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THE CRIMINALITY OF THE NEGRO

HANS VON HENTIG¹

The concept of "race" is one of the many helpful—helpful but dangerous—simplifications of the human mind. We like to say that races as biologically-grouped human units show strong anatomical or physiological similarities. Such conformities have probably been developed during periods of isolation—geographical, forced, or self-imposed isolation—and present a maximal adjustment to a set habitat. This laboriously established equilibrium, however, is bound to falter as soon as the physical forces around it suffer a change or when migrations carry the racial groups into new regions and among other breeds.

Nobody has ever tried to distinguish races by peculiarities of conduct as we are accustomed to do by color of skin, by hair-form, by bodily shape, or by anatomical configurations. Naturally various races have evolved specific psychic responses to outside stimuli, and one of the most powerful of these outside forces, one which shapes and moulds human beings, is the pattern of their social organization. But basic impulses and inhibitions do not seem to differ fundamentally in human races, nor is there any doubt that they are approximately the same in animals and men.

Misconduct, by contrast, is the result of conflict between human bent and social curtailments. Misconduct is society-made. Misconduct implies maladjustment to the demands of society, to the changing claims and conditions of society which are sometimes but a collective wrong way. Like the King of England, organized society can do no wrong, although its way may be wrongful and even suicidal. It is true, there are relations between race and crime, but they are most complex and are obscured by the interference of unknown or misjudged factors.

The tendency of members of different races to commit crime, although a fundamental problem of criminology in the United States, has not been probed thoroughly during the post-war period.² There are a few studies on the criminality of the Jew and of the

¹ Professor of Criminology, University of Colorado; Director, Colorado Crime Survey.

² See for example, E. H. Sutherland, *Principles of Sociology*, Chicago, Lippincott, 1934, pp. 110-112; J. L. Gillin, *Criminology and Penology*, New York, The Century Co., 1926, pp. 59-61.

gypsy in European literature,³ but they are not very satisfactory. I do not mean the unscientific nonsense of race theories which is spread in some European countries. But based on an incomplete knowledge of statistical intricacies and the handling mostly of misleading absolute figures, a real mythology of racial delinquency has sprung up.

It might be worthwhile to retrace the problem by scientific methods, and that is the purpose of this study which will be confined to the criminality of the male negro.⁴ The study of the delinquency of the colored woman, albeit by no means a small task, shall be set aside for a later publication.

I.

A glance into prison statistics shows that the admission rate of the Negro far surpasses that of the white man. Ratios for the past seven years are as follows:

MALE PRISONERS RECEIVED FROM COURTS⁵

By Race

Per 100,000 Population, 15 Years and Over

| Year | White | Negro |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1930 | 120.4 | 353.5 |
| 1931 | 132.7 | 371.2 |
| 1932 | 124.6 | 351.3 |
| 1933 | 113.3 | 345.3 |
| 1934 | 109.8 | 356.2 |
| 1935 | 118.5 | 391.5 |
| 1936 | 109.0 | 370.0 |

The admission quota⁶ is now more than three times as high for

³ Some literature on racial delinquency is to be found in G. Aschaffenburg, *Das Verbrechen und seine Bekämpfung*, Heidelberg, 1923, p. 42.

⁴ Compare my earlier paper, "Die Kriminalitaet des Negers. Ein Beitrag zur Frage: Rechtsbruch und Rasse," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift fuer Strafrecht*, Berne, 1938, pp. 34-61.

⁵ *Prisoners in State and Federal Prisons and Reformatories*: 1931, p. 19; 1932, p. 19; 1933, p. 23; 1934, p. 28; 1935, p. 33; 1936, p. 33. *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932*, p. 556.

⁶ Some local studies which apart from state prisons and reformatories also consider state farms give much higher figures; for example in the state of Indiana, for the year ending June 30, 1938, there were:

| COMMITMENTS | |
|--------------------------|--------|
| per 100,000 of Each Race | |
| White | 271.2 |
| Negro | 1270.3 |

(figures computed from data in, John H. Kliner and Thomas G. Hutton, *Indiana and the Adult Offender*, 1939, p. 98.

colored men. There is a certain conformity, however, in the fluctuation of white and colored figures.⁷

Prisoners are received in state and federal prisons for the most diverse offenses. Murder and disorderly conduct stand side by side as equal numerical magnitudes, as do rape and prostitution, or other minor sexual irregularities. Their sociological and practical significance, however, differs widely. We must, therefore, break down the bulk of admissions and select a few major crimes:

MALE PRISONERS RECEIVED FROM COURTS⁸

White and Negro
Per 100,000 Population
(5 Year Average—1932-1936)

