Previous rural-to-urban and Southern-to-Northern migration had not aroused continuing concern in either section or in either racial community. As the numbers of migrants multiplied after 1915, however, the impact on both the donor and recipient communities was considerable. In the South, increased mobility and initiative in the black communities stirred long-nurtured fears in white society. Any deviation from the traditional roles of subservience and acquiescence implicitly challenged the security of the white world. Racial violence was not uncommon as social tension mounted.

W. T. Andrews was unusually frank in pointing out the sources of racial pressures in the South. The historical significance of Andrews’ address, however, goes beyond its tone. The clarity with which this black South Carolinian perceived the variety of economic, social, and political forces behind the migration is impressive. Well-trained professional scholars, with the perspective of time and hindsight, have added few dimensions to the analysis which Andrews provided his listeners, even though, in 1917, this perceptive speaker was witnessing only the early stages of a tremendous population movement.

THE CAUSES OF NEGRO MIGRATION FROM THE SOUTH

W. T. Andrews

Rev. Carroll, president of the Race Conference, has requested me to submit some observations touching the present movement of Negroes away from the South to other portions of the United States and the causes of the movement.

The causes of this movement are far too many and stretch over too lengthy a period to be covered in a brief discussion.

I shall, therefore, attempt to recite some of those which I conceive to be the most deep seated and far reaching and in doing so I feel that they should be submitted with perfect frankness and thorough directness, yet without bitterness or rancor. I feel deeply, more deeply than I can express the seriousness of this Negro migration and approach its discussion as a duty and in furtherance of that duty shall “nothing extenuate nor aught set down in malice.”

In my view the chief causes of Negro unrest and disturbance of mind are as follows: The destruction of his political privileges and curtailment of his civil rights; no protection of life, liberty and property under the law; insufficient wages to the laboring classes with which to buy the necessities of life; Jim Crow car, residential and labor segregation laws; no educational facilities worthy of the name for the education of Negro children in most of the Southern states. These, I believe, are the most potent causes which are now impelling the Southern Negro
to seek employment and find homes in Northern and Western sections of the country. I shall endeavor to discuss these in brief detail.

These causes date back practically to the day of the Negro's emergence into freedom. Then the former slave was a pauper; the former master impoverished; the former slave was forced to labor for such wage as the former master was able or could pay. With the same patience and faithfulness exhibited as a slave the Negro began life as a freeman, to learn upon the very threshold of freedom that he was remanded by law, designated as the "Black Code," to a condition worse than the slavery from which he had just been released. Then came enfranchisement, given to him in the hope and belief that armed with the attributes and muniments of citizenship, he would be able through their power and influence, as in the case with all other citizens of the Republic, to protect himself.

Its possession was brief and accompanied with violence, and the most serious shock and disturbance of the Negro's content came when the suffrage was rudely and violently wrested from him, his political rights destroyed, his civil rights menaced, restricted, and repressed to a limit as extreme as the federal constitution permits.3

In South Carolina, and I believe it to be equally true of every Southern state, except those classed as "border states," statute after statute has been passed to curtail the rights of the Negro, but in not a single instance can a law be pointed to which was enacted for the purpose of enlarging his opportunity, surrounding himself and his family with the protection of the law, or for betterment of his condition. On the contrary every law passed relating to the Negro has been passed with the intent of controlling his labor and drawing his circle of freedom into similar and smaller compass.

Senators and representatives from the South, for several years have boldly and openly begun an agitation in Congress for the repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Federal Constitution for the avowed purpose of exercising complete control of the Negro. These same men have for years been loud and frequent in their abuse of the Negro; some of them carry their message of hate and prejudice into nearly every state where it had not already a healthy growth and perfection.4

Although eliminated from politics in the South, the Negro is more in evidence in Southern politics than when he enjoyed the franchise in fullest freedom; he is a live and stirring issue in every primary campaign; politicians, from magistrate to United States senator, appeal to the white electorate upon their record of hostility to the Negro or their future schemes for keeping him in his place and crushing his aspiration to measure up to the requirements of American civilization and progress.

