

SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF NEGRO MIGRATION DURING THE WAR

IRA DE. A. REID¹

AMONG the more important internal migratory currents of the United States, past and present, are (1) the flight of the Negro from the land; (2) the flood-tide of population movement from South to North; and (3) the annual movement of hundreds of thousands of rural Negroes from one farm or plantation to another. The importance of these residential shifts may be indicated by the fact that in 1940 nearly one-half (48.7 per cent) of the Negroes in the United States were urban residents. In 1910 only one in every four Negroes was living in an urban center (27.3 per cent).

Even more significant than the above facts, perhaps, is the trend indicated in the decline in the number of counties where Negroes constituted 50 per cent or more of the total population. In 1900 there were 286 counties in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia in which Negroes outnumbered whites. These counties contained 45.9 per cent of all the Negroes in the United States. By 1910 these Negro majority counties had declined to 264, with 40 per cent of the nation's Negro total; by 1920 to 221 counties, with 31.1 per cent; by 1930 to 191 counties, with 23 per cent of the total Negro population. By 1940 the number of majority counties had declined from 286 to 180, the number of Negroes affected from 4,057,619 to 2,642,808, and the percentage of the total Negro population from 45.9 to 20.5. The states named above, with the exception of Arkansas, Maryland, Tennessee, and including Oklahoma, are the areas of the most extensive Negro out-migration, the only states where the proportion of native Negroes residing in the state of their birth was lower than the percentage for native whites.²

¹ Visiting Professor of Education, New York University.

² United States Bureau of the Census: *Census of Population: 1940*. Series P-10, No. 35.

Yet another aspect of Negro migration that may be regarded as normal is the spatial and social mobility of farm families. A very large share of this Negro movement is the aimless and socially and economically pernicious milling around of the farm family. Though associated in the popular mind with Negro migration and supported by a stereotype that the Negro is endowed with some sort of "migratory instinct," the pattern was definitely related to the system of sharecropping. The data analyzed by T. Lynn Smith³ indicated that in the entire South 62 per cent of the whites and 49 per cent of the Negro tenants had been on the farms they were occupying in 1940 for less than five years. However, 64 per cent of the Negro sharecroppers and 72 per cent of the white ones in 1940 had been on the places they were occupying less than five years. This reservoir of agricultural labor provides the real body of South-North migration, the overflow from that reservoir yields hundreds of thousands of urban and industrial workers to other regions, but the movement of the Negro workers, who are more visible physically and socially, is the one that is regarded with alarm—perhaps not without cause. This is the background for consideration of the migration of Negro peoples within the United States between 1940 and 1945.

The recent war, like World War I, has permanently in-

Table 1. Regional distribution and increase of the Negro population: 1930 and 1940.¹

AREA	NUMBER		PER CENT OF ALL NEGROES LIVING IN AREA		PER CENT INCREASE 1930-1940
	1940	1930	1940	1930	
United States	12,865,518	11,891,143	100.0	100.0	8.2
The North	2,790,193	2,409,219	21.7	20.3	15.8
The South	9,904,619	9,361,577	77.0	78.7	5.8
The West	170,706	120,347	1.3	1.0	41.8

¹ Adapted from United States Bureau of the Census: *Population-Special Reports*, Series P-10, No. 20, November 14, 1942, p. 2.

³ Smith, T. Lynn: *A Demographic Study of the American Negro. Social Forces*, March, 1945, xxiii, No. 3, pp. 379-387.

fluenced the distribution of the Negro population. After thirty years of intensive northward and cityward migration, the regional distribution of nearly 13,000,000 Negroes in the continental United States in 1940 was that indicated in Table 1.

The southern Negro population is largely a rural one (63.5 per cent) while the Negro populations of the West and North are predominantly urban—89.4 per cent in the North and 83.1 per cent in the West.

Changes in the structure and location of economic activities during the period of defense and war mobilization brought about an extensive redistribution of the nation's population. Negroes participated with other groups in that migration, but with some striking differences:

1. The beginning and the peak of large-scale Negro migration lagged behind similar phases in the general population shift.
2. Once the Negro migration got under way, the number involved was disproportionately large and the rate of migration more intense.
3. The proportion of Negroes remaining in the centers of in-migration appeared to be significantly higher than the average for all in-migrants.

