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THE NEGRO OFFENDER IN A NORTHERN INDUSTRIAL AREA

VERNON FOX AND JOANN VOLAKAKIS

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Negroes are sentenced to prison in Michigan, a northern industrial State, with significantly greater frequency in proportion to the total population than are whites. The reason for the higher proportion of delinquency among Negroes in that state, according to Wiers, is that Negro migrants to Michigan had settled in cities which had already established a high rate of delinquency to which the newcomers merely conformed¹. Taft generalizes that urbanization makes for crime, and the urbanization rate for Negroes has recently exceeded that of whites². Reckless believes that the Negro has greater problems of adjustment in the United States than do whites and hence, have greater difficulty in conforming to law³.

Another phenomenon was observed in Michigan. In 1940, the population of the State of Michigan was 5,256,106, of which approximately four percent was Negro. With four percent Negro in its general population, the state had twenty percent Negro in its prison population. In 1950, the population of the State of Michigan was 6,371,766, with seven percent Negro in the general population and the proportion of Negroes in its prison population had risen to forty percent. While the proportion of Negroes in the prison population was rising appreciably in Michigan more rapidly than the whites, States like Missouri, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida held a rather constant proportion of Negroes in their prisons as compared with the proportion in the general populations of these States. With approximately twenty percent Negroes in its general population, for instance, they were but twenty-seven percent in the prison population in 1950. Other southern States showed similar figures. While the explanations and generalizations in the literature undoubtedly apply, further explanation is needed to account for Michigan's significant rise in proportion of Negroes in its prison population. One hypothesis may be that the Negro in contemporary American culture constitutes an entirely separate social group which, when transported to an unfamiliar socio-economic milieu, finds difficulty in adjusting.

This situation presented problems of administrative importance to corrections in northern industrial Michigan. With a general population of only seven percent Negro in 1950, the prison population was forty percent Negro. Should the emphasis in the prison program be shifted to accommodate a different cultural group on a permanent

¹ WIERS, PAUL; *Economic Factors in Michigan Delinquency*, New York, 1944, p. 37.

² TAFT, DONALD R.; *Criminology*, New York, 1947, p. 100.

³ RECKLESS, WALTER C.; *Criminal Behavior*, New York, 1940, p. 115.

basis? If so, how should the shifts be made? In order to answer these questions, more information is needed. Significant social, psychological, and occupational differences between the white and Negro groups in the prison population must be known. Further, it must be known whether or not the in-migrant Negro groups intend to remain in the northern area or to return to their native homes in the South.

In order to determine some of the social, psychological, and occupational differences between Negroes and whites in the prison population, one thousand whites and one thousand Negroes were selected at random from the population of the State Prison of Southern Michigan at Jackson in May, 1951. All had arrived at the prison during the years 1949 and 1950. Tabulations were made on each group as to (1) offenses, (2) county of residence, (3) place of birth, (4) intelligence quotient, (5) grade claimed to have completed in school, (6) occupation, (7) marital status, (8) number of children, (9) religious preference, and (10) age. To determine the significance of the differences, critical ratios were computed on intelligence quotients, grades claimed completed in school, number of children, and age. The chi-square method was used in determining the significance of the differences in the other factors. In order to determine whether or not Negro in-migrants intended to remain in Michigan, one hundred Negroes who came to Michigan from other States during the period from 1940 to 1949, inclusive, were interviewed for another study in 1949 and 1950. Reasons for their coming to Michigan and whether or not they expected to remain were recorded.

RESULTS

The results of this study showed a statistically significant difference in the types of crimes for which the Negroes and whites were sentenced. The comparisons of the offenses are shown in Table I. The Negroes tended to commit more (1) homicide, (2) assault, (3) larceny, and (4) narcotics violations. The last consisted mostly in possession of marijuana. Whites tended to commit more (1) burglary, (2) forgery, (3) embezzlement, and (4) drunk and disorderly offenses. The chi-square value of 182.712 shows that the difference is beyond the .001 level of significance. Negroes tended to be more assaultive than whites.

