

# The Black Ten Millions

By Robert Minor

**W**ITHIN the great white city of New York is another city of one-quarter of a million Negroes. Five other great American cities have within each of them a Black City of more than 100,000 inhabitants.

The separateness of the Black Cities within the white is fairly complete. The Negro may freely visit the white town, and may work there the day through, but, come the end of his labor, must return, be it to sleep, to eat or to amuse himself, to his own pale.

The Black Man has a culture of his own: his musicians, his poets, novelists, actors, students, his bourgeoisie, his scientific men and—his apostles of liberty. The Black Man of the city is a restless man; he wants to break down all the humiliating restrictions that confine him as a lower race, the "white supremacy" that loads his life down with limitations and holds him to a "black belt" as a prostitute is segregated.

The city Negro is the articulate Negro. It is he who forms the many organizations which have the purpose of completing the emancipation of his race. And among the city Negroes it is the Negro "intelligentsia" which at present has the lead. Thus it is characteristic that Professor Kelley Miller, Dean of Howard University, Washington, D. C., and a noted scholar, has sent out the call which brings together in Chicago on February 11, 1924, a national conference of organizations especially concerned with Negro emancipation. It is called the "Sandhedrin Conference," in memory of the ancient Jewish racial council at Jerusalem. The conference is sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Equal Rights League and the African Blood Brotherhood.

The "Negro Sandhedrin" will be a bold attempt to gather all Negro and mixed pro-Negro organizations into a "united Negro front" on a common program for race emancipation. If it were merely a matter of a few hundred Negro intellectuals gathering decorously to discuss ways and means of smoothing their professional careers, one need pay little attention. But back of these intellectual leaders are the Black Ten Millions that stir in unhappy slavery on plantations from Florida to Texas and in ill-paid labor in factory, mine, mill and lumber-camp the country over. The unrest of these is pressing the intellectuals forward to perhaps greater lengths than they as yet dream of going. No matter what mild speaking may be heard from the black prophets of today, the Negro in the vast heart of his race wants, and cannot stop with less than, complete and unqualified equality both in law and in social custom. Leaders may promise to take less, but the black race will ultimately walk over the faces of any such leaders.

## Slave Revolts

It is a mistake to assume that the Negro was a submissive slave. Even before the American revolution there were twenty-five insurrections of Negroes against

slavery in the American colonies. One of the reasons given in favor of the adoption of the American Constitution in 1787 was that it made possible the formation of a national army with which to suppress the then threatened slave rebellions of Georgia and other southern states, which it was feared that no single Southern state with its own army would be able to suppress.

And the fears were justified. A dozen slave rebellions, large and small, occurred in the United States after the American revolution and before the Civil War of 1861. The nineteenth century began with one thousand armed slaves marching against Richmond, Virginia, led by two Negro slaves, Gabriel and Jack Bowler. Two years later an area covering ten counties in North Carolina was the scene of an armed insurrection of Negroes, and this was followed three years later by another. In the year 1811 a little army of five hundred armed slaves marched against the city of New Orleans, recruiting the adult male Negro population of each plantation as it passed. The insurrection was crushed by the garrison of Fort Charles after a military engagement. Five years later a planned slave insurrection at Fredericksburg, Virginia, was prematurely disclosed and its leaders hanged. A similar disturbance occurred in Camden, South Carolina, in that year, followed two years later by another at Charleston, South Carolina. In the next year, 1819, a Negro slave insurrection was attempted in Augusta, Georgia.

In 1822 a wide-spread conspiracy for a slave insurrection was organized by that strange Negro genius, Denmark Vesey. Throughout an area of forty or fifty miles around Charleston, South Carolina, the best of the Negroes were carefully and secretly organized by a recruiting committee. One organizer, Peter Poyas, is said to have sworn in six hundred persons. The mistake was made of trusting a meek household servant, who betrayed the plot. Thirty-five leaders of the plot were hanged, including Denmark Vesey—to whom, I swear, a monument will some day be raised in Charleston, South Carolina.

Nine years later, 1831, the Negro preacher, Nat Turner, led an armed insurrection in Southampton County, Virginia, which was put down by United States troops and state militia with the loss of the lives of one hundred Negroes and sixty white persons. Twenty Negroes were afterward hanged. Before the year ended another rebellion began in three counties of North Carolina, but was betrayed by a free Negro and crushed. In Maryland there was an uprising of slaves in 1845, followed by disturbances in 1853 and in 1857. John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 was an attempt at Negro uprising incited and led by a white man. Because it occurred at a tense political moment it has been made in our histories to overshadow the greater uprisings which were inspired, organized and led by Negroes alone. The John Brown insurrection was comparatively and actually very small.

The outstanding fact is that the American Negro has found within his own race both the genius and the daring

by the comparative freedom and better living standards into forgetfulness of "Dixie." With the first industrial slump the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, for instance, became worried about the 20,000 new Negroes in the city, and considered ways and means to get rid of them; until business revived and made them useful. The Negro population of Detroit rose from about 5,700 in 1910 to about 53,000 in 1923.

