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## THE ECONOMIC FUTURE OF THE NEGRO

W. E. B. DUBOIS

The object of this paper is to note the historic rise of economic classes among Negro Americans and to seek by a study of present conditions to forecast the economic future of this class of American citizens. As has been many times pointed out the slaves consisted of a mass of field hands and a smaller number of selected servants and a few artisans. When this mass of labor was suddenly transmuted into a body of laborers more or less free there ensued a struggle for economic independence which is still going on. When now we discuss the economic future of this group of ten millions we must first of all not fall into the prevalent error of speaking of these persons as though they formed one essentially homogeneous group. This was not true even in slavery times, and it is so false today that any theories built on such a conception are false from the start.

The Negro American after slavery made four distinct and different efforts to reach economic safety. The first effort was through the preferment of the selected house servant class; the second was by means of competitive industry; the third was by means of landholding and the fourth by means of what I am going to call the group economy—a phrase which I shall later explain.

1. The effort of the house servant.

The one person who under the slavery régime came nearest escaping from the toils of the system and disabilities of the caste was the favorite house servant. This arose from four reasons :

(a) The house servant was brought into closest contact with the culture of the master's family.

(b) He had more often the advantages of town and city life.

(c) He was able to gain at least some smattering of an education.

(d) He was usually a blood relative of the master class.

For this reason the natural leadership of the emancipated race fell to this class, the brunt of the burden of reconstruction fell on their shoulders and when the history of this period is written according to truth and not according to our prejudices it will be clear that no group of men ever made a more tremendous fight against more overwhelming odds.

It seemed natural at this time that this leading class of upper servants would step into the economic life of the nation from this vantage ground and play a leading rôle. This they did in several instances: the most conspicuous being the barber, the caterer, and the steward. For the most part however economic society refused to admit the black applicant on his merits to any place of authority or advantage; he held his own in the semi-servile work of barber until he met the charge of color discrimination from his own folk and the strong competition of Germans and Italians; while the caterer was displaced by the palatial hotel in which he could gain no foothold. On the whole then the mass of house servants found the doors of advancement closed in their faces; the better tenth both themselves and through their better trained children escaped into the professions and thus found economic independence. The mass of servants remained servants or turned toward industry.

2. In lines of industrial coöperation the second attempt of the freedmen was made. It was a less ambitious attempt than that of the house servants and comprehended larger numbers ; it was characterized by a large migration to cities and towns and entrance into work as teamsters, railway sections hands, miners, saw-mill employees, porters, hostlers, etc.

This class met and joined in the towns the older class of artisans, most of them connected with the building trades and together this class attempted economic advance. Outside the farmers it is this class that has attracted most attention, that has met all the brunt of the economic battle, and that are usually referred to in studies of this sort. What the outcome of this second attempt at economic freedom will be can only be divined by calling attention to the third method by which the Negro has sought the Way of Life.

3. Meantime, however, the freed had hands started forward by a third way that of land ownership. Most of those who got any start became share-tenants and a fourth of these succeeded in buying land. Those who bought land approximated economic independence, forming the closed plantation economy of the olden times but with colored owner, colored laborers, and colored tenants. In an increasing number of cases the colored store came in to help them and we have a complete system of what I have called the group economy.

4. The Group Economy. This fourth method is of striking importance but outside the country districts is little understood. It consists of such a coöperative arrangement of industries and services within the Negro group that the group tends to become a closed economic circle largely independent of the surrounding white

world. The recognition of this fact explains many of the anomalies which puzzle the student of the Negro American—pardon me, I should not say puzzle; nothing ever puzzles a student of the Negro—but that which makes our conclusions so curiously incoherent.

You used to see numbers of colored barbers; you are tempted to think they are all gone—yet today there are more Negro barbers in the United States than ever before, but at the same time a larger number than ever before cater solely to colored trade where they have a monopoly. Because the Negro lawyer, physician, and teacher serve almost exclusively a colored clientele, their very existence is half forgotten. The new Negro business men are not successors of the old; there used to be Negro business men in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore catering to white trade. The new Negro business man caters to colored trade. So far has this gone that today in every city of the United States with a considerable Negro population, the colored group is serving itself with religious ministrations, medical care, legal advice, and education of children: to a growing degree with food, houses, books, and newspapers. So extraordinary has been this development that it forms a large and growing part in the economy in the case of fully one-half of the Negroes of the United States and in the case of something between 50,000 and 100,000 town and city Negroes, representing at least 300,000 persons the group economy approaches a complete system. To these may be added the bulk of the 200,000 Negro farmers who own their farms. They form a natural group economy and are increasing the score of it in every practical way. This then is the fourth way in which the Negro has sought economic salvation.

