

Group 1: Black Migrant Workers from the South—Handout 1 (page 1 of 29)

Directions

- Pretend that it is 1917 and you are black migrants from the South now working in the North.
 - Review the questions with your group.
 - Read excerpts from primary source documents in the “Group 1” file in the online folder for this class (or access the file at https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/Education/Lessons/pdf/maps/Group1_BlackMigrants.pdf).
 - Consider the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of your assigned category and answer the questions from the perspective of those people.
 - Combine your answers to create a perspectives page for your assigned category.
 - Decide who will do each of the following jobs:
 - Record agreed-upon answers: Number the questions on the sticky-note paper and write the group’s answers.
 - Find PACED-model alternatives: List alternatives for black southern workers considering migration to the North.
 - Find PACED-model criteria: List criteria for black southern workers considering migration to the North.
 - Apply the economic terms: Identify how the given economic terms apply to the acceleration of the Great Migration.
 - Check sources: Locate the answers in the specific documents.
1. **What factors caused a labor surplus in the South?**
 2. **What factors contributed to balancing the labor supply between the surplus in the South and the shortage in the North?**
 3. **What changes in conditions were evident for migrants in the North after the acceleration of the Great Migration?**
 4. **What changes in conditions were evident in the South for those who stayed behind after the acceleration of the Great Migration?**

Economic Concepts		
Factors of production	Scarcity	Surplus
• Natural resources	Supply	Human capital
• Labor	Demand	Opportunity cost
• Capital resources	Shortage	

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 Visual 1: PACED Decisionmaking Model

PACED Decisionmaking Model						
Alternatives	Criteria					Totals
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration During the War* by **Emmett J. Scott***

“Editor’s Preface,” David Kinley, page iii

I think that no one more capable than Dr. Emmett J. Scott could have been found to present to the public a study on the subject of this monograph. The topic is one of great public importance, and the author is equipped for its treatment both by his wide knowledge of the subject and his sympathy with the viewpoint of his race.

The problem of negro labor, its diffusion and its adaptation to more numerous kinds of work, are problems not only of great public importance but of great difficulty. Whatever views one may hold on the general subject of race relations between the negroes and the whites in this country, there is no question that we can not reach safe conclusions without a full knowledge of the facts as they appear to both of the interested parties. For that reason this presentation by Dr. Scott is a welcome addition to our information on the subject.

Sympathetically read it will help the whites to understand better the negro viewpoint, and will help the negroes to appreciate more fully the difficulties which appear from the white viewpoint. This is a field in which Tennyson’s words are preeminently true, that “Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.” Yet we can not hope ever to attain the necessary wisdom excepting by an increasing fulness of knowledge. Therefore I commend this study to every one who is interested in the question for dispassionate reading and consideration.

*Scott, Emmett J. *Negro Migration During the War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1920.

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Excerpt from ***Negro Migration During the War*** by **Emmett J. Scott**

Chapter III: Stimulation of the Movement

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In answer to the warnings of the South against the rigors of the northern winters, the *Defender* [newspaper] said:

To die from the bite of frost is far more glorious than at the hands of a mob. I beg you, my brother, to leave the benighted land. You are a free man. Show the world that you will not let false leaders lead you. Your neck has been in the yoke. Will you continue to keep it there because some “white folks’ nigger” wants you to? Leave for all quarters of the globe. Get out of the South. Your being there in the numbers in which you are gives the southern politician too strong a hold on your progress... So much has been said through the white papers in the South about the members of the race freezing to death in the North. They freeze to death down South when they don’t take care of themselves. There is no reason for any human staying in the Southland on this bugaboo handed out by the white press.¹

If you can freeze to death in the North and be free, why freeze to death in the South and be a slave, where your mother, sister and daughter are raped and burned at the stake; where your father, brother and sons are treated with contempt and hung to a pole, riddled with bullets at the least mention that he does not like the way he is treated. Come North then, all you folks, both good and bad. If you don’t behave yourselves up here, the jails will certainly make you wish you had. For the hard-working man there is plenty of work—if you really want it. The *Defender* says come.²

¹ The following clippings are taken from these white papers:

“Aged Negro Frozen to Death—Albany, Ga., February 8.

“Yesterday the dead body of Peter Crowder, an old negro, was found in out-of-the-way place where he had been frozen to death during the recent cold snap.”—*Macon Telegraph*.

“Dies from Exposure—Spartanburg, S. C., February 6.

“Marshall Jackson, a negro man, who lived on the farm of J.T. Harris near Campobello, Sunday night froze to death.”—*South Carolina State*.

“Negro Frozen to Death in Fireless Gretna Hut.

“Coldest weather in the last four years claimed a victim Friday night, when Archie Williams, a negro, was frozen to death in his bed in a little hut in the outskirts of Gretna.”—*New Orleans Item*, February 4.

“Negro Woman Frozen to Death Monday.

“Harriet Tolbert, an aged negro woman, was frozen to death in her home at 18 Garibaldi Street early Monday morning during the severe cold.”—*Atlanta Constitution*, February 6.

