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# MIGRATION AND BUSINESS CYCLES

By

HARRY JEROME

OF THE STAFF OF THE  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH  
INCORPORATED

With a Foreword by

WESLEY C. MITCHELL

NEW YORK  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC  
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1926

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## FOREWORD

*Migration and Business Cycles* presents the results of investigations made by the National Bureau of Economic Research at the request of a committee of the National Research Council. It forms part of two series of studies. One series, planned by the Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration, deals with the character, causes, and effects of mass-movements of men. The second series, planned by the National Bureau, deals with the character, causes, and effects of cyclical fluctuations in economic activities.

The Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration was appointed in October, 1922, by the National Research Council on recommendation of the Council's Division of Anthropology and Psychology. Its duties were

- (1) carefully to consider, from the point of view of natural science, the complex migrational situation resulting from the World War and from the virtual elimination of space as a barrier to movements of man and to race intermixture;
- (2) to prepare a research program which might reasonably be expected to yield ultimately such reliable information concerning physical, mental, and social characteristics, relations and values of ethnic groups (races and peoples) as is necessary for the understanding and wise regulation of mass-movements of mankind; and
- (3) to initiate, organize, support, coordinate, or otherwise further, in accordance with the best judgment of the group, important investigations.<sup>1</sup>

The members of this Committee as originally organized were Dr. Raymond Dodge, then Professor of Psychology at Wesleyan University, Dr. Frank R. Lillie, Professor of Zoology at the University of Chicago, Dr. John C. Merriam, President of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, Miss Mary Van Kleeck, Director of Industrial Studies in the Russell Sage Foundation, Dr. Clark Wissler, Curator

<sup>1</sup>See the report of Dr. Robert M. Yerkes, Chairman of the Committee, *Journal of Personnel Research*, October, 1924, vol. iii, p. 189.



of the Department of Anthropology in the American Museum of Natural History, and Dr. Robert M. Yerkes, Chairman of the Research Information Service of the National Research Council, and also of the Committee.

In preparation for their work, the Committee called a conference of anthropologists, biologists, economists, psychologists and sociologists interested in various aspects of migration. After surveying the field and considering numerous suggestions, the Committee decided that it could render the best service by promoting work upon certain fundamental problems which must be solved as preliminaries to the scientific study of the characteristics, causes and effects of migration. Each problem was referred to a group of technically qualified investigators. The various groups worked in severalty, by whatever methods were best adapted to their tasks. Meanwhile the Committee gave the program as a whole such unity as was possible, by holding occasional conferences, in which all the cooperating investigators took part. The scope of the work undertaken is indicated by the following partial list of topics: the possibility of developing reliable measures of the psychological characteristics of different ethnic groups, the influence of race upon pathology, the behavior of physical traits in race intermixture, and the sources of information concerning the causes of migration available in Europe. To defray the expenses incident to these inquiries, the National Research Council obtained a grant from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial.

Among the problems which the Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration thought important to investigate was the "Shortage and surplus of labor in the United States in its relations to immigration and emigration." This problem was referred to the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Before it received this request to cooperate in the migration program, the National Bureau had begun a series of researches into the phenomena of business cycles. One report within this field, made at the request of a committee of President Harding's Conference on Unemployment, had already been published under the title, *Business Cycles and Unemployment*. A second report was on the point of appearing—*Employment, Hours and Earnings in Prosperity and Depression*, by Dr. Willford I. King, Dr. Leo Wolman's monograph on *The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880-1923*, was then well under way, and has since been printed. Dr. Frederick

R. Macaulay had begun an elaborate investigation of bond yields and interest rates since 1859, which we hope will appear soon. Dr. Willard L. Thorp was making two collections of materials dealing with cyclical fluctuations—a collection, recently published, of business annals for 17 countries during periods ranging from 36 to 136 years, and a collection of economic statistics which is well advanced. Finally, the present writer had in hand a general treatise upon Business Cycles, the first volume of which will be submitted to the directors of the National Bureau within a few months. Since the “shortage and surplus of labor in its relations to immigration and emigration” is chiefly a problem of short-period oscillations, it was obviously relevant to the National Bureau’s existing scheme of work.

