



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Pamphlet: The Color Line Series No. 2: 5,000,000 Jobs: The Negro at Work in the United States

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Habits That Handicap

- (a) Living down a tradition of slavery.
- (b) Frequently, regardless of skill, he is forced to begin at the bottom and seldom does his promotion follow the usual procedure so popularly regarded as typical in a democracy.
- (c) When there is prosperity and plenty of work, there are opportunities at the bottom. In times of unemployment, the pressure on the "bottom" position drives the Negro out of industry.
- (d) There are traditions of unemployment - "deadlines" limiting the employment of Negroes.
- (e) Labor unions, by limiting their membership to white citizens, effectively bar the entrance of Negroes into occupational fields under their control.
- (f) Inefficient preparation for new and old skills.

It is essential that young people now preparing for occupations pursue accepted practices in vocational guidance. They should begin early to think of their aptitudes, their health, and their temperament, in relation to the particular occupation they think they wish to follow.

Trends of Employment

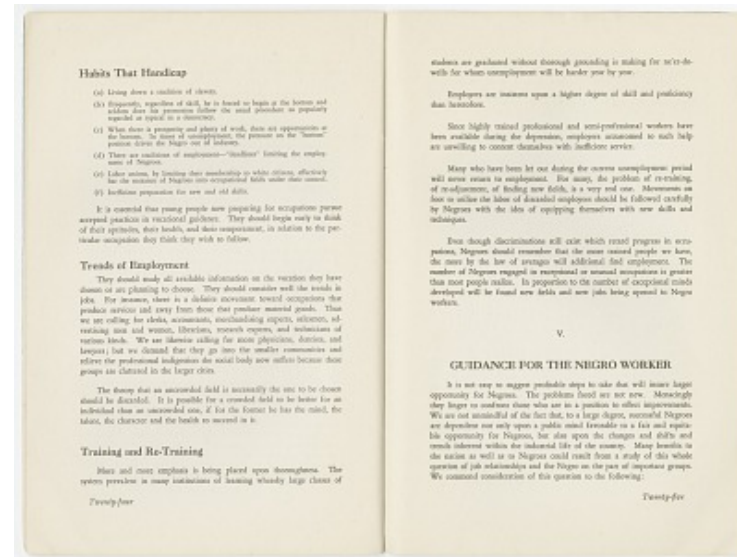
They should study all available information on the vocation they have chosen or are planning to choose. They should consider well the trends in jobs. For instance, there is a definite movement toward occupations that produce services and away from those that produce material goods. Thus we are calling for clerks, accountants, merchandising experts, salesmen, advertising men and women, librarians, research experts, and technicians of various kinds. We are likewise calling for more physicians, dentists, and lawyers; but we demand that they go into the smaller communities and relieve the professional indigestion the social body now suffers because these groups are cluttered in the larger cities. The theory that an uncrowded field is necessarily the one to be chosen should be discarded. It is possible for a crowded field to be better for an individual than an uncrowded one, if for the former he has the mind, the talent, the character and the health to succeed in it.

Training and Re-Training

More and more emphasis is being placed upon thoroughness. The system prevalent in many institutions of learning whereby large classes of

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students are graduated without thorough grounding is making for ne'er-do-wells for whom unemployment will be harder year by year. Employers are insistent upon a higher degree of skill and proficiency than heretofore.



Since highly trained professional and semi-professional workers have been available during the depression, employers accustomed to such help are unwilling to content themselves with inefficient service.

Many who have been let out during the current unemployment period will never return to employment. For many, the problem of re-training, of re-adjustment, of finding new fields, is a very real one. Movements on foot to utilize the labor of discarded employees should be followed carefully by Negroes with the idea of equipping themselves with new skills and techniques.

Even though discriminations still exist which retard progress in occupations, Negroes should remember that the more trained people we have, the more by the law of averages will additional find employment. The number of Negroes engaged in exceptional or unusual occupations is greater than most people realize. In proportion to the number of exceptional minds developed will be found new fields and new jobs being open to Negro workers.

V.

GUIDANCE FOR THE NEGRO WORKER

It is not easy to suggest profitable steps to take that will insure larger opportunity for Negroes. The problems faced are not new. Menacingly they linger to confront those who are in a position to effect improvements. We are not unmindful of the fact that, to a large degree, successful Negroes are dependent not only upon a public mind favorable to a fair and equitable opportunity for Negroes, but also upon the changes and shifts and trends inherent within the industrial life of the country. Many benefits to the nation as well as to Negroes could result from a study of this whole question of job relations and the Negro on the part of important groups. We commend consideration of this question to the following:

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