Industrial and business life of Negroes in Omaha

James Harvey Kerns

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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INDUSTRIAL AND BUSINESS LIFE OF NEGROES IN OMAHA

By

James Harvey Kerns, B. A.

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Sociology of the Municipal University of Omaha

1932
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<tr>
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<td>52.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

There are in the city of Omaha according to the census report of 1930, 11,123 Negroes. They have come to this city from various sections of the country, but in the main from the rural and urban centers of the South. They have migrated here, as to other Northern and Western cities, to improve their social and economic conditions and for better opportunities in general. They have secured employment in the various industries of the city and have found positions in domestic employment. Some have engaged in business of their own, while still others have entered the different professions. There have been various opinions expressed relative to the industrial status of Negroes and whites in different occupations, but for the most part, the results of these studies have never been assembled or reflected upon as a whole to see how valid or reliable they were or what light may come out of them.

With the new emphasis being placed on a man's work and his relation to industry, it becomes evident a clearer insight should be gained of the actual conditions of his work as a basis for planning. The Omaha public, though aware of the Negroes' presence, is not always aware of the facts as they relate to the industrial status of 5.2% of the general population, nor of the significance of these facts in relation to the Negroes' welfare or the general welfare. With this need and common objective in view, the present study is being made.
The Historical, Analytic, and the Economic approaches were used in the study of the problem. Before beginning the study, an effort was made to become acquainted with industrial problems of Negroes in other cities, and an analysis was made of investigations already made along similar lines. Interviews and conferences were held with more than 200 workers and a total of 50 business and professional men.

Questionnaires were sent to 100 employers of domestics and 50 heads of labor unions. Visits were made to 25 industries employing Negroes. Practically every workers' organization devoted to the interest of Negroes in the city was visited and the procedure of the meetings observed. Much data from applications and records of the Omaha Urban League were utilized and a careful analysis of all United States census data bearing on the subject was made. The study is made, not for the purpose of a thesis only, but to focus attention on the industrial and business relationship of Negroes. Health, education, housing, crime conditions are largely determined by his conditions of work and his opportunities to secure employment. That the synthesis of data revealed and analyzed in this study based on the methods of research, may serve as intelligent guidance, is the hope of this study.
Prior to the year 1910, the American Negro was generally thought of in terms of an agricultural worker, and his status, that of a rural dweller. The depressed conditions in the rural South beginning about 1910 was an impetus to these rural dwellers with a low earning power to first turn cityward. The dissatisfaction of Negro tenants with the old sharecropper system, and the ravages of the boll weevil were dual circumstances which prompted the urge for better wages and conditions which could only be found in the city. The movement between 1900 and 1910 was slow and still left Negroes in the majority in a number of Southern towns. From 1910 to 1920 and the ten years following to 1930, new causes became prominent which played a large part in causing a feeling of unrest and stimulating the move cityward. Between 1920 and 1930 it is estimated that the decrease in rural population of Negroes numbered 240,000.

During this period, the increase in industrial activities occasioned by the World War opened for Negroes unparalleled industrial opportunities of which they readily took advantage. According to the 1930 census, there are seven cities with a Negro population of more than 100,000 and two with a population of more than 200,000. The rapid increase in a few of the Northern cities in 1930 is evidenced by the
following cities given:

Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>NEGRO POPULATION</th>
<th>PERCENT INCREASE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>13,564</td>
<td>16,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>44,103</td>
<td>109,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>3,448</td>
<td>34,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>91,709</td>
<td>152,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>5,299</td>
<td>5,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>34,459</td>
<td>134,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>10,017</td>
<td>30,719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>43,960</td>
<td>69,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td>4,426</td>
<td>10,315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"The route Northward followed roughly the path of the Underground Railroad." Cities of the West, Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Cleveland, received a black population from the Southern states along the great Mississippi Valley, and more particularly along the route of the Illinois-Central Railroad. The states feeding this section are Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas. The cities of the Northern section have drawn principally from Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Alabama, and Virginia. Each state represents a fairly distinct background of social and economic life with fixed customs and habits of work and life. This shifting and movement took three distinct directions and these have not been confined to Negroes. The first was urbanization, the second the quest for more productive lands, and the third a movement to the industrial cities." Historically and traditionally the southern Negro is a rural dweller. It is therefore natural to expect many of the problems presented them is migrating to the cities. "One of

(1) Johnson, Chas. S., Negro in American Civilization, p. 17
first and most perplexing problems confronting him was competition with foreign and Southern white laborers who had also been impelled to the North by many of the same causes affecting Negroes."

Negro Population In Omaha

The first record of Negroes in Omaha dates back to 1860, in which an article appeared in the Omaha Nebraskan of the running away of Eliza, a slave, from Stephen A. Nuckalls to Chicago and of her arrest November 12, 1860. The first labor known to be done by a Negro was that of a slave owned by an Indian squaw,

With the development of the Union Pacific, Negroes first received their impetus to migrate to Omaha: first in the capacity of laborers in the construction work and later when the city became the Eastern terminus of the Union Pacific, many who were employed as porters and cooks moved their families here. The need of man power immediately preceding and following the World War furnished the next incentive for Mass Movement of Negroes as may be indicated by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>Present Increase 1910-20-30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pop.</td>
<td>4,426</td>
<td>10,315</td>
<td>11,123</td>
<td>133.5% 7.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) ibid, p. 19
(3) Palladium, Aug. 16, 1854
With the opening of these industrial opportunities, many Negroes came to Omaha as to other industrial cities North and West primarily to improve their economic condition. With the restlessness which was economic at bottom were other forces. Literacy had increased and slowly but gradually, standards had developed. The hundreds of small and obscure schools of the South were sending out yearly their graduates had not been without effect. The development of good roads and increased mobility, the newspapers with vivid flashes of Northern city life, and opportunities, all aided in producing a dissatisfaction with the monotony and drudgery of farm life which no mere argument or proposed measures of reform could still. Another of the chief stimuli was discussion. The talk in barber shops and grocery stores where many assembled soon began to take the forms of reasons for leaving.