At our request, the University of Wisconsin granted leave of absence to Dr. Harry Jerome, Assistant Professor of Economics, in order that he might assume charge of the new undertaking, and later extended the leave. To the University, and particularly to its Department of Economics, our hearty thanks are due. Aided by a small corps of assistants and the advice of other members of the National Bureau’s staff, Dr. Jerome analyzed the voluminous, yet incomplete, records of migration to and from the United States, and compared these records with various indices of business activity here and abroad. The present volume presents in concise form his conclusions concerning the short-period fluctuations in the demand for and supply of labor in the United States, and the role played by migration in these fluctuations. The National Bureau hopes that this carefully documented study of a problem too often treated in a controversial spirit will prove useful to all who are interested in migrations and to all who are interested in business cycles.

Before Dr. Jerome had finished the present monograph, the Committee on Scientific Problems of Human Migration asked the National Bureau to undertake another investigation. This concerns the problem of “Migration and the Mechanization of Industry”—that is, the relation between the conditions on which relatively unskilled labor can be hired and the adoption of automatic machinery for the performance of work which may be done by hand. In May, 1924, the recently organized Social Science Research Council appointed a Committee on Human Migration, which included besides three members of the older Committee (Dr. Yerkes, Miss Van Kleeck, and Dr. Wissler), Dr. Edith Abbott,

chairman, Professor John R. Commons, Professor John A. Fairlie, Dr. Robert F. Foerster, Professor Edward A. Miller, Professor Charles E. Merriam, Professor Frederick A. Ogg, Professor Carl Wittke, and the writer. The plan of co-operation between the old Committee and the new one transferred the "machinization study" to the Social Science Research Council, under whose auspices it has been carried nearly to completion by Dr. Jerome.

Finally, the Social Science Research Council has enabled the National Bureau to supplement the present study of short-period fluctuations of migration in the United States by a long-period investigation of mass movements of mankind over the earth. Of course, the preparation of a broad sketch of the great world migrations of the past three or four generations requires the critical examination of many estimates of population movements for years and countries in which accurate records are lacking. It requires also the use of all the relevant statistics compiled in any part of the world. In short, it is a project which calls for close international co-operation among the leading authorities upon population statistics. Dr. Walter F. Willcox, of Cornell University, is organizing this co-operation with the National Bureau, and, when the materials are assembled, he will prepare a report.

Like the National Research Council, the Social Science Research Council asked and obtained financial support for its migration studies from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial.

Belonging as it does to two series of studies, *Migration and Business Cycles* is designed to cover a limited field. The major issues with which it deals are summed up in two questions:

- (1) To what extent are fluctuations in migration attributable to fluctuations in employment?
- (2) To what extent, in turn, are fluctuations in migration an ameliorating influence, and to what extent an aggravating factor, in employment and unemployment fluctuations?

Dr. Jerome has sought to get the most definite answers to these questions which he can wring from the available records. Other phases of the problem he treats incidentally, if at all. Among the factors affecting migration which he passes over lightly are political conditions, steerage rates, and the methods adopted by steamship companies to stimulate passenger traffic. A scientific analysis of

the causes and consequences of human migration, comprehensive in scope and thorough in detail, can be developed only by co-operative efforts, such as the committees of the National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council are promoting. Many intensive investigations of specific issues, like the present report, must be made before we can attain the well-rounded knowledge needed as a basis for private opinion and public policy regarding migration.

In accordance with the established procedure of the National Bureau, Dr. Jerome's present monograph was submitted in manuscript to our Board of Directors. Criticisms made by members of the Board have resulted in various improvements upon the original draft. This process of criticism and betterment through which the National Bureau's reports pass before publication involves much labor upon the part of the Directors;—labor which is mostly self-effacing, for almost all the suggestions are incorporated in the text before publication. It is but just to state that this volume, like its predecessors, owes much more than appears to the acumen, the wide and varied experience, of the Directors.

WESLEY C. MITCHELL.



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