² Articles such as the following kept alive the spirit of the exodus:

“Tampa, Florida, January 19. J.T. King, supposed to be a race leader, is using his wits to get on the good side of the white people by calling a meeting to urge our people not to migrate north. King has been termed a ‘good nigger’ by his pernicious activity on the emigration question. Reports have been received here that all who have gone north are at work and pleased with the splendid conditions in the North. It is known here that in the North there is a scarcity of labor; mills and factories are open to them. People are not paying any attention to King and are packing and ready to travel north to the ‘promised land.’”

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“The foreign laborer has been called home to bear arms for his country. The daily death toll [from World War I] and waste and the recently enacted immigration law make it certain that he will not soon return in great numbers. As a result a large market exists for the negro laborer in localities in which he would have been considered an impudent trespasser had he attempted to enter a few years ago. The history of the world from the days of Moses to the present shows that where one race has been subjugated, oppressed or proscribed by another and exists in large numbers, permanent relief has come in one or two ways—amalgamation or migration. The thought of amalgamation is not to be entertained. If conditions in the South for the colored man are to be permanently improved, many of those who now live there should migrate and scatter throughout the North, East and West. I believe the present opportunity providential.”—Hon. John C. Ashbury, Philadelphia Bar.

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration During the War* by **Emmett J. Scott**

Chapter V: The Call of the Self-Sufficient North

Pages 52-53

The following is a statement taken from reports of the Bureau of Foreign Immigration.

Immigration Since 1913

Year	Number
1913	1,197,892
1914	1,218,480
1915.....	326,700
1916.....	298,826
1917.....	295,403

The decrease of over 900,000 immigrants, on whom the industries of the North depended, caused a grave situation. It must be remembered also that of the 295,403 arrivals in 1917, there were included 32,346 English, 24,405 French and 13,350 Scotch who furnish but a small quota of the laboring classes. There were also 16,438 Mexicans who came over the border, and who, for the most part, live and work in the Southwest. The type of immigration which kept prime the labor market of the North and Northwest came in through Ellis Island. Of these, Mr. Frederick C. Howe, Commissioner of Immigration, said that “only enough have come to balance those who have left.” He adds further that “As a result, there has been a great shortage of labor in many of our industrial sections that may last as long as the war.”

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration During the War* by **Emmett J. Scott**

Chapter VI: The Draining of the Black Belt

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The interstate migration has resulted from the land poverty of the hill country and from intimidation of the “poor whites” in Amite, Lincoln, Franklin and Wilkinson counties [in Mississippi]. In 1908 when the floods and boll weevil worked such general havoc in the southwestern corner of the State, labor agents the Delta went down and carried away thousands of families. It is estimated that more than 8,000 negroes left Adams county during the first two years of the boll weevil period. Census figures for 1910 show that the southwestern counties suffered a loss of 18,000 negroes. The migration of recent years to adjacent States has been principally to Arkansas.¹

¹ The reasons back of this, as obtained from migrants themselves, are that, except in the town of Mound Bayou, negroes have not been encouraged to own property or rent, but to work on shares; in Arkansas it is possible to buy good land cheaply and on reasonable terms; inducements are offered by Arkansas in the form of better treatment and schools; there are no such “excessive” taxes as are required in the Mississippi Delta to protect them from the overflows; the boll weevil has not yet seriously affected that State, and a small farmer may be fairly independent in Arkansas.

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Chapter VI: The Draining of the Black Belt

Page 66, Footnote 1

The lumber mills and the local corporations provide a great part of the work for laborers in the city. Wages last year ranged from \$1.25 to \$1.50 a day. Wages at present are \$1.75 and \$2 a day. Cotton picking last year brought 60 and 75 cents a hundred; at present \$2 is paid for every hundred pounds picked. The city has enacted “move on” laws intending to get rid of drones. The police, it is said, could not distinguish drones from “all negroes.”

It was further complained that the police deputies and sheriffs are too free with the use of their clubs and guns when a negro is involved. It was related that Dr.——, practicing 47 years in Greenville, Mississippi, was driving his buggy in a crowded street on circus day when he was commanded by a policeman to drive to one side and let a man pass. He replied that he could not because he himself was jammed. He was commanded again and then dragged from the buggy, clubbed and haled into the police court and fined. The officer who arrested him swore that he had given frequent trouble, which was untrue according to reliable testimony and his own statement. This incident is also told:

A policeman’s friend needed a cook. The policeman drove by a negro home and, seeing a woman on the porch, told her to get in the buggy. No questions were permitted. She was carried to his friend’s home and told to work. The woman prepared one meal and left the city for the North.— [Charles S.] Johnson, *Report on the Migration from Mississippi* [n. d.].

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Pages 68-69

It is an interesting fact that this migration from the South followed the path marked out by the Underground Railroad of antebellum days. Negroes from the rural districts moved first to the nearest village or town, then to the city. On the plantations it was not regarded safe to arrange for transportation to the North through receiving and sending letters. On the other hand, in the towns and cities there was more security in meeting labor agents. The result of it was that cities like New Orleans, Birmingham, Jacksonville, Savannah and Memphis became concentration points. From these cities migrants were rerouted along the lines most in favor.

