

Opening Activity

The Great Migration

1915-1950

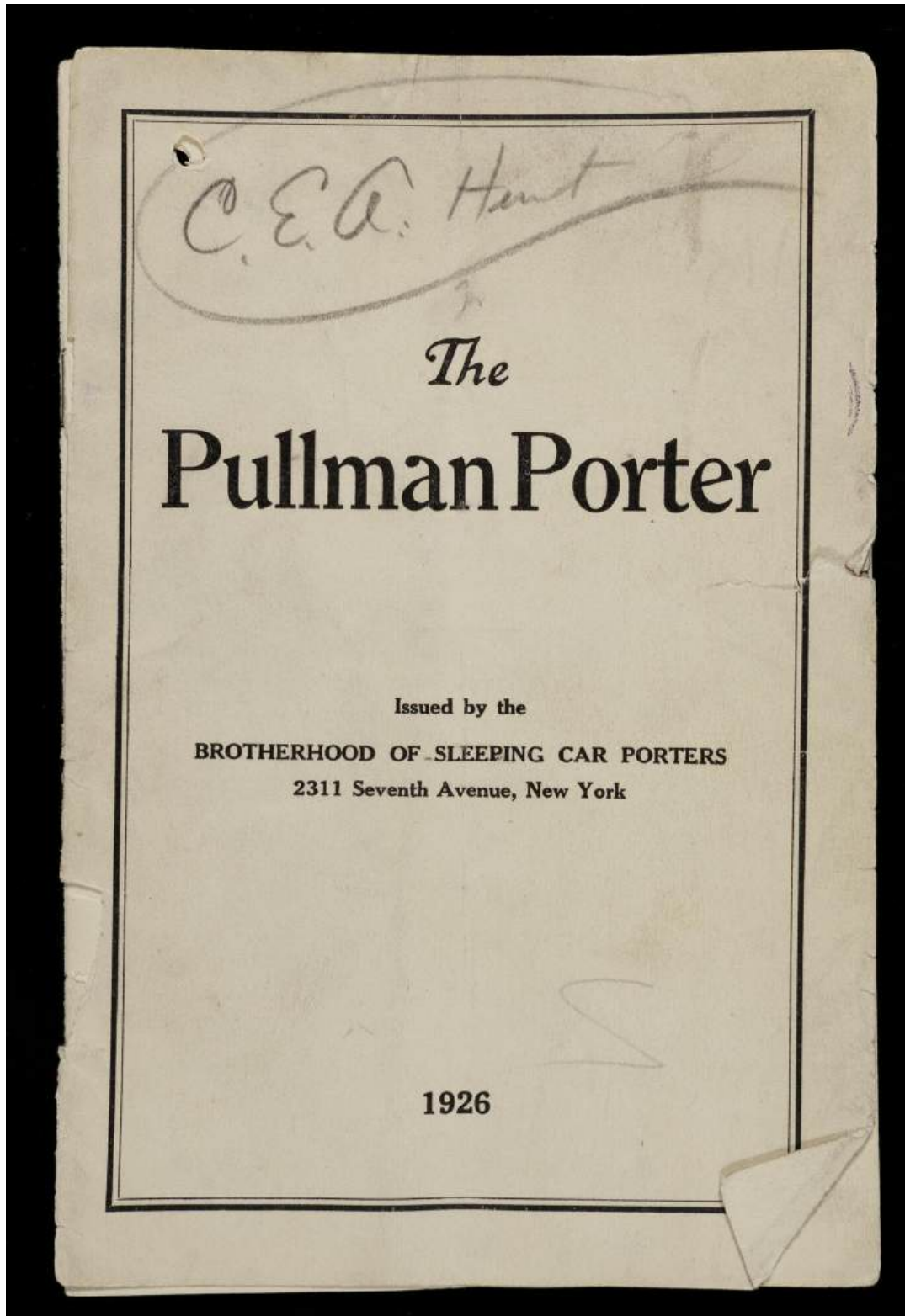
No longer do our lives depend upon the soil, the sun, the rain or the wind; we live by the grace of jobs and the brutal logic of jobs.

Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*

The Defender said come: here
is a promised land. fill the factories.
the train travels north. leaves at dusk.
leaves the Delta. the train forward
lurches where earth hardens into sky
rises into steel. still Black in the 8 hours
(at least) of chaos. here accents foreign
fast. a's stretch like restrictive covenants
circling Bronzeville. the city builds heaven
for a few. tenements for most. a project
to carve a moment of quiet in the roar
& rumble of machine. lines more rigid
by the minute. lines visible & not;
at the beach, on the train, schools
banks. lines shift, sharpen, root thick.
blueprint into bars: which ones to go
into & not. neighborhoods demarcated
sounds nothing like democracy. separate
& nothing equal. sections. housing
authorities. prisons, windows open
air, industrial, capital, labor under
a different overseer, a different punch
clock. in, off hours, invent in the domestic
space with wares brought from the south
the other side of the atlantic, made electric,
sped up & swinging, Jack Johnson. A. Philip
Randolph will rise from this earth;
a Black mayor, a Black president.

everything will change & nothing will

Group 1: The Experiences of Pullman Porters





FOREWORD

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters presents this pamphlet for the information of the public.

We have made no attempt here to "propagandize" our cause, but have set down, in as brief and convenient fashion as possible, some well authenticated facts about the wages and working conditions of the Pullman porters. These facts are drawn largely from an extensive survey of their work carried on over a period of months by the Labor Bureau, Inc. They form a part of the argument to be presented to the United States Railway Mediation Board in the porters' fight for recognition of their union and adjustment of their grievances.

The public has had little opportunity to discover any facts about porters before the organization of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. A general feeling has prevailed that "porters get rich from their tips and own their own homes and businesses." Nobody has supposed that the courteous, smiling porter had any "grievances."

But the porter suffers some distinct injustices. Not only does he work long hours for low wages, but he is subject to many petty abuses which the Employee Representation Plan, controlled by the Pullman Company, entirely fails to correct. A real labor union, independent of Company control, is the only agency which is capable of making those adjustments in the relations between employer and employed which will permit the men to carry out their work and voice their needs without fear.

We feel that the public is entitled to know something about the Pullman porters' case. The public pays a yearly tribute of \$7,000,000 in tips to Pullman porters to eke out the scanty wages paid them by the Pullman Company. This must be counted as a \$7,000,000 saving on the wage bill of the Pullman Company, which emphasizes the courtesy and efficiency of its porters as an integral part of the service it sells. The porters' demand for a living wage from the Pullman Company which would permit the abolition of the tipping system deserves the consideration of the traveling public.

The significance of this movement to the organized labor movement of America should not be overlooked. This is the first successful effort of Negro labor to organize itself. It is being carried on in the largest single group in America—the key group of the unorganized Negro workers of this country. Success in this struggle against the largest and most powerful employer of Negro labor will mark an epoch in the fight of all workers to organize the unorganized, to strike down the company union, and to carry forward a militant movement for the cause of the workers.



Service	"Soo" Line Monthly Wage	Pullman Monthly Wage
Sleeping car	\$80.40	\$72.50
Parlor car	90.40	72.50
Porter in charge (doing work of conductor)	95.00	84.50

The Porter as a Worker

The Pullman Company has made its porter service a closed industry. There is no chance for advancement beyond the rank of porter into any service that pays better wages. Even salary advance for length of service is only at the rate of about \$1.30 a year—\$10 in 15 years. Nevertheless, the Company has professed itself as anxious to "attract the best elements of the Negro race," and by its requirements does draw a high type of worker to its service.

The complexity of the porter's task makes it evident that he must be a responsible and capable person. The book on instructions for porters issued January 1, 1925, lists 217 matters to which he must give attention—matters pertaining to care of linen, blankets and pillows, to the preparation of berths, to the handling of baggage, to the guarding of cars, to the care of cars and equipment, to heating and lighting, to the maintenance of sanitation, etc.