Opportunities, 1910-1920

Prior to 1910, the Omaha Negro was largely engaged in personal service. Most of the catering work was done by them and a goodly number were employed as porters and janitors. With the entrance of the United States in the World War and the loss of immigrant labor, a labor vacuum was produced in

(4) Johnson, Chas. S., The Negro in American Civilization, p. 21
in Omaha as in other industrial cities which created a demand for labor. This urgent supply was found in the South and the migration which had been underway slowly gathered momentum and the Negro was not only encouraged to come to Omaha but agents were dispatched to the South soliciting them and in many instances, transportation was provided. During the period 1914-1920, the Negro came into recognition as an integral part of the industrial life of the city. The Packing Houses registered increases of 50% in Negro personnel. The Smelters showed a substantial gain and garages and factories employed them as semi-skilled and skilled mechanics. This introduction of Negroes in a new and different environment was not occasioned without difficulties. Physical combats and group legislation were employed to combat this mass induction of Negroes. The most pronounced antagonism Negro workers experienced was with organized labor. The skilled Negro found it difficult to secure employment or a fair rate of pay. In a study of twenty-five industries in 1931 employing 16,600 workers, a total of 1,800 were Negroes. The packing house industry is the largest employer of Negro labor. The data gathered showed that 950 were employed in the four plants in 1930 out of a total of 16,600. A total of 675 Negroes of the 14,750 total was employed May 1932.
In the beginning of Negro employment in the packing industries, the turn-over was greater than among the old employees of other races and many of the Negroes recently from the South would not work Saturdays or the day following payday. A process of careful selection of married men or single men over a period of years together with the influence of group meetings, has brought into industry a group of workers whose reliability and efficiency are comparable to any of the employed groups. Further interviews with Superintendents and personnel managers revealed that the reliability and efficiency of their colored workers is unquestioned.

The census record of 1930 shows that 41.4% of Negro women ten years of age and over are gainfully employed. The report also showed 62.1% of all Negro men ten years of age and over are gainfully employed. The distribution of occupations among native whites (Male) was 74.0%. Among foreign born whites (Male) 19.1% and among Negroes, 5.8%. A similar situation is true among women. Among native whites the distribution is 83.6%. Foreign born white women, 8.8% and Negro women, 7.4%. From the foregoing statistics, it seems safe in concluding that the occupational opportunities of Negroes are limited. Of a total of 1,919 Negro women reported by the census report as gainfully employed in Omaha in 1930, 1,275 were servants, 48 laundresses,
40 laundry operatives, and 56 waitresses. The largest industrial group of Negro women were found in the following divisions of employment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing &amp; Mechanical</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Communication</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional service (including actresses, reporters, musicians, teachers, photographers, religious workers, social workers and trained nurses.)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic &amp; Personal service</td>
<td>1,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Occupations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Negro men have advanced more rapidly than women in Omaha, they are still found in largest numbers on the fringes of industry. A striking fact about Negro occupational distribution is the apparent lack of specialization. The following table shows the distribution of 2915 Negro male workers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing &amp; Mechanical industries (including laborers on construction.)</td>
<td>1,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Communication</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional service</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Service (including, barbers, janitors, porters, waiters, cleaning &amp; dye shops, etc.)</td>
<td>1,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) United States Census Bureau, Labor Division, 1930
(6) Sullenger & Kern, Negro in Omaha
Packing Industry

In the packing industries are found the largest number of Negroes in any employed group. The four plants reported in May 1932 a total of 14,750 employees of which 675 were Negroes. They did not become a permanently large factor in the local plants until about 1916. Negroes are found in practically every department in the industry from laborer to highly skilled butchers, chemists, and inspectors. In one of the plants Negroes are foremen and in another they are serving as representatives of the employee representation boards.

Hotels

Negroes are employed as waiters in every large hotel in the city. Perhaps the percentage of Negro waiters to the total Negro population is higher in Omaha than any metropolitan city. A study of 21 hotels and clubs in 1931 disclosed the following jobs held by Negro employees. Waiters 97, Bell boys 24, Porters 65, Maids 110, Cooks 9, other Kitchen help, (7) 25.

In interviewing a number of employers regarding employment of Negroes, there seemed to be a general feeling that

(7) Sullenger & Kerns, Negro in Omaha, p. 8
once a few labor and porter jobs are filled, there remained no further opportunities for Negroes. A sample of several opinions stated may further explain this point.

Mr. A., Manager of a large dairy: "We have used a few Negroes as porters and in the stables but there is no opportunity open now in either place. The men we have in these departments are sticking rather close to their jobs."

Mr. B., "We have a Negro porter who has been in our employ for ten years. He has a good education and can do any job in the store. He would prove a credible porter in any concern."

Mr. C., "John was employed by our firm five years ago as a porter, after he worked awhile he had occasion to assist the electrician-mechanic. We soon found he knew more than the mechanic and last winter when business fell off, we let the white mechanic go and John is handling both jobs. On Saturdays we employ an extra porter to assist him. If conditions continue to improve we'll have to employ the old mechanic or secure another for it is too much for John, I feel."

The statement by a Negro high school graduate who had been a janitor in the same concern eight years, "Once a porter always a porter", seems to be substantiated by objective evidence in a score of establishments. Interviews with more than 50 Negro girls and women, many high school and college
graduates, revealed they experience difficulties in securing opportunities of employment commensurate with their training. A few opinions expressed by employers relative to better jobs for colored girls will illustrate the point.

"There would be no need of employing a colored girl as saleslady for she would meet with insults and we would lose business. I wish I could do something for them."

"The public is accustomed to them as stock girls and elevator operators, but as a clerk—well, it just won't work."

"We have let the stock girls wait on colored patrons but if they performed this duty as a saleslady, our white clerks would not work."

Clannishness of foremen and straw bosses was found to be another obstacle to Negroes securing employment. In 1929, a local realestate firm took over an office building in which 32 Negro charwomen were employed. The foreman was a Bohemian who used women of his own race in other buildings under his control. One week after his company assumed control of this building, the 32 Negro women were discharged by him and replaced with Bohemian women for no apparent reason. An excuse frequently given by employers is that white customers object to being served by Negroes. For instance, white householders would not wish Negro gas meter readers in their homes. The

(8) Sullenger & Kerns, Negro in Omaha, p. 9
(9) Hill, T. Arnold, Picketing for Jobs, Opportunity, p. 216 July, 1930
objection is largely imaginary since meters are frequently in the basement and read without the knowledge of the occupants of the home. The following tables made from a study of 300 male and 300 female applicants in the Omaha Urban League gives an objective view of Negro workers.

