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1-1-1932

## The American Negro

James Stewart Allen

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### Recommended Citation

Allen, James Stewart, "The American Negro" (1932). *PRISM: Political & Rights Issues & Social Movements*. 838.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/prism/838>

**No.18**

**THE  
AMERICAN  
NEGRO**

by  
**J. S. Allen**

**10c**

**INTERNATIONAL PAMPHLETS**  
**799 Broadway**                      **New York**

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE



*THIS pamphlet, prepared under the direction of the Labor Research Association, is one of a series published by International Pamphlets, 799 Broadway, New York, from whom additional copies may be obtained at ten cents each. Special rates on quantity orders.*

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*Printed in the U.S.A. (1932)*

Second Edition

COMPOSED AND PRINTED BY UNION LABOR

## THE AMERICAN NEGRO

By J. S. ALLEN

"CORAL GABLES, FLA. . . 'Hell, they were only niggers,' was the only excuse given for the white guards running away from 15 Negro prisoners shackled in a burning prison van with dynamite.

"One was killed, four are expected to die, several were maimed for life.

"The prisoners, all of whom were serving terms of less than one year, were herded into the prison van at the end of their 10-hour day. With them were their guards, carelessly smoking, and a large amount of dynamite. A spark from a cigarette set fire to the truck and ignited the dynamite.

"The guards dropped their guns and ran, leaving the prisoners shackled in the blazing truck to burn to death. Finally one of them had the courage to go back to the truck and unsnap the lock, allowing the convicts to pour out.

"What was once sound flesh and blood was now burned to the color of a dingy ash. One of them is dead, four will die."

(*Federated Press* news item, April 8, 1931.)

### *The Negro Population*

Today there are about 12,000,000 Negroes in the United States, of whom approximately 9,500,000 are in the South where the oppression and persecution directed against them are the sharpest. About three-quarters of the Negro population in the South live in rural sections. In the North the Negro is principally located in the industrial cities and towns, with an insignificant number rural—about 250,000.

The dominant trend, especially since the war, for the Negro as well as the white has been from the farms to the cities. The demand for labor in the war industries during the World War and the period of inflation after that, coupled with the unbearable feudal conditions of the southern countryside and the chronic farm crisis in the cotton and tobacco country, led to a great cityward migration. Between 1920 and 1930 over 1,000,000 Negroes sought a "better life" in the cities. It is estimated that



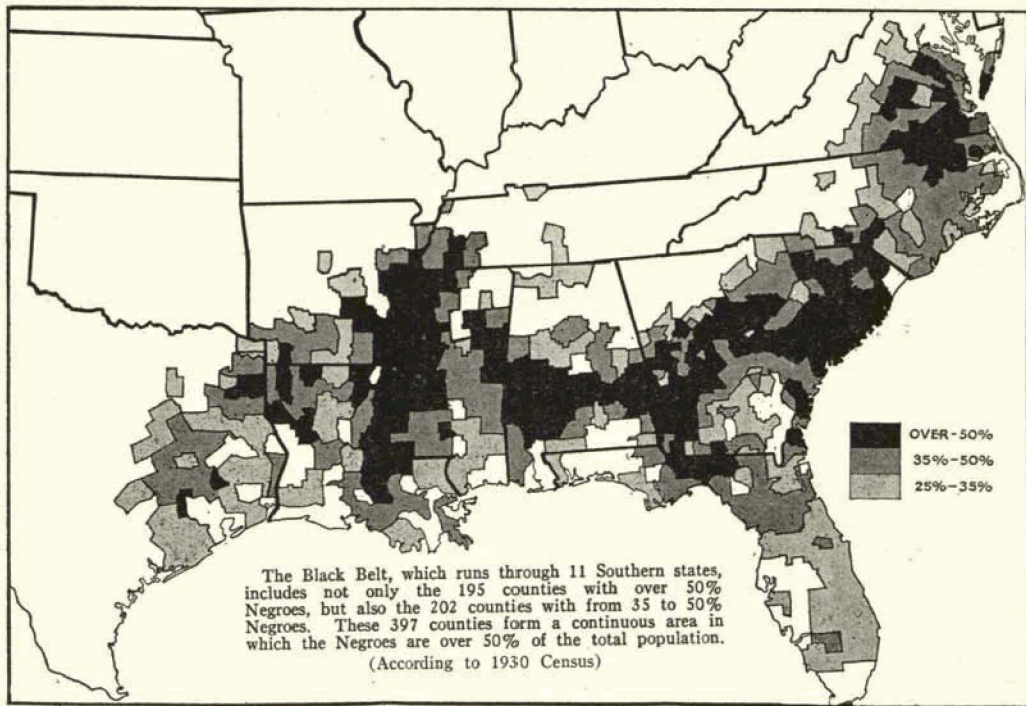
about 650,000 of these went to southern cities, the remainder to northern cities. Between 1916 and 1928 about 1,200,000 southern Negroes came North, entering, for the most part, the unskilled section of heavy industry.

In nine cities today in the United States segregated communities of Negroes comprise the largest Negro settlements in the world. New York City now has 328,000 Negroes; Chicago follows a close second with 234,000; and Philadelphia has 220,000. New Orleans, Baltimore, and Washington each have over 130,000. Before 1920 the bulk of increase had been chiefly in the larger cities, but the last 10 years were marked by a similarly large increase in smaller cities as the Negro workers entered the industrial sections everywhere. The Negro is thus becoming a more and more important factor in the struggles of the workers in practically every important industry.

### *The Negro on the Land*

The great rural Negro masses of the South are chiefly concentrated in what is known as the Black Belt. This is an area stretching from eastern Virginia and North Carolina, through South Carolina and the central parts of Georgia and Alabama, into Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and touching the coastal regions of Texas. In this area there are 195 counties in which the Negroes form the majority of the population. In 20 of these they comprise more than 75% of the population. (See map on page 5.) In 202 counties they are from 35% to 50% of the total population; but throughout this Black Belt territory, taken as a unit, the Negroes outnumber the whites. It is here that the exploitation and oppression of the Negro people is at its sharpest.

