

# **ON SEGREGATION**

**THE CRISIS IN RACE RELATIONS  
TWO NATIONS – WHITE AND BLACK**

**by**

**Leo Huberman & Paul M. Sweezy**

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**MONTHLY  
REVIEW**

# ON SEGREGATION

## THE CRISIS IN RACE RELATIONS TWO NATIONS—WHITE AND BLACK

**THE AUTHORS**—Leo Huberman was formerly chairman of the Department of Social Science at New College, Columbia University, and the first labor editor of the newspaper "PM." Among his books are "We, the People," "Man's Worldly Goods," "The Labor Spy Racket," "The Truth About Unions," and "The Truth About Socialism."

Paul M. Sweezy was for more than ten years a member of the Harvard University Economics Department where he taught courses on American corporations and socialism. He is a frequent contributor to scholarly magazines and popular journals. Among his books are "The Theory of Capitalist Development," "Socialism," and "The Present As History."

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All this seems to bear out fully the hopes and anticipations of capitalism's more thoughtful supporters. The system's Achilles heel, they argue, is its susceptibility to major economic crises: it is the agonies of bankruptcy and mass unemployment that produce political upheavals, whether they be of the New Deal or the Hitlerite variety. Stabilize the economy at a high level of employment, and political calm will follow. Capitalism, cured of what the Cassandras once thought a mortal illness, will then be able to thumb its nose at its detractors—and live happily ever after. Back in the days of Keynes and FDR, we are told, this was still only a theory. Today, after ten years of solid experience, it is proven fact.

Could illusion and self-deception go further? Could boasting and complacency be more out of place? The fabled visitor from Mars, having caught up with the last few weeks' newspapers, could hardly be blamed if he found these the most puzzling of all questions about the strange creatures who inhabit the earth.

The world position of the Anglo-American partnership is deteriorating at a rate which must leave even the most sanguine anti-imperialist gasping. And what does the heroism of Autherine Lucy and the wonderful solidarity of the fifty thousand bus-boycotters of Montgomery signify if not that the American people are coming face

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to face with the gravest and potentially most explosive social crisis in nearly a hundred years?

A stable society indeed! One that is traveling the road to isolation in a world in which no nation can live alone! One that is in imminent danger of renewing a struggle that has already cost the bloodiest civil war in history! The gods on Olympus may well laugh at the cosmic irony of their handiwork. It used to be said that whom they would destroy they first make mad: today it is apparently enough to endow their victims with a capitalist mentality.

How long can the glaring contradiction last between economic prosperity and bipartisan political calm on the one hand and mounting international and social crises on the other? How will it be resolved? What form will the resolution take? No one can yet give assured answers to these questions, but no one should be under any illusions about their momentous importance *in the immediate future*. Now is the time to begin to devote to them all the intelligence and analytical power we can possibly muster. In this issue's Review of the Month, we propose to examine, within the context of these questions, the nature and implications of the mounting race-relations crisis in the South.

Let us begin by calling attention to some things that are, or should be, well known but that even the most heedful of us may tend to forget in the welter of interested propaganda and outright lies amidst which we live.

The kind of race antagonism which characterizes Negro-white relations in the United States today (in the North as well as in the South: the difference is one of degree, not of kind) is neither "natural" to human beings nor even historically old.\* It has its origins in the early capitalist period, some three centuries ago, when the rising bourgeoisie of Europe was chasing all over the earth in search of loot and profits. One of the greatest needs of the period was for exploitable labor, and the invading white man's solution was to subject and enslave the militarily weaker colored peoples. To justify their brutal and un-Christian behavior, our devoutly Christian forebears needed, and in due course elaborated, the ideological doctrine of white supremacy and colored inferiority. And wherever white and colored workers coexisted in the same society, the white rulers deliberately fostered and incited race antagonism as a means of controlling *both* groups and in order to have at their disposal a special class of helots to do the dirtiest work for the lowest reward.

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\* In what follows we have relied heavily on Oliver Cox's *Caste, Class, and Race* (1948), a classic of American social science which the authorities, academic and otherwise, have honored with the silent treatment reserved for works which lay bare the inner mechanisms of American capitalism.

The history of race relations in the United States has been but a variation on this central theme. Outright slavery "broke in" African labor to the demands of the Southern plantation economy. The Civil War abolished slavery and with it the methods by which the Southern oligarchy had up to then controlled its labor force. New methods were needed, and it was in these circumstances that the present-day system of segregation took root and developed.

Segregation is crucial to the maintenance of the present complex structure of social classes and power relations in the South. By keeping whites and Negroes apart in their social lives, it fosters the development of racial myths and helps to inculcate in the white masses emotions of fear and hatred toward Negroes. The two communities are prevented from developing a common culture, their working class elements are barred from making common cause against their joint exploiters. Negroes are in effect imprisoned in an economic and cultural ghetto, and their visible "backwardness" provides "proof" of their inferiority. Both white and Negro workers are thus more easily exploited, and white workers are made to do a large part of the work of "keeping the Negro in his place." The Southern oligarchy, though economically obsolescent in a world in which King Cotton has been dethroned and corporate capital has taken its place, maintains social status and political power by tightly controlling the racial situation through the instrumentality of segregation.

Two conclusions of fundamental importance to an understanding of the present situation follow logically from this analysis. First, segregation is rooted in, indeed can accurately be described as an aspect of, the class struggle between employers and workers. And second, since segregation is in no sense natural but is *imposed* on society by a small minority in order to maintain its privileged position, the shibboleths and taboos which sustain it must be inculcated afresh in every rising generation. This second point goes very far toward explaining the bitterness and intensity of the present crisis.

