THE NEGRO IN AMERICA

By MAXWELL S. STEWART

The most comprehensive and impartial study ever made of the Negro in American society is the two-volume report by the distinguished Swedish sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal, published under the title, *AN AMERICAN DILEMMA, The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy,* by Harper in 1944.

The Public Affairs Committee, Inc., subsequently issued a 30-page summary of Dr. Myrdal's report in the form of a pamphlet prepared by Maxwell S. Stewart. This pamphlet is herewith reproduced for distribution by the *"Committee of 100"* because we believe that Dr. Myrdal's findings are of interest and importance to many who lack time to read his complete report.

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DURING the last few years many Americans have become increasingly uneasy about our treatment of Negroes in this country. The war is largely responsible for this. Hitler's savage persecution of the Jews and other minorities, which we all denounce, has made us wonder about our attitude toward our 13,000,000 Negroes. The unscientific Nazi doctrine of Aryan supremacy seems uncomfortably like the idea that the white race is innately superior to the black. The war also served to bring the unequal treatment of the Negro much more to public attention than in previous years. In many parts of the country, factories were slow to take on Negro workers even though they were desperately short of men. Even today Negroes are plainly handicapped in obtaining skilled jobs, especially in the technical and white collar field. The Army and Navy still separate white and Negro service men.

The Negroes themselves are, of course, most disturbed by all of this. They see a wide gap between our professed belief in race equality, as evidenced by our hostility to the Nazi race ideas, and our practices. For a Negro is rarely allowed to forget that he is "different." He seldom talks with a white man, and still less to a white woman, without having it called to his mind. Even in a group of white and Negro friends, the Negro "problem" constantly looms in the background. It colors the jokes and allusions where it is not actually a matter of discussion.

A Negro is not often permitted to be an American first and a Negro second. He is looked on as primarily a Negro. Many Negroes have become prominent, or even famous, but usually as representatives of their race. A Negro economist is always expected to specialize in Negro problems; a Negro lawyer is expected to handle Negro cases; a Negro soloist is supposed to sing Negro songs; and a Negro trade union leader usually represents Negro workers. Most of the Negroes holding high government posts serve as advisers on Negro affairs. There are no Negro Senators, no Negroes in the Cabinet, no Negro presidents of any but Negro universities, and no Negro state governors.

Negroes in the more humble walks of life are just as handicapped. They are not allowed to forget their color. Many of the better-paid occupations and professions are practically closed to them. In some states they find it impossible to carry out their duties as American citizens. A Negro who commits a crime is rarely referred to in the newspapers as John Jones but as a Negro by the name of John Jones.

An American Dilemma

Recognizing the importance of the Negro problem in American life, the Carnegie Corporation several years ago determined to bring the resources of the social sciences to bear on the problem. In order to avoid all danger of bias or partisanship in this study, it decided to bring a scholar from abroad "who could approach his task with a fresh mind." It was felt that it was important that such a scholar should be chosen from a country with no background or traditions of imperialism which might lessen confidence in the impartiality of the study. These considerations led to the selection of Dr. Gunnar Myrdal, a distinguished social economist from the University of Stockholm and economic adviser to the Swedish government, to undertake the task. The following pages represent a brief summary of his four years of intensive study as contained in his two-volume report entitled *An American Dilemma,* and four other volumes prepared by noted scholars associated with him.

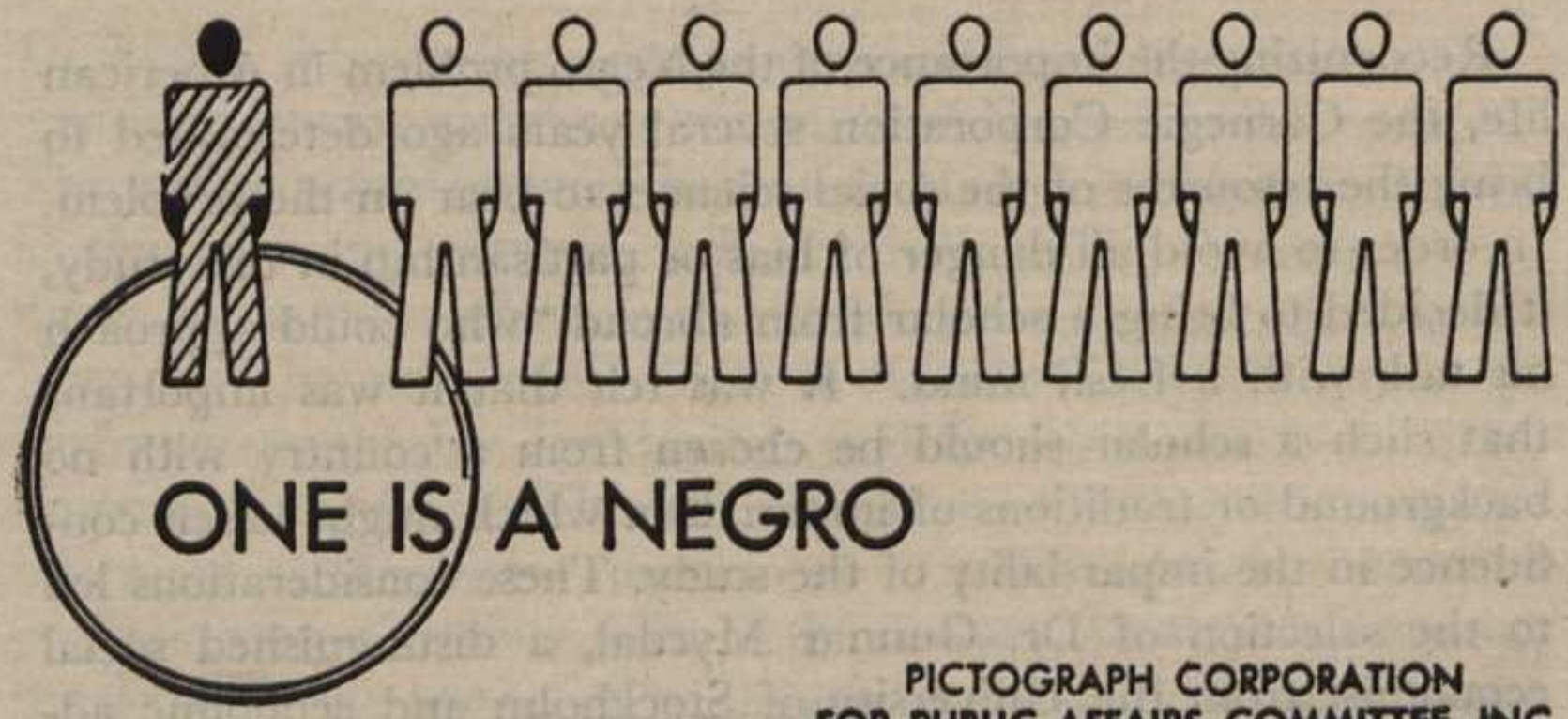
NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

DR. MYRDAL discovered a striking difference between what many Americans *say* about the Negroes and what they really *think*. As he traveled over the country he found that many Americans indignantly deny that there is a "Negro problem" in America. They insist that if there ever was one it has been solved to the satisfaction of both parties. This view is heard most frequently in the Deep South. It is usually accompanied by a statement that the Negroes are all right in their place, but they must be kept there or they will cause trouble.

Denial of Problem Symptom of Tension

But Dr. Myrdal is doubtful whether those who most fervently insist that the problem has been solved actually believe it. For the white South seems to be "obsessed by the Negro problem." The very vigor with which people deny that it exists reflects the

intensity of the race tension. This may easily be seen if one suggests the possibility of a Negro uprising. Many Southerners immediately show alarm. And the persons who are most cocksure in insisting that there is no Negro problem and that the Negroes are content with present conditions often display the greatest



fear. Without seemingly being aware of a contradiction, the same person may in one sentence defend the suppression of the Negroes on the ground that they are satisfied with things as they are and in the next explain that the Negroes must be kept down because they are always wanting to be like white people.

Statements that no problem exists are not limited to the South or even to white people. Negroes often declare that there is no difficulty between the races in their part of the country. Such statements are made by some Negro college presidents, principals, and teachers of Negro schools whose jobs are dependent on white boards of directors. They seem to be expected of Negro leaders at all public interracial affairs. They are, however, usually different from the similar statements made by white persons. They are nearly always limited to the local community and are qualified by mention of some particular situation which might be improved. And they are rarely, if ever, made by Negroes when talking "off the record" or among friends. As with similar statements by white persons, the assertion that there is "no Negro problem" is an indication of the unhealthiness of the situation. Actually, the problem not only exists but is of great importance in many parts of the United States.

