

Negro  
Liberation

*Harry Haywood*

# NEGRO LIBERATION

*by Harry Haywood*



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*To the Memory of My Mother Harriet  
Born in Slavery,  
She Taught Me To Fight  
for Freedom*



## P R E F A C E

THE AMERICAN NEGRO faces the most crucial decision in his entire history. All of the gains so painfully won by him through years of struggle and sacrifice stand in jeopardy as the specter of World War III looms sinisterly above the skyscrapers of Wall Street.

During the late war the Negro took his stand in overwhelming numbers against fascism. He turned a deaf ear to the siren voices that would have swerved him from his true interests and rejected the counsel that the war was a "white man's war" and that he stand on the side lines while the fate of humanity was being decided. He understood that his deepest aspirations for freedom would be achieved only by wholehearted participation in the struggle against fascist reaction. But even while he fought the enemy abroad he had to contend with his traditional enemy at home who sought to retain the Nazi-like system of Jim Crow.

This bitter experience in the war saved him from illusions. He knew that with the defeat of the Axis slave powers his battle was far from over. The victory in the war marked an historic advance of the democratic peoples of the world. The system of imperialist oppression was broken through on a wide front, in India, China, Indonesia, and the liberated countries of Eastern Europe. Here at home the Negro's own forces and those of his democratic allies were strengthened. But the end of the war also brought a resurgence of reaction and fascism frantically striving to stem this new worldwide advance of the common people. This new threat stems no longer from Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo, but from his own country, from the handful of Wall Street monopolists who stand in mortal fear before the advancing tide of democracy in the world.

These "wilful men," served by a venal Congress and national administration, have now taken over the imperial baton of world aggrandizement knocked down from the hands of the recent foe. Once more they are ready to plunge the world into a bloody holocaust for the enslavement of nations and peoples, and in



the interest of profits and privilege to carry the banner of Mr. Henry Luce's "American Century" to the four corners of the earth. They seek to mask these sinister aims by the hypocritical use of the slogans of "democracy" and "freedom"; to extend to benighted humanity the "blessings" of "our American democratic way of life," to stem the rising tide of "bolshevist totalitarianism" upsurging from the East; these, according to the oracles of big business, are the noble aims which inspire the present crusade of the imperialist cohorts for world supremacy.

But the bitter facts are that today the United States has become the rallying and organizing center of reaction, plotting subversion of democracy on a global scale; and through the bi-partisan Marshall-Truman plans it is seeking to throttle the rising peoples' movement for peace, security, and national independence.

This new "democratic" moral stance, assumed by America's profit-hungry rulers in pursuit of their expansionist program, is viewed with profound suspicion by the Negro. He is disgusted with the spectacle of Truman's lip service to Negro rights which is designed to mask a dastardly sell-out to Wall Street and its feudal-minded bourbon hangers-on. He is not ignorant of the fact that among the warmest supporters of the "new crusade" for world "emancipation" are the most vicious poll taxers and Negrophobes of the country. To him, therefore, the words of democracy and "free" elections in the mouths of men who deny the most elementary rights to millions of America's Negro citizens are a mockery and a swindle.

These self-dubbed knights of Anglo-Saxon "race superiority" do not even trouble to conceal their cynical flaunting of the Hitlerian race lie. And yet, they are cunning. Unfortunately there are those among the Negro people whose acts and words help to conceal the true character of the course and policies which America's present rulers would impose upon the country and world. They would minimize the mortal threat of this course to the Negro and thus deliver him disarmed and helpless to the tender mercies of the enemy. They would dull the sharp edge of the mass struggle for Negro rights by distorting its aims, by setting before it narrow and illusory goals and thus isolate the Negro from his true allies in the struggle against the common enemy—American imperialism. Clearly, the interest and future of

the Negro people lie with the camp of democracy the world over, with the colonial and semi-colonial millions of Africa, Asia, Latin America, now on the march for freedom.

The Negro must choose. He cannot in any way permit himself to become an instrument in the service of the new fascism. He must become an active force on the side of people's democracy. The Negro in the United States has been historically a potent force for progress. The full weight of his democratic influence and strength now must be thrown into the scales against imperialism. To permit the imperialist forces to triumph is to allow the return of slavery. Since the war, the evidence of reaction's plans to put the Negro "back in his place" has accumulated overwhelmingly.

