

Journal of Negro History

(volume 4: July, 1919)

LETTERS OF NEGRO MIGRANTS OF 1916-1918

Emmett J. Scott, Compiler

p. 297

Palestine, Tex., Mar. 11th, 1917.

Sirs: this is somewhat a letter of information I am a colored Boy aged 15 years old and I am talented for an artist and I am in search of some one will Cultivate my talent I have studied Cartooning therefore I am a Cartoonist and I intend to visit Chicago this summer and I want to keep in touch with your association and too from you knowledge can a Colored boy be an artist and make a white man's salary up there I will tell you more and also send a few samples of my work when I rec an answer from you.

Topeka, Kansas, May 1st, 1917.

The Editor of The Chicago Defender.

My Dear Sir: Being a regular reader of your most valuable paper (The Defender) I am impressed with the seeming unlimited interest that paper is taking in the welfare of the army of emigrants coming from the south.

This alone without the knowledge of its incomparable service as a link in the chain that should bind our people together more closely through out the country, should demand its presence in every negro home of this country. In keeping in touch with the doings of our people in the east and northern states through the Defender. To the Majority of the Middle

western race people it seem quite improbable that opportunities for good wage earning positions such as factory work and too a chance for advancement would be given to the workers of our race.

[Pg 298]

Such conditions in this part of the country to my knowledge is rare. Noteing in the issue of last weeks paper through the investigation into certain matter concerning our people some appearantly well organized league found openings for negro workmen in some parts of Wis. and Ill. that could not be filled.

As I for one that am not satisfied to content myself with little and to remain in the same old rut for the sake of lengthy assiation and fair treatment I am making My appeal to you in your wide aquaintence with conditions to help me to take advangage of an oppertunity that I might other wise miss.

I am mechanically inclined also with the advantage of a course with the International Correspondance School in Automobile work and with several years experience. I am not afraid of any kind of work that pays.

Will kindly ask you to help me all you can at my expense and I will be very grateful to you.

Gonzales, Texas, May 28, 1917.

New York Age, New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: I wish to know if a man from the south come north, such as common laborer, stationery engineer, gasoline engineer, fireman or janitor able to care for heating plants ets. and able to pay his own way there, is there a likelihood of finding lucrative employment?

I would be plased to have you advise me on the same as myself and several other men of good morals and sober habits and who are able to bear our own expenses would like to better our conditions by coming North.

If you can advise us or Know of any one or place that we can get the desired information please give us the benefit of the same.

Find stamp enclosed for answer.

Houston, Texas, April 20, 1917.

Dear Sir: wanted to leave the South and Go and Place where a man will Be any thing Except A Ker I thought would write you for Advise As where would be a Good Place for a Comporedly young man That want to Better his Standing who has a very Promising young Family.

I am 30 years old and have Good Experence in Freight Handler and Can fill Position from Truck to Agt.

would like Chicago or Philadelphia But I dont Care where so long as I Go where a man is a man

[Pg 299]

Hopeing hear of you soon as I want to leave on or about 15 day of May I am yours as Ever.

Temple, Texas, April 29, 1917.

Mr. T. Arnold Hill, 3719 State St., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Being a reader of the Defender and young man seeking to better my conditions in the business world, I have decided to leave this State for North or West. I would like to get in touch with a person or firm that I might know where I can secure steady work. I would certainly appericate any information you might be able to give. I finished the course in Blacksmithing and horseshoeing at Prairie View College this State and took special wood working in Hampton Institute Hampton Va. Have been in practical business for several years also I am specializing auto work. I am a married man a member of the church. Thanking you in advance for any favors Am very truly

Rome, Ga., 5/16/17

Dear Sir: "Ive" just read your ad in the Chicago Definder on getting employment. So I will now ask you to do the best you can for me. Now, Mr. —, I am not a tramp by any means, I am a high class churchman and business man.