It is amazing how enlightened men can so bitterly denounce a helpless people and stir to the depths the fires of racial hatred and yet when it suits their purposes declare that they, and they only understand the Negro and are his best friend. It never seems to occur to such men that the Negro might possibly understand himself to some slight degree and like other races, is usually able to pick his
friends even though those friends do not make known their friendship by noisy
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protestations.

The men in whose hands the reins of government are placed lead, and probably
control, the sentiments of the people who elevated them to power and the senti-
ments which built up year by year by such men and set in motion by abuse and
denunciation of the Negro have revived the dictum of the Dred Scott decision that
"a Negro has no rights which a white man is bound to respect." It has created in
the mind of the white man the belief that in his relation with the Negro he is a law
unto himself. His will is law and the Negro must bend to it or be broken by it.

In the courts an unwritten law exists that the testimony of a Negro shall not be
given weight against the word of a white man, most especially in cases between
white men and Negroes or when a white man may be convicted upon such tes-

In the rural districts the Negro is not only at the mercy of the lawless white
individual citizens but equally at the mercy of the mercy of the rural police, magistrates’ const-
ables and the magistrate. There is hardly a record in modern history of greater
oppression by judicial officers than that dealt to the Negro by a large majority of
the magistrates and other officials who preside over the inferior courts of South
Carolina.

The most approved hours for making arrests of Negroes charged with mis-
demeanors are between ten o’clock at night and two or three o’clock in the
morning, when the constable with several assistants will storm the Negro cabin,
drag the accused out of bed, perhaps beating him into insensibility if he is slow or
stubborn in submitting to arrest.

In towns and cities, as a rule, mayors and recorders’ courts are mills for grind-
ing out Negro convicts; Negroes charged with petty offenses are brought into
these courts, convicted and sentenced with lightning speed before they even
realize that they are on trial unless they are able to hire attorneys, whose fees
often equal the fine that would be imposed. They are beaten at will by arresting
officers, frequently shot and many killed if attempt is made to escape by running
from the officer, and for any such shooting officers are seldom put to the incon-

In tragic truth it must be confessed that there is in the South, South Carolina
most certainly, no protection for the life or person of any Negro whatever stand-
ing, sex, or age when in the hands of the bloody minded white man.

Negro labor in most of the Southern states, especially in agricultural districts, is
so poorly paid that the wage earned is insufficient to buy for the laborer and his
family the indispensable necessities of life. There is nothing to lay by for “a rainy
day” nor for the purchase of a home and ordinary comforts; no stimulus to
develop greater efficiency and to improve conditions, and as a consequence,
habits of indifference, shiftlessness and heedless spending of the little so hardly
earned are entailed.

During the past year and half throughout the entire country the cost of every
item necessary to the sustenance and maintenance of life has advanced in cost
from fifty to a hundred per cent, thus reducing the purchasing power of a dollar. As a consequence every class of labor has been granted an increase in wages except the Negro in the South. And still he is charged with being inefficient, lazy and unreliable. Is it believable that he is ignorant that people of other races receive their due reward for their labor and that his is withheld from him? What are the promptings of human nature in other races when they feel they are not receiving a fair return for their work? He does not take example from other races; he does not destroy what his labor has created or resort even to peaceable strikes. He may shirk his work or may even strike himself until hunger forces him to return to work for the same employer or some other for the same wage.

There never has been a time in the history of the world when unwilling workers were classed as efficient; and every man who feels that he is ill paid for his labor is an unwilling worker.

Among the most irritating and almost unendurable conditions of which the Negroes are subjected are the Jim Crow Car, Residential Segregation and Labor Segregation laws of various Southern states. Negroes pay the same railroad fares as other passengers but are forced to ride in second hand, filthy, unsanitary, combination coach and baggage car jammed next or near to the locomotive tender; if the Negro coach becomes crowded, which is more frequent than otherwise, they are compelled to stand and ride thus to their destination, although they have paid for a seat.

