

THE NEGRO'S STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN THE NORTH

By RAY STANNARD BAKER in March American Magazine.

One of the questions I asked of Negroes whom I met both North and South was this: "What is your chief cause of complaint?" In the South the first answer nearly always referred to the Jim Crow cars or the Jim Crow railroad stations; after that, the complaint was of political disfranchisement, the difficulty of getting justice in the courts, the lack of good school facilities, and in some localities, of the danger of actual physical violence.

But in the North the first answer invariably referred to working conditions. "The Negro isn't given a fair opportunity to get employment. He is discriminated against because he is colored."

Professor Kelly Miller, one of the acutest of Negro writers, has said: "The Negro (in the North) is compelled to loiter along the edges of industry." Southern white men are fond of meeting Northern criticism of Southern treatment of the Negro with the response: "But the North closes the doors of industrial opportunity to the Negro."

And yet in spite of this complaint of conditions in the North, one who looks Southward can almost see the army of Negroes gathering from out of the cities, villages and farms, bringing nothing with them but buoyant hope in a distant freedom, but tramping always Northward. And they come not alone from the old South but from the West Indies, where the colored population looks wistfully toward the heralded opportunities of America.

And yet, although I expected to find the Negro wholly ostracized by union labor, I discovered that where the Negro became numerous or skilled enough, he, like the Italian or the Russian Jew, began to force his way into the unions.

"I'm all right. I'm a member of the union and get union wages." And I found after inquiry that there are a few Negroes in most of the unions of skilled workers, carpenters, masons, iron-workers who in an exclusive typographical union and in the railroad organizations—a few here and there, mostly mulattoes. They have got in just as the Italians get in, not because they are wanted, or because they are liked, but because by being present, skilled and energetic, they have had to take them in as a matter of self-protection.

In several great industries North and South, indeed, the Negro is as much a part of labor unionism as the white man. Thousands of Negroes are members of the United Mine-Workers, John Mitchell's great organization, and they stand on an exact industrial equality with the whites.

Other thousands are in the cigar-makers' union, where, by virtue of economic pressure, they have forced recognition. Indeed, in the North, in spite of the complaint of discrimination, I found Negroes working and making a good living in all sorts of industries—union or no union. A considerable number of Negro firemen have good positions in New York, a contracting Negro plumber in Indianapolis who is doing help has been able to maintain himself not only against white competition, but against the opposition of organized white labor.

Here is a little newspaper account of a successful skilled pattern maker in Chicago: "A few days ago a large box containing twenty-one large and small patterns was shipped to the Jamestown, Excelsior City, of the Company of Paris, Illinois, one of the largest car companies in the West. The box was shipped scores of newspaper men, engineers and business men were permitted to inspect what is said to be the most complete and most valuable exhibit of the kind ever sent to an exhibition in this country. The contents of this precious box is entirely the work of a colored man named George A. Harrison. Mr. Harrison is one of the highest-salaried men on the pay-roll of the company. He makes all the patterns for all of the steel, brass and iron castings for every kind of engine and boiler in the world. He graduated by this company in his class of sixty members in a pattern-making establishment in Chicago."

Cases of this sort are exceptional among the vast masses of untrained Negro population in the cities, and yet it shows what can be done—and the very possibility of such advancement encourages Negroes to come North. Trades Which Negroes Dominate. So much for the higher branches of industry. In some of the less skilled occupations, on the other hand, the Negro is not only getting hold, but actually becoming dominant.

The asphalt workers are nearly all colored. In New York they have a strong union and although part of the membership is white (chiefly Italian), the chosen representative who sits with the Central Federated Union of the city is James E. Wallace, a colored man.

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The Road from Slavery to Freedom. At Indianapolis I found an organization of Negro women, called the Woman's Improvement Club. The president, Mrs. Lillian T. Fox, told me what the club was doing to solve the problem of the colored girl and boy who could not get work. She found that, after all, white prejudice was not so much a bugaboo as she had imagined. The newspapers gave publicity to the work; the Commercial Club, the foremost business men's organization of the city, offered to lend its assistance; several white employers agreed to try colored help, and one, the Van Camp Packing Company, one of the great concerns of its kind in the country, even fitted up a new plant to be operated wholly by colored people.