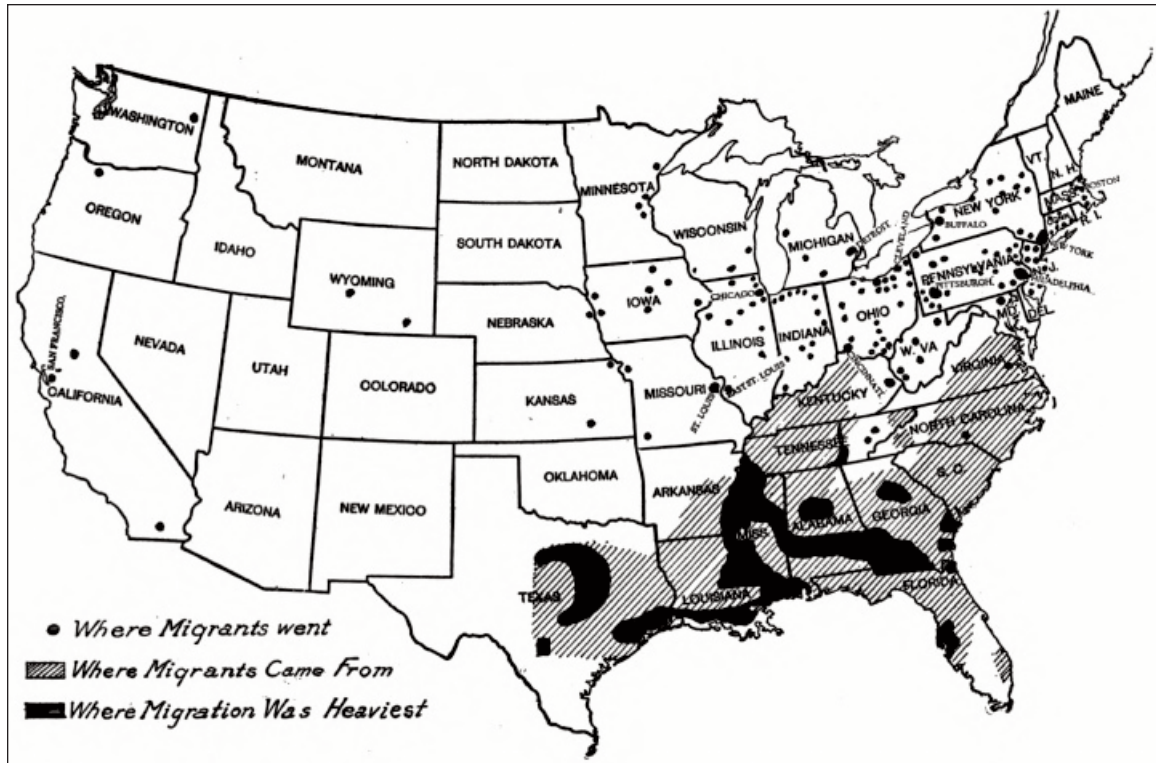
The principal difference between this course and the Underground Railroad was that in the later movement the southernmost States contributed the largest numbers. This perhaps is due in part to the selection of Florida and Georgia by the first concerns offering the inducement of free transportation, and at the same time it accounts for the very general and intimate knowledge of the movement by the people in States through which they were forced to pass. In Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for example, the first intimation of a great movement of negroes to the North came through reports that thousands of negroes were leaving Florida for the North. To the negroes of Florida, South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia the North means Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and New England. The route is more direct, and it is this section of the northern expanse of the United States that gets widest advertisement through tourists, and passengers and porters on the Atlantic coast steamers. The northern newspapers with the greatest circulation are from Pennsylvania and New York, and the New York colored weeklies are widely read. Reports from all of these south Atlantic States indicate that comparatively few persons ventured into the Northwest when a better known country lay before them.

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Chapter VII: Efforts to Check the Movement

Pages 78-79

...The federal authorities were importuned to stop the movement. They withdrew the assistance of the Employment Department, but admitted that they could not stop the interstate migration.¹

One remarked, however, "It will scarcely be possible, to make a sectional issue of these Columbus convictions, as the charge of 'enticing away of labor in that country is aimed at certain Arkansas planters who carried away several carloads of negroes to work on their places, leaving the Mississippi employers without the labor to gather or grow their crops. It can not, therefore, be interpreted as an attempt to keep the negro in semislavery in the South and prevent him from going to work at better wages in the northern munition factories; it is only an effort to protect Mississippi employers from Arkansas planters."²

...After having enforced these drastic measures without securing satisfactory results, and having seen that any attempt to hold the negroes by force resulted apparently in an increased determination to leave, there was resort to the policy of frightening the negroes away from the North by circulating rumors as to the misfortunes to be experienced there. Negroes were then warned against the rigors of the northern winter and the death rate from pneumonia and tuberculosis. Social workers in the North reported frequent cases of men with simple colds who actually believed that they had developed "consumption." Speakers who wished to discourage the exodus reported "exact" figures on the death rate of the migrants in the North that were astounding. As, for example, it was said by one Reverend Mr. Parks that there were 2,000 of them sick in Philadelphia. The editor of a leading white paper in Jackson, Mississippi, made the remark that he feared that the result of the first winter's experience in the North would prove serious to the South, in so far as it would remove the bugbear of the northern climate. The returned migrants were encouraged to speak in disparagement of the North and to give wide publicity to their utterances, emphasizing incidents of suffering reported through the press.

