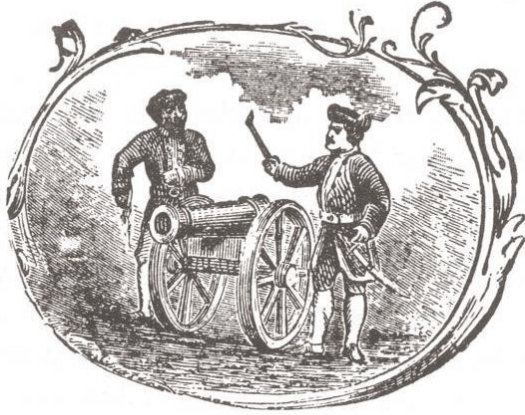


— Excerpted by the National Humanities Center for use in a Professional Development Seminar —



Brave Colored Artilleryman.

**A SCHOOL HISTORY**  
OF THE  
**Negro Race in America**  
FROM 1619 TO 1890  
by  
**EDWARD A. JOHNSON**

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\_\_\_\_ Excerpts, with illustrations from the 1911 edition \_\_\_\_

**\_\_\_\_ P R E F A C E \_\_\_\_**

To the many thousand colored teachers in our country this book is dedicated. During my experience of eleven years as a teacher, I have often felt that the children of the race ought to study some work that would give them a little information on the many brave deeds and noble characters of their own race. I have often observed the sin of omission and commission on the part of white authors, most of whom seem to have written exclusively for white children, and studiously left out the many creditable deeds of the Negro. The general tone of most of the histories taught in our schools has been that of the inferiority of the Negro, whether actually said in so many words, or left to be implied from the highest laudation of the deeds of one race to the complete exclusion of those of the other. It must, indeed, be a stimulus to any people to be able to refer to their ancestors as distinguished in deeds of valor, and peculiarly so to the colored people. But how must the little colored child feel when he has completed the assigned course of U. S. History and in it found not one word of credit, not one word of favorable comment for even one among the millions of his foreparents, who have lived through nearly three centuries of his country's history! The Negro is hardly given a passing notice in many of the histories taught in the schools; he is credited with no heritage of valor; he is mentioned only as a slave, while true historical records prove him to have been among the most patriotic of patriots, among the bravest of soldiers, and constantly a God-fearing, faithful producer of the nation's wealth. Though a slave to this government, his was the first blood shed in its defence in those days when a foreign foe threatened its destruction. In each of the American wars the Negro was faithful — yes,

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\* Full text of original 1890 edition at Documenting the American South, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/johnson/menu.html>

faithful to a land not his own in point of rights and freedom, but, indeed, a land that, after he had shouldered his musket to defend, rewarded him with a renewed term of slavery. Patriotism and valor under such circumstances possess a peculiar merit and beauty. But such is the truth of history; and may I not hope that the study of this little work by the boys and girls of the race will inspire in them a new self-respect and confidence. Much, of course, will depend on you, dear teachers, into whose hands I hope to place this book. By your efforts, and those of the children, you are to teach from the truth of history that complexions do not govern patriotism, valor, and sterling integrity. . . .

I respectfully request that my fellow-teachers will see to it that the word *Negro* is written with a capital *N*. It deserves to be so enlarged and will help, perhaps, to magnify the race it stands for in the minds of those who see it.

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

**The Origin of the Negro** is definitely known. Some very wise men, writing to suit prejudiced readers, have endeavored to assign the race to a separate creation and deny its kindred with Adam and Eve. But historical records prove the Negro as ancient as the most ancient races — for 5000 years into the dim past mention is made of the Negro race. . . .

**The Present Condition** of the African is the result of the fall of the Egyptian empire, which was in accord with the Bible prophecy of all nations who forgot God and worshipped idols. That the Africans were once a great people is shown by their natural love for the fine arts. They are poetic by nature, and national airs sung long ago by exploring parties in Central Africa are still held by them, and strike the ears of more modern travellers with joy and surprise. . . .



