

The Exploited Negro

Historical Background

The position of the Negro in the United States has become since the Civil War less a sentimental and humanitarian problem and more an economic problem. His first introduction to the country in 1620 was as a unit of labor. He was contributory to the prosperity of New England, whose ships carried him, together with cargoes of rum, from Africa to the British colonies in this hemisphere. With the increasing cultivation of tobacco and cotton, and especially since the invention of the cotton gin, he became the basis of the South's industrial existence.

Upon this basic circumstance, the emancipation of the Negro from legalized slavery during the Civil War had less effect than is commonly supposed. A brief period of political enfranchisement for the Negro in the southern states, during which he was taken advantage of by white politicians and adventurers, was followed by the determined, brutal and complete expulsion of the Negro from public life. Since about 1876 Negroes have not voted in the rural South, they have been subjected to "jim-crowism," which means that they are segregated from white people like lepers and forced to accept inferior service and accommodations at exorbitant prices; and their economic subjection has been fortified with a creed asserting their "racial inferiority."

The Agricultural System

It is as farm laborer and farmer that the Negro has chiefly functioned in the South. To understand his position it is necessary to know something of the agricultural system under which he works. It is this system which to a great extent is responsible for the 50 to 100 lynchings which occur each year in the South; and it is this system which provoked a number of so-called race riots, of which the outstanding ones occurred near Elaine, Arkansas, in 1919, and at Tulsa, Okla., in 1921.

Under the South's agricultural system most Negroes work as farm hands, or as share croppers. The cropper works the landlord's ground, receives supplies in advance, and in return pays to the landlord a certain share, varying from one-third to two-thirds, of the season's crop. In fact, the system has resulted in a new form of slavery. Many Negroes being illiterate, as there are few schools for them throughout the rural South, they are not given written statements by their landlords. In many cases the crop is taken and disposed of by the landlord, and the Negro farmer who has perforce purchased his supplies at the plantation store, is presented with a statement charging him with indebtedness.

Furthermore, the practice has developed of arresting and imprisoning Negroes on charges of having committed some trivial offense. The Negro, having slight standing in a Southern court, is usually fined or sentenced to imprisonment as an alternative. In this way much of the rural South's road labor is recruited. White planters often pay the fines thus imposed upon Negroes and the latter are then taken to the white man's plantations to work off the debt. There have been many such cases, especially in the states of Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and also in Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas.

The Arkansas Massacre

The Arkansas riots of 1919 were the direct consequence of this peonage system. Negro farmers had organized to employ a lawyer in order to compel some sort of an accounting from the landlords by whom their crops had been taken and sold. They were accused of a conspiracy to murder white planters and seize the plantations. On this pretext hundreds of Negroes were hunted down and killed in the Arkansas cane brakes.

The exact number has never been ascertained, but the final death roll showed 5 whites and at least 100 Negroes killed. Twelve men were sentenced to death and 67 to long

prison terms for being members of the Progressive Farmers' and Household Union of America, the organization that was attempting to secure settlements for the Negro share-croppers. In the face of great difficulties due to intense local prejudice both racial and economic, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has defended and thus far has saved the lives of these men.

Dramatic confirmation of the extent of the peonage system in Georgia came early in 1921 when it was discovered that the owner of one plantation in Jasper County had had upward of eleven of his peons murdered in cold blood in order that they might not give information to officers of the Federal government who were investigating. This terrible discovery stimulated Governor Hugh M. Dorsey of Georgia to publish a pamphlet entitled "The Negro in Georgia," in which he set forth 135 cases of unpunished brutality practiced against Negroes which had been called to his attention.

The Tulsa Riots

An event of tremendous importance and one indicative of the growing tension between the races because of the Negro's increasing racial and economic solidarity was the Tulsa riots of May 31 -June 1, 1921. The Negro in Oklahoma, and especially in Tulsa, has achieved greater unity than in almost any other section of America. Many of them have gained economic independence through the discovery of oil. Others have had great success in business and agricultural pursuits. In Oklahoma there are a number of the lower order of whites who bitterly resent economic progress on the part of colored people. These white workers have been carefully manipulated and forced to believe that their interests have no common basis with those of colored workers. Combined with this resentment was a vicious newspaper propaganda against the Negro as well as a rotten political and police situation. These factors combined, resulted in the Tulsa riots which cost the lives of ten or more white people; between 150 and 200 colored men, women and children; and the destruction of 44 square blocks of Negro residential and business property valued at more than \$1,500,000.

