WDN Room U.S. returns

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLET No. 128

Mar '47

OUR

NEGRO VETERANS

BY CHARLES G. BOLTÉ AND LOUIS HARRIS

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OUT of every major war in our nation's history has come progress for the American Negro. Yet each war has been followed by a reaction which wiped out many of the gains. In each case there has been a clash between those who have raised their standards of living, who have opened new channels of opportunity, and those who want to turn back the clock to prewar conditions.

The American Revolution saw the rise of a brisk, mercantile society and a Jeffersonian outlook in the North. The combination removed all vestiges of slavery from the North. But not long after, the booming cotton market gave rise to the plantation system which firmly implanted slavery in the South for the greater part of another century.

The material in this pamphlet is based on a series of surveys made by the Bureau of the Census, the National Urban League, the Southern Regional Council, and the American Veterans Committee.

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The Civil War gave the Negro formal emancipation, the right to bear arms for his country, and partial political franchise. But the postwar reaction severely curtailed the new-found political freedom and reduced Negroes to economic serfdom.

The First World War opened Northern industry to Negro workers for the first time. More than a million Negroes migrated to industrial centers. Although the standard of living in the urban North was depressed by all-Negro slum districts, life was better than it had been under peonage and tenancy in the South. The postwar protest inevitably came, subsequent unemployment produced race tensions and serious riots, and Negroes were segregated in the North more strictly than before.

Today, Negro veterans of World War II find themselves in a similar crisis. No longer are Negro troops and war workers of strategic military importance. The need for using every human and material resource to win the war has passed. The bargaining strength of the Negro population as a whole has been reduced. Greater difficulty is encountered in combating such race terror groups as the Columbians and the Ku Klux Klan.

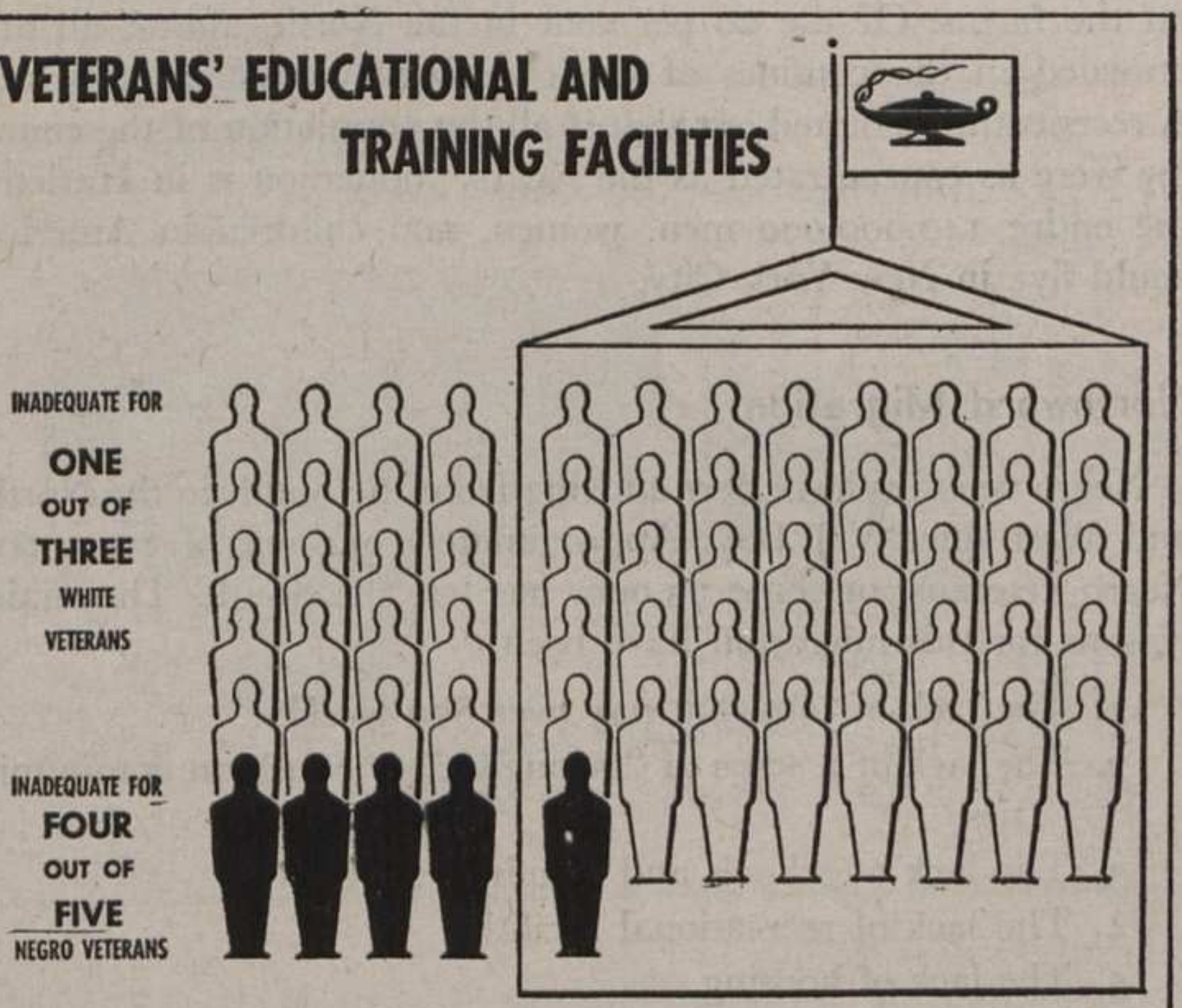
Veteran's Problems Intensified for Negroes

Each difficulty confronting veterans as a whole is intensified for Negro veterans. Veterans generally want jobs that pay more; Negro veterans desperately need jobs of any kind. Veterans need housing; the Negro is always in dire need of housing. One out of three white veterans cannot find adequate educational and training facilities; four out of five Negro veterans are faced with most unsatisfactory educational and training opportunities. The Negro veteran meets greater obstacles than the non-Negro veteran at every turn for one reason: his skin is darker.

What happens to the Negro veteran today and in the next five years is important to the nation. America is at the crossroads in its pattern of race relations. The Negro veteran has seen more of the world than the rest of his people; he is the first to seek a new voice at the polls in hitherto white primaries; he is firmer in demanding better jobs than have been available to Negroes in the past; his potential contribution to the nation is greater in terms of leadership. He is also more likely to suffer violence

for carrying the torch of the Negro postwar protest against discrimination in America.

The Negro veteran is old enough to have killed men in battle and young enough to look forward to a whole lifetime of adult-



hood. He wants very simple things in life: a good job, educational and vocational guidance, better housing, and a little self-respect. He knows that returning veterans were supposed to find these things. He knows they exist in this land of ours. But he does not find them. He is different from other veterans only because whatever he is seeking in life is harder for him to attain, whatever obstacles lie in his path are more difficult to overcome.

WHERE OUR NEGRO VETERANS LIVE

ONE out of every thirteen veterans of World War II is a Negro. Of the 1,154,486 Negro veterans 1,029,946, or 89 per cent, have their homes either in the thirteen Southern states or the big urban centers of the North. Almost two-thirds of them are in the South, with twice as many in the cities and small towns as are on the farms. Of the 26 per cent in the North, almost all are crowded in the confines of the overpopulated Negro districts. A recent study pointed out that if all the population of the country were as concentrated as the Negro population is in Harlem, the entire 140,000,000 men, women, and children in America could live in New York City.

Northward Migration

Negro veterans have been moving from the South to the North and West since V-J Day. Approximately one out of every ten Negro veterans, or some 75,000, has left the South. The main reasons for this migration have been:

1. The lack of jobs that pay over $20 weekly.
2. The lack of a sense of "belonging" to Southern communities.
3. The lack of schools and training facilities.
4. The lack of recreational facilities.
5. The lack of housing.
6. The promise of greater opportunity in the North and West.
7. The promise of new industrial development in the West.
8. The promise of greater "equality" in the North.
9. The desire to see the country.
10. The desire for a change of any kind.

