

# The Negro Migrations

## A SYMPOSIUM

*Summarizing or quoting opinions of various prominent men and women on a subject which was debated by Judge Blanton Fortson and William Pickens in the November issue of THE FORUM*

For the past ten years the Negroes have been migrating North in ever increasing numbers. What is the cause of this exodus, and what is its result to be for the Negro himself, and for the country? Blanton Fortson, judge of the superior courts of Georgia, maintains that the Negro is migrating northward to extinction. William Pickens, Field Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, carries on the discussion from the point of view that the Negro is moving toward a fuller and freer life. With the causes and effects of this migration scores of FORUM readers are concerned. Their letters offer an illuminating diversity of views.

### CAUSES OF THE MIGRATIONS

"People have an inertia against migration unless pushed or pulled," William Pickens argues. This line of thought is followed by Eugene Kinckle Jones, Executive Secretary of the National Urban League, who feels that the Negro is both "pushed" and "pulled" to migration. "The causes of the recent migration from the South to the North can be classified under two heads: social and economic. The social forces at work are those which grow out of lack of opportunity for self-expression in civic matters such as the right of franchise and holding public office, safety of person and property, justice before the courts, lynching, and mob-violence. Those forces, however, which might be called 'push' forces, though ever so strong could not cause any very great hejira unless there were attendant economic attractions or 'pull' forces in the North. These 'pull' forces are the economic reasons. They became operative with great power during and immediately following the World War. Higher wages in the North, accompanied by better opportunity for securing jobs offering advancement, lure the Negro. The great reduction of immigration from Europe

during the war, and later, its legal limitation, created a vacuum in the labor supply in the North which gave the Negro his long-wished-for opportunity."

The Negro is "instinctively seeking freedom" in the opinion of A. A. Graham, Corresponding Secretary of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention. Mr. Graham feels that the Negro has long cherished the desire to leave the South, oppressed as he is by poverty, desperate living conditions, and poor educational advantages. "His vision has grown with the years, and the world to him no longer has its alarming dimensions. Nothing in Heaven or on earth will stop this migration but just and fair treatment in the South. This, the Negro believes, will never be." Archibald H. Grimke, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Elizabeth B. Grannis, President of the National Christian League second this reaction.

That the actions of the Negro in America always seem to require extraordinary explanation, is a fact commented upon by W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, Editor of "The Crisis," who writes, "If the white American leaves the East for the West he does it because there are better chances in the West. If a white southerner leaves the South for the North, he does it because he thinks he can get along better in the North. But if a black American leaves the South for the North then it is extraordinary, and a number of reasons must be given." When the flood of immigration was cut off during the war, the Negro eagerly and promptly took advantage of the opportunity and "swept toward the North and greater justice, freedom, and opportunity," to quote Walter White, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Bishop Samuel P. Spreng, Naperville, Ill., and J. Harvey Kerns, Executive Secretary of the Milwaukee Urban League, share in this point of view.

## "NATURAL HUMAN IMPULSE"

"The Northward migration of the Negroes in the United States is due," writes William Grant Brown, counselor at Law, New York City, "to the natural human impulse of the more enlightened of the race to escape from a locality that in itself brands them as members of an inferior race, and to the more attractive industrial opportunities here." In direct support of this statement is a letter from John P. Grace, attorney at Charleston, S. C., who says, "We know no such thing here as social equality, or practically speaking, political equality. Now that you have shut out the European from the North the Negro is hastening to the field where he is welcome socially and politically. We have had the Negro on our hands, and the problem. Now you can have him on yours. I say this without any but the kindest feelings for this inferior race."

"It is no wild wanderlust that propels thousands of Negroes across three and a half or more states toward the north pole. The same silent force which dragged the population of England on to the coal fields two centuries ago is at work. Migrations are never accidental. We are all the flotsam drifted about by the currents of economic and social forces," is the statement of Professor T. Compton Pakenham, of the School of Commerce, University of North Carolina.

"'Less toil—more comfort,' is the slogan of the Negro, as well as the white," in the estimation of Thomas C. T. Crain, Judge of the Court of General Sessions, New York, who continues, "Thousands seeking happiness associate diversion, excitement, money, culture, power,—and what they deem success, with city rather than with country life. In this general trend white and black alike are involved. Maitland L. H. Smith, Camden, N. J., and Dr. Edmund A. Christian, Pontiac, Michigan, agree with this point of view.