Myths and Bogies

One of the means for keeping the Negro in the position where he is most defenseless and therefore most easily exploited has been the circulation of a myth that the Negro is more disposed than other races to sexual crime and to rape. On this pretext thousands of Negroes have been lynched, and as Mr. Herbert J. Seligman has pointed out in his book, "The Negro Faces America," the relations between whites and Negroes have been subjected to all the hatred implicit in sexual jealousy. Authentic statistics show that in less

than one-fourth of the lynching cases has there been even a charge of rape. Accompanying this myth has been the bogy of "Negro domination" and the desire which the Negro is supposed to harbor for "social equality." Upon this theme southern politicians and editors have embroidered, with the result that many Negroes have been publicly hanged or burned at stake

on the mere suspicion of their having made advances to white women. Frequently when a Negro has been lynched for some other cause the report is sent out to the world that he had committed or attempted the crime of rape.

Lynching

The tables given below show the number of lynchings in the United States during the year 1920, the manner of lynching and the offenses charged:

Alabama	6 (1 white)
Arkansas	1
California	3 (3 white)
Florida	13
Georgia	8
Kansas	1
Kentucky	1
Minnesota	3
Mississippi	7
Missouri	1
Montana	1 (white)
North Carolina	2
Ohio	1
Oklahoma	3 (1 white)
South Carolina	1
Tennessee	1
Texas	10
Virginia	1
West Virginia	1 (white)
Total	65

Manner of Lynchings

Hanged	31
Shot	15
Burned	8
Flogged to death	1
Manner unknown	8
Drowned	2
Total	65

Alleged Offenses

Murder	24
Assault on white woman (murderous)	2
Attack on white woman	15
Insulting white woman	3
Attempted attack on white woman	1
Attack on white boy	1
Stabbing white man	2
Assaulting white man	3
Threatening to kill white man	1
Aiding escape of murderers	2
Jumping labor contract	1
Negro labor troubles (in riot)	1
Election day disturbances	6
Insanity (in attempt at arrest)	1
Connection with moonshine still	1
Offense unknown	1
Total	65

In the thirty years, 1889-1918, upward of 2,522 colored people have been lynched in the United States, there being practically never a case in which any member of the lynching mob was punished. In the state of Georgia alone some 415 colored people have been lynched since 1885, according to Governor Dorsey, only a few of them for the "usual crime," and in not one of these cases was any lyncher tried or convicted.

Abortive attempts have been made in some states to check lynching. The states of West Virginia, Kentucky and Minnesota have recently passed anti-lynching laws. With the exception of the State of Kentucky these laws have not been

in effect long enough to judge adequately of their efficiency. In Kentucky the law proved unable to prevent a recent lynching or to punish the lynchers. At the time of writing there is pending before Congress a bill which will make lynching a federal offense.

Migration

The hatred and repression to which the Negro has been subjected in the South brought about a large migration northward during the world war. There were a number of other contributory causes of the migration, chief among them being a failure of the cotton crop owing to the destructive ravages of the boll weevil and the opportunity which wartime industries offered to Negroes in the North. The number of Negroes coming North during the migratory movement is estimated at all the way from one-quarter to three-quarters of a million. Probably a half million came.

The northward migration of Negroes has created difficult problems in many northern cities. In many cases Negroes were imported by industrial and manufacturing concerns which desired to use Negro labor as a weapon against white labor unions. To this the labor union policy of excluding Negroes had lent itself. The bitterness so caused among working people and also antagonisms over the rapid expansion of Negro residential districts, capitalized by real estate manipulators, brought about such riots as that in Chicago in the summer of 1919.

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