

The BOOKER T. WASHINGTON Papers
Extracts from an Address
at the Unitarian Club of New York

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OUR DUTY IN THE SOUTH

In the present condition of affairs in the South it is easier to find errors than remedies; yet I am tempted to say that any one who can so far lift himself above party, race, and geographical divisions as to make a calm, philosophical study of the past and the present condition of the negro in the South must conclude that at the beginning of our freedom there were three errors committed.

These errors I mention only that we may draw a lesson from them for our future guidance. It was unfortunate that those of the white race, with few exceptions, from the North, who got the political control of the South in the beginning of our freedom, were not men of such high and unselfish natures as to lead them to do something that fundamentally and permanently would help the negro rather than yield to the temptation to use him as a means to lift themselves into political power and eminence. This mistake had the effect of making the negro and the Southern white men political enemies.

It was unfortunate, at the beginning of the negro's freedom, when we were without education, without property, without experience in government, that the burden of the government in the South was so largely thrown upon our shoulders in the way that I have mentioned. This was done when our strength should have been concentrated in the direction of securing property, education, and character as a basis for our citizenship. Any race or nationality, I fear, under similar conditions would have made the same kind of blunders that are now charged to the account of my race. Put the government of Cuba to-day completely into the hands of the inexperienced natives, even of the white race, and I think you will see a repetition of what took place in the South, from the Anglo-Saxon standpoint of government.

It was unfortunate that the negro got the idea that every Southern white man was opposed by nature to his higher interest and advancement, and that he could only find a friend in the white man who was removed from him by a distance of thousands of miles. And just here,