I am the Daddy of the Transfer Business in this city. And carried it on for teen years. Seven years ago I sold out to a

white Concern.

I prefer a job in a Retail furniture store if I can be placed "Ill' now name a few things that I do. Viz I can repair and Finish furniture, I am an Exspert packer & Crater of furniture, I pack China, Cut Glass & Silver ware.

I can Enamel, Grain & paint furniture. I can repair Violins, Guitars, & Mandolins, I am a first-class Umbrella Man, I can do any thing that can be do to Umbrella & parasol, I can manage a Transfer Business, I understand all about Shipping H. H. Goods & gurniture, I can make out Bills of Lading & write tags for the same.

Now if you can place me on any of these Trades it will be all O.K.

Houston Tex April., 30, 1917.

Sir: I read in the Chicago Defender April the 28 inst that you wonted men to labor in mills sir Eff you Cand Get me a joB to doo it will be Hiley orpresheAted I am A masster firman I cand handle oil or I cand Burn Cole Keep up my pumps in Good order

[Pg 300]

and i is A no. 1 masheane helper I cand doo moste eny thange around the mill and if you cand Get me a joB I Will hiley orpresheate it

And I Will Ask you to send me a pass for self and wife and when I Come take out my fare out off my work so pleas let me here from You at once I wonter com at once Cand Come recker-mended pleaS oBlige

p. 316

Jacksonville, Fla., April 29, 1917.

My dear Sir: I take grate pleazer in writing you. as I found in your Chicago Defender this morning where you are secur job for men as I realey diden no if you can get a good job for me as am a woman and a widowe with two girls and would

like to no if you can get one for me and the girls. We will do any kind of work and I would like to hear from you at once not any of us has any husbands.

Moss Point, Miss., May 5, 1917.

Dear Sirs: Will you please send me information towards a first class cookeing job or washing job I want a job as soom as you can find one for me also I want a job for three young girls ages 13 to 16 years. Pease oblidge.

[Pg 317]

New Orleans, La., May 7, 1917.

Gentlemen: I read Defender every week and see so much good youre doing for the southern people & would like to know if you do the same for me as I am thinking of coming to Chicago about the first of June, and wants a position. I have very fine references if needed. I am a widow of 28. No children, not a relative living and I can do first class work as house maid and dining room or care for invalid ladies. I am honest and neat and refined with a fairly good education. I would like a position where I could live on places because its very trying for a good girl to be out in a large city by self among strangers is why I would like a good home with good people. Trusting to hear from you.

Selma, Ala., May 19, 1917.

Dear Sir: I am a reader of the Chicago Defender I think it is one of the Most Wonderful Papers of our race printed. Sirs I am writeing to see if You all will please get me a job. And Sir I can wash dishes, wash iron nursing work in groceries and dry good stores. Just any of these I can do. Sir, who so ever you get the job from please tell them to send me a ticket and I will pay them. When I get their as I have not got enough money to pay my way. I am a girl of 17 years old and in the 8 grade at Knox Academy School. But on account of not having money enough I had to stop school. Sir I will thank you all with all my heart. May God Bless you all. Please answer in return mail.

Natchez, Miss., Oct. 5, 1917.

Dear Sir: Now I am writing you to oblige me to put my application in the papers for me please. I am a body servant or nice house maid. My hair is black and my eyes are black and smooth skin and clear and brown, good teeth and strong and good health and my weight is 136 lb.

Corinth, Miss., April 30, 1917.

Dear Sir: I am a good cook age 35 years. I can bring my recermendation with me my name is — — ——. I am in good health so I would like for you to send me a transportation I have got a daughter and baby six months old so she can nurse so I would like to come up there and get a job of some kind I can wait table

[Pg 318]

cook housegirl nurse or do any work I am ready to come just as soon as you send the passes to us I want to bring a box of quilts and a trunk of clothes so you please send us the passes for me and daughter. Write me at once I am a negro woman. We will leave her Sat. if you send the passes if you are not the man please give me some infamation to whom to write to a negro friend.

