from New Negro anthology

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Chapter: The New Frontage on American LifeThe New Frontage on American Life

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I

The cities of the North, stern, impersonal and enchanting, needed men of the brawny muscles, which Europe, suddenly flaming with war, had ceased to supply, when the black hordes came on from the South like a silent, encroaching shadow. Five hundred thousand there were in the first three-year period. These had yielded with an almost uncanny unanimity of triumphant approval to this urge to migration, closing in first upon the little towns of the South, then upon the cities near the towns, and, with an unfailing consistency, sooner or later, they boarded a *Special* bound North, to close in upon these cities which lured them, with an ultimate appeal, to their gay lights and high wages, unoppressive anonymity, crowds, excitement, and feverish struggle for life.

There was Chicago in the West, known far and wide for its colossal abattoirs, whose placarded warehouses, set close by the railroad, dotted every sizable town of the South, calling for men; Chicago, remembered for the fairyland wonders of the World's Fair; home of the fearless, taunting "race paper," and above all things, of mills clamoring for men.

And there was Pittsburgh, gloomy, cheerless -- bereft of the Poles and Lithuanians, Croatians and Austrians, who had trucked and smelted its steel. And along with Pittsburgh, the brilliant satellite towns of Bethlehem and Duquesne and Homestead. The solid but alert Europeans in 1916 had deserted the lower bases of industry and gone after munitions money, or home to fight. Creeping out, they left a void, which, to fill, tempted industry to desperate measures. One railroad line brought in 12,000 of these new laborers graciously and gratuitously. The road-beds and immense construction projects--
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--279--of the State were in straits and the great mills wanted men.
And there was New York City with its polite personal service and its Harlem -- the Mecca of the Negroes the country over. Delightful Harlem of the effete East! Old families, brownstone mansions, a step from worshipful Broadway, the end of the rainbow for early relatives drifting from home into the exciting world; the factories and the docks, the stupendous clothing industries, and buildings to be "superintended," a land of opportunity for musicians, actors and those who wanted to be, the national headquarters of everything but the government.

And there was Cleveland with a faint Southern exposé but with iron mills; and St˙ Louis, one of the first cities of the North, a city of mixed traditions but with great foundries, brick and terra-cotta works; Detroit, the automobile center, with its sophistication of skill and fancy wages reflecting the daring economic policies of Henry Ford; Hartford, Connecticut, where, indeed, the first experiment with southern labor, was tried on the tobacco plantations skirting the city; Akron and its rubber; Philadelphia, with its comfortable old traditions; and the innumerable little industrial towns where fabulous wages were paid.

White and black these cities lured, but the blacks they lured with a demoniac appeal.

II

Migrations, thinks Professor Carr-Saunders -- and he is confirmed by history -- are nearly always due to the influence of an idea. Population crowding, and economic debasement, are, by their nature, more or less constant. In the case of the Negroes, it was not exclusively an idea, but an idea brought within the pale of possibility. By tradition and probably by temperament the Negro is a rural type. His metier is agriculture. To this economy his mental and social habits have been adjusted. In exact contrast to him is the Jew, who by every aptitude and economic attachment is a city dweller, and in--280--whom modern students of racial behavior are discovering a neurotic constitution traceable to the emotional strain of peculiar racial status and to the terrific pressure of city life.

South, there are few cities. The life of the section is not manufacture but the soil -- and more than anything else, the fluffy white bolls of cotton. There is Mississippi where 56 per cent of the population are Negroes and 88 per cent of the Negroes are farmers. Cotton is King. When it lives and grows and escapes the destroying weevil and the droughts and the floods, there is comfort for the owners. When it fails, as is most often, want stalks, and a hobbed heel twists on the neck of the black tenant. The iniquitous credit system breeding dishonesty and holding the Negroes perpetually in debt and virtually enslaved; the fierce hatred of poor whites in frightened and desperate competition; cruelty of the masters who reverently thanked God for the inferior blacks who could labor happily in the sun, with all the unfeeling complaisance of oxen; the barrenness and monotony of rural life; the dawn of hope for something better; distant flashes of a new country, beckoning -- these were the soil in which the idea took root -- and flowered. There was no slow, deliberate sifting of plans, or measurement of conduct, or inspired leadership, or forces dark and mysterious. To each in his setting came an impulse and an opportunity.