When such efforts as these failed, however, the disconcerted planters and business men of the South resorted to another plan. Reconciliation and persuasion were tried. Meetings were held and speakers were secured and advised what to say. In

¹ Johnson, *Report on the Migration from Mississippi* [n.d.].

² *Times Picayune*, New Orleans, October 1, 1916.

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cities and communities where contact on this plane had been infrequent, it was a bit difficult to approach the subject. The press of Georgia gave much space to the discussion of the movement and what ought to be done to stop it. The consensus of opinion of the white papers in the State was that the negro had not been fairly treated, and that better treatment would be one of the most effective means of checking the migration. Mob violence, it was pointed out, was one of the chief causes of the exodus.³

³ Johnson, *Report on the Migration from Mississippi* [n.d.].

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Chapter VII: Efforts to Check the Movement

Pages 83-84

It was found necessary to increase wages from ten to twenty-five per cent and in some cases as much as 100 per cent to hold labor. The reasons for migration given by negroes were sought. In almost all cases the chief complaint was about treatment. An effort was made to meet this by calling conferences and by giving publicity to the launching of a campaign to make unfair settlements and other such grievances unpopular. Thus, in Bolivar county, Mississippi, a meeting was called, ostensibly to look after the economic welfare of the Delta country, but in reality to develop some plan for holding labor. A subcommittee of seventeen men was appointed to look into the labor situation. There were twelve white men and five negroes. The subcommittee met and reported to the body that the present labor shortage was due to the migration, and that the migration was due to a feeling of insecurity before the law, the unrestrained action of mobs, unfair methods of yearly settlement on farms and inadequate school facilities. As a result of the report, it was agreed to make an appropriation of \$25,000 towards an agricultural high school, as a step towards showing an interest in the negroes of Bolivar county and thus give them reasons for remaining. A campaign was started to make unpopular the practice among farmers of robbing negroes of the returns from their labor, and a general effort was made by a few of the leading men behind the movement to create "a better feeling" between the races.

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Chapter VIII: Effects of the Movement on the South

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The first changes wrought by this migration were unusually startling. Homes found themselves without servants, factories could not operate because of the lack of labor, farmers were unable to secure laborers to harvest their crops. Streets in towns and cities once crowded assumed the aspect of deserted thoroughfares, houses in congested districts became empty, churches, lodges and societies suffered such a large loss of membership that they had to close up or undergo reorganization.

Probably the most striking change was the unusual increase in wages. The wages for common labor in Thomasville, Georgia, increased almost certainly 100 per cent. In Valdosta there was a general increase in the town and county of about 50 per cent, in Brunswick and Savannah the same condition obtained. The common laborer who had formerly received 80 cents a day earned thereafter \$1.50 to \$1.75. Farm hands working for from \$10 to \$15 per month were advanced to \$20 or \$35 per month. Brick masons who had received 50 cents per hour thereafter earned 62 1/2 cents and 70 cents per hour. In Savannah common laborers paid as high as \$2 per day were advanced to \$3. At the sugar refinery the rates were for women, 15 to 22 cents per hour, men, 22 to 30 cents per hour. In the more skilled lines of work, the wages were for carpenters, \$4 to \$6 per day, painters, \$2.50 to \$4 per day, and bricklayers \$4 to \$5 per day.

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For those who remained conditions were much more tolerable, although there appeared to persist a feeling of apprehension that these concessions would be retracted as soon as normal times returned. Some were of the opinion that the exodus was of more assistance to those negroes who stayed behind than to those who went away.

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The negroes, too, are very much in demand in the South and the intelligent whites will gladly give them larger opportunities to attach them to that section, knowing that the blacks, once conscious of their power to move freely throughout the country wherever they may improve their condition, will never endure hardships like those formerly inflicted upon the race. The South is already learning that the negro is the most desirable labor for that section, that the persecution of negroes not only drives them out but makes the employment of labor such a problem that the South will not be an attractive section for capital. It will, therefore, be considered the duty of business men to secure protection to the negroes lest their ill treatment force them to migrate to the extent of bringing about a stagnation of business.