The entire Negro world looks to the American Negro, situated in the center of world reaction, to strip the cloak of false democracy from the imperialist vultures and to expose their real predatory aims. Africa is being prepared openly as an advanced base for the new war of enslavement to American capital. Fascism undisguised and supported by the Marshall-Truman doctrines rides the saddle in the Union of South Africa. To help thwart this barbarous dream of world conquest is one of the most vital conditions of Negro freedom.

The common people of the world have long been able to see through the hypocritical pretense at democracy by America's rulers in their odious oppression of the Negroes. The Negro can and must make an historic contribution to the titanic world struggle for peace and democracy.

Under the circumstances, the need for clarity on the Negro question is more urgent than ever. The Negro must know not only his general interest, but who is the enemy and what are the specific prerequisites for the achievement of freedom. This alone can clarify the path.

For progressive Americans generally, and especially for the white workers, understanding of the Negro question is crucial, since it is above all a question of unity. It is pre-eminently a question of how to rally the masses of laboring people for joint struggle for common goals against a common enemy. American white labor can no longer ignore the fact that the unsolved Negro problem is a main hindrance to the development of working-class unity, a continuous brake upon the struggle for democracy

and socialism, a mainspring of Wall Street domination over the working class and the masses of the American people.

The Negro question, the fight of 15,000,000 black Americans for land, equality, and freedom, can and must become a potent force in the struggle for the maintenance and extension of American democracy against fascist reaction. The Negroes, once their full strength is brought to bear, can become a decisive element, tipping the scales on the side of progress.

The vast potential of Negroes for democratic struggle, however, has only been tapped. Their full resources can be brought into active support of the cause of labor and American democracy only to the extent that the white workers and progressives understand and uncompromisingly support their full and just demands.

This book is a modest effort to restate some of the fundamentals of the Negro question, and to refocus attention especially upon the basic requisite of the Negro struggle for equality—the fight for democratic land-division and the liberation of the Negro nation in the Southland—which has not been sufficiently emphasized in the recent past. The author is fully aware of the limitations of the present study, and offers it purely as a contribution to the discussion and clarification of this crucial question.

In the preparation of this book, I have received invaluable assistance from many quarters, for which I am duly grateful. I have made full use of very excellent standard works, which I have cited. This book could not have been written without extensive and fruitful discussion with my friends and colleagues. In its general line and approach this book is a collective product. For any deficiencies in the development of the general thought I alone am responsible. Some of the many friends who have read the manuscript and whose suggestions and criticisms have been invaluable are: Henry Winston, William Z. Foster, William L. Patterson, Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., Elizabeth Lawson, A. W. Berry, Alexander Bittelman, Edward Strong, David Gordon, James Allen, John Pittman, Herbert Aptheker, Theodore Bassett, Herbert Wheeldin, Maude White, and Otto Hall.

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## CHAPTER I

# The Problem

THE NEGRO QUESTION in the United States is agrarian in origin. It involves the problem of a depressed peasantry living under a system of sharecropping, riding-boss supervision, debt slavery, chronic land hunger, and dependency—in short, the plantation system, a relic of chattel slavery.

It presents the curious anomaly of a virtual serfdom in the very heart of the most highly industrialized country in the world. Slave-whipping barbarism at the center of “enlightened” twentieth-century capitalist culture—that is the core of America’s “race” problem.

### *The Black Belt*

Today, long after the abolition of slavery, about five million southern Negroes of the fifteen million total Negro population of the country<sup>1</sup> still live in the Black Belt, historically a continuous area of Negro majority. It holds a Negro population equal to that of the whole Negro population of the North and West, and almost a third of the entire country’s Negro inhabitants. This Negro population is larger than the total population of such countries as Switzerland or Norway. Embracing the central cotton-growing region of the South, the Black Belt is the area in which plantation economy is most firmly rooted; the peon farms of today correspond to the slave plantations of yesterday.

The Black Belt shapes a crescent through twelve southern states. Heading down from its eastern point in Virginia's tidewater section, it cuts a strip through North Carolina, embraces nearly all of South Carolina, cuts into Florida, passes through lower and central Georgia and Alabama, engulfs Mississippi and the Louisiana Delta, wedges into eastern Texas and Southwest Tennessee, and has its western anchor in southern Arkansas.

