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# The Humor of Teaching in The Crisis

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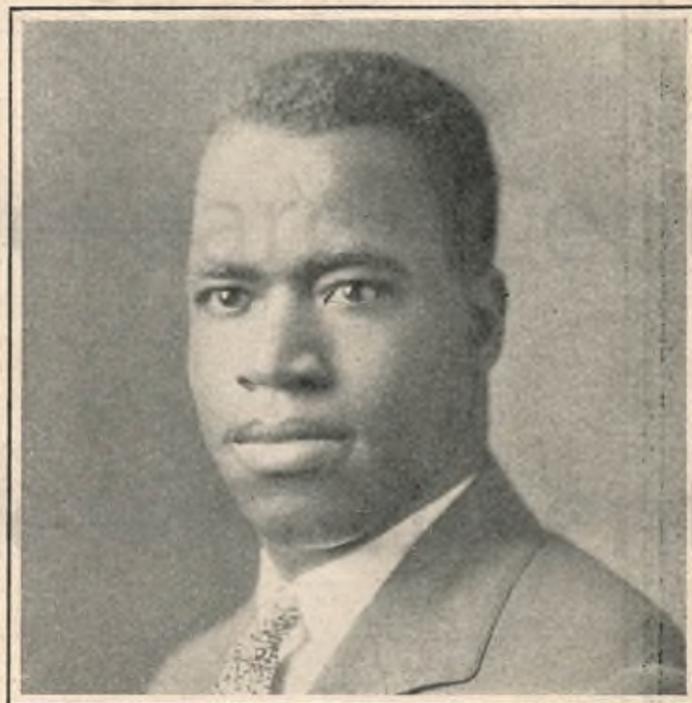
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# THE CRISIS

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



**HEYWOOD  
WRITES ON  
THE NEGRO VOTER**  
**BROUN**



**WALTER WHITE ON NEGRO VOTES IN OHIO**

**DR. GEORGE HAYNES ON AFRICA**

# The Humor of Teaching

By DR. ANNA J. COOPER

I HAVE read with interest the strictures of Professor Davis on the Negro College Student and likewise the three or four answers from students in a subsequent issue of THE CRISIS. I am impressed particularly with the true teacher-spirit of Mr. Davis' faultfinding and the high detachment of his aim and purpose in writing. His criticism while severe is not carping or slanderous, neither is it the flippant sort that seizes an opportunity to rush to print for the vain glory of making talk through the newspapers; rather is it the honest findings and chastening of an intelligent father who wishes to correct an imperfect son,—constructive, as all criticism should be, with an eye single to the ideal, not a relative, standard.

The answers, too, so far are not the tiresome attack and counter-attack that get us nowhere beyond the over brilliant sparring exhibition of hit and thrust: they suggest causes and further criticisms—one, the need of ripe scholarship among teachers themselves, specifically the frivolous fledgelings just out of college and serving an indeterminate sentence to teach on their way to something hoped for; a second, the dry-as-dust abstractions and mental gymnastics embalmed in an outworn college curriculum that have no discoverable connection with the practical life interests of the student and never made to grip his attention and disclose where he, the individual John Jones, can catch on, etc.

If you will allow, I should like to add one other point of view in the same spirit of meeting our collective difficulties by unearthing a possible contributing factor not yet mentioned. In the first place, I believe we must admit that by large our group have not the jack-be-nimble, jack-be-quick mental processes that discover short cuts and invent speed tilts into the goal. A fellow may give you the cold stare that shows he is not yet on the road, not because he is too lazy to travel (that is, if laziness has to do with will) but because he is still groping for the way out and has not yet caught on to the meaning of the word Go! Such students usually get short shift at the hands of ambitious young professors who are thinking loftily of the cloistered walks of Oxford and Cambridge or the sacred inspirations of Heidel-

*Dr. Cooper has long been a teacher in the public schools of Washington, D. C. and was once principal of the high school. She received her doctorate at the Sorbonne, Paris. This article is a continuation of the discussion begun in the August CRISIS by Arthur P. Davis and continued in the September CRISIS by several other writers.*

berg and Berlin. Many fellows come hungering and thirsting to college as to an interpreter and unfold of life, a warm touch of an understanding friend—but too often in place of the Bread of Life they get a stone.

In the second place, I believe that few teachers realize that segregation in education puts an undreamed of handicap on the student in the colored college from the all-unsuspecting teacher himself. I do not mean the exclusion from the very atmosphere of current life and thought, from lectures, plays, symphonies, oratorios, from airplanes, hotels and even in some sections from public libraries and parks,—all this is well-known and bewailed from every pulpit and platform. I speak of a handicap unknown and unsuspected in the teaching body itself, the most cultured, painstaking, conscientious devotees of the higher learning, and just in proportion to their excellence of preparation and their devotion to their ideals.

