THE NEGRO IN CHICAGO

A STUDY OF RACE RELATIONS AND A RACE RIOT

BY

THE CHICAGO COMMISSION ON RACE RELATIONS

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CHICAGO RACE RIOT—BEGINNING OF THE RIOT
WHITES AND NEGROES LEAVING TWENTY-NINTH STREET BEACH AFTER THE DROWNING OF EUGENE WILLIAMS

Often Negroes from the South said they missed the care-free social greetings and relationships that prevail in the rural South. They thought that people in the North were "colder," that they did not show sufficient hospitality.

Asked what conditions they would change if they could have their way, the most frequently expressed desire was for more and better housing. Improvement of social, moral, or political conditions followed. Some emphasized the necessity of improving the management of the migrants from the South, whose new-found freedom had led them to become offensive in their conduct. Interviews with migrants, however, indicated that instruction was being received without offense from many social agencies on how to act, dress, and speak in such a manner as not to create unfavorable impressions.

There were some complaints of political exploitation and of being obliged to live in proximity to gambling and vice that were encouraged by political bosses in their neighborhoods.

The inquiry showed that membership in clubs, lodges, and kindred organizations was almost as universal as church affiliation. There were only a few families in which no member had any association with a fraternity or club.

V. A GROUP OF FAMILY HISTORIES

The general statistical treatment of these 274 Negro families takes away many of their human qualities. For this reason a selection has been made of various types of Negro families in order that a rounded picture of the whole unit may be given. The family stories that follow include typical migrant Negroes from the South—common laborers, skilled laborers, salaried, business, and professional men. They illustrate the commonplace experiences of Negroes in adjusting themselves to the requirements of life in Chicago.

AN IRON WORKER

Mr. J—, forty-nine years old, his wife, thirty-eight years, and their daughter twenty-one years, were born in Henry County, Georgia. The husband never went to school, but reads a little. The wife finished the seventh grade and the daughter the fifth grade in the rural school near their home.

They worked on a farm for shares, the man earning one dollar and the women from fifty to seventy-five cents a day for ten hours' work. Their home was a four-room cottage with a garden, and rented for five dollars a month. They owned pigs, poultry, and a cow, which with their household furniture, were worth about $800. The food that they did not raise and their clothing had to be bought from the commissary at any price the owner cared to charge.

They were members of the Missionary Baptist Church and the wife belonged to the missionary society of the church and the Household of Ruth, a secret order. Their sole recreation was attending church, except for the occasional hunting expeditions made by the husband.

Motives for coming to Chicago.—Reading in the *Atlanta Journal*, a Negro newspaper, of the wonderful industrial opportunities offered Negroes, the husband came to Chicago in February, 1917. Finding conditions satisfactory, he had his wife sell

the stock and household goods and join him here in April of the same year. He secured work at the Stock Yards, working eight hours at $3 a day. Later, he was employed by a casting company, working ten hours a day and earning $30 a week. This is his present employment and is about forty minutes' ride from his home. Both jobs were secured by his own efforts.

The family stayed in a rooming-house on East Thirtieth Street. This place catered to such an undesirable element that the wife remained in her room with their daughter all day. She thought the city too was cold, dirty, and noisy to live in. Having nothing to do and not knowing anyone, she was so lonely that she cried daily and begged her husband to put her in three rooms of their own or go back home. Because of the high cost of living, they were compelled to wait some time before they had saved enough to begin housekeeping.

Housing experience.—Their first home was on South Park Avenue. They bought about $500 worth of furniture, on which they are still paying. The wife then worked for a time at the Pullman Yards, cleaning cars at $1.50 a day for ten hours' work. Their house leaked and was damp and cold, so the family moved to another house on South Park Avenue, where they now live. The house is an old, three-story brick, containing three flats. This family occupies the first flat, which has six rooms and bath. Stoves are used for heating, and gas for light and cooking. The house is warm, but dark and poorly ventilated. Lights are used in two of the rooms during the day. The rooms open one into the other, and the interior, as well as the exterior, needs cleaning. There are a living-room, dining-room, and three bedrooms. The living-room is neatly and plainly furnished.

The daughter has married a man twenty-three years old, who migrated first to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, then to Chicago. He works at the Stock Yards. They occupy a room and use the other part of the house, paying half the rent and boarding themselves. A nephew, who was a glazier in Georgia, but who has been unable to secure work here, also boards with Mr. and Mrs. J—, paying $8 a week. He is now unemployed, but has been doing foundry work. Mrs. J— occasionally does laundry work at $4 a day.