## CHAPTER IV. MASSACHUSETTS, RHODE ISLAND, AND CONNECTICUT

NEGRO slavery existed in Massachusetts as early as 1633. The Puritan fathers who came to this country in search of liberty, carried on for more than a century a traffic in human flesh and blood.<sup>2</sup> The New England ships of the 17th century brought cargoes of Negroes from the west coast of Africa and the Barbadoes. They sold many of them in New England as well as in the Southern colonies. In 1764 there were nearly 6000 slaves in Massachusetts, about 4000 in Rhode Island, and the same in Connecticut. . . .

**Felix Holbrook** and other slaves presented a petition to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1773, asking to be set free and granted some unimproved lands where they might earn an honest living as freemen. Their petition was delayed consideration one year, and finally passed. But the English governors, Hutchinson and Gage, refused to sign it, because they perhaps thought it would “choke the channel of a commerce in human souls.”

**British Hatred** to Negro freedom thus made itself plain to the New England slaves, and a few years later, when England fired her guns to subdue the revolution begun at Lexington, the slave population enlisted largely in the defence of the colonists. And thus the Negro slave by valor, patriotism and industry, began to loosen the chains of his own bondage in the Northern colonies. . . .

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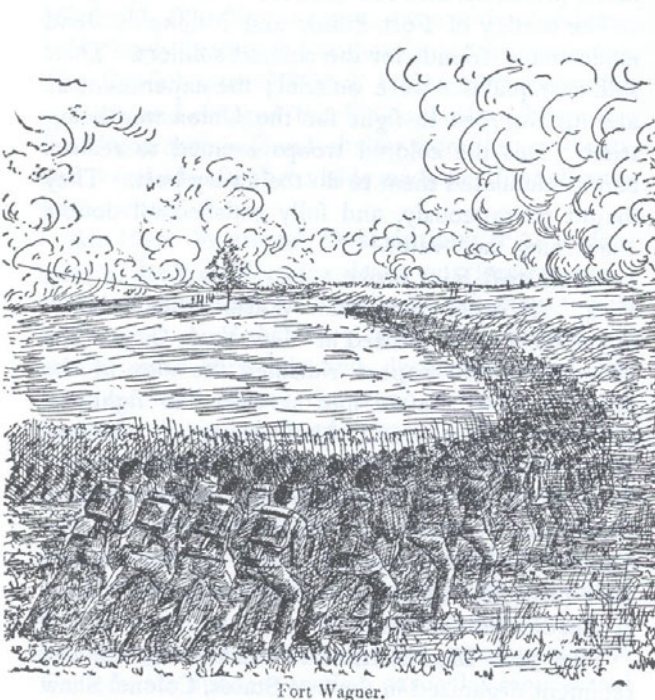
<sup>2</sup> 1890 ed.: “The Puritan fathers who came to this country in search of liberty did not hesitate to carry on for more than a century a disgraceful traffic in human flesh and blood.”

## CHAPTER XX. THE SLAVE POPULATION OF 1860

IN the sixteen slave States there were 3,950,000 slaves in 1860, and 251,000 free colored people. Nearly 3,000,000 of the slaves were in the rural districts of the South; and the slave products of cotton, tobacco, rice, sugar-cane, hemp, and molasses, amounted to about \$136,505,435. These products, made by slave labor, formed the basis of Southern prosperity. The war of the rebellion which commenced in the following year, was destined to shake the very foundation of Southern civilization. From a people unaccustomed to hard work, it was to take away those who worked for them, and those same people who were to be taken away were to be regaled in the priceless boon of citizenship. . . .



## CHAPTER XXII. EMPLOYMENT OF NEGRO SOLDIERS



Fort Wagner.