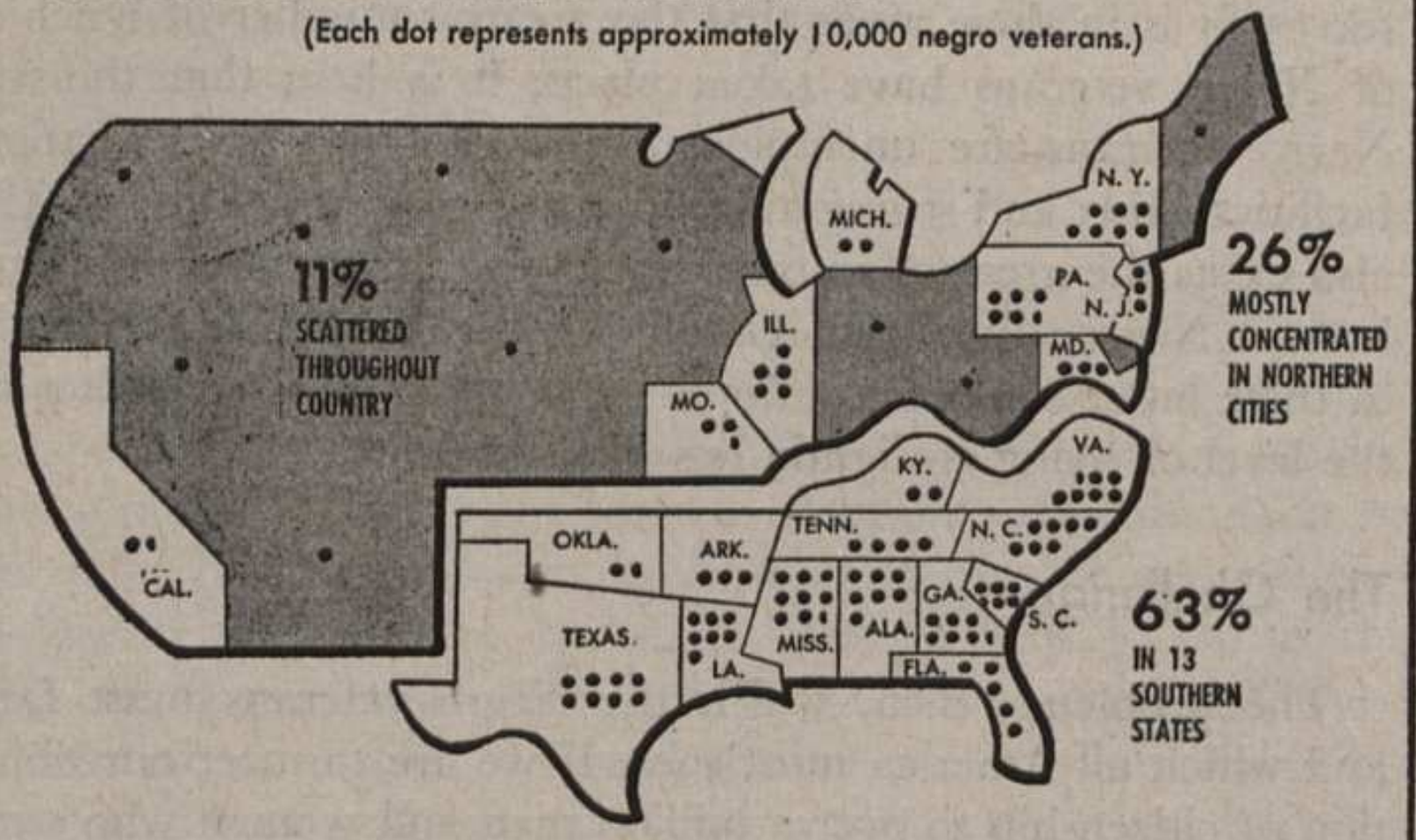
Restless, ambitious, with a newly acquired sense of mobility, young Negro veterans have migrated chiefly to the West. Almost inevitably, however, they have gravitated to cities where they trade the slow-moving undercurrent of Southern frustration for the hemmed-in restriction of the Negro ghetto. Trusting only members of their own race, Negro veterans seek other Negroes

when they migrate. Yet, for all of the overcrowded, slum-filled conditions they find in Northern cities, Negro veterans probably have a greater chance there of attaining security and opportunity than they did in their previous homes.

Most of the Negro veterans will undoubtedly remain in the South. They will stay there because in most cases they were born

LOCATION OF NEGRO VETERANS

(Each dot represents approximately 10,000 negro veterans.)



there and have family attachments and responsibilities there. Most of them are unable to afford moving to another part of the country. In many cases, they live in such ignorance and poverty that they never even consider the possibility of moving. A considerable number of Negroes believe that the colored people should remain in the South and "see it through." More progressive Negroes hold, however, that their only hope as a race lies in a widespread scattering to all parts of the country where assimilation and acceptance will come more readily. The latter group may be right in evaluating the best interests of their people. But the bulk of the Negro veterans face an uncertain future south of the Mason-Dixon line.

Where Negro Veterans Are Concentrated

Apart from Washington, D. C., where they constitute 25 per cent of the veteran population, Negro veterans are most heavily concentrated in the following states, where the percentage of veterans who are Negro is as shown: Louisiana, 27.6 per cent; Alabama, 24 per cent; Florida, 22.7 per cent; Georgia, 21.4 per cent; Mississippi, 38.5 per cent; and South Carolina, 28.1 per cent. These figures are to be contrasted with the over-all percentage of only 7.7 per cent of Negro personnel in the armed forces. It is in these areas that the greatest number of lynchings of Negro veterans have taken place; it is here that the most Negro veterans are unemployed; that the poorest educational facilities exist; and segregation is most drastically enforced. Here also exists the greatest amount of poverty. There are large numbers of Negroes in North Carolina, New York, and Texas, but in these latter states the ratio of whites to Negroes is higher and the level of living is slightly less depressed.

The Challenge

The problems, then, which the Negro veterans must face—and which all America must solve if we are to meet our obligation of citizenship to over a million men and women who served in World War II—are the problems which the South and the urban centers of the North raise. Each is peculiar unto itself, steeped in the traditions and folkways of the region. The pace in each is different. The degree of progress is different. But the central issue is the same in all areas: How can economic and educational discrimination be ended in our lifetime?

WARTIME GAINS

LIKE all of the men who fought in the recent war, Negro veterans came back home with a wide range of experience. Over two-thirds of those in the Army had been overseas and had seen the way people of other lands live. Many had been to France and England where they had been accepted by civil populations

without discrimination. Many were embittered over the menial tasks to which they had been assigned. They resented being kept from combat after having sailed to the battlefronts. In the Army over 70 per cent of all overseas Negro troops were assigned to unskilled duties behind the lines; in the Navy 90 per cent were assigned to such tasks as stewards, cooks, mess boys, and seamen.

Yet they had moved out of their homes and seen new faces and new habits for the first time. They had learned many new skills which could be applied to civilian life. Although Negro veterans found conditions at home no worse than when they went away to war, they were far more restless and dissatisfied when they returned to civilian life.

Among Negro Civilians

In the North, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, there was greater prosperity among Negroes than ever before. More skilled jobs were being held down by Negroes; wage rates were higher; and public indignation against discrimination had grown. The Negro had shown himself to be able and skilled as a worker, and nothing has done more to help his status than this demonstration of competence. Scarcely a public official in the North could afford openly to look down upon the Negro people. There was tension in the great urban centers where Negro districts were spilling into formerly all-white districts, where overcrowded living conditions gave outlet to latent prejudices. But there had been a definite and important improvement in race relations.

The Fight for Citizenship

In the South, the traditional caste system was feeling the effect of Northern protest. A larger number of Southern whites and Negroes—many of them veterans—were becoming conscious of the injustice of the traditional pattern of segregation, though the group was still a small minority. The South as a whole was becoming conscious of the race problem instead of merely accepting the double standard. A wave of violence swept the least enlightened areas.

During the height of the primaries in 1946, at which Negro veterans took the lead in bringing out a record Negro vote, six Negro veterans were lynched. All six slayings occurred between July 20 and August 8, 1946. In addition, a number of colored veterans disappeared around registration time in the fifteen Southern states. Many left the region because of threats; the bodies of others were found floating in the Mississippi River or mutilated in the woods.

