

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

DIVISION OF ECONOMICS AND HISTORY

JOHN BATES CLARK, DIRECTOR

PRELIMINARY ECONOMIC STUDIES OF THE WAR

EDITED BY

DAVID KINLEY

Professor of Political Economy, University of Illinois
Member of Committee of Research of the Endowment

No. 16

NEGRO MIGRATION DURING THE WAR

BY

EMMETT J. SCOTT

Secretary-Treasurer, Howard University,
Washington, D. C.

NEW YORK

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Within the brief period of three years following the outbreak of the great war in Europe, more than four hundred thousand negroes suddenly moved north. In extent this movement is without parallel in American history, for it swept on thousands of the blacks from remote regions of the South, depopulated entire communities, drew upon the negro inhabitants of practically every city of the South, and spread from Florida to the western limits of Texas. (In character it was not without precedent.) In fact, it bears such a significant resemblance to the migration to Kansas in 1879 and the one to Arkansas and Texas in 1888 and 1889 that this of 1916-1917 may be regarded as the same movement with intervals of a number of years,

Strange as it might seem the migration of 1879 first attracted general notice when the accusation was brought that it was a political scheme to transplant thousands of negro voters from their disfranchisement in the South to States where their votes might swell the Republican majority. Just here may be found a striking analogy to one of the current charges brought against the movement nearly forty years later. (The congressional inquiry which is responsible for the discovery of the fundamental causes of the movement was occasioned by this charge and succeeded in proving its baselessness.¹)

The real causes of the migration of 1879 were not far to seek. The economic cause was the agricultural depression in the lower Mississippi Valley. But by far the most potent factor in effecting the movement was the treatment received by negroes at the hands of the South. More specifically, as expressed by the leaders of the movement and refugees themselves, they were a long series of oppression, injustice and violence extending over

¹ *Congressional Record*, 46th Cong., 2d sess., vol. X, p. 104.

a period of fifteen years; the convict system by which the courts are permitted to inflict heavy fines for trivial offenses and the sheriff to hire the convicts to planters on the basis of peonage; denial of political rights; long continued persecution for political reasons; a system of cheating by landlords and storekeepers which rendered it impossible for tenants to make a living, and the inadequacy of school facilities.¹ Sworn public documents show that nearly 3,500 persons, most of whom were negroes, were killed between 1866 and 1879, and their murderers were never brought to trial or even arrested. Several massacres of negroes occurred in the parishes of Louisiana. Henry Adams, traveling throughout the State and taking note of crime committed against negroes, said that 683 colored men were whipped, maimed or murdered within eleven years.²

In the year 1879, therefore, thousands of negroes from Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Tennessee and North Carolina moved to Kansas. Henry Adams of Shreveport, Louisiana, an uneducated negro but a man of extraordinary talent, organized that year a colonization council. He had been a soldier in the United States Army until 1869 when he returned to his home in Louisiana and found the condition of negroes intolerable. Together with a number of other negroes he first formed a committee which in his own words was intended to "look into affairs and see the true condition of our race, to see whether it was possible we could stay under a people who held us in bondage or not." This committee grew to the enormous size of five hundred members. One hundred and fifty of these members were scattered throughout the South to live and work among the negroes and report their observations. These agents quickly reached the conclusion that the treatment the negroes received was generally unbearable.³ Some of the conditions reported were that land rent was still high; that in the part of the country where the committee was organized the people were still being whipped, some of them by their former owners; that they were cheated out of their crops and that in

¹ *Atlantic Monthly*, LXIV, p. 222; *Nation*, XXVIII, pp. 242, 386.

² Williams, *History of the Negro Race*, II, p. 375.

³ *Atlantic Monthly*, LXIV, p. 222.

some parts of the country where they voted they were being shot.

