of Ohio¹ at this time was 65.4; of Pennsylvania, 78.3; of New York, 92.0; and of Massachusetts, 181.3. There were only two² counties in the state with a population over 30,000, and there were seven counties³ with less than 5,000. There were only four towns in the state with a population over 2,000, and Vicksburg, the largest of these, had only 12,443.

The importance of density of population with respect to education may be seen in the following statements. In fifteen counties, comprising an area of 9,292 square miles, the Negroes out-numbered the whites nearly three to one.⁴ In this 'black belt' there were 179,237 Negroes and 60,004 whites, or 298 Negroes to every 100 whites. This situation was equalled in only one other southern state, Alabama, which had a somewhat more extensive black belt with 315 Negroes to every 100 whites. The black belt counties of Mississippi were among the most populous of the state, and yet there were but 19.3 Negroes and 5.1 whites to the square mile. This means that even the most populous areas of the state were but sparsely settled. It means, further, if we allow three children to the family, that there were many townships in this section in which thirty-six white families⁵ would have to support schools for approximately 100 white children and 400 Negro children. But educational conditions were more favorable, under a system of local taxation, in the black belt than in many of the more sparsely settled white counties, since the black counties were not only the most populous but the richest. In respect to the poor white counties Superintendent Pease reported⁶ in 1872 that there were many in which the

¹ I refer to these states in particular because many of the northern men who had in hand the organization of the new school system, were most familiar with schools in these states, and hoped to plant their old ideas in new soil. They failed to consider the difference pointed out above.

² Hinds and Lowndes.

³ The 'white counties': Greene, Hancock, Jackson, Jones, Marion, Wayne, Perry.

⁴ Kelley Miller: *Education of the Negro*, United States Commissioner's Report, 1900-1901, p. 731.

⁵ The white families were the tax-payers; the Negroes had not yet acquired property to any extent.

⁶ United States Commissioner's Report, 1873, p. 213.

maximum tax levy (ten mills for schoolhouses and five for teachers) would not raise revenue sufficient to educate one-fourth of the scholastic population. It is clear, therefore, that the factor of sparse distribution of the population was to play an important part in determining the number, size, and grade of schools to be established, as well as in determining their future support.

Illiteracy. The problem of illiteracy in 1870 was not complicated to an undue extent by the question of race. It was mainly a colored problem. Advance sheets of the census ⁷ this year showed that out of a total population of 382,896 whites, there were 23,103 adult illiterates; and that out of a total of 444,896 Negroes, there were 168,031 adult illiterates. It is evident that very few adult Negroes were able to read and write. These figures are sufficient to indicate that the educational problem in 1870 was largely the problem of providing schools for Negroes for whom no schools had heretofore existed.

Economic Situation. The economic situation has much to do in shaping the sentiment of people toward education. A brief summary therefore will not be out of place just here. The following figures represent the assessed value of real and personal property for the years indicated:⁸

1860	\$509,472,902
1865	134,131,128
1870	177,288,892

It is impossible to estimate the market value of this property, but considering the unsettled times, the figures for 1865 and 1870 are certainly not underestimated. It may be added that during the decade between 1860 and 1870 the value of farm property ⁹ alone declined from \$241,478,571 to \$92,890,758, or 61.5 per cent. During the same period the cotton crop declined from 1,202,507 bales to 565,559. The demoralization of war and the inability to make a proper adjustment to the new economic situation are written large in these figures.

An element worthy of consideration in this connection is the fact that the cotton crops for 1866, 1867, and 1870 were failures.

⁷ United States Commissioner's Report, 1871, p. 68.

⁸ United States Congress, Report of Committee on Affairs in Late Insurrectionary States, p. 179.

⁹ Abstract of United States Census, 1910, Mississippi Supplement, p. 612.