

Harry Haywood: The Negro Nation



Harry Haywood, 1948

The following is Chapter VII of Harry Haywood's 1948 book, Negro Liberation.

In the struggle against the plantation system of the South, the Negro people are necessarily the chief driving force. The liberal "remedies" which shy away from the fundamental economic changes indispensable for the democratic transformation of the South, ignore this crucial fact and, with it, they ignore the special character of the social and political struggle of the Negroes.

The Myth of Race

The "white supremacists" insist on presenting the Negro question as one of race. This makes it possible for them to "justify" the notorious color-caste system in the name of spurious race dogmas which depict the Negroes servile status in American life, not as the result of man-imposed prescription, but as a condition fixed by nature. Negro inequality is supposedly due to natural inherent differences.

In this credo, Negroes presumably are a lower form of organism, mentally primitive and emotionally undeveloped. "Keeping the Negro in his place" is thus allegedly prescribed by nature and fixed by Holy Writ. Color of skin is made an index to social position. Race, a strictly limited biological concept, becomes a social factor and used as an instrument for perpetuating and intensifying Negro subjugation. The Negro problem is explained in terms of natural conflict between races, the result of inborn peculiarities.

This hideous distortion, whose roots go back into ante-bellum times and beyond, permeates the entire cultural pattern of the South; this vile calumny is fixed in the South's folkways, mores and customs, sanctioned in its laws, and, in the last analysis buttressed by violence and lynch terror.

The lie of natural, innate and eternal backwardness of the Negro and other dark-skinned peoples is the theoretical foundation upon which rests the whole noxious system of Negro segregation and its corollary, "white supremacy."

Formerly a rationalization of chattel slavery, it is used to justify the Negroes present-day vassalage. Held down by an all-pervasive and absolute system of Jim Crow based on color of skin and curl of hair – whose myriad taboos found him from the cradle to the grave – the Negro is America's "untouchable."

Buell G. Gallagher observes in *Color and Conscience*:

"Slavery as ownership of chattel is gone: as a caste system it remains. Its purpose is to keep non-whites in a position that, in one way or another, is inferior or subordinate to that

of whites. Its devices range from lynching and mob violence, at one extreme, through legal enactment and extra-legal manipulations of courts and police, to custom and etiquette as instruments of caste control.”¹

From its taproot in the semi-feudal plantation system, anti-Negro racism has spread throughout the country, shaping the pattern of Negro-white relationships in the North as well. With the clandestine encouragement of Yankee financial power and its controlled agencies of public opinion, art literature, education, press, and radio, the dogma of the Negroes “inherent inferiority” has been cunningly infiltrated into the national consciousness of the American people. Woven into the national fabric, it has become an integral part of the “American way of life,” despite repeated refutation by authoritative science.

In reality, the so-called racial persecution of the Negro in the United States is a particular form and device of national oppression. The use by an oppressor nations ruling class of such social differences as language and religion to preserve the isolation (and thus the economic and social inequality) of a subject people is common knowledge.

Everywhere in the world, a study of the national question reveals the use of these differences by the ruling bourgeoisie as the foundation for its strategy of “divide and rule,” of fomenting strife and friction between the toilers of various nationalities. In Hitler’s Germany with its slogan of “one race, one culture, one nation,” racism reached a high peak making the cult of race the cornerstone of state and world policy. Bloody pogroms, artificially created almost overnight against Jews, became the openly declared official program of Nazi rule.

In America, the roots of racism are deeper, sunk as they are in the unsolved land question of the Black Belt. The current upswing of racism in the United States is utilized by monopoly capital in the drive toward fascism and its by-product, war. In the United States, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, a far-flung system of racial persecution, springing from the mire of chattel slavery – with strong survivals up to the present day – provides an even more fertile soil than Hitler had.

Racism, always the game of a reactionary governing class, is being played for much higher stakes today.

Among American Negroes, physical difference becomes almost the sole characteristic whereby the subject race can be distinguished from the oppressor nation. In the absence of such socio-cultural distinctions between white and Negro as language and religion, the “racial visibility” of the Negro enables the Anglo-Saxon ruling clique to set him apart from all others among the population as a permanent object of scorn and oppression.

Effect on the Negro

In the ideology of race, the dominant classes have a much more potent weapon at their disposal than even religion and language. The latter, as social phenomena, are historically transient; whereas race, a physical category, persists. And once a people has been smeared with the stigma

of “racial inferiority” they are ipso facto ruled out as unworthy of nationhood and its inherent right of self government – a right which in itself is presumed to be the special privilege of “superior” races.

This deliberately cultivated emphasis on the racial factor, particularly on the aspect of color differences, has not been without its adverse effect upon the Negro. It has indeed acted as a retardation on the growth of political self-assertion. The fog of racist obscurantism, thrown up by his oppressors, has made difficult clear political orientation, i.e., the job of locating and thus confronting the real enemy – the forces of monopoly capitalism. It is therefore not surprising that until quite recently Negro protest has been shunted off into the blind alley of a defensive “racialism.” What is in reality an aspiration for identity as a nation has sought expression through false symbols of “race” foisted on him by white rulers. He has perforce defined his fight for freedom as a fight for “racial equality,” “racial opportunity.”

Manifestly, the Negro problem cannot be defined by any racial formulae. Ideologically, they obscure the economic and political conditions for the achievement of Negro equality, and impede the full and necessary clarity as to the nature of the issue. They are tank-traps to block the road to the understanding of the profound revolutionary implications of the struggle of the Negro people for liberation.

The maintenance of the pariah status of Negro Americans, their lack of equality, is an integral part of the policy of American finance capital. That policy has for its objective the achievement of the following:

1. The artificial and forcible stifling of the free economic and cultural development of the Negro through racist persecution as a basic condition for maintaining his super-exploitation and for maintaining the degradation of the great mass of southern white folks;
2. The infection of the organism of American democracy with the virus of race hatred as a deterrent to the formation of a common front of labor and democratic people against the common enemy – monopoly capitalism.

The fulcrum of that policy is the retention by monopoly of the slave survivals in the Black Belt as an essential economic and social base for its allies – the decadent Bourbon squirearchy of the South. And now, this policy has led to the conversion of the entire South into a bulwark behind which the most noxious forms of native fascism are rallying for a full-scale sortie against the democracy of the whole country and the world.

Real Nature of the Problem

The secret to unraveling the tangled skein of America’s Negro question lies in its consideration as the issue of an oppressed nation. Within the borders of the United States, and under the jurisdiction of a single central government, there exist not one, but two nations: a dominant white nation, with its Anglo-Saxon hierarchy, and a subject black one.