Male Applicants

Places from which Applicants Came

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern states</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western states</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Western states</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern states</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign countries</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respective Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20 yrs.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 yrs.</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 yrs.</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 yrs.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100 yrs.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade school</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Types of Employment Sought

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Employment</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Professional</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female Applicants

Places from which Applicants Came

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern states</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western states</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Western states</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern states</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign countries</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respective Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20 yrs.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 yrs.</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 yrs.</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 yrs.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100 yrs.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade School</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Types of Employment Sought

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Professional</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An effort was made to study the opinions of Employers of Negro labor. Interviews were held with 25 white employers of Negro labor regarding their experience with these workers. "There has always existed a body of beliefs regarding the efficiency of Negro labor. It has been called wasteful, inefficient, lazy and indifferent." The following are a few samples of opinions:

"We have six colored porters and find them very competent workers. During the World War period we used a good many but found it very expensive to keep them as they constantly sought advances in wages and were quite irregular on the job."

"We have one colored porter who has been with us for ten years. We have always found him honest, faithful, and loyal in the duties assigned him."

We have used colored men as laborers and find when used in a gang they are cheerful workers and can turn out more work than white men. My only criticism of them is that they get drunk occasionally and lay off, but I guess the work is hard and they are entitled to an occasional good time."

"We have no criticism with our colored men at present. When we first employed them in large numbers we could not make a careful selection. Now with the demand for labor lessened, we have been careful to select only Omaha men and as far as possible married men who have an interest here. I see no difference in the efficiency, reliability, or honesty of our Negro employees."

A compilation of returns from 31 questionnaires submitted to employers shows the comparisons of Negro labor and white:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Establishments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faster than white</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As good as white</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorer than white</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In interviews with employers of Negro labor it was found that where criticisms were made of the excessive turn-over of Negro labor, they were employed on jobs which were termed least desirable and work not always adapted to the man's training. In some departments where high turn-over was reported, the employer admitted it was not greater than that of other groups. Some employers were of the belief that Negroes and
whites would not work well together. The policy of other plants was to either employ all Negroes in a Department of all white. One employer did not feel there was any department in his business where it would be advisable to employ Negroes. The policy of the four packing plants seems to prove conclusively that Negroes and whites can work harmoniously together. Practically every department employing white labor used Negro labor with no resultant frictions.

"The quality of Negro labor has not been uniform and there is evidence that in many places where poor opinion is entertained concerning them, it is well deserved, but the opinion unfortunately and erroneously extends from one inefficient group of Negro workers to include the entire Negro working population." (11)

An effort was made to discover the relation of Negroes in Omaha to organized labor and to ascertain how far the affiliation of Negroes in unions contributed to the higher wage level of Negroes. In the South the question of organized labor and the Negro has for many years been an important one. William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, in a statement to representatives of the Negro press in answer to a number of queries relative to the Federation's attitude toward Negro workers said, "There are within the United States wage earners of many nationali-

(11) Johnson, Chas. S., Negro in American Civilization, p. 80
ties and races. The ideals for which our republic stands require that all these wage earners shall be accorded equal opportunities for self development and progress. Keenly conscious of these self-evident facts, the American Federation of Labor in convention assembled 1890, declared that the American Federation of Labor looks with disfavor upon trades unions having provisions in their constitution excluding from membership persons on account of race and color and requests they be expunged. The Omaha Negroes from all data available have little sympathy for the efforts of the Local Trades Unions. They claim an indifference to Negro memberships and the lack of proper recognition to those who do possess Union Cards. In spite of the seeming disfavor which the American Federation of Labor looks upon race, class, and creed discriminations, we were only able to find the building trades and Hod Carriers Unions offering Negroes membership on equality with whites.

Charles S. Johnson, in writing of the Negro workers and organized labor, states the types of Union relations as, Unions which exclude Negro workers, Unions which discourage Negro membership, Unions which do not discourage Negro memberships, Unions admitting freely to separate organizations, and Unions admitting Negroes freely to mixed and separate membership.

Omaha has never been a stronghold for organized labor

(12) Negro Year Book, p. 158
(13) Johnson, Chas. T. Negro in American Civilization, p. 108
though repeated attempts have been made to organize labor
groups by representatives of the National organization.
The building trades and the hod-carriers unions which seem­
ingly would have a considerable Negro group because of the
nature of employment, fail to attract any considerable
number. One reason attributed is that union wages on labor
jobs and in building construction in Omaha are only 45
cents an hour. A man has little to gain by union affilia­
tion in that the wages in open shop are no less in most jobs.
The procedure of the white unions to Negroes in a number of
crafts seems to be similar with procedures as found in
other cities. The Barbers have encouraged organization of
Negro barbers. There is a separate union of the Master
Barbers. The Colored Musicians have a separate local, but
is recognized by the white local through which the charter
is granted. The Post Office clerks have a local of their
own which is affiliated with the national organization (color­
ed).

There are 99 members of the Musicians' Union, 20 in the
building laborers union, 32 journeymen and master barbers, and
16 in the local branch National Alliance of Postal Employees.

"Though the American Federation of Labor as early as
1890 looked with disfavor upon trades unions excluding persons
from membership on account of race and color, this expression
of policy during the intervening years has been practically
The following quotations from questionnaires submitted to local labor unions with reference to Negroes may partially explain the local attitude.

Operative Plasterers and Cement Finishers Union. "Colored men can join if they can qualify. We have members in the East and South. Most colored men lack apprenticeship."

Molders' Union. "Personally, I have no objection, but of course, I do not know how the membership of the local would act as there have never been any applications."

Omaha Building Tradesmen. "This is an organization of building tradesmen and the colored people are mostly common laborers or hod carriers. Hod carriers are not organized in Omaha. I do wish they would. I know of no objection on the part of a Negro entering this union."

Postal Clerks. "None of our colored members ever force themselves on the whites. They are strong for our organization because they as well as the whites know it is what is making their job a better one. They are treated on equality with the white clerks while on duty. Of course, I am in no position to say whether or not the same feeling would prevail outside the work room, but I am inclined to think that in the case of these men, they would be treated just as well then as at any other time."

(14) Op. cit. p. 159
Journeyman-barbers local 614. "We have met with Negro barbers several times urging them to join our local or organize one by themselves. The colored master barbers have a very good local and are doing good work."

The experiences and attitudes of Negroes with unions may be partially explained from the following extracts from questionnaires submitted to 50 Negro workers.

C. W. says, "I am against labor unions. There is discrimination against Negroes. During strikes Negroes are persuaded to join the strike, but they are not treated fairly afterward."

W. J. says, "White men will not work fairly with Negroes as I have experienced on several jobs. I can get many more good jobs in the open shop."

A. J. H. has been a union man a number of years. Has been on several strikes with white men and in each case when the strike was over, the whites were taken back and he was left without a job.

E. A. B. "Labor unions are beneficial. I have been a member of the Pullman Porters' Union and feel it is doing a very good work."