Just recently a meeting of colored carpenters was held in New York to organize for self-help, and they found that, by bringing pressure to bear, the Brotherhood of Carpenters was perfectly willing to accept them as members of the Union, on exactly the same basis as any other carpenters. In short, the Negro is beginning to be awakened to the fact that he is to survive and succeed in Northern cities, it must be by his own skill, energy and organization. For, like any individual or any race striving for a place in industry or in modern commercial life, the Negro must, in order to succeed, not only equal his competitor, but become more efficient. A Negro contractor said to me: "Yes, I can get any amount of work, but they expect me to do it a little better and a little cheaper than my white competitors." Then he added: "And I can do it, too!"

Those are the only terms on which success can be won. For so long a time the Negro has been driven or forced to work, as in the South, in an intense, impersonal, competitive life like that of the North, where work is at a premium, that he himself, not the white man, must do the driving. It is the lesson that raises any man from slavery into freedom. Pullman Porters. So much for industry. The Negro in the North has also been going into business and into other and varied employment. The very difficulty of holding a job, and the consequent low salary in salaried employment has driven many colored people into small business enterprises; grocery stores, tailor shops, real estate or renting agencies. If they are being driven out by white men as waiters and barbers, they enjoy the other hand, growing opportunities as railroad and Pullman porters and waiters in places which are often highly profitable, and lead, if the Negro saves his money, to better openings. A Negro banker whom I met in the South told me that he got his start as a Pullman porter. He had a good run, and, by being active and accommodating, often made from \$150 to \$200 a month from his wages and tips.

But the same change is going on in the North that I found everywhere in the South; I mean a growing race consciousness among Negroes—the building up of a more or less independent Negro community life within the grasp of the white civilization. Every group seems to be working in that direction. Business Among Boston and Philadelphia Negroes. As I showed in my last article, many Negroes in Boston (and indeed in other cities) have made a success in business enterprises which are patronized by white people—or rather by both races. Colored doctors and lawyers in Boston have more or less white practice. Of course, colored men who can succeed without reference to their color and do business with both races, wish to continue to do so—but the tendency in the North, as in the South, is all against such development and toward Negro enterprises for the Negro population. Even in Boston numerous enterprises are conducted by Negroes for Negroes. I visited several small but prosperous grocery stores. A Negro named Basil F. Hutchins has built up a thriving undertaking and heavy establishment for Negro trade. Charles W. Alexander has a print-shop with colored workmen and publishes "Alexander's Magazine." A new hotel called the Astor House conducted by Negroes for Negroes, has 250 rooms with telephone service in each room, a large restaurant and many of the other attractions of a good hotel. But, in this growth of the North to face head and the South. Scores of Negro banks are to be found in the South, not one in the North. Cities like Richmond, Virginia; Jackson, Mississippi; Nashville, Tennessee, have a really remarkable development of Negro business enterprises.

Perhaps I can convey a clearer idea of the great variety of employment of Negroes in Northern cities by outlining the condition in a single city, Philadelphia—informed for which I am indebted to R. R. Wright, Jr. The census of 1900 shows that out of 28,940 Negro males (boys and men), 21,123 were at work, and out of 33,673 girls and men, 14,095 were wage-earners. Here are some of the most numerous occupations of Negro men: Common laborers, 7,690; Servants and waiters, 4,378; Teamsters and hackmen, 1,957; Porters and helpers in stores, 921; Barbers and hairdressers, 444; Messengers and errand boys, 245; Brick and stone masons, 308.