The county of sentence is at least an index of where the person is functioning about the time of the crime, if not a rough index of residence. Significantly more Negroes were sentenced from Detroit and Wayne County, and the other industrial areas of southeastern Michigan. Significantly more whites were sentenced from the industrial areas of western Michigan and in the rural and other areas of northern Michigan. The socio-economic base of the counties from which they came would seem to have greater import than geographic location, *per se*. The State Department of Social Welfare has classified the counties in Michigan according to the socio-economic base as (1) upper peninsula mining, fishing, and timber, (2) upstate cut-over area, (3) agricultural, (4) industrial, and (5) metropolitan Detroit. The proportion of Negroes and whites from each of these areas is shown in Table II. A chi-square value of 428.038 shows significant differences beyond the .001 level. By far the greatest number of Negroes came from Detroit. Of the 1,000 Negroes in the sample, 801 came from Detroit, with the rest of Michigan contributing only 199. Twelve Negroes came from agricultural counties, one from the up-state cut-over area, and none from the

TABLE I
OFFENSES FOR WHICH NEGROES AND WHITES WERE SENTENCED

Offenses	Whites		Negroes		Total
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Homicide.....	21	41.0	61	41.0	82
Rape.....	45	35.5	26	35.5	71
Robbery.....	132	137.5	143	137.5	275
Aggravated assault.....	21	45.5	69	45.5	90
Other assault.....	7	7.0	7	7.0	14
Burglary.....	289	246.5	204	246.5	493
Larceny.....	120	157.5	195	157.5	315
Auto theft.....	61	67.0	73	67.0	134
Property offenses.....	2	5.0	8	5.0	10
Forgery.....	72	54.0	37	54.0	109
Embezzlement.....	57	44.5	32	44.5	89
Carrying weapons.....	12	18.0	24	18.0	36
Marriage laws.....	3	3.5	4	3.5	7
Sex offenses.....	55	51.0	47	51.0	102
Offenses against family.....	24	19.0	14	19.0	38
Drug laws.....	2	18.0	34	18.0	36
Traffic violations.....	3	2.5	2	2.5	5
Liquor laws.....	0	1.5	3	1.5	3
Drunk and disorderly.....	13	7.5	2	7.5	15
Gambling.....	10	7.5	5	7.5	15
Other major offenses.....	10	5.5	1	5.5	11
Miscellaneous.....	41	25.0	9	25.0	50

TABLE II
NEGROES AND WHITES SENTENCED FROM VARIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC AREAS

Area	Whites		Negroes		Total
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Upper peninsula.....	1	0.5	0	0.5	1
Upstate cutover.....	65	33.0	1	33.0	66
Agricultural.....	125	68.5	12	68.5	137
Industrial.....	446	316.0	186	316.0	632
Wayne.....	363	583	801	582.0	1,164

upper peninsula. Of the 186 Negroes who came from the industrial areas, the large majority came from industrial areas near Detroit. Significantly more whites came from industrial areas other than Detroit and from all other socio-economic areas.

More than half of the whites were natives of Michigan, while less than a quarter of the Negroes were natives of the state. Of a thousand whites and a thousand Negroes, 427 whites and 773 Negroes had migrated from other States. A chi-square value of 1.730 shows that while approaching significance, the differences can not be called significant statistically. This shows a considerable shift from the prewar, wartime, and early postwar periods when the number of southern Negroes sentenced to

Michigan's prisons significantly exceeded both the whites and the Michigan-born Negroes. During the ten-year period from 1939 to 1948, the following areas, in the order of their contributions, furnished most Negroes and whites to Michigan's prisons:

<i>Whites</i>		<i>Negroes</i>
1. Michigan	6. Indiana	1. Georgia
2. Foreign-born	7. New York	2. Alabama
3. Ohio	8. Connecticut	3. Michigan
4. Illinois	9. Kentucky	4. Tennessee
5. Pennsylvania	10. West Virginia	5. Mississippi
	11. Wisconsin	6. Arkansas

In 1939, 567 Negroes were received in Michigan's prisons, of which number only 58 were born in Michigan. In 1946, 737 Negroes were received in the prisons, of which 126 were Michigan-born. By 1949-50, this study shows that the number of Michigan-born Negroes sentenced to prison had increased so that the differences between Michigan-born whites and Michigan-born Negroes sentenced to Michigan's prisons, while still present, were not sufficiently wide to show statistical significance.