Unlike the white immigrant minorities, the Negro, wearing his badge of color, which sets the seal of permanency on his inferior status, cannot, under contemporary economic and social conditions, be absorbed into the American community as a full-fledged citizen, limited as this absorption is in practice even for large sections of the white minorities. He cannot hope to escape as long as the status quo remains unchanged in the South. True, there are colored minorities, such as the colored Latin Americans Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and others; there are Orientals, and remnants of the American Indians. But these also are tarred with the brush of color and are in the main relegated to the category of “unassimilables,” outside the limits of majority democratic tradition.

But the classification of the Negro as a “minority” leaves unanswered the question posed long ago by George W. Cable, a foremost champion of Negro rights: why one-tenth of the population, all natives of the United States, and by law an inseparable part of the nation, do not have the same full measure of citizenship that they would have were they entirely of European rather than of partially African descent. For really, as Cable put it, the Negro remains in America a “perpetual alien.”²

The policy of Jim-Crow proscription of America’s black folk has resulted over the years in the shaping of the Negro as a distinct economic, historical, cultural, and, in the South, geographical entity in American life. The Negro is American. He is the product of every social and economic struggle that has made America. But the Negro is a special kind of American, to the extent that his oppression has set him apart from the dominant white nation. Under the pressure of these circumstances, he has generated all the objective attributes of nationhood.

The history of the Negro people in the United States is unquestionably intertwined with the history of the rest of the American people. But to say no more than this would be to falsify both the special story of the Negro people and to befog the history of American capitalism. For, on the one hand there were the dominant whites, and among them existed from the beginning the division into economic classes. The Negroes, on the other hand, were forced into the stream of American history in a special manner as oppressed slaves whose present position as a whole people still bears the marks of the slave lash.

The Negro was not freed by the Revolution of 1776, nor was he fully freed by the Second American Revolution of 1861-77 – the Civil War and Reconstruction. The fact is that the first American republic contained a glaring flaw – the institution of chattel slavery. This despite the aims so proudly proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence of man’s inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Excluded from these “inalienable rights” was an important segment of the American people – the Negro slave who, at the time, comprised one-fifth of the country’s population.

Thus, the new American national state created as a result of revolution got off to a false start. This “omission” was to prove almost fatal. The glaring ambiguity of a nation half free and half slave was recognized by the most advanced statesmen of the period, by Paine, Jefferson, Franklin, Samuel Adams, and others.

It was the belief of the Founding Fathers that slavery would soon die out. Slavery was not particularly profitable, except in a very few areas. The tide of history turned with the industrial revolution in England and the various inventions, topped by the cotton gin, which created a world-wide demand for cotton. In 1789, when the Constitution was adopted, no one doubted that there would soon be an end of slavery. By 1818, when the debate began on the admission of Missouri, a new slavocracy had arisen which was demanding expansion into new lands.

The compromises which the Constitution contained on the issue of slavery precluded the participation of the Negro in the first American republic. It prevented his democratic integration into the new national state. He was thus cheated of the fruits of the victory to which he had contributed in terms of 5,000 of his people in the revolutionary armed forces.

But the constitutional compromises only postponed the issue of slavery. This issue was to flare up anew in the second decade of the nineteenth century and was to occupy the spotlight in American politics up to the end of the Civil War.

The question of slavery, as Marx observed, was for half a century the moving power of American history.³ The issue was finally resolved only by the Second American Revolution – the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Here again, for the second time, hope was held for the full integration of the Negro into American life as a free and equal citizen, for the consolidation of Americans, black and white, into one nation. But again the revolution was aborted, again the Negro was left outside the portals of full citizenship. The great betrayal of 1877, sealed by the Hayes-Tilden gentlemen's agreement, turned over the management of the South to the new Bourbon classes, who were given the chance to reconstruct that region "in their own way."

Again the Negro was denied the fruits of the victory, which he had helped to win. Deserted by his erstwhile allies, he was left landless and at the tender mercy of the former slaveholders. Again, as in the Revolution of 1776, he was placed at the doorstep of full freedom only to have the door slammed in his face – an unwelcome intruder. This second great defeat blasted his hopes for democratic absorption into American national life.

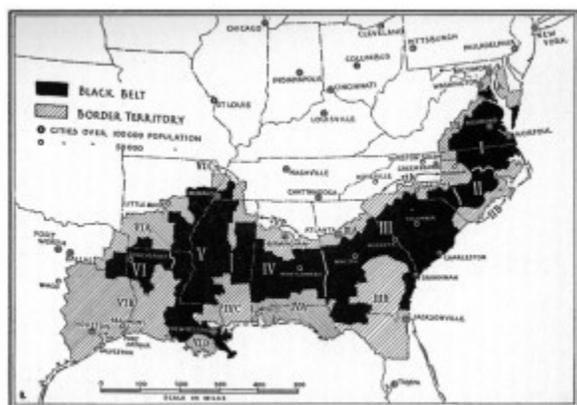
But a qualitative change had taken place in his status. Freed from chattel slavery by the uncompleted revolution, he -was now ready for the appearance of economic classes within his group, which under the conditions of segregation and imperialist oppression, necessarily served as driving forces for a movement of national liberation. The process of class stratification among Negroes was of necessity a slow and tortuous one, taking place as it did against the overwhelming odds of post-Reconstruction reaction. But proceed it did, so that the Negroes, who at the time of their release from chattel bondage comprised an almost undifferentiated peasant mass, had by the beginning of the twentieth century become transformed into a people manifesting among themselves the class groupings peculiar to modern capitalist society. Along with an increasing mass of wage laborers, there began to appear a class of small business people, with more or less well-defined capitalist aspirations. This class was to find its spokesmen among

the educated middle class. The rise of a Negro bourgeoisie marked the appearance of a class which, striving to defend its own interests under American conditions, was destined to initiate an historical movement, which could only develop in the direction of national freedom. The process of class differentiation developing against the background of Jim-Crow oppression, and in conditions of continued majority concentration of Negroes in the Black Belt, thus formed the main objective conditions for their emergence as an oppressed nation.

The advent of imperialism, the epoch of the trusts and monopolies, at the turn of the century, riveted the yoke of white ruling-class tyranny still tighter, with the result that the Negro was thrust still further out of the pale of American democracy into deeper isolation within his own group. The rise of a finance-capitalist oligarchy to dominant position in American economic and political life precluded the possibility of peaceful democratic fusion of the Negro into a single American nation along with whites. Thenceforth the issue of Negro equality could be solved only via the path of the Negro's full development as a nation. The Negro question had now definitely become the problem of an oppressed nation striving for national freedom against the main enemy, imperialism.*

Objective Conditions for Nationhood

Geographically, the Negroes are scattered throughout the United States, but almost one-third of their number (five million) are still massed in the Black Belt area, including its peripheral counties. Despite the migrations of the last eighty years, they exist as a stable community and form a majority of the population over a broad area.