Selected Crimes

| <i>Crime</i> | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Homicide | 3.6 | 25.3 |
| Robbery | 9.7 | 25.1 |
| Aggravated Assault | 1.9 | 17.0 |
| Burglary | 17.1 | 64.7 |
| Rape | 2.0 | 4.5 |
| Larceny | 13.6 | 43.9 |
| Auto Theft | 5.2 | 6.2 |
| Embezzlement and Fraud | 3.1 | 2.0 |
| Forgery | 5.9 | 6.1 |

Homicide and aggravated assault appear with very large figures. Among the crimes for gain, burglary is the most frequent offense, although it is possible the smaller robbery figures may be explained by a limited detection rate. The slighter embezzlement-fraud data for the negro are easily interpreted by the fact that a group to whom little money is entrusted cannot keep unlawfully that which it never has in its possession. Forgery and fraud are activities denied the great mass of colored people for technical reasons. The same holds true for auto theft.

From a practical point of view it would be essential to know which race is the victim of homicide, aggravated assault, burglary, and rape; and there are two, rather unsafe, ways of approaching the problem. Since we do not possess any statistics which indicate the race of, let us say, the murderer in relation to the murdered person, we must make a detour.

⁷ Our computations differ from the figures given for the year 1930 in *Negroes in the United States*, p. 556, and in the *Prison Statistics*, 1931 and 1932, page 19, for these years.

⁸ *Prisoners*: 1932, p. 20; 1933, p. 27; 1934, p. 30; 1935, p. 35; 1936, p. 35.

The first attempt could state the mode of killing and try to draw certain conclusions. In Chicago, for instance, in 1926 and 1927, figures for stabbing as a death cause were:

*Killed by Stabbing*⁹

| | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Males | 7% | 27% |
| Females | 8% | 25% |

Although the English, German, and Scandinavian populations probably would not kill by stabbing, the Italian, Pole, Spanish, and Greek populations perhaps would. Therefore this method of ascertaining the racial relation of killer and killed is scarcely practicable.

The second attempt would be to investigate unsolved murders. We are allowed to assume that more white murderers escape detection and apprehension. When, therefore, we meet a very high rate of solved murders, they might easily be committed by colored people. The fact that a colored man or woman has been murdered does not constitute in itself an immoderate stimulation for detective work.

Again figures of the Illinois Crime Survey come to our aid. There were the following unsolved murder rates during the years 1926 and 1927:

*Unsolved Murders*¹⁰

Chicago

| | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Males | 50.81 | 13.63 |
| Females ¹¹ | 30.63 | 2.27 |

The high detection rate for negroes killed seems to indicate that colored people are essentially involved as victims. We should not, however, forget that an excessive number of colored victims are killed under the headings of justifiable homicide (66 cases) or police killings (27 cases).¹² These justified killings naturally restrict the number of murder cases in which a perpetrator could remain undetected or unapprehended.

Unfortunately the Judicial Criminal Statistics do not supply us with data concerning racial groups. The Uniform Crime Reports, in contrast, give particulars on arrests of whites and negroes.

⁹ *The Illinois Crime Survey*, 1929, p. 609.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 620.

¹¹ The rate would be about 50% if infanticides were eliminated.

¹² *The Illinois Crime Survey*, p. 605.

DISTRIBUTION OF ARRESTS¹³

Males

White and Negro

4 Year Average—1935-1938, inclusive
Per 100,000 Population

Selected Crimes

| <i>Crime</i> | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Criminal Homicide | 6.9 | 34.7 |
| Robbery | 16.6 | 58.1 |
| Assault | 27.5 | 166.9 |
| Burglary | 42.2 | 135.2 |
| Larceny | 68.3 | 234.9 |
| Auto Theft | 16.8 | 26.95 |
| Embezzlement and Fraud | 22.6 | 26.2 |
| Forgery and Counterfeiting..... | 10.5 | 10.4 |
| Rape | 7.4 | 18.9 |

The Uniform Crime Reports present but urban criminality or, better said, a provisional judgment of the urban police as to who, according to their opinion, might have been the perpetrator of an offense. Only if these limitations are kept in mind do the figures of the Uniform Crime Reports remain a weighty help to our knowledge.¹⁴

Arrest figures vary widely in different cities as shown by figures for Philadelphia and Pittsburgh:¹⁵

| ARRESTED | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Per 100,000 of Each Race in | | | |
| <i>Philadelphia</i> | | <i>Pittsburgh</i> | |
| 6 Months—1924 | | 6 Months—1924 | |
| <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
| 7 | 29 | 45 | 97 |

In any case, here again the delinquency quota surpasses that of the white man to a considerable extent, being the highest in homicide and the lowest in forgery and counterfeiting.

¹³ Figures taken from *Uniform Crime Reports: 1935*, p. 43; 1936, p. 167; 1937, p. 235; 1938, p. 177.