Residential segregation agitation, now rife, seeks to force Negroes into certain blocks or districts in towns and cities and certain townships or districts in rural districts. These laws, when applied, will simply mean that whatever portion of any city is most undesirable will be open to Negroes for residential purposes; he will not be permitted to exercise his choice as a free man in buying a home nor will the party who may like to sell him the home he may desire be allowed to exercise his choice in selling property owned by him to the person willing to pay the price. The same is true of rural segregation; the Negro will be pushed into the swamps and worn out sandhills when rural segregation laws are passed. The viciousness and injustice of law[s] of this character readily reveal themselves when examined.

In the textile mills of South Carolina, Negroes and whites are prohibited from working in the same room at the same time. If Negroes and whites can be prohibited from working together in the same room the prohibition can be extended to prevent them working together in or on the same building; in banks as porters or messengers; in stores as porters or drivers of delivery wagons or as window washers in any building where there are white workers, in hotels, or on railway trains; and when politicians begin to see the beauty of new schemes, brand new issues affording opportunity to pose as champions of the poor, white working man and upon which he can appeal to the white voter in the primary, demand will be made that statutes be passed to prohibit Negroes from working together in any occupation where white men will want the jobs.

The most flagrant disregard of the Negro's welfare and rights as a taxpaying citizen is the refusal to provide reasonably adequate facilities for the education of
Negro youth. The public schools in South Carolina, except in some towns and cities, are a pretense and a farce. There is absolutely no supervision except in some towns and cities, and in most of these, supervision is merely perfunctory. The Negro rural school teacher is the poorest paid of any class of workers except female domestics. Their schools average about three months in length of term at an average salary of about $18.00 per month for each teacher. This condition is driving the most competent teachers out of the school room into other occupations and leaving the work to be done by young and inexperienced female teachers and others for the most part incompetent. Splendid edifices, beautiful and complete in design and equipment are built for white children who are conveyed to and from school at the public expense; night schools are established for whites and public libraries are maintained out of the taxes paid by all, while Negro schools are still conducted in shacks without equipment, a majority of them subjecting teacher and children to exposure in severe weather hardly less dangerous to health, or more comfortable than in the open air; hence, Negro schools, from year to year, are retrograding instead of improving, and thousands of Negroes have deserted the farms and taken residence in the cities in order to give their children the advantage of better school facilities, while a great many board their children in the cities during school term for the same reason, frequently crowding out children living in the cities, every Negro school, city or country, being usually crowded beyond the capacity of the school building and of the teachers to do efficient work.\textsuperscript{11}

When it is considered that the Negroes of South Carolina pay into the treasury for educational purposes more money than is spent for the education of their children, it should cause no surprise that they manifest a desire to escape from such conditions.

That the Negro has endured all the harsh and galling conditions imposed on him and remained in the South, contributing with apparent cheerfulness and with marvelous willingness, his due share of sacrifice in the upbuilding of this great Southern country, was because there was no market for his labor, no haven of refuge where opportunity, a man's chance, and real freedom beckoned him to come.

And now after fifty years of hoping against hope, the gates of the labor market have opened to him in every section of our common country, and the call, the enticing lure, is not alone high wages, but opportunity, a man's chance and real freedom.

In my opinion, the South is the place where the Negro can best reach his highest development if living can be made tolerable and like all other citizens he can be brought under the protection of the laws of the states in which he resides and he is granted the right of sharing the benefits proceeding from the laws.

But if the Southern white people remain blind to the fact or refuse to concede that the Negro is a human with human aspirations and ambitions the same as humans of other races and continue to withhold from him justice and a square deal, there is no alternative but for him to leave the South that he loves so well.