The chief mechanisms by which ideas and ideologies are implanted in the minds of the young are the home and the school. And in general the two have worked closely together in this country to produce a docile and conforming citizenry.\* In the South, segregation in education has been fundamental to the whole system. By *living*

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\* Some have been misled into believing that the public school system is a leveling institution which works against the formation and differentiation of social classes, and in this sense is basically opposed to the structure of an increasingly class-divided society. This is a fallacy which it is one of the great merits of W. Lloyd Warner and his associates to have exposed. See in particular Warner, Meeker and Eels, *Social Class in America*, pp. 24-33, and the works cited therein.



segregation from their early years, white children have been conditioned to accept it as "natural," inevitable, necessary. School has thus teamed up with home to indoctrinate them with all the myths and stereotypes of racist ideology. To maintain this pattern in education has been crucially important precisely because racial prejudice is *not* natural to children: left to themselves, kids associate freely without any regard to skin color (the evidence on this point is overwhelming). Hence the attack on segregation in the elementary schools is an attack on the whole Southern system in one of its most vulnerable spots. Hence also the intensity and passion with which the attack has been and is being resisted.

What lies behind this attack, and why is it coming to a head just now?

Part of the answer to these questions is obvious. Apart from its more cowed and backward elements, the Negro community has always decisively rejected segregation and fought for its abolition. Since the early years of the twentieth century, this struggle has taken on an increasingly organized and effective form. In the North, Negroes have won the vote and learned to play politics in their own interest. Gradually, at times imperceptibly, but inexorably the barriers of segregation have been chipped away and undermined. The 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in the public schools was by far the biggest victory yet won by the Negro community, but essentially it was no more than a logical step in a long and uninterrupted process—and it was won by the organized efforts and political power of Negroes themselves.

But this is not the whole story by any means. Negroes are not so powerful that they can simply impose their will on the Supreme Court, which after all is the judicial upholder of the interests of the dominant capitalist class and not the impartial dispenser of justice of our political folklore. There must have been a strong disposition in ruling-class circles to accept the Negro point of view rather than to close ranks with the Southern oligarchy. Any analysis of the present situation which neglects this factor is bound to be incomplete and misleading.

Up to a point, of course, the ruling-class approach to this question has been affected by the international situation. When you are desperately striving abroad to line up hundreds of millions of colored people on your side in a cold war against a system that not only preaches but consistently practices racial democracy, you can ill afford to insult them by treating them as second-class citizens at home.

But even this isn't the whole story. In addition, there is the fact, which has been given less attention than it deserves, that industrial capital, specially of the large-scale corporate variety, is essentially

color-blind and tends to find in segregation an annoying barrier to the full and rational exploitation of the labor force. Big employers are as interested as any in getting their labor cheap, but they also want to be able to assign workers to jobs by productivity standards and to allow them to advance in accordance with native ability and acquired skill. Segregation, in other words, makes sense from the point of view of any employer, business or household, who can benefit from the exploitation of a *special* class of backward and unskilled labor, but in general this is not the point of view of industrial capital. Henry Ford, for example, was one of the most bigoted of Americans, but he was also one of the first large-scale employers of Negro labor in regular industrial operations; and the integration of Negroes into a single homogeneous labor force has gone furthest in the great mass-production centers like Detroit, Chicago, and Pittsburgh. Moreover, it is surely no accident that desegregation has proceeded relatively rapidly and smoothly in the armed forces where the attitudes and influence of Big Business are particularly strong.

There are, of course, plenty of exceptions to the rule that big capital is color blind, but on the whole it holds good and goes far to explain why the accelerated development of monopoly capital in the postwar period has been favorable to the Negro struggle to end segregation.

A closely related development in the South itself also deserves emphasis in this connection. Industrialization has made giant strides in the South in the last decade and a half, mostly under the aegis of big corporations with nationwide interests. Many Northern executives have moved into the area, and many younger Southerners have begun to substitute the folkways of Big Business for the folkways of the old oligarchy. In the larger cities such as Atlanta and Richmond, the economic position of Negro workers has tended to improve and, as always, enhanced social status and a greater share of political power have followed along. To be sure, these changes have been largely confined to the municipal level as yet—the South's traditional political structure, with its heavy over-representation of rural areas, has seen to that—but they have not been without influence among both Negroes and whites all over the country. Perceptive observers everywhere sense that the South is entering a New Era and they know, whether or not they approve, that it must and will include a New Deal in the whole field of race relations.

In one sense, this analysis is definitely on the optimistic side. In their struggle for racial democracy, the Negro community has a strong ally in the self-interest of big capital, which is the real ruler of America. (The Negro struggle has also received some assistance and support from the organized labor movement, but *far* less than

it could and ought to get. The truth is that until the labor movement expels Jim Crow from its own ranks it will never be able to bring to bear its full potential strength for greater equality and progress in the community at large.) Without this ally, the gains of the postwar period would certainly have been fewer and harder to come by, and the outlook for the period ahead would be darker than it is. But this should not lead us to misunderstand the present situation. Negroes can no more count on salvation from Big Business than can workers in general. And, as can clearly be seen from the current vacillations of the Eisenhower administration, Big Business has now reached the point where it is torn between continuing to lend support, even if only indirect, to the cause of Negro rights, and a policy of conciliating the Southern oligarchy.

Why? Here we reach the nub of the whole crisis.

Now that the issue of segregation in the schools has been straightforwardly posed, the Negro struggle has reached a turning point. The die has been cast, and there can be no turning back. But to go ahead requires what amounts to total defeat for the Southern oligarchy. Obviously, the oligarchy is not going to give in to sweet reason even if it takes the form of a Supreme Court decision, and equally obviously the Negro community is in no position to enforce the law. The issue is therefore squarely up to the federal government. Will it now follow up what the Supreme Court has so auspiciously begun? Or will it back down and leave the oligarchy in possession of the field of battle?

