

## INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION OF THE NEGRO

By F. Forest

The entry of Negro workers into war production industries produced an industrial and social revolution of first magnitude, the scope of which has not yet been fully grasped. It is true that four out of five Negro workers still remain in the unskilled category, but they are now not on the fringes of industry, but in the production process itself. An outstanding bourgeois authority on Negro labor estimates that there has been more occupational diversification in the four years, 1940 to 1944, than in the preceding seventy-five years. (1)

In viewing the development created by World War II, we must bear in mind the dialectical inter-relationship between the objective development of industry initiated by the war boom, and the subjective development of the Negro mass struggle which forced the introduction of Negroes into war industries, from which they had practically been excluded until mid-1942. It was the organization of the NOW in January 1941 which first brought the existence of the Negro labor force to the attention of the Government with its threat to March on Washington, and which <sup>thus</sup> forced the incorporation of Negro labor into mass production industries.

An added feature of ~~the~~ <sup>of</sup> the greatest importance of the new migration of the Negro is that this time it encompasses the whole of the United States, including the Pacific Northwest. World War II completed the process begun in World War I, of transforming the Negro Question from a "Southern" to an all-American problem. An analysis of the latest data dealt with here is of utmost importance to Marxists who have long since recognized in the Negro a most potent force in the making of the third American revolution.

(1) Robert C. Weaver: Negro Labor, p. 78.

### I. The Migration<sup>(2)</sup>

To the millions of unemployed at the outbreak of World War II, the establishment of mass production centers around war industries held a greater lure than did the Western lands for the old pioneer. Between 1940 to 1944 four million workers--and, with their families, they totalled no less than nine million!--moved out of 30 states and into 18 and the District of Columbia. A million of these were Negroes. When we recall that, until mid-1942, the Negro migration contributed no more than 5 per cent of total migration, we can see how unprecedented must have been their migratory wave between 1942-45. The greatest movement was to the Pacific Northwest.

The United States Census Bureau, in conducting a survey in 1944 of the ten most congested production centers, found that, whereas the white migrants contributed 19 per cent of the 1,840,000 increase in the total population in these centers, the Negro migrants contributed 49 per cent. It is true that the overwhelming majority of Negroes still live in the South--nine million out of thirteen million. But whereas only 5 per cent of Negroes lived in the North in 1910, by 1930 that percentage had grown to 13. What is even more remarkable is that even during the depression, when there were no job opportunities North, the Negroes kept leaving the South. By 1940, the nearly 13 million Negroes in the United States were thus distributed: 9,904,519, or 77 per cent, lived in the South; 2,790,193, or 21.7 per cent lived in the North, and 170,706, or 1.3%, lived in the West. By 1945 fully 25 per cent

(2) The author is indebted to Drs. St. Clair Drake and L. D. Reddick for making available to her their valuable unpublished material on war-time migratory movements.

The reader should acquaint himself with the following material: (a) The U. S. Census Bureau reports on the ten congested areas: Charleston, S. C., Detroit-Willow Run, Hampton Road area, Los Angeles, Mobile, Alabama, Muskegon area, San Francisco-Bay area, Portland-Vancouver area, Puget Sound and San Diego; (b) the Urban League Report to the President: "Racial Aspects of Reconstruction, 1940-44."; and (c) the special issues of The Journal of Educational Sociology edited by L. D. Reddick, the January 1944 issue on "The Negro in the North during Wartime", and the November 1945 issue on "Race Relations on the Pacific Coast".

lived North and Northwest. More than 90 per cent of these are urbanized!

During the previous great migration North--there were two waves, 1916-1919 and 1921-1924--one and one-half million Negroes left Southern farms. The Negro populations in Northern cities seemed to grow up overnight. Between 1910 and 1930 the Negroes in New York grew from 91,709 to 152,647, an increase of 66.3 per cent. In Chicago the Negro experienced an 148.2 per cent increase. Detroit's growth was the most phenomenal, from a mere 5,741 in 1910 to 40,838 in 1920--an increase of 611.3 per cent. These cities never ceased to grow, and this new migration in 1942-1945 increased the Negro population of Chicago from 270,000 to 350,000, and that of Detroit from 150,000 to 230,000.