The Black Belt is the center of America's Negro problem, the core of its greatest concentration. Here is the seat of the infection from which the virus of Negro persecution spreads throughout the country, contaminating all phases of Negro life. Here, in the status of the Black Belt Negro, is the clue to the economic, social, and cultural inequality of America's black millions. To quote Arthur F. Raper, well-known southern scholar:

"The Black Belt sketches the section of the nation where the smallest proportion of adults exercise the franchise and it defines the most solid part of the Solid South." Here is the stronghold of white supremacy, where the Negro is excluded from political life and his children are denied adequate educational opportunities; all institutions are designed to keep the Negro "in his place," and violence and the threat of violence always hang over his head.<sup>2</sup>

The Black Belt is likewise the matrix of the nation's number one economic problem—the cradle of southern economic and cultural lag. And, as a growing body of southern white liberal opinion is coming to understand, its depressing influence bears down fully upon the white population of the South. Says Raper:

"Human relations in Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, Memphis, New Orleans, and Dallas are determined largely by the attitudes of the people of the Black Belt plantations from which many of their inhabitants, white and Negro, came. The standard of living in these cities does not escape the influence of this area of deterioration. No real relief can come to the region so long as the planter, who wants dependent workers, can confound the situation by setting the white worker over against the black worker, and so long as the industrialist, who wants cheap labor, can achieve his end by pitting

urban labor against rural labor. There are literally millions of farm laborers in the Black Belt who are eagerly awaiting an opportunity to work for wages even smaller than are now being paid textile and steel workers in southern cities.<sup>3</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that wages in the traditionally "lily white" textile industry "grow progressively lower the further one penetrates into the Deep South".<sup>4</sup>

### *The County System*

The Black Belt is arbitrarily broken up by a mass of state or county boundaries and administrative, judicial, and electoral subdivisions. These divisions in no way correspond with the economic and political needs of the oppressed majority population and are artificially maintained and gerrymandered by the real rulers of the South. Their avowed purpose is to perpetuate the political impotence of the region's predominant Negro population.

The role of the county government as an instrument of governmental power for Bourbon planter interests and the decisive influence of the county in the state politics of the region were dramatically brought out in the results of Georgia's gubernatorial primaries of July, 1946. Through a county unit system of voting,\* in which elections are rigged in favor of downstate planters, the rabid Ku Kluxer, Eugene Talmadge, was nominated, despite a statewide popular vote majority for his opponent, James V. Carmichael.

### *The Skeleton in the Closet*

Shackled by a common slavery and bound by a common history, ethnic origin and aspirations, the Negro people have problems which are matters of growing import, not alone to the South but to the whole country.

The explosive political material in this condition has never

\*The county unit system assigns two to six votes to a county, depending upon population (206 unit votes are needed for a majority). The fact that counties can have a maximum of only six penalizes the heavily populated urban counties.



been ignored by the leaders of southern Bourbonry, and it is the skeleton in the closet of the rabid "white supremacists" of the Talmadge-Bilbo breed. Here is a condition which their obscene racism is designed to hide. Political power in the hands of the black majority, the same specter that haunted their slave-trading forbears, dogs them today; for even a breath of genuine freedom for the millions of black bondsmen would change the social face of the South.

One can only marvel at the cynicism of our erstwhile Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes who, in the name of "free elections," attacks the peoples' democracies of eastern Europe. If applied to his own Black Belt state of South Carolina, "free elections" would mean the end of the stolen power of the Bourbon clique which Mr. Byrnes really represents. Let it be remembered that the first milestone in the meteoric political career of our eminent ex-Secretary of State was in 1922, when he was elected to Congress with only 4,163 votes cast in a congressional district with a population of 300,000!<sup>5</sup>

The great mass of American people remain in deep ignorance of the existence of the huge vassal Negro community in the Black Belt, and of its blighting influence on our country's democracy. The truth concerning the Black Belt, so essential to any serious analysis of the Negro problem, remains buried in the works of authors not widely read by the general public. Vital statistical facts are unstated, distorted, or obscured in a mass of inconsequential minutiae by federal and state agencies (the United States Census Bureau not excepted), from which they can be extracted only by the most painstaking research. As Karl Brandt, a critic of agricultural statistics, pointed out in *Social Research* a decade ago:

"In counting farm operators the census makes no distinction between the sharecropper on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the farmer who operates his property either personally or with the aid of a manager and the tenant who operates a rented farm. By this procedure the census has erased from the whole picture one of the most distinctive features in the constitution of agriculture in this and in many other countries. *Strange as it*