

and that they are making progress. But care is taken lest we see them, and they seldom appear on stage to speak for themselves.

There are few, if any, references to the nameless black men who helped to create the social wealth of the South and the black politicians who gave many Southern communities their first public school systems and their first welfare institutions. We are not told of the individual achievements of black men and women like Phillis Wheatley, the colonial poet who was the second American woman to write a book; Benjamin Banneker, the astronomer who helped to lay out Washington, D.C.; Jan Matzeliger who revolutionized the shoe industry by inventing a machine for attaching soles to shoes; and Charles Drew who helped perfect the blood plasma technique which has saved the lives of so many Americans, black and white.

The use of textbooks filled with half-truths, evasions and distortions is disastrous to both white and black Americans: to white Americans because one cannot know a great deal about America unless one knows a little about the Negro: to black Americans because personal health depends to a great extent on group self-esteem and because the spirit withers and dies if it is deprived of the opportunity to feed on the deeds of great men and the ideals of great movements.

In general, white-oriented textbooks tend to inoculate white Americans with the virus of racism, giving them a sense of exclusive identification with a land created by blood and sweat and tears of men and women of all races and creeds. The effect on black youth is equally disastrous.

E. A. Johnson, a Negro historian, wrote:

During my eleven years as a teacher, I have often observed the sins of omission and commission on the part of white children, and studiously left out the many creditable deeds of the Negro. The general tone of most of the historians * * * has been that of the inferiority of the Negro * * *. How must the little colored child feel when he has completed the assigned course of United States history and in it found not one word of credit, not one word of favorable comment for even one among the millions of his forefathers, who have lived through nearly three centuries of his country's history.

I might add that this statement was made in 1891, and that very little has changed in our educational system in the intervening years.

It may be that some of our problems with disturbed and angry black youths stem from this situation. The pattern of meaning we call education is not relevant to the lives of black Americans who constitute the majority of the public school pupils in Washington, D.C., and a majority of the elementary school pupils in Chicago and other cities.

Education does not tell these students who they are and how they got that way. It does not give them an image of their condition. It does not corroborate their reality. They do not live in the country described in the books. The books, the words, the pictures, the symbols, are about another people who live in another country.

Within recent years, there has been increasing public recognition of the dimensions of this problem. Several big-city school systems are now using supplements. But supplements are at best temporary and inadequate substitutes. The only solution is an adequate supply of total texts which give a balance portrayal of the role and achievements of all Americans.

Although publishers are beginning to offer balanced texts, the supply does not meet the demand or the need, and I believe the Federal