It is nonsense to say that the federal government lacks the power to pursue the former course (we do not mean that new legislation might not be required, but nothing that the Republicans and Northern Democrats, both supposedly champions of Negro rights, couldn't put through in a week if they wanted to). The oligarchy will certainly not risk a repetition of the Civil War, and a policy based on individual or collective acts of terrorism would not be likely to survive an honest and determined campaign to bring the perpetrators to justice. Moreover, there are many means at the disposal of the federal government to undermine the power of the oligarchy—federal supervision of federal elections or reduction of Southern representation in Congress to accord with voting rather than total population are two such methods (recently suggested by Dr. Du Bois in the *National Guardian*, March 5). No, what the federal government lacks is not power but will power. It could uphold the Constitution and enforce the law in the South if it were only half as anxious to apprehend and punish violators as it has been to jail the leaders of the already impotent Communist Party.

At first sight, it would appear that we have landed ourselves

in a hopeless paradox. On the one hand, it is politically (in terms of Negro votes and international prestige) and economically (in terms of profits) advantageous to big capital to support and assist the struggle for Negro emancipation. And yet when it comes to the sticking point, the federal government, which is controlled more tightly by big capital than any of its predecessors, does nothing—which means in effect taking sides with the Southern oligarchy.

It is a paradox. But it can be explained, and the explanation throws a flood of light on all the other paradoxes and contradictions of American society.

The truth is that big capital's control over the political life of the country is exercised through a delicate and complicated mechanism in which the Southern oligarchy plays a key part. To deal the oligarchy a series of political body blows at this time would not only earn the latter's undying enmity; much more important, it would risk knocking the whole political system into a cocked hat. And once that happened, who can guarantee that another system could be devised which would perform the miraculous feat of keeping all the great issues of the day out of politics? Indeed, who could even *imagine* another such wonderful arrangement?

We are all familiar with the system and how it works, though we are perhaps insufficiently aware of its ingenious and delicate nature. It consists of government by two parties, each with a "liberal" and a "reactionary" wing. The right wing of the Republican Party is made up of a motley crew of know-nothings and warmongers whose chief function is to make the status quo seem positively progressive: whenever a showdown threatens, we are all called upon to rally to the support of the moderates (just now in the person of Ike) against the menace of the diehards (who, strangely enough, include in their ranks Ike's closest collaborators: the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the GOP Senate leader). The *modus operandi* of the Democratic Party is somewhat different. Here the emphasis is all on the liberal side. The Democratic Party is the Party of Jefferson and Jackson, of FDR and the New Deal. It speaks for the worker and the small farmer; it carries the hope of a brighter future for America. But it just happens to include in its ranks the Southern oligarchy whose future is in the past and not very bright either. By a variety of devices—not least that which assigns Congressional committee chairmanships on a basis of seniority—the Southerners are given effective control over the actual political behavior (as distinct from the alleged principles) of the Party. The labor movement and liberals generally are chained to the Democratic chariot by the argument that the way forward lies through strengthening the forward-looking wing of the Party, while

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the leaders of that wing, like Mr. Stevenson, turn themselves inside-out to appease the Southerners. (Stevenson's immediate motives, which are doubtless perfectly sincere, have to do with fear of losing Southern support to another candidate or, in an actual election, votes to a new Dixiecrat movement. But whatever their motives, the fact is that all Democratic Presidents, including both Roosevelt and Truman, *neither of whom was dependent for nomination or election on Southern support*, have been effectively hobbled by the Southern wing of their party.)

What the American political system amounts to is thus an elaborate make-believe in which the "liberal" Republicans pretend to block reaction and the "liberal" Democrats pretend to overcome it, while in practice "liberals" and "reactionaries" of every kind and description team up to keep all real issues out of politics and to manage the socio-economic system in the interests of big capital.

Now it is precisely this make-believe that the race-relations crisis threatens to explode once and for all. If the moderates of both parties follow through on the Supreme Court decision—which means no more and no less than upholding the Constitution and enforcing the law—they will be signing the political death warrant of the Southern oligarchy, which simply cannot survive the end of segregation. But with the Southern oligarchy knocked out, the whole system of automatic political checks and balances will be smashed. The Democratic Party will lose its one persuasive excuse for breaking all its promises and will either have to *become* a party of reform, or—what seems much more likely—give way to a *new* party of reform in the manner of the Liberal Party in Britain some half century ago.

To put the matter in a nutshell: behind the race-relations crisis stands the specter of a new political party with an enormous potential vote among white workers and Negroes of all classes, a party unencumbered by the hateful reactionaries of the South and hence subject to the influence and will of its members as the Democratic Party has never been. *This* is the specter that is haunting America today, and it is this that keeps omnipotent capital cowering before the blustering threats of an arrogant but basically weak minority. For as soon as the long-delayed political realignment gets under way, *all* the great issues of the day, and not only the issue of Negro emancipation, will crowd onto the political stage. And when that happens, the policies, and ultimately the very power, of big capital itself face a challenge—this time not of a handful of fanatical racists but of the largest and in many ways the most advanced working class in the world.

The American Left has been bemused for a long time now by the idea that only a severe depression could create a new political situa-

tion with new perspectives and new opportunities. We can now see that this is wrong. The struggle for Negro rights has produced a crisis of the first magnitude, and out of it can come the new political alignment which liberals and leftists alike have long been hoping and striving for. It is up to us of the Left to do our part to see that this comes about. We must lend every ounce of support we can to the struggle of the Negro community for desegregation and racial equality. We must bring all the pressure we can on the federal government to uphold the Constitution and enforce the law. We must strive to win understanding—especially in the trade unions—of the life and death character of the struggle shaping up around the issue of Negro rights in the South. We must explain the importance of, and ceaselessly agitate for, democratic political reform in the South. Finally—and this will probably be particularly difficult for many of us to grasp and accept—we must work not to *elect* the Democratic Party but to *explode* it and thus to clear the ground for the upbuilding of a new party which will reflect and further the interests of the working people, both black and white.