The black peasantry is starving, with land, credit, and means of production in the hands of the white ruling class. The poor white farmer and tenant in the cotton and tobacco areas of the South are utterly poverty stricken. But the Negro is always a rung lower on the economic ladder, more exploited by landlord, merchant and banker. In southern speech he is only a "Nigger,"



**Map Showing Continuous Stretch of Dense Negro Population in the South—the Black Belt**

valuable only because he can be exploited even more than the "poor white."

The tenant system, with its peonage and miserable standard of living, is based on the production of two main money crops, cotton and tobacco. The greatest amount of tenantry is found in those areas where cotton is the principal crop. The Negro farmer, even more than the white farmer, is a one-crop farmer. That is, he is forced by the landlord to devote most of his acreage to a crop which the landlord takes in payment for rent, interest, and advances, and sells on the market for cash. When prices of farm products go down sharply, as during the present crisis, the tenant suffers accordingly. When there is a drought, the little corn he may have raised is entirely burnt up and all food sources are gone; for even in "good years" the tenant farmer sees very little cash.

The Negro farmer of the Southeast, the Mississippi Delta, and sections of Texas and Arkansas, depends almost entirely on cotton. In Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and parts of Tennessee he depends largely on tobacco. A measure of the present economic status of the southern farmer can be obtained from the current prices of cotton and tobacco. Cotton which, according to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, costs 17 cents or more a pound to produce, sold at from 9 to 10 cents a pound for the 1930 crop as a result of the deepening world crisis, and in 1931 sold at 5 and 6 cents a pound. The same tobacco which sold at 18 cents a pound in 1930 sold from 7 to 10 cents a pound in 1931.

### *The Tenant System*

To understand the slavery of the tenant system it is necessary to see clearly the economic bonds which tie the tenant to the landlord, money lender, and merchant. There are two main classes of tenants in the South—the renter and the share-cropper.\* The

\* The United States Dept. of Agriculture, in its reports, lists five classes of tenants: (1) the *share tenant* who pays a specified share of his crop for the use of the land and furnishes his own tools and animals; (2) the *share-*



share-cropper pays a specified share of his crop, usually 50%, for the use of the land. The planter usually furnishes the animals and tools. The renter pays a smaller share of his crop for the use of the land and in some cases pays partly or fully in cash. In Texas, for example, a renter gives the landlord one-fourth of his cotton and one-third of his feed crop and supplies his own tools and animals.

Obviously the share-croppers are the most completely dependent upon the landlord. They are tied up with a contract to the landlord which makes the latter the master of the tenant and his belongings. When a landlord sells his land, he sells it together with his tenants and croppers, much as slaveholders sold their plantations in the days of chattel slavery.

The percentage of tenancy among Negro farmers is much greater than among white farmers. According to the 1925 census 42% of the white farmers in the South were tenants, and 76.5% of the Negro farmers were in the tenant class, of whom at least 47% were croppers, the lowest category of the tenantry and the most oppressed.

Between 1910 and 1925 the farm lands in the ten southern cotton states decreased by 28,000,000 acres. Half this decrease was in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. This decrease occurred despite the fact that 42,000,000 additional acres of southern farm woodlands had been cleared during the same period, as the farmer resorted to wood-cutting in a last desperate effort to keep going. While, during the same period, there was a tendency in the old Black Belt to divide the larger plantations into smaller tenant farms, there was a decrease of 96,000 farms in the four southeastern states, 84,000 of these being Negro farms. This cut in the number of farms is forcing thousands of Negroes from the farms into the army of the un-

*cropper* who also pays a specified share of his crop, usually 50 per cent, for the use of the land while the planter furnishes animals and tools; (3) the *share-cash tenant*, who pays rent partly in cash and partly in crops; (4) the *cash tenant*, more common to northern agriculture, who pays his entire rent in cash; and (5) the standing *renter* who pays a stated amount of produce for the use of the land.



employed in the cities, and those who remain on the farm are forced down into lower economic classes of the tenantry.

### *Starvation*

Actual starvation now faces the Negro on the farms. In a "better" year, when the farmer had at least some chance of getting a job between seasons in the nearby towns or cities, the average total yearly income of a Negro farmer in Greene County, Georgia, was \$399 for the whole family, or slightly more than \$1 a day. This included the crops sold and crops consumed on the farm, as well as the value of wages for his work on the farm and other incidental work in the town. Lewis F. Carr, an agricultural economist, states that "in the South there are at least 7,000,000 people living on a family income of less than \$250 a year and 3,000,000 of these live on a family income of less than \$150 a year." This was before the economic crisis began in 1929. Today the lowest level possible is being reached—starvation.

Witness letters such as this, received by the *Southern Worker* from a Negro share-cropper in the Black Belt of Alabama: "The farmers of the South are in need. I ask you all please to help me. I have got 20 head in my family. I want you all to help me to get some work or a mule and a plow and something to eat." His crop had been taken by the landlord to pay for rent and advances and, still heavily in debt, the landlord refuses to stake him for the new crop.

In the spring of 1932 thousands of farm families faced a similar plight. After surviving a winter of starvation and cold they had nowhere to turn. As the spring plowing began the landlords and merchants refused to advance them credit for food, animals, seed, and fertilizer for their new crop.

The landlord keeps the accounts, and takes what he pleases of the crop, without bothering to give a reckoning to his tenant. This letter from a Negro tenant at Vincent, Alabama, written to the *Southern Worker*, gives a clear picture of the transaction: "Last year I made 17 bales of cotton and after my landlord got through figuring up what I owed him, I still was in debt to him

after he had taken the 17 bales of cotton that I had slaved hard to make. He told me I still owed him and he had to have it. He then came to take my mule. After having an argument with him, he told me that if I did not let him have the mule he would send the sheriff after me."

Thus the tenant lost his mule, the only thing that made it possible for him to keep some slight measure of independence, and he is now forced to become a cropper, a slave to his landlord until he works off his debt, if he can do so at all.