. . . **The 54th Massachusetts** was the first colored regiment organized in the free States, Colonel Shaw commander. It played a prominent part in the attempt to take *Fort Wagner*, near Charleston, S. C. It marched two days and nights through swamps and drenching rains to be in time for the assault. Soaking wet, muddy, hungry and fatigued, they reached the field in time and gladly accepted the “post of honor and danger,” immediately in front. After a five minutes’ rest they double-quickened a half-mile to the fort, where, after a most gallant and desperate fight, *Sergeant William H. Carney* planted the regimental flag on the works. Nearly all the officers of the regiment were killed, and it was led off by a boy — Lieut. Higginson. . . .



## CHAPTER XXIX. PROGRESS SINCE FREEDOM

**Through a Century and a Half** we have now traced our ancestors' history. We have seen how they performed the hard tasks assigned them by their masters: following the hoe and the plow with a laugh and a song; making magnificent estates, building mansions, furnishing them with the splendor of the times; so eager in patriotism as to be the first to shed their blood on the altar of their country's liberty. All this they did with no other hope of reward than a slave's cabin and a life of bondage for themselves and children. Scarcely have they ever sought revenge in riot or bloodshed. Stolen from a home of savage freedom they found themselves in strait circumstances as slaves in America, but the greatness of the Negro's nature crops out plainly in the wonderful way in which he adapted himself to his new conditions. The fact that he went to work willingly, worked so long and faithfully, and rebelled so little, marks him as far superior to the Indian, who never accepts the conditions of labor, either for himself or another; and universally enjoys the rank of a savage rather than that of a civilized being. A plant placed in the window of a dark chamber gradually bends its foliage towards the sunlight; so the Negro, surrounded by the darkness of slavery, bent his life toward the light of his master's God. He found Him. In Him he trusted, to Him he prayed, from Him he hoped for deliverance; no people ever were more devout according to their knowledge of the word, no people ever suffered persecution more bravely, no people ever got more out of the few talents assigned them; and for this humble devotion, this implicit trust and faithfulness, God has now rewarded them. The race comes out of slavery with more than it had before it went in. *But there was no need of any slavery at all. Jamestown, New England, and the other colonies might have held the Negro long enough to serve out his passage from Africa, and then given him his freedom, as they did their white slaves imported from England.* The mistake was made then; the mistake became a law which the people were educated to believe was just. Many *did not* believe it, and some slaveholders sought to make the condition of their slaves comfortable. The affection arising between the slave and his master often governed the treatment. The Negro being largely endowed by nature with affection, affability, and a forgiving spirit, generally won for himself good treatment. Then, too, the master had some soul, and where that ingredient of his make-up was deficient, a selfish interest in the slave as his property somewhat modified the venom that might have more often visited itself upon the unfortunate slave in lashes and stripes.

**Many Affections and Friendships** formed between master and slave exist to the present day. Some slaves are still at the old homestead, conditions entirely reversed, voting differently at the polls, but *friends* at home; and in death the family of one follows that of the other to the grave.

**When the War Ended**, the whole South was in an unsettled condition — property destroyed, thousands of her sons dead on the battle-field, no credit, conquered. But if the condition of the whites was

bad, that of the blacks was *worse*. They were without homes, money, or learning. They were now to feed, clothe, and protect themselves in a gover[n]ment whose treasury they had enriched with two centuries and a half of unrequited labor, and a country whose laws they must obey but could not read.

**It was Natural** that they should make mistakes. But they made less mistakes than the *bummers* who came South for plunder during reconstruction times, and with the false promise of “forty acres and a mule,” led the unlettered race into a season of idleness and vain hopes. But this condition did not last. The Negro inherited the ability to work from the institution of slavery. He soon set about to utilize this ability. I ask what race could have done more? And this the Negro has done, though virtually ostracized from the avenues of trade and speculation. His admission to a trades union is the exception rather than the rule in America. A colored boy taking a place as porter in a store at the same time with a white boy, may find the white boy soon promoted to a clerkship, then to a partnership in the firm, if he is smart; but the colored boy remains, year after year, where he first commenced, no matter how worthy, no matter how competent. His lot is that of a menial; custom assigns him there, and in looking for clerks and partners he is not thought of by the white business man; and thus, by the rigid laws of custom, he has continually lost golden opportunities to forge his fortune; yet he has prospered in spite of this, and it bespeaks for him a superior manhood.