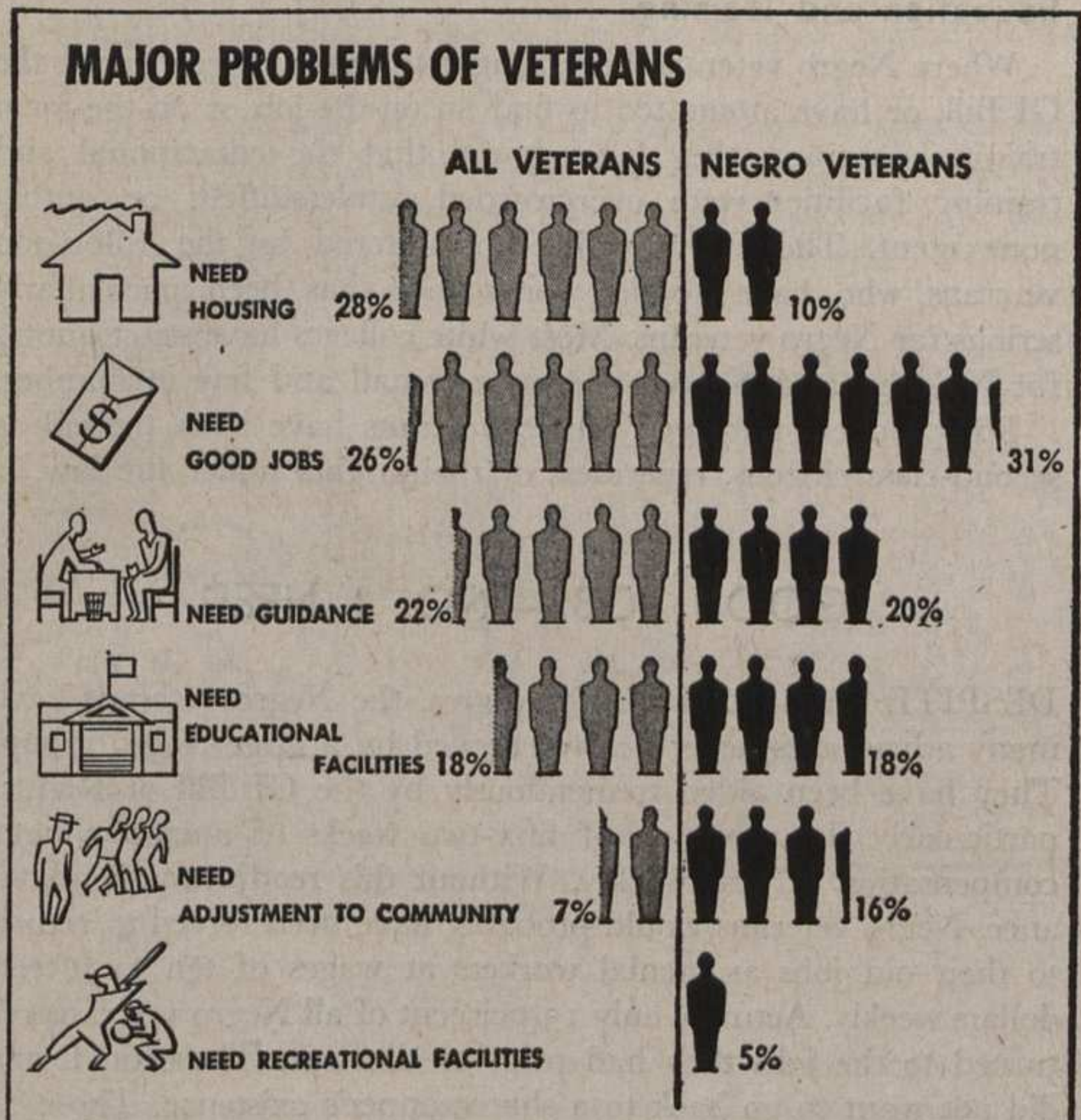
The South was reacting to the postwar protest, as it had after the first World War: resisting the general, nation-wide rise in living conditions among Negroes, attempting desperately to hold color lines fast. But many white veterans as well as their Negro comrades-in-arms had broadened their outlook. With distances shortened, with widespread use of aircraft and modern communications, the more liberal and less discriminatory North was moving physically closer to and having greater influence on the South.

WHAT THE NEGRO VETERAN WANTS

THE way in which the white South and the North allow the Negro veteran to exercise his rights as a citizen will shape the whole future of the Negro in America for this generation. The needs of Negro veterans are essentially the needs of all Negroes, but the veterans have a greater chance of fulfilling them. A special survey of some sixty-seven communities, mainly in the South, reflects the special problems of the Negro veteran and the difficulties he faces in solving them. The accompanying chart points up, for example, the difference between opportunities for white and Negro veterans.

Housing

Although housing for Negro veterans has had a relatively low priority, Negro veterans need houses more than any group in the population. But the shortage of homes has been no more acute than the shortage in jobs—that is, real jobs paying more than $20 a week. And, until they can find jobs with decent wages, Negroes simply cannot afford to buy homes or pay higher rentals.



Jobs

It is distressing to find jobs the number one problem of Negro veterans at a period when employment in the nation is soaring to new heights. The reason is twofold: first, Negro veterans want jobs that are more than menial; second, most employers and many unions refuse to lift racial barriers to employment. Negro veterans want to develop skills, to get better jobs. The Negro veteran has not only been unable to find better jobs, but he has had no place to go for advice on where to seek them.

Education and Training

Where Negro veterans have sought to enter college under the GI Bill, or have attempted to find an on-the-job or on-the-farm training program, they have found that the educational and training facilities were overcrowded, understaffed, or simply nonexistent. The overcrowding encountered by the 1,800,000 veterans who have applied for schools has been particularly serious for Negro veterans. Most white colleges have strict quotas for Negroes, and Negro colleges are small and few in number.

For practical purposes, Negro veterans have been treated as second-class citizens, regardless of their rights under the law.