The exodus has driven home the truth that the prosperity of the South is at the mercy of the negro. Dependent on cheap labor, which the bulldozing whites will not readily furnish, the wealthy southerners must finally reach the position of regarding themselves and the negroes as having a community of interests which each must promote. "Nature itself in those States," Douglass said, "came to the rescue of the negro. He had labor, the South wanted it, and must have it or perish. Since he was free he could then give it, or withhold it; use it where he was, or take it elsewhere, he pleased. His labor made him a slave and his labor could, if he would, make him free, comfortable and independent. It is more to him than either fire, sword, ballot boxes or bayonets. It touches the heart of the South through its pocket." Knowing that the negro has this silent weapon to be used against his employer or the community, the South is already giving the race better educational facilities, better railway accommodations, and will eventually, if the advocacy of certain southern newspapers be heeded, grant them political privileges. Wages in the South, therefore, have risen even in the extreme southwestern States, where there is an opportunity to import Mexican labor. Reduced to this extremity, the southern aristocrats have begun to lose some of their race prejudice, which has not hitherto yielded to reason or philanthropy.

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Chapter XIV: Public Opinion Regarding the Migration

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Among those holding the view that the South needed the negro was the [October 5, 1916] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. Concerning this an editorial in this paper said that not only does the South need the negro, but that he should be encouraged to stay.

The enormous demand for labor and the changing conditions brought about by the boll weevil in certain parts of the South have caused an exodus of negroes which may be serious. Great colonies of negroes have gone north to work in factories, in packing houses and on the railroads.

Some of our friends think that these negroes are being taken north for the purpose of voting them in November. Such is not the case. The restriction of immigration because of the European war and the tremendous manufacturing and industrial activity in the North have resulted in a scarcity of labor. The negro is a good track hand. He is also a good man around packing houses, and in certain elementary trades he is useful. The South needs every able-bodied negro that is now south of the line, and every negro who remains south of the line will in the end do better than he will do in the North.

The negro has been a tremendous factor in the development of agriculture and all the commerce of the South. But in the meantime, if we are to keep him here, and if we are to have the best use of his business capacity, there is a certain duty that the white man himself must discharge in his relation to the negro.

The business of lynching negroes is bad, and we believe it is declining, but the worst thing is that the wrong negro is often lynched. The negro should be protected in all his legal rights. Furthermore, in some communities, some white people make money at the expense of the negro's lack of intelligence. Unfair dealing with the negro is not a custom in the South. It is not the rule, but here and there the taking of enormous profits from the labor of the negro is known to exist.

It should be so arranged that the negro in the city does not have to raise his children in the alleys and in the streets.

Liquor in the cities has been a great curse to negroes.

Millions of dollars have been made by no account white people selling no account liquor to negroes and thus making a whole lot of negroes no account. Happily this business is being extinguished.

The negroes who are in the South should be encouraged to remain there, and those white people who are in the boll weevil territory should make every sacrifice to keep their negro labor until there can be adjustments to the new and quickly prosperous conditions that will later exist.

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The [July 1, 1917] *New Republic* of New York City pointed out that the movement gave the negro a chance and that he, the South and the nation, would in the end, all be gainers.

When Austria found the Serbian reply inadmissible, the American negro, who had never heard of Count Berchtold, and did not care whether Bosnia belonged to Austria or Siam, got his “chance.” It was not the sort of chance that came to the makers of munitions—a chance to make millions. It was merely a widening of a very narrow foothold on life, a slightly better opportunity to make his way in the industrial world of America.

In the beginning such a migration of negroes would increase the present race friction in the North. Within certain limits a racial minority is unpopular directly in proportion to its numbers. Only as it increases to the point where political and economic power makes it formidable, does it overcome opposition. The negro’s competition for jobs and homes will probably exacerbate relations. As the negroes increased in numbers they would not only seek menial and unskilled work, but also strive to enter skilled trades where they would meet with antagonism of white workers. Moreover, the negroes would be forced to seek homes in what are now regarded as “white” neighborhoods, and a clamor would be raised at each new extension of their dwelling area.

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration in 1916-17* by R.H. Leavell, et al. *

“Introduction,” by J.H. Dillard, pages 10-12

...Many immigrants from Europe and most of the colored people in our southern States are within the definition of those who had the least chance of improvement through power, education, or inheritance. What can be done for extending their chances of improvement is a matter of supreme importance. The Negro migration may or may not be a step toward the attainment of better chances, but it is at any rate a most interesting effort in this direction, and should be recognized as such in our thoughts on the subject.

These thoughts recurred to my mind while talking with a colored man in Cincinnati, and while looking over the rolls of new admissions to a colored school in Philadelphia. I had just come up from the South with my mind full of the opinion, which I still hold, that the South is the best home for the masses of our Negro population. I was making my way near nightfall toward a railroad station in Cincinnati, and stopping to inquire the nearest way was accosted by a polite colored man who said he was going to the same station and would gladly show me the way. I found that he had been six months in the city, had moved from Atlanta, had a good job in some iron-works, had brought his wife and three children, and was making for the station to meet his brother for whom he had secured a position in the same plant. He himself had come through correspondence with a friend who had lived for some time in Cincinnati. He stated that he was getting better wages, and that he was paying the same rent for a better house. He gave no cause for moving other than the desire, as he said, “to better himself.” In view of various reports in regard to housing conditions, this man’s experience may have been exceptional in this respect, but at any rate he was apparently much pleased with his move, and I could not but think that he was to be commended for his desire and effort “to better himself.”