The Pullman Company has frequently recognized its debt to the porter as an integral part of its service. George M. Pullman, founder of the Company, once declared, "You would have to go a long way to find a finer body of men than the Pullman porters." Edward F. Carry, President of the Company, said in his report to stockholders in 1925, "Without the efficient help given by its loyal employees the Pullman Company could not have made the splendid record it did in the year just closed." L. S. Hungerford, Vice-President and General Manager, has said, "The reputation of the service depends as much upon the efficiency of the employees as upon the facilities provided by the Company for the comfort of its patrons."

THE DEMANDS OF THE BROTHERHOOD

Wages

The union demands minimum wages of \$150 a month instead of the \$72.50 now in effect. This would make it possible to abolish the tipping system.

Hours

The union demands a month's service of 240 hours instead of nearly 400 hours. The Pullman conductor's working month is 240 hours.



Preparatory and Terminal Time

The union demands pay for preparatory and terminal time. *Example:* Porters now receive no pay for time spent in preparing cars and receiving and discharging passengers. A porter leaving New York at 12:30 midnight for Washington is required to report for duty at 7:30 p. m. Although he works 5 hours for the Company preparing the car to depart and receiving passengers, his time does not begin until the train leaves the station. The porter receives about 25 cents an hour from the Company. Thus the 5 hours spent in preparatory time represent \$1.25 for one run, and he makes his trip twelve times a month. Therefore, over a period of a year the porter has contributed \$180 to the Pullman Company in free labor—quite an item to a worker whose yearly wage is only \$870. When it is considered that every one of the 10,000 porters contributes preparatory time in the same way, it is easy to estimate what a great saving the Company derives from this practice.

Delayed Arrivals

The union demands adjustment of pay for delayed arrivals of trains. On the present basis the porter is paid about 14 cents an hour for time spent in delayed arrivals of trains, this being a little more than half pay, for work performed during the time assigned for a rest period. Pullman Car conductors are paid on a basis of time and a half for overtime, and receive about 96 cents an hour for this same service.

Doubling-out

A porter who has returned from his regular run, however long, may be "doubled out" on another run without a rest period and at a lower rate of pay than if he were on a regular run. The union demands adjustment of the doubling-out system. *Example:* A porter who has a western run from New York to Chicago may be required to double out to Philadelphia. This short run takes a total of five hours and would command about \$2.97 from the Pullman Company if a regular porter filled it. But doubling-out is paid for at the rate of 60 cents for every 100 miles. Therefore the porter who is doubling from his Chicago run, on his own rest time, can make only 90 cents. When he returns from Philadelphia he may be out of line and must lay over until his regular line is again due out. By losing his long run and laying over without pay while he waits for it, the porter may lose nearly \$5 from his month's wages, excluding the loss in tips, by doubling only once. If he refuses to double he may be discharged.



Telephone: BRAdhurst 0454



BROTHERHOOD OF
Sleeping Car Porters

Headquarters:

2311 SEVENTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y.



General Organizer
A. PHILIP RANDOLPH
Assistant General Organizer
W. H. DES VERNEY
Assistant General Organizer
A. L. TOTTEN

Secretary-Treasurer
ROY LANCASTER
Special Organizer
FRANK R. CROSSWAITH
Field Representative
S. E. GRAIN

July 20th, 1926.

Dear Sir & Brother:

One of your fellow-workers who works side by side with you in your honest effort to make a living, has given us your name requesting that we write and inform you of the great struggle the Brotherhood is making to better the conditions of the Pullman Porters.

No man with any race pride, any self-respect will deny that we need a living wage, shorter hours and better treatment. We can meet these needs only through ORGANIZATION. ORGANIZATION has improved the lot and life of the white workers on railroads, and it will do the same for the Porters and Maids. As soon as we began to organize, the Pullman Company strove to prevent us from doing so by granting a small wage increase. Our aims are (1) A living wage, a wage that is certain and upon which a self respecting man can support his family without depending upon tips which are degrading and at best uncertain. No man should be satisfied to risk the life of his family upon such an uncertain and insecure thread as "tips". (2) We want our time put upon an hourly basis, like the conductors'. (3) We want our self-respect, our manhood.