Journal of Negro History

(Volume 4: October, 1919)

ADDITIONAL LETTERS OF NEGRO MIGRANTS OF 1916-1918

[Pg 418]

Jacksonville, Fla., May 5, 1917.

Dear Sir: Kindly inform me by return mail are there any factories or concerns employing colored laborers, skilled or unskilled, the south is ringing with news from Chicago telling of the wonderful openings for colored people, and I am asking you to find the correct information whether I could get employment there or not. Please find postage enclosed for immediate reply.

Charleston, S. C., April 29, 1917.

Dear Sir: I saw your add in the Chicago Defender where you wanted laborers and I taught that this would be a grand oppotunity for me to better my present conditions so I taught I would write you and ask you would you be kind enough as to give me a job dear sir. I am a single man and would be willing to do any kind of work, dear sir would you be kind enough as to forward me a transportation and I would come write away so please do the best you can for me. There is but little down here to be gotten dear sir will you kindly grant me that favor. Hopeing to receive a favorable answer.

Greenwood, S. C., May 8, 1917.

Dear Friend: I saw in the Chicago Defender where you

waned labor. please send pass for as many men as you can are let me know what I must do to get one by return mail because I want to leave the south and go north where you get a better chance. So please answer at once.

Sumter, S. C., May 12, 1917.

Dear Sir: Could you get me a job in the — Tin Plate Factory at —, Pa. a job for (3) three also a pass from here for (3) I am a common laborer and the other are the same. If you could we will be ever so much obliged and will comply with your advertisement. If you can't get a job just where we wish to go we will thank you for a good job any where in the state of Pa. or Ohio. I am in my 50 the others are my sons just in the bloom of life and I would wish that you could find a place where we can make a living and I also wish that you could find a place where we all three can be together. If you will send us a pass we will come just as soon as I receive it. If you find a place that you can send us please let us hear what the job will pay. Nothing more. I am yours respectfully.
[Pg 419]

Carrier, Miss., May, 1917.

Please sir will you please send me transportation for me and my wife I am willing to work anywhere you put me at the rate I am going it would take me from now until Christmas to feed myself and get money enough to come with. Wages is so low and grocery is so high until all I can do is to live. Please answer soon to.

Newbern, Ala., 5-21-1917.

My dear Sir: Your letter of the 11th inst. to hand and contents noted. In reply I wish to thank you for the kind offer relative to the laides. We shall leave for New York on or before June 20th; I desire to know if it be possible to secure our transportation fare from the parties to whom they shall work? Owing to conditions (here) in the south one is hardly able to eke out an existence on the paltry salaries allowed by our white friends; therefore we need help. If you can

comply with our request, we shall be very grateful to you; & I wish to say in advance that you will not have cause to regret for whatever the charges may be we shall pay them willingly. I shall furnish the best references as to character. Now, if it be possible for us to secure our transportation, we could leave here on or before the 5th of June. We prefer coming by water as it is cheaper. I trust that I have made myself plain and that you will see your way clear to serve us.

Newbern, Ala., 4/7/1917.

Dear Sir: I am in receipt of a letter from —— of ——, ——, in regards to placing two young women of our community in positions in the North or West, as he was unable to give the above assistance he enclosed your address. We desire to know if you are in a position to put us in touch with any reliable firm or private family that desire to employ two young women; one is a teacher in the public school of this county, and has been for the past six years having duties of a mother and sister to care for she is forced to seek employment else where as labor is very cheap here. The other is a high school pupil, is capable of during the work of a private family with much credit.