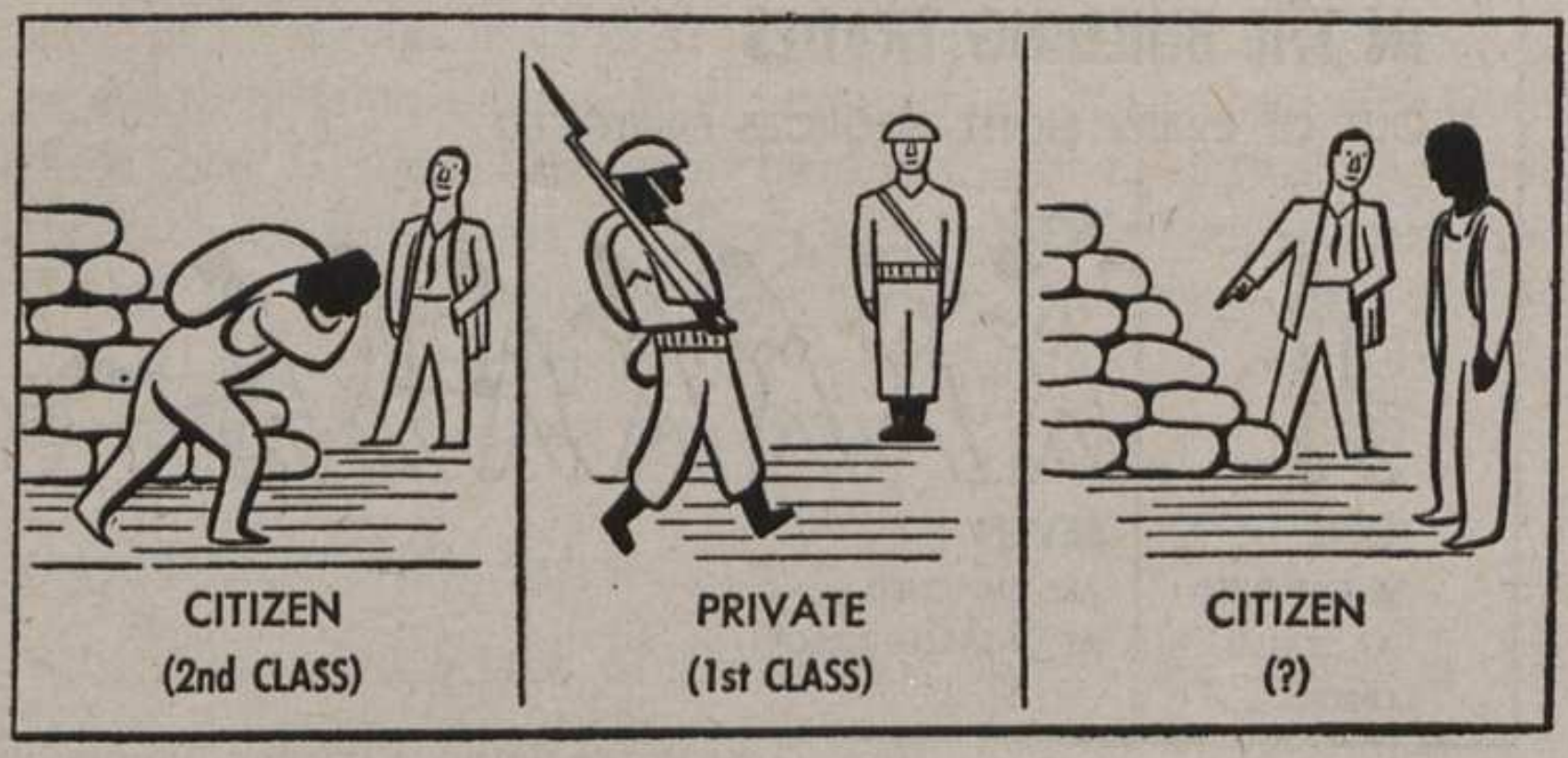
GOOD JOBS—NO. 1 NEED

DESPITE the handicaps listed above, the Negro veterans have many advantages never before enjoyed by a large Negro group. They have been aided tremendously by the GI Bill of Rights, particularly the provision of fifty-two weeks of unemployment compensation at $20 weekly. Without this readjustment allowance, Negro veterans would probably have been forced to return to their old jobs as menial workers at wages of ten to fifteen dollars weekly. Actually only 15 per cent of all Negro veterans returned to the jobs they had prior to the war. Those on farms did not want to go back to a sharecropper's existence. Those in small towns working in unskilled jobs in mills or in low-paying cigarette factories wanted a future with greater promise. The "52–20 club," as the veterans call the unemployment compensation, has given Negro veterans an opportunity to look around before taking a job.

Many Negro soldiers and sailors visited war-boom cities while in the armed forces. They talked with many of the Negro workers who had been up-graded and had learned skills in war production. Negro war workers jumped from a total of .6 per cent to 6 per cent in skilled categories in the two years from 1942 to 1944. In the industrialized North, Negro veterans knew that precedents had been broken, that some of the race barriers to employment had been broken down. They were determined to

obtain good jobs or the training that would eventually provide them with better employment. The "52–20 club" permitted them to wait it out.

For the first year after V-J Day, an average of approximately 15 per cent of all Negro veterans were receiving unemployment compensation. But this does not take into account the nearly 35 per cent who shifted their jobs every few months.

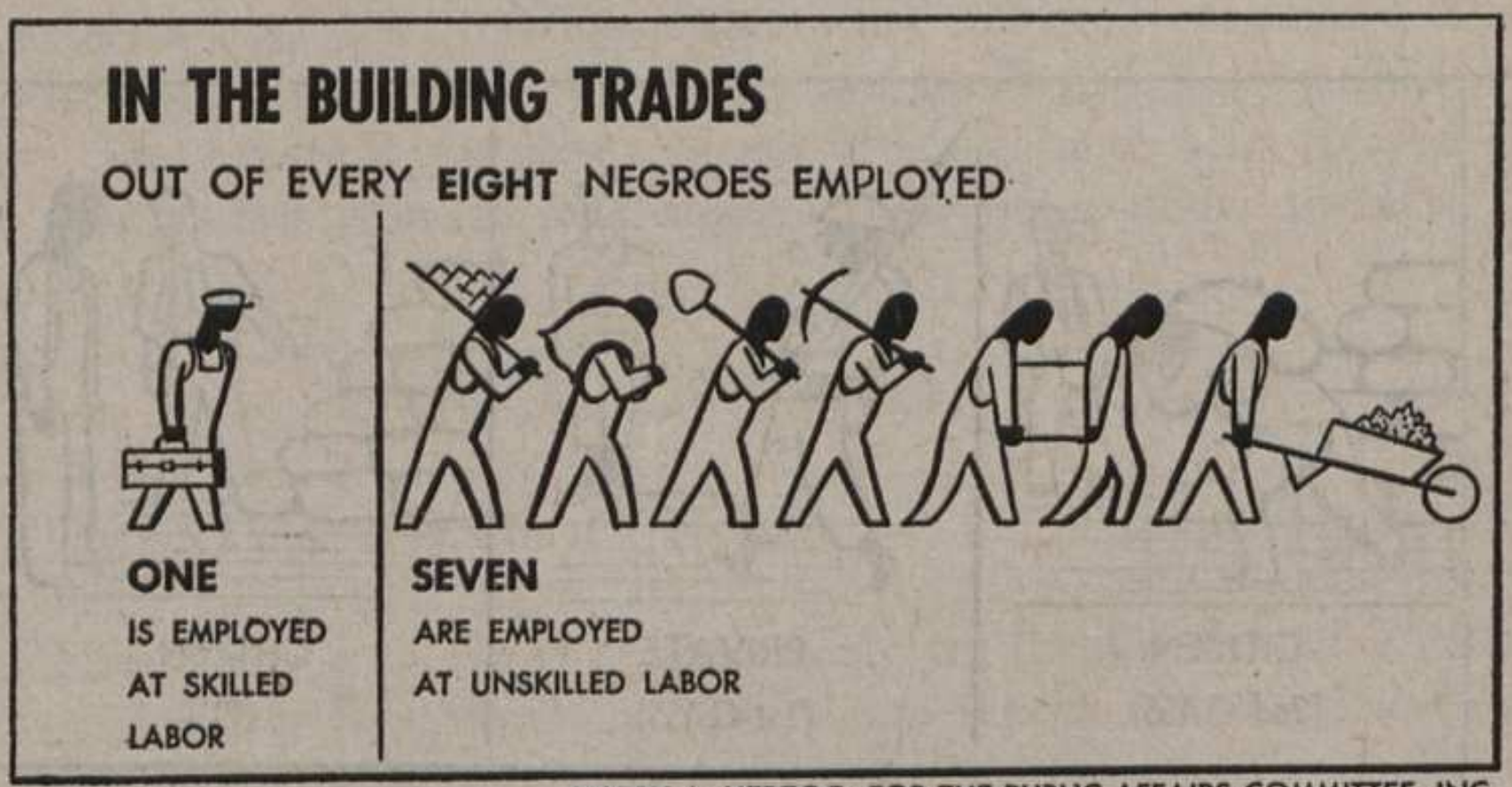


Jobs Aplenty—At Low Pay

In forty-one out of sixty-seven towns and cities surveyed, the desire for better jobs ranked first among all needs. In most places Negro veterans have found only menial old-line Negro jobs offered. In Arkansas, for example, 95 per cent of the placements made by the USES for Negroes were for service and unskilled jobs. A survey in Georgia concludes, "Jobs are aplenty but at low pay and in unattractive work. In town after town, it is being found that Negro veterans are being offered jobs at twelve, fifteen, eighteen, or twenty-odd dollars a week. A large proportion of the men can show industrial or army experience at work better than common labor, and they are therefore entitled to draw the readjustment allowances. This is 'rocking chair' money." Even in the West, where many Negro veterans have gone in the hope of better wages, figures for October 1946 showed 12 per cent of Negro veterans were receiving unemployment com-

pensation. For the first half of 1946, unemployment ran 11 per cent higher among former Negro service men than it did among white veterans.

On the whole, Negro veterans have been accepted in new small businesses rather than large ones. In industries which have large plant units, race lines are usually settled; a firm policy of



nonemployment is normal. But many small shops in new industries, particularly in the service and repair fields, have successfully employed Negro veterans.

