

Toward Freedom

MANY observers are unduly alarmed by growing racial tensions in the United States. Their alarm would be more appropriate if inter-racial "harmony" prevailed, for then there would be no significant progress toward Negro democratic rights.

There is no doubt that conscious race conflict is becoming more widespread. Detroit, Chicago and other communities live in constant peril of such anti-Negro outbreaks as took place recently in Philadelphia. Southern demagogues grow increasingly virulent in their calls for race hate and oppression. Among rank-and-file white citizens in the South, there is talk about Negroes getting "too independent" and "uppity," usually coupled with vows to put Negroes "back in their place" when the war is over.

A recent national public opinion survey reveals that 63 percent of the white citizens polled believe Negro-white relations will be "worse" after the war. Dr. Howard Odum's *Race and Rumors of Race* catalogues some 2,000 inflammatory rumors and stories circulating in the Southwest, which he interprets as reflecting a "racial crisis." Dr. Charles S. Johnson's *To Stem This Tide: A Survey of Racial Tension Areas in the United States* concludes: "There appears no way to avert racial clashes either now or after the war unless the power of law says there



By Doxey Wilkerson

must be none, and means it." The executive secretary of the Research Institute of America predicts postwar race riots more bloody and bitter than any yet seen.

THUS, there would appear to be considerable basis for the Journal of Negro Education's editorial judgment that "race relations have steadily worsened" during the past two years. Merely to record this trend without interpreting its basic cause is to stimulate undue pessimism and fruitless anxiety. But to understand the rapid and substantial progress from which these racial tensions emerge, and to see not only what ought to be done about them, but also what now can be done, gives rise to confidence and constructive effort.

The necessities of this people's war and the enlightened policies of the Roosevelt Administration have subjected the traditional pattern of racial discrimination to terrific strain. Here and there—in employment, in the armed forces, in civic and political relations—the old barriers are breaking. Negroes are "getting out of place" all up and down the line.

This progressive trend has aroused sharp opposition from those who have vested interests in racial discrimination—and from many other deluded persons who think they have. They struggle to prevent further ex-

Reaction Is Powerful, But Negro Struggle Goes Forward

tensions of Negro freedom, and are determined to restore the pre-war status quo.

But the Negro people have also been aroused, and are struggling as never before in recent history to consolidate and extend their wartime progress toward full democratic rights. Moreover, new and powerful allies, especially in the ranks of organized labor, now fight by their side; and they are aided time and again by the courageous action of a progressive Federal Government.

THIS growing conflict between the forces of progress and the forces of reaction—aggravated by enemy agents on our home front—is the basic cause of the heightened "racial tensions" about which so many observers are alarmed.

Let us be fully aware that the situation is serious that reaction is powerful, and that the entire nation is endangered by the now acute "Negro problem." But let us also bear in mind that the democratic forces of our country are still growing in power, that they are achieving a new unity in the struggle to reelect President Roosevelt and that the Negro people are becoming ever more firmly integrated into the democratic camp of national unity.

The same forces which made possible the wartime progress of the Negro people, and thereby gave rise to increased racial tensions, can also extend and strengthen that progress now and after the war. The situation calls not for pessimism and anxiety, but for confidence—and struggle.