

Constructive Thinking

by George M. Brooks

Rolles Range Road, St. Michaels, MD

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The following document was published in booklet form and reportedly distributed by George M. McClellan Brooks within the “colored community” of St. Michaels and Talbot County along with his fellow black Masons and democrats. I have been told that it was published by the Star Democrat of Easton during 1936.

George M. Brooks and his wife Mamie were born in 1867 and died in 1954 and are buried in the neglected burial grounds of the Union Methodist Church behind “Big Al’s” and the Brooks Lane townhouses. According to his nephew, Bill Cole, and James “Sawdy” Thomas of St. Michaels, George M. Brooks started out as a waterman but found that he could make a better living as a farmer and by hauling tomatoes to the packinghouse and ice to the seafood plants. George was known in town for selling watermelons from his truck in the summer along with eggs from his chicken coop out at Rolles Range. George boasted that the Democrats had helped him when he needed a mortgage in 1900 to buy the “big house” on Rolles Range Road (George would reportedly admonish his fellow colored men with “what have the Republicans done for you since emancipation”), and later bragged that he owned the largest house of any colored man in Talbot County. His wife Mamie was a schoolteacher for many years at the one room “colored school” in St. Michaels. After George and Mamie bought the prominent house at Rolles Range Road from Andrew C. Barkman in March of 1900, they were faced with one of life’s great challenges when George’s sister Margaret Brooks Johnson died in 1908 leaving 11 children (with the youngest girls only one and three years old). The father, Robert Johnson, was elderly and a civil war veteran and apparently not able to provide the housing and support his 11 children needed at the time. George modified the house on Rolles Range to accommodate his new family - dormer windows facing the rear of the house were added along with three partitioned sleeping areas on the third floor of the house. George became known as “Big Daddy” to his “adopted” 11 children and the colored community at large, and was referred to by his nephew Bill Cole as “Uncle Daddy”. Although George Brooks only attended the “colored school” for one day according to his nephew, the following treatise on “race relations” was written in 1936 – the height of the depression – and probably tells us much about what he believed in and what he felt was necessary for the “colored man” to succeed in Talbot County in those difficult years. No editing was done to the original document.

Forward by Willard F. Workman, Jr. (owner of the Parsonage Inn, St. Michaels)

PREFACE:

The object of this book is, if possible, to help do away with much of the so-called race prejudice and bring about a better understanding between the two races. Nothing but the truth will set us free.

Chapter I

No man ever did anything worth while without first doing some very good thinking. Now the question I want to ask myself is; how much constructive thinking is the colored man doing? In answer to this question I will say that the colored man has very little thought as to what tomorrow will bring. Since from one blood sprang all nations, why is it that the colored man is so far behind the other races. God has so arranged it that whosoever will do may. God does not hold back anything from any particular race or color. God will give wisdom and understanding to any person just for the asking, and the only condition is we must believe. For 315 years the white man has tried and is still trying to make something out of us. Still we don't seem to catch on very good and today, if we were turned out on our own merit, what would become of us? We only have to work for three things – something to eat, something to wear and a shelter. Here we have all three of these things at our fingers ends, if we could have ambition enough to grasp them. Now there is nobody to blame for this but our own self. If we say someone has kept us back we don't tell the truth, because God did not put the crude material here for any particular person. If the colored man don't dig it is because he has not the wisdom or the understanding. Without wisdom and understanding no man ever gets very far in this world. Now let us stop here and think for a moment. The white man will go in the forest and when he comes out the chances are he will bring out a steamship under his arm. Why is it that the colored man could not do this same thing? It is because we are not thinking. They are not looking ahead. We know that we are just as able to work as any people on earth and since we know that no people can survive without working why shouldn't we learn how to do anything any other man on the face of the earth can do. It is impossible to make angels out of any people by giving them Hell, so for this and other reasons we should not fight the hand that has made it possible for us to exist.

Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! Men, women and children throughout the country. It is now high time for us to wake up and get down to some good hard constructive thinking. For instance we must put some reality into our religion and do away with so much formality which is practiced so much in our every day life, and how much better it would be for all if we did this. We know according to the word of God that whatsoever ye sow shall ye reap, so for that end we would be better off if we would sow good seed at all times. There is so much for us to think about, so many things we could do to make burdens lighter for the man who has had our burdens on his shoulders for 315 years. Again if we stop to think that the same thing that that it takes for the maintenance and existence of the white man is applied to the colored man; which is something to eat, something to wear and a

shelter. God gave this material to every man and to get out whatsoever he had wisdom and understanding to get out. Then, if this is true, which it is, why is it that the colored man is so far behind?

We have been taught to work, we have been taught to read the word of God, so let us stop to think for a moment that we as men can make our chance as good any man's chance on the face of the globe. So why sit down and howl about our chance when we have the opportunity to make a chance for ourselves and no man can hinder.

First of all, let us consider the source from whence we came. Second, acknowledge the truth whenever you hear it spoken. Third, let credit go where it belongs. Fourth, be always willing to trust God on his merit. Fifth, stop growling and complaining and roll up your sleeves and go to work, and make a chance for yourself.

Let us stop to think for a minute. There is a living in the earth for every soul. Some get more than they need, others get all they want, and many hardly get enough to keep soul and body together. Now this looks one-sided, looks like God thinks more of one man than he does of the other, looks like the last man is not getting a square deal. But let us view the situation in a different light. Let us know the truth and that is this: Down through all ages one man has been known to outwit another by using better wisdom and understanding than the other fellow, and finally gets more of the world's goods and therefore makes a better chance to raise himself up as the first man has. Again let us stop to think and ask ourselves the question, does God hold back anything from any person who asks for it and believes he is going to get it. We will say No because he is a God of truth and cannot lie. When he says Ask anything of me in faith and believing and I will give it to you. To my mind this is a fair statement. God has everything and nothing to sell, so if we want wisdom ask and it shall be given. If we want understanding knock and the door will be opened unto you. If we seek we will surely find. Then why should the colored race be lagging behind?