Discrimination in the Building Trades

An example of an industry which badly needs skilled workers but bars Negro veterans is the building trades. With a construction boom of unprecedented proportions, the industry needs some 1,500,000 workers. There are thousands of trained Negro construction workers who were electricians, plumbers, sheet metal workers, carpenters, and other mechanics in the Army and Navy. Yet, except for work as common laborers and hod-carriers, Negro veterans are virtually banned from the industry. Only four cities out of twenty-one surveyed by J. A. Thomas of the National Urban League had an adequate training program for veterans in the building trades.

Take, for example, Negro carpenters. Although more than 24,000 of them were trained in the Army, not more than 5 per cent of these have been employed as carpenters since returning to civilian life. The discriminatory practices of the AFL craft unions is chiefly responsible for the inability of Negro veterans to find skilled jobs in the building trades. Chief offenders are the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the United Association of Journeymen, Plumbers, and Steamfitters which virtually shut out all Negroes from membership. These unions serve as hiring agents in their trades. Continuation of their policy of discrimination automatically cuts off all Negro veterans from these jobs. If the construction industry were to expand its labor force to its full needs, it alone could furnish employment for almost all Negro veterans. The outlook, however, is a dismal one. The building industry will continue to hang out a shingle which says "No Negroes wanted here."

Apprentice Training

In view of the lack of skilled and semiskilled labor in the South, Negro veterans are seeking training in trades. They are particularly anxious to enroll in an apprenticeship or on-the-job training program. Part of this demand for job training comes from the failure to find decent full-time employment. Part is a positive desire for self-improvement and a better life. Successful apprentice-training programs have been set up for carpenters, plasterers, and brickmasons. In each case, the program has been worked out because strong Negro locals of unions have pushed the training. Three Southern cities—Memphis, New Orleans, and Augusta—have developed a significant apprentice program in these three trades. In the North, Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia have begun apprentice programs. This apprentice training can be considered a success only in comparison with the dearth of opportunity for the training of Negroes that previously existed. Even in the best programs, white veterans have outnumbered Negro veterans about fifty to one. In electrical, sheet metal, plumbing, machinist, and other crafts, no Negro veterans are receiving apprentice training. As long as the federal and state governments' apprentice-training divisions refuse to

give special consideration to locating Negro veterans in training programs, and as long as unions and employers pursue a policy of shutting out all Negroes, apprentice training will not be a real hope for thousands.

On-the-Job Training

Potentially the most valuable provision of the GI Bill for Negro veterans is on-the-job training. This training is not limited to the crafts as is the apprentice training, and the government pays the veteran a subsistence allowance while he is learning a job. The record, however, is not impressive. Out of a total of 102,200 receiving on-the-job training in twelve Southern states, only 7,700 were Negroes. Only one out of twelve veterans receiving this training is a Negro, although one veteran out of three in the area is colored. A major obstacle to the development of job-training programs for Negroes has been the attitude of state departments of education, who have to approve all programs. Many of these departments have followed tradition in conceiving of all training programs and schooling as being segregated, and have assumed that the on-the-job training-program is "for whites only." The programs that have been most successful for Negroes have been in small repair and maintenance shops employing small numbers of men, where each individual has a better chance of being judged as an individual according to his ability and capacity to learn rather than by the color of his skin.

On-the-Farm Training

On-the-farm training has been even less successful. It has usually been limited to owners and tenants, while most Negro veterans come from families who are either sharecroppers or laborers. The program is highly decentralized and the white landholding interests who direct the training in many areas do not seem to be inclined to train Negroes to operate farms which they might some day own. Out of 28,000 veterans who have received on-the-farm training in the South, only 3,500, or approximately 11 per cent, are Negro veterans. Thus, only 1 per

cent of the 350,000 Negro veterans who were drafted from farms have received training for this vocation at government expense.

Vocational and Trade Schools

Vocational and trade schools also present a disappointing picture. A survey of fifty key cities by the Urban League revealed that only eleven cities had any formal vocational or technical training facilities. Only Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D. C., among those cities with segregated school systems, had satisfactory schools which Negro veterans could attend. In cities where color lines were not drawn, Negro veterans were able to attend only the industrial arts departments of high schools. These give only a general training which is not applicable to a specific job. Negro veterans attending trade schools have been particularly anxious to get training in radio and electrical work, machine shop and mechanics, business training, carpentry and woodwork, and commercial photography. These trades have been almost entirely closed to Negroes.

Substandard Courses

Because of the limited training opportunities, a number of individuals and groups have set up special vocational training courses for Negro veterans. Although these courses have, in every case, been approved by the Department of Education in the respective states, it is doubtful if many of them meet minimum standards for this type of training. In the absence of other opportunities, the Negro veteran may easily be exploited.

In view of these conditions, it can be readily understood why so many Negro veterans have remained in the "52–20 clubs." Shut out of industry after industry, offered only old-line Negro jobs at low pay, unable to obtain a workable job-training program, it is surprising that the Negro veterans have not given up the struggle for advancement. But most of them are patiently seeking to take advantage of each new job opening, each new opportunity to become better citizens. The responsibility lies with white America to see that the gates of economic opportunity are opened to Negroes.

HOMES FOR NEGRO VETERANS

ALL veterans agree there is no place like home—if you have one. The housing situation remains acute for 4,000,000 veterans. It is worse for Negro veterans. Not more than 100,000 Negro veterans can afford to pay for the homes built under the Veterans Emergency Housing Program. In the South, for every four units being constructed for white veterans, only one is being built for Negro veterans although the ratio of white to Negro veterans is two to one.

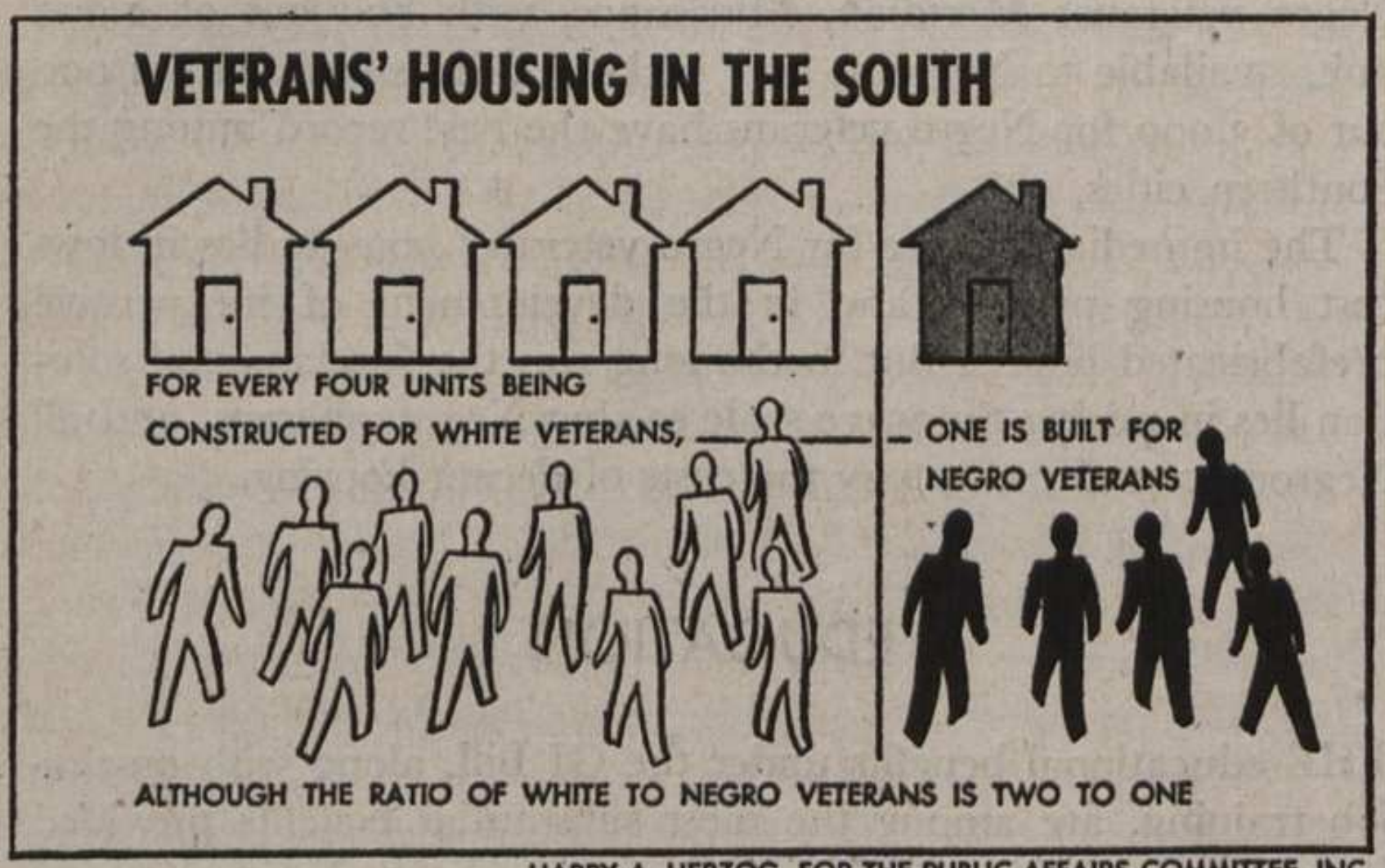
The Negro veteran in the South is eager both to buy and to rent new homes. This is probably a reflection of his discontent with life in his prewar home as compared with life in Army barracks. It is part of his general feeling of unrest and the desire for a change for the better which affects all Negro veterans. The Negro veteran cannot afford, on the average, however, more than $30 or $35 a month rent, nor a purchase price, on the average, over $4,000. Since it is impossible to build for less than $6,500 and to rent new houses at less than $60 per month, the Negro veteran must look to public, low-cost housing for housing within his means. This will continue to be the case until the general income level of Negro veterans is raised to the level of other veterans.