¹⁴ "Of the Negroes arrested in Philadelphia, 1,282 or 31.1 per cent, were discharged. In addition, it is only reasonable to suppose that a number of those held for trial also were discharged. . . . The greatest number . . . of all Negroes arrested in Philadelphia were charged with drunkenness. Larceny, attempted larceny or 'suspected of larceny' accounted for the next group. . . . In the majority of cases it was petty larceny. The third largest number was . . . charged with being inmates of disorderly houses. . . . This includes gambling, bootlegging and bawdy houses." *Negro Survey of Pennsylvania*, Harrisburg, 1927, p. 70.

¹⁵ *Negro Survey of Pennsylvania*, p. 69.

Criminality is not a static condition, but a dynamic process. Criminals do not jump ready-made into life; they develop and grow gradually, cast off inhibitions, acquire technical experience, establish step by step an emotional set-up which is negative and retributive to society.

Hence it is most important to watch the initial stages of this rebellious antagonism. According to New York figures the number of delinquent colored children is continuously increasing.

DELINQUENT CHILDREN¹⁶
Arraigned in Children's Court
New York City
 1925-1937

| | <i>Per Cent</i> <i>Negro Children</i> |
|------------|--|
| 1925 | 7.6 |
| 1926 | 8.8 |
| 1927 | 7.9 |
| 1928 | 9.8 |
| 1929 | 11.2 |
| 1930 | 11.7 |
| 1931 | 11.3 |
| 1932 | 11.1 |
| 1933 | 12.7 |
| 1934 | 16.3 |
| 1935 | 21.8 |
| 1936 | 25.9 |
| 1937 | 25.8 |

Negroes made up 3.3 per cent of the total population of New York in 1930. The percentage of delinquent negro children amounted to 25.8 per cent of all delinquent children in 1937. No comment need be made concerning the obvious gravity of the situation which has taken a turn for the worse since 1933. A glance at the offenses charged against boys and girls arrested in the Harlem Area, 1930-1934, indicates that offenses such as hitching on trolleys, stealing subway rides, and selling newspapers after seven o'clock in the evening form a large per cent of the total.¹⁷ This is not genuine criminality but is the reflex of wide-spread economic insecurity.¹⁸

¹⁶ Figures in "Second Report of the New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Colored Urban Population," New York, 1939, p. 1934.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 136.

¹⁸ Of all relief cases in New York City, 21.9 per cent were Negroes in 1936. *Ibid.* p. 136.

II.

Criminals are human beings. Nature has moulded them differently; their habitat varies; they have been born into manifold social surroundings, have ascended its height or descended to its most oppressive depths. Aside from what they really are, they undergo human censure before they can be labelled "criminals." Many, many more than we think escape this formal judgment and remain in the category of law-abiding citizens. Others, in contrast, are subjected to another sort of error. They are not overlooked but are misjudged in the opposite way; they are, so to speak, over-assessed. Police, courts, even the legislature are nothing but fragments of that wolfish, monstrous creature—the mass—and are subject to its passions, failings, and shortcomings.

If that is true, it appears necessary to break down the shapeless quantities—whites and negroes—into smaller and more characteristic units. If we should succeed in forcing our way into the inward structure of this meaningless generality, if we are able to disjoin it and to reach its social and psychological composites, we will be somewhat nearer the truth.

Arrests are made by human beings; sentences are pronounced by human beings; statistics are compiled by the same unwise homo-sapiens. When, as it is in our case, minorities are the subject of judgment and treatment, it is more than ever important to turn our attention to these agencies which we would like to believe unbiased and evenhanded and which are the more liable to errors the less they feel free of them. Furthermore, the colored race is a minority of which we are in dread.¹⁹

III.

Exactly as the outbreak of a senile psychosis is conditioned upon advanced age, crime is to a large extent the outcome of two vital factors—male sex and youth. For various reasons races differ as to sex ratio and age distribution. It is necessary, therefore, to inquire carefully into sex and age proportions when we venture to compare the criminality of two racial groups. It might easily be that a higher number of criminal acts is less a symptom of a stronger propensity than of a greater quantity of males and youthful males in an otherwise numerically equal population.

¹⁹ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations has gathered evidence of such fear. See *The Negro in Chicago*, Chicago, 1922, pp. 440 ff. We may add that black has some affinity to gruesome emotions. We have called the great plague during the Middle Ages the "Black" death, and in many mental diseases black figures are seen. The devil, according to the testimony of arrested witches in former centuries, was regularly clad in black.

We are inclined to disregard the formidable weight of such primary facts. After the World War, for example, in Germany and France millions of younger men had been removed from the normal structure of population by death. With them certain criminal tendencies of which they were the carriers were stricken off the social structure of these nations. The criminality should have declined accordingly, and if it did not, if it remained on the same level as in pre-war days, it had in reality grown larger.