BLACK BELT AND BORDER TERRITORY

We defined the Black Belt in Chapter I as an area girding the heart of the South, encompassing its central cotton-growing states and 180 counties in which the Negroes constitute more than half (50 to 85.5 per cent) of the population. From this core, the Black Belt Negro community overflows into 290 or more neighboring counties, whose populations are from 30 to 50 per cent Negro. In the whole of this area, then, in a total of approximately 470

* The uniqueness of the Negro problem in the United States lies in the fact that the Negro was left out of the country's general democratic transformation. Quite the reverse was the development in France. Pre-revolutionary France was what Mirabeau aptly called a "formless heap of disunited peoples." These peoples were welded into one united French nation as a result of the revolution. For example, in France all ethnic groups, without exception, Bretons, Normans, Basques, Alsatians, etc., shared equally in the "liberty, equality, and fraternity" achieved by the great French Revolution. They were therefore all welded into one French nation on the basis of this democratic transition. Had any one of these ethnic groups been excluded from the benefits of that revolution, as were the Negroes from the American revolution, a national problem similar to that of the present-day Negroes would have survived in France. Similarly in Britain, although the democratic transition followed its own peculiar pattern, the Welch, the Scottish, the English all shared in its benefits. The Irish, who were excluded from this process of democratic transformation, remained an oppressed nation within the geographic configuration of the British Isles.

counties, live five million Negroes.

This Black Belt region is the heartland of the American Negro. Here he has lived from generation to generation. It was upon its Atlantic Seaboard that his forefathers landed in Jamestown, Virginia, over 800 years ago. As a chattel slave, the black man followed the trek of King Cotton and the plantation across the face of the South. He planted and raised the South's chief cash crops, tobacco and cotton. His unrequited labor as a slave formed an essential part of the primary accumulation of wealth upon which the towering edifice of American industrial civilization was founded. Yet, eighty-five years after "emancipation" he is still denied his share. He remains a disinherited pauper, a social leper in his own homeland, groaning under the burden of absentee rulers and their regional henchmen, forced to obey laws which he has had no part in making.

Any serious examination will show that the Negro population of the Black Belt is tied together by myriad internal bonds, by all facets and agencies of modern capitalism, has all the prerequisites for existence as a nation. In the Black Belt, there is a division of labor between city and country typical of our capitalist era. Though it is primarily an agricultural community, this area has its cities, serving as commercial and industrial outlets for the agrarian hinterland, cities such as New Orleans, Savannah, Mobile, Memphis, Charleston, Atlanta, Norfolk, Winston-Salem, all lying within the Black Belt or at its periphery. These cities are economically and historically part of that region. This is so notwithstanding the fact that Negroes comprise roughly only thirty to forty per cent of the populations of these centers.

As elsewhere in the modern world, town and country are linked by a unified system of transportation and communication, by monetary unity, by a common banking and credit structure, by all media essential to modern capitalist market relationships.

Among the Negro people of the area, there exist all class groupings peculiar to capitalism, which historically provided the basis for the emergence of modern nations. Not only do Negroes work as laborers in the cotton and tobacco fields; they work also in the coal mines, steel mills, saw and planing mills, ginning and cotton seed oil mills, in furniture, turpentine refining, in processing of tobacco, in chemical industries and in pulp and paper, in longshore and logging, on railroads, etc.

There is a Negro upper class or bourgeoisie, living in both urban and rural communities, striving as do all bourgeois classes for the extension of its markets. Its most influential segment resides in the cities, functioning mainly in the fields of insurance, small-scale banking, real estate, undertaking and other services for the Negro community. There is also a sprinkling of well-to-do Negro farm owners in the rural areas. This Negro bourgeoisie has its ideologists in the educated middle classes, striving for the modern development of their people. There is the thin stratum of professional people, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, ministers (the largest group), and social workers.* The development of all these classes is artificially retarded by American monopoly

* Most Negro institutions of higher learning are situated in the South, at Atlanta, Nashville, Washington, D.C., etc. The largest Negro insurance company is at Durham, N.C. The only Negro daily newspaper is published in Atlanta.

capitalism and its Bourbon cohorts. All classes suffer from the ferocious national oppression. The people as a whole find their interests running counter to this stifling Jim Crow. The Negro workers want modern conditions of labor; the sharecroppers, poor farmers, and plantation hands want land and freedom from the yoke of peonage; the town middle classes and intellectuals want equal opportunities in businesses and professions.

Although the Negro community in this area has all these economic and social elements of capitalism welding it together, we must not lose sight of the decisive fact, that the region's economy remains backward, mainly agrarian in character. The full development of modern capitalism has been arbitrarily arrested. In this respect the region's economy is typical of that of colonial and other retarded nations. One can say that the Black Belt is a kind of "internal colony" of American imperialism, made to function mainly as the raw material appendage of the latter. The character of the oppression of the Negro people in no sense differs from that of colonial peoples. The economy of the region is not controlled by the Negro capitalists. Its immediate direction is in the hands of white local capitalists and landlords, who act as the outpost command for the real rulers, the financial dynasty of Wall Street.

This only emphasizes the fact that the economy of the Black Belt is typical of that of an oppressed nation, whose full development is artificially and forcibly retarded by imperialism.

Negro Culture

A common tradition and culture, native to Negro America, has been in the making since the first Negroes were landed at Jamestown. The special history of the Negro people in the United States is the history of oppression and the struggle against it. It is the history of the misery of the chattel slave sold from the holds of the slave ships into bondage where an unknown tongue prevailed. It is the history of more than two hundred heroic slave revolts and insurrectionary plots, all of them foredoomed and ruthlessly suppressed. The history of the Negro people has infused the Negro with hopes, ideals, customs, and traits which are blended in a psychology whose activities and aims move in a thousand ways toward freedom and equality. This psychology has been evidenced in slave revolts, in participation in the democratic wars of this country and in its political life, especially during Reconstruction, and in the various organizations that developed the liberation movement of modern times.

The entire development of Negro music, literature, poetry, and painting, of churches, fraternal groups, and social societies, bears the imprint of this struggle for liberation. The psychological as well as the economic need for continuous struggle to gain equal democratic status, to throw off the oppressive chains and assume the upright posture of a free people – this is and has been the dynamic of Negro culture.

Dr. W. E. B. DuBois pointed out this fact in his introduction to the appeal to the United Nations, submitted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in February 1947:

“The so-called American Negro group, therefore, while it is in no sense absolutely set off physically from its fellow Americans, has nevertheless a strong, hereditary cultural unity, born of slavery, of common suffering, prolonged proscription and curtailment of political and civil rights; and especially because of economic and social disabilities. Largely from this fact have arisen their cultural gifts to America – their rhythm, music and folk-song; their religious faith and customs; their contributions to American art and literature; their defense of their country in every war, on land, sea and in the air; and especially the hard, continuous toil upon which the prosperity and wealth of this continent has largely been built.”