C. E. "I have found no prejudice between colored and white workers in the Butchers' Union. Treatment has always been good. The Union has helped make better friends and it has helped secure better wages."
J. H. says, "I have been a member of a labor union for many years and I have been successful in securing better jobs and better conditions."

"Negro workers and organized labor see quite differently the problems of unionization," said Charles S. Johnson. "To the first it means improvement, to the other getting something in the first place. Men of any race or station may be expected to follow the direction in which their best interests lie."

Public Service

There are 53 Negroes employed in city, county, and state jobs in Omaha. Though it was difficult to secure definite figures regarding wages of these persons, from reports obtained in several of the departments, wages for Negroes are identical as those for whites performing similar tasks. The 53 workers are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Court House:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitors........3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer's Office...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorder's Office...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorder of Deeds...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Court...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Court...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Hall:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner of Finance Office...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitor........1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Board...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record of Weights' Office...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Surveyor's Dept...1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Commissioner's Office...1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(15) Johnson, Chas. S., Negro in American Civilization, p. 113
Other City Positions Include

- County Jail (Porters): 2
- Fire Department
  - Captain: 1
  - Lieutenant: 1
  - Linemen: 7
- Police Department
  - Lieutenant of Police: 1
  - Detective Sergeants: 3
  - Plain Cloths Detectives: 3
  - Patrolmen: 9
- Street Cleaning Dep't
  - Laborers: 15
  - Foreman: 1
- Health Department
  - Nurse: 1

**Wages**

Wages for Negro unskilled labor on construction jobs, excavation and building labor ranged from 30-40 cents per hour. Common laborers in the packing houses were paid $14-$22 a week depending in many cases on the amount of over-time work performed. The wage rate for porters range from $7-$18 a week. Hotel waiters average $45 a month, but earn considerable more in tips. A study of 125 applicants' cards who registered at the Omaha Urban League showed the standard deviation of wages in a miscellaneous group was $14.25. The standard deviation of wages for 76 colored women was $3.00; the wage range running from $1-$12 a week. Negro carpenters receive 50 cents to $1.25 an hour. Butchers, $18-$30 a week. In studying the wage rate of Negro domestics some interesting facts were discover-
Increasingly more employers are requesting Negro women to work for nothing to $1.00 or $2.00 a week.

Investigation of the Negro at work in the industries of Omaha showed no variance of wages between Negroes and whites performing the same services. Negroes being employed largely as unskilled and semi-skilled workers, it is natural to expect wages in these fields to be comparatively lower. There have been expressions made and opinions passed that the low wages of the Negro are due largely to his inefficiency as a worker. Our study forces us to discredit such statements because they are statements of opinions and many of these were contradictory. The packing houses for instance rated the efficiency on par with white workers while certain contractors feel Negroes are less efficient. One employer stated, he found his Negro shipping clerk very attentive to duties and quite efficient. Another employer did not feel Negroes capable of handling a job where accuracy counted. The contradiction in the various statements concerning the efficiency of the Negro indicate that we are still in the realm of belief and opinion and not in the realm of ascertained fact. Negro plasterers and paper hangers are either contractors or jobbers. An effort

(22) Johnson, Chas. R., *The Negro in Industry*, p. 389
was made to ascertain the scale of wages, but no definite information was available. Judging from the cost per job we were able to arrive at a scale if placed on an hourly basis which would approximate 50 cents per hour on a one-man job. On the basis of actual time consumed for a contract with more than one man, wages were proportionately higher per man employed.

A study of weekly wages of 496 men on miscellaneous occupations disclosed the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5 and under</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5-$10 inclusive</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10-$15</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15-$20</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20-$25</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25 and above</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women Workers**

Of the women workers studied in this survey, the three groups in the highest wage group include elevator operators, charwomen, and hotel maids. The average weekly wage of Negro elevator operators is $11.75. A Negro charwoman average $10.52 a week which is approximately the same as white women performing the same service. Hotel maids weekly wage ranges from $7-$10 a week. On the whole, Negro women constitute the lowest paid group in the city. This is partially explained by the fact that they are generally excluded from clerical, semi-skilled, or skilled factory work. The wages paid Negro women in personal service and domestic work re-
vealed the lack of organization of this kind of work. The All-Day Conference on Domestic Employment Relations sponsored by the Omaha Urban League revealed there was no uniform scale of wages for domestics. Complaints registered by the women were that extremely long hours were required and the lack of any business methods in domestic employment relations.

In view of the widespread attention being given domestic employment, the report of the Findings Committee of the Conference (which was composed of representative white employers and social workers) on Domestic Employment Relations directed by the writer as an Urban League project, states the opinions of Negro employees and white employers interested in the problem.

**Employees' Standpoint Regarding Domestic Employment Relations**

1. Generally speaking, too many hours are required in a day's work.
2. There is no demarcation between time and overtime.
3. In general, the wages paid are not adequate to maintain a decent standard of living.
4. In many cases the living conditions of the domestic employee are standard with (a) Uncomfortable living quarters, and (b) Inadequate provisions for meals.
5. There are no social outlets or recreational opportunities with (a) No opportunity to entertain guests or company, especially men friends,
6. The employer does not recognize home-making as a dignified
occupation with resulting class feeling.
7. There is often lack of system in the home, causing inefficiency on the part of the maid, through--
   (a) Lack of schedule of hours and rates
   (b) Lack of respect for maid's time off.

Employers' Standpoint Regarding Domestic Relations
1. Many girls going into domestic employment are not sufficiently trained for the work.
2. The employee is often unwilling to accept teaching or criticism.
3. The employee often has the wrong attitude toward the job due to an inferiority complex.
4. The employee is often not dependable or reliable as to hours.
5. Both colored and white girls are unwilling to stay in the home at night. (a) When they have homes to go to
   (b) When certain approaches are made from male members of families.
6. It was thought by a few that the colored girl was less honest, loyal and reliable than the white girl under the same circumstances.
7. Constant requests for special concessions are annoying.
8. There is added expense because of waste and breakage.
9. The employee sometimes lacks neatness in personal appearance.
The recommendations of an inter-racial committee of representative employees and social workers which follow indicates a need for more definite consideration in this field of labor which affects two-thirds of the working group of Negro women in the city.

1. An attempt should be made to bring colored employees together for a discussion of their mutual problems.

2. That opportunities for training in home making be made easily available.

3. That discriminating employment agencies shall be put in operation. That these agencies be qualified to sell the idea of the need of preparation to applicants for employment and the necessity for right living conditions to those who are seeking employees.

4. That a more systematic attempt be made to educate people to see their responsibility to their employees; this work to be done through constructive conversation; newspaper and magazine articles and public talks.