A few days later I visited the Durham School in Philadelphia, a large public school for colored children. I thought that the new enrollment would probably afford some information as to new arrivals in that city. The principal had enrolled the new pupils on sheets containing 50 names, and he had been careful to enter opposite each name the place from which the pupil came. I took six of these sheets at random and found that one of them had 26 names of children who had been brought within the past year from various States of the South— Georgia, Alabama, Virginia, etc. The lowest number of names of recent arrivals found on any one of the six sheets was 21. In other words, among the new pupils there were between 40 and

*Leavell, R.H.; Snively, T.R.; Woofter, T.J. Jr.; Williams, W.T.B.; Tyson, Francis D. and Dillard, J.H. *Negro Migration in 1916-17*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary Division of Negro Economics, 1920.

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50 per cent who were newcomers, and all these from the South. I was surprised at the number, and could not but realize that the parents who had migrated to that city showed a commendable desire to give their children the benefit of education. I am inclined to the opinion that the desire to secure better opportunities for “schooling” has been one of the influential causes of the migration, certainly among the better class of Negroes who have moved. For it is an undoubted fact that the movement has embraced Negroes of all grades; many herded together by labor agents and many who have moved separately and of their own initiative.

On this subject, as well as on the other facts regarding the migration, I must refer to the reports. I had thought to collate these reports, but have concluded that it is better to let each writer’s facts and inferences be read in his own setting.

It may be well, however, to bring together here a few of the statements in regard to certain leading questions:

1. The number.—The movement had been well under way for some time before anyone thought of making an effort to secure statistics. Moreover, so many left separately and unobserved that to get complete statistics would at any time have been impracticable. Mr. Leavell says that “any numerical estimate must be based on such scanty data as to have no scientific value.” Mr. Snively estimates 75,000 left Alabama within 18 months, but adds that “except in a few particular instances it is impossible to give numbers with scientific accuracy.” Mr. Woofter estimates the number leaving Georgia between May, 1916, and September, 1917, at 35,000 to 40,000, but says that “a numerical estimate of the total number must be an approximation.” Mr. Williams gives 50,000 for Georgia, quoting the commissioner of commerce and labor; 90,000 for Alabama, quoting the commissioner of agriculture; and 100,000 for Mississippi, according to officials of insurance companies, and 75,000 according to the editor of the *Jackson Daily News*. Prof. Tyson says that “within certain limits one guess is as good as another.” I should be inclined to set the limits at 150,000 and 350,000 and my guess would be 200,000. The number of those who have returned South is equally uncertain. Some say 10 per cent; some say as much as 30 per cent.

2. The cause.—That the lack of labor at the North, due mainly to the ceasing of immigration from Europe, was the occasion of the migration all agree. The causes assigned at the southern end are numerous: General dissatisfaction with conditions, ravages of boll weevil, floods, change of crop system, low wages, poor houses on plantations, poor school facilities, unsatisfactory crop settlements, rough treatment, cruelty of the law officers, unfairness in courts, lynching, desire for travel, labor agents, the Negro press, letters from friends in the North, and finally advice of white friends in the South where crops had failed. All of these causes have been

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mentioned, and doubtless each cause mentioned has had its influence in individual cases. A discussion of these causes will be found in the reports, none of which give as much prominence to the influence of labor agents as might be expected. Doubtless the spectacular part of the migration, the movement of large numbers at the same time, was due to agents, and doubtless in many localities the labor agent was the instigator of the movement. "The universal testimony of employers was, however," says Mr. Woofter, "that after the initial group movement by agents, Negroes kept going by twos and threes. These were drawn by letters, and by actual advances of money, from Negroes who had already settled in the North." Mr. Williams says that "every Negro that makes good in the North and writes back to his friends starts off a new group." He thinks that this quiet work "has been more effective in carrying off labor than agents could possibly have been." Mr. Leavell approves the opinion that "the railroads and the United States mails have been the principal 'labor agents.'" However the influence came, and whatever concurrent causes may have operated, all will agree with Mr. Williams when he says that "better wages offered by the North have been the immediate occasion for the exodus."

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Excerpt from ***Negro Migration in 1916-17*** by R.H. Leavell, et al.

“The Negro Migration from Mississippi, with Special Reference to the Exodus to Northern Communities in 1916-17,” by R.H. Leavell

“Causes of the Negro Migration,” pages 21-22

Hence my effort has been twofold. I have sought to find out what economic and social facts are pushing the Negro out of Mississippi and pulling him toward other communities. And I have tried to find out what beliefs of the Negroes have been influencing their migration. In both endeavors I have found the widest variety of facts and beliefs operating as motives in different parts of the State and in different local communities.

The inference is obvious that this diagnosis of causes of the movement will be useful only when employed by white leaders locally in determining whether actual or threatened shortage of labor is due to one or more of the causes mentioned. For such testing of the attractiveness of a community to Negro labor, the facts and beliefs about facts which are herein set forth it is hoped may be of help.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CAUSES OF MIGRATION.

