

Group 5: Agents—Handout 5 (page 1 of 25)

Directions

- Pretend that it is 1917 and you are agents encouraging workers to move to the North to work.
- Review the questions with your group.
- Read excerpts from primary source documents in the “Group 5” file in the online folder for this class (or access the file at https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/Education/Lessons/pdf/maps/Group5_Agents.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 shortage in the North?**
2. **What factors contributed to balancing the labor supply between the surplus in the South and the shortage in the North? Also, what hindrances were there to efforts to balance the labor supply?**
3. **What impact did the acceleration of the Great Migration have on the imbalance between the supply of workers in the North and South?**

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

Page 31

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

Chapter III: Stimulation of the Movement

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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

Page 65

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

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

Chapter VI: The Draining of the Black Belt

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.

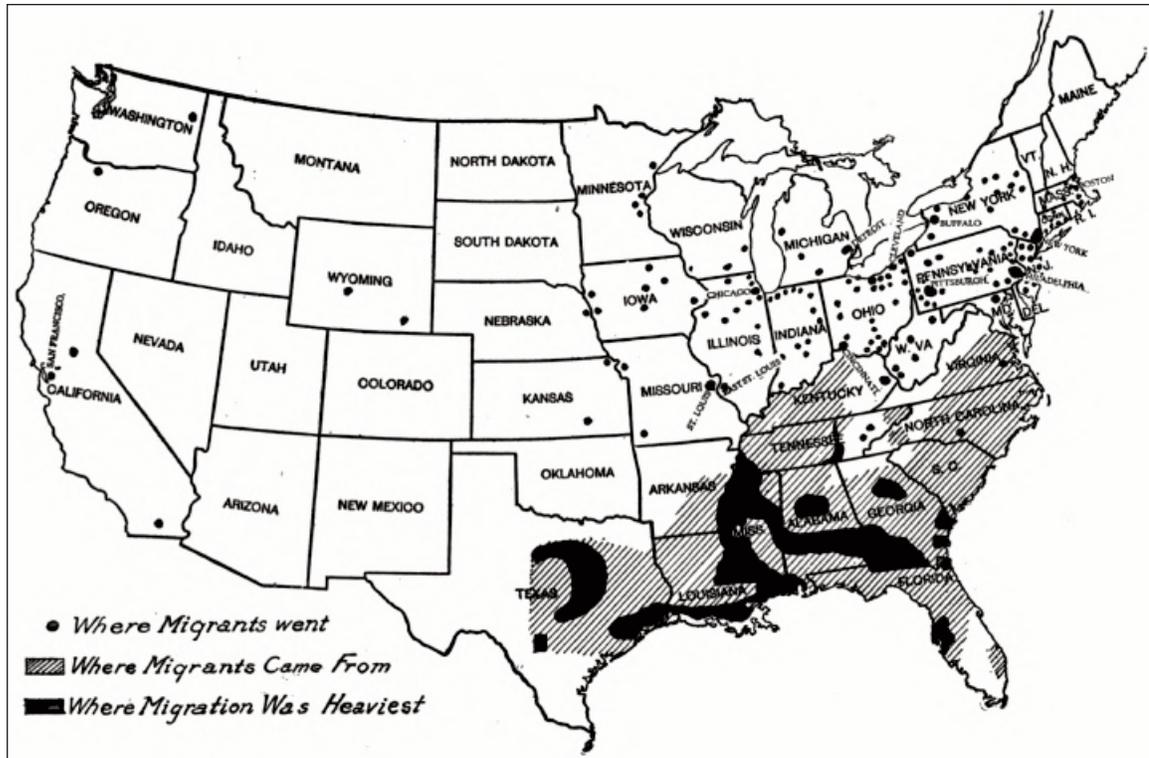
The principal difference between this course and the Underground Railroad was that in the later movement the southernmost States contributed the largest numbers. This perhaps is due in part to the selection of Florida and Georgia by the first concerns offering the inducement of free transportation, and 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 VI: The Draining of the Black Belt

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

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

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

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

Chapter VIII: Effects of the Movement on the South

Page 90

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

Chapter VIII: Effects of the Movement on the South

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

Chapter XIV: Public Opinion Regarding the Migration

Page 154

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

Chapter XIV: Public Opinion Regarding the Migration

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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

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 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. Doubt-

*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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less 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

“Agents of Migration,” pages 27-28

Many of the whites whom I interviewed laid great stress on the activities of labor agents as a cause of emigration. The truth seems to be that the white labor agent was and to some extent still is an important means for acquainting Negroes with the superior wages of the North, and with the greater degree of equality of treatment in the courts, in the schools, in the cars [trains], at the polls, and elsewhere.

But since the parties to whom the labor agent went, if they responded, left Mississippi, it has not been practicable to get direct information from those securing free transportation through such agents. The repeated statements of men of standing, both whites and Negroes, leave no doubt, however, that free transportation could be had for the asking by Negroes willing to go north in the autumn of 1916, although the labor agent himself is inclined to be secretive, his occupation not being regarded favorably as a rule by white communities. The impression prevails that the white labor agent is still somewhat active, but that more and more dependence is placed upon Negro emigrants who have been sent back to draw others after them.

