

NEGROES

IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

IN 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.

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About 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.

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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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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.



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.

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

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 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.

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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.

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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 secre-

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tary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. 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.