It was decided about 1877 that all hope and confidence that conditions could be changed should be abandoned. Members of this committee felt that they could no longer remain in the South, and decided to leave even if they "had to run away and go into the woods." Membership in the council was solicited with the result that by 1878 there were ninety-eight thousand persons from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas belonging to the colonization council and ready to move.¹

About the same time there was another conspicuous figure working in Tennessee—Benjamin or "Pap" Singleton, who styled himself the father of the exodus. He began the work of inducing negroes to move to the State of Kansas about 1869, founded two colonies and carried a total of 7,432 blacks from Tennessee. During this time he paid from his own pocket over \$600 for circulars which he distributed throughout the southern States. "The advantages of living in a free State" were the inducements offered.²

The movement spread as far east as North Carolina. There a similar movement was started in 1872 when there were distributed a number of circulars from Nebraska telling of the United States government and railroad lands which could be cheaply obtained. This brief excitement subsided, but was revived again by reports of thousands of negroes leaving the other States of the South for Kansas. Several hundred of these migrants from North Carolina were persuaded en route to change their course and go to Indiana.³

Much excitement characterized the movement. One description of this exodus says:

Homeless, penniless and in rags, these poor people were thronging the wharves of St. Louis, crowding the steamers on the Mississippi River, hailing the passing steamers and imploring them for a passage to the land of freedom, where the rights of citizens are respected and honest toil rewarded by honest compensation. The newspapers were filled with accounts of their

¹ Williams, *History of the Negro Race*, II, p. 375.

² W. L. Fleming, "Pap Singleton, the Moses of the Colored Exodus," *American Journal of Sociology*, chapter XV, pp. 61-82.

³ *Congressional Record*, Senate Reports, 693, part II, 46th Cong., 2d sess.

destitution, and the very air was burdened with the cry of distress from a class of American citizens flying from persecution which they could no longer endure. Their piteous tales of outrage, suffering and wrong touched the hearts of the more fortunate members of their race in the North and West, and aid societies, designed to afford temporary relief and composed almost wholly of colored people, were organized in Washington, St. Louis, Topeka and various other places.¹

Men still living, who participated in this movement, tell of the long straggling procession of migrants, stretching to the length at times of from three to five miles, crossing States on foot. Churches were opened all along the route to receive them. Songs were composed, some of which still linger in the memory of survivors. The hardships under which they made this journey are pathetic. Yet it is estimated that nearly 25,000 negroes left their homes for Kansas.²

The exodus during the World War, like both of these, was fundamentally economic, though its roots were entangled in the entire social system of the South. It was hailed as the "Exodus to the Promised Land" and characterized by the same frenzy and excitement. Unlike the Kansas movement, it had no conspicuous leaders of the type of the renowned "Pap" Singleton and Henry Adams. Apparently they were not needed. The great horde of restless migrants swung loose from their acknowledged leaders. The very pervasiveness of the impulse to move at the first definite call of the North was sufficient to stir up and carry away thousands before the excitement subsided.

Despite the apparent suddenness of this movement, all evidence indicates that it is but the accentuation of a process which has been going on for more than fifty years. So silently indeed has this shifting of the negro population taken place that it has quite escaped popular attention. Following the decennial revelation of the census there is a momentary outburst of dismay and apprehension at the manifest trend in the interstate migration of negroes. Inquiries into the living standards of selected groups of negroes in large cities antedating the migration of 1916-1917 have revealed from year to year an in-

¹ *American Journal of Social Science*, XI, pp. 22-35.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

creasing number of persons of southern birth whose length of residence has been surprisingly short. The rapid increase in the negro population of the cities of the North bears eloquent testimony to this tendency. The total increase in the negro population between 1900 and 1910 was 11.2 per cent. In the past fifty years the northern movement has transferred about 4 per cent of the entire negro population; and the movement has taken place in spite of the negro's economic handicap in the North. Within the same period Chicago increased her negro population 46.3 per cent and Columbus, Ohio, 55.3 per cent. This increase was wholly at the expense of the South, for the rural communities of the North are very sparsely populated with negroes and the increment accruing from surplus birth over deaths is almost negligible.¹