The Negro people are a separate folk, a people with distinct interests, feelings and attitudes built upon their common history of suffering and oppression.

“The result,” continues the statement, “has been to make American Negroes to a wide extent provincial, introverted, self-conscious and narrowly race-loyal; but it has also inspired them to frantic and often successful effort to achieve, to deserve, to show the world their capacity to share modern civilization. As a result there is almost no area of American civilization in which the Negro has not made creditable showing in the face of all his handicaps.”⁴

Notwithstanding its many points of contact with the culture of the dominant white nation, this Negro culture has its own distinctive features. Thus there has arisen within the Negro community a socio-cultural structure corresponding to the status of fixed inequality forced upon him by the dominant white nation. There is among the Negro community a multiplicity of organizations, national and local, devoted to every field of human interest and endeavor: to education, to civil rights, to the special interest of various professional groups and of women, youth, veterans, and business enterprises. There is a Negro church which in many parts of the country is a social rallying point of the Negro community.

The authors Drake and Cayton, describing Bronzeville, Chicago’s Negro community, observed that:

“The people of Bronzeville have, through the years, crystallized certain distinctive patterns of thought and behavior...

“While Bronzeville’s institutions differ little in form from those in other Midwest Metropolis communities, they differ considerably in content. The dissimilarity springs primarily from two facts: Because the community is spiritually isolated from the larger world, the development of its families, churches, schools and voluntary associations has proceeded quite differently from the course taken by analogous white institutions; and, second, Bronzeville’s ‘culture is but a part of a larger, national Negro culture, its people being tied to thirteen million other Negroes by innumerable bonds of kinship, associational and church membership, and a common minority status. The customs

inherited by Bronzeville have been slowly growing up among American Negroes in the eighty years since slavery.”⁵

The cultural pattern of Chicago’s Bronzeville has its replica in Harlem, in Detroit’s “Paradise Valley,” in the Pittsburgh Hill section, in Los Angeles’ Central Avenue, indeed in every Black ghetto in America, the greatest of which is the Black Belt itself. National Negro culture finds expression in a rich folklore, in music, in the dance, in an expanding and virile theatre movement and in a highly developed literature. It is voiced in a rapidly growing press. (In 1946 the combined circulation for 137 Negro newspapers was almost two millions.⁶) But, through whatever medium it manifests itself, this culture is built around themes of distinctly Negro life and Negro problems.

Coming from the heart of the masses of people welded together by like yearnings, stirred by the same causes, this culture expresses the deep-felt aspirations of the Negro people, their strivings to break through the walls of the Jim-Crow ghetto and to achieve recognized status as a free people.

The present great Negro political awakening is finding expression in a new resurgence of Negro literature and art. Langston Hughes, outstanding Negro folk poet, has hailed this new cultural “renaissance” as transcending in depth and scope the vast wave of Negro cultural activity following World War I, which found in Alain Locke its foremost interpreter.⁷

To the glory of poetry, it may be said that in literature Negro poets raised most clearly and feelingly the ringing tones of struggle for liberation. Standing highest among these bell-like singers are such contemporary poets as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Sterling Brown. Among the younger poets are Owen Dodson, Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker. The interpretative writings of Alain Locke, the novels of Arna Bontemps, Richard Wright, Ann Petry, the poetry of James Weldon Johnson, the biographical work of Shirley Graham, the plays of Theodore Ward, the dramatic interpretations of Canada Lee, have enhanced the treasury of American and world literature and art. The great people’s artist and leader, Paul Robeson, is a towering example of the magnificent contributions of the Negro people in the world of music and drama. William Grant Still, outstanding contemporary Negro composer; Marian Anderson, world famous contralto; Richard Barthe, foremost Negro sculptor; Ernest Crichlow, prominent illustrator and caricaturist, and Hale Woodruff, prize-winning muralist, are only a few of the many creative Negro talents in these fields. In the roster of creative writers who have dealt and deal now with Negro life are names of Negroes who vie for top honors with all other writers in the United States.

To the literary expressions of a resurgent Negro people must be added the increasing numbers of works by Negro scholars and scientists who represent, on the whole, a deeper probing of the problem. Outstanding among these are the works of that sterling Negro scholar and fighter, W.E.B. DuBois, and of the eminent historian Carter Woodson. The late George Washington Carver, one of the world’s great scientists, is an example of their outstanding achievements in the sciences.

Progressive scholars have done yeoman work in unearthing the Negro's pre-American past, in piecing together that broken line of Negro history and the contribution the black man has made throughout time and throughout the world. They have refuted the spurious race stereotypes depicting the Negro as a man without a past, without a history, and, therefore, unworthy of an equal place at the table of civilization.

The myth of the Negro's past as only a "drawer of water and a hewer of wood" is now exploded. And in the shattering of this myth, the Negro has seen himself emerge as the inheritor of a rich historical tradition with antecedents reaching back into the dawn of civilization itself. This literature has brought to the consciousness of Negro America and to an ever-growing segment of whites the missing pages of American and African history, the great contribution made by the Negro to civilization-and democracy.

The trends which Alain Locke noted in the 'twenties have become more fully matured. What he said then can more emphatically be stated today:

"The day of 'Aunties,' 'Uncles' and 'Mammies' is... gone. Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on, and even the 'Colonel' and 'George' play barnstorm roles from which they escape with relief when the public spotlight is off. The popular melodrama has about played itself out and it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts."⁸

The New Negro is here and in much greater numbers than he was in the 'twenties. The stereotypes are giving way to a Negro with a new sense of his own dignity and worth and a newly awakened pride in himself as a contributor in no mean sense to the progress of our society. He is a Negro determined to fight for his just rights.

And behind this new Negro is the emerging dynamic force of the Negro industrial working class, which is playing an increasingly important role in the councils of Negro leadership.

Of course, this picture of Negro culture is not complete. There are also negative, non-progressive features, expressing the trend of self-isolation, Negro particularism. That the culture of the Negro people is expressed through the medium of the English language is no argument against the apparent fact that theirs is a distinctly Negro culture. English is the language of the Negro American as it is the language of all Americans. All American Negroes speak English. It is their common medium of expression. A common language, not necessarily a separate or distinct language, is the requirement of nationhood. In England, the United States, Canada, Australia, English is the native language. Yet no one will seriously argue that they are not separate nations.

For, with their past behind them, and in the course of their three hundreds years' sojourn on the American continent, the Negroes have adopted the English language as their own in the same manner that they have adopted other institutions of the dominant American nation. They have become transformed from the enslaved descendants of various African tribes and nations, having different levels of economic and social development, speaking different dialects and languages,

into an ethnically homogeneous and tightly welded people. They are today a people strengthened and hardened by oppression and rapidly gaining maturity.