It is suspected that two factors may account for this shift. First, the same processes of culture conflict and its attendant disorganization by which second generation immigrants manifest higher crime rates than the immigrants themselves or the third generation, may be at work in the cases of northern-born Negro children to southern-born parents. The differences in attitudes and social outlook between his southern-born parents and the northern culture may be difficult for the first northern-born Negro generation to reconcile. These conflicts may tend to increase the difficulties in social adjustment which may manifest themselves in criminal behavior. Second, the Negro boys who were arriving in prison in 1949-50 had gone through middle and late adolescence during the time when Detroit was the "Arsenal of Democracy" with the highest wages in the land, where southern Negroes were experiencing northern freedom, and social values were shifting to the extent that the famous Detroit race riot broke out in June, 1943. That this race riot was part of the shifting social values is illustrated by the fact that the men arrested and sentenced to prison on charges growing out of that race riot were primarily southern Negroes and southern whites. These two in-migrant groups were trying to settle their conflicts in a northern industrial area where the southern institutionalized racial controls to which each group had become accustomed were absent. It is the contention of the authors that the effect of this social disorganization on the young Michigan-born Negroes resulted in their higher crime rates.

Interviews with 100 in-migrant Negroes in 1949-50 indicated that 92 intended to remain in Michigan for the rest of their lives, three intended to return "home" and five were undecided or did not want to commit themselves to permanent residence. All objected to the winters in Michigan, which they considered to be severe, but the majority considered the economic opportunity and greater social freedom worth enduring the winter. The conclusion was that the vast majority of in-migrant Negroes had come to Michigan to stay.

The mean age for the whites was 36.6, as compared with 34.0 for the Negroes.

TABLE III
MARITAL STATUS OF NEGRO AND WHITE PRISONERS

Marital Status	White		Negro		Total
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Single.....	354	340.5	327	340.5	681
Married.....	305	267.0	229	267.0	534
Separated.....	74	125.0	176	125.0	250
Common Law.....	28	84.5	141	84.5	169
Divorced.....	207	146.5	86	146.5	293
Widowed.....	32	36.5	41	36.5	73

TABLE IV
OCCUPATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS OF INCARCERATED NEGROES AND WHITES

Occupational Classification	Whites		Negroes		Total
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Professional and Managerial.....	46	38.5	31	38.5	77
Clerical and Sales.....	74	48.5	23	48.5	97
Service occupations.....	79	113.5	148	113.5	227
Agriculture.....	137	92.0	47	92.0	184
Skilled.....	140	101.0	62	101.0	202
Semi-skilled.....	341	360.5	380	360.5	721
Unskilled.....	183	246.0	309	246.0	492

While this difference shows statistical significance with a critical ratio of 7.8, it is probably because of the larger number of older white offenders who have always lived in Michigan. The largest age-group of whites and Negroes committed to prison was in the early twenties. The absence of the older Negro apparently accounted for the difference in mean ages.

The marital status of the whites differed significantly from that of the Negroes, as shown by a chi-square value of 180.138 computed from Table III, indicating a significance beyond the .001 level. The greatest difference was the large number of common-law relationships among the Negroes. A fifth of the whites were divorced while less than a tenth of the Negroes were divorced. A greater number of Negroes was separated. Whites and Negroes were single with approximately similar frequency, 354 and 327, respectively. The pattern was one of greater fluidity in marital status among the Negroes, with less regard for ceremonial marriage. The average number of children in both groups was 1.7, with no difference indicated.

The occupations by which Negroes and whites earned their livelihood immediately prior to imprisonment are shown in Table IV according to the major divisions used by the U. S. Department of Labor. A chi-square value of 163.954 is beyond the .001 level of confidence, indicating significant occupational differences. More whites were in the skilled, the agricultural, and the clerical and sales occupations. More Negroes were in the unskilled industrial and the service occupations.

Comparison of religious preferences shows significant differences in all denomina-

TABLE V
RELIGIONS OF INCARCERATED WHITES AND NEGROES

Religion	Whites		Negroes		Totals
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Protestant.....	533	698.5	844	698.5	1,397
Catholic.....	330	213.0	96	213.0	426
Mohammedan.....	0	4.0	8	4.0	8
Jewish.....	13	6.5	0	6.5	13
Atheism.....	104	78.0	52	78.0	156

tions, as listed in Table V. One-tenth of the whites and only half that proportion of Negroes claimed atheism. Most of the Negroes, but little more than half the whites were Protestants. One-tenth of the Negroes were Catholic and one percent of the Negroes claimed Mohammedanism. Thirteen Jewish persons were among the whites. While the distribution of religious preferences varied widely, the Protestant preference constituted the majority in both racial groups, with 84 percent of the Negroes and 53 percent of the whites claiming that preference.