The present Negro migration had two outstanding new features: (1) the movement to the Pacific Northwest, hardly touched previously, and (2) the migration within the South, from rural to urban areas. In the Portland-Vancouver area the Negro population has increased no less than 437.5 per cent. There were, for instance, only 2,866 Negroes in the whole state of Oregon in 1940, 1,851 of whom lived in Portland. The Kaiser industries moved in, and by 1945 the Negro population leaped from less than 2,000 to 22,000. In Seattle the Negro population was 3,729, and that of near-by Bremerton had only 77. The Bremerton Navy Yard opened its doors to Negro labor, and five years later the Negro population of Bremerton leaped from a mere 77 to 4,617. Next to this "major area of tension on the West Coast," the FEPC lists the San Francisco-Bay area. In San Francisco itself there were only 4,845 Negroes in 1940. By 1945 the Negro population increased to 25,000.

Of as great importance as the movement to the Pacific Northwest has been the urbanization of the Negro within the South itself. Between 1942 to 1945, 250,000 Negroes moved from rural to urban areas within the South. Mobile, Alabama increased its Negro population ~~from~~ by 106 per cent, from 30,558 to

60,000. Of the total population of Charleston, S. C., 70 per cent came from elsewhere in the South. The Negro population in the South is now approximately 50 per cent urbanized. To get the epochal significance of this, we must take a brief view of the South.

## II. The South

### 1. "The Boss and Block" relationship (3)

In the period 1940-44 non-farm employment in the 13 Southern states have increased by one-third. It was not, however, the mechanization of agriculture which freed the agricultural population for manufacturing employment. There had been a backlog of 2 million unemployed in the South at the outbreak of the war, and it is these who poured into the war industries, which were established in the South alongside the cotton culture. This is the key to the whole industrialization of the South which, ever since the Civil War, has been built not on the ruins of slavery, but alongside its economic remains.

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Industrialization in the South, instead of disintegrating the peasantry, i.e., transforming the overwhelming majority into proletarians, and thus creating the traditional home market for bourgeois production, had developed so haltingly that the black peasant or sharecropper, remained largely untouched. The bourgeoisie decided upon this sacrifice of the home market for the sake of the maintenance of the archaic social structure there. Continuation of the crop lien system, instituted at the end of the Civil War, forced Northern capital to follow <sup>what is euphemistically called the "Southern</sup> ~~the~~ "color pattern".

(3) Cf. Johnson, Embree and Alexander: The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy; also Report on Economic Conditions of the South, prepared for the President, by the National Emergency Council, 1935. For later data, Chapters 11 and 12 of An American Dilemma by Gunnar Myrdal, as well as the special Business Week Reports to Executives on "Better Farming, Better Market".

The basis for it is ~~the~~ the "boss and black relationship" inherent in cotton culture. The result has been that the labor supply of the plantations were left intact in order not to intrude upon these semi-feudal agrarian relations upon which cotton production is based. ~~and which navigation has been the~~  
~~the South has established the institution of slavery but~~  
~~and not give~~  
~~lead the way~~  
~~where there had been some fraudulent~~  
~~attempt to give the soil the land. It was intended~~  
~~the needs of the backward~~  
~~the Negro~~  
~~relationships were~~  
~~the gory reign of "white~~  
~~supremacy" is rooted in cotton culture. The "gentleman's agree-~~  
~~ment" that Southern industry develop under the conditions~~  
~~that it leave untouched the black labor supply of the plantation~~  
~~holds to this day. One of the main reasons for the slowness~~  
~~with which the Negro was able to benefit for the industry boom~~  
~~produced by World War II is that the Southern oligarchy insisted~~  
~~that the black labor be left "free" for cotton picking. And he~~  
~~was able to have this unnatural power although war-time industry~~  
~~in the South was government-financed to the extent of 81 per~~  
~~cent, as against 65 per cent for the rest of the nation!~~

Just as cotton labor was at first exclusively a Negro occupation, so textile labor was exclusively a poor white occupation. As late as 1937 only 20,000 of the 350,000 workers in the textile industry were Negroes. With World War II production of textiles increased tremendously, and the labor force practically doubled, now comprising 680,000 workers. But only 26,000 of these are Negroes and practically all of them are employed not in the direct process of production but around the