Joseph Stalin, who was chiefly responsible for formulating the successful program for solving the problem of Russia's many nations, has defined a nation as an "historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture."⁹ The validity of this definition has been attested by the fact that it has served as the theoretical cornerstone for the building of that unique fraternity of free and equal nations known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Negroes in the United States manifest all these attributes of nationhood listed in the concise and classic definition of Stalin. They are "a nation within a nation."

The Status of National Consciousness

True, the actual movement for national liberation among the Negro people in the U. S. has been comparatively weak. It has even been argued that the Negro himself rejects the concept of separate nationality as a classification of his status in the contemporary American social scene. For, the argument runs, if the Negroes were a nation, would not the asseveration of their nationality find definite expression in the demands, slogans, and programs of their organizations? Since, allegedly, the capitalistic upper classes are the bearers of the "national idea," is not the fact that this class among Negroes has never, in a clear-cut and consistent manner, raised the demands of nationhood, conclusive proof that the Negroes are not a nation?

The fact is that the Negroes are a young nation whose advance to political consciousness and strength is retarded by imperialistic oppression. Yet, this very oppression is creating the basis for the rise of a fully conscious national movement among them. The weak development of national consciousness, or the lack of it, is characteristic of young nations. For example, in our own hemisphere fully a score of new nations have come into existence within the last one hundred and fifty years. The acquisition of national consciousness was in most cases a slow and arduous process. It is a fact that some of these nations, particularly in Central America, have yet to develop a vigorous sense of nationhood, and have by no means won full independence.¹⁰

The anti-imperialistic revolution in India has thrust forward on the political arena of that vast sub-continent a score of distinct and hitherto submerged peoples, energetically demanding a place in the sun – their recognition as nations within the frame of a free India. Outstanding is the case of the Moslems, who, until quite recently, recognized themselves as a religious entity, with only communal and religious differences separating them from the main mass of Hindu peoples. Despite the reactionary distortion of the legitimate Moslem national aspirations contained in the Mountbatten Award, which established two states, Pakistan and Hindustan, on the basis of religious difference only, the movement of the Moslem peoples for the right of national self-determination now occupies a central sector on the front of Indian freedom.¹¹

The road to national consciousness of the American Negro is more arduous and tortuous than that of most peoples. It is beset by formidable obstacles both of an ideological and a physical environmental nature.

First, there is the overwhelming and stifling factor of race the chief weapon in the ideological arsenal of the ruling classes of the oppressor nation. The spurious dogma of Negro racial inferiority is sunk deep in the thinking of white America. It has left its indelible stamp on the nascent Negro nation, befogging the basic concept of the Negroes' status as that of an oppressed nation. The charge leveled against the Negro people, that they are less than human, has forced them into an untenable defensive position, in which much of their energy has been consumed in the assertion of their basic humanity, their right to be considered human beings. To meet this invidious attack they have perforce rallied under the slogans of racial equality, racial solidarity, slogans which, though militant, do not hit the center of the target their oppression as a nation in the Black Belt.

Secondly, an additional deterrent to the Negroes' quest for freedom, via nationhood, is that the concept of Negro nationality is a totally new one, and thus outside the bounds of the traditional thinking of American democrats. Thus the idea of Negro nationhood, on American soil, when first projected by the Communist Party, met with attack not only by reactionaries, but also by well-meaning liberals, including many Negro leaders, who felt it to be a retreat before Jim Crow, an acquiescence to segregation.

Finally, perhaps the most formidable retarding factor in the development of the Negro's consciousness of nationhood is the fact that the new Negro nation of the Black Belt finds itself set down in the midst of the strongest capitalist nation in the world, totally engulfed by what the Negro playwright, Theodore Ward called "The Big White Fog."

Furthermore, as Stalin has pointed out, the national question nowadays is "virtually a peasant question." However, in this struggle against financial exploitation, political enslavement, and cultural effacement of the Negro people by the imperialist bourgeoisie, the mass of the Negro peasantry have lacked the leadership from those classes on which the development of the national movement has historically depended. The Negro bourgeoisie and industrial proletariat are comparatively recent social formations.

For the Negro to claim the rights of nationhood in these conditions would be an act of the highest political consciousness. And yet the fact is that, while eager to combat every manifestation of Jim Crow within American life, the Negro people see the solution of their problems neither in a process of ethnological absorption into the white community, nor in the abandonment of their American homeland for some illusory refuge in Africa or a "49th State," nor in any escapist scheme of mass exodus from the South. On the contrary, they have continued to build their own organizations and agencies affecting every phase of Negro endeavor in the United States,

systematically throwing off the feeling and even the terminology of “racial” inferiority,^{*} and strengthening the wellsprings of national consciousness. The Negro masses want equality, and increasingly feel that they can and must achieve it as a people in their own right. The emergence of new mass forces and influences, spearheaded by a rapidly maturing Negro industrial working class, has proved decisive in this development.

This growing sense of nationhood has been most dramatically expressed in the appeals of the National Negro Congress and of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to the United Nations. DuBois, in his introduction to the N.A.A.C.P. appeal, writes:

“The United Nations surely will not forget that the population of this group [the Negroes] makes it in size one of the considerable nations of the world. We number as many as the inhabitants of the Argentine or Czechoslovakia, or the whole of Scandinavia including Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. We are very nearly the size of Egypt, Rumania, and Yugoslavia. We are larger than Canada, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Hungary, or the Netherlands. We have twice as many persons as Australia or Switzerland, and more than the whole Union of South Africa. We have more people than Portugal or Peru; twice as many as Greece and nearly as many as Turkey. We have more people by far than Belgium and half as many as Spain. In sheer numbers then we are a group which has a right to be heard; and while we rejoice that other smaller nations can stand and make their wants known in the United Nations, we maintain equally that our voice should not be suppressed or ignored.”¹²

Despite the weak growth of national consciousness among Negroes, the road ahead for the Negro people in the United States points to the further, accelerated development of national aspirations. The experiences of World War II, in which the Negro people made great sacrifices in the common struggle against fascist aggression, only provided new evidence that the Negro was suffering from a distinct form of national oppression. The post-war period multiplied the evidence a thousand-fold. Instead of being followed by an unprecedented extension and revitalization of democracy in the United States, the triumph over the fascist powers was followed by a post-war offensive of reaction which, in addition to its assault upon the democratic rights of the labor and progressive movements generally, also set itself the task of “putting the Negro back in his place.” Even if the Negro people had chosen to integrate themselves with the nation as a whole, the forces of reaction, spurred on by the program of monopoly capital, put up new barriers to such integration and left no doubt that freedom for the Negro people could only be won by even greater struggles against national oppression, and first of all for land and political power in the Black Belt.