The Brotherhood will always stand as a monument to the capacity and courage of 12,000 New Negroes. Historians in the future cannot overlook the Brotherhood, and every man who helped to make it possible will be accorded a place in the history of our race, a place of which his children will be prouder as the days grow older.

After August 5th the joining fee in the Brotherhood will be \$10. Therefore, it is to your advantage to join now at the usual rate of \$5.00 Your membership and 1926 identification cards will be sent you upon receipt of your application. Read the enclosed circular letter carefully and grasp the opportunity to prove to the brave Porters in the Brotherhood that you are with them, that you are a New Negro, willing to do battle so that our race may overcome some of the obstacles in its path. I am enclosing an application blank. Use it by answering the questions marked (X). The eyes of nearly 11,000 Porters are upon you; the eyes of your race are upon you. Will you fail them?

With undimmed faith in our great cause, I remain

Yours for victory

A. Philip Randolph

General Organizer.

OUR GOAL

More wages; better hours; better working conditions; pay for overtime; pay for "preparation" time; abolition of "doubling out," conductor's pay for conductor's work when in charge and manhood rights.

Group 2: Interviews with Domestic Workers

Introduction: The following passages come from interviews with Black women workers taken from a large study of Black life in Chicago, *The Black Metropolis*, written in 1945. The passages describe working conditions, pay, expectations, discrimination, and organizing efforts. The italicized passages below are direct quotes from Black domestic workers in Chicago in the 1920s.

“Slave Markets”

Many Negro women were so desperate for employment during the Depression that they actually offered their services at the so-called “slave markets”—street corners where Negro women congregated to await white housewives who came daily to take their pick and bid wages down. One experienced stenographer who was forced to offer her services for \$3 a week at the West Side “slave market” described the situation as follows:

“It is an area on the West Side of 12th St. near Halstead. A large number of girls go there daily and hire themselves by the day to the highest bidder. The more enterprising would solicit—others would wait to be approached. Many days I worked for 50 cents a day and no carfare—one meal was given. I then applied for relief. After suffering more embarrassment and humiliation I was refused relief because I could now and then get jobs at the ‘salve market.’ Having no references it was hard for me to get a good job.”

Domestic workers often expressed the hope that their children would be able to find other types of work. Typical of the attitudes of many domestic servants with daughters were those expressed by one woman:

“I have not told you much about the life of my two daughters for, as you know, each of them has a work life of her own. My life as a maid had been brief—until I married I did office work. Only after my second husband and I separated did I begin to work as a maid. My oldest daughter is quite bitter against what she calls the American social system and our financial insecurity. I hope they may be able to escape a life as a domestic worker for I know too well the things that make a girl desperate on these jobs.”

Colored girls are often bitter in their comments about a society which condemns them to “the white folks’ kitchen.” Girls who have had high school training, especially, look upon domestic service as the most undesirable form of employment. It is not surprising that with the outbreak of the Second World War, middle-class white housewives in the Midwest Metropolis began to complain about “the servant problem.” Negro women had headed for the war plans or were staying at home.

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Barriers to Organizing

“No, I haven’t heard of the union, but I imagine it is a good thing. Maids really need helping, for those white people will certainly take advantage of you. When you first start with them you are only supposed to do so much, but the longer you remain with them, the more they expect and the longer the hours. I am so tired in the evening. I don’t feel like reading—in fact, not doing anything but getting away from the house, even if it is only across the street. I have to wash all the little girl’s clothes too. If I leave, I shall have more time. Then I will be able to learn more about this organization and perhaps attend a meeting. I have become rusty in everything. I don’t get to see my friends often.”

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"Uncle Tom Types"

“The Jewish woman that I work for tries to get a colored woman to do all of her work for as little as \$2 a day and pay her own carfare.