The extreme poverty of the Negro peasant is shown again by the live stock owned by farm families in the four Southeastern cotton states. In 1925, in this area, 580,000 farm families had no cattle, 900,000 no pigs; 300,000 families were without a single chicken. These are the cropper families—one can hardly call them farmers. Since, additional thousands of families have become croppers, practically slaves, without the live stock that one expects to see on a farm. One of these southern "farms" consists of a ramshackle hut, a few acres of land—and starvation.

### *Credit and Wage Slavery*

Negro farmers must contend with a vicious system of credit, in which are involved local merchants, bankers, and landlords. Fertilizer, so necessary to the money-crop lands because the soil becomes exhausted by the planting of the same crop every year, is a primary expense. From a recent study made in North Carolina of 588 Negro farm families it was found that 65% of these farmers pay an average of 37% interest on fertilizer advances, either from the landlord or local merchant. For advances in the form of food or tools from the local merchant an average of 26% is paid. Thus, by the time the Negro tenant or share-cropper harvests his crop, it is entirely mortgaged out to landlord and merchant. As the agricultural crisis has deepened, the debts have mounted, until now it is a hopeless proposition ever to work them off. This means peonage for increasing thousands of farm families.

Negro "landowners" in the South in 1925 numbered about

194,000, having decreased from 218,000 in 1920. Since 1925 they have continued to decrease in number. Their position has none of the independence that the name suggests. They own the poorest land and must borrow heavily at high interest rates in order to make a crop. At least one-fourth of them must rent additional land from a white landowner in order to pull through. Thus, they are also dependent upon the white landowner and the credit merchant, although not to so great a degree as the tenants.

At least half of the 500,000 male farm laborers are Negroes. As a result of the crisis farm wages have reached unbelievably low levels. Sugar plantation workers in Louisiana receive 75 cents a day cutting cane from sun-up to sun-down. At Rembert, S. C., day laborers on large plantations in 1931 were receiving 25 cents a day, and were forced to buy their food out of that sum in the planters' commissary. Fifty cents a day for male and 25 cents for female farm workers was the wage paid in many sections for chopping cotton. Thirty cents a hundred pounds, or about 60 cents a day was paid for picking the 1931 cotton crop.

### *Peonage*

Both farm laborers and share-croppers are little better off than slaves. The tenant system, especially on the large plantations, with absolute control by the landlord, means peonage. This is particularly widespread in southern Arkansas, northern Louisiana, parts of Mississippi, as well as in eastern Texas and central Georgia. Forced to buy all their goods and food from the commissaries, with the landlord having undisputed sway over the accounts for labor and advances, the tenants and laborers are kept in debt. They are forced to work off this debt before they are allowed to leave the land. This system is enforced by the machinery of "justice" in the control of the white landlords.

If a cropper who is in debt to his landlord should attempt to run away, he is arrested and given the alternative of going to work on the chain gang or going back to his landlord, with the cost of the chase and the fine added to his debt. White planters often volunteer to pay the fines of Negroes convicted of minor



cases and then force them to work out the amount on their land, under a contract which the Negro is forced to sign.

During the Mississippi floods of 1927 the wide extent of peonage was revealed. When the Red Cross set up refugee camps, the planters of the Delta would not at first allow "their" Negroes to go to the camps for refuge, and agreed only when the Red Cross promised that they would be returned. A Negro could not leave the Red Cross camp unless he had a pass signed by his planter, and if he attempted to do so he was shot down by the National Guard like a runaway slave. When the camps broke up, the Negroes were returned to the plantations, huddled together and guarded on river scows, like slaves on the way to market.

The drought in 1930-31 revealed in Arkansas the same condition of peonage. No Negro cropper was given the miserly two-and-one-half-cent relief meals by Red Cross officials unless he had written permission from his landowner. The latter made this arrangement with the Red Cross in order to prevent his croppers from leaving the plantation. One of the largest landowners in the vicinity of England, Ark., where a food riot occurred in January, 1931, sent notice to the Red Cross, when his 75 share-croppers left the plantation, not to give them any relief. They were sent back to starvation on the land.

But the Negro croppers do not in all cases submit to peonage without a struggle. At Elaine, Ark., in October, 1919, Negro share-croppers on several large plantations organized the Progressive Farmers and Household Union in order to fight peonage and for better conditions. They were attacked by the landlords and deputies. They fought back, killing a number of their attackers, and a few of them were shot down. Twelve were sentenced to death and 67 to long prison terms, but the death sentences and many of the prison terms were later revoked in the federal courts. The slogan of the Arkansas Negro organization was "We Battle for Our Rights."

During the starvation winter of 1930-31 many individual struggles took place between tenants and landowners over the division of the crops and payment of debts, amounting to an actual strug-



gle for existence itself. When the tenant shot first and the landlord was killed, the state took its bloody vengeance in the form of a legal electric chair lynching as in the case of the three Nelson brothers, Negro share-croppers of Lauderdale County, Miss., two of whom were sentenced to death and the third to life imprisonment. If the tenant was killed in the fight, the landlord was generally acquitted. These individual armed combats were really a struggle against starvation, but fruitless of permanent result, because they were not organized into a mass struggle.

### *Camp Hill*

The events which centered in Camp Hill, Ala., during the spring and summer of 1931 represented the first organized movement by both Negro and white croppers, under Communist leadership, to better their conditions. The struggle led, in July, to a reign of terror, to the murder of at least one Negro cropper, the burning of a meeting place and the homes of union men and women, and mass arrests. It also led to a victory on the part of the croppers and to the extension of the Share-Croppers' Union, under Communist leadership, to include hundreds of Negro and many white croppers and poor farmers in three adjoining Black Belt counties. The union was formed with the aid of a Communist organizer, after the Scottsboro defense, led by the International Labor Defense and supported by the working masses of the country, had given to the Negro croppers widespread confidence in Communist leadership.

In the Camp Hill district the croppers—especially, of course, the Negroes—had been put in the position of actual slaves or serfs. During the crisis conditions grew worse, and a few of the larger landlords began to absorb the holdings of the smaller. One wealthy man increased his holdings in this way from 280 acres to 14,000 acres in a little more than two years, throwing thousands of croppers and small farmers off the land to beg or to compete for what work there was left to do. The croppers suffered from starvation and the diseases of starvation.