5. Agencies dealing with household employees understand and cooperate with the Smith-Hughes Department and urge employees to pursue courses in household work toward the granting of a certificate upon completion of such course.

6. The conclusions of this conference should be brought to the attention of as many employers and employees as possible for discussion and work toward the bettering of conditions of work and relationships.
In gathering data used in this study certain questions were raised by persons interviewed which have a definite bearing on the Negroes' relation to local industrial conditions. Such queries as "Why did the Negro come to Omaha?" "Is becoming less difficult or more difficult for him to secure employment?" "Will he be able to survive the competition?" "What of his future in industry?" In answer to the first query, it was stated in the beginning, that some of the impelling forces which caused Negroes to move North were dissatisfaction with his low economic status, the boll weevil ravages of cotton crops, better educational facilities and fairer treatment by guardians of the law. It must also be remembered that for past years, the white workers of the rural south have been going from the country to the mill-village, thence onward to the city. Just as the growing productivity of the machine decreased relatively the demand for men causing white workers to migrate, the Negro finding it harder to get a foothold, likewise began a search for new outlets. In migrating to the North the Negro found old traditions of his former white neighbor had been thrown aside in the competition with foreign labor. He also found many jobs which he had traditionally held as his own being performed by whites.

In our local study we found white men shining shoes, waiting table, driving trucks, doing scavenger work, digging (23) Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 29, p. 65
ditches and doing other jobs formerly held by Negroes as their own. This brings us to the second query relative to the difficulty of Negroes to secure employment. This difficulty as the investigation disclosed is not due in any large measure to prejudiced whites, but more as a result of changing economic conditions. T. Arnold Hill, director of the department of industrial relations of the National Urban League, feels this condition is coincident with the penetration of Negroes into lines in which they were not formerly employed. It is interesting to compare this view with some of the gains listed below being made by Negroes in Omaha.

Negro men are being employed by auto dealers as salesmen and insurance companies are employing them as agents. Stores operated in Negro neighborhoods by whites are using Negro sales persons in larger numbers. Laundries and dairies are using colored deliverymen to a greater extent.

Prof. Broadus Mitchel of Johns Hopkins' University, stressed the fact that social principles are not immutable, and that they are constantly being altered by economic forces. "It is often claimed that the Negro is unfit for industrial employment, that he is shiftless, unskilled, and unreliable, and that he is a good agricultural worker

(24) ibid, p. 66
he cannot fit into the tempo of modern industry. All these things were also said of poor whites when they were first brought into industry."

The third query, will he be able to survive the competition? From the light of this investigation may be answered in the affirmative. Indications are that more Negroes will lose jobs as a result of improved mechanism, but there is little or no proof of Negroes losing jobs through inability to compete. Negro civic and social organizations are urging superior efficiency and are sponsoring weekly forums where conditions of work and fair play are discussed as a means of raising the status of Negro workers. The chief changes in Omaha since the World War favorable to the Negro may be briefly stated:

(a) Accumulated experience of the Negro in industry.
(b) Expansion of Negro business
(c) Entrance of Negroes in new occupations.
(d) A growing feeling of race consciousness
(e) Changes in attitudes of employers
(f) Increasing political influence

The fourth query, what is the future of the Negro in the industrial life of the city can be determined largely by the Race. From available records over a period of fifteen years, indications point to a slow but gradual enlarging of the fields of employment. There are known types of work in which they have labored with less opposition than others.

(26) ibid., p. 67
and where friction has been at a minimum. It is also evident that some progress has been made in these fields.

To the extent that custom, tradition, and prejudice can be broken down, will the Negroes efforts to enter broader fields be achieved with less opposition. The growing awareness of the Negroes purchasing power has been used effectively in a number of instances and should point the way to enlarged opportunities. The known attitudes shared by employer and employee should serve as live knowledge in pointing the way to his future industrial activities.

Graph Showing Comparative Placements

Negro Male and Female Applicants, 1930-1931

(Made by the Omaha Urban League)
The present position of the Negro in the industrial life of the community has been largely determined by the special circumstances responsible for his presence here. Though as pointed out numerous factors within and outside the race have enlarged his scope of employment, he still remains the marginal worker in the industrial life of the city. During the past twelve years important changes have occurred. The movement from South to North increased the level of Negroes by exposure to sterner requirements. New wants were created which higher wages were able in some measure to justify. Negroes have been a factor in the industrial life of this community for twelve years and they have in a large measure readjusted their working habits to its demands. Negroes who have gained entrance in the skilled professions have seemed to dissipate the theory of inferior ability in performance. Some of the better jobs being held by Negro workers include, butchers, chemists, auto mechanics, foremen, tailors, government inspectors, and salesmen.

Dr. Du Bois, writing in the American Economic Association series of 1906, expressed the feeling that the average Negro worker at that period was probably less efficient than the average European. The present efficiency of the Negro

(26) Annals American Academy, Vol. 140 p. 135
wage earner would undoubtedly alter this statement due to his exposure to industrial opportunities. The findings in this field as it relates to the Negro worker points to conspicuous barriers to which attention might well be directed. A more careful selection of workers sent on jobs, further training for Negroes on jobs to improve their efficiency, opportunity of apprenticeship for Negroes attending vocational schools, elaboration of current lines of work into new directions, strengthening political influence as an aid in securing municipal posts, that efforts be made to obtain recognition of Negro labor by local labor unions, that employers be made aware of the social and economic waste resulting from unemployment, lack of stabilized work and low wages of Negro workers.

From this investigation the Negro female worker has scarcely any opportunity as an industrial worker. The 1930 census reports of 1,839 Negro women gainfully employed in Omaha, 1,699 were in domestic and personal service. Even in these occupations there seems to be an increasing competition between Negro and white domestics. An analysis of the daily want ads of the World-Herald and Bee-News for February, 1931 reveals a marked tendency on the part of employers to show a preference for white workers.
TABLE IX

Requests for Domestic Workers—Bee-News and World Herald
February, 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Colored</th>
<th>No-Preference</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st week</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd week</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd week</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th week</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings of this survey seem to point to definite problems confronting the Negro in the industrial life of this community. The various social and economic maladjustments faced by the race finds their logical source in employment opportunities or lack of them. Edward E. Lewis, in a recent article on the mobility of the Negro published in the Columbia University Press, says, "The economic salvation of the Race, in so far as one may be discerned, lies in the adjustment of its members to the status of industrial wage earners. The adjustment is not a mere matter of learning to perform the simple tasks which modern industry sets for its workers. It is a matter of achieving a satisfactory position in American economic life and that process has important social and political ramifications." While the findings of this study are not conclusive, they point to rather definite problems of a minority group in the community who for lack of proper industrial opportunities and adjustments may prove a menace in the broader social problems of the Community.

