

"The Purpose of Education"

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Writing in the campus newspaper, the Maroon Tiger, King argues that education has both a utilitarian and a moral function.¹ Citing the example of Georgia's former governor Eugene Talmadge, he asserts that reasoning ability is not enough. He insists that character and moral development are necessary to give the critical intellect humane purposes. King, Sr., later recalled that his son told him, "Talmadge has a Phi Beta Kappa key, can you believe that? What did he use all that precious knowledge for? To accomplish what?"²

As I engage in the so-called "bull sessions" around and about the school, I too often find that most college men have a misconception of the purpose of education. Most of the "brethren" think that education should equip them with the proper instruments of exploitation so that they can forever trample

1. In 1925, the *Maroon Tiger* succeeded the *Athenaeum* as the campus literary journal at Morehouse. In the first semester of the 1947–1948 academic year, it won a First Class Honor Rating from the Associated Collegiate Press at the University of Minnesota. The faculty adviser to the *Maroon Tiger* was King's English professor, Gladstone Lewis Chandler. King's "The Purpose of Education" was published with a companion piece, "English Majors All?" by a fellow student, William G. Pickens. Among the many prominent black academicians and journalists who served an apprenticeship on the *Maroon Tiger* staff were Lerone Bennett, Jr., editor of *Ebony*; Brailsford R. Brazeal, dean of Morehouse College; S. W. Garlington, city editor of New York's *Amsterdam News*; Hugh Gloster, president of Morehouse College; Emory O. Jackson, editor of the *Birmingham World*; Robert E. Johnson, editor of *Jet*; King D. Reddick of the *New York Age*; Ira De A. Reid, chair of the Sociology Department at Atlanta University; and C. A. Scott, editor and general manager of the *Atlanta Daily World*. See *The Morehouse Alumnus*, July 1948, pp. 15–16; and Edward A. Jones, *A Candle in the Dark: A History of Morehouse College* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1967), pp. 174, 260, 289–292.

2. Martin Luther King, Sr., with Clayton Riley, *Daddy King: An Autobiography* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), p. 143. In an unpublished autobiographical statement, King, Sr., remembered a meeting between Governor Eugene Talmadge and a committee of blacks concerning the imposition of the death penalty on a young black man convicted of making improper remarks to a white woman. King, Sr., reported that Talmadge "sent us away humiliated, frustrated, insulted, and without hope of redress" ("The Autobiography of Daddy King as Told to Edward A. Jones" [n.d.], p. 40; copy in CKFC). Six months before the publication of King's article, Georgia's race-baiting former governor Eugene Talmadge had declared in the midst of his campaign for a new term as governor that "the only issue in this race is White Supremacy." On 12 November, the black General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia designated his inauguration date, 9 January 1947, as a day of prayer. Talmadge died three weeks before his inauguration. See William Anderson, *The Wild Man from Sugar Creek: The Political Career of Eugene Talmadge* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), pp. 226–237; Joseph L. Bernd, "White Supremacy and the Disfranchisement of Blacks in Georgia, 1946," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 66 (Winter 1982): 492–501; Clarence M. Wagner, *Profiles of Black Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Bennett Brothers, 1980), p. 104; and Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 221–223.

Feb over the masses. Still others think that education should furnish them with
1947 noble ends rather than means to an end.

It seems to me that education has a two-fold function to perform in the life of man and in society: the one is utility and the other is culture. Education must enable a man to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life.

Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking. To think incisively and to think for one's self is very difficult. We are prone to let our mental life become invaded by legions of half truths, prejudices, and propaganda. At this point, I often wonder whether or not education is fulfilling its purpose. A great majority of the so-called educated people do not think logically and scientifically. Even the press, the classroom, the platform, and the pulpit in many instances do not give us objective and unbiased truths. To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education. Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction.

The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals.

The late Eugene Talmadge, in my opinion, possessed one of the better minds of Georgia, or even America. Moreover, he wore the Phi Beta Kappa key. By all measuring rods, Mr. Talmadge could think critically and intensively; yet he contends that I am an inferior being. Are those the types of men we call educated?

We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. The broad education will, therefore, transmit to one not only the accumulated knowledge of the race but also the accumulated experience of social living.

If we are not careful, our colleges will produce a group of close-minded, unscientific, illogical propagandists, consumed with immoral acts. Be careful, "brethren!" Be careful, teachers!

PD. *Maroon Tiger* (January–February 1947): 10. Copy in GD.