In the South the Negro is almost never discussed formally. He is almost never referred to in schools or in the church.

Southern newspapers, with remarkable exceptions, ignore Negroes except for their crimes. For a long time there was an unwritten rule that a picture of a Negro should never appear in print; and even now it is rare. Yet the extent to which the Negro dominates people's thinking may be seen in a story reported by Ray Stannard Baker a generation ago, and which still crops up in the South.

A Negro boy went as a sort of butler's assistant in the home of a prominent family in Atlanta. His people were naturally curious about what went on in the white man's house. One day they asked him:

"What do they talk about when they are eating?"

The boy thought a moment; then he said: "Mostly they discusses us cullud folks."

Mr. Baker adds that Negroes display the same consuming interest in white people and the race question.

Ignorance about the Negro Is Widespread

In his travels throughout the country, Dr. Myrdal was astonished at the lack of correct information about Negroes which he found in all walks of life. He found physicians who held absurd ideas about the amount of disease among Negroes; educators who knew nothing of the results of modern intelligence research; lawyers who believed that lynchings are practically all caused by rape; and ministers who knew practically nothing about Negro churches in their own town.

"The ignorance about the Negro is the more striking," Dr. Myrdal writes, "as the Southerner himself is convinced that he 'knows the Negro,' while the Yankee is supposedly ignorant on the subject." In insisting that they have reliable and intimate knowledge about the Negro problem, the Southern whites are only fooling themselves. "The average Southerner 'knows' the Negro and the interracial problem as the patient 'knows' the toothache—in the sense that he feels a concern—not as a diagnosing dentist knows his own or his patient's trouble. He further 'knows' the Negro in the sense that he is brought up to use a social technique in dealing with Negroes" by which he is able to lord it over them. "The technique is simple: I have often observed that merely speaking the Southern dialect works the trick."

In the North the Negro problem is not nearly so important as in the South. Northern whites believe that they treat Negroes, on the whole, much better than Southerners do. Do they not allow the Negro to vote, and to attend the same schools as white

children? Having thus consoled himself, the average Northerner wants to forget about the whole matter. The result is an astonishing ignorance about the Negro. Many educated Northerners are far better informed about foreign problems than about Negro conditions in their own city.

Conflict with the American Creed

Dr. Myrdal declares that he has no doubt, following his exhaustive study in all parts of the country, that a great majority of white people in America would give the Negro a much better deal if they knew the facts. But they find it easier and much more comfortable to know as little about him as possible.

Dr. Myrdal suggests that ignorance about conditions under which Negroes live probably explains in part the gap between America's professed belief in equality and democracy and its manifestly unequal treatment of members of the black race. He is profoundly impressed with what he calls the American Creed. He finds that every American believes in the principles set down in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. Americans believe that "all men are created equal," in freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and racial tolerance; they believe that America is the "cradle of freedom," the "land of opportunity," and the "home of democracy." In principle, most Americans, in the North at least, concede that the Negro has the same right to freedom and justice as other citizens. But, in practice, Negroes have not shared many of these rights. This gap between our profession and our actions constitutes, according to Dr. Myrdal, "the Negro problem."

Is the Negro Inferior?

There is probably no aspect of the Negro problem on which there is so much misunderstanding as on the supposed biological inferiority of Negroes. This idea seems to have developed gradually. At first slavery was defended chiefly by Biblical and political arguments. It was said that the Negro was a heathen, a barbarian, a descendant of Noah's son Ham, doomed to be a servant forever on account of an ancient sin. It was not, of course, hard to recast this view into biological terms. But this was not done until within comparatively recent years.

Why some white people regard the Negro as biologically inferior is not hard to see. They believe it because they want to, and because it seems to make sense. To the uninformed white person it appears obvious from everyday experience that the

Negro is inferior. And inferior he is. This shows up in scientific study. His body is more often deformed than that of a white person. He is more often sick; his death rate is higher; he shows up badly in intelligence tests. He is less likely to be a skilled worker, or to attain distinction in professional fields.

Inferiority and Race

It is one thing, however, to say that the Negro is inferior, and quite another to trace his inferiority to race. After careful investigation, scientists have found no basis for the belief that the Negro and white races differ in intelligence or character because of biological heredity or color of skin.* Neither have they been able to prove that no differences exist. They have, however, found that such things as lack of sufficient food, bad housing, and poor schooling have great effect on intelligence, character, and physical health. Less easy to measure—and difficult for the average person to understand—is the effect on a people of being *treated* as inferiors. Although it is hard to measure exactly what happens to a Negro child's mind when he is brought up as an inferior, scientists have found that when Negro children are treated more nearly as equals they show up increasingly well in intelligence tests.

DISADVANTAGES OF BEING A NEGRO

Most Negroes Are Poor

Most Negroes are desperately poor. This is true in the North as well as the South. Most Negroes own little property; what furniture and household goods they have are badly dilapidated. They not only are poorly paid when they work but they are much more frequently unemployed than whites. They are forced to live from day to day with little chance to plan for the future.

In the South the Negro's poverty is connected with the decline of King Cotton and the overcrowding of Southern farm lands. More than half of America's 30,000,000 farm population is in the South. But the South has only a little more than one-third of the country's farm land. In value, the proportion is even less —28 per cent of the total.

The Decline of King Cotton

The backwardness of the South agriculturally is largely the result of too much dependence on cotton. Little change has been

*For details, see *The Races of Mankind,* Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 85, 1943.

made in the methods for growing cotton since the days of slavery. Most of it is still cultivated by old-fashioned methods. A large part of the work is done by children. This encourages large families and cuts down schooling.

Cotton growing in the Southeastern states became less and less profitable in the period between World War I and World War II. Prices were driven down by competition with cheap labor in Brazil, India, China, and other countries. Cotton was more seriously affected by the depression than other crops and recovered less afterwards. The AAA helped the South in many ways, but the Negroes did not get their share of these gains. More Negro tenants than whites were driven from the land by its crop-reduction program. Most of these were reduced to wage laborers.

Erosion

Furthermore, cotton growing is extremely wasteful of the soil. It robs the soil of its fertility and causes widespread erosion. The Southeast pays more than half of the nation's bill for commercial fertilizers. One of the effects of erosion in the Southeast has been to encourage the development of cotton growing in Texas and other parts of the Southwest. This has resulted in still lower prices for cotton.

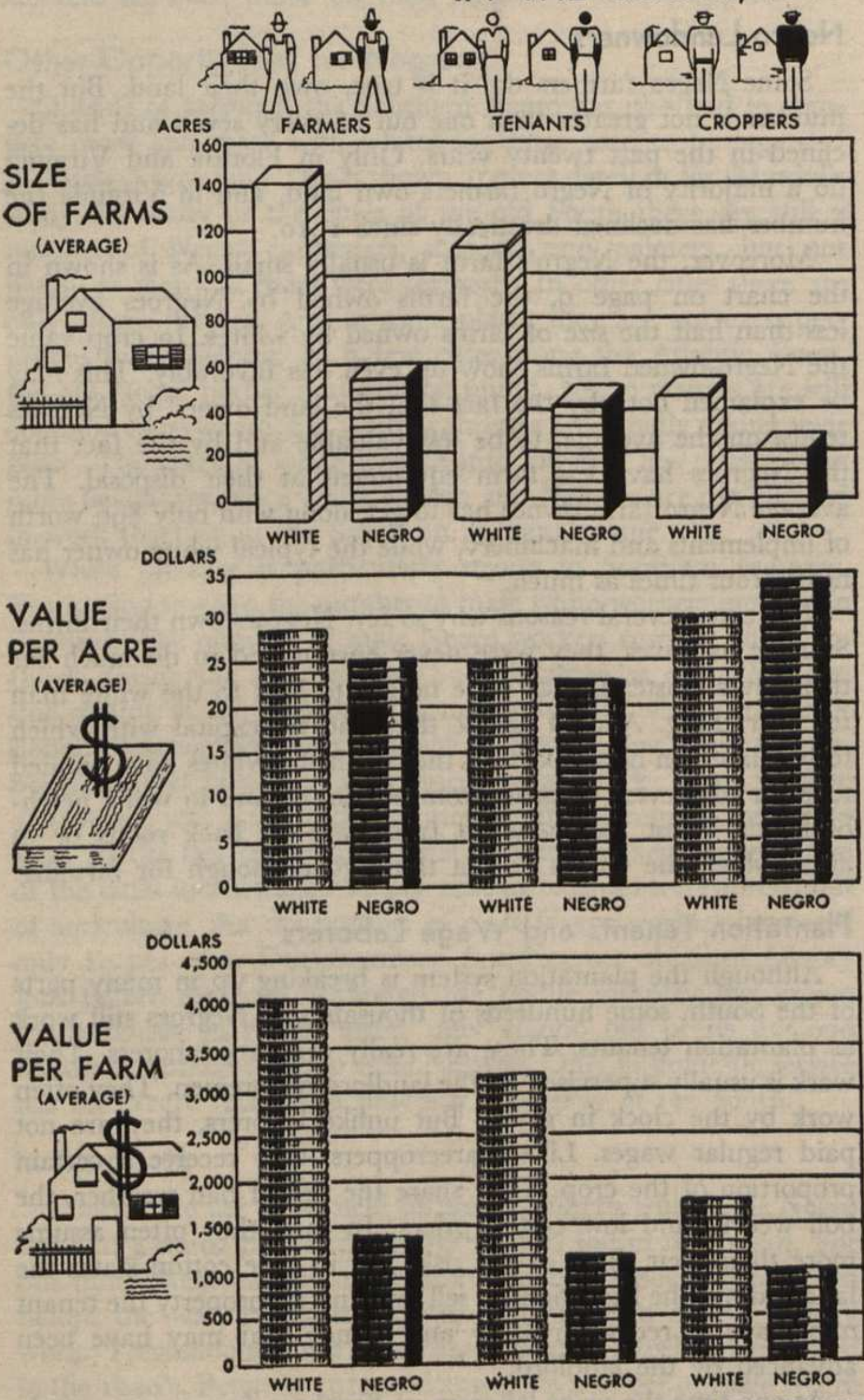
Although both whites and Negroes suffer from the traditional dependence on King Cotton, the Negroes have been more dependent than the white farmers. Negroes produce one-third of the total cotton crop. As long ago as 1929 it was estimated that three Negro farmers out of every four received at least 40 per cent of their incomes from cotton. There are 4,500,000 Negroes who live on the land.