Another instance is the insignificant criminality of the foreign-born in the United States. About half of the foreign-born males in this country were 45 years old and over in 1930.²⁰ In native whites this proportion was 20.2 per cent, in colored males even 18.8 per cent. Necessarily and regardless of social or anti-social propensities, regardless of certain complications of the milieu, the criminality of the foreign-born should be inferior, and if it turns out to be lower only to a small extent, potentially it should be regarded as higher. Both age distribution and sex-ratio differ in the white and in the colored populations.

Children and old people are of no great actual significance in perpetrating crimes. Seventy-eight per cent of all males and females arrested during the year 1938 belonged to the age group 15 to 39 years of age.²¹ Therefore it is this group in which we are interested and which we should compare in the two races:

*Age Groups by Color*²²

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | Males | |
| | 1930 | |
| | 15 to 39 Years Old | |
| | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
| All Classes | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| 15-39 Years | 40.3% | 42.7% |

This difference does not seem to be too significant; it obtains more regard when we consider that this period of twenty-five years embraces all the large well-provided groups—army, navy, police, civil service, etc.²³ Apart from the economic security which these bodies afford, they give a moral countenance to weak characters and exercise a supporting ascendancy. Although not totally excluded, the male negro population is allowed to take a minimal part in these activities. Excluded to a great extent from these

²⁰ Age Distribution, Fifteenth Census 1930, Washington, 1933, p. 584. The exact figure for foreign-born males is 49.0 per cent.

²¹ Computed from figures in *Uniform Crime Reports*, 1938, p. 161.

²² From figures in *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932*, p. 91.

sheltering groups, the male negro is pushed into unhealthy, exhausting, badly paid occupations as we shall soon see. No wonder that all varieties of criminal reactions result from the inclemency of these conditions.

The proportion is still more displaced when urban areas of the country are taken into consideration.

Urban Areas

1930

| | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Age Group, 15-39 years | 42.7% | 47.9% |

Hence we see that two facts stand out: the endangered age group includes a larger section of the total population and a greater proportion of this group lives under urban conditions.

Furthermore, the sex-ratio does no small amount of work upon the causation of crime. It is a serious complication in the dominant race; it becomes much more momentous in a minority which is excepted from legal or extra-legal sexual relations with the ruling race.

The problem of sex-ratio is most complex in the United States. It has undergone wide changes during the last forty years. There is a large surplus of white males; there is a small deficit of males in the colored population.

Males per 100 Females²⁴

1930

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| <i>White</i> | |
| Native | 101.1 |
| Foreign-Born | 115.1 |
| Negro | 97.0 |
| Mexican | 114.3 |
| Chinese | 394.7 |

These figures, however, cover an enormous territory and do not give a very clear picture. The sex-ratio varies considerably in different sections of the country and in rural and urban areas. Cities attract females and tend to level down a possible surplus of males. On the other hand, migratory movements are first started by the females of a race in which over 1,100,000 women live under "personal services."

²³ It has been stated that of the five and one-half to six million persons employed in the State of New York, no less than 250,000 or from 4 to 5 per cent were receiving their compensation from public funds (exclusive of those employed on relief projects). "Second Report of the New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Colored Urban Population," Albany, 1939, p. 49.

²⁴ *Negroes in the United States*, p. 78.

Males per 100 Females
1930
*By Urban and Rural Areas*²⁵

| | <i>Urban</i> | <i>Rural</i> |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| White | 98.4 | 109.0 |
| Negro | 91.3 | 101.7 |

Of great importance is the knowledge of whether the greatest surplus of females is found in the years of greatest activity or in the years of early or later infirmity.

*Negro Males per 100 Females*²⁶
1930

| <i>Age</i> | |
|----------------|-------|
| 10 years | 101.3 |
| 20 years | 74.5 |
| 30 years | 92.1 |
| 40 years | 95.9 |
| 50 years | 111.4 |
| 60 years | 115.2 |

From these figures it may be concluded that the sex-ratio undergoes fallacious changes. The surplus of females is largest from 18 to 45 years, that is during the years of strongest vitality and most violent conflicts. The surplus turns to a definite deficiency from 45 to 80, probably on account of the heavy mortality of the female negro. The mathematical average eclipses the finer details of the most complicated process.

The sex-ratio differs widely by geographical divisions and states. There are states with a surplus of negro males (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, West Virginia, Arizona, etc.). Other states show an excess of females (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, etc.). The balance of the sexes, indispensable to our monogamous habits of sexual life, is gravely displaced. Certain forms of delinquency or pre-criminal vice are bound to result from this disproportion. Our civilization demands monogamy and at the same time blocks monogamous life by annihilating its preliminary conditions.