^{*} For example, the term “Negro race” has more and more fallen into disuse and the term “Negro people” has been gaining general acceptance in the Negro community.

Right of Self-Determination

In fact, it is here that the national character of the struggle is most pronounced. The battle for fundamental agrarian reform is inextricably interwoven with the fight against the most barbarous type of fascist racist oppression of the Negro majority. Here it is not simply a matter of landlordism, but a particular brand of landlordism, that of a white ruling clique. In collusion with urban capitalists of the region, and with the clandestine backing of northern reactionaries, this landlordism maintains through the instruments of “white supremacy” (courts, police, militia and extra-legal auxiliaries of the K.K.K. and other such terroristic bodies) a system of special persecution and plunder of the Negro people, rivaled only in the most backward colonial lands. It is a landlordism that glories in the open flouting of the Reconstruction amendments to the Constitution.

This persecution of the Negro in the Southland, as we have indicated, is actually an auxiliary of national oppression of the most voracious kind, equivalent to foreign rule. It is designed for the political suffocation and suppression of a people who comprise the majority of the population of a contiguous land area, a people of common ethnic origin, and with a common history.

Any program envisioning fundamental reorganization of the South’s agrarian structure and land relationships must take into full account this “racial” or national factor, which is integrally tied in with the agrarian problem. Such a program must project as its long-range objective the breaking of the class domination of the Wall-Street-backed Bourbon oligarchy and the white supremacy color-caste system by which this rule of arbitrary violence over the Negro people is legally and morally sanctioned.

Democracy in the Black Belt

This means that the corrupt rule of monopoly capitalism and its allies in the Black Belt must be supplanted by the democratic rule of the majority, that is, of the Negro people, with the full participation of their allies among the disfranchised white minority. Without governmental and administrative control in the hands of the most oppressed section of the people, fundamental agrarian reform is impossible, as has been universally proved. Only government institutions that represent and express the special interests of the preponderant Negro population, and enjoy its confidence, can effect a radical change in the structure of southern landownership, so urgently needed by the bulk of the Black Belt’s people and southern whites generally.

The question of self-government for the Negroes in the South, however, is inseparable from their character as a nation.

In the last analysis the fight for self-government in the Black Belt is the fight for the right of self-determination by the Negro nation.

What, concretely, is the meaning of the right of self-determination of nations? What should be understood by it? Is it to be identified with separation? As regards the Negroes, is it to be equated to the demand for a separate Negro state in the Black Belt – a Negro republic? Does it

run counter to the principle of Negro and white unity, so essential to the struggle for Negro rights and democracy? Is it not a capitulation to Jim Crow or segregation, as many of the critics of this principle contend?

These are some of the questions raised, not only by reactionaries who have donned the false cloak of friendship for the Negro's cause in order better to sabotage it, but by many honest and sincere proponents of Negro freedom.

The right of self-determination means none of these things. Quite the contrary. It implies the application of consistent democracy in the sphere of relations between nations, the elimination of the forcibly imposed distinction between oppressed and oppressing nations; it means the abolition of all and sundry privileges of one nation over the other. Specifically it means simply the right of the people of a nation to determine their own fate, or destiny, free from forcible intervention from without by the people of another nation. A nation has the right to organize its own life in the manner or form it chooses, independent of the dictates of any other nation – to be master in its own house. Finally, self-determination means the recognition of the sovereignty of a people in all matters affecting their internal life as well as in matters involving their relationships with other peoples or nations. This, then, is the content and principle of the right of self-determination.

Quite definitely, this right includes the right of separation, that is, the right to free political secession from the oppressing nation. But self-determination must not be construed as identical with secession and the establishment of an independent state. The right of nations to secede is an inviolable democratic right, but it is not an obligation, or a duty.

“A nation,” says Stalin, “has the right to arrange its life on autonomous lines. It even has the right to secede. But this does not mean that it should do so under all circumstances, that autonomy, or separation, will everywhere and always be advantageous for a nation, for the majority of its population, for the toiling strata.”¹³

An illustrative parallel which might serve to bring out the distinction between right and obligation is afforded in the field of woman's rights. The right of divorce is universally recognized in all advanced nations as basic to the emancipation of womanhood. Every democrat worthy of the name is duty-bound to support this right. But the *right* of divorce by no means signifies an *obligation* on the part of women to divorce their husbands. And so it is with nations. Any attempt to reduce the right of self-determination to the demand for secession is in fact to deny this right. It would be equivalent to dictating the form in which the nation should apply its rights.

A study of the national question reveals that the choice of settlement of the problem may be exercised in any one of the following forms, depending on the decision of the nation itself:

A nation may decide upon complete secession, that is, to set itself up as an independent state, or again it may decide on federation with the former oppressing nation, or it may decide upon territorial autonomy within the borders of the former oppressing state, with a varying degree of

sovereignty over its own internal affairs, viz., some form of local or regional self-government. There are, of course, varying degrees of autonomy within a state of mixed national composition, depending primarily upon the degree of unification of the respective autonomous people as a modern nation.* Federation implies voluntary association between free and equal nations in the form of a federative state. All these forms of the exercise of the right of self-determination have found a living and truly creative expression in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which assures the economic and cultural development of all of its peoples.†

International experience in the solution of the nationality problem has shown clearly that any program for its solution must include two points. First, it must confirm the unconditional right of the nation to democratic self-determination up to the point of secession and the organization of a separate state. Secondly, it must include a point on territorial autonomy in the event that the nation should decide on this alternative and consider it to be the most advantageous for its people.

“We demand the freedom of self-determination,” Lenin said, “not because we dream of an economically atomized world, nor because we cherish the ideal of small states, but on the contrary, because we are for large states and for a coming closer, even a fusion of nations, but on a truly democratic, truly internationalist basis, which is *unthinkable* without the freedom of separation.”¹⁴

The recognition of the principle of self-determination implies an uncompromising fight for the conditions for its realization; that means, the fight for equality in all fields, and against all forms of national or racial oppression, in short, complete democracy in the country. The exercise of the right of self-determination is the crowning point of this struggle and symbolizes that the equality of the given nation has been fully achieved.

Self-determination is, therefore, “merely the logical expression of the struggle against national oppression in every form.”¹⁵ It is an irrefutable demand of consistent democracy in the sphere of the national problem.

Self-determination as the ultimate solution of the Negro national question is no communist dogma, as the spokesmen of imperialism both open and covert strive so desperately to prove.‡

* “Wherever an ethnic group [in the Soviet Union] exists, its area of settlement is marked off as a political entity. The degree of autonomy which it receives depends upon several factors. One is its size. Another is whether or not it forms a majority even in its own territory. A third is the degree to which its people have progressed toward unification as a modern nation.” (William Mandel, *A Guide to the Soviet Union*, p. 472, Dial Press, N. Y., 1946.)