How they live.—The cost of living includes rent $25; gas $5.40 a month; coal $18 a year; insurance $9.60 a month; clothing $500 a year; transportation $3.12 a month; church and club dues $3 a month; hairdresser $1.50 a month. Little is spent for recreation and the care of the health. The family carries insurance to the amount of $1,700, of which $1,200 is on the husband.

The meals are prepared by the wife, who also does the cleaning. Greens, potatoes, and cabbage are the chief articles of diet. Milk, eggs, cereals, and meat are also used. Meat is eaten about four times a week. Hot bread is made daily, and the dinners are usually boiled.

Relation to the community.—The whole family belongs to the Salem Baptist Church and attends twice a week. The wife is a member of the Pastor's Aid and the Willing Workers Club, also the Elk's Lodge. The husband is a member of the Knights of Pythias. He goes to the parks, bathing-beaches, and baseball games for amusement. The family spends much of its time in church and helped to establish the "Come and See" Baptist Mission at East Thirty-first Street and Cottage Grove Avenue. They have gone to a show only once or twice since they came to the city. During the summer they spend Sunday afternoons at the East Twenty-ninth Street Beach.

Heavier clothes were necessary because of the change of climate, and more fresh meat is used because of the lack of garden space and the high cost of green vegetables.

The wife thinks that northern Negroes have better manners, but are not as friendly as the colored people in the South. She says people do not visit each other, and one is never invited to dine at a friend's house. She thinks they cannot afford it with food so high. She thinks people were better in the South than they are here and says they had to be good there for they had nothing else to do but go to church.

She feels a greater freedom here because of the right to vote, the better treatment accorded by white people, the lack of "Jim Crow" laws. She likes the North because of the protection afforded by the law and the better working conditions. "You don't have an overseer always standing over you," she remarked.

Life here is harder, however, because one has to work all the time. "In the South you could rest occasionally, but here, where food is so high and one must pay cash, it is hard to come out even." The climate is colder, making it necessary to buy more clothes and coal. Rent also is very much higher here. They had to sell their two $50 Liberty bonds.

Economic sufficiency.—With all this, Mrs. J— gets more pleasure from her income because the necessities of life here were luxuries in Georgia, and though such things are dear here there is money to pay for them. Houses are more modern, but not good enough for the rent paid. They had to pay $2 more than the white family that moved out when they moved in.

Sentiments on the migration.—Mrs. J— says "some colored people have come up here and forgotten to stay close to God," hence they have "gone to destruction." She hopes that an equal chance in industry will be given to all; that more houses will be provided for the people and rent will be charged for the worth of the house; and the cost of living generally will be reduced. She does not expect to return to Georgia and is advising friends to come to Chicago.

A FACTORY HAND

In his home town in Kentucky, Mr. M— was a preacher with a small charge. Now, at the age of forty-nine, in Chicago, he works in a factory and is paid $130 a month. He has an adopted son, twenty-three years of age, who is an automobile mechanic in business for himself, drawing an income of $300 a month.

Mr. M— might still be a preacher on small salary but for the intervention of his wife. He came to Chicago about 1900. His wife came from Nashville, Tennessee, in 1902, and they were married in 1904. Mrs. M— felt that she was too independent to "live off the people" and persuaded her husband to give up the ministry. He got a job as foreman at a packing-house, where he earned $25 a week for a ten-hour day. Next he worked for the Chicago Telephone Company, and finally secured the position with a box-manufacturing company which he now holds.

Family life.—The M—s have adopted three children, having had none of their own—the adopted son already mentioned, an adopted daughter now twenty years of age, and another foster son of thirteen. The latter is in a North Side school. The girl is in a normal school in Alabama. Both Mr. and Mrs. M— completed high school. All speak good English.

Wife and husband have separate banking accounts. Living expenses for such a large family are, of course, heavy. For example, the bills for food aggregate from

cerned, but believe there should be better enforcement of the laws. They find life easier here, although there is more work to be done. They feel a great satisfaction in the more modern homes and other comforts and pleasures they are able to obtain. Each month they add a small amount to their bank account. They suggest that Negroes who have became adjusted to Chicago should take pains in a kindly spirit to inform newcomers concerning the proper deportment. They believe that if advice is offered in the right manner it will always be gladly received. They do not intend to return South.

A STOCK YARDS LABORER

A son-in-law of the B— family, also from Mississippi, is employed at the Stock Yards. His impressions throw light on the adjustment of migrants and on their views. He said:

"A friend met me when I first came to Chicago and took me to the Stock Yards and got me a job. I went to the front of the street car the first time I entered one here because my friend told me to; I would not sit beside a white person at first, but I finally got courage to do so.