*No preference adds were checked by telephone and letter. Of the 63 cases during the 4 weeks, only four of 49 employers would consider colored help.*
Negro Business

There are in the city of Omaha, ninety-four business organizations conducted by Negroes. Most of these establishments are in the class of small business with a capital investment of from $50-$15,000 each. Most of the business enterprises are conducted along racial lines which would of necessity limit their patronage. Aside from the 94 organizations there are numerous jobbers who label themselves as business men but who are not included in this study. In the canvas was discovered numerous kitchen apartment hair dressers and seamstress, plasterers, painters and paper hangers. Though these persons earn independent livlihoods, they do not measure up to the criteria of business persons. We found sixteen different lines of business operated in the Negro communities. It was difficult to gather complete data on the business conditions of these establishments. Few conduct any system of bookkeeping or regular inventory. Of the 94 establishments included in this study, the average individual establishment employed 2 1/2 persons. Table X shows the number and types of local Negro business establishments and the total number of employees, 1931.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF BUSINESS</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>NO. EMPLOYEES</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Stores</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Stores</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressing &amp; Tailor Shops</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas &amp; Oil Stations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressmen</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(23) Women who do hair dressing and straightening business at home usually in the kitchen.
### TYPE OF BUSINESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF BUSINESS</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber Shops</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal &amp; Ice</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garages</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertakers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty Culturists</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The growth of the small business unit in Omaha among Negroes is due to several causes. First, the migration brought to Omaha not only laborers and personal servants, but merchants and barbers whose business had been materially affected in the South. These men and women migrated largely to improve their business by catering to many of their former patrons who were in position to purchase more of their necessities through increased earnings. Second, the industrial depression caused many Negroes to lose their jobs. Many of those who had saved a part of their former earnings invested it in some type of business. Third, the inability of Negroes to secure employment from some of the establishments they patronize had served as a justification for certain establishments who urge patronage as an exhibition of race loyalty, and to enlarge opportunities for Negro boys and girls in other positions than porters and janitors.

### The Negro Grocery Store

There are five grocery stores operated by Negroes in Omaha with capital investments ranging from $100-$8,000. In no field is there more competition than in the field of retail business.
In spite of this fact, the retail store represents the largest group of retailers in the city. The belief that a retail grocery establishment can be set up with less capital than other types of retail establishments and that its operation requires no specialized training and little or no previous experience, has entered into the calculations of many of these merchants. Of the six Negro grocery store proprietors interviewed, the previous occupations were: one was a janitor and his wife operated the store, two previously operated stores in the South, one is employed as a Pullman Porter, and employs a clerk to operate the store, one was a janitor and one a carpenter. Two of the stores reported investments of $300-$500, four had capital investments of $700-$8,000. The stock in two of the establishments was limited. In the other four, the brand and variety of goods was large and in quantities which compare favorably with any of the neighborhood stores. An effort was made to ascertain the gross amount of business a year but no reliable data was available. One store gave an estimate of $15,000 and another of $25,000. The six stores employed in June 1932, a total of 32 employees including the proprietors. None of the six establishments kept any standard bookkeeping system. They depended entirely on customers day book, cash register, or credit slips. The advertisement

(24) Edwards, Paul K., The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer
program consisted in hand dodgers, slides on a neighborhood motion picture screen, and advertisements in the local color-ed weekly. In answer to the question of length of the time of establishment, we found that two had been in business less than one year, one for five years, two seven to eight years, and one twelve years. The average wage paid employees was $7.50 a week. An effort was made to ascertain the chief problems of the retail grocery stores conducted by colored merchants. All six proprietors stated their major problem was collecting past due bills. Three stated many customers expect the Negro merchant to sell his produce at a lower price than his white competitor.

The Negro retail merchant complains of the lack of patronage by Negroes in the community and censures them for closing the doors of opportunity in the faces of their children who are forced to accept blind alley jobs because white merchants will rarely employ them in clerical capacities. On the other hand, many Negroes gave as their reason for not patronizing Negro retail stores as excessive prices as compared with other neighborhood establishments. One of the problems which was common to all the retail groceries was the lack of capital and the inability of Negroes to secure loans. "On account of lack of capital, Negro dealers cannot make the display incident of the business they operate and because of limited credit they are not able to obtain many of the things that the trade requires. With such unusually low buying power they are not able to compete in prices."
There are 26 retail grocery stores operated by white merchants in the area in which Negroes predominate. Four of these stores are members of local chain systems which enables them to undersell most of the Negro merchants. In the merchandising of grocery products, the demand is chiefly for staples or necessities in the sale of which price competition is particularly severe and upon which the margin of profit is exceedingly narrow. The Negro working population of Omaha naturally represents a low income group since two-thirds of them are engaged in common labor and semi-skilled occupations. A market composed of labor families of low income makes the problem of credit extension to the Negro consumer unusually hazardous. With their limited resources, the Negro retail grocery stores are offering to the young Negro boy and girl their first opportunity in business training.

Restaurants and Cafes

More numerous than the retail grocery stores are the restaurants and cafes operated by Negroes. There are seven with the qualifications which warrant us classifying them as a business. Numerous home service establishments were found in the survey where meals are served and barbecue is a specialty in other places. The restaurants and cafes enjoy a rather fair mixed patronage (Negroes and whites). The seven establishments employed on June 30th, 7 cooks, 11 waitress, and 4 dishwashers. The average wage paid cooks was $15.00 a week, dishwashers, $7.00, and waitresses, $5.00 a week. Only two of the buildings are owned by the proprietors. The rent varies from
$20 to $35 per month. The success of Negroes in the restaurant field is not as competitive as in the retail field. The competition is rather between other Negroes in the same field. Negroes have been doing catering service for years. His special dishes and unique recipes have made popular many white restaurants and hotel dining rooms. It would seem natural that he could use this same ability to promote his own business interest and draw largely on the patrons he has served while employed in similar capacities. The Negro restaurants and cafes are more successful than most other business enterprises because they are in fields where racial discrimination is more evident and where their patronage is less welcome in reputable establishments operated by other groups. Of the seven restaurants studied one had been in business four years, two for a period of two years, three less than one year, one three years. The life of the average restaurant in the community is about two years. During 1931 five of these establishments were forced to go out of business. There are three cafes conducted by Negroes which serve as excellent examples of what can be done in this field.