Having reviewed now historically these four sets of efforts let us ask next : What are the questions in the present problem of economic status? they may be summed up in four groups :

1. The relation of the Negro to city and country.
2. The relation of the Negro to group and national economy.
3. The influence of race prejudice.
4. The question of efficiency.

1. City and country. A fact of great importance in regard to the economic condition of the Negro is his rush city-ward so that today nearly a fourth of the colored population lives in cities and towns. This means an intensifying of the urban economic problem. The group of over two million town Negroes represents preëminently all of the economic problems outside of those connected with land-holding and agriculture.

Moreover the city Negroes contain probably a third of the intelligent Negroes, and have a rate of illiteracy of probably less than 33%. Here it is then in the city that the more intricate problems of economic life and race contact are going to be fought out. On the other hand the very presence of seven million Negroes in the country districts makes the economic problem there though simpler in quality of tremendous proportions in quantity and of added significance when we see how the country is feeding the city problems.

2. The group and national economy. Present conditions show that while the force of competition from without is of tremendous economic importance in the economic development of the Negro, it is not by any means final ; in an isolated country the industry of the inhabitants could be supported and developed by means of a protective tariff, until the country was able to

enter into international trade with fully developed resources; that a similar kind of thing could be accomplished in a group not isolated but living scattered among more numerous and richer neighbors is often forgotten. There is therefore a double question in regard to the Negroes' economic advance; the first question is: How far is the Negro likely to gain a foothold as one of the economic factors in the nation's industrial organization? The second is, How far can the Negro develop a group economy which will break the force of race prejudice until his right and ability to enter the national economy are assured?

3. The influence of race prejudice. This brings us to a consideration of the kind of retarding prejudice which the Negro meets in the economic world. This may be stated briefly as follows: outside of all question of ability an American of Negro descent will find more or less concerted effort on the part of his white neighbors:

- (a.) To keep him from all positions of authority.
- (b.) To prevent his promotion to higher grades.
- (c.) To exclude him entirely from certain lines of industry.
- (d.) To prevent him from competing upon equal terms with white workingmen.
- (e.) To prevent his buying land.
- (f.) To prevent his defence of his economic rights and status by the ballot.

These efforts have had varying success and have been pressed with varying degrees of emphasis. Yet they must all be taken into account; strikes have repeatedly occurred against Negro foremen, of whose ability there was no complaint; the white office boy, errand-boy, section hand, locomotive firemen, all have before them

the chance to become clerk or manager or to rise in the railway service. The Negro has few such openings. Fully half of the trade unions of the United States, counted by numerical strength, exclude Negroes from membership and thus usually prevent them from working at the trade. Another fourth of the unions while admitting a few black men here and there practically exclude most of them. Only in a few unions, mostly unskilled, is the Negro welcomed as in the case of the miners; in a few others the economic foothold of the Negro was good enough to prevent his expulsion as in some of the building trades. Agitation to prevent the selling of land to Negroes has always been spread over large districts in the south and is spreading, and in a recent campaign in Atlanta the most telling cartoon for the influencing of white voters was one which represented the house of the candidate being built by black men. The black vote was of course disfranchised in this contest.

4. The last element in the economic condition of the Negro is the great question: How efficient a laborer is the Negro, and how efficient can he become with intelligence, technical training, and encouragement? That the average Negro laborer today is less efficient than the average European laborer is certain. When, however, you take into account the Negro's ignorance, his past industrial training, and the social atmosphere in which he works it is not so easy to say off-hand what his possible worth is. Certainly increasing intelligence has made him increasingly discontented with his conditions of work; the determined withdrawing of responsibility from the Negro has not increased his sense of responsibility; the systematic exploiting of black labor has hurt its

steadiness and reliability ; notwithstanding all this there never were before in the world's history so many black men steadily engaged in common and skilled labor as in the case of the American Negro ; nor is there a laboring force which judiciously guided seems capable of more remarkable development.