**The Black "Foreigner"**

Afraid that immigrant labor would bring the revolutionary fever of Europe to our shores, Congress passed the severely restrictive immigration law. At the same time began the after-war industrial revival demanding cheap immigrant labor.

The Southern Negro became the "immigrant laborer." The rumor of "high wages and human treatment" that had once gathered the millions of Eastern and Southern Europe now swept the Black South of the United States. It is recorded that one Negro church at Lone Oak, Georgia, lost ninety-eight members between a Saturday evening and Sunday morning. 478,700 are said to have migrated in one year. The total of the great migration is roughly estimated at one million.

Georgian agriculture is said to have suffered \$25,000,000 of damage in 1923 through the loss of its black peons. Other Southern States had similar experiences. The result of the migration was called by many writers a "revolution." It is said that the South will be forced now to discard its primitive economic processes and to "mechanize" itself. And Northern industry is also profoundly affected by the introduction of the new and dark-faced "immigrant labor."

But most of all the Negro is affected. James Weidon Johnson, secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, is quoted as declaring the great migration to be the greatest single factor in the twentieth century emancipation of the race. Whatever the objective reasons, the Negro has his own subjective reasons for no longer "wishing he was in Dixie," and he states them as:

**Mob violence.**

**Low wages.**

**Inequality of law enforcement.**

Let no one imagine, however, that the Negro escapes discrimination when he escapes from the South. As fast as the Negro becomes a large factor in the Northern cities and industrial centers, most of the persecutions, petty and large—especially lynching and segregation—follow at his heels. American capitalism cannot accept race equality. In fact race discrimination appears to be increasing with the bourgeois development. Racial residential segregation is as rigid in the big Northern cities as in those of the South—and seems to be in process of extension to the Jews! Advertisements for apartments to let, often carry the proviso, "for Gentiles," meaning that Jews are excluded as well as Negroes, whose exclusion is taken for granted. Race discrimination is on the up-grade, not the down-grade, in these mad days of capitalist decay.

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had the awakening experience of the War, and associates influenced by them, began to transform the lynching into what is called a riot—that is, a two-sided fight.

But it really began before the men went to France. A young Negro friend has told me of the pride and new-found security that he felt on the day of his first leave after being mobilized, when, in his new uniform, accompanied by a half-dozen of his fellow Negro soldiers, he strolled in the streets of a Southern city where before then he had never been free of the uneasiness engendered by white terrorism.

In 1917 Corporal Baltimore of the 24th (Negro) Infantry, then waiting at Houston, Texas, to be shipped to France, interferred with two policemen who were beating a Negro woman on the street. The result was—not a lynching this time, but a race-battle in which many were killed. The military authorities stepped in on behalf of the whites and hanged nineteen of the Negro soldiers. Fifty-four members of the 24th Infantry are now confined in Leavenworth penitentiary. Thus, when the Negro defends himself worth penitentiary. Thus, when the Negro defends himself the Law steps in to complete the thwarted lynching.

From March 1919, when a white man attempted to exercise his privilege of slapping a "nigger woman" on a Birmingham street car and was killed for it by a Negro man, there has been a long series of incidents called "race riots" in Charleston S. C., Chicago Ill., Elaine Arkansas, Knoxville Tenn., Longview Texas, Omaha Neb., Washington D. C., Duluth Minn., Independence Kansas, Ocoee Florida, Springfield Ohio and Tulsa Oklahoma. Nearly all of these incidents would a few years ago have taken the form of a simple, respectable lynching of a Negro "without disorder."

But with what the Negroes call their "new attitude," practically all of these incidents now take the form of terrific two-sided fights in which the Negroes in resisting lynching take white life for black life. As reported in the New York Age (Negro):

"The colored people of the District of Columbia have shown what a people can do when assailed on all hands by a mob of whites. They were organized and led by the Federal Government, both of which to all intents and purposes were their organized influence against the color. Disorganized as they were and without leadership, when the rioting was started Saturday night and continuing through Sunday, they were able to stand firm and defend themselves on Monday to defend themselves, after a fashion, and began to enter into the strike with more determination than the whites who started it. In fact, they stuck to the job all week like heroes of many battles."