As Taeuber has indicated,⁴ "Little information is available on the migration of Negroes during the War. Indications are that some areas of the South lost large numbers of the Negro population. However, for the nation as a whole, the percentage of migrants in the 1945 civilian population was about 12 per cent for both the white and the nonwhite populations. This figure in itself indicates an increase in Negro migration as compared to the prewar period, for in 1940 the proportion of migrants among whites was almost half again as great as that among nonwhites. The 1944 Censuses of Congested Production Areas revealed that the nonwhite population increased more rapidly than the white population in the western and northern cities, where the numbers were small, and increased less rapidly

⁴ Taeuber, Conrad: *Wartime Population Changes in the United States*. The Milbank Memorial Fund *Quarterly*, July, 1946, xxiv, No. 3, pp. 238-239.

in the southern cities of Charleston, Hampton Roads, and Mobile, where the numbers were large.”

In a later analysis the Bureau of the Census pointed out that the major Negro migration since the beginning of World War II started in the South and terminated in war-boom cities, regardless of location. The peculiar aspect of wartime migration was that between 1940 and 1944 Negro population movements usually started in the South and ended at such industrial points as Detroit, Norfolk, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, where Negroes could find employment in war activities. In ten Congested Production Areas the increase in Negro population from 1940 to 1944 of 49 per cent was substantially above the 19 per cent rise in the total population.⁵

In the five Congested Production Areas of the West, Los Angeles, Portland-Vancouver, Puget Sound, San Diego, and San Francisco Bay, the total Negro population grew from 107,000 in 1940 to approximately 230,000 in 1944, an increase of more than 113 per cent. In the Portland-Vancouver area the Negro population increased 437 per cent; in the San Francisco area 227 per cent. The largest absolute increase (59,000) occurred in the Los Angeles area, where the Negro population grew from 75,000 in 1940 to 134,000 in 1944. Unofficial estimates for 1945 gave Los Angeles a Negro population of 160,000. As an over-all figure it is estimated that between 1941 and 1945 more than 700,000 Negro civilians moved North or West from the South. New York estimated an increment of 25,000; Chicago has had an influx of 50,000 from Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. Cleveland now estimates its Negro population at 102,000 though it was only 85,000 in 1940. Detroit, according to the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, has received 65,000 Negro migrants since 1940, 70 per cent of whom have come from the South. On the West Coast, San Francisco with 4,000 Negroes in 1940, reported 23,000 in 1945; Portland with 1,300 in 1940 reported 15,000 in 1945; Seattle with 3,365 in 1940 reported 16,000 Negroes in 1945. And

⁵ United States Bureau of the Census: Release, March 4, 1945.

scattered polls indicate that more than half of the people plan to remain in these centers.⁶

The Negro migration also differed from the general movement in the timing of its various phases. Whereas the peak of total migration was reached in late 1943, it was not until early 1945 that the corresponding phase of the population shift among Negroes was reached. The main stream of Negro migration did not start moving until after mid-1942, the geographical patterns corresponding to the areas of most stringent manpower requirements in 1943-1945. Large numbers of Negroes moved from farm areas in the South to southern industrial centers; from the South to the North; from the South, mid-West, and East to the Pacific Coast. It is estimated that more than 100,000 Negroes moved to southern industrial centers from other urban communities in the South; that approximately 300,000 southern Negro workers moved to the border states and northern industrial communities. The West Coast gained over 250,000 Negroes from the rural and urban South, mid-West and East, 200,000 of whom are supposed to have come from the South. Ten per cent of the migrants into California, Oregon, Washington, and Arizona were Negroes. In 1940 they formed only 1.5 per cent of those states' populations.⁷

The most important factor to influence the proportionately high Negro interstate and inter-regional migration was the racial patterning of defense training and war employment. Before its liquidation the National Youth Administration was the major source, and in many communities the only source, furnishing the facilities for skilled war-production training for Negroes. Restrictions on their employment after they had been trained forced many Negroes to leave their communities in the South in order to get the jobs for which they were qualified. This fact was amply illustrated during the early months of the war emergency and as late as January, 1943, when white labor was imported for employment in many areas where thousands

⁶ Barnett, Claude A.: *The Postwar Outlook for the Southern Rural Negro*. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Fall, 1945, xiv, No. 4, pp. 566-575.

⁷ United States Bureau of the Census: Release, March 4, 1945.

of local Negro job seekers with essential skills were still unemployed.

Discriminatory administration by state and local education officials of training programs financed from Federal funds, seriously handicapped Negro workers. In the states of out-migration where three-fourths of the Negro labor was to be found, training facilities were either inadequate or nonexistent. In January, 1942, Negroes constituted only 4 per cent of the total trainees for war industries in the eighteen southern and border states where they constituted 22 per cent of the total population. The only permissive outlets for full training were in the large cities of the East and mid-West; the only permissive outlets for war employment were on the Pacific Coast. The Federal government acting under its creed of training and employment "without regard as to race, creed, or color" frequently sent workers from Georgia and Alabama to Kansas, Missouri, California, and Washington when the demands were at their peaks.