“She is expected to do all the washing, including the linen and towels as well as all the clothes for the five members of the family. She is supposed to finish all the work—that is iron the entire wash—and then clean the house thoroughly—all for \$2. Because there are some women who will do all of the work for that amount, this Jewish woman feels that a colored woman who demands more is silly to think that she can get it. She says that she doesn’t understand why, if some colored people can get along on that amount, all can’t do the same. I know one woman who does all this work. This woman is an ‘Uncle Tom’ type of person who says ‘Yes, ma-a-am!’ and grins broadly whenever the woman speaks to her. The woman prefers this type of servant to the more intelligent type.”

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Fighting for More

Another colored girl was given the floor.

“In my factory we already get thirty cents an hour. We struck ourselves and our employer said sure he’d give us that. Now thirty cents an hour is all right for them [gesturing with her thumb to some girls back of her], but we don’t work for nothing less than thirty cents an hour in our place now and thirty cents isn’t doing us any good. We’re already getting that. We want more and we’re going to get more!” [Applause and cheers.]

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Group 3: Labor Charts

Introduction: The following charts and graphs come from a large study of Black life in Chicago, *The Black Metropolis*, written in 1945. These charts contain information on the types of jobs open to Black men and women in comparison to their white counterparts between 1930 and 1940.

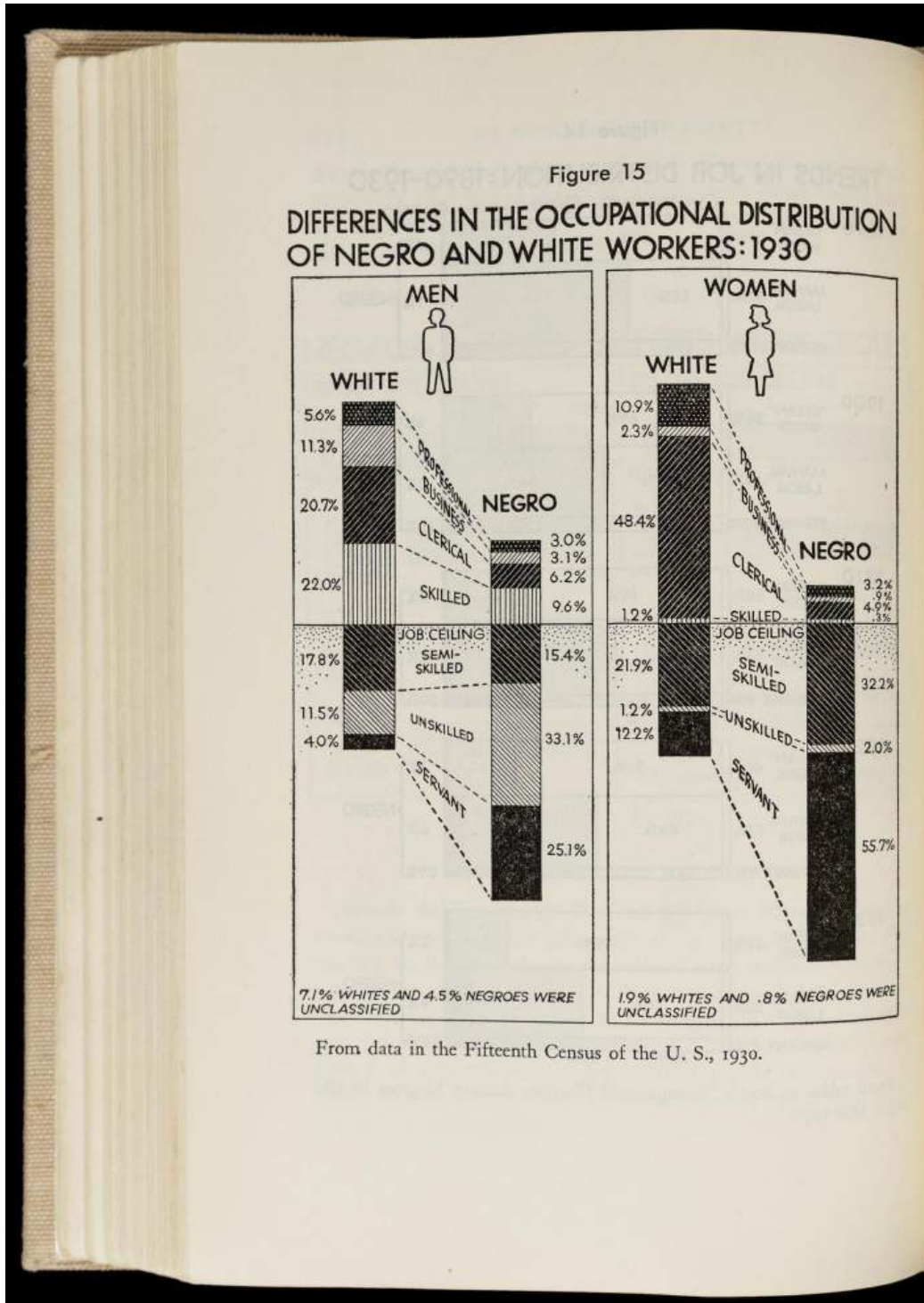
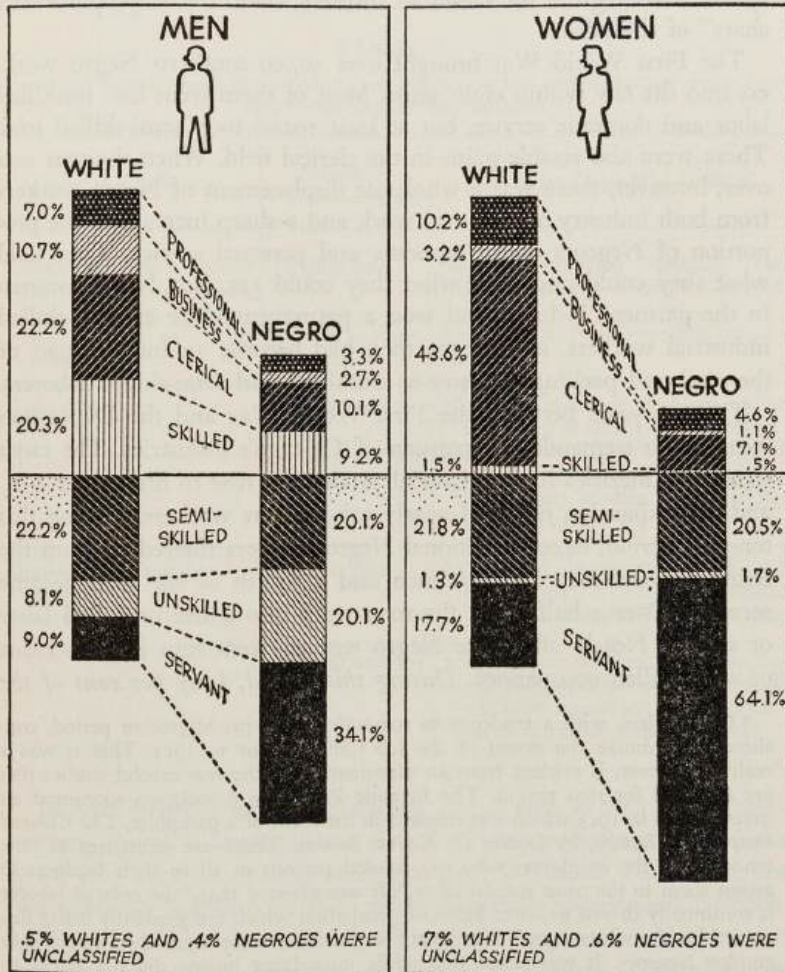