(March 15, 1956)

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## BLACK

*I'm crucified  
Not on the tree  
But hour by hour  
Secretly.  
Without respite—  
Without rest—  
The fangs of hate are deeply prest  
Like javelins into my breast.*

*I know the way  
Of loneliness, of cold disdain,  
Know well the numbness and the pain  
Of never having lived—  
Have died  
With every hour—  
Crucified.*

—Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Phylon*,  
First Quarter, 1954

## TWO NATIONS—WHITE AND BLACK

*Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws. . . . The Rich And The Poor.*

—B. Disraeli, *Sybil, or The Two Nations*, 1845

What Disraeli wrote of England over a century ago applies with equal truth to the United States today. We, too, have our “two nations,” our very rich and our miserably poor; but with us the figure takes on added meaning in the relative position of our white people and our black people. When such a comparison is made, the whites are the rich and the blacks are the poor.\*

Racial discrimination is more than an offense against the brotherhood of man; it does violence not only to the spirit of the black people, but to their physical well-being as well. When we enlist in the war against segregation we are fighting for more than the dignity of the black people—we are fighting for their right to eat wholesome food, enjoy decent homes, have the opportunity to get higher education, work in better jobs for better pay, live longer.

Many of us have an idea, in a vague sort of way, that Negroes are worse off than whites, but today, when the race relations problem is most critical, that's not enough; it is imperative that we know the facts, not generally, but specifically. Those facts are available either in government reports or in authoritative special studies. We assemble below some of the revealing statistics.

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\* To avoid misunderstanding, we should perhaps explain that by using Disraeli's “Two Nations” figure of speech we of course do not imply any support for the false theory that Negroes in the United States constitute a separate nationality in the socio-economic sense of the term.

Family Income in the United States: 1954<sup>1</sup>

Family Income	No. of families	Total		White		Nonwhite	
		Percent	Cumulative Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under \$1000	3,700,000	8.8	8.8	7.6	7.6	21.7	21.7
\$1000 to \$1,999	4,600,000	11.0	19.8	10.0	17.6	21.5	43.2
\$2000 to \$2,999	5,000,000	11.9	31.7	11.3	28.9	17.1	60.3
\$3000 to \$3,999	6,400,000	15.4	47.1	15.2	44.1	17.9	78.2
\$4000 to \$4,999	6,500,000	15.6	62.7	16.1	60.2	9.8	88.0
\$5000 to \$5,999	5,000,000	11.9	74.6	12.6	72.8	4.7	92.7
\$6000 to \$6,999	3,600,000	8.5	83.1	9.0	81.8	3.4	96.1
\$7000 to \$9,999	4,700,000	11.1	94.2	11.9	93.7	3.1	99.2
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1,800,000	4.4	98.6	4.8	98.5	0.8	100.0
\$15,000 and over	600,000	1.0	99.6	1.1	99.6	0.1	100.1
\$25,000 and over	. . . .	0.4	100.0	0.4	100.0	. . . . .	
Total No. of families	41,934,000			38,170,000		3,764,000	
Median income		\$4,591		\$4,827		\$2,876	

<sup>1</sup> References will be found at the end of the article.



These are the latest available income figures. They tell us a great deal.

They tell us, first, that in the richest nation in the world, in 1954, one of our most prosperous years, 19.8 percent of all the families in the country had a money income, before deductions for taxes, of under \$2000. That means that roughly one out of every five American families received less than \$40 per week.

Some 13,300,000 families, or 31.7 percent of all American families, had a money income of less than \$3000 for the entire year. That means that roughly one out of every 3 families had less than \$60 per week to live on.

There is much more to be learned about the poverty and wealth of all American families and we hope readers will give the table the attention it deserves; but our major concern here is not with the country as a whole, but with *the relative position of the whites and the nonwhites*. The nonwhite group, as the Census Bureau defines it, "includes Negroes, Indians, Japanese, Chinese, and other non-white races." Since the Negroes constitute roughly 96 percent of the nonwhite population, the statistics deal essentially with the white nation and the black nation within our borders.

Most Negroes are desperately poor. The income table shouts that fact. Three times as many Negro families (21.7 percent) as white families (7.6 percent) had a money income of under \$1000 in the year 1954. That's less than \$20 per week *per family*, not per individual.

The second category under Family Income, the \$1000 to \$1999 group, tells us how many families were getting less than \$40 per week. Among the whites, 17.6 percent; among the Negroes, 43.2 percent, or about 2½ times as many.

More than three out of every five Negro families, 60.3 percent, had less than \$60 per week with which to eat, drink, and be merry—and pay the rent, clothe the children, buy schoolbooks, pay the doctor bills. For whites the figure was 28.9 percent.

Look at the Percent column under Nonwhite. Note how it declines, slowly at first, until it gets to the 17.9 figure where it breaks to almost half or 9.8, then breaks in half again when it hits 4.7 percent. Those breaks come as income goes up—and income goes up much more sharply for whites than for Negroes. While only 9.8 percent of the Negro families were in the \$4000 to \$4999 bracket, the figure was 16.1 percent for whites; while only 4.7 percent of the Negro families were in the \$5000 to \$5999 bracket, the figure was 12.6 percent for whites.

There are some well-to-do Negroes, of course. But their number

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is very small relative to that of the whites. How many Negro families had a money income of \$10,000 to \$14,999? Eight-tenths of one percent, or less than 1 out of every 100 Negro families. How many whites were in that bracket? Exactly six times as many.

The statistics for median income<sup>2</sup> round out the picture. For whites, \$4827; for nonwhites, \$2876.