The Share-Croppers' Union, organized secretly, spread very

rapidly. In a short time it numbered 800 members in Tallapoosa and Lee Counties. It expressed the croppers' demands, which were, chiefly: (1) continuation of the food allowance which had been cut off July 1, when the crop was already cultivated, leaving the cropper to starve or beg until cotton picking time in September; (2) right of the cropper to sell his produce for cash, where and when he pleased, rather than to turn it over to the landlord for "division"; (3) cash settlement for the season at cotton picking time; (4) a 9-months' Negro school with free school bus; (5) right of the cropper to have his own garden.

Every effort was made by white storekeepers and landowners to destroy the organization. On July 15, deputies forcibly broke up a union meeting; 300 property-owning whites spread terror through the section. Ralph Grey, a Negro cropper, was murdered. "Nigger hunts" were organized to kill or run out union men. Four croppers, out of more than 50 arrested, "disappeared" from the Dadeville jail. But despite the terror, the croppers won the continuation of their food allowance and they won the right to raise gardens, rather than be forced to buy from the landlords the food they themselves had raised. They forced the release of their imprisoned comrades and made the landowners let down on the terror. This struggle instilled a new fighting spirit in the Negro peasantry, for in it was embodied the struggle of the Negro people in the Black Belt itself for liberation.

### *The Negro Worker*

Migration of Negroes to the cities has added over 1,000,000 Negroes to northern cities alone in a decade and made the Negro worker an integral part of the working class in practically all the basic industries of the country. In 1920 there were 886,810 Negroes in manufacturing and mechanical industries; 1,064,000 in domestic and personal jobs; 312,000 in transportation; and 73,000 in mining.

Just before the severe unemployment that began in 1929, Negro workers had entered all branches of industry. In the Ford plant alone in Detroit there were 10,000 Negro workers

and 17% of all the auto workers were Negroes. In the Chicago stockyards there were 8,000 Negro workers. In the steel mills of the Pittsburgh district alone in 1925, 22% of the workers were Negroes.

Of the 25,000 mine workers in the Birmingham district three-fourths are colored. One-fourth of the miners in western Kentucky are Negroes, and there are 25,000 Negro miners in West Virginia.

The lumber industry in the South is composed almost entirely of Negro workers. Many Negro women and boys are employed in tobacco, mostly in re-handling. In the whole textile industry of the country 17,477 Negro men and 7,257 women are employed, mostly as draymen, scrubbers, and janitors. By special legislation in South Carolina a few years ago, complete segregation was enforced in all textile operations. In the southern cotton industry there are very few Negroes working at the machines, such work being reserved for the whites. It is a Jim Crow industry.

Negro women workers are used in many branches of industry to replace men at lower wages. Women are employed largely in the re-handling of tobacco in the South and in the cotton sorting rooms of the cotton mills. It is estimated that there are 16,000 Negro women in the New York laundry industry. There are 2,000 Negro women in the New York dress industry and there are large numbers of Negro women in the fruit canning and meat-packing industry in Chicago.

### *Without a Job*

The saying "last to be hired, first to be fired," is generally true for Negroes. In the North, it has sometimes paid the bosses to keep the Negroes at lower wages and fire the whites. However, in most cases, the Negro has been among the first to lose his job.

That unemployment is greater among Negro workers than among other workers is the conclusion of a survey conducted in 1931 by the National Urban League. The report covering 106 cities shows that in cities like New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Atlanta, and Memphis, from 20% to 30% of the working Negro



population is unemployed and has been for a year or more. In practically every city the percentage of Negro unemployed is from four to six times as high as for the city as a whole. In Philadelphia Negroes constitute 11% of the population and at least 20% of the unemployed, while in St. Louis they constitute 11% of the population and over 33% of the unemployed. Some 95% of the Negro building workers in St. Louis were reported out of work in December, 1931.

In the South, it is a deliberate policy to replace Negroes by whites. This process is breaking down the old lines drawn between Negro and white jobs. White workers are used by employers to take the place of Negroes at even lower wages. In many cities all city employees who are Negroes are being replaced by whites. As unemployment increased in 1930-32 contracts for public works made by state or city governments in the South often specified that only white workers were to be used, or a very small percentage of Negroes. In the distribution of the few charity relief jobs in southern cities, as well as in many northern cities, the Negro is discriminated against.

Negro and white workers are maliciously played against each other especially in times of unemployment. The southern press is full of propaganda about sending the Negro back to the land, giving his job to the white unemployed worker. On the other hand, the Department of Agriculture of the state of Alabama, faced with even a more serious situation on the farmlands, advocates sending the Negro off the land to permit the white farmer to "save" the agricultural situation. This agitation had led to actual bloody attacks by unemployed white workers and starving white farmers upon employed Negro workers. Instead of organizing and fighting together for relief, as they later did at England, Ark., white farmers of Lonoke County, in that state, in the fall of 1930 attacked a road camp of Negro road construction workers and forced the contractors to fire them. A number of such incidents occurred in the South during the crisis years. The white workers had been misled into this action by the campaign



of race hatred carried on by the southern ruling class in an effort to divert the attack from themselves.

### *On the Job*

On the job, race lines are tightly drawn. By paying Negro workers a lower wage than white workers for the same work, by having them do the most dangerous and difficult work, by forcing Negro and white to compete in the speed-up process, the employers have so far achieved their purpose—division of the workers. This results in greater profits and wage reductions, at the same time making it more difficult for the workers to organize and struggle effectively.

Here is a typical example of wage cutting. A white molder working in a Chattanooga pipe shop a few years ago received a wage of \$8 a day. His union refused to accept Negro members. His helper was a Negro, who in time became as skilled as he was. The white worker was fired and the Negro put in his place at a wage of \$4 a day. The union, as a result, is now non-existent.

The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry reports that in 1930 the average hourly rates of wages were lower for Negro than for white workers in all the industries of the state. In tobacco factories, for example, the male white worker received 54 cents an hour, the Negro 29 cents, the white woman worker 33 cents, and the colored woman worker 16 cents an hour. The employers discriminate against the Negro workers by giving them the lowest paying jobs while reserving the better paying jobs for white workers.