Negro veterans by and large have not been able to buy houses at the high prices which have prevailed since V-J Day. They need rental housing—at low rents. That the need of Negroes for housing is more acute than that of the general public is borne out in the 1940 general housing census. This showed that while the house of one white family out of four was substandard, one Negro family out of three had substandard housing.

Government-sponsored low-cost housing projects, which offer rentals within the present price range of Negro veterans, undoubtedly offer the greatest hope. But if wartime governmental policy is any indication, Negro veterans may not obtain their share of such housing. In the building of defense housing, only 2 per cent of the units were allocated to Negro families. Of the 200,000 public units which Congress authorized to be built in 1946–1947, Negro veterans will do well to get 10,000 or 15,000.

Discrimination in Housing Costs

Rents have jumped more for Negro dwellings since 1936 than for white. Today, the Negro veteran and his family receive considerably less for their housing dollars than the white veteran or any group in the white population. This can be readily seen in the overpopulated Negro ghettos of Northern cities and the



increased population in the Negro districts of Southern communities.

Steep increases in rents are not the only disadvantage Negro veterans have to face in meeting their housing needs. In every kind of home financing with the exception of government-sponsored HOLC and FHA mortgages, Negroes have had to pay higher interest rates. And, in many cases, commercial banking institutions have used high interest rates as a means of enforcing restrictive covenants for keeping Negroes out of predominantly white areas.

As Dr. Frank Horne, director of the Race Relations Division of the National Housing Agency, has pointed out: "The privilege of being a Negro comes at a high premium in the current real-estate and financial market."

Fewer New Houses

Current plans for veterans' housing in eight Southern states allot only 21 per cent of the new homes to Negroes although one-third of the veteran population is Negro. Tennessee is the only state where the proportion of houses for Negro veterans exceeds the proportion of Negroes among the veterans. Memphis, Tennessee, with 3,500 out of 3,500 homes planned for Negro veterans; Meridian, Mississippi, with 800 out of 2,000 units available to Negroes; and Jackson, Mississippi, with 1,000 out of 3,000 for Negro veterans have the best record among the Southern cities.

The immediate future for Negro veterans' housing lies in low-cost housing projects and in the development of inexpensive prefabricated homes. But in the long run the fundamental solution lies in raising the wage scale so that Negro veterans, and all Negroes, can afford to pay the costs of decent housing.

EDUCATION

THE educational benefits under the GI Bill, along with on-the-job training, are among the most substantial benefits provided for veterans of World War II. But once again, Negro veterans have been prevented, through discrimination, segregation, and second-class facilities, from obtaining the advantages which are theirs under the law. Out of 100,000 Negro veterans who are eligible to attend college under the GI bill, only 20,000 have been able to obtain admittance. Another 15,000 applied but were unable to find a college or university which had room for them. It is estimated that if there were space, another 50,000 would have applied for higher education. Upwards of 70 per cent of the Negro veterans who have succeeded in enrolling in colleges are attending all-Negro institutions.

Those who are attending college are specializing for the most part in education, social work, and social services. It is in these fields that Negro college graduates traditionally have been able to find employment. In the past, few Negroes have taken up engineering, chemistry, physics, law, and medicine. Today, how-

ever, there are signs of greater diversity among the interests of veterans in Negro colleges—one more indication that Negroes are beginning to demand the right to full citizenship in every walk of life.

Some of the Obstacles

Chief sources of difficulty for Negro veterans who want a college education are: the lack of physical plant, difficulties in obtaining surplus materials, strict quotas adhered to by most Northern universities, and the inadequacy of governmental allotments. As with all universities, housing is the number one shortage of Negro colleges. The National Housing Agency helped by providing some 6,000 dwelling units to Negro colleges in the fall and winter of 1946–47. Shortages of equipment have prevented one-third of all Negro colleges from admitting more veterans. The inability of the colleges to outbid noneducational buyers for laboratory equipment in War Assets Administration sales has seriously curtailed the courses in the physical sciences available to Negro veterans. Classroom space has been another limiting factor. A number of colleges report a shortage of recreational equipment.

A survey of twenty-one of the leading Negro colleges, with a total veteran enrolment of 11,043, showed that 55 per cent of all veteran applicants had to be turned away because of a lack of space. Among veterans as a whole, approximately 28 per cent were turned away for lack of space. The loss of potential leadership as a result of these rejections is great. It is unlikely that the opportunities which the GI Bill presents young Negroes for higher education will be duplicated for many years to come. Fortunately, veterans have seven years in which to take advantage of these benefits. But the casualty rate will be high.

Gains

Despite the barriers which prevent the majority of eligible Negro veterans from receiving a college education, more Negro youth are attending universities than ever before—20,000 of them are ex-GI's. These men and women, the majority of whom are

now veterans, will provide leadership for Negroes in the years ahead. If their training is sufficiently diversified, they can easily become the first generation of Negroes in American history who have furnished leadership in every field of our nation's life. Much depends, however, upon the willingness of the white majority to allow these veterans to use their capacities fully. It is not enough to train Negro doctors, lawyers, engineers, physicists, and social scientists. They must be offered the same opportunities as are offered all others in their professions.

DISCRIMINATION IN GOVERNMENT OPPORTUNITIES

FEDERAL laws give blanket benefits to veterans. All laws passed by Congress to assist veterans are meant to apply to all veterans. No federal legislation has ever exempted certain veterans from benefits because of the color of their skin, the religion to which they hold, or their ancestral backgrounds.

"For White Veterans Only"

But the administration of these laws is quite another story. Consistently, as though the legislation were earmarked "For White Veterans Only," federal agencies, particularly in the South, have discriminated against Negroes. The chief government agencies which serve veterans are the Veterans Administration, the Veterans Employment Service, and the Apprentice-Training Divisions of the Department of Labor, the National Housing Agency, and the Reemployment and Retraining Administration. The United States Employment Service was returned to the states on November 15, 1946, after wartime federal control.

Discrimination by federal agencies can be measured only in terms of failure to render adequate service to individual veterans. But this is difficult to measure. Federal agencies keep few statistical records of service according to race. In the South, there are virtually no records of how Negro veterans have fared in their relations with their government's representatives. When

asked why no accounting is made, the agencies correctly point out that under the law no distinction is made between races. But every survey that has been made points up the lack of vocational and educational guidance facilities for Negro veterans, especially in the South. And precisely because discrimination exists, governmental agencies must statistically examine their services to all minorities in order that abuses may be avoided.

Typical of answers given by governmental administrators when pinned down on this question of discrimination was that of a top official in the Apprentice-Training Service who said, "It is not our policy to approve or register programs which would exclude persons because of race or religion—but we cannot interfere with the rights of employers and unions to hire whom they wish."