Having now glanced at the historic development and the present elements of the problem, let us take each economic group of Negroes and consider its present condition and probable future.

1. The 250,000 independents. This group includes 200,000 farmers, 20,000 teachers, 15,000 clergymen, 10,000 merchants, and numbers of professional men of various sorts. They are separated sharply into a rural group of farmers and an urban group. They are characterized by the fact that with few exceptions they live by an economic service done their own people. This is least true in regard to the farmers but even in their case it is approximately true ; they, more than any other group of Negro farmers, raise their own supplies, and use their cotton as a surplus crop ; through this alone usually do they come into the national economy. This group is the one that feels the force of outward competition and prejudice least in its economic life and most in the spiritual life. It is the head and front of the group economy movement, comprehends the spiritual as well as economic leaders and is bound in the future to have a large and important development, limited only by the ability of the race to support it. In some respects it is of course vulnerable. Many of the teachers for instance, depend upon educational boards elected by white voters, and upon philanthropy. There has been concerted action in the rural districts of the south to drive out the best Negro teachers and

even in the cities the way of the independent black teacher who dares think his own thought is made difficult, the teachers too in the great philanthropic foundations are being continually warned that their bread and butter depend on their agreeing with present public opinion in regard to the Negro. There is growing up however silently almost unnoticed a distinct Negro private school system officered, taught, attended, and supported by Negroes. Such private schools have today at least 25,000 pupils and are growing rapidly.

If we regard now the city group exclusively we find this is true :

The best class of this group is fully abreast in education and morality with the great middle class of Americans, their physical record in the thirty-four great life insurance companies is far better than the record of the Irish and as good as that of German Americans. They have furnished notable names in literature, art, business, and professional life and have repeatedly in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington, and in other great centers proved their right to be treated as American citizens on a plane of perfect equality with other citizens. Despite this, and despite the fact that this group is numerically small and without much inherited wealth, it has been struggling under two overwhelming burdens : first upon this group has been laid the duty and responsibility of the care, guidance, and reformation of the great stream of immigrants from the rural south simply because they are of the same race ; there is no claim or vestige of a claim that this small city group of risen Negroes is responsible for the degradation of the plantation, yet the whole community partly by thoughtless transference of ideas and

largely by deliberate intention has said, for instance, that when between 1840 and 1900, 50,000 strangers, ignorant, mistrained, careless, and sometimes vicious—that when this group precipitated itself on a city like Philadelphia that practically the whole responsibility of their training and uplifting be placed not upon the half million Philadelphians but upon a small group of 10,000 persons in that city who were related to them by ties of blood. This was a hard thing to ask and an unfair requirement, and yet if it is asked that Irish see to poor Irish immigrants, and Jews to poor Jews, at least this is always done: the helpers are given all aid and sympathy in their undertakings and their hands are upheld. In the case of the Negro however, every disability, every legal, social, and economic bar placed before the new immigrant *must be endured by the city group on whom they were dumped*. And that group must be judged continually and repeatedly by the worst class of those very immigrants whose uplift was calmly shifted to their shoulders by the city at large. What could be the result of this? It could only be the submerging of the talented tenth under the wave of immigration. This has happened repeatedly in great cities; New York had in the forties as intelligent a group of well-to-do thrifty and skilled Negroes as the nation has ever seen. Forty thousand strangers dropped on them. The city stimulated by white southerners formed a cordon around them and not only cut off every avenue of economic and social escape, but narrowed, beat, and crowded back the better class out of their vantage ground which men like my grandfather helped them gain by work and diligence and desert, and this group was literally drowned and suffocated beneath the deluge of immigrants and has never wholly recovered itself to this

day. In Philadelphia this rise and choking to death has taken place three distinct times within a single century. In Chicago today a silent battle of this sort to the death is taking place ; there is a city where in law, medicine, and dentistry men of Negro blood have repeatedly stood in the foremost ranks of their profession, where Negroes have risen in economic coöperation to positions of authority and preferment, today when 25,000 strangers trained partially in the Mississippi delta of which my good friend, Mr. Stone, will tell you, when these men have been precipitated on Chicago a desperate effort is being made to level every Negro in the city by treatment and discrimination down to the disabilities and limitations of the least deserving of the group.