The economic and social facts, as distinguished from beliefs about facts, that have been responsible for much of the Negro migration are the following:

1. In southeast and east Mississippi *lack of capital* for carrying labor through the fall and early winter until time to start a new crop. This lack of capital has been occasioned by one or more of three causes—a succession of short crops, the more recent advent of the boll weevil, a destructive storm in the summer of 1916.
2. *Reorganization of agriculture* behind the boll weevil so as to for a smaller number of farm laborers per hundred acres. This is notable in southwest Mississippi, which was the first section to meet the boll-weevil pest. Such reorganization, although paying considerable attention to trucking, is emphasizing live stock, particularly beef cattle.
3. *Hunger wages* in Mississippi.
4. *The attractions of Arkansas*. That State, country Negroes assert, competes for Mississippi Negro agricultural labor not only affording larger economic opportunity but also by offering more considerate treatment.
5. The attractions of the northern urban and industrial centers. These attractions are of two sorts: (a) Distinctly higher wages for unskilled labor, such as

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in munitions plants, railroad construction, stockyards; (6) better living conditions, such as (1) housing that seems superior to the rough cabins of southern plantations; (2) a closer approximation to evenhanded justice in the courts in cases where both whites and Negroes are involved¹; (3) better schools for the Negro race than in either the country or the towns of Mississippi; (4) equal treatment on the cars [trains]. Indeed, in the cars equality of treatment is the necessary result of the fact that there is no segregation in them. Concerning equality of treatment, be it noted that northern Negro leaders are strenuously opposed quite generally to any sort of compulsory segregation anywhere. The southern Negro leaders pay little attention to this, but limit themselves to asking for equality of treatment, even though segregated. It is quite possible, however, that this difference in attitude is accounted for by the fact that at present abolition of "Jim Crowism" is in Mississippi a purely academic proposal.

¹ A Chicago weekly calls attention to the fact that the grand jury was able at least to find persons to indict for the East St. Louis affair; but this same weekly maintains that grand juries seem unable to locate the culprits in southern mobs.

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Excerpt from ***Negro Migration in 1916-17*** by **R.H. Leavell, et al.**

“The Negro Migration from Mississippi, with Special Reference to the Exodus to Northern Communities in 1916-17,” by **R.H. Leavell**

“Agents of Migration: United States Mails Stimulate Migration,” pages **28-29**

The United States mails have been increasingly effective in prompting the migration in two different ways. Letters from Negroes in the North—especially letters containing that unanswerable evidence of better conditions, considerable sums of actual cash—have probably been of unsurpassed effectiveness in stimulating the later migration. A white banker told me of one young Negro who regularly every two months sent back to his aged father \$75. Other remittances for smaller, though considerable, amounts were reported to me in a number of communities.

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration in 1916-17* by R.H. Leavell, et al.

“The Negro Migration from Mississippi, with Special Reference to the Exodus to Northern Communities in 1916-17,” by R.H. Leavell

“Negro Suggestions on Practical Plantation Management,” page 38

One colored man whom I interviewed in Chicago, after telling me that he would keep silent about anything that he would be silent about in Mississippi, expressed the opinion that better living conditions in the North were not the same stimulus to the migration of the country Negro as to the one in town. “If you have never eaten lemon pie, you don’t know how fond you may be of it. After you have tasted it, it’s different.” He believed that improved living conditions in the northern cities, even though not the attracting force for the country Negro, would keep him from returning South. This colored man laid special emphasis on the city housing of the North. “A country Negro,” he said, “may not use the bathtub in the house he rents in Chicago; but it’s there and he can write home about it.” The whole situation as the Negro sees it was summed up by one educator in these words: “The Negro wants a square deal.”

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration in 1916-17* by R.H. Leavell, et al.

**“The Exodus of Negroes from Southern States: Alabama and North Carolina,”
by Tipton Ray Snavely**

“Causes of the Movement,” pages 60-61

One of the underlying causes of the migration, therefore, may be characterized as the changed conditions incident to the transition from the old system of cotton planting to stock raising and the diversification of crops...

The immediate causes came at a time most favorable for the exodus. The effectiveness of the movement was greatly enhanced on account of this fact. One of these was a shortage of crops which resulted from the floods of July, 1916. The crops were destroyed not only in the black-belt counties but throughout a large portion of the State.

For many planters this new disaster formed a climax to a series of misfortunes from which they have not been able to recover. They were making a final attempt to recoup themselves from the losses of the past four years. The result was immediate. Both farmers and tenants who had staked all on this last effort were obliged to find some means for a present livelihood.

The customary advances of provisions to the negro tenants were cut off. Owners of large plantations were compelled for the first time in their lives to tell their Negroes that they could not feed them and that they were forced to let them move away. In a number of the black-belt counties the state of actual privation was such that food was distributed to the starving Negroes by the Federal Department of Agriculture and by the organization of the Red Cross. The tenants were not only left without food but they were also in debt for provisions which had been furnished them during the past winter. Thus in many instances they lost their mules and other property which were taken for the payment of rent and store debts.