"The boll weevil, the antagonism of certain people against him, and a rising ambition to do things which cannot be satisfied in the South," are stimuli attributed to the Negro in his migrations by Edgar L. Vincent, Broome County, N. Y. These reasons are likewise touched upon

by William H. Baldwin, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. who adds the additional striking cause, "Induction into the army with consequent travel to training camps and possibly overseas lengthened the radius of the Negro's thoughts about moving. To this purely geographic force was added a widening economic horizon through the development of industry in the South and the demand for men in the older plants in the North. The Negro began to think in terms of steel. The barrier at Ellis Island was erected at the expense of the old Mason and Dixon line." Moorefield Storey, Boston attorney, marvels that the Negro has remained in the South as long as he has. "Lynching, peonage, and general denial of their rights as citizens make migration necessary." An appeal for aid and redress from a helpless colored woman in Georgia was forwarded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to the Inter-racial Commission in Atlanta, with a request that the case be investigated. Mr. Storey sends the following account: "The colored woman, whose name, together with that of her white assailant, is withheld for purposes of safety, reported that she had been beaten and her son and daughters shot. The victim of the outrage, a widow with eight children, writes:

'On September first, 1924, about 2 o'clock, he (the white man) came to my home and asked me to let my son go to a log camp. I refused to let him go with him. Then he cursed me, then came back in the house and struck me with his fist. Then he threw a brick and struck my daughter . . . in the side. Me and my daughter are now in bed under the doctor's (care). He also went home and got his shotgun and revolver and shot my daughters, 2 of them, and one of my sons. . . . Down here, Sir, we colored people can't ever get a warrant for a white man, don't care how bad he do. Please help me to bring him to justice.'"

Until the War, in the opinion of Abraham Lefkowitz, executive officer of the Central Trades and Labor Council, New York, the Negro had no guarantee that if he invested his life's savings in a trip

northward, he would be certain of regular employment. "During the War, large corporations sent their representatives to the South with power to pay the passage of Negroes to their northern factories and to guarantee them a permanent job at good wages." Hence the wholesale migration.

### A CITYWARD MOVEMENT

"It is no more a question of 'Negro' migration than 'white,'" writes John W. Davis, President of the West Virginia Collegiate Institute, who believes that "migration as related to the American Negro is only a part of the trend toward urbanization in America. Shameful abuses without doubt have increased the movement of the Negroes northward." Abram L. Harris, Professor in the Department of Economics, at the same institution, has a similar view, and adds, "The tendency to isolate a purely social phenomenon, only incidentally involving black people, is example *par excellence* of our American tradition to think in racial categories. Whether the migration of the Negro be studied scientifically or regarded from the standpoint of social prejudice, it must at all times be remembered that the underlying causes are economic and specifically those connected with the growth of large-scale machine production. For that reason the movement must not be considered purely racial."

"The reason Negroes are migrating north is economic, but the reason they are going *willingly* is social," in the opinion of C. H. Tobias, executive official on the International Committee, Y. M. C. A. Mr. Tobias recalls that during the first months of the migration Southern newspapers freely predicted that the coming of cold weather would witness a return of the migrants south. They did not return. More extensive education of the Negro is a cause attributed by Dr. Joseph L. O'Brien, Bishop England High School, Charleston, S. C., to the exodus northward. "Education has brought about a race consciousness which leads the present day common school educated Negro to rebel against the economic, political, and social position in which he finds himself in the Southern States." L. Hollingsworth Wood, New York attorney and member of several national boards working in

behalf of the Negro, reminds us that "even before the trend northward there was already in the South a distinct trend cityward, following very much the trend of other populations in our United States." Mr. Wood lays much of the blame on the unfortunate situation of the tenant-farmer or "share-cropper" in many of our rural districts in the South. Alberta V. Dunn, New Orleans, La., and Monte J. Goble, Cincinnati, O., share this view, Mr. Goble further stating that in his estimation the "natural increase in population, which as it advances, contributes a normal exodus," has something to do with the migrations.