In the south the beating back of the leading group has not awaited the excuse of immigration. On the general ground of impudence or indolence this class of economic and social leaders have been repeatedly driven out of the smaller towns, while in the larger cities every possible combination and tool from the Jim Crow laws to the secret society and the boycott have been made time and time again to curtail the economic advantages of this class and to make their daily life so intolerable that they would either leave or sink into listless acquiescence. I know a Negro business man worth \$50,000 in a southern city. He has a white clientele and he tells me that he dare not buy a horse and buggy lest the white people may think he's getting rich and boycott him ; a barber in another city built a fine house on a corner lot and in a single year his white trade was gone. A black business man in a country town of Alabama where I made some studies preparatory to this paper underbid his white fellow merchant

in buying cotton seed and was shot down for his shrewdness.

What then can this town group do in self defence? It can organize the Negroes about it into a self-supplying group. This organization is going on. So far has it gone that in cities like Washington, Richmond, and Atlanta a colored family which does not employ a colored physician is in danger of social ostracism; in the north this is extending to grocery stores; in Atlanta when I went there eight years ago the whole business of insurance for sickness and accident was in the hands of white companies. Today fully one-half of it has passed to black companies. This year I saw organized such a company with \$12,000 cash capital and this company today is taking \$700 a week in dues.

There are persons who see nothing but the advantages of this course. But it has its disadvantages. It intensifies prejudice and bitterness. The white collectors of Atlanta insurance companies for fear of white opinion would not take off their hats when they entered Negro homes. The black companies have harped on this, published it, called attention to it, and actually capitalized it into cold cash. Then too this movement narrows the activity of the best class of Negroes, withdraws them from much helpful competition and contact, perverts and cheapens their ideals—in fact provincializes them in thought and deed. Yet it is today the only path of economic escape for the most gifted class of black men and the development in this line which you and I will live to see is going to be enormous.

Turning now to the rural group of this independent class we come to the Negro land owners. Here first we run flat against one of those traditional statements which pass for truth because unchallenged: namely,

that it is easy for the southern Negro to buy land. The letter of this statement is true, but the spirit of it is false. There are vast tracts of land in the south that anybody black or white can buy for little or nothing for the simple reason that they are worth little or nothing. Eventually these lands will become valuable. But they are nearly valueless today. For the Negro, land to be of any value must have present value—he is too poor to wait. Moreover it must be

1. Land which he knows how to cultivate.
2. Land accessible to a market.
3. Land so situated as to afford the owner protection.

There are certain crops which the Negro farmer knows how to cultivate: to these can be added certain food supplies. Gradually intensive cultivation can be taught but this takes a long time. It is idle to compare the south with Belgium or France. The agricultural economy of their lands is the result of centuries of training aided by a rising market and by law and order. The present agricultural economy of the south is but a generation removed from the land-murder of a slave régime. No graduate of that school knows how to make the desert bloom and the process of teaching must be long and tedious. Meantime he must live on such crops as he knows how to cultivate. Moreover bad roads, comparatively few railroads, and few navigable rivers throw much of this land out of usefulness. But even more important than all this: the black farmer must seek the protection of some community life with his own people and he finds that in the black belt. But it is precisely in this black belt that it is most difficult to buy land; here it is that the capitalistic culture of cotton with a system of labor peonage is so profitable that land is high; more over in

many of these regions it is considered bad policy to sell Negroes land because a fever of land owning "demoralizes" the labor system so that in the densest black belt of the south the percentage of land holding is often least among Negroes—a fact that has led to curious moralizing on the shiftlessness of black men. The country does not yet realize that the cutting up of southern plantations has ceased, and that under the new slavery of Negro labor there has begun an astounding and dangerous concentration of landholding in the south; this is shown not simply by the increase of the average size of farms in the central south from 144 to 155 acres in the last decade but these figures must be modified enormously by the fact that these farms do not belong to single owners but are owned in groups of as high as 40 or 50 by great landed proprietors. In the south there are 185,000 owners who hold from two to 50 farms each and there are 5000 owners who have over 20 farms apiece. In the South Central states alone 800 men own a tract of land larger than Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut combined, and but a few days ago I stood on the land of a white Alabama land-owner who held 50 square miles and would not sell a single acre to a black man. This land is the best land of these regions. There are still other regions in the south, and large regions, where black men can buy land at reasonable terms but it is usually land poorly situated as regards market, or unhealthful in climate, or so placed as to afford the owner poor schools and lawless and overbearing white neighbors.