The economic raising of slaves, ~~with their own hands~~  
~~which are the same as the slaves of the South,~~  
~~which is the same as the slaves of the South,~~  
~~growing, with its "boss" and "black" ~~the~~ ~~white~~ ~~man~~ ~~boss~~~~  
~~placed to the lowest rung of the ladder. If a white man ~~boss~~~~  
~~the same tenant set-up, though verbally he is the~~  
~~violent protagonist of the race issue, he must have the inevitable~~  
~~and he subjected to the "boss" relationship.~~  
~~consequent ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~kind~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~boss~~ ~~relationship~~~~  
~~of ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~kind~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~boss~~ ~~relationship~~~~  
~~World War II~~  
 has created a veritable agricultural revolution everywhere but  
 in the South. Farm population as a whole dwindled by one-fifth,  
 while total population increased. With one-tenth manpower, out-  
 put per worker nevertheless doubled because of the mechanical  
 revolution. Rural electrification, which was only 10 per cent  
 in 1935, was over 50 per cent in 1945. But even now only a fourth  
 of our farms, at most, boast running water and flush toilets.  
 The majority of these are in the South. The South alone has as  
 many farms as the rest of the country combined, with twice as  
 many tenants and subsistence operators. But altogether they have  
 less than half as much land, a quarter as many machines. 1,660,000  
 Negroes live on Southern farms; of these no less than 748,000  
 constitute labor reserves. Were the mechanical cotton wester  
 and picker introduced, it would produce so great an army of  
 unemployed that neither the bourbon South, nor the Wall-Street-  
 North which owns it (5) dare introduce it.

(5) The Morgans, Mellons, Fords and Rockefeller control the South. The Tennessee Coal, Iron & Rrd. Co., for ex., is a subsidiary of U. S. Steel; the ~~Ryan~~ International Harvester Co. has acquired many thousands of acres of land. To see the extent to which ~~the~~ ~~North~~ ~~owns~~ ~~semi-feudal~~ ~~South~~, cf. "The South in Progress" by Katherine Lumpkin.

~~the later the bourgeois revolution~~ <sup>takes</sup> place, whether against feudalism as in Europe or against slavery as in the South, the less complete it is. At a certain stage it becomes impossible for the bourgeoisie to carry out this revolution, as was the case in Russia. That is the historic foundation of the permanent revolution. It is the lateness of the ~~the~~ Civil War which accounts for the tenacious economic survivals of slavery which to this day exist and dominate the life of the Negroes. The cotton plantation in the days of its power drove the Negro down as a slave, and such power as it has today, it uses to dominate the Negro in the South and project its influence in the North. ~~It is the lateness of the Civil War which accounts for the tenacious economic survivals of slavery which to this day exist and dominate the life of the Negroes.~~

2. Industrialization(6)

The Negro, being at the very bottom of the social structure, capitalist society pushes him into the worst paid industries. But for that very reason, as the capitalist economy develops, these industries become ever more important. Heavy industry did not, as did textiles, by-pass the Negro. Thus, from the very fact of what he is in capitalist society, the Negro becomes one of the forces for the overthrow of capitalism. The Negro proletariat has been very strategically placed in industry. By 1907 39.1 per cent of Southern steel workers were Negroes. In 1930, out of a total of 19,392 employed in the iron and steel industry, 13,331, or 68.7% were Negroes. The latest movement into Southern urban areas shows how important a place he occupies even in single enterprises. For example, out of the 25,000 workers of the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Co., in Mobile, 20 per cent are Negroes.

(6) For the industrialization and trade unionization of the Negro both North and South, see, for the period to 1930: "Black Worker" by Spero and Harris; for the ~~the~~ CIO: "Black Workers and the New Unions" by Cayton and Mitchell; up to 1942: Chapters 13, 18 and 19 and Appendix 6 in "An American Dilemma" by Gunnar Myrdal; and for the war period and reconversion: "Organized Labor and the Negro" by Northrup, and "Negro Labor, A National Problem" by Weaver.

Between ~~the~~ textiles which employ no Negroes in the direct process of production; and mines and steel mills, <sup>in</sup> which Negroes are more or less equal in number to whites, there are the so-called "strictly Negro jobs" in the South--saw mills, fertilizer plants, etc. These remain unorganized. They are located rurally so that the Negro<sup>worker</sup> is as much isolated as if he were a peasant still. But, on the whole, the Negro has not only been an integral part of labor in heavy industry since the earliest days of Southern industrialization. He has, moreover, been a militant member of whatever unions that took there, and had its doors open to him.

At the height of its power, the IWW claimed one million members, 100,000 of whom were Negroes. The most important of the IWW unions among Negroes were precisely in prejudice-ridden South, in the lumber industries in Louisiana and Texas, and among the longshoremen and dockworkers in Baltimore, Norfolk and Philadelphia. The Brotherhood of Timber Workers in the lumber camps of Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas had 35,000 members in 1910, 80 per cent of whom were Negroes. The Negro proletarian has been an active militant of the U.M.W.. It was these UMW militants who were used by the CIO organization drives to organize steel. Where the Negro ~~was~~ in 1919 was used to break the strike, the Negro steel worker in 1937 broke Big Steel's lordly refusal to negotiate with the union.