In the course of a day's work a white boss or foreman uses dozens of ways to discriminate against the Negro, in apportioning work, in speed driving, and by other methods. This all serves to divide the workers on the job and makes it more difficult for them to organize. If any one thinks this policy is not consciously followed by employers let him note the comment of a personnel manager of a large Chicago company. Asked why he hired both white and black workers, he said, "It makes fraternizing among the employees difficult." Note also the constant threat of the

white boss on almost any southern job when he wants to put across lower wages or more speed-up. "If you don't like it, there's a Nigger waiting for your job, and you don't want a Nigger to take it, do you?" And the other way, too: "If you don't like it, Nigger, get out! Plenty of white men just waiting for you to quit."

*White Misleadership in the A. F. of L.*

Discrimination by leaders of the American Federation of Labor has made it possible at times for the employers to use Negroes as strike-breakers. Treacherous union officials can thus be held partly responsible for keeping the working class divided and playing into the hands of the employers.

There are at least 26 national unions, including the railway brotherhoods, who by their constitutions or rituals exclude Negroes from membership. Other unions exclude Negroes in practice. Still others, which claim they do not discriminate against Negroes, restrict them to Jim Crow locals and discriminate against them in the distribution of jobs and union offices. Many indirect but equally vicious methods are used by the labor bureaucrats to exclude Negroes. The Plumbers and Steamfitters Union, for instance, excludes Negroes by means of the license law, forcing all applicants to pass a municipal examination before an examining board which often grants no licenses to Negroes. In other cases the union misleaders will set such restrictive conditions for Negro membership that the black worker is discouraged from the start. Where the Negro is permitted to join the union he is Jim-Crowed into separate locals or "auxiliary" locals and discriminated against on all sides by the white labor leaders, as in the case of the International Longshoremen's Association.

So consciously and persistently have the white officials turned the Negro away from the unions that the total Negro membership in all A. F. of L. unions is not more than 55,000 and probably less than 50,000.

### *Race Prejudice in Strikes*

From the very beginning of the Negro migration to the industrial centers the policies and practices of the reactionary labor officials have turned the Negro workers away from trade unionism. Because of this many strikes have been defeated, unions smashed, improvements in conditions of work lost, and the Negro workers made to look with suspicion even upon the organization efforts of honest and militant labor unions.

The employers use the color line to divide the working class. As early as 1855, and again in a number of eastern cities in 1863, the bosses imported Negroes to break dock strikes. Nationality divisions among white workers are likewise played upon by the capitalists for their own purposes, and whites are used much more frequently in efforts to break strikes than Negroes.

But always the Negro in the rôle of a strike-breaker is exaggerated both by the bosses and the labor misleaders, with a view to shifting the struggle from its basic class line to a "race line," thus confusing the workers and weakening them. During the teamsters' strike of 1905 in Chicago, for instance, there were 5,800 strike-breakers employed to replace 5,000 strikers. Of the strike-breakers only 800 were Negroes, but the newspapers carried greatly exaggerated accounts about the Negro strike-breakers, raising the heat of race prejudice among the strikers.

The longshoremen's strike in New Orleans in 1923 was broken with "rabbit" labor, that is workers who while not longshoremen, had received such training on the side. The majority of the strike-breakers were white, in a port where the Negroes are about three-fourths of the longshoremen. During the 1921 strike of organized Negro coal trimmers at Hampton, Va., the U. S. Shipping Board imported both white and Negro strike-breakers. In other strikes white scabs have been similarly used against Negro strikers. With the bosses it is a conscious policy of dividing the workers, of playing one group against another, of arousing race prejudice as a means to further suppression.

Although treacherous labor official policies have caused the



Negroes occasionally to act as strike-breakers, they have in other strikes been among the most militant of fighters. Negro lumber workers in Louisiana struck with white workers, in 1913, against the Southern Lumber Operators Association. With "complete and defiant solidarity," as described in a statement at the time, the strikers stood for many weeks against the great lumber trust. During the 1908 coal strike in Alabama, Negroes were the backbone of the struggle and they also played an important part in the coal strikes in the Birmingham areas in later years. They proved equally militant in the Chicago stockyards strike of 1921. During the 1927 coal strike Negroes played an active part in the left-wing movement. And Negroes were among the most militant fighters in the 1931 coal strike led by the National Miners Union. In recent dress strikes, in New York City, under the leadership of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, Negro women strikers played an important part. In the future, with a clear class-conscious militant union organization like the Trade Union Unity League to lead both white and black strikers, the Negro worker will show his true mettle as a working-class fighter.

### *"Race Leaders"*

Middle-class Negro leaders take the position that the Negro workers must depend primarily for advancement upon the white employers and not trust their fellow workers, Negro and white. This is how Professor Kelley Miller of Howard University, a Negro institution, expresses it: "For the Negro wantonly to flout their [the capitalists'] generous advances by joining the restless ranks which threaten industrial ruin would be fatuous suicide. . . . Whatever good or evil the future may hold in store for him, today's wisdom heedless of logical consistency demands that he stand shoulder to shoulder with the captains of industry."

The general attitude of the Negro church is summed up admirably by Bishop Carey: "I believe that the interest of my people lies with the wealth of the nation and with the class of white people who control it."



These "race leaders" act as scab-herders for the employers, betraying the Negro workers and striking blows at American labor. During the steel strike of 1919 a Negro minister at Gary, Ind., urged the Negro workers to return to the mills. He received a donation of \$2,000 from the United States Steel Corp. An itinerant Negro preacher turned up in Birmingham and fought against the organization of the miners, publishing an anti-labor sheet known as the *Southern Industrial Fraternal Review*. For this work he received donations totalling nearly \$4,000 from the mine owners. In the Hampton Roads section a Negro Y. M. C. A. secretary actively opposed the efforts of the longshoremen to organize the shipyard workers. It turned out that his salary and the main support of his "Y" came from the Newport News Shipyard. Numerous instances such as these can be gleaned from American labor history. Both to advance their own position as a middle class and at the same time gather in what dollars they can, these race leaders lick the boots of the white ruling class and stoop to the lowest forms of treachery and betrayal. Their very existence and function depends upon segregation, which reserves for them a special sphere for exploitation. The growing unity of white and Negro workers, wiping out Jim-Crowism in the process, threatens the position of the "race leaders" who are accordingly fighting this movement tooth and nail.