"At Swift's the whites were friendly. There I was in the dry-salt department at 22½ cents an hour. The foreman, a northerner, had been there thirty-five years. He was fair to all. I worked with Americans, Poles, and Irish. But the work was very hard, and I had to leave. I carried my lunch with me. Negroes and whites there eat together when they wish. I am now working at Wilson's. The Irish and Poles are a mean class. They try to get the Negroes to join the union. When the Negroes went to work Friday after the riot, most of the Irish and Poles quit and didn't come back to work until Monday. They came back jawing because the Negroes didn't join the union. White members of the union got paid when their houses had been burned—$50 if they had families and $25 if they were single. Colored members of the union got nothing when their houses had been burned. That's why I won't join. You pay money and get nothing. The whites worked during the riot; we had to lose that time. I lost two weeks. It seemed strange to me. It looked unfair. They are still mean and 'dig ditches' for us. They go to the foreman and knock us, just trying to get us out of jobs. The foreman so far hasn't paid any attention to it. I am working in the fresh-pork department, handling boxes.

"The Negroes stick together and tend to their business. Some of the Americans and Polish are very friendly. Everybody does his own work. We use the same showers and locker-rooms. They don't want us to work because we are not in the union. One asked me yesterday to join. The Poles said non-union men would not get a raise, but we got it."

Opinions on race relations.—"When I first came I thought the city was wide open—I mean friendly and free. It seems that there is more discrimination and unfriendly feeling than I thought. I notice it at work and in public places. Wages are not increasing like the high cost of living. As soon as one gets a raise, the cost of living goes up [May, 1920].

"The whites act just as disorderly on cars as the Negroes. Monday evening two white laborers sitting beside a white woman cursed so much that I had to look around. Nothing is ever said about such incidents.

"Rent goes up whenever people think of it. We have to pay $8 more since April. Things are getting worse for us and we need to think about it. Still it is better here than in the South."

AN OLD SETTLER

Mr. S— was born in Baltimore in 1851. At the time of the gold rush to California, his father took his family and started out to seek his fortune. They had got as far as Chicago when his father was robbed and the journey ended. Mr. S— has lived here since. He has seen many changes during his sixty-three years' residence in Chicago. When he came here the city limits were Twelfth Street on the South and Chicago Avenue on the North, and there were no street cars. The Negro population was 175. His parents took him on Sunday to the Railway Chapel Sunday School, started in 1857 in two passenger cars by a Presbyterian minister, Father Kent. The first building occupied by this congregation was on the site where the Board of Trade now stands, 141 West Jackson Boulevard. This was destroyed in the fire of 1871. The second church was at the corner of State and Thirteenth streets, where the Fair warehouse now stands. The next site of the church was that of the Institutional Church at Thirty-eighth and Dearborn streets.

Early housing experience.—Prejudice, Mr. S— says, was unknown in the early days. He has lived south of Thirty-first Street for thirty-five years. They were the first Negro family to enter the block in which they now live. He built his home there and has been living there twenty years.

A BASEBALL "MAGNATE"

Mr. G— was born in La Grange, Texas, the son of a minister. As a boy he worked on his father's farm, went to school, and progressed as far as the eighth grade. He was a good baseball player. He played first in Forth Worth, Texas, then in New York and Philadelphia, and finally came to Chicago in 1907. The highest amount he had been able to earn was $9 a week. His first job in Chicago netted him about $1,000 a year. In 1910 he had acquired ownership of the team, and now, at the age of forty, it nets him $15,000 a year. His team has traveled extensively, having covered the principal cities in the United States at least twenty-five times.

Home life.—Mrs. G— was born in Sherman, Texas. She completed the first-year high school at her home. She is a modest woman and a good housekeeper. They have two children, a son of nine and a daughter of three. Mr. G— has moved four times in Chicago, seeking desirable living quarters for his family. He owns a three-story brick building containing nine rooms, the house in which he now lives. In addition he owns $7,000 worth of Liberty bonds and values his baseball team and other personal property at about $35,000.

Community participation.—Both Mr. and Mrs. G— were church members in the South. This membership is continued in Chicago. Mrs. G— belongs to an A.M.E. church and is interested in and helps support Provident Hospital and Phyllis Wheatley Home for Girls, while Mr. G— is a member of several fraternal orders, City Federation of Clubs, and the Appomattox Club. Their recreation is baseball and dancing, and they find entertainment in attending theaters and orchestra concerts principally in the "Loop." Mr. G— is very much interested now in a playground which is being established near his home and a tennis and croquet club for young people in the same vicinity.