There was Jeremiah Taylor, of Bobo, Mississippi, long since at the age of discretion, gnarled and resigned to his farm, one of whose sons came down one day from the "yellow dog road" with the report that folks were leaving "like Judgment day"; that he had seen a labor man who promised a free ticket to a railroad camp up North. Jeremiah went to town, half doubting and came back aflush and decided. His son left, he followed and in four months his wife and two daughters bundled their possessions, sold their chickens and joined them.

Into George Horton's barber shop in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, came a white man of the North. Said he: "The colored folks are obligated to the North because it freed them. The North is obligated to the colored folks because after freeing them it separated them from their livelihood.--281--Now, this living is offered with interest and a new birth of liberty. Will the colored man live up to his side of the bargain?" The clinching argument was free transportation. George Horton's grievance was in politics. He already earned a comfortable living and could decline the free ride as a needless charity. But his place contributed forty men. The next year the Hattiesburg settlement in Chicago brought up their pastor.

And there was Joshua Ward, who had prayed for these times and now saw God cursing the land and stirring up his people. He would invoke his wrath no longer.

Rosena Shephard's neighbor's daughter, with a savoury record at home, went away. Silence, for the space of six weeks. Then she wrote that she was earning $2 a day packing sausages. "If that lazy, good-for-nothing gal kin make $2 a day, I kin make four," and Mrs. Shephard left.

Clem Woods could not tolerate any fellow's getting ahead of him. He did not want to leave his job and couldn't explain why he wanted to go North and his boss *proved* to him that his chances were better at home. But every departure added to his restlessness. One night a train passed through with two coaches of men from New Orleans. Said one of them: "Good-by, bo, I'm bound for the promised land," and Clem got aboard.

Jefferson Clemons in De Ridder, Louisiana, was one of "1,800 of the colored race" who paid $2 to a "white gentleman" to get to Chicago on the 15th of March. By July he had saved enough to pay his fare and left "bee cars," as he confided, "he was tired of bein' dog and beast."

Mrs. Selina Lennox was slow to do anything, but she was by nature a social creature. The desolation of her street wore upon her. No more screaming, darting children, no more bustle of men going to work or coming home. The familiar shuffle and loud greetings of shopping matrons, the scent of boiled food -- all these were gone. Mobile Street, the noisy, was clothed in an ominous quiet, as if some disaster impended. Now and then the Italian storekeeper, bewildered and forlorn, would walk to the middle of the street and look first up and--282--then down and walk back into his store again. Mrs. Lennox left.

George Scott wanted more "free liberty" and accepted a proffered railroad ticket from a stranger who always talked in whispers and seemed to have plenty of money.

Dr. Alexander H. Booth's practice declined, but some of his departed patients, long in his debt paid up with an infuriating air of superiority, adding in their letters such taunts as "home ain't nothing like this" or "nobody what has any grit in his craw would stay," and the Doctor left.

John Felts of Macon was making $1.25 when flour went up to $12 a barrel and the New York *Age* was advertising cheap jobs at $2.50 a day. He had a wife and six children.

Jim Casson in Grabor, Louisiana, had paid his poll taxes, his state and parish taxes and yet children could not get a school.

Miss Jamesie Towns taught fifty children four months for the colored tenants, out near Fort Valley, Georgia. Her salary was reduced from $16.80 to $14.40 a month.

Enoch Scott was living in Hollywood, Mississippi, when the white physician and one of the Negro leaders disputed a small account. The Negro was shot three times in the back and his head battered -- all this in front of the high sheriff's office. Enoch says he left because the doctor might sometime take a dislike to him.

When cotton was selling for forty cents a point, Joshua Johnson was offered twenty and was dared to try to sell it anywhere else. Said Joshua: "Next year, I won't have no such trouble," and he didn't.

Chicago's Negro population had dragged along by decades until the upheaval, when suddenly it leaped from 44,000 to 109,000. In a slice of the city between nineteen blocks, 92,000 of them crowded: on the east the waters of Lake Michigan; on the west the great nauseous stretch of the stockyards and the reeking little unpainted dwellings of foreigners; on the north the business district, and on the south the scowling and self-conscious remnant of the whites left behind in the rush of fashion to the North Shore.