Cleaning & Pressing Establishments

The cleaning and pressing establishments operated by the Negroes in Omaha serve as an outlet for the business aspirations of a limited number of the race. In these establishments, as in the retail grocery business, the Negro meets the competition of the white shops. The proprietors of the establishments studied
in answer to the question regarding their problems, were un-
animous in replying, "securing patronage of Negroes", as the
most serious. Handling open accounts was likewise given by
all as a serious problem. Negro cleaning and pressing estab-
ishments were forced to reduce prices which was begun by the
490 Cleaners operating in the Negro district. The operation of
a cleaning establishment requires a degree of specialized train-
ing as some bushel work is usually requested by customers. In
addition to the bushel work, most of the establishments do
tailoring. Of the several establishments studied, six of the men
are tailors. Two of them had learned their trade at Tuskegee
Institute, one from the Topeka Industrial Institute, one from
the Master School of Designing, and one from the John J. Mitchell
Institute. The length of time engaged in business ranged from
one to 27 years. The cleaning and pressing establishments offer
to Negroes an opportunity for apprenticeship not afforded in the
establishments operated by other groups in the city. The total
number of persons employed in these establishments including
the proprietor was 22 or an average of three and one-seventh per
establishment. Five of the seven buildings in which the business
is operated are rented and two owned by the occupant. Only two
of the seven establishments studied seem to have achieved more than
a reasonable degree of success. This success we attribute to
their high grade workmanship and their ability to compete in
prices with the larger establishments operating offices in the
district.
The drug stores operated by Negroes do a larger volume of business than any other retail business conducted by them. There are only two, both located in neighborhoods densely populated by Negroes. These stores have all the appearance of prosperity. As the retail grocery store and pressing establishment, the drug store is operated in a highly competitive field. The most serious competition these stores have to meet according to their proprietors, is in the sales of patent medicines and toilet goods. The prescription business is received almost wholly from the eight Negro physicians in the community. The success of the two drug stores included in this study may be attributed to the higher requirements by law than in the other business establishments mentioned. The state requirement that a graduate pharmacist be in charge of the prescription department makes it less easy for uneducated persons to enter the field. One of the proprietors had previously operated a drug store before coming to Omaha and had been practicing in his present location for ten years. His training was received at Kansas University. The proprietor of the second store had been assistant pharmacist in the older established store and has operated a business for himself two years. He is a graduate in pharmacy from the University of Nebraska. Both stores employ graduate pharmacists as assistants. Both establishments are well stocked and carry a complete list of
drugs, cosmetics, and sundries. The success of the drug
stores may partially be attributed to the wide assortment of
merchandise they carry, each representing a distinct busi-
ness. One of these stores reported doing a gross business
of $25,000 in 1931. The other more recently established report-
ed an annual gross business of $32,000. Neither store practice
any approved method of bookkeeping. Both conduct regular inventor-
ies.

The Negro drug store, because of the custom of social
segregation in the South from which a majority of the patrons
have migrated, serves as an important social center in the com-
munity. Some data obtained from the two stores gives an objec-
tive view of them. "A" representing the older store and "B" the
newer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug Store A</th>
<th>Drug Store B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross Business --$25,000</td>
<td>Gross Business --$32,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am't. Capital Investment--$6,000</td>
<td>Am't. Capital Inv.--$3,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly payroll--$85.00</td>
<td>Weekly payroll--$85.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number employees--5</td>
<td>Number employers--6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years established--10</td>
<td>Years established--2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aside from the development of the two local drug stores as
the most successful local Negro business enterprises, they also
offer the only opportunity for the young Negro pharmaceutical
graduate to receive his apprentice training. In spite of the
highly competitive field in which the drug store is operating,
the success of these enterprises is an argument in favor of

specialized training. One of the proprietors was of the opinion that the development of greater race pride is responsible for his growing business. Both stores give as their major problem collection on open accounts. One proprietor stated that many customers would purchase prescription drugs from his store on a charge account and purchase other articles from downtown cut-rate stores. Both stores have quick delivery service, but admit it does not pay on account of the small margin of profit on a number of articles customers have delivered.

The Negro business man in Omaha seems to have a great opportunity for success. Though he faces a number of problems which seem unsurmountable, he possesses also a number of highly important advantages. First, as contrasted with the units of larger organizations he enjoys a greater freedom of action. He is at liberty to adjust his methods and his stock to the particular tastes and moods of his patrons. Such freedom requires a good deal of vision and resourcefulness; it is also a stimulus to his merchandising ingenuity. The close personal contact he has with his trading public, most of which are members of his race, makes it quite possible for him to render a pleasingly individual service, which is one of the greatest assets of the independent merchant. The fact that he has started business with limited capital may be a handicap, on the other hand the local Negro business men who have achieved under similar handicaps seems to prove that willingness to work and utilize new methods,
and take advantage of new conditions partially overcomes this handicap. Our investigation seems to prove that the majority of Negro business men have devoted little time to studying their field or the public they serve. Julius Klein in writing on the possibilities of Negro business attributes much of the losses they occasion by unwisely undertaking types of service that result in loss. Such for example as deliveries over too extensive a territory or in too small amounts. There is a definite need for a functioning Business League among local Negro business men where could be gathered dependable facts on the trades represented and a discussion of mutual problems. Observation of the grocery stores disclosed much dead wood stock on hand and antiquated store and stock arrangements. The criticism by many of the Negroes in the community of excessive prices as compared with other retail stores is a challenge the Negro must face squarely if he hopes to secure this patronage. To expect all members of the group to exhibit so much race pride they are willing to lose a few cents to give a Negro merchant his patronage regardless of the quality of merchandise he offers, the price he charges, or the cleanliness or sanitation of his establishment, is unreasonable. Of the 94 business establishments included in this study, only two carried on systematic advertising. A system of joint advertisement as


(28) Edwards, Paul K., *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*
as practised by some of the local chains would seem beneficial to the Negro merchants, coal dealers, and drug stores. The argument given by most of the men interviewed, that advertisement did not pay, is wholly without foundation. The trouble is not so much with the advertisement as the kind and methods used. The regular bulletins issued by the United States Dep't. of Domestic Commerce dealing with all phases of small business is not read by any of the business men included in this study. The first effort in improving the status of the Negro business group was undertaken by the Omaha Urban League in March, 1932. A Course of eight lectures and demonstrations dealing with such subjects as business psychology, psychology in marketing, psychology in selling, psychology in employing workers, the sizing-up process, etc. was offered Negro business and professional men. The instructors were heads of some of the large retail department stores, personnel managers, editors, and specialists in store arrangements. More recent efforts to develop Negro business in the city on a sound basis is the organization of a Consumers' Cooperative League. This seems to be a logical step in that adequate capital can be made available through cooperative efforts of large numbers of Negroes. From the limited data we were able to secure, it is our opinion that the conclusions herein contained will be helpful in improving the standing of these enterprises.
SUMMARY OF INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS OF NEGROES IN OMAHA

1. From the evidence which was revealed by this study, the writer is of the opinion that the inferior economic status of the Negro in Omaha involving as it does, irregular employment and low wages of men and women and limited opportunities for economic advancement as one of the most serious of the problems confronting the race.