The basis for organizations like the Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association of the World, is found in a growing Negro middle class which has made its advances with the coöperation of the white rulers and at the expense of the Negro masses. The open anti-labor rôle of these "race leaders" in strikes we have already noted. They play the same rôle in every phase of the Negroes' struggle.

### *The Middle Class*

The growth of the Negro middle class in the Harlem section of New York City has been repeated in a lesser degree in other

northern cities. In 1909 there were only 309 Negro business places in the whole of Manhattan. But a survey made in that section of Harlem bounded by St. Nicholas Avenue, 155th Street, Madison Avenue, and 125th Street, in July, 1928, showed there were 1,260 Negro businesses and professional offices.

At the same time there has been a growing Negro official class connected with the dominant political machine in the northern cities. In 1917 there were only 172 Negroes employed by the city of New York. But there are now at least 750 Negroes, not including laborers and teachers, employed in various branches of the city administration. Over half of these are political appointees. Negro ward politicians have played an important part in the corrupt Tammany political machine; but they are also tied up with the no less crooked Republicans in this and other cities.

It is from the same capitalists who have fostered and supported the Negro middle class as an ally in stemming dissatisfaction and resentment that organizations like the Urban League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Tuskegee Institute, receive their main financial support. Rockefeller, together with other strike-breaking millionaires, is on the board of trustees of Tuskegee and is a heavy contributor to the Urban League. With his Dunbar model apartments in Harlem and the Dunbar bank he is building a Negro business under his direct control.

The Urban League became notorious for its scab-herding activities during the steel strike of 1919 and in many other strikes in northern cities. It was likewise active against the Pullman porters, a purely Negro union, in its efforts to organize in Chicago during 1926. For blocking this organization, the Chicago branch received large contributions from the Pullman Company.

Marcus Garvey plays the game of American imperialism with his back-to-Africa movement and his Universal Negro Improvement Association. He preaches coöperation with the white ruling class at home and enslavement of American Negroes on Firestone's plantations in Liberia. Garvey says, "If the Negro takes my advice he will organize by himself and always keep his scale

of wages a little lower than the whites until he is able to become, through proper leadership, his own employer; by doing so he will keep the good-will of the white employer and live a little longer under the present scheme of things." This is selling out, bag and baggage, to the white ruling class.

Under the pressure of a sharp mass struggle for Negro rights led by the Communist Party during the past years the Negro reformist and middle class elements have demonstrated more clearly than ever their philosophy of social betrayal. Fighting to retain their waning influence over the Negro masses, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People opened a campaign against the Communists and the International Labor Defense. This campaign, in connection with the Scottsboro case, developed into open coöperation between the police departments of Chattanooga, Birmingham, Atlanta, and a number of northern cities, and the local agents of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The program of the N. A. A. C. P. was inspired by the teachings of Booker T. Washington and others of his disciples. It was expressed by William Pickens, field secretary of the N. A. A. C. P., in a speech in Chattanooga during the Scottsboro campaign and later given more polished treatment by Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois in the September, 1931, issue of *The Crisis*, official organ of the organization. In essence it is this: You "ignorant" Negro toilers are being fooled by Red promises. Look to the rich whites for help. The poor whites are your enemies. Become "white men's Niggers" and don't disturb the peace and harmony of the existing relations between the white ruling class and the Negro upper class.

This is but a further development of the traditional program of the "race leaders." But this program of betrayal becomes more open and emphatic in a period when the Negro masses are turning to Communist leadership.

In Chicago, local N. A. A. C. P. leaders coöperated with the Negro real estate men and the police in attacking Negro and



white workers fighting against evictions. This coöperation resulted in the Chicago massacre of August, 1931, when three Negro unemployed workers were murdered as police without provocation fired into a demonstration against evictions. During the same month, Negro business men, preachers, and other "race leaders" of Birmingham, joined the lynch mob which used the pretext of the killing of two white society women by a Negro highwayman, to institute a reign of terror against Negro workers and the Communist Party. These Negro misleaders offered rewards for the arrest of the Negro, directed police to the homes of Negro Communists, and can be held partly responsible for the murder of 75 Negroes and the mass arrests during this period. During the Camp Hill events they played a similar part. Instead of attacking the slave conditions among the croppers they joined with the white ruling class in accusing the Communists of causing bloodshed and strife.

### *"White Supremacy"*

To justify the severe economic exploitation of the millions of Negro workers and tenant farmers; and at the same time to secure the support of the white workers in attacking the Negroes, the white ruling class of the country has deliberately cultivated the idea of "white superiority." This notion which pervades every phase of the relations between white and black, originated in the days of slavery. Then the white landowners of the South used it to draw a distinct line of division between their slaves and the poor white farmers whose conditions were in many cases even worse than those of the slaves, being economically dependent on the large plantation owners through credits and rents. The animus of the small white farmer was thus turned against the Negro slave, who, he was led to believe, was the direct cause of his misery. Today, when capitalism inevitably causes mass unemployment and misery, the white worker of the South is still told that the Negro is to blame. Not only in the South, but in northern communities as well, the doctrine of white supremacy is used to separate white and Negro workers.



In the army also the American imperialist government takes good care to segregate the Negro soldiers into Jim Crow regiments, where they are insulted and mistreated by white ruling

*Jim Crow in the Army*

In the North the Negro is also segregated, ostracized, and persecuted. With the growth of the Negro proletariat in the North and the fostering of race prejudice by the employers for their own ends, many elements of the southern "white superiority" idea and Jim Crow system function just as viciously.