Fifteen years ago over 60 per cent of all these working--283--Negroes were engaged in domestic and personal service. There was nothing else to do. Then the fashion had changed in servants as Irish and Swedish and German tides came on. An unfortunate experience with the unions lost for Negroes the best positions in their traditional strongholds as waiters and poisoned their minds against organized labor. Racial exclusiveness, tradition and inexperience, kept them out of industry. Then a strike at the stockyards and the employers miraculously and suddenly discovered their untried genius, while the unions elected to regard them as deliberate miscreants lowering wage standards by design and taking white men's jobs. Smoldering resentment. But with the war and its labor shortage, they came on in torrents. They overran the confines of the old area and spread south in spite of the organized opposition of Hyde Park and Kenwood, where objection was registered with sixty bombs in a period of two years. Passions flamed and broke in a race riot unprecedented for its list of murders and counter-murders, its mutilations and rampant savagery; for the bold resistance of the Negroes to violence. Then gradually passions fired by the first encounter subsided into calm and the industries absorbed 80 per cent of the working members.

Before the deluge, New York City, too, lacked that lusty vigor of increase, apart from migration, which characterized the Negro population as a whole. In sixty years, its increase had been negligible. Time was when that small cluster of descendants of the benevolent old Dutch masters and of the free Negroes moved with freedom and complacent importance about the intimate fringe of the city's active life. These Negroes were the barbers, caterers, bakers, restaurateurs, coachmen -- all highly elaborated personal service positions. The crafts had permitted them wide freedom; they were skilled artisans. They owned businesses which were independent of Negro patronage. But that was long ago. This group in 1917 was rapidly passing, its splendor shorn. The rapid evolution of business, blind to the amenities on which they flourished, had devoured their establishments, unsupported and weak in capital resources; the incoming hordes of--284--Europeans had edged them out of their inheritance of personal service businesses, clashed with them in competition for the rough muscle jobs and driven them back into the obscurity of individual personal service.

For forty years, moreover, there have been dribbling in from the South, the West Indies and South America, small increments of population which through imperceptible gradations had changed the whole complexion and outlook of the Negro New Yorker. New blood and diverse cultures these brought -- and each a separate problem of assimilation. As the years passed, the old migrants "rubbed off the green," adopted the slant and sophistication of the city, mingled and married, and their children are now the native-born New Yorkers. For fifty years scattered families have been uniting in the hectic metropolis from every state in the union and every province of the West Indies. There have always been undigested colonies -- the Sons and Daughters of North Carolina, the Virginia Society, the Southern Beneficial League -- these are survivals of self-conscious, intimate bodies. But the mass is in the melting pot of the city.

There were in New York City in 1920, by the census count, 152,467 Negroes. Of these 39,233 are reported as born in New York State, 30,436 in foreign countries, principally the West Indies, and 78,242 in other states, principally the South. Since 1920 about 50,000 more Southerners have been added to the population, bulging the narrow strip of Harlem in which it had lived and spilling over the old boundaries. There are no less than 25,000 Virginians in New York City, more than 20,000 North and South Carolinians, and 10,000 Georgians. Every Southern state has

contributed its quota to a heterogeneity which matches that of cosmopolitan New York. If the present Negro New Yorker were analyzed, he would be found to be composed of one part native, one part West Indian and about three parts Southern. If the tests of the army psychologists could work with the precision and certainty with which they are accredited, the Negroes who make up the present population of New York City would be declared to represent different races, for the differences between South--285--and North by actual measurement are greater than the difference between whites and Negroes.

III

A new type of Negro is evolving -- a city Negro. He is being evolved out of those strangely divergent elements of the general background. And this is a fact overlooked by those students of human behavior, who with such quick comprehension detect the influence of the city in the nervousness of the Jew, the growing nervous disorders of city dwellers in general to the tension of city life. In ten years, Negroes have been actually transplanted from one culture to another.