Over the years there have been, proportionately, more nonwhite women working than white women. Thus in 1954, 44.7 percent of all nonwhite women were in the labor force compared with only 32.5 percent of white women. Why? Mainly because of the low income of nonwhite families, which forces the wife (and frequently the children) to supplement the earnings of the father. Yet despite the fact that the average Negro family had more members working, its median income, in 1954, was less than 60 percent of the average white family's.

These income figures are the key to an understanding of the Two Nations in the United States. Many white families are very poor—but the Negro families are much worse off. And their shocking poverty affects every aspect of their life. "It is common knowledge," reports Dr. Marcus Goldstein of the Public Health Service, "that income level has a direct bearing on housing, education, nutrition, medical care, and probably other factors related to health and longevity."<sup>3</sup>

Income level is itself determined, in great part, by the kind of jobs people have, how steady those jobs are, how high their wages are. For the answers to these and related questions we turn now to an examination of another Census Bureau report.

## EMPLOYMENT

*The American race problem is simply a special version of the world colonial problem, which, in the last analysis, is a problem involving the exploitation of labor.*

—Carey McWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*

This Census Report is entitled "Employment of White and Non-white Persons—1955." It begins with these words:

Among the most important social and economic developments of the past several decades has been the steady improve-

ment in the status of nonwhite persons. Although on the whole they still lag behind whites in many respects—in education, income, and type and adequacy of employment, to mention a few—the historical differentials between the two have been narrowing.<sup>4</sup>

The statistics bear out the fact that the differences between the Two Nations are not as great as they once were. But in respect to jobs, the Negro was so far behind that, with all the marked improvement, he is still at a great disadvantage compared to the white man. This is a summary of the employment picture as it is revealed in the Census Report:

(1) Negroes get the relatively unskilled low-paying jobs; whites get the skilled better-paying jobs. Negroes can go “so far and no further” in many jobs and professions; in others they are excluded entirely (p. 3).

(2) Negroes in non-agricultural industries work fewer hours per week than whites (p. 3).

(3) Negroes have to take more part-time jobs, because they are unable to find full-time work (p. 3).

(4) Negroes are given less overtime work (p. 3).

(5) Negroes have less continuity of employment than whites. “Year-round full-time employment was more prevalent among both white men and women in virtually every industry group, with domestic service the only exception. In 1954, three out of every five white workers had as much as 50 weeks or more of employment, primarily at full-time jobs, as compared to only two out of every five nonwhite workers” (pp. 3-4).

(6) Negroes have a harder time than whites getting jobs. They are the last to be hired and the first to be fired. The rate of unemployment among Negroes, both male and female, is double that of whites. The higher unemployment rate for Negroes appears in every major occupation and industry group (pp. 4-5).

The first table on the next page gives the percent distribution of employed persons, by color and major occupation group in 1955.<sup>5</sup> Note that the professional, technical, managerial, and white-collar clerical and sales jobs are held by 42 percent of the white workers and by only 12 percent of the Negro workers; while in the case of service and other unskilled nonfarm occupations the proportions are reversed—14 percent white and 47 percent Negro.

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<i>Major Occupation Group</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite</i>
Professional, technical and kindred workers	9.8	3.5
Farmers and farm operators	6.0	5.0
Managers, officials, and proprietors, except farm	11.1	2.3
Clerical and kindred workers	14.2	4.9
Sales workers	6.9	1.3
Craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers	14.1	5.2
Operatives and kindred workers	20.2	20.9
Private household workers	1.8	14.8
Service workers, except private household	7.2	16.8
Farm laborers and foremen	3.9	9.5
Laborers, except farm and mine	4.7	15.8

The table below combines the percentage figures on unemployment rates by color with unemployment figures for all occupations and industries:

*Unemployment Rates, By Color and Sex: 1955<sup>6</sup>*

	<i>White</i>		<i>Nonwhite</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
	3.4	3.9	8.2	7.5
All occupations	3.5		7.7	
All industries	3.2		7.5	

One further shameful fact, not mentioned in the Census Report, should be added here: Negroes are still excluded from membership in many labor unions.

That's the relative position of the Two Nations in respect to employment and unemployment. What's behind the inferior status of the Negro? Race prejudice, we are told. Yes, indeed, but what's behind race prejudice? Mr. William Faulkner, recent winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, gave an important answer to this important question in an interview with the New York correspondent for the London *Sunday Times*, reprinted in *The Reporter* on March 22. Mr. Faulkner is in quite a muddle on the problem of segregation—he doesn't like it, thinks "racial discrimination is morally bad, that it stinks, that it shouldn't exist, but it does." Nevertheless, let there be an attempt to enforce the Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, on school integration, and Mr. Faulkner would be on the side of the discriminators: "If it came to fighting I'd fight for

Mississippi against the United States even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes.”

But confused though he may be on how to solve the problem, Mr. Faulkner is crystal clear on what's behind it. Here are the questions put to him and his answers:

Q. Is the basic cause of race prejudice economic, in your opinion?

A. Absolutely. To produce cotton we have to have a system of peonage. That is absolutely what is at the bottom of the situation.

Q. Are the psychological rationalizations for prejudice something grafted on to the economic root?

A. Yes, I would say that a planter who has a thousand acres wants to keep the Negro in a position of debt peonage and in order to do it he is going to tell the poor class of white folks that the Negro is going to violate his daughter. But all he wants at the back of it is a system of peonage to produce his cotton at the highest rate of profit.

## EDUCATION

*One of the gravest charges to which American society is subject is that of failing to provide a reasonable equality of educational opportunity for its youth. For the great majority of our boys and girls, the kind and amount of education they may hope to attain depends, not on their own abilities, but on the family or community into which they happened to be born or, worse still, on the color of their skin or the religion of their parents.*

—Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947

The color of their skin means Negroes—most of whom happen to be born in communities which segregate school children. So their difficulties begin in the kindergarten and continue, for the small number who can stick it out, through college and even after when, as graduate doctors, they can't get into a qualified hospital, or as graduate lawyers they find that the Negro community understandably feels that a white lawyer can do better in a white court than a Negro.

