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Chapter XI: The Negro Balance of Power

Significant political effects will result from the sudden influx of a half million Negroes to the North. This Negro migration was due primarily to the industrial necessities of the World War. The Negro is an inalienable Republican. He adheres to the fortunes of the party of Lincoln with a fealty that never falters. This adherence is not only due to gratitude for former favors, but also to the past, present and persistent hostile attitude of the Democratic party. To the mind of the Negro, the political appellations, Democratic and Republican, convey moral condonation. They convey contrasted ideas of good and bad, like up and down in ethics. A one party race occupies an unfortunate position in a two party state. Fluctuating political fortunes will ultimately put the one-sided adherent at the mercy of the political enemy. The ultimate political salvation of the race depends upon its enfranchisement from the bond which binds it to its salvators, and leaves it free, as other races, to form political allegiance. But, alas, there--207--seems to be but little immediate hope. The Southern element is dominant in the Democratic party. The stubborn attitude of this Bourbon constituency makes affiliation with that party impossible. The recent experiment under the first term of Woodrow Wilson's administration proved disastrous.

The Negro newcomers to the North will adhere to the fortunes of the party which, in the past, gave their race freedom and the franchise, and at present offers more favorable consideration than its political adversary.

The solid Negro vote constitutes the balance of power in the closely contested states of the North and West which usually determine the issue between the two parties. Outside of New England there are few states in which prediction of success for either party can be relied upon with satisfied assurance in a presidential election. The tide of fortune turns according to the merits of the candidates and the issues espoused. The overwhelming result in the last election is no criterion. A political landslide slideth where it listeth. We feel the effect thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. It sweeps a given party in or out of power with equal celerity and suddenness.

Every new Negro voter counts for a certain addition to the Republican ranks and adds--208--probability to success. European immigrants usually distribute themselves more or less evenly between the two dominant parties, and do not greatly disturb the political balance. But as this source of numerical augmentation has now been greatly diminished by stringent legislation, the Negro influx will receive greater consideration and emphasis. The enfranchisement of woman also lends advantage to the party to which the Negro belongs. Enfranchised white women divide their vote in about the same ratio as the white men. But the new Negro female vote adds a solid block to the Republican column. Negro men have been known, under appropriate inducement and persuasion, to vote the Democratic ticket, but the Negro woman is more cautious and conservative. No inducement or persuasion yet advanced can swerve her from allegiance to the party of racial deliverance.

The Negro in the North, especially the newcomer, is mainly adult, and yields a larger proportion of voters than is contributed by a normal population. It is reasonable to estimate that more than half of the half million Negro migrants are over twenty-one years of age. This would add at least 250,000 voters to the Republican strength in the Northern States.

The Northern influx of Negroes has been--209--confined mainly to a few industrial states which, curiously enough, are the states of greatest political uncertainty. The following table, giving the

Northern states containing over 50,000 Negroes, and the decennial increment during the last decade, furnished interesting material for political speculation:
Negroes in the North

State 1919 1920 Increase Entire North 1,078,336 1,550,754 472,418 Pennsylvania 193,919 234,494 40,575 New York 134,191 198,433 64,242 Ohio 111,452 186,183 74,731 Illinois 109,049 182,254 73,205 Missouri 157,452 178,241 20,789 New Jersey 89,760 117,132 27,372 Indiana 60,320 80,810 20,490 Michigan 17,115 60,082 42,967 Kansas 54,030 57,925 3,895 Total 927,288 1,295,554 368,266 Eighty-seven per cent of the Negroes in all of the North and West are found in these nine states, which also caught 88 per cent of the increase of Negro population. This shows that the race is growing slightly more rapidly in this area than in the other twenty-two more thinly settled states comprising the North and West.--210--

Four hundred eighteen thousand Negroes, or 88 per cent of the Northern migration, went to the heavy Negro states above enumerated. In all of the remaining twenty-two states of the North and West there were only 151,048 Negroes whose numbers increased by 54,152 from 1910 to 1920.

Estimating that 25,000 voters will probably turn the tide in a closely contested election, it will be seen that the Negro easily holds the balance of power in the above enumerated states. There were at least 45,000 new voters added to the Republican party in New York, 32,000 in Pennsylvania, 37,000 in Ohio, 36,000 in Illinois, 10,000 in Missouri, 17,000 in New Jersey, 10,000 in Indiana, 22,000 in Michigan, and 3,000 in Kansas. The 205,200 Negroes scattered throughout the other twenty-two states have important political weight, amounting in some instances to a decisive factor.

On the whole, the Republican party represents the capital and organized business, on a large scale. The Democratic party is more largely composed of laborers and industrial workers. The conflict between labor and capital threatens the stability of our social order. The Negro's alignment with the party of conservative business integrity may serve to postpone the final issue of this conflict and, it may be,--211--lead to permanent security of the existing order.

The Negro in the North is found mainly in the large centers of population. This city concentration will have great bearing, not only on municipal politics in general, but will enable the colored voter to utilize his ballot for the welfare of his group. For it will stimulate ambition to elect members of the race to official position.

The following table shows the cities with a Negro population of over 20,000, together with the decennial increase:

Negro Population -- Cities North of the Potomac River

City	1910	1920	Increase
New York	91,706	153,088	61,382
Philadelphia	84,459	134,098	49,639
Washington	96,446	109,976	13,530
Chicago	44,103	109,594	65,491
St. Louis	43,960	69,603	25,643
Detroit	5,241	41,532	36,241
Pittsburgh	25,623	37,688	12,065
Indianapolis	21,816	34,690	12,874
Cleveland	8,448	34,474	26,026
Kansas City	23,566	30,706	7,140
Cincinnati	19,639	29,636	9,997
Columbus	12,739	22,091	9,352
Total	477,746	807,176	323,901

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The Negro in these cities increased by 72 per cent during the last decade, whereas the Northern contingent increased by only 46 per cent, the southern element by only 1.9 per cent, according to census reports. The race is not only flocking rapidly to the North, but much more rapidly to the large cities of that section. While this remarkable increase is due to causes of limited duration, yet the numbers are not likely to diminish, but will probably show substantial increase for the coming decades.