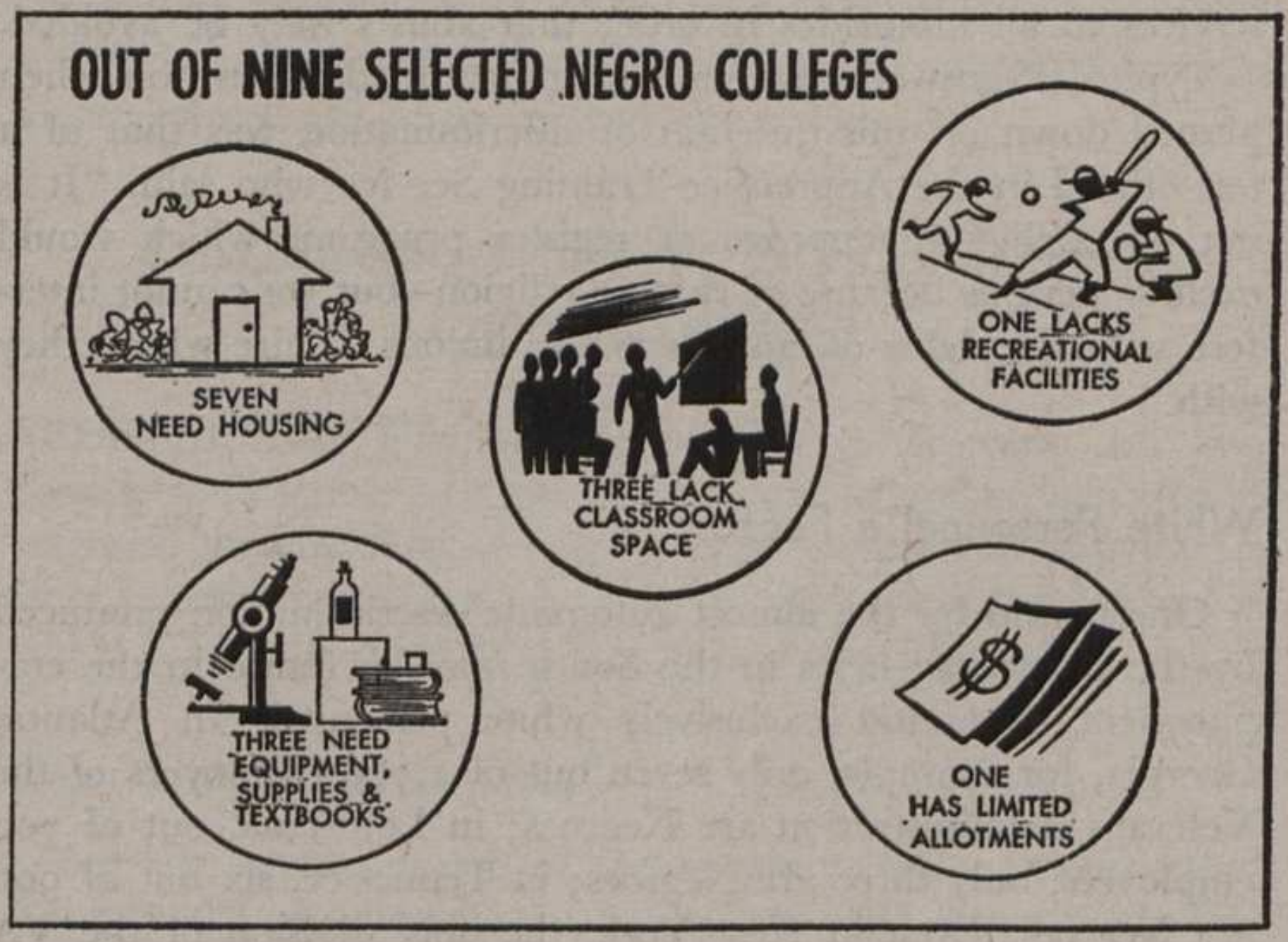
White Personnel a Factor

One reason for the almost automatic discrimination produced by the federal agencies in the South may be found in the employment of almost exclusively white personnel. In Atlanta, Georgia, for example, only seven out of 1,700 employees of the Veterans Administration are Negroes; in Louisiana, out of 700 employees, only three are Negroes; in Tennessee, six out of 900 are Negroes. Even in New York, the only division of the VA which has adequate Negro representation is the Vocational and Rehabilitation Section. An unofficial check showed no Negro employees on the Merit Rating Boards or in the Legal and Adjudication Divisions. In fact, only one city in the country was found to have Negro representation on the Merit Rating Boards, despite the many Negroes who must be served there.

In the Veterans Administration

In the South, virtually the only Veterans Administration offices which are properly manned to handle Negro veterans are the branch offices at Negro colleges. Of these, there are, on the average, one or two in each state. Negro veterans cannot be expected to travel fifty, a hundred, or two hundred miles to go to a Veterans Administration office.

Veterans with service-connected disabilities or injuries are promised treatment in Veterans Administration Hospitals. Yet twelve out of 116 VA hospitals do not accept Negro veterans except in emergency cases. And of the 10,612 Negro veterans hospitalized in VA facilities, 4,379, or 42 per cent, were being



treated in segregated wards. The twelve hospitals refusing admittance are located in Texas, Kentucky, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Nevada. There is an all-Negro hospital at Tuskegee, Alabama. A report by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People points out that "In Army and Navy hospitals, service men are not segregated by race, but when the VA takes over such a facility from the Army, it immediately organizes the hospital according to the 'pattern of the community.' The service men in the hospitals are discharged and become veterans under a blanket order. Colored veterans are immediately moved to Jim Crow wards if the hospital is located in the South." For wounded Negro service men, the first taste of civilian life is segregation. And they don't even have to get out of bed to find it.

Although top VA officials point to the no-discrimination pledge of the agency, admitted difficulty is encountered when enforcement of this policy is attempted on the local level.

Discrimination in the USES

Of the most importance to the Negro veteran in terms of job placement is the United States Employment Service, which is now controlled by the states. While still under federal control, the USES did not have a single Negro employee in the states of Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Texas, although more than 50 per cent of the job applicants were Negroes. Negro veterans were not allowed to use the same employment offices as white veterans in these states. North Carolina is the only Southern state which employs a significant number of Negro interviewers and employment officers. Facilities for job guidance and placement of Negroes in the government employment offices certainly cannot be expected to improve with the return of this agency to local autonomy. Dependence upon Congress for funds might have made some federal agencies reluctant to undertake a fair race-relations program, but when these same offices must appeal to state legislatures, elected in the South by a predominantly white electorate, the situation can hardly be expected to improve.

The Veterans Employment Service, which continues under federal controls, has done little to assist Negro veterans with skills in obtaining employment. The pattern in this agency parallels closely that of the USES. Very few Negroes are employed by the agency, and Negro veterans do not find a welcome reception at most of its offices below the Mason-Dixon line.

The Race Relations Service of the National Housing Administration

Shortly after he assumed office as National Housing Expeditor, Wilson Wyatt announced that his Veterans Emergency Housing Program was meant for "all veterans—not just for white veterans." Early in the program, which was eventually destroyed by the removal of price controls, Wyatt appointed Dr. Frank S.

Horne as head of a Race Relations Service. The Race Relations Service was designed to:

1. Review all policy statements for compliance with fair standards for minorities.
2. Develop techniques and methods essential to secure homes for minority veterans.
3. Effect equitable participation of minority groups in all phases of the housing program.
4. Provide representation of the Service in all parts of the Agency.
5. Provide information to and reflect accurately all observations of all organizations or individuals interested in minority groups.
6. Accumulate and release operational experience in handling minority group aspects of the program.
7. Assist the personnel division in securing positive application of the nondiscrimination policy of the Agency.

The section under Dr. Horne's direction was a model of what services a federal agency could offer minority veterans. It was reflected in a generally better record in housing for Negro veterans than other agencies could show in their fields. Only by recognizing the tendency toward discrimination can a government agency ever satisfactorily meet the needs of those less privileged citizens.

The Race Relations Service of the NHA can take the lion's share of the credit for the record of 20 per cent allocation of all veterans' homes in the South to Negroes. Had the Wyatt program been maintained, Negro veterans would have made a significant stride toward getting a fair deal in housing. It is to be hoped that the Race Relations Service will continue in existence and become a model for other agencies.