FORUM readers who have sent us interesting personal reactions or recollections of the South and of the black race, are Edward A. Guthrie, Madison, N. J.; William M. Ashby, New Jersey Urban League; Samuel H. Johnson, Baltimore, Md.; A. H. Woodward, Woodward, Ala.; Marianna G. Brubaker, Bird-in-Hand, Penna.; Mrs. Roswell Skell, Jr., Seven Gates Farm, Vineyard Haven, Mass.; Miss Ernestine Rose, Librarian, New York Public Library; Mrs. Alexander B. White, Merion, Penna.; Miss Mary McLeod Bethune, Daytona, Fla.; John C. Wright, Daytona, Fla.; W. W. Clark, Milton, Fla.; Kelley Miller, Howard University, Washington, D. C.; E. Franklin Frazier, Atlanta, Ga.; P. LeRoy Pinksusohn, Charleston, S. C.; Arthur A. Schomburg, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Chase S. Osborne, Ex-Governor of Michigan; E. G. Spilman, Oklahoma City, Okla.

### SUMMARY

The fundamental causes of Negro Migration are summed up by Jesse O. Thomas, Field Secretary, National Urban League: "The Negro moves,

1. Because of fear of Mob Violence.
2. Lack of police protection.
3. Disfranchisement, and general denial of justice in the courts.
4. Insecurity of life and limb.
5. Non-participation in the affairs of government.
6. Double economic standard. (One wage paid to Negroes and a different wage paid to whites for the same task performed.)

7. Segregation, — the general practice of Jim Crow cars on street cars and railroads.
8. Peonage and lack of freedom of speech.
9. Lack of adequate educational facilities for the training of Negro children.
10. General denial of citizenship rights, and economic and social slavery."

### WITH WHAT EFFECT?

The Negro migrates north. To what, and with what result? Judge Fortson, it will be recalled, maintained that the Negro migrates to racial extinction. William Pickens asserts that the Negro race will never die out, but that his blood may be diffused throughout the entire population. Likewise, what will be the effect upon the South which he leaves behind, and the North to which he goes?

For the most part those contributing their views on the question tread gently upon or step aside from the point of amalgamation. Dr. C. B. Wilmer, Rector of St. Luke's Church, Atlanta, Ga., considers it essential that we should not ignore the protests of racial instincts on the part of the white race. He says, "It seems certain that the very suggestion of totally wiping out race lines is bound to hamper most seriously the actual work of reconciliation and coöperation that is at present so beneficial and so hopeful in the South." Dr. Wilmer does not believe that the Negro race is moving northward to extinction, nor does he believe that racial amalgamation will result. "For present practical consideration, we ought to think of the two races as each standing for its own racial purity."

Powel Crosley, Jr., Cincinnati, Ohio, feels that the Southern planter who is rapidly losing his farm labor has just as acute a problem to solve as the Northerner who must face a new issue in color adjustment. "There is a shortage of labor in Southern agricultural districts," writes T. J. Woolfer, Jr., of the Georgia Committee on Race Relations, who likewise touches upon the effect in the South of the great exodus. "Southern agriculture suffers from the suddenness of the movement. When the temporary ill effects have passed, however, the result to Southern agriculture will be good." In outlining the effects on the Negro himself, Mr.

Woolfer maintains, "If he is to remain a cheap, easily exploited class of common labor his industrialization causes a grave menace to the race. If he can attain the skilled and semi-skilled positions and raise his standards of living the race will benefit by these new outlets for his skill, and the labor supply of the nation will be the gainer." "One of the effects of the migrations will be to make America democratic in the larger sense of the term," in the opinion of John W. Davis, previously quoted. "One situation seems to me of real interest," writes L. Hollingsworth Wood. "Large aggregations of city-dwelling Negroes, such for instance as the one district of New York which we call Harlem, where it is estimated there are over a hundred thousand Negroes living in a compact group, makes possible a city life for the Negro in which he is almost exclusively eliminated from contact with the white people."

