

## NEGROES—

### Their Goal Is Equality in the Land of the Free

**I**N A certain democratic country, there is a minority race of 12,500,000 people. Nearly 1/10th of their country's population, they have only one representative of their race in the nation's legislature. Many of them are prohibited by law from voting. Few of them are admitted to responsible jobs. Their incomes average less than half those of the majority race. Most of their residential districts are slums.

This democratic country is the United States, and these underprivileged are Negroes. They are the nation's largest and most important racial minority. Last week, almost unnoticed by white citizens, they observed Negro History Week.

In meeting halls and school auditoriums, colored speakers stressed some outstanding facts: that the Negro has been in the New World nearly as long as its English colonizers; that he has adopted and enriched American culture in a creditably short space of time; but that he is still the social and economic inferior of the white man.

**EPIC:** It is not strange that Negroes annually should devote a week to their history. Because it helps Negroes to understand themselves better, colored educators have campaigned tirelessly to have the Afro-American folk epic taught in Negro schools. With its periods of migration, captivity and persecution, it is a remarkable story.

For the African ancestors of the American Negro, captivity and migration began simultaneously. In 1619, a Dutch sea captain brought to Jamestown, Va., "20 Negars" from the west coast of Africa. To till the tobacco fields of Virginia, thousands more followed them into slavery. After Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin in 1793, the center of the Negro population moved to the cotton fields of the deep South, and stayed there more than a century.

By 1790, every fifth person in the United States was a Negro. Although the Constitution forbade the importation of slaves after 1808, slavery continued to be the backbone of an agricultural system based on cheap labor. Economically, it was so different from northern industrialism that a great Civil war was fought over slavery. At its end in 1865, the Negro found himself free.

For 20 years afterward, Negroes in the South enjoyed unprecedented liberty. Eight states sent colored senators or representatives to Congress. Negroes controlled several state legis-

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*Crowded Harlem Is the Heart of the Biggest Negro Settlement in the Nation*

latures. The right to vote was extended to include Negroes; civil rights were given new legal protection; and provision was made for the education of Negroes. But the Reconstruction governments were corrupt, and the white electorate finally returned to power.

Negroes themselves were saved from sinking back nearly to their previous level of serfdom by the appearance of a powerful orator and spokesman. He was Booker T. Washington, slave-born founder of the Tuskegee Institute for Negro education in Alabama. To the Negro, he preached the usefulness of education and honest labor. To white men, he promised: "In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

Under Washington's urging, churches re-established long-lapsed missions to the Negro. White philanthropists like Julius Rosenwald donated funds to promote Negro education. The lot of the colored man was made easier, and Negroes still have for Booker T. Washington the same kind of reverence that American whites reserve for another Washington called George.

About the time the Negro Washington died in 1915, Negroes saw promise of a "second emancipation" in the industrial boom during the World war. Eagerly recruited by northern industry, they moved from southern farms to new occupations and better pay in the great cities of the north. Before their migration ended in about 1930, millions had made new homes.

**BROWN AMERICA:** Thus was created what some writers have called Brown America. It lies chiefly in the South, but has islands scattered through the urban areas of the middle west and north. Only about 125,000 Negroes live anywhere west of Missouri, and 90,000 of them are in California.

In a "black belt" which curves through substantial parts of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, Negroes outnumber the white population. Georgia and Mississippi, with more than 1,000,000 apiece, have the most colored inhabitants. Together, the 13 southern states have a population of 9,375,000 Negroes.

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## *Washington Was Their First Great Leader*

As a result of industrial migration, some 3,000,000 Negroes live in the north. New York, with a colored population of 330,000 largely contained within the section of Harlem, is the nation's biggest Afro-American city. Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, New Orleans and St. Louis have well over 100,000 Negroes each.

**TENTH MAN:** Because the colored race comprises almost a 10th of the population of the United States, sociologists sometimes refer to the Negro as "the 10th man." As such, he is little known to most of the other nine. Yet there are 12,500,000 colored persons in the nation—black, brown and some so white that 10,000 pass over the color line every year to take up life as whites.

At the beginning of their captivity, Negroes mated with Indians. White plantation owners soon began to have children by colored women. A new race of mixed blood, known as mulattoes, came into being. Patriotic Patrick Henry was so impressed by them that he once introduced a bill in the Virginia Assembly offering a state bonus to children of mixed parentage.

Today, at least 20 and perhaps 80 per cent of American Negroes have the blood of white men in their veins. One anthropologist has calculated that as many as 40 per cent have more white than Negro blood. The physical traits of the Negro race—black skins, kinky hair, broad noses, thick lips and powerful physiques—are no longer so uniformly characteristic as they once were. After 300 years of evolution, the typical Afro-American is infinitesimally taller, slightly larger around the chest and somewhat thinner than the average American white.

Similar in physical dimensions, the Negro is widely supposed to be the mental inferior of the white. Intelligence tests, in fact, show that the mental attainments of the average colored

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student are far below those of the white one.

These tests, however, are so strongly influenced by factors of environment and training that psychologists do not consider them actual gauges of native intelligence. During the World war, for instance, examinations of enlisted men showed northern Negroes only slightly less advanced mentally than southern whites. Thus, there is an indication that the mental attainments of the Negro are directly dependent on his environment; potentially, he seems to be the intellectual equal of the white man.

**BRICK WALL:** In the paths of Negro progress, however, great obstacles remain. Chief of these is the color line. Composed of fear, prejudice and misunderstanding, it is almost as solid as a brick wall.