Where once there were personal and intimate relations, in which individuals were in contact at practically all points of their lives, there are now group relations in which the whole structure is broken up and reassorted, casting them in contact at only one or two points of their lives. The old controls are no longer expected to operate. Whether apparent or not, the newcomers are forced to reorganize their lives, to enter a new status and adjust to it that eager restlessness which prompted them to leave home. Church, lodge, gossip, respect of friends, established customs, social and racial, exercise controls in the small Southern community. The church is the center for face-to-face relations. The pastor is the leader. The rôle of the pastor and the social utility of the church are obvious in this letter sent home:

"Dear pastor: I find it my duty to write you my whereabouts, also family . . . I shall send my church money in a few days. I am trying to influence our members here to do the same. I received notice printed in a R˙ R˙ car (Get right with God). O, I had nothing so striking as the above mottoe. Let me no how is our church I am so anxious to no. My wife always talking about her seat in the church want to no who occupies it. Yours in Christ."

Religion affords an outlet for the emotional energies thwarted in other directions. The psychologists will find rich--286--material for speculation on the emotional nature of some of the Negroes set into the New York pattern in this confession:

"I got here in time to attend one of the greatest revivals in the history of my life -- over 500 people join the church. We had a Holy Ghost shower. You know I like to have run wild."

In the new environment there are many and varied substitutes which answer more or less directly the myriad desires indiscriminately comprehended by the church. The complaint of the ministers that these "emancipated" souls "stray away from God" when they reach the city is perhaps warranted on the basis of the fixed status of the church in the South, but it is not an accurate interpretation of what has happened. When the old ties are broken new satisfactions are sought. Sometimes the Young Men's Christian Association functions. This has in some cities made rivalry between the churches and the Associations. More often the demands of the young exceed the "sterilized" amusements of Christian organizations. It is not uncommon to find groups who faithfully attend church Sunday evenings and as faithfully seek further stimulation in a cabaret afterwards. Many have been helped to find themselves, no doubt, by having their old churches and pastors reappear in the new home and resume control. But too often, as with European

immigrants, the family loses control over the children who become assimilated more rapidly than their parents. Tragic evidences of this appear coldly detailed in the records of delinquency.

Social customs must change slowly if excesses and waste would be avoided. Growth of a new custom on a town will be slow; introduction of a foreigner to a new custom in its maturity necessitates rapid accommodation. It cannot be fully comprehended at first sight. The innumerable safeguards which surround these departures from social customs are lacking. There is a different social meaning in Ophelia, Mississippi, when one does not go to church, or a woman smokes or bobs her hair; Palatka's star elocutionist does not always take--287--Chicago's dramatic circles by storm; neither does Noah Brown, the local potentate of fraternal circles wield the same influence in New York. There are new leaders and new objectives, which for many moons remain incomprehensible to the newcomer.

There is a reorganization of attitudes. There is a racial as well as a social disorientation. For those who fed their hopes and expectations on a new status which would afford an escape from unrighteous and oppressive limitations of the South, there is a sensitiveness about any reminder of the station from which they have been so recently emancipated -- a hair-trigger resentment, a furious revolt against the years of training in the precise boundaries of their place, a fear of disclosing the weakness of submission where it is not expected, an expansiveness and pretense at ease in unaccustomed situations. Exact balance is difficult. Here are some of the things that register: John Diggs writes home to his friend this letter:

"Dear Partner: . . . I am all fixed now and living well, I don't have to work hard. Don't have to mister every little boy comes along. I haven't heard a white man call a colored a nigger you know how -- since I been here. I can ride in the street or steam car anywhere I get a seat. I don't care to mix with white what I mean I am not crazy about being with white folks, but if I have to pay the same fare I have learn to want the same acomidation and if you are first in a place here shoping you don't have to wait till all the white folks get thro tradeing yet amid all this I love the good old south and am praying that God may give every well wisher a chance to be a man regardless of color . . ."

If the Negroes in Harlem show at times less courtesy toward white visitors than is required by the canons of good taste, this is bad, but understandable. It was remarked shortly after the first migration that the newcomers on boarding street cars invariably strode to the front even if there were seats in the rear. This is, perhaps, a mild example of tendencies expressed--288--more strikingly in other directions, for with but few exceptions they are forced to sit in the rear of street cars throughout the South.