### \_\_\_\_CHAPTER XXX. RELIGIOUS PROGRESS\_\_\_\_

BEFORE the war, the colored people of the South worshipped mainly in the white churches, or in separate churches usually ministered to by white pastors. But the colored people, naturally inclined to religion, soon developed preachers of their own. They composed their own music, which expressed, in their own way, thanks and petitions to heaven. Their music is original, entertaining, and pathetic — and the only original music of the American Continent, when we remember that other than Negro techniques and melodies are all borrowed from the masters of Europe.

**Debarred of the Privileges** of schools, it is not surprising that the religion of the slaves should be otherwise than somewhat twisted from the cultured tone of the Bible to suit the whims of an unlettered race. It can be truly said though, that, considering the circumstances, they did not bury the talents given them. But the religious progress since freedom is so marvellous as to completely overshadow much of the darkness of the past. . . .

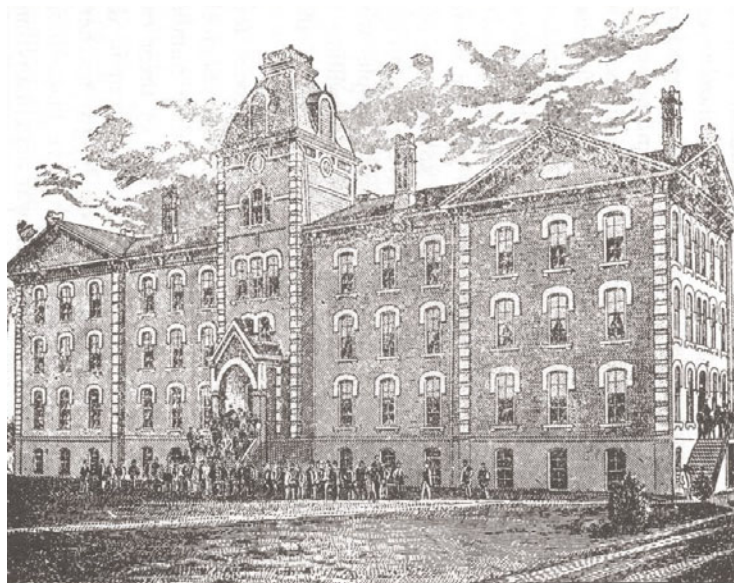
## CHAPTER XXXI. EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

**Can the Negro** learn anything? was the first question he had to answer after schools were established for him. He has answered this question satisfactorily to the most incredulous in every instance where brought to a test. The fact that every slave State had laws against his being taught before the war, and that they opposed it afterwards, ought to be a sufficient answer. . . .

### WHAT THE SOUTH IS DOING FOR NEGRO EDUCATION

It would be a serious error to omit, in speaking of the educational progress of the Negro since freedom, what has been done to help him by the Southern States. Though at first bitterly opposed to Negro education, there has been a wonderful change of sentiment on this subject. They made laws against Negro education before the war, now they make laws for it. . . . There are some who oppose Negro education on the ground that the whites pay two-thirds of the taxes. A false position this — the laborer and consumer pay the taxes on capital. The Negro is the laborer of the South, and a large consumer. He produces more than a billion dollars' worth of farm products annually, not estimating other products; and it is his toil, his muscle that makes the school-fund; and out of the inexhaustible store-house of his own labor does he draw his quota of the appropriation for the schools. Add also what he pays into the fund by taxes.