2. The competition of white labor is limiting the opportunities for the masses of Negro workers and is resulting in a loss of many of their traditional opportunities.

3. The attitudes of employers regarding the capacity of Negroes to perform certain jobs, and the intolerance on the part of many white workers with whom he works are factors which seem to limit his industrial opportunities. It is also apparent that the Negro worker has lost many occupations because he lacked thrift, initiative, and reliability.

4. The fact that some Negroes in the city are employed on jobs requiring a high degree of specialization and ability seems to prove that where given the opportunity and the proper incentives, Negroes may become an asset to local industry.

5. The fact that Omaha Negroes have no opportunity for apprenticeship is a barrier to potential opportunities in the various trades.

6. Our findings seem to prove that for the Negro worker, there is little incentive for long and continued service.
7. At the present time the skills learned in the technical schools by Negro boys and girls serve as little aid in helping them secure employment.

8. With the supply of available labor for those occupations open to Negroes greater than the demand, the wage scale has been held to a low level.

9. The discriminating attitude of organized labor to the Negro seems perhaps to explain in part his leaning toward capital rather than labor.

10. The problem of the Negro woman in domestic employment calls for a more tolerant attitude and continued demonstration of capacity and efficiency.

11. Negro business is largely in the experimental state and must prove itself before a large patronage from Negroes is fully realized.

12. There is need for more careful study of business methods and an application of these methods to their business institutions.

13. Negro capital and experience are factors which limit the ability of Negro business men to compete with merchants of other groups.

14. Business organizations in order to encompass the large group of jobbers and merchants seem desirable as an aid in raising the business efficiency of the group.
QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN STUDY OF ECONOMIC STATUS OF NEGROES IN OMAHA

Appendix I.

DOMESTIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Do you employ colored domestics.................................
If not, have you ever employed them.............................
If you have changed from colored to white, or from white to colored, will you please state reasons...........
...................................................................................
...................................................................................
How many colored employees do you use...........................
In what capacities....................................................
Do you use colored day-workers or laundress...................
Average wage for Domestics.....................Day workers........
Where do you secure your colored employees?

Omaha Urban League ( )  Newspaper Ads. ( )
City Employment Office ( )  Friends ( )

Other sources...............................................

Are your colored help

As neat as white ( )  More neat ( )
As reliable { }  More Reliable { }
As pleasing ( )  More Plesasing ( )
As dependable { }  More dependable ( )
As efficient ( )  More efficient ( )

Less neat ( )
Less reliable ( )
Less pleasing( )
Less dependable ( )
Less efficient( )

Remarks...............................................................

.............................................................................

Signed

-49-
Appendix II.

EMPLOYERS SCHEDULE

Total number of employees .......... Number Negroes ........
Approximate number employed 1930 .... White .... Negroes ....
Nature of work done by Negroes ....................
Are white workers paid same for same work ...........
Are your Negro workers faster ( ) equal ( ) slower ( )
in speed than whites. (check one)
Are they more equally or less reliable .............
If not now, have you ever employed Negroes ..........
If competent Negroes could be secured, would you employ
them .............................................
If not give reasons ................................
.....................................................................
.....................................................................
What is the attitude on your white workers toward Negroes
.....................................................................
............. .............................................................
Through what mediums do you secure your colored employees

City Employment Office ( )

Omaha Urban League ( )

Private Commercial Agencies ( )

Other Colored Employees ( )

Newspaper Advertisements ( )

Other Mediums ( )
Appendix III

QUESTIONNAIRE ON LABOR UNIONS

Name                        Address

Present Occupation

Birth place                How long in Omaha

How long on this particular job.          Wages

Have you a trade            Name of trade

Comment on experience in your line of work in the South explaining how much you were paid, how you were treated, and why you left.

Comment on your experience since coming to Omaha; your difficulties and successes, troubles with employers, foreman, white workers, labor unions, etc. if you have any:

Why did you come to Omaha?

How did you come to Omaha?
   Induced by friends
   Fare paid by labor agents Paid own fare

Did you ever try to join a labor union here?

What union?                  What success did you have?

Do you think there are benefits to be derived from labor unions?

Explain what you mean.

In what way can they prove harmful to you?
Appendix IV

BUSINESS SCHEDULE

When established how long at this address
Is your organization individual ( ) Partnership ( ) Agent ( )
Kind of business
Number of employees
Estimated total business done 1930 1931
Previous occupation of owner
Years in Omaha
Valuation of Equipment
Valuation of Merchandise
Do you own your building Value Rent Buying
Do you have a definite system of bookkeeping
Why did you enter business

Remarks on history of firm
Appendix V

GARAGE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name

Address

How long in business

Where did you learn trade.
  Apprenticeship ( )  Auto School ( )  Correspondence ( )

Number employees

Own building ( )  Buying ( )  Rent ( )

Wages paid ( )

Former Occupation

Appendix VI

GROCERY STORE QUESTIONNAIRE

How long established

Stock on hand (amount)

Number employees, including manager

Type of work engaged in before Grocery Store

Wages of employees

Cash  Open Accounts

Chief problems

Bookkeeping system  Yes ( )  No ( )

Gross business 1931

Do you receive loss from open accounts

Own Building  Rent  Buying

Type of Business engaged in before.
Appendix VII

**RESTAURANT QUESTIONNAIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Proprietor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number cooks</td>
<td>Waitresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long established</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronage Colored ( )</td>
<td>White &amp; Colored ( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own building</td>
<td>Buying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix VIII

**BEAUTY SHOP QUESTIONNAIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Proprietor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number employees, excluding manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own building</td>
<td>Rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System used</td>
<td>Poro ( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operators education (Academic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many graduates of Beauty Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookeeping system</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages paid operators</td>
<td>straight ( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix IX

**TRANSFER COMPANIES QUESTIONNAIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Proprietor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual or partnership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number trucks</td>
<td>Number Male employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long in business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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