The difference between the background of northern and southern Negroes is even wider than it seems. In the two there are utterly different packets of stored up memories marking out channels of conduct. The southern Negro directs his ambitions at those amenities of which the northern Negro boasts and, until the first wonderment and envy subside, ignores his reservations. This is the hectic period of transition, so noticeable after huge accessions -- inevitably in the wake of the newcomers north, whether the numbers are large or small. There comes the testing of long cherished desires, the thirst for forbidden fruit -- and disillusionment, partial or complete, almost as inevitably.

IV

Cities have personalities. Their chief industries are likely to determine not only their respective characters, but the type of persons they attract and hold. Detroit manufactures automobiles, Chicago slaughters cattle, Pittsburgh smelts iron and steel -- these three communities draw different types of workers whose industrial habits are interlaced with correspondingly different cultural backgrounds. One might look to this factor as having significance in the selection of Negro workers and indeed in the relations of the Negro population with the community. The technical intricacy of the automobile industry, like the army intelligence tests, sifts out the heavy-handed worker who fits admirably into the economy of the steel industries, where 80 per cent of the operations are unskilled. A temperamental equipment easily adapted to the knife-play and stench of killing and preserving cattle is not readily interchangeable either with the elaborated technique of the factory or the sheer muscle play and endurance required by the mill. These communities draw different types of workers.

Similar differences between cities account for the curiously varied directions of growth which the Negro populations take.--289--They help to explain the furious striving after commercial glory in Chicago, and the chasing of the will-o'-the-wisp of culture in New York; the objective of an unshakable berth in a skilled job at $10 a day in Detroit, and a near future of benign comfort in Philadelphia. The Negro workers can no more become a fixed racial concept than can white workers. Conceived in terms either of capacity or opportunity, their employment gives rise to the most perplexing paradoxes. If it is a question of what Negroes are mentally or physically able to do, there are as many affirmations of competence as denials of it.

In skilled work requiring membership in unions they are employed only in small numbers, and membership is rarely encouraged unless the union is threatened. Since the apprentice-recruits for these jobs are discouraged, and the numbers sparse, the safety of the union is rarely threatened by an unorganized Negro minority. In certain responsible skilled positions, such as locomotive engineers, street cars and subway motormen, Negroes are never employed.

The distinctions are irrational. A Negro worker may not be a street or subway conductor because of the possibility of public objection to contact -- but he may be a ticket chopper. He may not be a money changer in a subway station because honesty is required -- yet he may be entrusted, as a messenger, with thousands of dollars daily. He may not sell goods over a counter -- but he may deliver the goods after they have been sold. He may be a porter in charge of a sleeping car without a conductor, but never a conductor; he may be a policeman but not a fireman; a linotyper, but not a motion picture operator; a glass annealer, but not a glass blower, a deck hand, but not a sailor. The list could be continued indefinitely.

Between the principal northern cities there is a simple but vital difference to be observed. While New York City, for example, offers a diversity of employment, the city has not such basic industries as may be found in the automobile plants of Detroit, or the iron and steel works and gigantic meat slaughtering industries of Chicago. In Chicago, there is diversified employment, to be sure, but there is a significantly--290--heavier concentration in the basic industries; more than that, there are gradations of work from unskilled to skilled. In certain plants skilled workers increased from 3·5 per cent of the Negro working population in 1910 to 13·5 per cent in 1920 in Chicago. In the slaughtering houses there are actually more semi-skilled Negro workers than laborers. The number of iron molders increased from 31 in 1910 to 520 in 1920 and this latter number represents 10 per cent of all the iron molders.

In the working age groups of New York there are more women than men. For every hundred Negro men there are 110 Negro women. This is abnormal and would be a distinct anomaly in an industrial center. The surplus women are doubtless the residue from the general wash and ebb of migrants who found a demand for their services. The city actually attracts more women than men. But surplus women bring on other problems, as the social agencies will testify. "Where women preponderate in large numbers there is proportionate increase in immorality because women are cheap." . . . The situation does not permit normal relations. What is most likely to happen, and does happen, is that women soon find it an added personal attraction to contribute to the support of a man. Demoralization may follow this -- and does. Moreover, the proportion of Negro women at work in Manhattan (60·6) is twice that of any corresponding group, and one of the highest proportions registered anywhere.