When any attempt is made to estimate the volume of this most recent movement, however, there is introduced a confusing element, for it can not definitely be separated from a process which has been in operation since emancipation. Another difficulty in obtaining reliable estimates is the distribution of the colored population over the rural districts. It is next to impossible to estimate the numbers leaving the South even on the basis of the numbers leaving the cities. The cities are merely concentration points and they are continually recruiting from the surrounding rural districts. It might be stated that 2,000 negroes left a certain city. As a matter of fact, scarcely half that number were residents of the city. The others had moved in because it was easier to leave for the North from a large city, and there was a greater likelihood of securing free transportation or traveling with a party of friends. It is conservatively stated, for example, that Birmingham, Alabama, lost 38,000 negroes. Yet within a period of three months the negro population had assumed its usual proportions again.²

Prior to the present migration of negroes, there was somewhat greater mobility on the part of the white than on the part of the negro population. As for example, according to

¹ *The Censuses of the United States*.

² *Ibid.*

the census of 1910 of 68,070,294 native whites, 10,366,735 or 15.2 per cent were living in some other division than that in which they were born. Of 9,746,043 native negroes reported by the census of 1910, 963,153 or 9.9 per cent were living outside the division of birth.¹ Previous to the present migration, the south Atlantic and the east south central divisions were the only ones which had suffered a direct loss in population through the migration of negroes.²

The census of 1910 brought out the fact that there had been considerable migration from the North to the South, as well as from the South to the North, and from the East to the West. The number of persons born in the North and living in the South (1,449,229) was not very different from the number born in the South and living in the North (1,527,107). The North, however, has contributed more than five times as many to the population of the West as the South has. The number of negroes born in the South and living in the North in 1910 was 415,533, or a little over two-thirds of the total number living in the North. Of the 9,109,153 negroes born in the South, 440,534, or 4.8 per cent, were, in 1910, living outside the South.³ The migration southward it will be noted, has been in recent years largely into the west south central division, while the migration northward has been more evenly distributed by divisions, except that a comparatively small number from the South have gone into the New England States.⁴

The greater mobility of whites than of negroes is shown by the fact that in 1910, 15 per cent of the whites and 10 per cent of the negroes lived outside of the States in which they were born. This greater mobility of the whites as compared with the negroes was due in a large measure to the lack of opportunities for large numbers of negroes to find employment in the sections outside the South. The World War changed these conditions and gave to the negroes of the United States the same opportunities for occupations in practically every section

¹ Vol. I, census of 1910, Population, General Report and Analysis, p. 693.

² *Ibid.*, p. 694.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 698.

⁴ Vol. I, 1910 census, Population, General Report and Analysis, p. 699.

of the country, which had heretofore been enjoyed only by the whites. In 1900, 27,000 negroes born in the North lived in the South. In 1910, 41,000 negroes born in the North lived in the South. This indicated that there was beginning to be a considerable movement of negroes from the North to the South because of the greater opportunities in the South to find employment in teaching, medicine and business. The migration conditions brought about by the war have probably changed this to some extent. Previous to the World War, the States having the greatest gain from negro migration were Arkansas, 105,500, Pennsylvania, 85,000, Oklahoma, 85,000, Florida, 84,000, New York, 58,450 and Illinois, 57,500.

The point brought out here indicates that because of economic opportunities, Arkansas and Oklahoma, being contiguously situated in one section of the South and Florida in another section of the South, had received a greater migration of negroes than any State in the North.

Dr. William Oscar Scroggs of Louisiana calls attention to the tendency of negroes to move within the South, although, as he points out, this tendency is not as great as it is for the whites. On this he says:

The negro shows a tendency, not only to move northward, but also to move about very freely within the South. In fact, the region registering the largest net gain of negroes in 1910 from this interstate movement was the west south central division (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas) which showed a gain from this source of 194,658. The middle Atlantic division came second with a gain of 186,384, and the east north central third with a gain of 119,649. On the other hand, the south Atlantic States showed a loss of 392,827, and the east south central States a loss of 200,876 from interstate migration. While the negroes have shown this marked inclination toward interstate movement, they nevertheless exhibit this tendency in less degree than do the whites.¹

The subjoined tables show the intersectional migration of the negro population:

¹ Scroggs, "Interstate Migration of Negro Population," *Journal of Political Economy*, December, 1917, p. 1040.