**The Great Migration**

But mobilization in the army was not the biggest means with which the World War wrought its changes in the life of the Negro. Just at the moment when the Northern manufacturers began to book huge orders for war supplies—the war shut off the customary source of American industrial labor: European immigration, Northern manufacturers began to dip into the great stagnant pool of the South for black labor-power. At first the White South was glad to see the Negro go, but soon began to change its mind and to try to stem the tide. At the end of hostilities and of war-manufacture, it is estimated a quarter of a million Southern Negroes remained in the North, charmed

dered on a peonage-farm in Jasper County, Georgia, are examples of a "sacred institution" of our Country. The Negro is still not a citizen in the South. Places of public resort are divided as are the buildings of a farm—houses for the (white) human beings and barns for the (Negro) animals. The railroads provide cattle-cars for cattle and Negro-cars for Negroes. In many parts of the South (Alabama, Florida) Negroes are kept out of public parks and playgrounds; sometimes "Jim Crow" parks and playgrounds are provided. Throughout the South it is taken for granted that Negroes are not to be permitted to live in houses near the residences of the well-to-do whites. Commonly Southern towns have their "red-light" districts and their "nigger-towns"—often jumbled together for the sake of real-estate convenience. Segregation is sometimes accomplished by law—as in Tulsa, Oklahoma, among many other localities—and sometimes by terrorism alone.

Occasionally there has come over the White South a panic due to a fear that the Negro parent's zeal for educating his black child is raising the literacy of the Negro child above that of the poor white. But the white man is doing his best to keep the Negro behind the white. In South Carolina, where the Negro population approaches that of the whites, ten million dollars is spent to educate white children, while one million is spent for a similar number of Negro children. It is claimed that in some parts of the South when the Negro progresses too far the Negro school-houses are burned.

They say that the Negro is not disfranchised in the South, and then they explain that he is permitted to vote whenever and to whatever extent that his vote won't win anything. Throughout the South wherever the Negro population outnumbered or dangerously approximates the white population in number, the Negro is frankly and openly excluded from the ballot to an extent sufficient to give the white man a guarantee of control. Then, in most cases, the real election takes place in the Democratic primaries, where the Negro is barred, and the formal election follows automatically. The disfranchisement of the Negro is considered basic in the political system. And the tendency to transform Negro disfranchisement into working-class disfranchisement is already apparent. Three years ago the editor of the Birmingham News made a serious proposal that "high-class" Negroes (of the new Negro bourgeoisie) should be carefully selected and given the "privilege" of voting.

**The Rise of the Black Giant**

The tremors of the World War that shook the world to its foundations, did not fail to reach the Negro. To be exempted from conscription was a privilege, and the "damn nigger" received no privilege. 307,110 young Negro men were drafted and given military training. About 200,000 had the amazing experience of a trip to Europe and a flickering glimpse of what is called "social equality"—yes, even between black men and white women—. The American Negro who went to France did not, when he returned, fit into the scheme of the plantation and the overseer.

What is more exciting, his neck no longer fitted meekly into the lyncher's noose! The young Negroes who had

to fight for his freedom. That the desperate and unsuccessful insurrections of the slavery days were inadequate in method and pitifully ineffective is beside the point: The Negro possesses the initiative and the courage to make his a free race.

**After "Emancipation"**

For fifty years after the Civil War the Negro wandered in a fog of republican "emancipation." He was "free"—to starve or to sell himself back to the white landlord. The white ruling class considered merely that they had been deprived of certain property, but not in the least that the Negro had attained "social and political equality with white persons," as a South Carolina statute of 1865 put it. Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" of 1863 had, according to its own wording, not the purpose of abolishing slavery, but the purpose of breaking the economic backbone of a rival war-power. The aim was not to free the Negro but to destroy \$1,500,000,000 worth of property in "black ivory" of a belligerent enemy. The "Preliminary Proclamation" directly offered to leave slavery intact in any part of the South that would lay down its arms. The "Emancipation Proclamation" very carefully specified that slavery should not be abolished "for the present" in sections of Louisiana and Virginia not at that time in arms against the Union.

The ex-slave was legally not a citizen, but a "freed-man"—quite a different thing; he was property that had been confiscated as a means of punishment of his owners. The Negro had, in Southern eyes, been changed from a domesticated animal to an undomesticated animal.

When the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1868, giving the rights of citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States," and when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870, providing that "the right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States, or by any State, on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,"—these Constitutional provisions merely refined the skill of Southern lawyers in writing laws to disfranchise and de-citizenize the Negro.

The emancipation of the American Negro from chattel slavery has not yet been completed. The Negro "share" farmer or tenant-farmer is still to all intents and purposes the slave of his white landlord. The white landlord continues to take the product of the labor of the Negro, and gives in return, in almost the same manner as seventy-five years ago, little more than a miserable ration of food. In Turner County, Georgia, in 1913 "the average annual cash income per Negro tenant farmer—usually a family—was only \$290." The Negro tenant is kept in debt to his white exploiter, sometimes for an entire lifetime, and his "run-ning away" is often forcibly prevented as long as his white overlord owns a "debt" interest in his body.

Peonage, a close imitation of chattel slavery, is still accomplished with the device of convicting men (both black and white, nowadays!) of "vagrancy" or "idling," or sometimes for real offenses, and then leasing them out to planters, mine-owners, lumber operators or contractors for periods of months or years. The recent cases of Martin Tabor (white) who was beaten to death by a "whipping boss" in Florida, and the eleven Negroes who were mur-