I quote upon this point a letter from a well-known Negro educator, who stands high with both the whites and his own race:

There were a few labor agents for a while, but they are not very abundant now; though I was told up north by some colored men that several white agents were in X at various times and the white people never knew it. Parties said it was the first time in their lives they ever knew colored people to keep anything or that it didn't leak out in some way, but they kept it absolutely secret.

Another labor agent is the colored man who comes back proclaiming he has come to stay, don't like the North, and is back to die in the Sunny South. Nine times out of ten he is back after a crew and pretty soon disappears and a hundred more with him.

Uncle Sam is the most effective agent at this time. All who are away are writing for others to come on in, the water's fine.

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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**

“Volume of the Migration,” page 57

It has been the policy of the railroads within recent months to discourage the movement of Negroes by refusing to provide extra equipment and by not accepting prepaid orders for transportation. Some months ago, when the Pennsylvania and Erie Railway Cos. Transported several thousand Negroes for employment on their roads, they tried to reach an agreement with certain railways in the South whereby prepaid orders would be accepted in lieu of cash fares for the Negroes being transported. The officials of some of the railways in Alabama stated that these requests were not complied with and that they have consistently refused to accept such orders for the transportation of Negroes from anyone. Labor agents have also found it difficult to obtain party tickets from the railways desiring to discourage the removal of Negroes. During the months when the migration was heaviest the railway companies provided extra cars, when the number leaving was sufficient to demand them.

This policy was discontinued after President Wilson requested the railroads to conserve their equipment. Since that time, when there are more passengers than can be accommodated on the regular cars, all who are unable to obtain seats are required to wait for other trains. On the through trains, however, Negroes are now being given the use of a full car, whereas formerly the cars contained a partition, one section being used for Negro passengers, the other as a smoking car for whites.

Group 5: Agents (page 23 of 25)

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,” page 62

This demand for labor in the north was another of the immediate causes of the movement. Without the economic basis of higher wages offered there it would not have been given the momentum which it attained during the past winter and spring. By the spring of 1916 there was a real surplus of labor throughout the black belt which was ready to respond to the demand for labor and higher wages in the northern and eastern States. But the current once started did not stop when the surplus was removed.

Another of the immediate causes was the labor agent. The agents have played the part of middleman in the exodus. By furnishing transportation and by other means they have made it possible and easy. From the conditions which have already been described it may be seen that Alabama afforded an exceptional field for the activities of such agents. This is especially true, since the unlicensed agents allowed to solicit for a time practically unmolested by the State authorities. The State had laws which imposed a heavy license for the soliciting of labor to be removed from its borders; but it was not until its own industries were threatened with a shortage of labor that a successful attempt was made to enforce the laws. In all the counties visited it was reported that unlicensed agents had come and gone, but that it was usually impossible to detect their presence until they had got away. White agents have found it advantageous to employ Negro subagents to work for them among the Negroes. This made it difficult for the State license inspectors to obtain the necessary proof for conviction. The statement was everywhere made that it was impossible to get much information concerning the agents from the Negroes themselves.

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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,” page 65

The labor agents as a class, whether residing temporarily or permanently and whether licensed or unlicensed, have been unscrupulous as to the means used for soliciting Negroes to be sent out of the State. Their work has been a profitable business in proportion to the numbers they have sent. One of the agencies at Bessemer has issued attractive circulars from time to time as a means of advertising. These were distributed among the Negroes in Birmingham and Bessemer and some were found in the black-belt counties. They contained such phrases as, “Let’s go back north where there are no labor troubles, no strikes, no lockouts; Large coal, good wages, fair treatment; Two weeks’ pay; Good houses; We ship you and your household goods; All colored ministers can go free; Will advance you money if necessary; Scores of men have written us thanking us for sending them; Go now while you have the chance.”

The agents stated that they have done no illicit soliciting through the employment of unlicensed subagents, but State license inspectors have caught such subagents from time to time and punished them. The use of subagents is an extremely effective method of soliciting. The licensed agents have not gone among the mining camps in person, but have attracted the Negroes to their offices. Negro subagents, however, disguised as salesmen and insurance agents, have obtained access to the Negro quarters. In some instances, those who went North were sent back by their northern employers to put up a plea of distress and regain their former jobs in the Birmingham district. When allowed to go to work they left for the North again in a few days, after having induced 20 or 25 other employees to go with them.

Group 5: Agents (page 25 of 25)

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,” page 86

Low wages, in the South and high wages in the North have been the chief determining factors in the movement. The foregoing discussion of the conditions prevailing in sections which have been losing Negro population indicate a complex of economic and social causes—wages, conditions of labor, lynching, minor injustices in the courts, and other social considerations. However, the fact that the movement began among the farm laborers and the day laborers in the city and, at first, largely among the unemployed in Savannah indicates that a living wage attracted the first migrants and has been one of the primary considerations with the large majority of the later migrants. In such cases the labor agent from the North was the instigator of the movement. Agents of the Pennsylvania and Erie railroads started the movement from Savannah, and agents carried the first groups up from the boll-weevil section. Arrests of labor agents were made in Americus, Cuthbert, Thomasville, and Sylvester, and direct evidence of labor agents having been at work was found in many of the south Georgia towns. Only one agent—who operated in Macon three months—paid the \$500 State license for soliciting labor; the others operated in a semisecret way. The universal testimony of employers was that after the initial group movement by agents, Negroes kept going by twos and threes. These were drawn by letters and actual advances of money from Negroes who had already settled in the North.