Race prejudice is strongest in the South among the so-called "poor whites," and in the north among low-salaried workers—both of whom compete with Negro labor. In both regions, America's 4,000,000 employed Negroes have been kept in the lowest economic brackets.

About half of Negro workers are farm tenants or farm hands, kept by the color line from advancing into more gainful occupations. Another 30 per cent make up the largest servant class in America. When depression struck, Negroes were the first to lose their jobs. Today, fully 1,500,000 colored adults are unemployed. About one-third of colored families receive some form of government relief, as compared with one-fifth of white.

In the South, where economic competition between Negroes and whites is greatest, funds for Negro schools are skimped. All of the southern states have enacted property or residence qualifications to keep the Negro away from the ballot box; not much more than 10 per cent of southern Negroes ever go to the polls.

Poorly paid and poorly educated, the nation's "10th man" has low standards of living. In the South, like the white sharecroppers, Negroes live in shacks without screens, toilets or electric lights. In the cities, colored families are crowded together more densely than any other part of the population. Yet rents for Negroes are higher than for whites.

Partly because of these factors, the Negro crime rate is twice that of other Americans. Because of environment, also, the colored man is critically exposed to disease. On the average, he dies about 10 years sooner than the white man. The proportion of Negroes in the general population is slowly diminishing.

**NICHE:** Despite these handicaps, the Negro has carved himself a niche in America. Barred from most institutions, he patronizes colored theaters, restaurants, banks, insurance companies and stores. Negro-owned enterprises of this kind have existed since the Civil war. Compared with

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white, however, Negro-owned business is generally so inefficient and so meager in capital that it handles only a small part of the two billion dollars colored persons spend every year.



*America's 12,500,000 Negroes Look to Jones,  
White and Randolph for Leadership*

*(continued)*

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In literature, art and music, the Negro has had a tremendous influence on American life. On the plantations, slaves took twin solace for their servitude in religion and song. Out of the two grew the melodious spirituals. Out of other Negro music grew rag-time, then jazz.

Beginning in the war era and flowering most in the 1920s, moreover, there was a Negro renaissance, when colored novelists, playwrights and poets attracted wide attention. Young Langston Hughes had a play produced in New York; novelist Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* was admired by critics. Last year, in nation-wide competition with white short story authors, Charles Wright, a WPA writer, won a first and a second prize.

To the stage, the Negro has contributed abundantly. A colored presentation of *Macbeth* was a sensation in the theater season of 1936. Negro actors, dancers and singers—like Ethel Waters, Josephine Baker and Bill Robinson, who taught Shirley Temple how to dance—are famous. On the concert stage, baritone Paul Robeson, once an All-American football end, and contralto Marion Anderson have two of the finest voices in America.

Perhaps even more by inspiration than by authorship, the Negro has enriched America's art and literature. The Afro-American has often been the subject for white creations, beginning perhaps with Stephen Foster's ballads and continuing through *Mamba's Daughters*, a play enjoying considerable success on Broadway this week.

To his cultural institutions, the Negro looks for leadership. About Baptist and Methodist churches, to which the Negro has belonged ever since before the Revolution, revolves much of colored social life.

For leadership in political and economic thought, the Negro also looks to his cultural institutions, and his men of culture—his educators, his writers, and his 100 colleges and universities. Typically, three of the most prominent Negro leaders today are a teacher and two authors.

**AMBITION:** The ambition of each of these three men is to widen the niche occupied by the Afro-American. The first is Eugene Kinckle Jones, once a teacher in a Louisville high school. He is head of the National Urban League, founded in 1910 to help Negroes adjust themselves to city life. Composed of Negroes and civic-minded whites, it is now active in more than 40 cities. It helps Negroes with vocational training and occupational advice. More strikingly, it compels stores with Negro patronage to employ Negro workers, and promotes participation by Negroes in city government.

Second Negro leader, and the best-known to white men, is himself only 1/64th Negro. He is 45-year-old Walter White, writer and executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

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He travels 25,000 miles a year presenting the views of the 1,000,000 white and Negro members of his Association. Briefly, his group wants an end to lynching in the South; improved education for the Negro; more voting by the Negro; and the end of economic discrimination against the Negro.

Third colored leader is Asa Philip Randolph. As editor of a Negro weekly, he early advocated the unionization of colored labor, despite the cold attitude of the A. F. of L. In 1925, he founded the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. In 1937, the 8,000 members of his union won pay increases amounting to \$1,250,000 a year—a feat which made him, next to boxing champion Joe Louis, the Negro most admired by Negroes.

Today, Randolph is head of a new organization—the three-year-old National Negro Congress for coordinating the work of country-wide Negro groups. He is typical of the willingness of the colored man to accept new ideas. Unionized Negro laborers now belong almost exclusively to the C. I. O. Important in the 1936 elections, most voting Negroes supported the New Deal. Arthur Mitchell, only Negro Congressman, is a Chicago Democrat.

At the present time, the Negro is progressing, with the help and understanding of whites, as he has done ever since his first arrival in America. Negro schools in the South are improving from year to year. A substantial minority of Negroes do not live in slums, nor do they receive mere subsistence wages or less.

Even after remarkable advancement, however, the Afro-American is still part of a submerged race. His leaders are convinced that not until the Negro can be as well educated as the white; not until he can vote as freely; and not until he can work beside and receive the same consideration as the white, will he receive his just due as a human being. That the bettering of the Negro would mean the betterment of the nation and of all races within it, they think, is obvious.