From the moment of his birth, the child of a white worker in the South drinks in race prejudice. Segregation is a universal rule—hospital, home, school, street-car, railway station, railroad, place of amusement, factory—in all these places the ruling class takes good care to draw the race line. There are legal ordinances in practically every southern city preventing fraternization of the races, providing for Jim Crow in amusement places, in housing, and the like. In six southern states intermarriage is prohibited by the state constitution, and 29 states have laws prohibiting intermarriage, although 80% of the American Negroes show a mixture with white blood.

A whole system of segregation and Jim Crow laws and practices has been made a part of southern life. The Negro is looked upon as a virtual outcast, "only a Nigger," who because of his "so evident inferiority" should be fortunate if he escapes a lynching party or the stray bullet of a policeman or overseer. This brutal system of persecution and tyranny is created by the capitalist class of the South. The more severe the economic exploitation the more severe all forms of oppression. Peonage on the southern farms is enforced by rope and faggot, by the state and the courts of "justice" run by white men. Poverty in the cities needs chain gangs and vagrancy laws and bullets. The Negro can be kept at his lower economic level to be used against white workers, only by this method of suppression. Because of this violent oppression the Negro workers are fast becoming the foremost revolutionary fighters.

class officers and made to slave in labor battalions. During the last war regiments of Negroes, who were induced to serve by their own misleaders with glib promises of liberation, were thrust into slaughter without sufficient training or equipment, as in the battle of the Argonne Forest. They were used as shock troops with medical attention refused them by the white doctors and nurses.

Thirteen members of the 24th Infantry were executed after the revolt of that regiment against persecution of Negroes in Houston, Texas, during the war. And on the return of the Negro soldiers from France, they were subjected to one of the fiercest reigns of lynch law ever witnessed in this country, Negro soldiers being lynched in uniform.

The government at Washington Jim Crowed the Negro Gold Star mothers on their trip to France to visit the graves of their sons.

In the autumn of 1931 the War Department began disarming and disbanding the 24th and 25th Infantry and the 9th and 10th Cavalry, Negro regiments stationed in the South, and distributing their members in labor battalions among the white troops. This action was taken as a precaution against fraternization of these troops with the Negro croppers and workers during a winter of bitter starvation and struggle. This, however, does not mean that the government will not make every effort to enroll Negroes into the army to fight the next war on promises of liberation just as in the last war. And the "race leaders" and Negro reformists of the N. A. A. C. P. will support the war just as they did the last imperialist slaughter.

### *Lynch Law*

Southern whites display their "superiority" by the most brutal lynching orgies at the root of which can always be found some economic purpose. Most lynchings take place in the farm regions where rope or flame is used to get rid of a more militant Negro who demands settlement on the crop or more advances from his landowner on which to keep himself and his family

alive. Or a lynching may serve to terrorize a whole community of Negro share-croppers, who have shown signs of rebellion. Lynch methods are used also to drive out of a community small Negro farm owners who have dared to make a living out of their land.

Between 1885 and 1927 some 3,248 Negro lynchings were recorded, and 90 of those lynched were women. The League of Struggle for Negro Rights reports 79 recorded lynchings for 1931, almost twice the number for 1930. With the increased severity of the economic crisis the ruling class intensifies its terror against the Negro toilers.

Special laws, like vagrancy and loitering laws, are used by the white ruling class to pick up both white and Negro workers in the cities and towns. The victims are forced into chain gangs under the most torturous conditions or are leased to private plantation owners. Forced labor can be found in all sections of the South. Brushy Mountain coal mines, owned by the state of Tennessee and worked by prisoners; the chain gang camps and stockades; the state farms and the private plantations working prison labor—these are living hells where the most cruel tortures are practiced on the prisoners.

Called upon recently to offer some answer to protests aroused by the increasing number of lynchings in the South, various inter-racial commissions and state governors have declared themselves to be horrified and have urged a stop to lynchings. But their program is essentially "better and stricter laws to 'get the Nigger.'" It would please their delicate senses more to have the Negro burnt legally in the electric chair than at the stake or on top of a schoolhouse at the hands of a mob. The southern courts will, without the slightest evidence, send Negroes to the electric chair or sentence them to life imprisonment or years of prison servitude. Lynchings take place legally, too. The state of North Carolina in 1930 electrocuted 15 Negroes in one week. The state of Alabama wiped out what was left of the Robertson family of share-croppers, after a lynch mob had taken four of



their number. Numerous Negroes are shot down by policemen on the slightest excuse, such as "resisting arrest."

The Scottsboro case—which has aroused world indignation after being dramatized and popularized by the International Labor Defense and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights—is but typical of legal lynch law methods and the forms of persecution used by the ruling class in the suppression of the Negro people. Nine young Negro boys—two of them but 13 years of age, another 14 and the oldest 20—were taken off a freight train at Paint Rock, Ala., April 6, 1931, and charged with raping two notorious white prostitutes. After a rapid indictment and arraignment, eight of the boys were sentenced to the electric chair within 72 hours, while a lynch mob of 10,000 surrounded the courthouse. An attorney was hired by the Chattanooga ministers alliance to defend the boys and betrayed them. Later the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People declared proudly that it had retained this attorney. The innocence of the boys was indisputably established by the International Labor Defense, and the defense movement, broadening into a wider struggle for Negro rights, has taken on world proportions. Mrs. Ada Wright, mother of two of the boys, was greeted by thousands of workers on her tour in Germany, despite the efforts of Socialist officials in the government to ban her meetings on the request of the State Department of the United States. At Chemnitz, Germany, one worker was killed when police tried to break the Scottsboro demonstration. While the case is being carried to the Supreme Court of the United States, the mass defense movement spreads rapidly.

### *"Democratic Rights"*

The so-called democratic rights—participation in primaries and elections, holding office and jury service—are denied the Negro in the South. He is barred from the polls by terrorism, as well as by various legal methods such as poll tax of two or three dollars, which many are unable to pay. Or certain property requirements may exclude him. In Alabama a worker must own

40 acres of land or \$300 worth of taxable property before he may vote. Or there may be a literacy or constitution test under which the voter is supposed to know by heart a certain section of the state constitution or be able to read and write. As a result the Negro is kept from the polls except in those cases where he is herded together by some political boss, white or black, and made to vote for one candidate or the other. In Louisiana, during the 1928 elections there were only 595 registered Negro voters in the state. By use of the white man's primary and one-party domination in the South the Negroes are excluded from participation in both state and national elections. During the 1930 state elections, however, the Communist Party succeeded in obtaining 3,392 votes for Sherman Bell, Negro, its candidate for Governor of Tennessee.