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Segregated schools are inferior schools. Most of the buildings are grimy, dilapidated, overcrowded; the money spent per Negro pupil is less than that spent for whites; teachers' salaries are lower, their training poorer. Small wonder then that the illiteracy rate among Negroes is much higher than that among whites. Here are the figures:

*Illiteracy in the Population, 14 years Old and Over, October 1952<sup>7</sup>*

<i>Both Sexes</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Nonwhite</i>
1.8	10.2	2.1	12.7	1.5	8.2

The existence of widespread illiteracy came as a shock to the President's Cabinet in February 1956. They had met to consider the question of getting enough skilled craftsmen for factories and—here's the rub—for the armed forces. They were shown, according to a story in *U.S. News & World Report* for February 24, 1956, a government study detailing the results of a test given to men before they were drafted or enlisted into the armed forces. The test was described as covering "an elementary knowledge of the English language, arithmetic, and the ability to solve simple problems."

The minimum passing score was 10 points out of a possible 100. Eleven percent, or 1 out of every 9 young men, failed.

Eleven percent illiteracy, a shortage of classrooms, many children in school only half time—that's the American elementary school picture today.

But perhaps American education gets better as our youth move up into high school? Undoubtedly it does—but unfortunately only a small percentage ever completes its high school education. According to the Census Report for 1950, in that year only 21.6 percent of the adult white population had completed high school. For Negroes, the figure was only 3.6 percent. The same Census Report gives these figures for college graduates: whites, 6.4 percent; Negroes, 2.2 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Is it surprising that the percentage of whites graduating from college is three times the percentage of Negroes? Not if you remember the family income figures for the Two Nations. For it costs money to go to college and Negroes are desperately poor. "Educational opportunity in the United States, at least above the grammar school level," says the Joint Committee on the Economic Report,<sup>9</sup> "still depends upon income status in marked degree."

A report giving a summary of several studies made in New

England, the South, and the Middle West, to determine the extent to which money income determines educational opportunity, is cited by the Joint Committee. This is what it says:

The following facts stand out: (a) The upper-income group sends nearly all its children through high school and about 90 percent to college. (b) The middle-income group sends about 60 percent of its children through high school and about 15 percent to college or some other higher institution. (c) The lower-income group sends about 30 percent of its children through high school and about 5 percent to college. It is usually a sacrifice for parents of this group to keep their children even in high school and they cannot possibly pay money toward college. The very few who aspire to college must work their way without help from home.

The report goes on to estimate that from 3 to 5 percent of our young people, or annually some 75,000 to 125,000, are of college caliber and would go to college if they could but are prevented by poverty.<sup>10</sup>

Extreme poverty is the lot of over half the Negro nation. That's the telling fact when it comes to the Negro student and higher education.

## HOUSING

*Equality of opportunity to rent or buy a home should exist for every American. Today, many of our citizens face a double barrier when they try to satisfy their housing needs. They first encounter a general housing shortage which makes it difficult for any family without a home to find one. They then encounter prejudice and discrimination based upon race, color, or national origin, which places them at a disadvantage in competing for the limited housing that is available.*

—Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947

Imagine all the people in the United States packed into an area one-half the size of New York City. That's what it's like to live in Harlem. In just one block of that Negro ghetto, 3871 people have

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their "homes." "At the same rate of density," says a handbook put out by the National Community Relations Advisory Council in 1952, "the entire population of the United States would live in one-half the geographic area of New York City."<sup>11</sup>

Water drips from the ceiling in many of these houses, walls are cracked, windows are broken, floors are rotten, and the plumbing, says Charles Abrams, formerly New York State Rent Administrator, and today Chairman of the New York State Commission Against Discrimination, "serves as a promenade for rats."<sup>12</sup>

That's not just a fancy figure of speech. It's a fact. "There were 481 officially reported cases of rat bites in 1952, and since it is estimated that only 1 in 5 cases is reported, some 2500 human beings—mostly babies—are bitten by rats every year. Most of the cases are in the Harlem slums."<sup>13</sup>

New York has its Harlem, Chicago its South Side, and other cities, large and small, have their counterpart Negro slum areas. In respect to the basic amenities, here are the figures for urban areas for 1950, compiled by the government's Housing and Home Finance Agency: Of homes that lack either running water, private toilet, or bath, nonwhites live in 30 percent, whites in 11 percent; of homes that lack a private flush toilet, nonwhites live in 42 percent, whites in 10 percent.

What housing is like for the Negro nation in rural nonfarm areas can be gathered from one simple statistic: three fourths of the nonwhite families in 1950 did not have piped running water; one fourth of the white families.<sup>14</sup>

The Housing Agency's definition of a dilapidated dwelling unit is one which is so run-down or has such serious deficiencies as not to "provide adequate shelter or protection against the elements, or endangers the safety of the occupants" (p. 17). How many Negroes' houses were "dilapidated"? Twenty-seven percent—five times the proportion of white houses (p. 12).

Discomfort and distress are not the worst aspects of living in such slums. In addition, the Committee on the Hygiene of Housing has pointed out, "more damage is done to the . . . children of the United States by a sense of chronic inferiority due to the consciousness of living in substandard dwellings than by all the defective plumbing which those dwellings may contain."<sup>15</sup>

Many people have the idea that Negroes live in slum areas because they are poor and can only afford miserable low-rent dwellings. That notion is understandable—but it's mistaken. It's true that Negroes are desperately poor, and it's also true that the slums they live in are miserable, but it is *not* true that slum rents are low. On



the contrary. In many cases prevailing rentals in the Negro ghetto are higher than in other sections of the city.