The nature of the work of at least 40 per cent of the men suggests a relationship, even if indirectly, with the tensely active night life by which Harlem is known. The dull, unarduous routine of a porter's job or that of an elevator tender, does not provide enough stimulation to consume the normal supply of nervous energy. It is unthinkable that the restlessness which drove migrants to New York from dull small towns would allow them to be content with the same dullness in the new environment, when a supply of garish excitements is so richly available.

With all the "front" of pretending to live, the aspect of complacent wantlessness, it is clear that the Negroes are in--291--a predicament. The moment holds tolerance but no great promise. Just as the wave of immigration once swept these Negroes out of old strongholds, a change of circumstances may disrupt them again. The slow moving black masses, with their assorted heritages and old loyalties, face the same stern barriers in the new environment. They are the black workers.

V

Entering gradually an era of industrial contact and competition with white workers of greater experience and numerical superiority, antagonisms loom up. Emotions have a way of re-enforcing themselves. The fierce economic fears of men in competition can supplement or be supplemented by the sentiments engendered by racial difference. Beneath the disastrous East St Louis conflict was a boiling anger toward southern Negroes coming in to "take white men's jobs." The same antagonisms, first provoked sixty years ago in the draft riots of New York during the Civil War, flared again in the shameful battle of "San Juan Hill" in the Columbus Hill District. These outbreaks were distinctly more economic than racial.

Herein lies one of the points of highest tension in race relations. Negro workers potentially menace organized labor and the leaders of the movement recognize this. But racial sentiments are not easily destroyed by abstract principles. The white workers have not, except in few instances, conquered the antagonisms founded on race to the extent of accepting the rights of Negro workers to the privileges which they enjoy. While denying them admission to their crafts, they grow furious over their dangerous borings from the outside. "The Negroes are scabs." "They hold down the living standards of workers by cutting under!" "Negroes are professional strike breakers!" These sentiments are a good nucleus for elaboration into the most furious fears and hatreds.

It is believed variously that Negro workers are as a matter of policy opposed to unions or as a matter of ignorance incapable of appreciating them. From some unions they are definitely barred;

some insist on separate Negro locals; some--292--limit them to qualified membership; some accept them freely with white workers. The situation of the Negroes, on the surface, is, to say the least, compromising. Their shorter industrial experience and almost complete isolation from the educative influence of organized trade unions contribute to some of the inertia encountered in organizing them. Their traditional positions have been those of personal loyalty, and this has aided the habit of individual bargaining for jobs in industry. They have been, as was pointed out, under the comprehensive leadership of the church in practically all aspects of their lives including their labor. No effective new leadership has developed to supplant this old fealty. The attitude of white workers has sternly opposed the use of Negroes as apprentices through fear of subsequent competition in the skilled trades. This has limited the number of skilled Negroes trained on the job. But despite this denial, Negroes have gained skill.

This disposition violently to protest the employment of Negroes in certain lines because they are not members of the union and the equally violent protest against the admission of Negroes to the unions, created in the Negroes, desperate for work, an attitude of indifference to abstract pleas. In 1910 they were used in New York City to break the teamsters' strike and six years later they were organized. In 1919 they were used in a strike of the building trades. Strained feelings resulted, but they were finally included in the unions of this trade. During the outlaw strike of the railway and steamship clerks, freight handlers, expressmen and station employees, they were used to replace the striking whites and were given preference over the men whose places they had taken. During the shopmen's strike they were promoted into new positions and thus made themselves eligible for skilled jobs as machinists. In fact, their most definite gains have been at the hands of employers and over the tactics of labor union exclusionists.

Where the crafts are freely open to them they have joined with the general movement of the workers. Of the 5,386 Negro longshoremen, about 5,000 are organized. Of the 735 Negro carpenters, 400 are members of the United Brotherhood--293--of Carpenters and Joiners. Of the 2,275 semi-skilled clothing workers practically all are members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The musicians are 50 per cent organized. The difficulty is that the great preponderance of Negro jobs is still in lines which are not organized. The porters, laundresses (outside of laundries) and servants have no organization. The Negroes listed as painters are not in the painters' union, many of them being merely whitewashers. The tailors are in large part cleaners and pressers. The waiters, elevator tenders (except female) are poorly organized.