### *Class Solidarity*

The Communist Party and the militant union center, the Trade Union Unity League, both in program and in action, carry on an uncompromising fight against all forms of economic and social inequality. The fight is based upon solidarity in organization and in struggle. The League of Struggle for Negro Rights, reorganized from the American Negro Labor Congress at its St. Louis convention in November, 1930, is pledged to carry on the fight for Negro rights in a wider field.

The Communist Party has shown to the Negro workers again and again that it is on no basis of condescension but of absolute equality that Negro workers are urged to join it and follow its direction in struggle. It recognizes that the struggle of the Negroes for liberation is a special phase of the struggle of the whole working class against capitalism. White Communists have been expelled from the Party, as unfit members, for showing in any way traces of the ruling class "white superiority" or for displaying race prejudice. The open trial and expulsion from the Party of A. Yokinien of New York City, a Finnish janitor, for not protesting the eviction of Negro workers at his workers' club, has convinced many Negroes that the Party means what

it says. Others have been expelled for the same attitude toward their Negro fellow-workers.

The Party's organization of Negro and white workers together and its work in the Black Belt of Alabama, South Carolina, and Georgia under the most dangerous terror conditions, has convinced many Negro workers and farmers, distrustful of whites, that the Party vigorously combats the treacherous ideas and practices of the labor fakers and the prejudices of the ruling class. The work in the South shows that even native white workers, once they understand how race prejudice is used by the bosses against the working class as a whole, actually organize and fight shoulder to shoulder with the Negro toilers.

In the organization of the T. U. U. L. unions no compromise whatsoever is made with ruling class prejudice that may have found its way into the ranks of the workers. The Party stands unflinchingly on a program of full economic, social, and political equality, fighting segregation, Jim Crow and lynch law. It urges the white workers to take a leading part in the struggle for Negro rights and calls for the organization of defense groups of white and Negro workers to fight lynching and terror. It fights against the misleadership of the "race leaders" as well as of the A. F. of L. In the leading bodies and committees of the Communist Party and revolutionary unions Negro workers play an important rôle and in all committees delegated by demonstrations to present demands to the authorities Negro workers participate actively. Negro candidates appear on the Communist ticket in all election campaigns. In the 1932 presidential elections its candidate for Vice-President is James Ford, a Negro born in Alabama and a prominent Communist.

### *Struggle for Right of Self-Determination*

Communists understand clearly that the Negroes, who suffer super-exploitation and persecution as an oppressed people or nationality, can only attain full equality with other peoples of the world by a struggle against the white ruling class, against which the white workers are also struggling. The struggle



of the mass of Negroes in the Black Belt of the South against semi-feudal exploitation and ruling class tyranny can be effective only insofar as it is directed along the lines of a struggle for the right of self-determination, without which full equal rights are impossible. By this is meant the right of the Negroes in the stretch of land known as the Black Belt, to exercise governmental authority over this entire territory and determine their relationship to other governments, especially the United States government, including the right of separation if so desired. This necessarily includes the demand for the withdrawal of the armed forces of American imperialism from this territory.

So sharp is the suppression of the credit and tenant system in the Black Belt that the struggle of the rural Negro masses for even the slightest improvement in their conditions must necessarily follow the path of a struggle for the right of self-determination, without which the exploitation of the tenant system cannot be wiped out.

The slightest struggle of Negro tenants and croppers to free themselves from the chains of the tenant system, brings them in direct clash with the white landowners and credit class, and necessarily raises sharply the question of who shall own the land and the means of agricultural production.

This basic contradiction can only be solved in the course of an agrarian revolution in the Black Belt when the Negro farm tenants and poor farmers will dislodge the white landowning class and take possession of the land and the farm stock and tools. With these basic weapons in their hands, they will be able to set up their own government and obtain full liberation.

The fight for the right of self-determination in the Black Belt, the basis of the struggle for Negro rights all over the country, will develop in the proper direction only insofar as the white and Negro workers lead and direct it, freeing the rural masses from the influence of the false race leaders, and guaranteeing the uninterrupted maturing of the struggle until it achieves the liberation of the Negro people. The rapidly developing struggles of colonial peoples throughout the world—in China, India, Africa and in the

semi-colonies and colonies of Wall Street imperialism—are hastening the decline of world capitalism already undermined by the deep economic crisis. With the example of the Soviet Union—where the formerly oppressed minor nationalities enjoy the full opportunities for self-directed development as the result of the proletarian revolution—the oppressed peoples of the world, including the Negro toilers of this country, are forming a united front with the world proletariat in the struggle for liberation.

White and Negro workers, North and South, in joint struggle, can and must obtain Negro liberation. Only to the extent that the white workers discard the capitalist poison of race prejudice, and clasp the hand of their Negro fellow-workers in common struggle, will there develop an effective struggle against unemployment, speed-up, wage-cuts, and all the persecutions of the capitalist system. Only a unified working class can obtain full liberation for the masses. As long as the working class permits itself to be divided on national lines no definite mass progress will be made. As Marx said in *Capital*: “Labor with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labor with a black skin is branded.”

That the Negro worker is now beginning to distinguish between his white employer enemy and his white worker brother is shown by the growing support given the Communist Party by the Negroes. That the white worker is beginning to realize the significance of race prejudice and is ready to act on a basis of full solidarity is shown by the recent mass outpourings of white and Negro workers in tremendous demonstrations against the murder by the police of Negro unemployed workers resisting evictions in Cleveland and Chicago. It is also shown in the united massing of the Negro and white workers in the historic Hunger March to demand bread and unemployment insurance of the capitalist government at Washington on December 7, 1931. On the basis of such militant actions the working class will be united, black and white, in an unbreakable struggle against capitalism which enslaves all toilers.

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