The obvious answer for the slum dwellers is, of course, not to stand for it, to move out. That's an answer that applies to whites—but not to Negroes. They can't move out. They are hemmed in, segregated, forced to stay in the "black belt."

Cities are overcrowded, so white people who can afford it move to the less crowded residential suburbs. But Negroes who can afford to move find these suburbs are "restricted." Not for them.

Cities are overcrowded, so public and private agencies build giant housing projects. Whites move in freely, and some Negroes get into some of the new buildings. But nowhere near enough to satisfy the demand. "In the 17 years since 1935 less than 1 percent of new dwelling construction was for the nonwhite families who comprise 10 percent of the population."<sup>16</sup>

There's money to be made in confining Negroes to ghetto life. Lots of money. Landlords don't make much-needed repairs—and they get away with it because their tenants are Negroes who are not in a position to move elsewhere.

Just as there is a squeeze on Negroes in the employment field, so there is a squeeze on Negroes in housing too. With the same results in both cases—extra profits for employers and landlords.

Employers refuse to hire you for certain jobs and thus crowd you into a restricted number of occupations where the resulting competition forces your wages down. Or they refuse to pay you wages equal to whites for equal work. And all the time they do everything they can to divide white and Negro workers, so they can be played off against each other with resultant lower wages for both.

In housing, the real estate and banking interests won't permit you to live where you want to live but force you to crowd into congested slum districts. "The same real estate interests that make money by excluding colored people from new subdivisions are able to collect inflated rentals from the slums into which they are driven. A profit is made on the Negro coming and going."<sup>17</sup>

People have been led to believe that Negroes create the slums. Not true. In most cases, the only places Negroes can get to live are in run-down neighborhoods where the houses are falling apart and in extreme disrepair. The Negroes don't make the slum district—they get into the neighborhood only because it already is a slum.

Negroes, we are told, live in unsanitary fashion with garbage strewn about, vermin infesting the walls, rats all over the place. Unfortunately that's too often true. The question is, however, do the

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Negroes do it, or is it done *to* them? Charles Abrams puts the responsibility where it belongs in this pertinent observation:

Garbage collections, building inspections, street maintenance, and other city services are less satisfactory than in other areas. The abnormal number of rat bites in Harlem, for example, may be ascribed not only to lack of proper upkeep but to the ready supply of uncollected garbage in the streets. Southern cities and some in the North omit street paving and sidewalks in Negro sections.<sup>18</sup>

Even more convincing evidence that Negroes, given a chance, take good care of their homes was furnished a few years ago, by real estate men themselves. In a survey conducted by the National Association of Real Estate Boards, this question was asked: "Does the Negro abuse property, or does he take as good care of it as other tenants of comparable status?" The answer, from 73 percent of the local real estate boards reporting, was: "He takes good care of it, in many cases better than other tenants of his economic group."<sup>19</sup>

The President's Committee on Civil Rights tells us that "equality of opportunity to rent or buy a home should exist for every American." Indeed it *should*. But it doesn't. It doesn't exist for the Negro nation which cannot choose freely but must pay more for a poorer place to live.

## HEALTH

*Yet do I marvel at this curious thing  
To make a poet black and bid him sing.*  
—Countee Cullen

The bitter irony of Countee Cullen's lines comes inevitably to mind when one remembers that being born with a black skin means that your chance of dying as an infant is 77 percent greater; and that even if you survive the Negro's higher incidence of disease, your average length of life will be 8 years shorter.

According to the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, in the years 1951 and 1952 "the infant mortality rate among Negroes in the United States was 45.6 per 1000 infants as compared with 25.7 per 1000 infants born to white mothers."<sup>20</sup>

Does this mean that it is more difficult for Negro women to

bear children than it is for white women? Not at all. It means that many more nonwhite mothers are delivered without benefit of medical attendance. It means, according to the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, that "maternity care by physicians in hospitals has progressed more slowly in the case of the nonwhite mothers."<sup>21</sup> It means a direct cause and effect relationship between overcrowding in slums and infant deaths because "the infant mortality rate, which is the most sensitive index to urban social conditions, is two and a half times higher among families with two or more persons per room than among families with one person or less per room."<sup>22</sup>

Back in 1900, the rate of mortality for all causes in both sexes was 17.6 deaths per 1000 whites and 27.8 deaths per 1000 Negroes. Remarkable progress has been made in the half-century since that time—the rate has been cut in half in each instance. In 1949, for whites the rate was 8.4 deaths per 1000; for Negroes, 12.6 deaths per 1000.<sup>23</sup> Progress in both cases—but still more Negroes die.

Is there any reason to suppose that Negroes are born less healthy than whites? No. Nevertheless, something happens after they are born which causes them to die earlier. "In 1950 the average life expectancy at birth in the United States was 61.0 years for the nonwhite population compared with 69.2 years for the white group."<sup>24</sup>

What happens is that the Negro nation is desperately poor. The food Negroes eat, the houses they live in, the medical care they receive, are not as good as they are for whites. How long you live is determined primarily by where and how you live. That's the answer.

Convincing evidence of the direct relationship between income and health comes from the figures in respect to tuberculosis. Deaths from this disease have declined significantly in recent years. But Negroes always have been, and still are, greater victims than whites. Because the death rate was so much higher, the belief grew that Negroes were particularly susceptible. But one study after another has shown that more Negroes die each year not because they are more susceptible, but because they are more poor. Where their living conditions are as good as or better than those of a white group, their death rate from tuberculosis is as low or lower.