I say that the handicap is unrecognized because it proceeds from these very qualities, which all must admire and want to emulate, a handicap of which the authors themselves are wholly unconscious and of which it would be most ungracious to speak save with the deepest appreciation and solely for the purpose of suggesting a let down of tension and an order from headquarters: *In place, Rest! Amusez-Vous!*

Segregated teachers are largely book-fed. What is worse, they believe what is in the books. They race to summer schools and institutes, to lecture courses and evening classes to "keep up" with their work and perhaps earn a much needed promotion. All of which is most commendable and highly necessary. But—the lectures and summer

courses are unavoidably sketchy and packed in under pressure. They read, mark, learn, but there is no time to "inwardly digest". Besides, a white man doesn't always mean all he says in a book, and hardly ever does all he suggests in a speech. A lecturer must sell his books, that is his bread and butter. He must get out a new edition of an old thought and so he says one thing today, another tomorrow. You must "keep up"—That's the thing! He naively admits the whole subject is in flux and never supposes any rational creature would try to do all he says and keep on doing it just as he says it. By and bye another "authority" comes along with another brand new wrinkle; ridicules all you've been told as fads and fancies and proceeds to give you the latest, the only true and accepted . . . precious words of gold in setting of silver which may have to be modified, adapted, even discarded altogether before the next hegira. And just here is where the conscientious teacher, sensitive over her "standards" (it is usually "she") becomes unwittingly and innocently a handicap and a hindrance to the equally conscientious student. She insists that the "Standard" (meaning the book) must be reached. She is sensitive about her "material" (meaning the colored folk she has to carry along) sensitive about the quality of her work and the mark she is to get on it, and deep down sore about her color and the suffering that entails. She is determined there shall be no flies on her teaching—and there aren't, except that she gives herself no joy in the act and loses entirely all sense of humor in the process.

If she were on the other side the color line she would laugh over the mistakes she now spends sleepless nights bluepencilling and would taste a literary tang in the idiosyncracies that she now turns from in horror and disgust because she dreads and fears any out-cropping of what may be considered "Southern" and to the manor born, that is to say, racial. The result is that the classroom platform, so long ago banished from white schools, is still an elevation to stand on, in thought at least, for most colored schools and the teacher speaks "from the chair" with authority, with dignity, and with finality. Naturalness (*Will you please turn to page 393*)

## Negro Judges for Harlem

(Continued from page 377)

show that the New York Negro has learned to play the game politically in a realistic fashion. The re-districting of Senatorial and Congressional lines in the fashion desired by the colored group, it is fair to believe, must take place within the next few years.

A strong effort will be made to avert the election of Negro justices. Sentiment has been expressed in many white quarters extremely hostile to having Negro judges on the bench. It can be expected that the most ruthless tactics will be resorted to by those opposing the election of Negro justices to kill them off. It means that the colored residents of Harlem must register in unprecedented numbers in order that the opportunity presented to them by this new law will not turn to ashes and leave them with nothing. With every colored lawyer both Republican and Democratic an aspirant for these judicial honors and with the entire population on the qui vive because of this unique opportunity, it is safe to predict that the registration and the political campaign this fall will be the greatest in its intensity and vigor that has ever taken place and that New York's first colored judges will be inducted into office on January 1st, 1931.

## The Browsing Reader

(Continued from page 378)

"As a result of the exclusion policies of these unions not less than 225,000 Negro workers are denied trade union affiliation and its attendant benefits."

In addition to these unions who openly discriminate, large numbers of other unions secretly keep Negroes out whenever they can. A study of the action of such unions fills sixty pages of the Report and is done in great detail, and yet is full of clear information.

Fifty cases of actual experiences of Negro workers and white unions close the book. Perhaps this closing is almost too abrupt. One always wants in a study of this sort to have the measured and careful conclusions of the expert who has done the work. Probably Mr. Reid lacked both time and money to do this. At any rate, what he has done is of unusual and lasting value.

W. E. B. D.

## The Humor of Teaching

(Continued from page 387)

on the part of students, initiative and an easy give and take in discussing a thought or its application to life with

a chance to focus it down to "cases" is a thing too daring to be tolerated and must be summarily squelched as impudent and not duly respectful to teacher's opinions and decisions. Thus saith the book—and that puts the inviolable cloture on all further debate.

Not long ago a student neighbor came in to ask the use of my reference library for some task that had been set him. Busy with my own work, I left him to browse at will among the books which he seemed to do in rather a pointless haphazard way that finally began to get on my nerves clear across the room. "Don't you find what you want?" I asked. "I had to look up Antoninus," he answered gloomily. "Here are six!"

We have been so ridden with tests and measurements, so lashed and spurred for percentages and retardations that the machinery has run away

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