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The civil service has proved of advantage to the Negro of Philadelphia, as of every other large Northern city. In the post-office there are about 150 clerks, carriers and other employees, the police force about 70 patrolmen, a 40 school teachers, and about 200 persons in other municipal offices. Wherein Lies Success for Negroes. I have thus endeavored to present the conditions of the Negro in the North and show his relationship with white people, except in the matter of politics, a subject of so much importance that I shall take it up in a later article. A new racial consciousness is growing up, leading to organizations for self-help; and while white prejudice is increasing, so is white helpfulness as manifested in social settlements, industrial schools, and other useful philanthropies. All these forces and counter forces—economic, social, religious, political—are at work. We can all see them plainly, but we cannot judge of their respective strength. It is a tremendous struggle that is going on—the struggle of a backward race for survival within the swift-moving civilization of an advanced race. No one can look upon it without the most profound feeling that the Negro, as a human spectacle, nor without the deepest sympathy for the efforts of 10,000,000 human beings to surmount the obstacles which beset them on every hand.

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skilled, they gradually become skilled, and in the course of time we will make excellent foremen out of them." Mr. Harrah added that there was absolutely no difference in wages of negroes and whites in the same grade of work. I have pointed out especially in my last article how and where prejudice was growing in the various areas of our country. On the other hand, where one gets down under the surface, there are to be found many counteracting influences—those quiet constructive forces, which, not being sensational or threatening, attract too little attention. Northern people are able to help Negroes when Southern people are deterred by the intensity of social prejudice; for in most places in the South the teaching of Negroes still means social ostracism.

Help For Negroes in the North. Settlement work, in one form or another, has been instituted in most Northern cities, centers of enlightenment and hope. I have visited a number of these settlements and have seen their work. They are doing much, especially in giving a moral tone to a slum community; they help to keep the children off the streets by means of clubs and classes; they open the avenues of sympathy between the busy upper world and the struggling lower world. Such is the work of Miss Partholow in Philadelphia, Miss Wharton in Philadelphia, Miss Eaton in Boston, Mrs. Celia Parler Woolley in Chicago, Miss Ovington in New York. Miss Hancock, a busy, hopeful Quaker woman, has a "broom squad" of Negro boys which makes a regular business of sweeping several blocks of streets in the worst slum district in Philadelphia; it gives them employment and it teaches them civic responsibility and pride.

Why the Negro Often Fails. As I continued my inquiries I found that the leading colored men in most cities, though they might be ever so discouraged over the condition of the ignorant, reckless masses of their people, were awakening to the fact that the Negro's difficulty in the North was not all racial, not all due to mere color prejudice, but also in large measure to lack of training, lack of aggressiveness and efficiency, lack of organization. In New York a "Committee for Improving Industrial Condition of Negroes" has been formed. It is composed of both white and colored men, and the Secretary is S. R. Scott, an able colored man. The object of the committee is to study the condition of the Negroes in New York city, find out the causes of idleness, and try to help the Negro to better employment.

In the South, as I have shown, Negroes receive much off-hand individual charity—food from the kitchen, gifts of old clothes and money; but it is largely personal and unorganized. In the North there is comparatively little indiscriminate giving, but an effort to reach and help Negro families by making them help themselves. One of the difficulties of the Negro is improvidence; but once given a start on the road to money saving, it is often astonishing to see him try to live up to cash in the bank. The Charity Organization Society of Indianapolis has long maintained a dime savings and loan association which employs six women collectors, one colored, who visit hundreds of homes every week. These form indeed a corps of friendly visitors, the work of collecting the savings furnishing them an opportunity of getting into the banks and so winning the confidence of the people that they can help them in many ways. Last year over 6,000 depositors were registered in the Association, two-thirds of whom were Negroes, and over \$25,000 was on deposit. Not less than twenty cents a week is accepted, but many have saved much more. As soon as they get into the habit of saving they usually transfer their accounts to the savings banks.

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A Cup of Coffee J.R. Ferrall & Co. Telephone orders filled promptly. The semi-annual examinations were held as well known upon West Side private school the other day, and while inspecting the papers the teachers found many humorous answers to some of the questions. A class of boys averaging about 12 years of age had been examined in geography, which had been preceded the day before by grammar. Among the questions in the geography paper was the following: "Name the zones." One promising youth of 11 years wrote this answer: "There are two zones, masculine and feminine, as masculine is in the North and feminine is in the South." Another boy wrote: "The zones are the North and the South." The man who knows English is so fond of his own business that he sends all that is worth knowing.