Harlem, notorious for its slum housing, has always had a high TB death rate. The cure for the disease was indicated recently by Mr. Joseph P. McMurray, speaking at the annual meeting of the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association. Here is the report of Mr. McMurray's speech in the *New York Times* of April 4, 1956:

State Housing Commissioner Joseph P. McMurray told a session on housing as a health factor, that tuberculosis incidence

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and other health problems were lower in good housing projects than in the areas surrounding them.

He said that the infant mortality rate in three state-aided projects in Harlem was less than half that of the other part of the health areas in which they are located.

He said that in the tuberculosis incidence, Elliot Houses containing 2300 units had not a single case in 1953 while the surrounding area had three cases per thousand population.

Mr. McMurray said that in the five Manhattan health areas with the greatest proportion of bad housing, more than 11 percent of the borough's tuberculosis cases and 15 percent of the deaths occur.

What Mr. McMurray was really telling his audience was a simple truth—that the worst disease is poverty. This is the disease that afflicts the Negro nation.

Millions of whites are poor, true, but the Negroes' poverty is a special kind of poverty—one made to order, so to speak, by racial discrimination and segregation. It is special, too, in that it is more widespread since it affects, in one way or another, not part of the people but the whole Negro community.

The statistics on income, employment, education, housing, and health prove that segregation blights and maims the lives of millions of Negroes. It is literally a killer of people.

Let the "gradualists" who cry patience, let the middle-of-the-rovers who advise going slowly, take heed of that fact. Let them face the issue squarely—to sanction segregation, even for a moment, is to sanction murder.

(May 15, 1956)

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- 1 This table is compiled from the following two sources: *Current Population Reports, Consumer Income, Family Income in the United States: 1954 and 1953*, Bureau of the Census, Series P-60, No. 20, December 1955, Table 2, p. 11; and *Number of Families by Family Income, for the United States, 1954, Characteristics of the Low-Income Population and Related Federal Programs*, Joint Committee on the Economic Report, 84th Congress, 1st Session, U.S. Government Printing Office, Table 9, p. 13. Detail does not necessarily add up to the total because of rounding of figures.
  - 2 The Census Bureau defines median income as "the amount which divides the distribution into two equal groups, one having incomes above the median, and the other having incomes below the median."
  - 3 Marcus S. Goldstein, "Longevity and Health Status of Whites and Non-whites in the United States," *Journal of the National Medical Association*, March 1954, p. 92.
  - 4 *Current Population Reports, Labor Force, Employment of White and Nonwhite Persons: 1955*, Bureau of the Census, Series P-50, No. 66, March 1956.
  - 5 *Ibid.*, from Table 3, p. 11.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, from Table B, p. 4, and Tables 9 and 10, p. 11.

## TWO NATIONS—WHITE AND BLACK

- 7 Joint Committee on the Economic Report, *op.cit.*, Table 1, p. 157. Persons completing less than six years of school are classified as illiterate.
- 8 Miller, Carroll L.: "The Relative Educational Attainment of the Negro Population in the United States, *The Journal of Negro Education*, Summer 1953, p. 390.
- 9 *Low-Income Families and Economic Stability*, Joint Committee on the Economic Report, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 16.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 11 *Equality of Opportunity in Housing, A Handbook of Facts*, National Community Relations Advisory Council, New York, June 1952, p. 6.
- 12 Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors*, New York 1955, p. 74.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 14 *Housing of the Nonwhite Population, 1940 to 1950*, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., July 1952, p. 12.
- 15 Quoted in *Equality of Opportunity in Housing, op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 16 Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
- 17 *Segregation in Washington*, A Report of the National Committee on Segregation in the Nation's Capital, 1948, p. 33.
- 18 Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- 19 *Segregation in Washington, op. cit.*, p. 31.
- 20 *Characteristics of the Low-Income Population and Related Federal Programs*, Joint Committee on the Economic Report, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 22 Abrams, *op. cit.*, p. 75, citing study by Robert M. Woodbury, *Causal Factors in Infant Mortality*, U.S. Children's Bureau, Publication No. 142.
- 23 Marcus S. Goldstein, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

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Our fight for freedom begins when we get to San Francisco.

—A Negro soldier returning from Okinawa, 1945

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*It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. . . . One feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.*

—W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

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*The Constitution does not provide for first and second class citizens.*

—Wendell L. Willkie, *An American Program*

HIGHER LEARNING



## A SONG OF COLOR

BY WILSON MACDONALD

Four White Men climbed  
to Heaven's throne;  
and each man went  
on his way, alone.

The First man said,  
when he came back:  
"The God I met  
was very black;

"But when He spoke  
His teeth flashed white,  
like a row of pearls  
against soft light."

The Second Man cried:  
"The God I saw  
had skin as yellow  
as the sun on straw.

"But when I looked  
in his strong, slant eyes,  
sweet lotus petals  
filled all the skies."

"God's face is brown,"  
the Third Man spoke,  
"like autumn leaves  
on a great, bronze oak.

"And His eyes are deep  
like bottomless wells,  
and His words are like  
a chime of bells."

"The God I saw,"  
the Fourth Man said,  
"wore a feather plume,  
and His face was red.

"His eyes were quiet,  
like forest aisles,  
and a wildwood rose  
was in His smiles."

I gaze from my window,  
as I write;  
and I know, as I look  
through the smoke-filled  
light,  
why none of the Four  
said, "God is White."

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Wilson MacDonald is one of Canada's best-known poets. He is also a socialist of long standing. Albert Einstein, after a trip to Canada, once wrote: "The greatest thing I discovered in Canada was Wilson MacDonald. Canada must be proud of this great genius writing in her midst." *A Song of Color* was inspired by the news of the exclusion of Autherine Lucy from the University of Alabama. It was originally published in the *Toronto Star* on Mr. MacDonald's stipulation that he be allowed to give it free distribution thereafter throughout the world. He sent the poem to MR through his close friend Scott Nearing, and we are proud to be the first to publish it in the United States.—Ed.

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