INTERSECTIONAL MIGRATION OF NEGROES

(As Reported by Census of 1910)

NUMBER BORN IN SPECIFIED DIVISIONS AND LIVING IN-OR OUT OF THESE DIVISIONS

Division	Total Born in the Division	Number Living:		Per Cent Living Without the Division in Which Born
		Within Division	Without Division	
United States	9,746,043	8,782,890	963,153	9.9
New England	37,799	30,815	6,984	18.5
Middle Atlantic ...	212,145	189,962	22,183	10.5
East North Central	173,226	145,187	28,039	16.2
West North Central	198,116	162,054	36,062	18.2
South Atlantic	4,487,313	4,039,173	448,140	10.0
East South Central	2,844,598	2,491,607	352,991	12.4
West South Central	1,777,242	1,713,888	63,354	3.6
Mountain	7,342	4,122	3,220	43.9
Pacific	8,262	6,082	2,180	26.4

NUMBER LIVING IN SPECIFIED DIVISIONS

Division	Total Living in the Division	Number Born in and Living in the Division	Number Living in the Division Born in Other Divisions	Per Cent Living in Division Born in Other Divisions
United States	9,746,043	8,782,890	963,153	9.9
New England	58,109	30,815	27,294	47.0
Middle Atlantic ...	398,529	189,962	208,567	52.3
East North Central	292,875	145,187	147,688	50.4
West North Central	238,613	162,054	76,559	32.1
South Atlantic	4,094,486	4,039,173	55,313	1.4
East South Central	2,643,722	2,491,607	152,115	5.8
West South Central	1,971,900	1,713,888	258,012	13.1
Mountain	20,571	4,122	16,449	80.0
Pacific	27,238	6,082	21,156	77.7

MIGRATION NORTH TO SOUTH, SOUTH TO NORTH AND EAST TO WEST

Race and Section of Residence	Total Native Population	Born in:			State of Birth not Reported or Born in Outlying Possessions, etc.
		The North	The South	The West	
All Races					
United States	78,456,380	46,179,002	29,010,255	2,906,162	360,961
The North	44,390,371	42,526,162	1,527,107	124,001	213,101
The South	28,649,319	1,449,229	27,079,282	38,230	82,578
The West	5,416,690	2,203,611	403,866	2,743,931	65,282
White					
United States	68,386,412	45,488,942	19,814,860	2,766,492	316,118
The North	43,319,193	41,891,353	1,110,245	116,939	200,656
The South	19,821,249	1,407,262	18,326,236	34,523	53,228
The West	5,245,970	2,190,327	378,379	2,615,030	62,234
Negro					
United States	9,787,424	621,286	9,109,153	15,604	41,381
The North	999,451	570,298	415,533	2,295	11,325
The South	8,738,858	39,077	8,668,619	2,412	28,750
The West	49,115	11,911	25,001	10,897	1,306

NET MIGRATION EASTWARD AND WESTWARD AND
NORTHWARD AND SOUTHWARD

Section	Population, 1910					
	Total	White			Negro	All Other
		Total	Of Na- tive Par- centage	Of For- eign or Mixed Parent- age		
Born east and living west of the Mississippi River ...	5,276,879	4,941,529	3,846,940	1,094,589	331,031	4,319
Born west and living east of the Mississippi River ...	684,773	616,939	417,541	199,398	63,671	4,163
Net migration westward across the Mississippi River	4,592,106	4,324,590	3,429,399	895,191	267,360	156
Born North and living South	1,449,229	1,407,262	1,156,122	251,140	39,077	2,890
Born South and living North	1,527,107	1,110,245	944,572	165,673	415,533	1,329
Net migration southward .....	.....	297,017	211,550	85,467	.....	1,561
Net migration northward	77,878	.....	.....	.....	376,456	.....