Tenancy

A large part of these—more than half of the total—are tenants or sharecroppers. The South has long been cursed by tenancy. Almost three-fourths of the cotton farms are operated by tenants or croppers. The economic position of this group, white and black, has been peculiarly difficult because of its association with a credit system carrying extremely high interest rates. This credit system, in turn, has increased the pressure for a cash crop—which in the South usually means cotton.

This completes the circle. The South grows cotton because it needs cash. Cotton growing is traditionally carried on by tenants and sharecroppers. This system not only robs the soil and interferes with the education of the next generation, thus preventing

WHITE AND NEGRO FARMERS IN THE SOUTH, 1940



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agricultural progress, but it requires the assistance of money lenders. And the Negro, being poorer and more dependent on cotton than the white farmer, is the chief victim of this circle.

Negro Landowners

Some Negro farmers do, it is true, own their land. But the number is not greater than one out of every seven and has declined in the past twenty years. Only in Florida and Virginia do a majority of Negro farmers own land, and in Virginia the number has declined drastically since 1910.

Moreover, the Negro's farm is usually small. As is shown in the chart on page 9, the farms owned by Negroes average less than half the size of farms owned by whites. In crop value the Negro-owned farms show up even less favorably. This may be explained both by the fact that the land owned by Negroes tends, on the average, to be less valuable and by the fact that the Negroes have less farm equipment at their disposal. The average Negro farm owner has to get along with only $90 worth of implements and machinery, while the typical white owner has nearly four times as much.

There are several reasons why so few Negroes own their farms. Starting as slaves, they were never encouraged to do much for themselves. Instead, they were taught to look to the white man for everything. And of course they had no capital with which to buy land. In many parts of the South the whites have banded together to prevent Negroes from obtaining land in white neighborhoods. Most Negro-owned farms are on back roads or in areas which the whites do not think good enough for farming.

Plantation Tenants and Wage Laborers

Although the plantation system is breaking up in many parts of the South, some hundreds of thousands of Negroes still work as plantation tenants. These are really ordinary laborers. Their work is usually supervised by the landlord or foremen. They often work by the clock in gangs. But unlike laborers, they are not paid regular wages. Like sharecroppers, they receive a certain proportion of the crop. They share the risk of bad weather, the boll weevil, and low cotton prices. In fact, they often assume more than their share of the risk. For in nine cotton states the landlord has the legal right to sell any and all property the tenant may have to recover rent or any money that may have been advanced by the landlord.

At one time the wage laborers on Southern farms were mostly

Negro. But at present somewhat more than half of them are white. Yet two out of five Negroes who work the land are wage laborers. Since they work only part of the year, these wage laborers are even worse off than tenants or sharecroppers.

Other Opportunities for Negroes

Outside of farming, the Southern Negro has also had to compete more and more with whites for what used to be regarded as purely Negro jobs. This is shown in great detail in Dr. Myrdal's study. In many of the cities of the old South there are still a number of Negro carpenters, masons, and painters, but not nearly as many as there were formerly. In other cities there are only Negro helpers. And in some places they are not even permitted to be helpers. In a few cities along the Atlantic Coast, the old Negro barber may still be found. Negro waiters are still common everywhere, but white waitresses are rapidly taking their place. The entry of white women into industry has caused even more headaches, since white women and Negroes are not allowed to work together in the South on an equal plane.

White pressure is particularly strong in Southern industry. From 1890 to 1910 the number of male white workers more than doubled. The number of male Negro workers rose by only two-thirds during the same period. Such increase as did occur was due mainly to the growth of certain industries which are traditionally reserved for Negroes, such as coal mining, work in lumber mills, and railway maintenance-of-way work. From 1910 to 1940 there was a much slower increase in the number of Negro jobs. In the last ten years of that period the Negro population of the cities increased by 20 per cent as Negroes were forced out of agriculture. But the number of male Negro workers increased only 12 per cent. Comparatively few Negroes obtained factory jobs before the war. Although the textile industry has grown tremendously in recent years, only 26,000 out of its 635,000 Southern workers in 1940 were Negroes. Only in domestic service has the Negro retained a practical monopoly in the South.

In the North

Contrary to the views held by most Southern whites, the Negro has had a much better chance for a good job in the North. For one thing, Negroes hold many more different kinds of jobs. Even before the war, many more were employed in skilled factory work. Tremendous gains were made during World War I and in the 1920's. Between 1910 and 1930, the number of male Negro

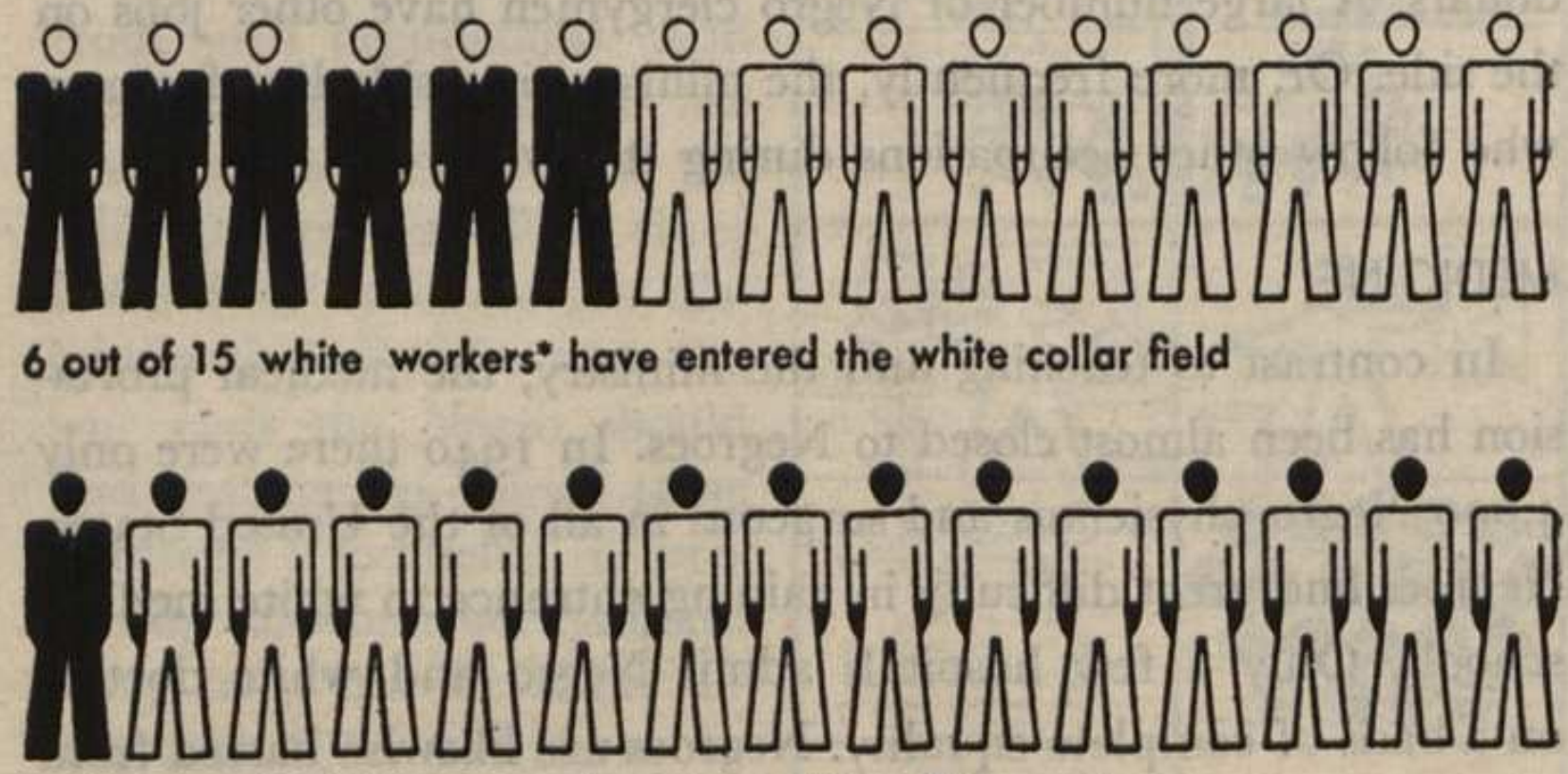
workers in the North outside of farming rose by 480,000. This was a much better showing than the South made, despite the fact that the South had many more Negroes.