Differences in intelligence between Negroes and whites were significant as tested by the Bregman (1941) revision of the Army Alpha. The I.Q.'s of the whites averaged 96.6, while the mean I.Q. for the Negroes was 83.4. A critical ratio of 39.0 indicates that this difference is highly significant. The whites claimed to have completed 8.6 grades in school (unverified) and the Negroes claimed to have completed 8.0 grades in school (unverified). Because of the value the Negroes seemed to place on education, the unverified claims of the grades they completed in school must be accepted with some reservation. It is noted that on the New Stanford Achievement Test, the whites averaged 7.6 grades retained while the Negroes averaged 5.2 grades in 1949.

At any rate, it is obvious that the Negro offender in Michigan differs considerably from the white prisoner in terms of types of crime committed; he is concentrated in and around Detroit; type of marital behavior; occupations; and intelligence as measured by pencil-and-paper test. Some differences can be shown in religious preferences and southern or out-of-state nativity. While only a few years ago, the vast majority of Negro prisoners in Michigan were from Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas, by 1949-50, the number of Michigan-born Negroes had increased so that the out-of-state Negroes, while still in the majority, had dropped below the level of statistical significance in proportion to the native and out-of-state whites.

CONCLUSIONS

The Negro offender in a northern industrial area tends to commit more assaultive and larceny offenses. The Negro prisoner is generally sentenced from industrial Detroit or the industrial areas around Detroit. While a large proportion of the Negro offenders was born in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas, the sons of migrants from the South, the Michigan-born Negro offenders, were beginning to reduce the formerly overwhelming significance of the original in-migrant

group. Interviews with a sample of 100 in-migrants from the South indicated that the Negroes had come to Michigan to stay. Further, most of them wanted to get away from agriculture as far as possible. Their objections to relatively severe winters were off-set by the greater social and economic advantages they found in and around Detroit. The prison experience apparently did not make Michigan sufficiently uninviting to cause them to want to return to their Southern homes.

As a group, the Negro offenders tended to be nearly three years younger than the whites. Their marital status showed greater fluidity and less regard for ceremonial marriage, although the proportion of single men and the number of children in the Negro and white groups were similar. Religious differences were present, with Protestantism prevalent in 53 percent of the whites and 84 percent of the Negroes. The Negroes reported less atheism, Judaism, and Catholicism, and more Mohammedanism. The Negroes scored considerably below the white group on paper-and-pencil tests of intelligence.

From the practical administrative viewpoint, it was obvious that the Negro group had come to industrial Michigan to stay, and a program had to be devised to effect the greatest benefit for the group. Plans had to be made to expand industrial trade training and on-the-job vocational training in the areas most selected by Negroes. This meant an expansion of the technical foundry program and the welding school, two areas in which the parole officers in Detroit had found most success in placing Negro parolees. The agricultural program was not expanded for the Negro group because they were not interested in it, and they were not going to be placed in agriculture after parole. The elementary school had to be expanded because of the limited education the Negroes showed on tests and the value they placed on academic achievement. An important phase of the program pointed out by this study was group discussions which had to be planned at the same elementary educational level for these adult southern Negroes or Michigan-born sons of southern Negroes. Some assistance had to be afforded them in gaining sufficient insight into cultural differences and changes from living with institutionalized prejudices to living with competitive prejudices in a northern industrial area so that adjustment in and around Detroit would present fewer problems.

The migration of the southern Negro to Michigan for permanent residence, then, had its influence in shifting the prison program to meet a changing need. No need for shifts in basic therapeutic program was discovered. The shift was in expansion of educational facilities already present in the direction of need as shown by a minority group which had grown to constitute 40 percent of the prison population where that minority group constituted only 7 percent of the State's total population. A further new program to be instituted as a result of this study was the examining in group discussion of cultural changes and compromises necessary for social adjustment when a new group with different social characteristics and values moves into a northern industrial area.