Figure 16

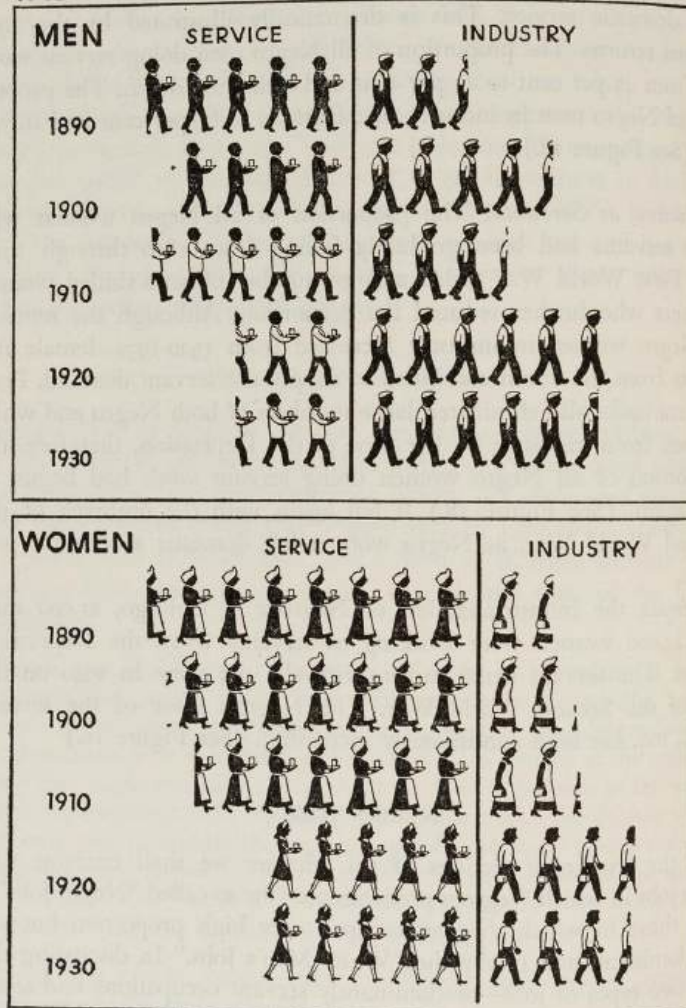
DIFFERENCES IN THE OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF NEGRO AND WHITE WORKERS: 1940



From data in the Sixteenth Census of the U. S., 1940.

Figure 18

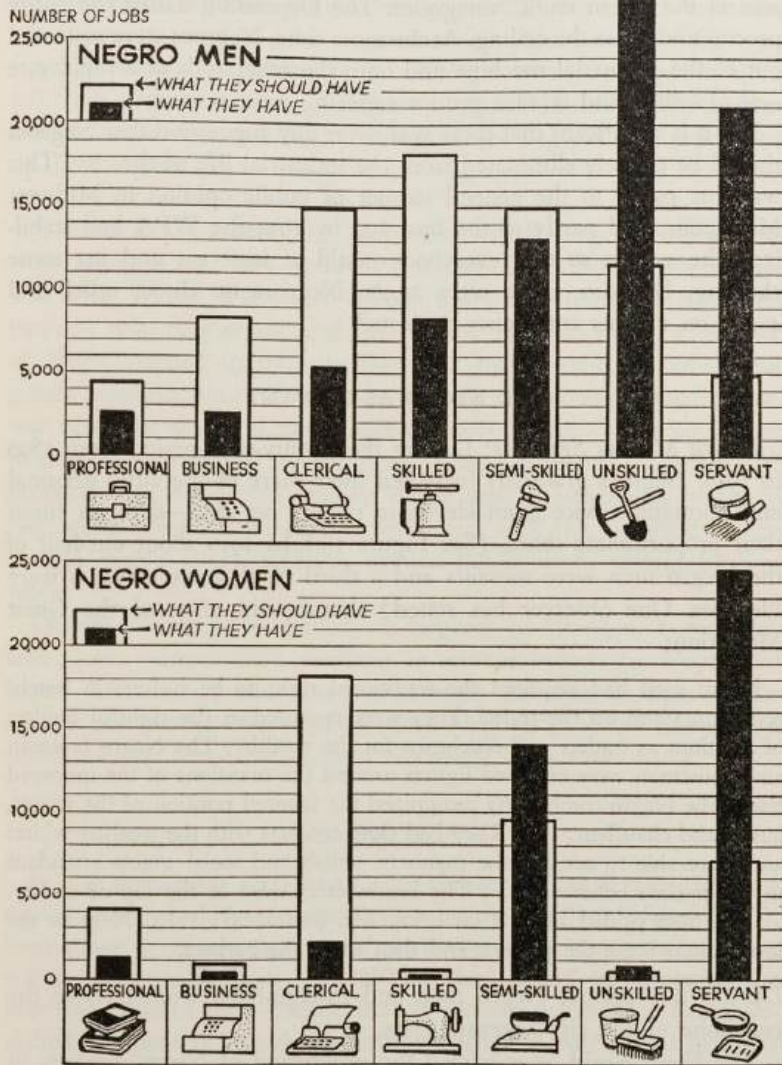
TREND IN NEGRO EMPLOYMENT TOWARD INDUSTRIALIZATION : 1890-1930