But even in the North the Negro has been kept out of many of the more desirable kinds of work. He has had little chance of getting a skilled job, for instance, in textile factories, sawmills, shoe factories, bakeries, or furniture factories. Few Negroes were employed by the railroads or utilities except as porters and similar work. And during the depression of the 1930's, the Negroes were first to lose their jobs. As Negroes continued to move from the South to the North during the depression, the unemployment situation among Negroes in Northern cities became extremely serious—much more serious than in the South. Strangely enough, young Negroes usually were able to find jobs about as easily as white youths, but middle-aged Negroes, particularly those listed as skilled workers, suffered much more from unemployment than whites of similar experience. This seeming good luck on the part of the young Negroes is probably due to their willingness to accept almost any kind of unskilled work. White young people are more likely to hold out for better jobs.

White Collar Opportunities

With all of these handicaps, a Negro wage-earner has a much easier time finding a place for himself than a Negro white collar employee or professional man. Dr. Myrdal has gathered together a mass of material substantiating this fact. Most Negro workers work for white people. But the Negro professional or business man is usually limited to the Negro community. Since the Negro community is extremely poor, this means that the Negro professional is badly paid as compared with white persons in the same field. It means also that while there are many Negro ministers, teachers, and storekeepers, there are very few openings for Negro engineers, architects, or industrial managers. And few Negroes are engaged in clerical work.

In 1930 only 254,000 Negroes were listed in the census as white collar employees, business or professional men. Only one out of every fifteen Negro workers, not including farmers, had entered the white collar field. Among whites the ratio was two out of five. Nor does the situation seem to be improving. The Negro's share in white collar and professional jobs declined in the twenty years between 1910 and 1930.



TEACHING

School teaching is the chief Negro profession. It is confined chiefly to Negro schools, or schools in which most of the students are Negro. Actually, Negroes are not more than half as well represented in the teaching profession as they are in the population. And although the teaching load of Negro teachers is much heavier than that of white teachers, their salaries, particularly in the South, are much lower than those of white teachers with similar qualifications.* The average salary in Southern Negro elementary schools was only $510 in 1935–36; in Southern white schools it was $833.

MINISTRY

The profession with a large proportion of Negroes is the ministry. This may be because Negroes are more regular church-

*North Carolina has recently taken action to provide equal salaries for white and Negro teachers.

goers than are the whites and because they tend to divide up into more small sects. Most Negro ministers are poorly paid. Although a few Negro ministers in the cities receive reasonably high salaries, most of them have to be content with a few hundred dollars. A large number of Negro clergymen have other jobs on the side. Or, more frequently, the ministry is a side line for men who follow other occupations during the week.

MEDICINE

In contrast to teaching and the ministry, the medical profession has been almost closed to Negroes. In 1940 there were only 4,000 Negro physicians and surgeons in all of the United States. Negroes find great difficulty in gaining entrance to white medical schools. Only a few hospitals admit Negro and white doctors on a basis of complete equality. Negroes are likewise barred from specialized work. This accounts for the widespread but unfounded belief that Negro physicians are ill trained. Since most Negro physicians draw their patients entirely from the Negro community, their incomes are far below those of white physicians of similar training and ability. The same applies to dentists and nurses.

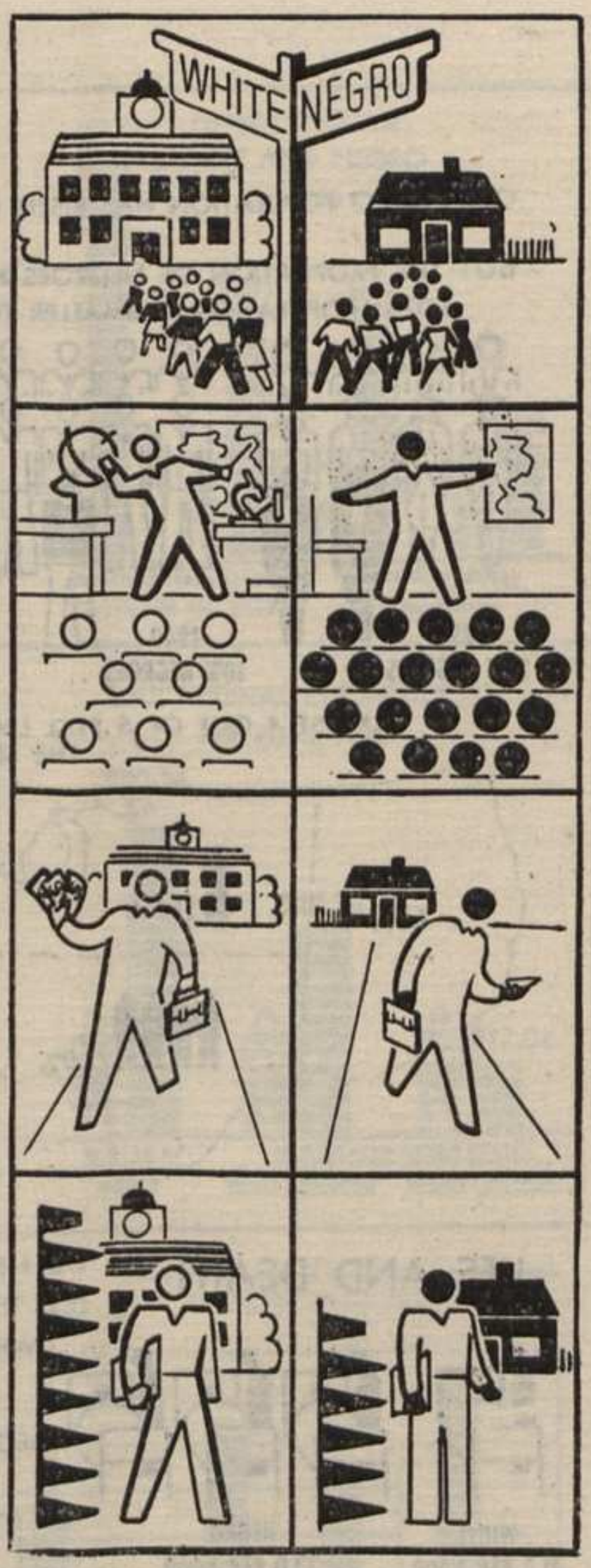
LAW

Negro lawyers have even harder sledding. While there would seem to be a great need for Negro lawyers to fight for the rights of their race in the courts, most Negroes have found that a "respectable" white lawyer could help them more before a white court than the best of Negro lawyers. As a result there were only 1,200 Negro lawyers in the entire country in 1930. About two-thirds of these lived outside of the South. Out of 600 lawyers in Alabama, for example, only six were Negroes. Negro artists, musicians, and actors fare somewhat better. But competition is severe and their opportunities are much narrower than those of whites.