The end of the Negro's troubles, however, does not come with organization. There is still the question of employers, for it is a certain fact that preference is frequently given white workers when they can be secured, if high wages are to be paid. A vicious circle indeed! One Negro editor has suggested a United Negro Trades Union built on the plan of the United Hebrew Trades and the Italian Chamber of Labor. The unions are lethargic; the Negroes skeptical, untrained and individualistic. Meanwhile they drift, a disordered mass, self-conscious, but with their aims unrationalized, into the face of new problems.

Out of this medley of strains in reaction to totally new experiences, a strange product is evolving, and with it new wishes, habits and expectations. Negro workers have discovered an unsuspected strength even though they are as yet incapable of integrating it. Black labor, now sensitive and

insistent, will have the protection of workers' organizations or by the strength of their menace keep these organizations futile and ineffective.

With the shift toward industry now beginning, and a subsequent new status already foreshadowed, some sounder economic policy is imperative. The traditional hold of domestic service vocations is already broken: witness the sudden halt in the increase of Negro male servants and elevator men. The enormous growth of certain New York industries has been out of proportion to the normal native production of workers. The immigration on which these formerly depended has been cut down and the prospects are that this curtailment will continue.--294--For the first time, as a result of promotion, retirement and death, gaps are appearing which the limited recruits cannot fill. Note the clothing industry, one of the largest in New York. There is a persistent lament that the second generation of immigrants do not continue in the trade. Already Negro workers have been sought to supplement the deficiencies in the first generation recruits. This sort of thing will certainly be felt in other lines. The black masses are on the verge of induction from their unenviable status as servants into the forces of the industrial workers, a more arduous, but less dependent rank. They require a new leadership, training in the principles of collective action, a new orientation with their white fellow workers for the sake of a future peace, a reorganization of the physical and mental habits which are a legacy of their old experiences, and deliberate training for the new work to come. It is this rehabilitation of the worker that the Urban Leagues have tried to accomplish, accompanying this effort with a campaign against the barriers to the entrance of Negro workers into industry. Conceiving these workers as inherently capable of an infinite range of employment, this organization insists merely upon an openness which permits opportunity, an objective experiment uncluttered by old theories of racial incompetence and racial dogmas.

The workers of the South and the West Indies who have come to the cities of the North with vagrant desires and impulses, their endowments of skill and strength, their repressions and the telltale marks of backward cultures, with all the human wastes of the process, have directed shafts of their native energy into the cities' life and growth. They are becoming a part of it. The restive spirit which brought them has been neither all absorbed nor wasted. Over two-thirds of all the businesses operated by Negroes in New York are conducted by migrant Negroes. They are in the schools -- they are the radicals and this is hopeful. The city Negro -- an unpredictable mixture of all possible temperaments -- is yet in evolution.--295--

VI

The violent sub-currents of recent years, which have shifted the economic base of Negro life -- as indeed they have affected all other groups -- have brought about a new orientation throughout, and have accentuated group attitudes among both black and white, sometimes favorably, sometimes unfavorably; here in a spurt of progress, there in a backwash of reaction.

Take the case of Negro business. It is only within recent years that a coldly practical eye has been turned to the capital created by that body of black workers; to the very obvious fact that a certain affluence breeds a certain respect; that where the pressure is heaviest, and unjust restrictions imposed, there is a politely effective boycott possible in "racial solidarity" which diverts Negro capital from disinterested hands into the coffers of "race institutions." Instance the Negro insurance companies, of which there are now sixty-seven, with over $250,000,000 worth of insurance in force, flourishing out of the situation of special premium rates for Negroes instituted by some companies, and a policy of total exclusion practiced by others. No work for

young Negro men and women in general business? Then they will establish their own businesses and borrow from the sentimental doctrine of "race pride" enough propulsion to compensate for the initial deficiencies of capital. But is this entirely representative of the new Negro thought? It is not. This increased activity is largely an opportunistic policy, with its firmest foothold in the South. Where it exists in the North it has been almost wholly transplanted by southern Negroes. The cities of the North where conditions tend most, in special instances to approach the restrictions of the South, become the most active business centers. The greater the isolation, the more pronounced and successful this intensive group commercialism.