The wealth and permanent progress of a commonwealth rest upon the foundation built by a laboring class that is contented, and who by their thrift and industry
can become prosperous and happy. And there is no room for nursing the hope of prosperity where civil and political rights are denied in a government where the ballot is the only weapon of defense; where protection under the laws is denied; where education is denied; where the wages of the toil are insufficient to buy the necessities of life; and where Jim Crow Car and Segregation laws are instruments of oppression and humiliation.

The Negro does not ask for special privileges or special legislation in his behalf. He does not ask to be measured by any standard less than the white man’s standard, but he insists that the same test shall apply to all men of all races. He refuses to accept the declarations of men, who claim to be the earthly agents and representatives of the Almighty, the interpreters of His plans and purposes of His will and laws and who solemnly assert that the God of the Christian ordained and decreed the Negro race to be in slavery or semi-slavery to the white race.

The Negro believes that the world is built on a moral foundation with justice as its basic rock. He believes that the Almighty is just, merciful and benevolent, and that He included all men in His plan of human development and reaching out for perfection.

He asks only for justice. Nothing less than justice will stay the movement of Negroes from the South. Its continued refusal will drive in the next two years a third or more of the Negro population to other portions of the country.12


2Othello V, ii 342–343.


4Senator “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman was the most vocal and renowned South Carolina political figure to take a firm stand for legal repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Tillman believed, as his biographer has stated, “that such a formal declaration of surrender in the struggle to give the Negro political and civil equality would confirm the black man in his inferior position and pave the way for greater harmony between the races.” Francis Butler Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), pp. 402–403.

5Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857).

6Complaint against the abuse visited upon black citizens by local government, especially the magistrate courts, was widespread in the South. Even the allegedly more enlightened “‘border states’
which Andrews sets apart came in for much criticism on this score. See Nashville (Tenn.) Globe, January 26, February 2, May 11, November 23, 1917.

Andrew's analysis of inflationary pressure is adequately borne out by price statistics. Wholesale prices in the United States rose by over fifty per cent between April, 1914, and April, 1917. By April, 1919 the price level had experienced a ninety-five per cent increase over a five year period. See Lester V. Chandler, The Economics of Money and Banking (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), pp. 374–378.


Urban residential segregation began in Baltimore in 1910 and had spread to Greenville, S. C. by 1913. Such action was forbidden by the Supreme Court in the case of Buchanan v. Warley in 1917, a case growing out of a Louisville, Kentucky statute. An adequate discussion of this aspect of segregation is Roger L. Rice’s “Residential Segregation by Law, 1910–1917,” Journal of Southern History, XXXIV (May, 1968), 179–199.

The South Carolina code of 1915, with numerous later additions, “prohibited textile factories from permitting laborers of different races from working together in the same room or using the same entrances, pay windows, exits, doorways, stairways, or windows at the same time, or the same lavatories, toilets, drinking water buckets, pails, cups, dippers or glasses at any time.” See Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, p. 83.

Racial discrimination in the dispensing of tax money for public education was more evident in South Carolina than any other state. Average expenditures for the state in 1915 were $13.98 for each white child and $1.13 for each black child. Andrew’s own county of Sumter had a ratio of $19.89 to $1 while neighboring counties of Lee and Calhoun had ratios of $39.76 to $1 and $33.50 to $1, respectively. See Louis R. Harlan, Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901–1915 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958), chapter VI.

Regarding the movement of the blacks within South Carolina from the rural areas to the city, the black urban population of the state grew from 84,358 in 1900 to 101,702 in 1910 and 116,489 by 1920. See Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920. Population, III, 924. Conditions changed slightly, if at all, in the next two years and by 1920 an estimated 321,890 blacks who were living in the South in 1910 had moved to the North. This is approximately 3.5 per cent of the total black population of the South in 1910. 26,723 or approximately 3.3 per cent of the 835,843 blacks living in South Carolina in 1910 showed up in Northern census statistics in 1920. See Louis Venable Kennedy, The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward: Effects of Recent Migrations to Northern Centers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 31; Fourteenth Census: 1920. Population, III, 924 and Thirteenth Census: 1910. Population, I, 189.