It is difficult to see how monogamous life can be realized in Columbus, Ohio, by colored people, where the sex-ratio is 109.4 males per 100 females, or even in Natchez, Mississippi, where 2,965 male negroes are confronted by 4,194 colored females.²⁷ Clean and health-

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 79.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 92.

²⁷ *Negroes in the United States*, p. 86 (1930). The sex-ratio of Natchez is 70.7 males per 100 females, and I have merely selected an urban location having more

ful social life can not be achieved, if certain numerical proportions are thrown into utter confusion, and sometimes sound population politics are the safest way of preventing crime.

IV.

Certain biological characteristics of a racial group are statistically ascertainable; others are not. Mortality, insanity and suicide, for example, can be determined, and these forms of biological failure enter into some kind of association with delinquency, negatively or positively.

Again it should be pointed out that the moment of such an occurrence is of great social significance. High infant mortality might possibly operate as a means of natural selection. The remaining specimen might be more resistant and less inclined to delinquency. Mortality, outbreak of insanity and suicide during the middle period of life has a very different meaning, since death, admission to an asylum, and suicide are usually final stages of pathological processes. Each illness affects human behavior, and the economic status as well and might thus lead to some form of delinquency. Our figures indicate that the colored race not only has a very high infant mortality, but that death works further havoc among that criminologically important age group of 15 to 39 years.

| <i>Mortality</i> ²⁸ | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Per 100,000 of Each Race | | |
| Males | | |
| 1933-1936 | | |
| | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
| All Classes | 1,191.2 | 1,615.6 |
| Age Group, under 1 year..... | 101.7 | 206.3 |
| Age Group, 15-39 years..... | 354.9 | 959.5 |

Since it is scarcely believable that the colored race is potentially more subject to illness, we must assume that powerful outside forces are set going which increase the mortality. This assumption is proved by our computations. When we isolate the age group, 15 to 39 years, it becomes manifest that the mortality of the Negro is excessively increased during this period of greatest vitality.

Turning to single death causes we note that the colored race is apparently not yet immunized in many ways as is the white race to the onslaught of certain diseases.

than 2,500 colored inhabitants. San Francisco, by contrast, has a sex-ratio of 135.8 males per 100 females. Columbus Ohio, belongs to the 80 American cities having 10,000 or more negro inhabitants.

²⁸ Mortality Statistics: 1933, pp. 33, 36, 112; 1934, pp. 36, 160; 1935, p. 62.

SELECTED DEATH CAUSES

Males

Per 100,000 of Each Race

1933-1935

| <i>Cause of Death</i> | <i>White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| All Death Causes | 1,191.2 | 1,615.6 |
| Influenza | 13.9 | 27.4 |
| Tuberculosis | 49.1 | 141.9 |
| Syphilis | 7.9 | 55.5 |
| Malaria | 2.6 | 15.7 |
| Pellagra | 1.4 | 8.0 |
| Diabetes Mellitus | 18.6 | 10.3 |
| Sudden Death | 1.6 | 6.3 |
| Ill-Defined, Unknown | 11.9 | 87.8 |
| Homicide | 8.9 | 74.0 |
| Suicide | 25.9 | 6.3 |
| Legal Executions | 1.8 | 17.2 |

Mort. Statistics, 1933, p. 150; 1934, p. 208; 1935, p. 248.

The low mortality rate for suicide in Negroes is a most astounding phenomenon; it emphasizes the strong dispositional origin of suicide.

The homicide rate for Negroes tends to rise in urban areas; for example, Memphis had a homicide mortality rate for Negroes of 118.2; Jacksonville, Florida, of 117.5; Miami of 112.0; Dallas followed with 108.5; and Kansas City with 106.7.²⁹ Obviously the same holds true for other death causes in many communities. In Dallas, the colored death rate from tuberculosis was five times as high as that for whites; in St. Louis, six times as high; and in Jacksonville and Cincinnati, seven times as high.³⁰

The highest general mortality of Negroes was to be found in 1932 in New Orleans, as shown by the following figures:

*Mortality by Race*³¹

New Orleans

Per 100,000 Population

| | 1920 | 1931 | 1932 |
|---------------|------|------|------|
| Whites | 14.1 | 13.5 | 14.5 |
| Negroes | 22.8 | 23.5 | 26.2 |

Moreover, the mortality of the colored male is surpassed by that of the female with whom we are not concerned at this time.³²

²⁹ Mortality Statistics, 1932, p. 47.³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 26.³¹ *Ibid.* p. 8.³² *Ibid.* p. 5.

Unfortunately it is not easy to study the insanity figures of the colored race. Since 1933 no official data have been published. We have, therefore, to limit ourselves to a period which is but a few years removed from our time.