Or, to take another angle of this picture: Mr˙ Marcus Garvey has been accused of inspiring and leading a movement for the "re-exaltation" of things black, for the exploitation of Negro resources for the profit of Negroes, and for the re-establishment--296--of prestige to things Negro. As a fact, he has merely had the clairvoyance to place himself at the head of a docile sector of a whole population which, in different degrees, has been expressing an indefinable restlessness and broadening of spirit. The Garvey movement itself is an exaggeration of this current mood which attempts to reduce these vague longings to concrete symbols of faith. In this great sweep of the Negro population are comprehended the awkward gestures of the awakening black peasantry, the new desire of Negroes for an independent status, the revolt against a culture which has but partially (and again unevenly) digested the Negro masses -- the black peasants least of all. It finds a middle ground in the feelings of kinship with all oppressed dark peoples, as articulated so forcefully by the Negro press, and takes, perhaps, its highest expression in the objectives of the Pan-African Congress.

New emotions accompany these new objectives. Where there is ferment and unrest, there is change. Old traditions are being shaken and rooted up by the percussion of new ideas. In this the year of our Lord, 1925, extending across the entire country are seventeen cities in violent agitation over Negro residence areas, and where once there was acquiescence, silent or ineffectually grumbly, there are now in evidence new convictions which more often prompt to resistance. It is this spirit, aided by increased living standards and refined tastes, that has resulted in actual housing clashes, the most notorious of which have been occurring in Detroit, Michigan, where, with a Negro population increase of more than 500 per cent in the past ten years, this new resistance has clashed with the spirit of the South, likewise drawn there by the same economic forces luring and pushing the Negroes. This same spirit was evidenced in the serious racial clashes which flared up in a dozen cities after the first huge migration of Negroes northward, and which took a sad toll in lives. Claude McKay, the young Negro poet, caught the mood of the new Negro in this, and molded it into fiery verse which Negro newspapers copied and recopied:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs, Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot . . .--297--
Nor does this embrace all of the ragged pattern: Silently and yet with such steady persistence that it has the aspect of an utterly distinct movement, the newer spirits are beginning to free themselves from the slough of that servile feeling (now happily classified by the psychologists as the "inferiority complex") inherited from slavery and passed along with virulence for over fifty years. The generation in whom lingered memories of the painful degradation of slavery could not be expected to cherish even those pearls of song and poetry born of suffering. They would be expected to do just as they did: rule out the Sorrow Songs as the product of ignorant slaves, taboo dialect as incorrect English, and the priceless folk lore as the uncultured expression of illiterates, -- an utterly conscious effort to forget the past, and take over, suddenly, the symbols of

that culture which had so long ground their bodies and spirits in the dirt. The newer voices, at a more comfortable distance, are beginning to find a new beauty in these heritages, and new values in their own lives.

Less is heard of the two historic "schools of thought" clashing ceaselessly and loud over the question of industrial and higher education for the Negro. Both schools are, sensibly, now taken for granted as quite necessary. The new questions of the industrial schools are concerned with adjusting their curricula to the new fields of industry in which Negro workers will play an ever mounting rôle, and with expanding their academic and college courses; while the new question of the universities is that of meeting the demand for trained Negroes for business, the professions, and the arts. The level of education has been lifted through the work of both, and the new level, in itself, is taking care of the sentiment about the division.

Thus the new frontier of Negro life is flung out in a jagged, uneven but progressive pattern. For a group historically retarded and not readily assimilated, contact with its surrounding culture breeds quite uneven results. There is no fixed racial level of culture. The lines cut both vertically and horizontally. There are as great differences, with reference to culture, education, sophistication, among Negroes as between the races.--298--(This overlapping is probably what the new psychologists have been trying to point out with their elaborately documented intelligence measurements.) And just as these currents move down and across and intersect, so may one find an utter maze of those rationalizations of attitudes of differently placed Negro groups toward life in general, and their status in particular. But a common purpose is integrating these energies born of new conflicts, and it is not at all improbable that the culture which has both nourished and abused these strivings will, in the end, be enriched by them.