

MAY · 1914

How can the white man use this Congress in promoting better conditions between the races in the South?

First, it can be used, as I have suggested, as a medium through which white people may get acquainted with the most useful and best type of black people in every community. The average white man, I sometimes fear, knows more about the criminal negro than he does about the law-abiding, self-respecting, and successful negro.

The white people can use this Congress to help advertise the better side rather than the worse side of negro life throughout the South. Too much space, I often fear, is given in newspapers to reports covering negro crime and not enough to reports covering the useful living and strivings of our race.

This Congress can be used to put in motion a public sentiment throughout the South that will insist that in the courts the negro may be sure of equal justice. The average black man has a notion that the court is a place of punishment rather than a place of protection. The total amount of time the best white people of the South lose every year in dealing with petty negro crime through the courts, if it were reckoned up, would represent a sum so large as to be startling. This Congress, directly and indirectly, can do much to stop the practice of arresting so many of our people for petty and trivial offenses, all of which impose a tremendous burden upon black people and white people in every community throughout the South.

This Congress can be used as a means of letting the people throughout the country know that the educated negro seldom commits crime, and in proportion as we get more education and better education the cost of punishing criminals will disappear.

This Congress can be used in creating a sentiment in every county in favor of better schools for negro children. It is often said that education for the negro has been a failure. We cannot say that a policy has failed until it has been actually tried. Education for the negro, especially in the rural districts, has not been tried in any effective way or upon a comprehensive scale. I say this although I am fully aware that in many counties it is poverty which retards white education as well as negro education.

The negro is going to get some kind of education at the hands of somebody, somewhere and at some time; and I believe the time has come when the white officials in every county should become the leaders and guides in the matter of giving to every negro child an opportunity