The segregation of the Negro in wards and districts in these cities has also important political significance. It will lead to political aspiration of the race for a measure of leadership and self-determination. If the Negroes were evenly divided throughout the entire population in such cities as New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, they would constitute a negligible per cent of the total population,

and would have little or no direct political influence. But, because of residential segregation, they will, to a large degree, dominate the circumscribed areas in which they reside. Already Negro aldermen are elected to city governments in New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, Indianapolis and Cleveland. In the course of time, the race will be represented by its members in all city governments where they reside in large numbers--213--and are restricted to circumscribed areas of domicile. Segregation also enables the race to elect members of the state legislatures as they dominate in the number of legislative districts. Already there are Negro members of the legislature in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Ohio and Illinois, based upon circumscribed numbers in segregated areas. Thus the Negro is not only gaining political power in local city affairs, but also in the state governments as well.

The Negro in the North is not an incurable Republican in municipal and state politics. The attitude of the Northern Democrat toward him is not less friendly than that of his Republican rival. In local affairs, they often affiliate with the party that offers the most advantageous consideration. In this way a basis of political influence is built up with both parties for the welfare of the race. The man with the votes is the man with the influence. The man without a vote is a nullity in the state.

It is a safe prophecy to predict that within the next half generation there will be Negro congressmen from New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. According to the present apportionment, it requires 211,877 to constitute a congressional district. Wherever the Negro constitutes the majority party, a Negro congressman--214--may be nominated and elected by skillful manipulation. A Negro population of 60,000 or more might easily claim this distinction. The whites are more than apt to be divided among a number of parties with divergent political tenets. A solid party vote of more than one-fourth of the total might very easily dictate the final selection.

If the Negro population in New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Chicago were located in a single congressional district, they could easily elect members of their own race to Congress. But while they are segregated, these areas in which they reside are not contiguous so as to form a separate congressional district. By the political device known as gerrymandering, manipulators may regulate affairs so as to frustrate this ambitious purpose. But if the present tendency toward augmentation in numbers and segregation in sections continues, several of our great cities will contain districts with Negro political leadership.

In an important sense, the Negro constitutes a separate political entity from the whites. In prevalent parlance, the "Negro vote" is a racial entity without reference to hard and fast geographical lines. If all the Negroes in New York or Illinois could sense the necessity for a racial representative in Congress, they might--215--so prevail upon the management of the Republican party, either to regulate congressional districts in their favor, or to throw the nomination to a Negro in districts even where they do constitute the majority of the dominant party. Trading votes is a practice well known to sagacious political management.

Self-determination is a phrase which President Wilson gave prominence to describe the spirit of the World War. Abraham Lincoln expressed the idea with greater aptness when he said that no man is good enough to govern another man without his consent. The same thought lay in the mind of Thomas Jefferson, who declared that all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. The wise man is not wise enough to govern the fool. The good man is not good enough to govern the bad man. The rich man is not liberal enough to govern the poor man. The white man is not good enough to govern the black man without his consent and participation in the government. American women have full faith and confidence in American men; but they do not feel that they are qualified to govern them without their consent.

No class of people can have self-determination in the sense of a government separate and distinct from the whole people. All that can--216--be expected is that every class shall have an equal say and an equal voice in the government by which it is controlled. An infant with no language but a cry exerts

as large a share of self-determination upon the household as the wiser and older members of the family. Self-government is better than good government, for without self-government, good government has no enduring basis. Any class which is excluded from the governmental circle cannot expect to have its interests carefully considered and safeguarded. One Negro member of a city council or state legislature, or of the Congress of the United States, would be likely to accomplish more for the just consideration of his race than is possible for white representatives to do. The specific provisions securing public and civil equality of the races in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and Illinois have, for the most part, been proposed and pushed through by a single Negro member who happened to be elected to the legislature. Two or three Negro members of Congress with a comprehensive understanding, calm judgment and adaptable good sense would go far toward changing the national attitude on the public and political relations of the race. The Negro's political power is in inverse proportion to his relative numerosity. A handful of Negroes in Massachusetts have more political--217--weight than a million of the race in Mississippi. It does not seem likely that the Negro will get his political power in the South within the near future, but whatever power the race asserts will come from the North.

The political oppression which tends to drive the black man to the North, and the proscriptive spirit which determines the metes and bounds of his habitation, will serve to give the race political vantage ground, and react to the undoing of the proscriptive tendencies of which he seems to be the helpless victim. Thus the Negro will become the negative beneficiary of circumstances which at first seemed calculated to work his political damage.

There is no likelihood that the North will resort to disfranchisement to deprive the Negro of his constitutional rights. His numbers are so small in proportion to the whole electorate that the scarecrow of Negro domination can have no terror.

The Negro voter in the North is actuated by altruistic racial motive in demanding full recognition for his race in the South. He will continue to keep the political agitation for constitutional rights which may serve to bring the nation to a realizing sense of its anomalous position when it would pose as the moral monitor of mankind and yet makes a scrap of paper of--218--its fundamental law. May it not be that this Negro migration incident to industrial exigencies will, by the good fortune of circumstances, lead to the fulfillment of the war amendments of our Constitution, and make of that document a charter of liberty indeed?