Now add to this fact the realization of the training and character of the Negro American farmer. We continually discuss and criticise these farmers as though they were responsible trained men who carelessly or

viciously neglect their economic opportunity. They are on the contrary unlettered men, trained consciously and carefully to irresponsibility, to whom all concepts of modern property and saving are new and who need benevolent guardianship in their upward striving. Such guardianship they have in some cases received from former masters and in this way a considerable number of the present landowners first got their land. In the great majority of cases however, this guardianship has consisted in deliberately taking the earning of the Negro farmer and appropriating them to the use of the landlord. The argument was this: "These Negroes do not need this money—if I give it to them they'll squander it or leave the plantation; therefore give them just enough to be happy and keep them with me. In any case their labor rightfully belongs to me and my fathers and was illegally taken from us." On the strength of this argument and by such practices it is a conservative estimate to say that three-fourth of the stipulated wages and shares of crops which the Negro has earned on the farm since emancipation has been illegally withheld from him by the white landlords, either on the plea that this was for his own good or without any plea.

Would this wealth have been wasted if given the laborer? I waive the mere question of the right of any employer to withhold wages—and take the purely economic question: Is the community richer by such practices? It is not. The south is poorer. The best Negroes would have squandered much at first and most would have squandered all, but this would have been more than offset by the increased responsibility and efficiency of the resulting Negro landholders. Nor is this mere pious opinion. There is in the south

in the middle of the black belt, a county of some 700 square miles, Lowndes county, Alabama; it contained in 1900 31,000 Negroes and 6000 whites. It was the seat of the most strenuous type of American slavery—with absentee owners, living at ease in Montgomery, great stretches of plantation with 500 to 1000 slaves on each driven by overseers and riders. There was no communication with the outside world, little passing between plantations and even today a 48 hours rain turns half the county into an impassible bog. The Negroes were slothful and ignorant—even today forty years after emancipation the illiteracy among those over ten is nearly 70%, and of the males of voting age over 72%. I know something of the south from ten years' residence and study, and outside of some sections of the Mississippi and Red river valley, I do not think it would be easy to find a place where conditions were on the whole more unfavorable to the rise of the Negro. The white element was lawless, the Negroes thoroughly cowed, and up until recent times the body of a dead Negro did not even call for an arrest. In this county, during the last ten years there has been carried on a scheme of coöperative land buying under the Calhoun School. It was asked for by a few Negroes who could not get land; it was engineered by a Negro graduate of Hampton; it was made possible by the willingness of a white landlord to sell his plantation and actively further the enterprise by advice and good will. It was capitalized by white northerners and inspired by a New England woman. Here was every element in partnership and the experiment began in 1897. It involved the buying of 3000 acres by 100 men. It encountered all sorts of difficulties: the character and training of the men involved; the enmity of the surrounding white

population with a few notable exceptions; the natural suspicion of the black population born of a régime of cheating; the low price of cotton until the last two years, and several years of alternate flood and drouth; and the attempts of neighboring whites to secure the homesteads through mortgages. And yet what are the results? Nine years ago not one of the 100 men had a deed to a single acre of land; today they hold 77 warranty deeds conveying to them over 3000 acres of absolutely unencumbered land. Of the 100 men who tried to buy land seven gave up and 18 were sent away after trial—25 in all. Seven are still paying for their land but owe only small sums. Of the men who tried to buy land 29 were born in slavery, 37 in reconstruction times, and the rest since 1875. I rode over that land a week ago with the black man who managed the enterprise. He knew every farm, and every person, and their personal history. All around pretty three or four room painted cottages were arising. Twenty-three one room cabins still remain, but there are 34 two room houses and 29 of three or more rooms. The Negroes round about call this the "Free Land"—there are no overseers and riders roaming about whipping the workers and seducing their wives and daughters; there is an eight months' school in their midst, a pretty new church, monthly conferences, a peculiar system of self-government, and a family life untainted in a single instance.