The War Boom

The war has, of course, opened many jobs for Negroes. But it is doubtful whether the Negro workers have done as well, in proportion to their numbers, as white workers. Negroes have not

swarmed northward as they did in World War I. Many Negroes have, however, obtained skilled jobs in factories that previously barred them from such occupations. And the federal government has made an effort through the Fair Employment Practices Committee to overcome discrimination. By the time the war ends the Negro should find that he has gained some "strategic" footholds in previously all-white occupations. They may not be many or large, and he will have to fight to hold them after the war. But they will at least help break down the idea that the Negro cannot do skilled work.



The Negro's education is inferior.

Educational Handicaps

Although Negroes have shown themselves capable of skilled work of all kinds, they have much greater difficulty than whites in getting the education and training necessary for better jobs.

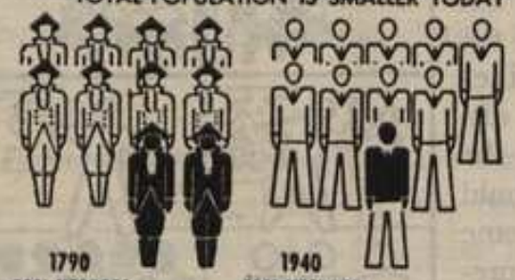
Their difficulties start in the grade school. In seventeen states and the District of Columbia, Negro children are compelled by law to attend separate schools. Elsewhere, local communities often have separate schools for Negroes. In most instances the Negro schools are inferior to white ones. The buildings are old; the equipment out-of-date; and the teachers are poorly trained and poorly paid. In parts of the South, the Negro schools are not open during the planting and harvest seasons.

Although many more Negroes are in school today than were

THE NEGRO IN THE U. S. A.

OUR NEGRO POPULATION HAS RISEN FROM 800,000 TO 13,000,000 IN 150 YEARS

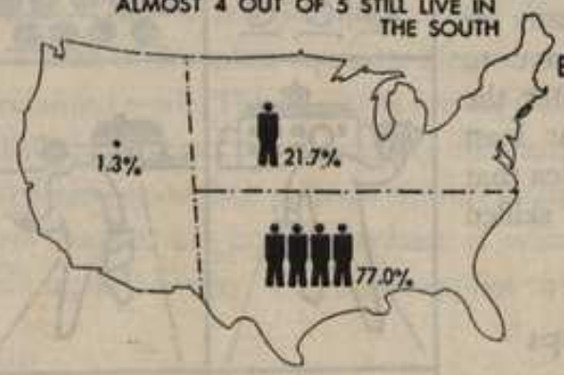
BUT THE PROPORTION OF NEGROES IN THE TOTAL POPULATION IS SMALLER TODAY



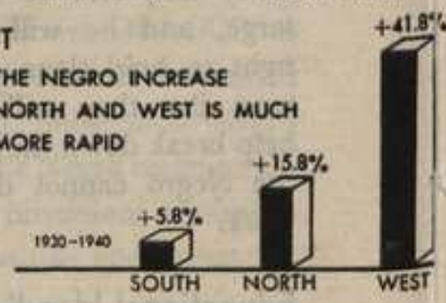
ALMOST HALF OF ALL NEGROES NOW LIVE IN THE CITY...



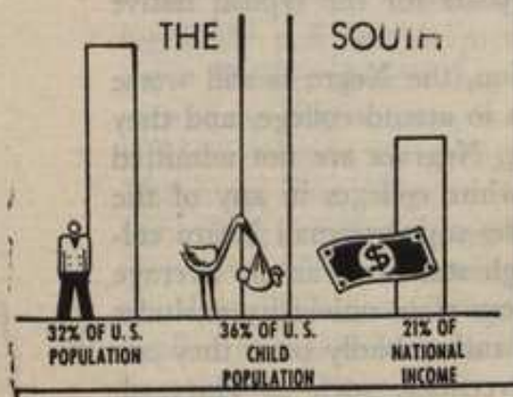
ALMOST 4 OUT OF 5 STILL LIVE IN THE SOUTH



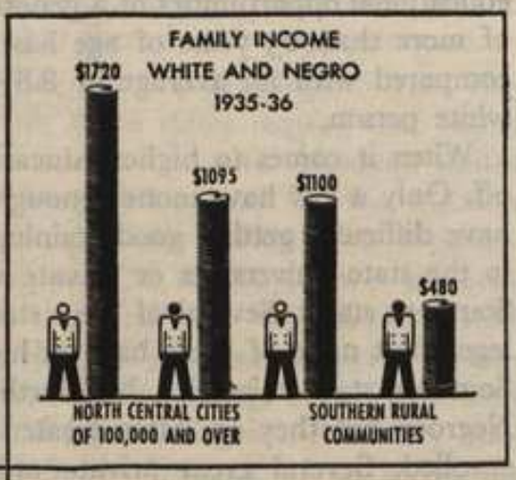
BUT THE NEGRO INCREASE NORTH AND WEST IS MUCH MORE RAPID



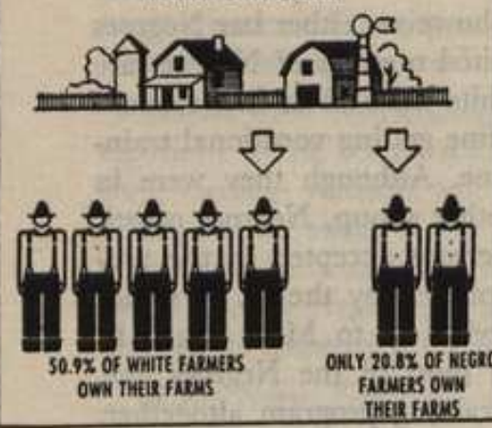
THE SOUTH



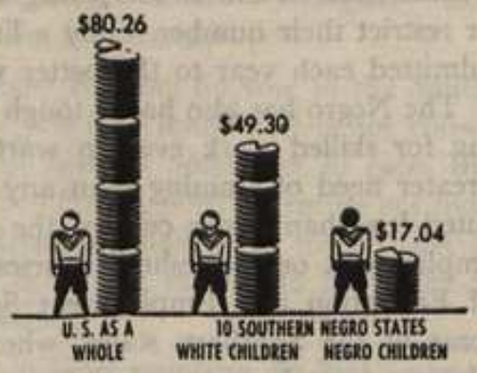
FAMILY INCOME WHITE AND NEGRO 1935-36



FARM OWNERSHIP



EDUCATIONAL EXPENDITURES PER PUPIL, 1936



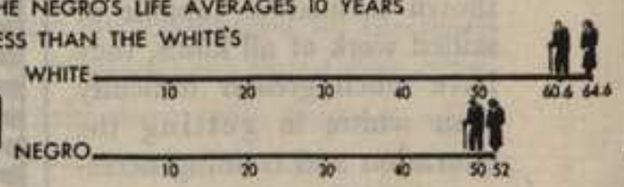
LIFE AND DEATH

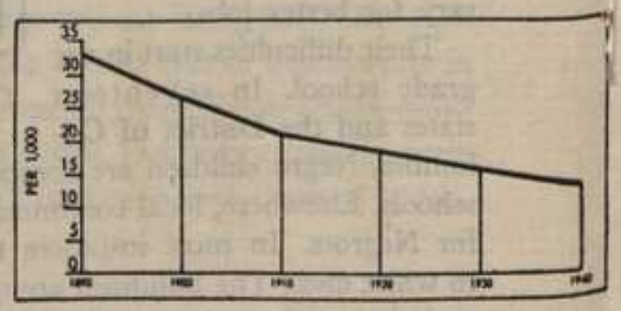


MATERNAL DEATH RATE IS THREE TIMES THAT OF WHITE

YET NEGRO DEATH RATE IS GOING DOWN

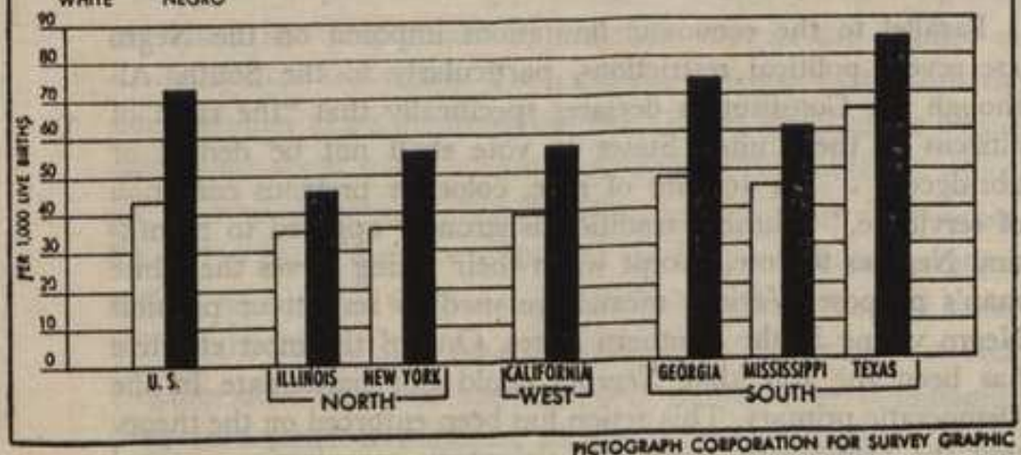
THE NEGRO'S LIFE AVERAGES 10 YEARS LESS THAN THE WHITE'S





INFANT DEATH RATES, 1940

Note that for both Whites and Negroes death rates are highest in the Southern sample.