Reemployment and Retraining Administration

Coordinating over 3,000 Community Advisory Centers, which are financed and staffed on the local level, is the Reemployment and Retraining Administration. The RRA has assisted cities and towns throughout the nation in establishing centers which have

advised veterans on all phases of their problems. For Negro veterans generally, the centers have been of moderate value since most of their employees are white and little emphasis has been placed on minority aspects of veterans' problems. In the South, the Community Advisory Centers were nearly always manned by whites. But in October 1946, General Graves B. Erskine, administrator of the agency, appointed a special advisory committee of four Negro leaders to develop a race-relations program for the Advisory Centers. At least one of these leaders is optimistic over the chances of introducing a race-relations service successfully in a majority of the 3,000 communities.

Progress Being Made

Slowly, government agencies are beginning to provide services for Negro veterans. Step by step, from the new precedents set in such agencies as the NHA and the RRA to the relatively well-staffed USES offices of North Carolina, the official instruments of the people of America are moving toward meeting the needs of Negro ex-service men. The outlook in the South is still dismal, however, when a Veterans Administration office or a Veterans Employment Service office is the last place a colored veteran will go.

Unsolved Problems

The major obstacles blocking full service by federal agencies to Negro veterans are:

1. The failure of top officials to recognize the special difficulties of Negro veterans.
2. The failure to implement broad policy directives which hold out pious promises of equal service.
3. The unwillingness of local officials of federal agencies to take the lead in establishing services to all veterans, regardless of race.
4. The lack of participation by organized minority groups in federal programs.
5. The reluctance of federal agencies to measure statistically the present status of Negro veterans, with a view toward defining their needs.

6. The lack of minority personnel on the staff of government field offices, particularly in the South.

7. The lack of enabling legislation such as the Fair Employment Practices Act which would allow federal agencies to enforce policies and open up opportunities in local communities.

8. The lack of integration between agencies in racial policies, so that uniform service is rendered.

On the credit side, it should be pointed out that the federal agencies are in a better position to deal fairly with the Negro than most local and state agencies, particularly in the South. It is an advantage, whether in the North or South, to be divorced from the local attitudes, direction, and control present in almost every community. The federal agencies are, in effect, the spokesmen for all of the people in every part of the nation, whether in Biloxi, Mississippi, or in Chicago, Illinois. Potentially, these federal agencies can serve the Negro veteran better than any other agency.

THE POSTWAR PROTEST

DESPITE all the restrictions and miseries of a disciplined, segregated life in the Army or Navy, hundreds of thousands of Negro veterans found that only in uniform did they have warm clothing, good meals, adequate medical services, regular pay, and a job that was sometimes exciting. Civilian life simply did not provide these advantages to many Negro veterans. Irrespective of their protests against segregation in the Army and Navy, Negroes provided proportionately more volunteers in the first year of the peace than did any other part of the population. Although Negroes made up only one-thirteenth of the total number who served during the war, 25 per cent of all volunteers from September 1945 to September 1946 were Negro veterans. Finally, in early September 1946, the War Department set a quota on Negro enlistments. This quota, supposedly based on the over-all percentage of Negroes in the population, has remained intact despite vigorous protests from enlightened groups who saw in the order the curtailing of still another opportunity

for full participation by Negro veterans. The large percentage of Negroes who want to reenlist is not so much a commentary upon the advantages in the armed forces as an indication that life back home is still insecure and lacking in the promise of fruitful living.

Veterans' Organizations

Among the Negro veterans who have not reenlisted, migrated, or simply submitted to traditional caste patterns, there has been a widespread desire to join forces with their former comrades-in-arms. Throughout the South hundreds of local veterans' clubs have been set up in small rural communities. Negro veterans are usually in all-Negro groups. Although they are mainly social, they give the Negro veterans a sense of "belonging" and of having common strength to meet the problems of adjustment. For the most part, however, Negro veterans have found themselves not wanted as fully participating members by such old-line veterans' organizations as the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Disabled American Veterans. The only opportunity to participate in these groups has been in segregated Negro posts, according to the "pattern of the community."

In response to protests against their discriminatory policies, the leaders of the Legion, VFW, and DAV say that the Negroes "want it that way." There is a surprising demand on the part of many Negro veterans to join these old-line organizations. Recently in Louisiana, after the Legion state department abandoned its policy of not admitting any Negroes, some thirteen Negro posts were organized within three weeks. In these cases, the desire to be part of a larger organization undoubtedly counterbalances the hostility toward segregation. Generally, however, Negro veterans have waited before joining a national organization, weighing the advantages of a small but nonsegregated local group against those of a large but discriminatory organization.

The alternatives to membership in all-Negro units are as rare as are the small islands of progress which exist throughout the country for Negroes as a whole. The largest veterans' organization with a complete no-discrimination policy is the American Veterans Committee. Segregated chapters, regardless of region,

are not allowed by constitutional provision in the AVC. The provision is strictly enforced.

The national counterpart to the localized, all-Negro veterans' groups which have been formed chiefly in the South is the United Negro and Allied Veterans of America which, although claiming a biracial structure, is in the main Negro in membership.

If the history of Negro protest organizations has any meaning, its lesson lies in the necessity for Negroes to join with whites wherever possible to strike out for greater freedom. It is highly improbable that Negro veterans will find fulfillment of their needs for better jobs and social and political advancement in organizations in which segregation is either forced or self-imposed.

CONCLUSIONS

THERE are two major sets of facts surrounding the life of Negro veterans in America today: (1) Over a million dark-skinned ex-service men are, by training, discipline, sacrifice, and determination, prepared for integration into the nation's life as first-class citizens. (2) The nation has almost universally failed to grasp the enormous opportunity which is presented through veterans' benefits for this minority group. Whether or not this generation of Negroes succeeds in gaining improved social and economic conditions, the present-day Negro veterans are the leaders of their people. Full citizenship is demanded by Negro veterans. It can be safely assumed that the majority will hold to this demand for the rest of their lives.

Whether the road these veterans travel is one of peaceful progress or violent frustration will be determined in the specific problems which must be met now:

Jobs

1. The "52–20" club is a disappearing cushion which does not answer the need for a decent paying job.

2. In the position of being the last-hired and first-fired, the stake of the Negro veteran in maintaining full employment is high.

3. Negro veterans particularly will migrate to those areas where some Negroes already serve as skilled workers.

4. They will continuously press for openings at other than unskilled jobs until they secure them.

5. When they are turned down on the basis of lack of training, Negro veterans will press for greater on-the-job training facilities, apprentice-training opportunities, and better vocational and trade schools.

6. Restrictive practices by employers and unions in many industries, chiefly the building trades, will have to be curtailed before full participation by Negro veterans in the labor market can be obtained.

Housing

1. Negro veterans will continue to live in substandard dwellings until they are economically able to participate equally as renters and buyers in the housing market.

2. Restrictive covenants, the legal device to keep Negroes confined to urban ghettos, should be abolished.

3. Discriminatory mortgage rates should be equalized.

4. Greater quantities of low-cost housing and prefabricated houses must be made available to Negro veterans.

Education

1. Segregated Negro colleges are neither well enough equipped nor numerous enough to meet the demands of Negro veterans for higher education.

2. Quota systems in most colleges severely limit the number of Negroes attending, and already have forced at least 50 per cent of eligible Negro veterans to abandon plans for higher education.

3. The traditional pattern of entering the teaching, social service, and social work field is giving way to greater diversity

of study—an indication of the demand for full citizenship in all fields.

Governmental Opportunities

1. Governmental agencies excuse failure to service Negro veterans properly by claiming that they would be discriminating if they dealt specially with minority problems.

2. Federal agencies fail to administer a broad biracial policy on the local level, particularly in the South.

3. Most agencies either have very few or no Negro personnel to staff Southern offices, although almost two-thirds of all Negro veterans live there.

4. There is little uniformity in over-all administrative policy in dealing with the race-relations aspects of veterans' problems.

5. The National Housing Agency, under Wilson Wyatt, stood out as a model of what a government bureau could do to establish an equitable policy for minorities.

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First Edition, March, 1947

Printed in the United States of America

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