And yet: if ten years ago a planter from Lowndes County had appeared here he would have told you of a lazy shiftless set of Negroes who had to be driven to work, who squandered their money in whiskey and gambling, who did not buy land because they did not want to. He would have told you that, and what's

more he would have sincerely believed every word he said. Yet in this very place comes an experiment which calls out selects and choses in one small corner of this county out of a neighborhood of perhaps 400 families, some 75, who in ten years have been transmuted into a respectable peasantry paying taxes on \$25,000 worth of property. Nor does this exhaust the possibilities of this community; if the land were available the same experiment could be repeated—men are clamoring for a trial but it is doubtful if they will get it for one man owns 50 square miles about there and he doesn't sell to Negroes.

My honest belief is that what has been done in Lowndes County under the Calhoun school and the sensible far-seeing guardianship of John Lemon, Pitt Dillingham, and Charlotte Thorn, could be duplicated in every single black belt county of the south.

That it will be done to some extent is my hope, and on that hope is based my faith in the economic future of this rural group.

I have dwelt upon this group of 250,000 independent men because in them lies the real economic future of the Negro. They are the examples, the leaders, the test. Let us now turn to the class which I call the *struggling*; they include the artisans, the industrial helpers, the servants, and the farm tenants. This group is characterized by three things:

1. It is sharply divided into a city and a country group.
2. While it has a large significance in the group economy of the Negro American—its overwhelming meaning is for the industry of the nation as a whole.
3. Its great hindrance is the necessity of group substitution in the place of individual promotion.

4. Its greatest enemy is the trade union.
5. Its greatest danger is immigration.

We may briefly review these points. The rural group consists of farm tenants. In a large number of cases farm tenancy has been an aid to land buying; in many cases farm tenancy has been a school of thrift and saving; in the majority of cases it was the only available system after the war, so long as the nation refused to do its bounden duty and furnish free land; and yet, when all this is said, it remains true that the system of farm tenancy as practiced over the larger part of the south today is a direct encouragement to cheating and peonage, a source of debauching labor, and a feeder of crime and vagrancy. It demands for its support a system of mortgage and contract laws and a method of administration which are a disgrace to 20th century civilization, and for every man which the system has helped into independence it has pushed ten back into slavery. It is claimed that honest and benevolent employers have made this system a means of uplift, development, and growth. This is perfectly true in thousands of cases as I can testify from personal knowledge; but at the same time it remains true, and terribly true that any system of free labor where the returns of the laborer, the settlement of all disputes, the drawing of the contract, the determination of the rent, the expenditures of the employees, the prices they pay for living, the character of the houses they live in, and their movements during and after work—any system of free labor where all these things are left practically to the unquestionable power of one man who owns the land and profits by the labor and is in the exercise of his power practically unrestrained by public opinion or the courts and has no fear of ballots in the hands of

the laborers or of their friends—any such system is inherently wrong, and if men complain of its results being listlessness, shiftlessness, and crime, they have themselves to thank. To the man that declares that he is acting justly and treating his men even better than they treat themselves, it is a sufficient answer to say that he is an exception to the rule; that the majority of the landholders are as indifferent to the welfare of their men as employers the world over, and that a large minority consciously oppress and cheat them. The best employer suffers therefore from the sins of the average. The only future of these tenants which means salvation is landholding and this is coming slowly. However shiftless and imprudent the Negroes of Mississippi can be proven to be, some of them somehow in one generation have bought 20,000 farms worth 18 millions of dollars. If they had been encouraged by such economic leadership as is found in Lowndes County this record could have been multiplied by ten.

The city group of this class of workers consists of perhaps 125,000 skilled artisans, 575,000 semi-skilled and ordinary industrial helpers, and 500,000 servants. The servant class have lost their best representatives because it offers a narrower and narrower method of uplift, because of foreign competition, and because the temptations to Negro girls in house service are greater than in any single industry. It must be remembered that the mulatto is the product of house service in the south. With the skilled and semi-skilled workers the industrial history has been this: groups of Negroes have been excluded entirely from certain trades and admitted to others. They held the second set by working for lower wages and they forced themselves into certain industries from which they excluded the same lever of low wages.

