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Newspaper clippings - Education, A Political Necessity Jan. 9, 1871

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EDUCATION A POLITICAL NECESSITY.

BY GEN. O. O. HOWARD.

Dear Brother;—I am still very much interested in the general work of education in this country, and I fear that our public men do not give it the attention that the subject demands. Whether I consider the matter in a religious or a political point of view, I am none the less anxious. I have regarded the Republican party as the party of reform. It has carried on to completion the work of enfranchisement, by opening the courts to the testimony of all, by protecting the new citizens in their civil rights, and, in brief, by giving them the right of suffrage and collateral advantages. In the way of rights, the party, the country has been generous. But, for its own sake, the Republican party needed to go one step further, so as not to put positive power in the hands of its enemies. And that step was, to secure *homes and schools* to the late slaves, and to their neighbors who had been degraded and impoverished by the presence of slavery. Every Republican I have ever conversed with, and many Democrats, admit the desirableness of this object, but they do not see *how* the work can be effected. Through the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's Associations, particularly the noble organization to which you are attached, practical results have been attained, that are patent to all thinking men. The accomplishment of this work, so much needed, may be placed in other hands, and, under all the circumstances, I would advise it, so far as the Government agency is concerned, because this agency has been limited to refugees and freedmen. But the exercise of the same or similar powers certainly can be as reasonably undertaken in the future as in the past. Only two objections, so far as I noticed, have been made to the general government aiding in the

work of education. The first is, *that it costs too much*, and, therefore, it should not be done until the public debt has been paid; and the second objection is, *that it would be centralizing in its tendency*.

It is only necessary to suggest one answer to the last objection: namely, that all proper education entered into by the state for the children of all the people, tends directly to individuality of thought and action, the best possible guaranty against a single monarchy, or a multiplicity of them. You are aware that many of our States claimed sovereign power before the war, if there was not a positive monarchical government in South Carolina or Mississippi, the power was in the hands of an aristocratic few, and the tendency to monarchy was acknowledged by the very citizens who entered into the rebellion. They constantly affirmed: "A republic is a failure, and we must have a stronger government." The permanent corrective to this state of things, is the diffusion of a proper education among the masses of the people. The exercise by the general government of the power of *help*—not of *control*—in the way of education, would no more tend to consoli-

tion, than the exercise of a similar power, as is now in operation in the Department of the Interior, with reference to the Indians, homesteads, or such internal improvements as come within its scope.

Now, as to the *cost*, the first objection: Every man who has studied at all, subjects connected with the government of a state, certainly under *any* forms of government, must see that no proposition is more clearly demonstrated than this, that there is positive *economy* in the true education of all the children of the state. It saves, by preventing crime, by taking from the expense of pauperism, and adding to the productive industry, and therefore, to the general treasury. There is no necessity in urging this proposition, or its complement, that there is no economy in the ruling of ignorant masses. I have been careful to use the expression, "*proper* education," for I am aware that intelligent men, having the best training of the schools, may be intensely selfish, and powerful disorganizers of all social order. A "*proper* education," of course, involves the moral and religious training. Many time-serving advocates of expediency shrink from this word "*proper*," while they assent to "*education*." And we should be willing that the teaching should take any form, provided all parties would agree to its continuance. But, fortunately, the descendants of the pilgrims, if not others, have had instilled into them the idea of *religious* liberty, as well as *civil*, and they would, therefore, be as unwilling to muzzle the schools lest they should read God's word, as the press. They do not understand that there would be any true liberty in the idea of shutting out any historical or literary works, and least of all, that epitome of history, that un-failing model of literature, that wonderful compendium of the knowledge of generations, the holy Book of divine truth.

My proposition is a simple one. It is, first, to give us a Department of Education, with a Secretary of Public Instruction, who shall have a seat in the Cabinet, and rank in importance next to the Secretary of State, and give to this Department the supervision and direction of all Educational work in public territory not embraced under State or Territorial organizations; and second, to give to it the power of help, such as has been afforded by the Freedmen's Bureau and the Indian Bureau, from time to time, in such sums of money, and under such limitations and control, as Congress shall, by specific law direct, to *any part* of our country where there is an educational system, or where a system is inoperative. And, even within State organizations, it seems to me that the safety of our Government demands that parents should be compelled to send their children to school.

Surely, if it is desired by our people, to carry out the solemn injunctions of Washington on the subject of education, we can never do it better, or give it more adequate importance, than by setting into operation a proper Educational Department of the General Government.

Earnestly hoping that the people will contribute more liberally than ever to the American Missionary Association, now that you are so much crippled by losing the aid I have been too glad to render, I wish you God speed in the grand work of Christian training.

WASHINGTON, D. C., Jan. 9th 1871.