**The High Schools**, Seminaries, Colleges and Professional Schools for the colored people number nearly two hundred. Many of them are controlled entirely by colored Faculties, as Livingston and Bennett Colleges, N. C.; Morris Brown College, Ga.; Tuskegee Normal School, Ala.; Wilberforce University, Ohio; Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute; Kittrell's Normal and Industrial Institute, and Shaw University, except its President, who is white, but one of the first Presidents to recognize the ability of young colored men to teach the higher branches. . . .



Shaw University.

**When the War Closed** there were about four million colored people in the United States. Scarcely a million of them could read. Now they number about eight millions, and nearly half of them can read. There are 1,158,008 colored children in the schools, annually taught by 20,000 Negro teachers. The colored people of the South have made more progress in education since the war than in anything else;

and they are still thirsty for knowledge. The schools everywhere are crowded. The love of knowledge seems to be instinctive, and thousands of faithful mothers spend many weary nights at the ironing-board and wash-tub in order to get money to help their children obtain an education. With the start they now have, twenty-five years more of earnest work will show marvellous changes in the educational condition of the race. No people ever learned more in so short a time.

#### MUSICAL PROGRESS

**The Fisk Jubilee Singers** have sung the fame of the Negro in all America, much of Europe and Australia. The slave music is the only original music of America. The Indian has none, and white Americans have borrowed from the masters of Europe. Negro melodies are now a part of the *classical* music of this country. The peculiarity of Negro song is its pathos and trueness to nature. It stirs the soul and revives a sunken hope. Travellers describe the music of the native African as sung in a *major* key, which key characterizes the songs of a conquering people. Slavery has not extracted this characteristic totally from the American Negro's songs. While he sings not the conquering *major* of battle, he thrills you with the pleasing *minor* of hope. . . .



### \_\_\_\_CHAPTER XXXII. FINANCIAL PROGRESS\_\_\_\_

**The Freedmen's Savings Bank**, though it failed, furnishes a strong argument in favor of the thrift and industry of the recently emancipated slaves. In this bank the colored people deposited during the years between 1866 and 1871, about \$57,000,000. The original design of this institution was doubtless good, but it fell into bad hands, and the consequence was a most disgraceful failure. . . . But the Negro is *putting his money in other enterprises*, and though unsuccessful in his first, his last efforts at economy are bearing rich fruit. . . .

**Much Property** is owned by the colored people of the North and West. Some of their estates run high into the hundred thousands. Many of them, though shut out almost entirely from the trades and business avenues, have accumulated handsome homes, and live in elegance and refinement. . . .

In closing this chapter on the progress of the race since the war, we desire to say to you, our young readers, that much has been done, as you have read in this chapter, to raise the race in the estimation of the world, but much more remains to be done. What has been said in this chapter is not to make you content and satisfied, but rather, to inspire new zeal and fresh courage, that each one of you may add something more to what has already been accomplished. You can, you must, and we believe you will. Do



not falter on account of difficulties. Set your standard high and go to it, remembering that labor, coupled with a strong devotion to integrity, will surely conquer. . . .

## \_\_\_\_ CHAPTER XXXV. CONCLUSION \_\_\_\_

Up to the present time the Negro has been a success in every avenue of life. As a soldier and citizen he has always been faithful to his country's flag; as a politician, he has filled successfully many honorable positions, from that of a Town Constable to the Registry of the Treasury of the United States; he has been a legislator, a senator, a judge, a lawyer, a juror, a shrewd business man, and won honor, respect, and confidence in every such position, and all this in twenty-five years. Every sort of hindrance has been thrown in his way, but he is overcoming them all, and daily winning friends from the ranks of those most opposed to his progress. Time is yet to bring forth better things for the race. Let there be patience, and an honest, persistent endeavor to do the very best in everything, and ere long we shall "reap if we faint not." We shall rise, not by dragging others down, but by encouraging those who are up to extend down to us the helping hand, which we must quickly grasp, and by its help *lift ourselves up*.

