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Booker T. Washington

Letter to the Editor of the Birmingham [Alabama] *Age-Herald*

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I notice that several newspapers have recently connected my name with political matters in such a manner as to show that my position is misunderstood. I desire, therefore, to make the following statement:

My life work is the promotion of the education of my race. It is well known that I have always advised my people that it is of supreme importance, at this period of their development, that should concentrate their thought and energy on the securing of homes, the cultivation of habits of thrift, economy, skill, intelligence, high moral character, and the gaining of the respect and confidence of their neighbors, white and black, both in the south and in the north. From such teaching and counsel, no influence can ever divert me.

Whatever conferences I have had with the President or with any public official have grown out of my position, not as a politician, but as an educator. It should be borne in mind that there are about nine millions of negroes in the United States, who are liable under the law for taxes and military service, and who are punishable for infraction of the law. These people at present have no member of their race in the national law-making body, and it is right that those charged with making and executing the laws of the land should at times seek information directly from members of the negro race when their interests and their relations with the whites among whom they live are concerned.

Under no circumstances could I seek to promote political candidacies or volunteer information regarding men or measures, nor have I done so in the past; but because of the importance I have always sought to place upon education and industry among my people as the bases of friendly relations between the races, there may be occasions in the future as there have been in the past, when, if I am so requested, I can give information about men and measures, which would tend to promote such friendly relations between the races, such information it is my duty to give when it is asked for.

At every proper opportunity I say to the youth of our people that they will make a mistake if they seek to succeed in life by mere political activity or the hope of holding political office. Now and then, however, public questions affecting our interests arise which are so fundamental and far-reaching that they transcend the domain of politics. When such questions present themselves, in justice to my race, I make my position known and stand for what I see to be the right.

We cannot elevate and make useful a race of people unless there is held out to them the hope of reward for right living. Every revised constitution throughout the southern states has put a premium upon intelligence, ownership of property, thrift and character.

As an educator, and not as a politician, I strive in every honorable and rational way to encourage the wise and enduring progress of my people; for if all inspiration and hope of reward is to be denied them, they will be deprived of one of the greatest incentives to intelligence, industry, and righteousness. On the other hand, if they are encouraged in sensible and conservative directions they will grow year by year into contentedness and added usefulness.

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