The Negro proletarian is not the cowed plantation hand. He is literate and has been disciplined by the factory. He knows the might of a cohesive group, organized by the very process of production. He feels himself, and is, a potent factor. No less than two million are now members of the CIO, A. F. of L. and independent unions. Yet four out of five Negroes remain in an unskilled category. And when the union meeting is over they white and Negro workers go their separate ways. We would be blind not to see that even the latest proletarianization and urbanization has not "solved" the Negro problem. The "boss and



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black"relationship still pursues him, in the city as well as in the country, North, ~~as we shall see~~, as well as South. Wage differentials exist in the factory as in the field. Segregation, Jim Crowism, social discrimination persist. The contradiction between the potency in the process of production and his seeming impotent"outside cannot but find a manner of expression.

The explosive power in the struggle of the Southern Negro proletariat in the Southern metropolis will have significance in repercussions for the contiguous rural Black Belt. It will strike directly at the heart of the Southern economy and Southern politics and upset as well Northern capitalistic interests which have so readily accepted the South's segregation pattern in order to coin surplus value from it. But among the millions suffering on the plantation and among the hundreds and thousands who have won themselves a place in industry the problem before them is and must continue to be for some time the emancipation from the national oppression which they feel at every turn. The bourgeois has posed the question in this form in order to draw the most reactionary conclusions. To the problem as posed by the bourgeoisie, the proletarian vanguard must beware of merely giving a direct negative or simple negative. Outside the unions and inside it must pose the emancipation of the Negroes from racial oppression not only as a legitimate demand of the Negroes themselves, but as an important contributory factor to the whole struggle against bourgeois society. A fundamental point of the Marxist education of the proletarian vanguard must be as clear a grasp as possible of the Leninist-Trotskyist position on the question. (7)

(7) Cf. "Capitalism and Agriculture in the USA" by V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, Vol. XII, Also See Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions, in Selected Works, Vol. X and the discussions at that congress and also at the Fourth Congress on the Negro Question; L. Trotsky, Chapter The Problem of Nationalities, in the History of the Russian Revolution, Vol. III, and discussions in 1933 and in 1938 on the Negro Question.

### III. The North

The basic movement of capital in 1917-1919 and the movement of the industrial reserve army of labor bring the Negroes to the North and from the fact that they are Negroes, sends them into mass industries. With World War I the Negro became an established part of the American labor force, constituting in 1930, 22.7 per cent of labor in building trades, 16.2 per cent in unskilled in steel, 25 per cent of unskilled in meat packing 31.7 per cent of longshoremen and 89.5 per cent in saw mills. However, so long as basic industries remained unorganized--and they could not but remain unorganized until the unions let down the color bars along with the craft lines--the Negro could not become an integral part of the trade union movement. But with the coming of the CIO we witness the unionization of the Negro on an unprecedented scale.

Nevertheless, in the North, too, the proletarianization and trade unionization of the Negro did not raise him to the status of the white proletarian and did not dissolve his struggle for elementary democratic rights into the general class struggle. First, in the trade unions he must fight as a Negro for his place as a worker. Wage differentials, seniority, upgrading have by no means been abolished. Then, outside the trade union, he is ghettoized.

It is the creation of comparatively free proletariat and semi-proletariat of the large urban centers in the North during World War I which created the possibility for the development of a powerful Negro press. In this respect, Gunnar Myrdal

has correctly pointed out: "The foreign language press is doomed to disappear as immigrants become fully assimilated and are not replenished by new immigration. The Negro press, on the contrary, is bound to become ever stronger as the Negroes are increasingly educated and culturally assimilated, but not given entrance to the white world."<sup>(8)</sup>

But, although the national oppression produced the Negro press, and his ghettoization the Negro community, which might not otherwise have had an economic base, that very community is given bathed in a different light precisely because the Negro is so overwhelmingly proletarian. A beautiful example of this

(8) An American Dilemma, Vol. II, p. 912.

dual movement and its economic base was given by the Pittsburgh Courier in 1937. A bourgeois newspaper most intensely race conscious, it nevertheless led the swing of the more progressive Negroes in the community towards entry into and acceptance of the CIO.

On the other hand, the more integrated the Negro is in the trade union, the more he resents his ghettoization outside. At the very time that he joins the trade union, he also joins ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ an independent mass Negro organization which fights for his democratic rights. ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ The new migration revived the NAACP, which had been declining because of its do-nothingness; it has now experienced so great an increase in membership that it has nearly one-half million members. Its greatest increase was precisely in such centers as Detroit, where the militant UAW has made his trade union integration easier than elsewhere. It is this dual movement which is the key to a Marxist analysis of the Negro question.