Just think of this: Mr. Henry Ford and his wisdom is giving work to possibly 125,000 people. Yet with all the crude material Mr. Ford has taken out of the earth there is not a man on earth who can miss it. So others still have a chance. Mr. Ford made his own chance and the colored man has his own chances and no man can stop it.

Mr. Booker T. Washington, the greatest colored leader we have ever had, who rose up from an old dirt floor cabin and climbed to the top of the ladder, has gone from the stage of action, yet there is ample room for thousands of others if they chose to make themselves so. Now here are two men I have spoken of and the only things that carried them to the top of the ladder was wisdom and understanding. Countless thousands have gone up the same way.

Since we know that if a man has no wisdom and understanding he does not get anywhere, then it is necessary for any man who wants to make the world

better than he found it, to ask first for wisdom and understanding, then other things will be added. We people do a lot of praying but not much believing and this is where we lose out. The white man has proved himself to be our best friend, but some of us fail to see this point. Why do I say this? Because down through the whole 68 years I have lived I have never failed to find a friend in the white race, then too when we look around we can see the white man constantly toiling and struggling in order to bring about a high type of civilization for the colored man. Now with this undeniable fact in view we should greatly appreciate what is being done for us. From now on let us stop finding so much fault, stop grumbling and growling, and instead roll up our sleeves and go to work helping the white man bring about the required amount of civilization that is due every man on the face of the globe. We have made mistakes but we don't have to keep on making them.

We have said things that were not the truth but we don't have to keep on saying them.

At this point let us learn what the truth is and what it stands for and our problems will be solved. I am convinced that the white man is glad to see the colored man try to do something for himself. Every man is proud when he can see the profits of his own labor and today the white man looks back over a period of more than three hundred years. Today he has got us sitting as members of the Grand Jury along side of him administering justice from the highest law body of the land. Certainly the white man is proud of what he has accomplished. As everyone knows it is a little bit more than a notion to go out, get wild things and tame them. Such was our condition 315 years ago. If, however, the white man is proud of the good things he has done then cannot we colored people try to do something we can be proud of, as there is yet plenty of room. The truth will set us free. So first let us learn what the truth is, next give credit to whom it belongs, work while it is called day, save what we make. The white man is trying to teach us all these things and even more if we will only grasp them. As we have said there is a bright side somewhere and we can only find the bright side by letting the truth guide us. When we gain wisdom plus understanding then we will know what the truth is and what it stands for, then too since God has plenty of wisdom and understanding for the asking we can get it if we believe. There is no justifiable reason for us as colored people to be lagging behind. In my weak judgement, as I have before said every man makes his own chance – let it be good or bad.

end

Postscript: It is interesting to see George Brooks refer repeatedly to “315 years” of experience for the white man in our country – which puts the date back to 1621. It was in 1620 that the Mayflower set sail from Plymouth, England to the new continent (with a charter to establish “New England”) and arrived on the shores of Cape Cod in November. After five weeks of exploration along the coastline, the settlers came ashore in December at a place they named “Plymouth Rock” and established the first permanent American settlement.

The reference to Booker T. Washington along with Henry Ford by George Brooks

is quite interesting given what Booker T. accomplished and how he felt about equality for the black people in America. Booker T. was born in 1856 on a Southern plantation to a mulatto slave woman and a white man. He managed to gain entrance to the Hampton Institute in 1872 after working in the salt furnaces and coal mines of Malden, WV following the Civil War. After graduation from the Hampton Institute in 1875, he taught at a black school in Malden, WV and then studied at the Wayland Seminary in Washington, DC. In 1879, he was appointed as an instructor at the Hampton Institute and then in 1881 was selected to establish a "normal and industrial school" for blacks in Tuskegee, Alabama. Under his direction, the Tuskegee Institute became one of the leading black educational institutions in America. Its programs emphasized industrial training as a means to self-respect and economic independence for black people. Booker T. gave many speeches in both the United States and Europe, and was recognized as one of the great orators of his time. In 1895 in Atlanta, Booker T. made a highly controversial speech on the place of the black man in American life. In it he maintained that it was foolish for blacks to agitate for social equality before they had attained economic equality. His speech pleased many whites and gained financial support for his school, but his position was denounced by many blacks including W. E. B. Dubois. From what I have learned about George Brooks and from his "Constructive Thinking" treatise, which you have just read, it appears that George Brooks clearly supported the position taken by Booker T. Washington. It is recalled by "Sawdy" Thomas that many blacks in Talbot County did not appreciate or support the position taken by George Brooks on race relations or his call for self reliance and hard work. And it is interesting to note how George Brooks takes reference to God's word and need for wisdom and understanding and to believe that all is possible. George is not recalled as either a "church goer" or a scholar but is remembered by his nephew Bill Cole as sitting under the mature evergreen trees next to the house on Rolles Range every Sunday morning with corn cob pipe reading his bible and thinking about the world as he knew it. George Brooks appeared to have spent his entire life in Talbot County with few trips of any consequence, spent only one day in school ("didn't like it"), worked hard to achieve his status as one of the ranking members of the "colored community" and found both the inspiration and resources to publish his treatise "Constructive Thinking" and to distribute it within his community. Even though it was written at the height of the depression when he was 68 – his words still carry significance for those of us who follow.