Now that the war is done, there is every indication that most of the Negro in-migrants will remain in or near these congested centers and that much of the interstate migration from the South will not be reversed. Military surveys revealed that a disproportionately large ratio of Negro veterans, 75 per cent of whom were from the South, did not desire to return to their places of former residence. The war intensified the dispersion as well as the will-to-move of the Negro peoples.

It seems reasonable to anticipate a postwar migration of Negroes similar to that which followed World War I. This movement may be expected to extend more to the West than formerly while also following the traditional migration channels from South to East and North.

As a result of this wartime migration, the development of social machinery wherewith to effect democratic adjustments in human relations has become a critical problem. The movements of populations have nationalized the problems of minorities and have promoted newer types of race attitudes and

feelings. The racial tensions that accompany postwar or post-migration adjustments have begun to be felt keenly in centers that appear ill-equipped to absorb large permanent populations. The problems of health, housing, education, employment are not eliminated by this movement; they are merely scattered and the need for action remains.

However, some special aspects of this Negro migration should be kept in mind as significant for any program of adjustment:

1. The spatial mobility of Negro populations, especially from South to North, may be regarded as a permanent characteristic of this population element for some time.

2. The migration of this war period was a maturer movement than were the earlier ones. The element of settlement is present; women frequently preceded men into the new areas and provided the basic security of residence for their men in the armed services.

3. There is a new line of movement involving agricultural workers who are remaining in agriculture. There is a movement of Negro workers across the expanding cotton belt of the South, following cotton from Georgia, Alabama, and the Delta into Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, and continuing into California with the truck gardening.

4. The racial character of seasonal agricultural migration, the acceleration of Negro workers on the East coast, and their use in the sugar, corn, and wheat belts, is a new migration incentive.

5. The problems of intra-minority movements also stand out. For the first time Negroes, Japanese-Americans, and Orientals are meeting at migration cross-roads and becoming potential victims of further economic exploitation and maladjustment. The displacement of Japanese-Americans and Orientals by Negroes in the residential areas of the Pacific Coast is a case in point.

6. The spread of "southern" race attitudes and practices by the migrating southern white population has to some extent been responsible for the growth of such subversive organizations as the KKK on the Pacific Coast.

7. On the other hand, the spread of Negro labor to the Pacific

Coast gave that area the opportunity to break down such racial limitations in employment as were practiced by the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, and Helpers of America which for more than 50 years had given Negroes only auxiliary membership in that organization.

8. The stream of migration may continue from the South into the areas of freer living. The present *push* of Negro talent out of the South by southern states which do not provide full facilities for the higher education of Negroes, but do give them scholarship aid for training in an institution of their choice in other states is certain to affect the social composition of the South's Negro population and to provide increasingly capable and experienced social and political leadership in the areas of in-migration.

9. If present indications are ominous, travel facilities for Negroes in the South are going to be altered as the states seek to offset the nondiscrimination rulings of the Supreme Court. Evidences of this fact are noted in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

10. Furthermore, and finally, any further abridgment of political rights for Negroes in southern states, as is threatened in Alabama and Georgia, and as has already taken place in Arkansas and South Carolina, will assure a steady stream of settlers in urban areas of the North and West where the racial accommodation pattern is less partial and more easily manipulated.

Thus, and though the estimates of the volume of this migration lack the validity of verification, it may be reasonably concluded that the migration of the American Negro during World War II represented a movement both spatial and social, with greater dispersion in both fields than had been previously experienced. This mobility in time and space, and the social circulation it permitted, indicated that Negro migration continues to be the free movement of individuals and families in response to economic opportunities. The Negro migrant continues to be normally a proletarian industrial or agricultural worker who from necessity has to seek his fortune among socio-cultural strangers. And in back of his decision to move may be

found the usual motivations of general cultural, economic, political, and social conditions in the areas of out-migration, as well as the personal desires for the economic and social gain, racial escape, and social adventure allegedly present in the areas of in-migration.

This migration, though basically a search for economic rewards, continues to carry power and prestige for the racial universe. The northward and westward movements have served as safety-valves for the steaming engines of social discontent in southern cities. They have provided outlets for the socially discontented in southern rural areas, where it has not gone unrecognized that the greatest economic, political, and social rewards seldom go to farmers. Well might we pose the premise that this unplanned movement of Negroes in response to economic opportunities promotes sound social redistribution, and that the areas of greatest and most stable opportunity for them are frequently those that superficially and temporarily appear to be the most undesirable as places of in-migration for other peoples. This thesis has great implications for the adjustment of racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Its tenableness can at least be viewed with equanimity, if not with positive proof.