† For an example of how the democratic forces of India, a vast subcontinent of diverse colored nations, envisage this problem, see the program adopted by the Second Congress of the Communist Party of India. (*Political Affairs*, May, 1948, pp. 460-77.)

‡ In this respect, an editorial in the *Amsterdam News*, a conservative Negro newspaper of New York, is highly suggestive. The editorial states in part: “A study of the census figures sheds some light on why Bilbo and Co. are anxious for a ‘Back to Africa movement.’ According to the 1940 Census, there are 180 counties where the Negro is the largest part of the population, which counties represent 4,237,739 persons.... When the Negro gets the vote in those counties, we will have a large area in which political self determination will be possible. That explains why the

Neither is it a mere theory. Quite the opposite. It is a living reality attested by the struggles of the oppressed nations everywhere, and confirmed beyond all dispute in the epic example of the Soviet Union, a country embracing one-sixth of the earth's land surface, in which the national question has been solved. Upon the ruins of the "prison of nations" that had been the Russia of the tsars, where the most rapacious and wildest forms of national and racial oppression prevailed, has now been built that great commonwealth of free and equal nations known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Here 189 peoples speaking 150 languages, different in tradition, race and color, enjoy the same rights and are forged together in an extraordinary unity of effort and enthusiasm for a common ideal – a multicolored, multi-national fraternity of peoples, a commonwealth of nations based on the free association of races and nations living in peace and friendly collaboration. This democratic solution of the national question, grounded in a socialist economy, is the reason for the unshakable unity displayed by the Soviet peoples in the recent war against fascism. Undeniably the Soviet achievement is a crowning victory for the policy that recognizes the unqualified right of nations to self-determination.

The policy of self-determination as the solution of the national question has found its confirmation most recently in the policies of the new people's democracies which have arisen in post-war Eastern Europe. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, states which prior to World War II had been torn by national strife and dissension, have now been transformed into democratic multi-national states based on equality and the right of self-determination of formerly oppressed nations such as the Slovaks in Czechoslovakia, and the Slovenes, Croatians, Montenegrins, Macedonians, and the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The principle of self-determination applies fully to the situation of the Negro nation of the Black Belt. Once the Negro community there is conceded to be a nation, the recognition of its right to self-determination logically and inalterably follows.

It would be scraping the very bottom of the foul pit of distortion and calumny to label this democratic need of the Negro people of the Black Belt a concession to Jim Crow, or to assert that it plays into the hands of the Bilbos and Talmadges. Jim Crow means separation of Negro and white, a separation arbitrarily and violently imposed by the Negro's oppressors.

It is the instrument of imperialist national oppression. But the right of self-determination for the Black Belt Negro, on the contrary, commits its proponents to the most consistent and unremitting fight for every democratic need of the Negro people; it means the obligation to assist in the organization of and to give practical support to their fight against all forms of Jim-Crow oppression and violence to the point of the establishment of their full equality; that is, the realization of the concrete conditions in which the right of self-determination of the Negro nation can be exercised.

poll tax and anti-lynching bills are fought so bitterly. Bilbo, Rankin, and their neophyte, Eastland, see the handwriting on the wall." (*Amsterdam News*, Aug. 25, 1945.)

In America the imperialist policy of Jim-Crow national oppression of the Negro creates the conditions for the rise of a movement for Negro national liberation. At the same time, imperialist oppression clears the ground for the emergence of the most dynamic force of that movement, the Negro working class, drawing it into the orbit of industry and into direct contact and fraternal relationships with white labor.

This is a glaring paradox in the world of imperialism; but for advanced labor whose perspective is socialism these trends are but part of a single process leading to world unity on a free and voluntary basis.

Self-Government

While the right and exercise of self-determination is the inherent goal of the Negro struggle for national liberation in the Black Belt, self-rule in the partial form of local self-government within the existing federal state is a first and mandatory step in its attainment. It is the minimum requirement for the recasting of the South's agricultural set-up along democratic lines, to guarantee to the Negroes the necessary political power for beginning the wide sweeping economic and cultural reforms needed in that region.

The precedent for Negro self-government was set historically in the period of Radical Reconstruction, when the newly emancipated Negro, in alliance with southern poor whites and supported by northern democracy, stepped forward to take his place in government, and to establish in the South the only democratic regime it has ever known – the Reconstruction governments of 1867-77. During this period, Negro self-government actually existed in a number of Black Belt counties. Its rudimentary forms were likewise observed in the Constitutional Conventions held in ten southern states and by the dominant Negro representation in the subsequent state legislatures of South Carolina, Mississippi and Louisiana.

In South Carolina, Negroes composed the great majority in the Lower House of the three legislatures which sat between 1868 and 1873, and a very large minority of the Lower Houses which sat between 1874 and 1878. Representation in the state legislatures of other states was considerably less.

Negroes occupied offices other than in legislatures in the following states: South Carolina – Lieutenant Governor (twice); Speaker of the House (twice); Secretary of State, Adjutant and Inspector-General; Louisiana – Acting Governor (in interim of 43 days, this was Lieutenant Governor P. B. S. Pinchback); Lieutenant Governor (three times); Secretary of State, State Treasurer, Superintendent of Public Education; Mississippi – Secretary of State, Lieutenant Governor, Superintendent of Education. Other offices were held by Negroes in other states.

From 1868 to 1901, there were a total of 23 Negroes in Congress, two of whom were Senators. Many of these served in more than one session of Congress. Some were reelected several times.

To the chagrin of its defamers, this “experiment in Negro government” resulted in the framing of the most democratic state constitutions in the nation. For example, the South Carolina

convention put through a constitution which included immediate abolition of property qualifications for office holding; universal suffrage for Negro and white; no discrimination against Negroes; proportional representation according to population and not on a property basis; no imprisonment for debt; compulsory universal education; recognition of woman's rights; and reorganization of state and county governments to provide for the fullest participation of the people.¹⁶

The falsification of the true history of Reconstruction, the concealing of its real lessons from the people has, over the years, become a built-in part of the whole system of "white supremacy," by which the Bourbon oligarchs justify their absolutist totalitarian rule.

Reconstruction is depicted as a period of unrestrained, violence, bloody terror, carnage, and rapine, in which the Negro is presented as a naive but semi-savage person who, freed from a benevolent slavery, roamed the land robbing and stealing, and venting his lust upon unprotected white womanhood; while in the background, directing this horror, stalked the most sinister of all figures, the vengeful, swaggering carpetbagger exacting his blood-drenched pound of flesh from a ruined and prostrate South.

A whole literature has been built upon such vicious distortions. Particularly in the South, among poor whites, has this lying version been accepted as irrefutable fact; the carpet-bag bogey and its corollary, the threat of "Black Domination," has been used by generations of Dixie demagogues not only to frighten little children but a whole white population.