EACH FIGURE REPRESENTS 10% OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT INCLUDING WHITE-COLLAR OCCUPATIONS. WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS ARE NOT SHOWN IN PICTURE.

From tables in Scott, "Occupational Changes Among Negroes in Chicago: 1890-1930." (Percentage of Negroes in white-collar occupations not shown.)

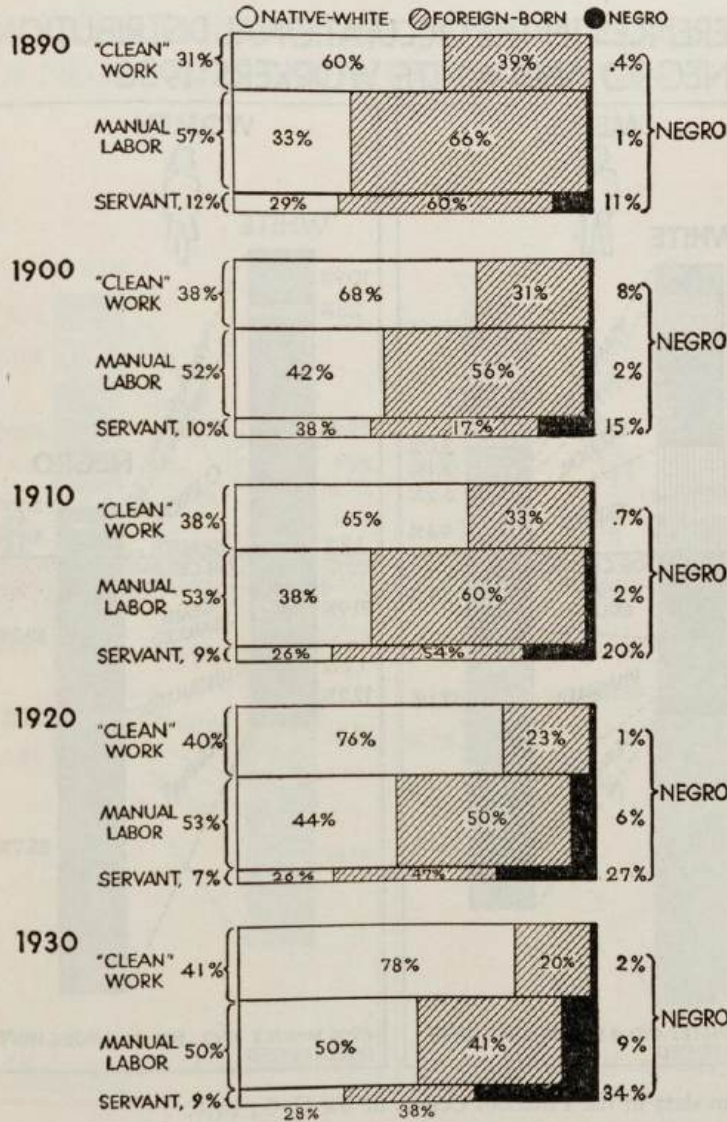
Figure 17
NEGRO'S "PROPORTIONATE SHARE" OF JOBS



From tables in Scott, "Occupational Changes Among Negroes in Chicago: 1890-1930." Data for 1930.

Figure 14

TRENDS IN JOB DISTRIBUTION: 1890-1930



From tables in Scott, "Occupational Changes Among Negroes in Chicago: 1890-1930."