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twenty or thirty years ago, today's Negroes reflect the lack of educational opportunities of a generation ago. The typical Negro of more than 25 years of age has only 5.7 years' schooling as compared with an average of 8.8 years for the typical native white person.

When it comes to higher education, the Negro is still worse off. Only a few have money enough to attend college, and they have difficulty getting good training. Negroes are not admitted to the state universities or private white colleges in any of the Southern states. Several of these states support small Negro colleges; but none of them have as high standards as the average Southern state university. No Northern state university excludes Negroes, but they are often treated rather badly once they are enrolled. Several great private universities, such as Harvard, Chicago, and Columbia, admit Negroes on an equal basis with whites. Most of the smaller colleges, however, either bar Negroes or restrict their number. Only a limited number of Negroes are admitted each year to the better white medical or law schools.

The Negro has also had a tough time getting vocational training for skilled work even in wartime. Although they were in greater need of training than any other group, Negroes constituted less than 5 per cent of the persons accepted in the pre-employment or "refresher" courses offered by the U. S. Office of Education and Employment Service up to May, 1942. In some of the Southern states, where most of the Negroes live, Negroes were kept out of the war training program altogether.

Citizenship Rights

Parallel to the economic limitations imposed on the Negro are severe political restrictions, particularly in the South. Although the Constitution declares specifically that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged . . . on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," Southern tradition is strongly opposed to permitting Negroes to vote, except when their voting serves the white man's purpose. Various means are used to restrict or prohibit Negro voting in the Southern states. One of the most effective has been the rule that Negroes could not participate in the Democratic primary. This action has been enforced on the theory that the Democratic party is a voluntary organization entitled to determine its own membership. Since the Democratic party is the only party that counts in the South, its primary really determines who is to be elected. In view of this, the Supreme

Court recently held that it was illegal to deprive the Negro of his right to vote in the primary. Nevertheless, several of the Southern states continued to bar them in the 1944 primaries.

Another device commonly used to prevent Negroes from voting is the poll tax. At present, seven states require that voters pay a small fee before they can register to vote. Although whites as well as Negroes may be compelled to pay the fee, election officials enforce the ruling much more strictly with Negroes. Moreover, since Negroes are poorer as a group, fewer of them are willing or able to pay the tax. Similar to the poll tax in that they restrict Negroes because they are poor, are property, educational, and "character" requirements for voting. These are seldom applied to whites but almost always to Negroes. And they may be applied most unfairly, as in the instance of an intelligent Negro woman in North Carolina who was not permitted to register because she mispronounced the words "contingency" and "constitutionality" in reading the state constitution.

Despite these restrictions, some Negroes do vote in the South, especially in the border states. Just how many vote is not known since election statistics are not divided according to race. But in most of the states of the Deep South, where Negroes are most numerous, the number is extremely small. This means that in the South the Negro has not been able to look to the ballot as a means of improving his position.

In the North Negroes vote in large numbers. In fact, in some cities more Negroes vote in proportion to their numbers than whites. But despite the large number of Negroes who vote, they get much less proportionately for their vote in the country as a whole, than the whites. For example, Negroes cast about the same number of votes throughout the United States as the whites cast in the seven states of the Deep South. Yet Southern whites get incomparably more benefits from politics than do Negroes. The Deep South has 52 members of the House of Representatives and 14 members of the Senate, while Negroes have but one member of the House and no Senators. In recent years, however, Negroes have increased their political influence by abandoning their traditional Republican allegiance and becoming "fluid," ready to support the party that offers them the greatest benefits. And in some cities, Negroes are coming to exercise important political influence in local affairs.

THE NEGRO AND COMMUNITY LIFE

IN addition to being poor and being denied a fair chance at an education or in political life, Negroes suffer from many other handicaps. Although they have lived in this country since its founding, they have been kept outside the main currents of American life. They are Americans by birth, by citizenship, and in the social habits—more American than millions of white people of recent European origin. Yet most of them live apart from other Americans; they attend their own churches; patronize their own stores; attend their own schools; have their own social and cultural organizations; and, in many places, work at "Negro jobs."

Segregation

Negroes and whites are kept apart from each other by a series of restrictions and taboos, some formal and legal but mostly informal and traditional. For example, the two rarely mingle in the same part of town. This is true in the North as well as in the South. Since the Negroes have few social contacts with whites, it seems almost natural for the Negroes to have their own schools, churches, hospitals, stores, and playgrounds. And since the Negroes are poorer, on the average, than white people, it seems almost natural that they should live in a more dilapidated part of town, with fewer paved streets and fewer hospitals, schools, and playgrounds.

On top of this, the Negro sections of town are always overcrowded. In the North, particularly, the Negro population has grown much more rapidly than the areas in which they are encouraged to live. Because so few houses are available for them, Negroes nearly always are compelled to pay much more than white families for a decent place to live, or else put up with much worse conditions. Many find that even after paying rents which most whites would consider out of reason they still cannot get decent housing.

This segregation has not been achieved by housing laws. Several attempts have been made to enforce segregation by means of zoning ordinances, but the Supreme Court has ruled that all such ordinances are unconstitutional. Segregation has usually been maintained by informal social pressure or property agreements which the courts have upheld. Few white property owners in white neighborhoods will even consider selling or renting to

Negroes. Neighborhood associations often devote their energies to keeping the Negroes out of white communities. Threats and violence are sometimes used if the more peaceful methods fail. The federal government has strengthened these segregation practices by its housing policies. The Federal Housing Administration extends credit to Negroes only if they build or buy in Negro neighborhoods. Although the United States Housing Authority has provided a considerable amount of low-cost housing to Negroes, it has usually built separate projects for whites and Negroes. Even where mixed projects were undertaken, they were forced by public opinion, except in one or two instances, to keep the Negroes at one end of the project and the whites at the other. This practice was later modified.

Jim Crow and Other Practices

Outside of housing, there is considerable difference between the South and the North in the extent to which Negroes are kept from mixing with whites. In the South, the race line is sharply marked. Negroes, for example, are not permitted in most parks, playgrounds, or libraries. Some Southern cities have special facilities for Negroes but they are never quite so good as those provided for whites. South of the Mason-Dixon line, Negroes are expected to travel in special Jim Crow railway coaches. Separate waiting rooms are provided in the stations. In most of the Southern states, Negroes are also kept apart in street cars and busses. Negroes are ordinarily barred from white hotels, restaurants, places of amusement, and cemeteries. Some hospitals admit Negro patients, but they are kept in separate wards. And although there are Negro Baptists and Methodists, there is no mixing of the races in the Southern churches.

Although there are no Jim Crow laws in the North, Negroes are often barred from schools, parks, playgrounds, and other places of amusement by social pressure. Many stores, hotels, and restaurants refuse to serve Negroes unless someone threatens to call in the police. In some cities the better-class stores are more likely to turn away Negroes than the cheaper ones. Churches in the North do not prohibit Negroes or even keep them separate, but Negroes rarely feel welcome enough to wish to attend. The Y.M.C.A.'s ordinarily segregate Negroes even in the North, the reason usually given being that they are equipped with swimming pools. The Y.W.C.A. is somewhat more tolerant.

Differences Bewildering to Negroes

Curious differences in the rules of segregation exist not only between the North and the South, but between cities both in the North and South. Many of these differences make no sense whatsoever and are bewildering to visiting Negroes. In some office buildings in Atlanta, for example, all Negroes must ride up in special Negro elevators, but they may come down in any of the cars. A federal office building in Nashville has separate rest rooms for white and Negro employees, but the public rest rooms are open to both races. The border states have harsher rules on some things than the South, while on others they are more lenient. In Washington, D. C., for example, theaters for whites are completely closed to Negroes, but libraries, public buildings, and parks are open. The department stores in Baltimore or Washington are much stricter about keeping Negroes out than those of the Deep South. In the North, Negroes are never quite sure how they will be treated in a restaurant until they have tried it out. In Baltimore they are served in the restaurant at one railroad station; in the other "they never try."