The Negro-white unity achieved during the Reconstruction "experiment in Negro government," held forth the promise of a rapid development of the South out of its morass of reaction and backwardness. It was crushed, however, by the victory of the counter-revolution of 1877, sealed in the Hayes-Tilden agreement between northern capitalism and southern reaction.

In the context of the present fight against encroaching fascism for a truly democratic people's government for the United States as a whole, the need of the Black Belt Negro for political self-rule means simply the establishment of the jurisdiction of the Negro majority over all questions purely of a local and regional character.

Its realization would of course involve the reorganization of the present governmental and administrative structure of a number of southern states whose boundaries now arbitrarily crisscross the area of contiguous Negro majority breaking up this area into a maze of governmental administrative, judicial, and electoral subdivisions, which in no way correspond to the life needs of its people.*

* The unique powers exercised by county governments in the "deep South" have been vividly described by W. E. B. DuBois: "County after county has been erected by the legislature as a corporate center of local government, until today Georgia is not one state—it is 166 independent counties, counties so independent that if anarchy wishes to stalk in Wilcox County, Fulton County has little more power than a foreign state. The independence and self-rule of these little bits of territory are astounding. They lay taxes, they spend monies, they have partial charge of education and public improvements, and through their dominating power in the legislature they make laws. Only when they touch corporate property, industrial privilege... are the reserve forces of capital and politics mobilized to curb them."

Indeed, these divisions are purposely maintained – in many cases are even gerrymandered – by the South’s rulers with the aim of continuing the political suppression of the region’s predominant colored population. The abolition of these bureaucratic and arbitrarily established boundaries and their replacement by truly democratic ones, conforming not with the needs of the bourbon oppressors but with those of the oppressed, is a key task of American democracy.

Self-government for the Black Belt region implies just such a regrouping of county and administrative districts to guarantee full proportional representation for the Negro people in all areas of government. What honest democrat could deny to the Negro majority in the Deep South the self-government that the peoples of other states comprising our federal union now enjoy? For the Black Belt this demand would mean simply majority representation on the governing body or legislature of the region, the right of such a body to make laws in the interests of the majority, to levy taxes, to control the police and militia, jurisdiction over education and public facilities, etc. On whose interests would such rights encroach? Certainly not those of the disfranchised and pauperized white minority. Plain it is that only the Bourbon lynchocrats have cause to fear this legitimate aim of the Negro people – democracy in the Southland. Let there be no mistake. The Talmadges, Rankins, and the rest of their unspeakable tribe clearly understand the real issues involved. And in that understanding lays the explanation for their frenzied beating of the drums of “race war,” amidst demagogic cries of “Black Domination.” Negro self-government is a simple democratic demand, in full conformity with the principles of majority rule.

Negro self-government, in this sense, is conceivable in the frame of our present federal system of government. Clearly, therefore, it can by no means be construed as separation. This demand has nothing in common with the fantastic and reactionary scheme proposed by the 49th State Movement which planned to herd Negroes into a segregated area, set aside especially for them by the federal government. Quite the reverse, Negro self-government for the Black Belt means representative government for the Negro in the area where he now resides and is largely concentrated. Its realization is a prerequisite for genuine democratic unity.

Its realization would lay the basis for the abolition of the odious white supremacy caste system, thus paving the way for a new democratic renaissance of the Negro people surpassing that of their aborted resurgence of post-Civil War times. It would make possible the unleashing of the full potential of creative energy and self-initiative of a people now smothered by Bourbon “race” strictures that are designed to hide the underlying social-class issues of the struggle for democracy in the South.

Self-government is therefore an irreducibly minimal demand of the Negro people of the Black Belt indispensable to their economic and cultural development.

This demand represents the basic interests of the impoverished white minority of the region whose backwardness and distress are anchored in the oppression of the Negro masses, since they

(W. E. B. DuBois, “Georgia: Torment of a State,” 1924, republished in the *New Masses*, Sept. 10, 1946.) This cogent description of Georgia’s county setup holds true for most of the Black Belt states.

can be freed only through uncompromising support for the full rights of the Negro people. Recognition of the right of self-government for the Black Belt Negroes is, therefore, basic to any permanent alliance between them and the southern white working people against the common enemy.

That self-government is a major political goal towards which the Negroes' struggle for democracy in the Black Belt is heading should be apparent to any keen student of southern politics. This need, in its elementary form, is inherent in the widespread demand of Negroes in southern urban communities for the redistricting of political subdivisions in a manner to assure them representation in local politics. And, in its primary stages, the fight for Negro self-government is implicit in the growing demand for representative government in the region; that is, in the fight for electoral reforms, such as the right to vote, to hold office, to sit on juries and for protection against Ku Klux terrorism and lynching. The necessity for such Negro self-government is made patent by the South's bi-color caste system, which dictates permanent inequality for the Negro. The need for it, while not yet clearly expressed, is nevertheless innate in the objective conditions of Negro life in the Black Belt, and will undoubtedly be forced to the surface in the surging wave of unrest now engulfing the colored population of the Deep South.

Self-government is a slogan that epitomizes the immediate political demands of the Negroes in the South. It would give the entire movement around these urgent demands of Negro equality – demands being accepted by ever increasing numbers of democracy-loving Americans – their proper focus and import. It would raise the struggle to a higher level, pointing this struggle to its ultimate goal – the achievement of fundamental agrarian reform and the full right of self-determination.

Endnotes:

1. Buell G. Gallagher, *Color and Conscience, The Irrepressible Conflict*, p. 3, Harper & Bros., N. Y., 1946.
2. See George W. Cable, *A Southerner Looks at Negro Discrimination*, pp. 27, 28.
3. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, p. 8, International Publishers, N. Y., 1937.
4. N.A.A.C.P., *An Appeal to the World! Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent, etc.*, pp. 1-2, N. Y., 1947.
5. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, p. 396.
6. *Negro Year Book, 1947*, p. 388.
7. See Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro—an interpretation*, Albert and Charles Boni, N. Y., 1925.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

9. Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, p. 12, International Publishers, N. Y., 1942.
10. See William Z. Foster, "On Self-Determination for the Negro People," *Political Affairs*, N. Y., June 1946, p. 549.
11. See R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, pp. 384-88, People's Publishing House, Bombay, 1947; see also "The Second Congress of the Communist Party of India," *Political Affairs*, May 1948, pp. 460-77.
12. N.A.A.C.P., *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
13. Stalin, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
14. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XVIII, p. 373, International Publishers, N. Y., 1930.
15. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XIX, p. 50, International Publishers, N. Y. 1942.
16. See Francis Butler Simkins and Robert Hilliard Woody, *South Carolina during Reconstruction*, pp. 96-102, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1932.