In 1933, a relatively greater number of insane Negroes were admitted to state hospitals than of whites. It is true that when we break whites down into native born and foreign born whites, there is a considerable surplus of foreign-born whites. This tendency, however, is nothing but a function of age.

FIRST ADMISSIONS TO STATE HOSPITALS³³

By Race

1933

Males

Per 100,000 Population

| | |
|--------------------|-------|
| White | 65.7 |
| Native | 60.0 |
| Foreign-Born | 104.1 |
| Negro | 72.6 |

The statistics tend to explain this fact.³⁴ "The fact," they say, "that the ratio of first admissions to State hospitals to population was considerably higher in 1933 for Negroes than for native whites does not necessarily indicate that mental disease was more prevalent among Negroes than among native whites. The difference between the ratios was undoubtedly influenced greatly by the relative sufficiency of the provisions made for caring for members of each race in State and other institutions. Doubtless most of the Negro mental patients were cared for in public hospitals, while large numbers of the white patients were cared for in private hospitals."

This can be only partly true. We need but go back ten or twenty years to see that only a comparatively few years ago the ratio of the Negro was below that of the white. Although our table³⁵ presents resident patients, it is easy to prove that first admissions too were below those of whites.³⁶

PATIENTS IN HOSPITALS FOR MENTAL DISEASE

Males

Per 100,000 Population

| | 1910 | 1923 |
|-------------|-------|-------|
| White | 213.2 | 259.8 |
| Negro | 131.4 | 192.0 |

³³ *Patients in Hospitals for Mental Disease*, 1933, Washington, 1935, p. 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 21.

³⁵ *Patients in Hospitals for Mental Disease*, 1923, Washington, 1936, p. 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.* See p. 117; the admission rate for whites was 69.5 per 100,000; it was 56.4 for Negroes.

I am, therefore, inclined to believe that mental disturbances are very much higher in Negroes now. It appears that the rate is especially high in general paralysis, cerebral syphilis (see the mortality figures for syphilis), epileptic psychoses, and mental deficiency. Paranoia, psychoneuroses, and psychopathic personality are rather rare, at least so with the diagnosis of the admitting medical man.³⁷

New England and the Pacific States have a distinctly superior admission rate; the West South Central division of the United States admits by far fewer colored patients than white patients. At least this was true in 1922.³⁸

It will not be accidental that the 15-to-39-years period, which we have seen is so ominous for Negro mortality, appears again in the genesis of mental disease of the colored race.

FIRST ADMISSIONS TO HOSPITALS FOR MENTAL DISEASE³⁹
Per 100,000 of the Same Age
1922

| | <i>Native White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| 15 to 19 years..... | 28.7 | 35.8 |
| 20 to 24 years..... | 60.2 | 65.5 |
| 25 to 29 years..... | 83.4 | 83.8 |
| 30 to 34 years..... | 96.5 | 101.0 |
| 35 to 39 years..... | 99.1 | 93.7 |

It is most significant from the point of view of human relations whether in one race, 60.7 per cent of the mental cases belong to the age group 15-39 years as it is in Negroes, or 48.0 per cent as it turns out to be in white patients.⁴⁰

The economic status of the insane Negro reflects the utter misery of the whole race.

FIRST ADMISSIONS TO STATE HOSPITALS⁴¹
By Economic Status and Race
1933

| | Per Cent | |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | <i>Native White</i> | <i>Negro</i> |
| Dependent | 27.6 | 55.5 |
| Marginal | 60.1 | 41.3 |
| Comfortable | 12.3 | 3.1 |

³⁷ *Patients*, 1933, p. 30.

³⁸ *Patients*, 1923, p. 117.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁴¹ *Patients*, 1933, p. 55.

That leads us to the grave problem of economic status and inequality in both races.

V.

It is not easy to depict briefly the social surroundings of the colored race which started to invade the industrial cities of the East and the Mid-West during and after the war.⁴² Only the most significant facts may be considered. The Negro is still chiefly an inhabitant of rural areas; but his transition to a city-dweller gradually assumes a faster pace. Of all Negroes, the percentage of those inhabiting rural areas was,⁴³ in

| | |
|------------|-------|
| 1910 | 72.7% |
| 1920 | 66.0% |
| 1930 | 56.3% |

Since the days of Rousseau, rural life has borne the gloriol of purity and peace. American economic history is not able to confirm the social legend of rural innocence. It is only a few years ago that the structure of American farm economy, which gave bread to 36 per cent of all Negroes, collapsed.

The occupational distribution of the Negro shows him in crises-endangered occupations. In this country where physical work is often extremely exhausting, oppressive muscular activity is mostly imposed upon the colored race. In those occupations which require operators to withstand high temperatures—cooking, washing, stoking—wherever work is exhausting, wherever it is to be carried on in the open or at night, we find the Negro. In many industries which are dangerous to health or are otherwise repulsive, it is the colored man who prevails.