Social Taboos

The strongest forces keeping Negroes and whites apart, however, are social. In the South the most powerful of all are those separating white women from Negro men. The desire to "protect" white women from Negro men amounts to an obsession in the South. A discussion of the justice of "keeping the Negro in his place" almost invariably ends by a Southerner asking heatedly: "Would you want your daughter to marry a nigger?"

Actually, of course, the question is an idle one. Marriages between Negro men and white women occur but rarely in the United States. Mixed marriages are prohibited by law in all of the Southern states and all but five of the non-Southern states west of the Mississippi. And there are few such marriages even where they are allowed. It is true that many American "Negroes" are actually largely of white descent. But the mixing of the races has been due almost entirely to white men taking an advantage of Negro women. Such relations have rarely involved marriage, and appear to be decreasing. Illicit sex relations between Negro men and white women are uncommon.

Nevertheless, the Southerner's fear of intermarriage is a very real thing. It accounts for many of the social restrictions placed against Negroes. Negroes and whites practically never dance

together, for example, in the South. Even in the North, Negro students are usually expected to stay away from high school or college dances, or, if they attend, they dance with each other. In many parts of the country Negroes are prohibited from using public swimming pools or beaches when whites are present. Even the shaking of hands is ruled out in the South, except for a servant's greeting his master. Eating together is also frowned on in many places. In the South it seems to be regarded as almost as bad as intermarriage. Like the other barriers, this has broken down only to a slight extent. A Southern writer explains that "the table, simple though its fare may be, possesses the sanctity of an intimate social institution. To break bread together involves, or may involve, everything."

Even conversation between the races is, in the South, heavily restricted by custom. Serious discussion is ruled out except as it concerns business affairs. The only Negro men whom the ordinary Southern white woman is likely to have occasion to talk to are her servants—although she may interest herself in a certain amount of polite welfare work among the Negroes. The form of the conversation is of great importance. A Negro is expected to address a white person by the title of "Mr.," "Mrs.," or "Miss." White men may be called "Boss," "Cap," or "Cap'n." But a white person is expected to address a Negro by his first name, or by such terms as "boy," "uncle," or "aunty." "Mr." and "Mrs." are practically never used by a white person in referring to a Negro unless it be by a salesman anxious to gain customers. A Negro is expected to beat about the bush and never to contradict a white man or mention a delicate subject directly.

These restrictions on conversation are important because they impose a very real barrier between the races. They keep each from knowing what the other is really thinking about. This obviously has a bearing on the Southerners' idea that they "know" their Negroes. The North has no restriction on conversation, but since the two races ordinarily live apart, they rarely have a chance to get to know one another.

ARE NEGROES DIFFERENT?

THE result of all this is that many white people think of the Negro as "different." He is thought to be good only for unskilled work and wholly unfitted for leadership. Also many whites say that Negroes are not to be trusted, citing their high crime rates

as evidence of supposed criminal tendencies. Careful examination shows both of these ideas to be wholly false.

Negro Achievements

Despite the many restrictions placed upon them, Negroes have achieved outstanding success in many fields. These achievements are naturally the greatest in the fields where Negroes have suffered the fewest handicaps, and the least in fields where they have found little or no opportunity. For example, no Negro has achieved fame in national, state, or local politics. Few have been outstanding in business. In both fields they suffer from tremendous handicaps. In the field of entertainment, on the other hand, many Negroes have made outstanding contributions. Among the ten highest paid concert artists in 1941, three were Negroes—Marian Anderson, Dorothy Maynor, and Paul Robeson. On the stage such famous actors and actresses as Todd Duncan, Paul Robeson, and Ethel Waters are Negroes. Many Negroes have achieved success as jazz band leaders and as dancers. Several Negroes are well known as composers of light music, and at least one Negro has enjoyed success as a symphony orchestra conductor. A number of Negroes have been highly successful in all fields of literature. Among those best known to white readers are Langston Hughes and Richard Wright.

In athletics, too, Negroes have won their full share of fame. Every sport fan is familiar with the names of Joe Louis and Jack Johnson as heavyweight champions of the world. At the 1936 Olympic Games Jesse Owens won outstanding individual honors. In his undergraduate days, Paul Robeson ranked among the football "greats" of the period. Negroes have been barred from major league baseball, but many critics believe that some of the Negro players could easily become stars.

Although we may search in vain for Negro Senators, Cabinet members, or state governors, this does not mean that the Negroes are lacking in statesmanlike qualities. It merely means that professional politics is largely a white domain. For outstanding Negro statesmen we shall have to turn to the field of race leadership. If we include this field with politics, we may say that some of the most capable statesmen in the United States have been Negroes. This is certainly true of such men as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, and James Weldon Johnson. Many of the younger Negro leaders of today are displaying similar qualities of statesmanship.

Crime and Negroes

At the other end of the social scale, much emphasis has been placed on the large number of Negro criminals. Many Americans firmly believe that the Negro is a born criminal. They read in their newspapers almost every day of crimes that were committed by Negroes. In fact, a large part, perhaps most, of the news about Negroes in the papers, in both North and South, is about crime. This is partly due to the way that the papers handle news. When a Catholic, a German, or a Swede commits a crime, his religion or nationality is rarely mentioned. But when a Negro commits a crime, his race is usually stated in the headlines.

Statistics can be quoted to "prove" that Negroes are much more likely to commit crime than whites. For example, there are more than three times as many Negroes in prisons and reformatories, in proportion to the population, as there are native whites. But what do these figures mean? Scientists have been trying to find out for years, and as yet no one really knows. Obviously, there are no statistics which reveal the amount of crime committed by the two races; what we have are figures on arrests, convictions, and imprisonment—which are much smaller than the number of crimes committed. It would seem that Negroes are more likely to be arrested for crimes than whites. This is particularly true in the South, where a crime committed by a Negro against a white person seldom goes unpunished, while crimes by whites against Negroes are likely to be overlooked. Some of the Negro "crimes" in the South are merely violations of segregation laws or "disorderly conduct," a term used to cover such things as failing to treat white persons with proper respect. In the North, white criminals are more likely than Negroes to have political "pull" protecting them from arrest and conviction. And, finally, Negro criminals are arrested more frequently and sent to jail for longer terms, thus warping the crime statistics.

Although no one can say so positively, it is quite possible that Negroes do commit more crimes, proportionately, than whites. This would be expected from a sociological point of view. Slavery brought about a low regard for human life. Assault and murder, although rarely premeditated, are more common among Negroes than among whites. Because of poverty and weak family bonds, prostitution seems to be more common among Negro women than among white women. Poverty and slum conditions, under which most city Negroes live, encourage the formation of criminal gangs. In fact, white criminals often operate in the

Negro areas because slum areas are rarely well policed. Negro children brought up under such conditions have two strikes against them before they come of age. Negroes are no more likely to be born criminals than whites, but their social handicaps are so great that it is a wonder that their crime record is as low as it appears to be.

THE NEGRO PROTEST

FOR years most Negroes accepted the severe handicaps forced upon them because there seemed nothing else to do. In the South, particularly, Negro leaders were largely men who "knew how to get along with whites." For years Uncle Tom was regarded as the symbol of a good Negro who knew his place. Most Negroes, desiring to avoid serious trouble, have been humble and subservient in the presence of whites—regardless of how they may have felt.

Gradually, however, a change has taken place. Although all Negro leaders must work with whites, the Negro leaders of today have been more aggressive in fighting for full equality. Their protest has been gaining in strength since the early 1900's and reached a climax in World War II.

Organizations

The Negro's struggle has been led in recent years by three interracial organizations. Oldest of these is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909. It operates primarily in the field of civil liberties, being concerned with getting a vote for Negroes, protecting them against lynching, and safeguarding their legal rights. In this struggle it has won many notable victories. It has been in the forefront of the battle against the poll tax. Although often attacked by militant Negroes, particularly in recent years, as being too cautious and conservative in its tactics, its achievements are undeniable.

The Urban League was founded in 1911 as a result of a merger of three older organizations. Its main aim has been to get equal job opportunities, with equal pay for equal work, and an equal chance for advancement. In this struggle the League has concerned itself with such things as the problems of education, home and neighborhood, problems of youth, recreation, vocational guidance, housing, and welfare work. Local branches of the League maintain employment agencies, day nurseries, child place-

ment agencies, clubs for boys and girls, neighborhood groups, parent-teacher associations, and study groups in trade unionism. In many cities the League has worked closely with the trade unions in efforts to improve conditions for Negro workers. Although it too has been criticized by extremists for being too timid, the League has rendered real service within its field.