### END NOT YET IN SIGHT

"I do not think that anyone at this time can state exactly what will be the ultimate effect of this exodus of the colored people," states J. C. Banks, Los Angeles worker in behalf of the Negro race. "The social and economic effects upon the race, in the North as well as in the South, are already far reaching, and the end is not yet in sight. But among the developments thus far ascertained, we may note the following: The disorganization of the labor system of the South and the attempt to reorganize it with white and alien labor supplanting the Negro. The favorable consideration on the part of white, of the Negroes remaining in the South, with the hope of checking the flowing tide of color. This is evidenced by the better living conditions and better schools for Negroes in rural communities, and the general effort to slow up lynching. Finally, the ultimate breaking up of the South as the centre of Negro population. The generalization of the race problem throughout the United States, is a notable result."

Amalgamation means the breaking down of innate prejudice. This, in the opinion of many, will never be. "The same law of the survival of the fittest will certainly apply in this case," writes H. E. Millard, Grand Rapids, Mich. "There may be intermingling of the races in

greater degree, but not such as to elevate the Negro or degrade the white to an equal standard." This point of view is expressed even more decidedly by W. W. Strong, Mechanicsburg, Penna., who feels that we should fight, if needs be, for racial purity. Reverend George Zurcher, pastor of St. Vincents Church, North Evans, N. Y., is likewise impassioned, lining up "High Finance, Jews, Negroes, and Infidelity, versus Religion and Morality, with organized Labor an unwilling tool of the former."

### READJUSTMENT

"In Washington, there is a number of colored Harvard graduates," writes Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, Director of the Good Housekeeping Institute. "Yet I have never seen one of them at a Harvard meeting. I imagine great consternation would prevail if one of them should go to a Harvard meeting. The colored man, therefore, especially educated colored men, exercises a wise repression of indulging in equal rights. My belief is that there are only two places that colored men can go with profit. One is far south of the border not within one hundred miles of any old free state; the other, far north not within one hundred and fifty miles of any old slave state. All the intervening ground seems to be fatal for colored inhabitants."

"The Negro himself is fast readjusting himself to his new environment; the Nation as a whole is far better off because of more equitable distribution of her colored population," is the reaction of A. L. Foster, Secretary of the Canton Urban League, Canton, Ohio. Mrs. John D. Hammond, New York City, feels that the migration is a blessing to both races. First, "it is making us Southern whites realize both the human and economic value of the Negro; it is bringing the Negro a desirable economic outlet; and it has lifted what the North and the South mistakenly regard as a sectional problem out of its sectional environment and set it squarely where it belongs, — a national responsibility and opportunity."

That the intensity of race prejudice in the South will be relieved, while widening its area in the North, is the estimation of John C. Dancy, Detroit Urban League. Henry Wollman, New York attorney,

fears that the colored people who come North will not be as greatly benefited as they expected to be, "because even the white people of the North have not shown the greatest disposition to be as helpful to the colored people and to be as sympathetic with their desire to progress, as they might have been."

The Negro in Northern communities will be a political factor that must be reckoned with, writes Jesse O. Thomas. Mr. Thomas believes that a more intelligent and sympathetic understanding on the part of white people respecting the Negro's position is being brought about. He refers, with appreciation, to the work being done by the Committee on Inter-racial Cooperation, — an organization that is daily increasing in numbers and influence. In a letter from Monroe N. Work, editor of the Negro Year Book, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, quotes President Jacobs of Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, Ga., as saying that "the very finest effect of this exodus of Negro laborers is its political effect. As long as there is a Negro problem in America, the South is in political slavery, unable to vote her mind about matters of national and international importance. When the time comes that the Negro problem is no longer a sectional problem, then, indeed, will the South be free." John M. Ragland, Louisville Urban League, and S. S. Caldwell, Omaha, Nebr., write along similar lines. Mr. Caldwell, serving as chairman of the War Camp Community Service at the time of the race riot in Omaha, says, "I believe this migration will be a betterment for the race should they find their economic independence. Otherwise there will be endless friction, brawls, and turmoil between the white and colored industrial workers." Mr. Caldwell makes a plea for colored leaders who have learned team-work and coöperation in all measures that will help the moral and industrial uplift of their own people.

"It would be a great blessing to this country," concludes Franklin E. Heald, of the Massachusetts State Grange, "if any question involving the Negro as a group or race could ever be discussed from civic, social, or economic viewpoints without passion and prejudice which merely blind and render impossible any fair and helpful verdict."