The economic status of the Negro is distinctly reflected by the housing conditions of the race. Physically the colored homes are located in sections of the city which are most undesirable—near railroad tracks, packing houses, and ice plants—in an atmosphere which reeks with the smoke of trains, with odors of the packing house, and ammonia of the ice plants.⁴⁴

The homes are located on the outskirts of cities or towns a considerable distance from trolley cars and other means of cheap transportation.⁴⁵ Vice districts and Negro residence districts are

⁴² The movement from the South to the North has been ably described by Charles S. Johnson in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1928, vol. 90, pp. 128-137; and in the "Report of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations," pp. 79-105. Songs and poems of the period characterized the exodus from the South—"Flight out of Egypt," "Bound for the Promised Land," and "Going Into Canaan."

⁴³ *Negroes in the United States*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ *Negro Survey of Pennsylvania*, Harrisburg, 1927, p. 32.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

closely pressed together. "Invariably the large vice districts have been created within or near the settlements of colored people."⁴⁶

Another strange result of the segregation of Negroes was revealed by a representative of New York City's charity organization society. He testified in December, 1937, that for 8,232 families served throughout the city, the median rental was \$23.94 a month. For 1,285 families in Harlem the median rental was \$30.08 a month. The lower rent was paid by white families whose income had dropped from an average of \$25.00 in 1929 to \$16.90 last year. The higher rent was paid by Negro families whose income during the same period dropped from \$22.00 to \$14.39.⁴⁷

Ten or twelve years previous to this time the same situation had already been disclosed in the city of Philadelphia. The rent paid by a white workingman for an unfurnished room was \$4.79 in July, 1927. The average rent per unfurnished room paid by the Negro workingman in Pennsylvania was \$5.43 during the same time.⁴⁸ Obviously the colored man does not pay higher rents voluntarily, but is compelled by the scarcity of housing to accede to the landlords' demands.

The high rents again create another difficulty. The only way that all the Negroes can be housed is by taking lodgers. According to the Negro Survey of Pennsylvania, 80 per cent of the Negro families had lodgers⁴⁹ and had to suffer from the obvious consequences of such congestion.⁵⁰

Not only that, the lodger is a powerful and victorious competitor to the child as well, as brought to light by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations.⁵¹ The paying lodger is replacing the costly child. The housing problem is but one of the many symptoms of the Negro's utter destitution.

In New York State, for instance, in 1930, practically 75 per cent of the Negro labor force was comprised of "marginal workers, engaged in occupations which were among the least secure and the

⁴⁶ Quoted from the "Report of the Chicago Vice Commission of 1911" by *The Negro in Chicago*, p. 343.

⁴⁷ "Second Report of the New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Colored Urban Population," Albany, 1939, p. 77.

⁴⁸ *Negro Survey of Pennsylvania*, p. 56. Justly the Survey adds: "The real injustice to the Negro in the matter of rents is in the quality of housing that the Negro gets for the rent he pays. The Negro who pays the same rent as the white man or even the Negro who pays more rent than the white, gets much inferior housing for his money." *Ibid.* p. 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 39.

⁵⁰ One of the results which we shall not discuss at this time is disclosed by the fact that in 1930, 38 million white females (15 years and over) had 32,344 illegitimate children; 4 million colored females had 34,647. *Negroes in the U. S.*, p. 364.

⁵¹ *Negro in Chicago*, pp. 159, 160.

lowest paid."⁵² In order to make this heavy concentration of Negro workers in marginal occupations understandable, the New York report has compiled the following data from the 1930 census:⁵³

SELECTED OCCUPATIONS BY RACE

New York State

Males

| | White | Negro |
|----------------------|--------|-------|
| Engravers | 4,401 | 4 |
| Electricians | 42,511 | 368 |
| Cabinet-Makers | 8,516 | 60 |
| Machinists | 70,783 | 505 |

This is the situation in quasi-normal times.⁵⁴ When a depression sets in, conditions are bound to change for the worse. In 1937, 50 per cent of the total New York colored labor force (totally unemployed and partially unemployed) was reported, while for the white unemployed, the percentage was but 21 per cent.⁵⁵

In the colored race a sharp distinction between employment and unemployment cannot be made from the standpoint of a decent standard of living. A New York study revealed in December, 1937, that one-half of all native white families in New York City had incomes of less than \$1,814. In contrast, one-half of the Negro families had incomes of less than \$837.⁵⁶ Compared with an estimated minimum requirement for a woman worker living alone of \$1,192.46 a year and of \$1,058.32 for a woman living in a family,⁵⁷ this family income of \$837 brings the extreme gravity of the situation to our minds.