Operating solely within the South, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation has been concerned with breaking down the barriers between the races and solving race problems so far as possible from within. Its emphasis has been largely on research, education, and publicity. But it has undertaken legal activities in its fight against lynching and on behalf of the Negro's civil rights. And it made interracial work socially respectable in the South. This organization has been replaced by the Southern Regional Council, which has a somewhat broader scope of activities.

THE NEGRO AND WORLD WAR II

AMERICA's entry into World War II greatly speeded up the Negro's demand for equality and justice. This was largely because of the nature of the war. Our enemies, both in Germany and Japan, gloried in a doctrine of racial superiority not unlike the old American doctrine of white supremacy. Both shocked the world by the persecution and oppression of what they considered "inferior" peoples. In opposition, America and the other United Nations have taken a stand for racial tolerance and equality.

The Negro was quick to see the inconsistency between what we said we believed and our treatment of our own racial minorities. And Negro leaders were wise enough to see that this inconsistency could be used to advance their cause. The advocates of racial superiority were placed on the defensive. The findings of science make it impossible for them to maintain, as they have for years, that the Negro is a different species of man, meant by the Creator to be a servant forever. They can no longer justify logically the kind of treatment the Negro had been receiving. The Negro also gained new bargaining power because he was needed as never before in industry and the armed services.

The Fight for Job Equality

At first most employers kept their unwritten rules against the use of Negroes as skilled workers in the war factories. But Negro

leaders began to demand that all bars be lowered and Negroes be granted the same rights as other Americans. One of them, A. Philip Randolph, organized thousands of Negroes for a threatened march on Washington if the right to job equality was not recognized. The President issued an Executive Order on September 3, 1941, forbidding discrimination in defense industries or the agencies of the federal government. A short time later he set up a Committee on Fair Employment Practice to "investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of this order and [to] take appropriate steps to redress grievances." Although the committee never had sufficient funds or power to carry out this directive, many firms have opened their doors to skilled Negro workers during the war—partly as a result of government pressure and perhaps even more because it was one of the few ways of overcoming the desperate manpower shortage.

Although the Negroes have supported the war to the fullest of their ability and made a brilliant record on the battlefield, there has been a good deal of bitterness against the whites for continued bars in industry and discrimination in the services.

Tension in the South

This growing militancy on the part of the Negro has alarmed the South. The ordinary conservative white Southerner may feel uneasy about the treatment accorded the Negro, but he is far from ready for a drastic change in his way of life. He is frightened to find that the North is becoming interested in such things as the poll tax, the all-white primary, and other injustices against the Negro which he guards behind the doctrine of "states' rights."

What is he supposed to do? he asks belligerently. Give up Jim Crow; allow a Negro to marry his daughter; build good schools for Negroes, though the schools are none too good for his own children; punish the white violators of Negro rights, though they may otherwise be good citizens; relinquish white supremacy? Is he supposed to retreat from all "Southern traditions"? Wherever he turns, he sees outside aggression.

To make the situation worse, he can no longer seriously maintain that he alone "knows" the Negro. Recent studies made among young Negroes in the South show that close personal, friendly relations between whites and Negroes hardly ever exist. Jim Crow laws and the practices of segregation, much more enforced than they were forty or fifty years ago, have raised barriers that are rarely crossed. Many Southern whites have shown signs of unbelievable panic, apparently believing that the Negro is about to rise in revolution.

Their panic is aggravated by the knowledge that whites in the North are moving in the opposite direction. As an individual, the Northerner still shows considerable prejudice against the Negro, especially when he is looking for a job or a home to live in. But as a citizen, the white Northerner is becoming prepared to give the Negro a square deal, even to the extent of job equality. In contrast to the South, almost everyone in the North is opposed to discrimination in general; at the same time, almost every Northerner practices discrimination in his own personal affairs. But the North will accept a change; the South insists that it will not. And the North has much more political power than the South, for the South is itself a minority.

The impact of the war on the Negro has thus had the effect of increasing the tension between the North and the South. This fact in itself would seem to make it essential for us to find a national rather than a sectional solution to the racial issues. Fortunately, the white South is not united in opposition to giving the Negro a better chance in life. The South is changing rapidly. Southern liberalism is gaining, while the conservative Southerner is finding it increasingly difficult to square his belief in individual freedom and democracy with his treatment of the Negroes.

Grounds for Hope

If the white population shows a reasonable amount of good will, there are solid grounds for believing that solution of the Negro-white problem can be reached. Much of the difficulty is due to misunderstanding arising out of the fact that the two groups rarely have an opportunity of talking matters out around the table. When asked to rank, in order of importance, the types of discrimination they consider important, white Southerners usually list them in the following order:

1. The ban on intermarriage and sex relations involving white women and colored men;
2. The established etiquette governing personal relations between individuals of the two races;
3. Segregation in the schools and churches;
4. Segregation in hotels, restaurants, and theaters;
5. Segregation in trains, street cars, and busses;
6. Discrimination in public service;
7. Inequality in political rights;
8. Inequality before the law;
9. Inequality in jobs and relief.

Thus, while white Southerners are completely opposed to intermarriage, and strongly opposed to calling Negroes "Mr." and "Mrs." or mixing with them socially, they say they do not object so strongly to seeing them obtain job equality, or even their rights as citizens of the United States.

This is hopeful because Negroes would rank their demands in almost exactly the reverse order. They are interested, first of all, in equality of jobs and pay, and second, in their rights as American citizens. Contrary to the white belief, few, if any, Negroes are concerned about intermarriage, and the question of civil courtesies is of much less importance than such things as decent schools, playgrounds, and housing. Segregation is not as burning an issue as equality.



"... WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL"

In view of the fact that the Negro places the greatest store on those rights which the Southern white says he considers least important, it would seem that some basis of understanding could be achieved once the white man recognizes the need for it.

America's Opportunity

Behind its two protecting oceans, America has never bothered much about its international reputation. Perhaps no other people have cared less about what other people thought of them. So long as the United States was a second-rate power, it did not matter much. But now most Americans realize that our days of isolation are over. America is not only a part of the world, but it must, in view of its tremendous power, accept world leadership if peace is to be preserved. Our reputation is now of great importance. A leader must have moral as well as commercial prestige if it is to have decisive influence. And none is watched so suspiciously as the one that is rising to leadership.

The treatment of the Negro is the greatest barrier to America's moral leadership. It has been tremendously publicized. This is particularly true in Asia where Japan has used our shortcomings as one of the main themes in its anti-American propaganda. But it is also true in Europe, particularly in Soviet Russia. For its international prestige, power, and future security, America must

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demonstrate to the world that its Negroes can be made part of its democracy.

In a way, then, the Negro problem is not only America's greatest failure, but also its greatest opportunity. America has a great moral tradition. It has always stood for equality, freedom, and liberty. It has a great national experience in uniting racial and cultural diversities. If it can show that justice, equality, and cooperation are possible between the white and black races, Dr. Myrdal declares that "America's prestige and power would rise tremendously. . . . The century-old dream of American patriots, that America should give the entire world its own freedoms and its own faith, would come true. . . . And America would have a spiritual power many times stronger than all her financial and military resources—the power of the trust and support of all good people on earth."

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The "Committee of 100"

Dedicated to the Creation of an America of Justice and Equality for Our Negro Fellow Citizens

69 Fifth Avenue — New York 3, N. Y.

WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON
Chairman

We invite every friend of the "Committee of 100" actively to support our work through adherence to the principles set forth in the following Affirmation, already subscribed to by 35,000 Americans.

THE BELIEVING

I believe in the brotherhood of man. I believe in the essential right of my Negro fellow man to equal justice under the law; to the same political, economic and educational opportunities as any other American. I believe in the immediate right of the young man of color to serve his country under its flag without suffering the stigma of segregation.

THE DOING

I will make plain, by personal example on every occasion, that I am on the side of those who suffer from unfair discrimination. I will help with my counsel, with my work, and with my material resources when my contribution can be useful in making these beliefs effective. In 1945 I will assist, by every means within my power, this effort to make an America of justice and equality for our Negro fellow citizens.

DR. WILLIAM A. NEILSON, *Chairman*
The "Committee of 100"
69 Fifth Avenue, New York 3, N. Y.

Please record my name as among the signers of the above affirmation.

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