An over-all picture, North and South, at the outbreak of this war showed that unemployment among Negroes had been as high as 17 per cent of the total labor force. The Negroes in manufacturing, which had risen from 6.2 per cent in 1910 to 7.3 per cent in 1930 had sunk to a new low of 5.1 per cent by 1940. The movement back into industry did not gain a real foothold till mid-1942. Despite ~~xxx~~ some notable exceptions (such as ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ the automobile industry in Detroit), the Negroes either in agriculture or domestic service at the outbreak of war comprised a full 80 per cent of the labor force. The war period, 1940-1944 took a million into the armed forces. Another million swelled the civilian labor force, raising the total Negro employment, from 4.4 million to 5.3 million. The employment of women, which had increased from 1.5 million to 2.1 million has an especial importance because it meant not merely an increase in employment, but so great a movement from domestic service to basic industry as to be comparable in importance to the movement from farm to non-farm employment.

This movement into basic industry also, of course, characterized the Negro male labor force. Negro employment in heavy industry tripled. A break-down of percentage increases in various heavy industries will show how strategically he was placed.

Per cent of Non-white workers employed in Selected War Industries, 1942-1945

	July 1942	January 1945
Agricultural Machinery & Tractors	1.9	6.0
Aircraft	2.9	6.8
Aluminum and Magnesium Products	7.1	13.5
Blast Furnaces, Steel worksRolling Mills	9.8	11.8
Communication EquipmentRelated Products	0.7	4.9
Explosives	3.3	7.1
Iron and Steel Foundry Products	18.8	25.4
Shipbuilding	5.7	11.7
Tanks	2.2	13.0

The employment of Negroes in war industries was concentrated in tight labor markets, such as, Trenton, Perth Amboy and Paterson, New Jersey; in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and in Wilmington, Delaware. In September 1944 there were one and one-half million Negroes in war industries. A majority of these were concentrated in the ten most congested war industrial areas, listed in the section on migration. Another 9 per cent were concentrated in four cities--Pittsburgh, Birmingham, New York and St. Louis.

Two ~~typical~~ characteristic examples of the horrible housing situation which this produced will illuminate the Negro's feeling of confinement. In Baltimore, the Negro constitutes 20 per cent of the population. But he is segregated to 2 per cent of the residential area. In Chicago 250,000 live in units built for 150,000. In wards 2 and 3 of that city, the density of population is 95,000 per square mile, which is comparable to Calcutta, India! This only helped sharpen the Negro's frustration, which W. E. B. Du Bois so graphically described in 1935:

"It is doubtful," he wrote then "if there is another group of 12 million people in the midst of a modern cultured land who are so widely inhibited and mentally confined as the American Negro."

(9) Black Reconstruction, p. 703.

It is precisely in the Northern urban centers<sup>(10)</sup> that the political results inherent in the situation in the South receive their sharpest political expression. Capitalism, in dragging the Negroes from the South, cannot prevent the explosion and revolt of the national oppression which the semi-feudal economic relations in the South not only generate, but are able to keep in subjugation. The ghetto-like existence, the social humiliation not only spring historically from the cotton plantation. The cotton plantation exports to the North its workers imbued with the ideology of the South along with the Klan, the Knights of the Camelia, etc., to stimulate, encourage and organize the anti-Negro prejudices of the people of the North, fortified among the working class by competition in industry.

The double oppression which the bourgeoisie has placed upon the Negro, as a worker and as a nationally oppressed minority has not only resulted in placing him in strategic industries, but will give his developing class consciousness a hostility to the existing society and a determination to destroy it which will be the counterpart to the history of the Negro people in the country. But for this reason declining capitalist society, aided by the historic traditions of the country, will see in the Negro Question a focal point of attack in order to disrupt the proletariat. When the riots broke out in 1943 Attorney General Biddle had the effrontery to pose the question of containing the Negro migration, in the now infamous secret memorandum to President Roosevelt. The rioting that took place over the country gives unmistakable evidence that the bourgeoisie is aware of its opportunities. It is equally clear that the proletariat is also aware of its dangers.

In his "Growing Up in the Black Belt"  
 (10)/Charles S. Johnson points out that the urban Southern Negro is more race conscious than the rural Southern Negro, and that the Negro in the North is more race conscious than the Negro in the South. Only he who grasps understands the dual development of the Negro from a Marxist point of view can grasp the full significance of this fact. ~~Mr. Johnson, unfortunately, does not~~  
~~grasp the full significance of this fact.~~ the "talented tenth", unfortunately, does not.