This gave the trade unions a chance to fight Negroes as scabs. In some battles the unions won and kept excluding Negroes. In other cases the Negroes won and were admitted to the unions. Even in the union, however, they were and are discriminated against in many cases. On the whole in the last ten years the Negroes have forced back the color line, but undoubtedly increased the color-prejudice of workingmen by so doing. In the near future this class of Negro American workingmen are going to have the struggle of their lives and the outlook indicates that by the fulcrum of low wages and the group economy, coupled with increasing efficiency, they will win. This means that the Negro is to be admitted to the national economy only by degrading labor conditions. The alternative offered is shameful and could be easily avoided if color prejudice did not insist on group substitution for Negroes in industry. I mean by this that a single individual or a few men of Negro descent cannot gain admittance to an industry usually. Only when they can supply workmen enough to supply the whole industry or the particular enterprise the black can be admitted. And immediately this substitution is made the occasion of a change in labor conditions—less wages, longer hours, worse treatment, etc. Thus often by refusing to work beside a single black man, workingmen in an industry suffer a general lowering of wages and conditions. The real question of questions then in the south is how long will race prejudice supply a more powerful motive to white workingmen of the south than decent wages and industrial conditions. To-day the powerful threat of Negro labor is making child labor and fourteen hour days possible in southern factories. How long will it be before the white workingmen discover that the interests that bind

him to his black brother in the south are greater than those that artificially separate them? The answer is easy: that discovery will not be made until the present wave of extraordinary prosperity and exploitation pass and the ordinary every day level of economic struggle begins. If the Negro can hold his own until then, his development is certain.

I now come to the final group of two million common laborers. A million and a quarter are farm laborers, 500,000 are laborers of other sorts, and the other quarter million are washerwomen. This group includes half the breadwinners of the race and its condition is precarious. In the southern country districts the laws as to contracts, and wages, and vagrancy are continually forcing the lower half of the laborers into crime and pauperism. In most southern states the breaking of a contract to work made between an ignorant farm hand and a land owner and covering a year's time is enforced to the letter and its breaking on the part of the laborer is a penitentiary offense. My observation is that three-fourths of the homicides in country districts in which Negroes are the killed or the killers arise from disputes over wage settlement. The condition of the country laborer in the south has become so intolerable that he is running away to the cities. A demand for immigrants to fill his place is being heard and I am curious to see the result. Certainly no immigrants can stand the present contract and crop lien system and above all they cannot stand the lawlessness of the country districts where every white man is a law unto himself and no Negro has any rights which the worst white is bound to respect. So bad has this lawlessness been in parts of the gulf states that concerted and commendable action has been taken against white cappers and a few peonage

cases brought to court. But these efforts have but scratched the surface of the real trouble.

On the whole there are four general cures for the economic submersion of this class of Negro Americans: first, the classes above must be given every facility to *rise so as not to bear down upon them from above*; secondly, the system of law and courts in the south by which it is practically impossible in the country districts and improbable even in cities for a black laborer to force justice from a white employer must be changed. Thirdly, Negro children must be given common school training. The states are not doing it today, the tendency is in my state to do less, and the United States government must step in and give black children common school training. Finally, the black laborer must have a vote. For any set of intelligent men like you, to think that a mass of two million laborers can be thrust into modern competitive industry and maintain themselves, when the state refuses their children decent schools and allows them no voice or influence in the making of the laws or their interpretation or administration, is to me utterly inconceivable. I have told you of those seventy-five landholders in Lowndes County—owning \$25,000 worth of land, building new and better houses and working steadily and saving. And yet, gentlemen, not a single one of those men under the new constitution of Alabama has the right to vote: they cannot say a word as to the condition of the roads that pass their farms, the situation of the schools, the choice of teachers, the kind of county officers or the rate of taxation. They are just as absolutely disfranchised as the worst criminal in the penitentiary and as I am in Georgia. You can twist this matter up and down and

apologize for it and reason it out—its wrong, and unjust, and economically unsound, and you know it.

To sum up then the conclusions of this paper: half the Negro breadwinners of the nation are partially submerged by a bad economic system, an unjust administration of the laws, and enforced ignorance. Their future depends on common schools, justice, and the right to vote. A million and three quarters of men just above these are fighting a fierce battle for admission to the industrial ranks of the nation—for the right to work. They are handicapped by their own industrial history which has made them often shiftless and untrustworthy but they can, by means of wise economic leadership, be made a strong body of artisans and landowners. A quarter of a million men stand economically at the head of the Negroes, and by a peculiar self-protecting group economy are making themselves independent of prejudice and competition. This group economy is extending to the lower economic strata.