On the other hand, hundreds of landowners simply released their tenants from such contracts as they held against them. The rents were either relinquished outright or postponed indefinitely. In some instances work was improvised on the farms in order that the Negroes might be supplied with food. But the mere canceling of rents and debts did not relieve the immediate necessity for provisions, and planters who were not able to furnish work for their Negro tenants saw them go to the railroads and sawmills for employment. The landowners who felt justified in carrying their tenants for another year, and were able to do so, have suffered less from the recent shortage of labor than have those who did not adopt similar measures. Absentee owners, who depended upon a self-adjustment of the situation, have suffered most. The exodus from the rural districts and towns into the cities began, and there was soon a steady movement toward the Birmingham district and to the northern and eastern States.

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration in 1916-17* by R.H. Leavell, et al.

“Migration of Negroes from Georgia, 1916-17,” by T.J. Woofter, Jr.

“Causes of the Movement,” pages 87-88

After the initial movement of laborers by agents, the migration attracted the attention of the press and excited much discussion among the Negroes themselves. Then their social grievances became a topic of conversation, and quite a few economically independent, respected citizens moved North. It was noted in connection with farm labor that a few independent renters and owners have sold their property, in the majority of instances at a sacrifice, and moved North. Real estate men also report that in the towns a number of home owners have sold out and left. While this number forms a relatively small proportion of the total number migrating, they form quite an appreciable proportion of the property-owning Negroes, and their departure from the South marks a recession of the Negro race from some of the gains it has made in its progress toward economic independence in the South. In these cases economic advantage can be said to play but a small part in the movement, for unquestionably these men sacrifice their property and move for better protection in the courts and better social advantages in housing and education.

It is difficult to determine the exact influence of the lynchings in Georgia upon the movement of Negroes, on account of the fact that the lynchings which occurred immediately before and during the movement of Negroes were in the boll-weevil section, where the economic conditions were also at their worst. Several planters across whose places lynching parties passed say that their loss was heavier than those of the surrounding plantations on account of the terrorization of their tenants. Negroes on the farm, the ignorant class, seem to take the lynching of a guilty Negro as a matter of course. In cases in 1915 and 1916, however, in the boll-weevil section of Georgia not only the guilty Negro was killed but also other Negroes. In one county the mob beat and terrorized many Negroes and after killing the criminal went across the county and killed his mother and one of his relatives. This feeling of danger, even from the misdeeds of other Negroes, has undoubtedly contributed largely to the willingness of many Negroes to seek opportunity in the North. The two counties in which these lynchings occurred, Randolph and Early, were among the heaviest losers in Negro population...

Minor injustices in the courts also are frequently assigned by Negroes as a cause of discontent with life in the South. Under the fee system county and police officials are often overzealous in rounding up Negroes for gambling, drinking, and petty infractions of the law. The limit fine or sentence to work the county roads is often imposed. Two city officials stated that they had endeavored to discourage

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this practice since the movement of Negroes started, and that they believed that their success had contributed to the slackening of the movement. As long as rural recreational facilities and social life of the Negro is so barren, such cases of petty disorders among the Negro population will continue, and as long as they are dealt with summarily he will continue to nurse his grievance against the courts.

A well-developed public opinion among the Negroes concerning inequalities in educational facilities is also apparent. A recent report of the Bureau of Education indicates that the per capita expenditure in public-school teachers' salaries for each white child 6 to 14 years of age is about six times the per capita expenditure for each colored child 6 to 14.

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Excerpt from *Negro Migration in 1916-17* by R.H. Leavell, et al.

“The Negro Exodus from the South,” by W.T.B. Williams

“Underlying Causes of the Exodus,” page 101

The unusual amounts of money coming in, the glowing accounts from the North, and the excitement and stir of great crowds leaving, work upon the feelings of many Negroes. They pull up and follow the crowd almost without a reason. They are stampeded into action. This accounts in large part for the apparently unreasonable doings of many who give up good positions or sacrifice valuable property or good businesses to go North. There are also Negroes of all classes who profoundly believe that God has opened this way for them out of the restrictions and oppressions that beset them on every hand in the South; moving out is an expression of their faith. Unfortunately the South gives the Negro abundant occasions for wanting to leave. As someone has put it, it is not only the northern pull but also the southern push that is sending so many Negroes out of the South.

The treatment accorded the Negro always stood second, when not first, among the reasons given by Negroes for leaving the South. I talked with all classes of colored people from Virginia to Louisiana—farm hands, tenants, farmers, hack drivers, porters, mechanics, barbers, merchants, insurance men, teachers, heads of schools, ministers, druggists, physicians, and lawyers—and in every instance the matter of treatment came to the front voluntarily. This is the all-absorbing, burning question among Negroes. For years no group of the thoughtful, intelligent class of Negroes, at any rate, have met for any purpose without finally drifting into some discussion of their treatment at the hands of white people.

*Leavell, R.H.; Snively, T.R.; Woofter, T.J. Jr.; Williams, W.T.B.; Tyson, Francis D. and Dillard, J.H. *Negro Migration in 1916-17*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Secretary Division of Negro Economics, 1920.