We may look at the problem from another angle. How are Negroes brought back into the process of production when better times come? New York figures show us that in February, 1937, Negroes, 7.5 per cent of the city's gainfully occupied population, constituted 21.7 per cent of the city's relief load but received only

⁵² "Second Report. etc.", p. 32.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁵⁴ "It is of interest," says the same report (p. 33). "that these are trades which usually require apprenticeships. The fact that Negroes have been denied apprenticeship training, particularly in these industries which are highly organized and controlled by trade-union agreements, explains in part why they cannot enter these trades at later times."

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 34. It adds: "When one remembers that these figures are not complete, particularly because of greater non-registration among Negro workers, he must recognize the fact that these percentages are actually understatements of the severity of unemployment. This comparison dramatically shows that it is the fate of marginal workers to be the first hard hit and the first displaced in times of industrial depression."

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem.*

9.8 per cent of the job placements made by the employment service of the Emergency Relief bureau.⁵⁸ They have been displaced from private employment at twice the rate of the whites and are being re-employed only one-half as fast. No wonder they must commit the crime of selling newspapers after seven o'clock in the evening, thereby increasing the figures of our arrest statistics.

VI.

The most pernicious environmental force, setting aside the infinite other handicaps, is the attitude of the white majority toward the colored minority. E. B. Reuter⁵⁹ hinted at the arrest problem twelve years ago, and Thorsten Sellin has presented data on race discrimination in our courts.⁶⁰ We would like to add but a few recent statistical findings. The homicide rate of the Negro is well known; the number of executions, however, is quite out of proportion with the murder rate.

EXECUTIONS⁶¹

Per 100,000 Male Population
18 Years and Older
5 Year Average
1932-1936

Males

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| White | 2.24 |
| Negro | 24.81 |

We have the same picture, although somewhat tempered, with life sentences:

LIFE SENTENCES⁶²

Per 100,000 Population, 15 Years and Older
3 Year Average
1930-1932

Males

| | |
|-------------|------|
| White | 1.52 |
| Negro | 8.44 |

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 36.

⁵⁹ E. B. Reuter, *The American Race Problem. A Study of the Negro*, New York, 1927, p. 356.

⁶⁰ Thorsten Sellin. "The Negro Criminal" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1928, pp. 52-64.

⁶¹ Computed from figures in *Prisoners in State and Federal Prisons*, 1933, p. 61; 1934, p. 70; 1935, p. 76; 1936, p. 70. The figures differ slightly in the single volumes so that the figures for 1934 are at variance in the 1934 and 1935 volumes. The figures of the Mortality Statistics, on the other hand, do not correspond to the statistics of State and Federal Prisons concerning executions. (Compare, for instance, Mortality Statistics, 1933, p. 150; 1934, p. 208; and 1935, p. 248.)

⁶² Computed from figures in *Negroes in the U. S.*, p. 566. Only definite sentences have been allowed.

The courts studied by Steiner and Brown in North Carolina "justify the conclusion that so far as they are concerned, the Negro has a smaller chance than the white to escape conviction,⁶³ and that the latter has a better opportunity to receive lenient treatment in the form of probation and suspended sentence."⁶⁴

This observation is proved by our computations. There are many methods of discharge from prison: an act of clemency, execution, death in prison, escape from the institution,⁶⁵ and going ghost-like through our statistics with big figures, "other methods." Two other release procedures stand forth, since they reflect faithfully the attitude of the common agencies of release. They are discharge at expiration and parole.

MALE PRISONERS DISCHARGED⁶⁶
By Method of Discharge and Race
4 Year Average—1933-1936
Per Cent of All Discharges

| | All Discharges | Discharge by | |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------|
| | | Expiration | By Parole |
| White | 100.0% | 31.9% | 58.2% |
| Negro | 100.0% | 52.7% | 38.1% |

Many more colored men are not discharged before expiration; many less receive the benefit of a discharge on parole.

The criminality of the Negro is thus the inevitable result of forces which we have attempted to describe. Many more details had to be omitted. Some of these detrimental forces are apt to removal or displacement. We shall interfere, if we begin to see, that the delinquency of the Negro is as much of a problem to the dominant race as it is a curse to the colored people.

⁶³ What sort of a successful defendant the Negro will be is best illustrated by the fact that 16.3% of all Negroes are illiterates compared with 1.5% of all native whites. (1930, Population, 10 Years old and over) *Negroes in the United States*, p. 230.

⁶⁴ Quoted by Thorsten Sellin, *loc. cit.* p. 62.

⁶⁵ The self-discharge by escape is not the most trifling of all release procedures. For obvious reasons it is much more difficult for the Negro to remain uncaptured than for the white man.

⁶⁶ Computed from figures in *Prisoners*, 1933, p. 59; 1934, p. 68; 1935, p. 74; 1936, p. 72.