Doubtless you have learned of the great exodus of our people to the north and west from this and other southern states. I wish to say that we are forced to go when one thing of a grown man wages is only fifty to seventy five cents per day for all grades of work. He is compelled to go where there is better wages and sociable conditions, believe me. When I say that many places here in this state the only thing that the black man gets is a peck of meal and from three to four lbs. of bacon per week, and he is treated as a slave. As leaders we are powerless for we dare not resent such or to show even the slightest disapproval. Only a few days ago more than 1000 people left here for the north and west. They cannot stay here. The white man is saying that you must not go but they are not doing anything by way of assisting the black man to stay. As a minister of the

Methodist Episcopal Church (north) I am on the verge of starvation simply because of the above conditions. I shall be glad to know if there is any possible way by which I could be of real service to you as director of your society. Thanking you in advance for an early reply, and for any suggestions that you may be able to offer.

With best wishes for your success, I remain,
yours.

very sincer

[Pg 420]

Brewster, Ala., Jan. 6, 1917.

Dear Sir: I am writing you enregards if work in the north I would like to came in turch with some of the leading men that wants colerd laborer and what about transportation there is a good deal of peple here wanting jobs.

Troy, Ala., 3-24-17.

Dear Sir: I received you of Feb. 17 and was very delighted to hear from you in regards of the matter in which I writen you about. I am very anxious to get to Chicago and realy believe that if I was there I would very soom be working on the position in which I writen you about. Now you can just imagine how it is with the colored man in the south. I am more than anxious to go to Chicago but have not got the necessary fund in which to pay my way and these southern white peoples are not paying a man enough for his work down here to save up enough money to leave here with. Now I am asking you for a helping hand in which to assist me in getting to Chicago. I know you can do so if you only will.

Hoping to hear from you at an early date and looking for a helping hand and also any information you choose to inform me of,

I remain as ever yours truly.

[Pg 421]

Columbia, S. C., Dec. 1, 1917.

Dear Ser: I am out of work and was inform to write you all about work in the north I am a labor and is willing to work

any where. I am in need of work very bad let me here from you at once.

Charleston, S. C., April 27, 1917.

Dear Sir: i was told by Mr. — — to rite you for one of cards as he say you got a lot of work to do in a brick yard and i am a hard working man i want to work and will work at any thing that pays so i rite to you for one of your blank so i can fill it out i dont care how soon i can get there and go to work there is no work here that pays a man to stay here so please send blank as soon as you can. Hoping to here from you soon.

Savannah, Ga., April 29, 1917.

Dear sir: I receive your letter and glad to hear from you, the reason why i wanted to come up there is for more wages, i am a man with family and works hard, but dont get sufficient wages to support my family. i does any kind of ordinary hard work such as farming or teamster or most anything, i would like to no what kind of work you got up there to do as i fell satisfied that i could please you, and also state your price that you pay, and if this application is satisfactory why ans and i am willing to come right way.

p. 457

Chicago, Illinois.

My dear Sister: I was agreeably surprised to hear from you and to hear from home. I am well and thankful to say I am doing well. The weather and everything else was a surprise to me when I came. I got here in time to attend one of the greatest revivals in the history of my life—over 500 people joined the church. We had a Holy Ghost shower. You know I like to have run wild. It was snowing some nights and if you didn't hurry you could not get standing room. Please remember me kindly to any who ask of me. The people are rushing here by the thousands and I know if you come and rent a big house you can get all the roomers you want. You

write me exactly when you are coming. I am not keeping house yet I am living with my brother and his wife. My son is in California but will be home soon. He spends his winter in California. I can get a nice place for you to stop until you can look around and see what you want. I am quite busy. I work in Swifts packing Co. in the sausage department. My daughter and I work for the same company—We get \$1.50 a day and we pack so many sausages we dont have much time to play but it is a matter of a dollar with me and I feel that God made the path and I am walking therein.

Tell your husband work is plentiful here and he wont have to loaf if he want to work. I know unless old man A—— changed it was awful with his sould and G—— also.

Well I am always glad to hear from my friends and if I can do anything to assist any of them to better their condition, please remember me to Mr. C—— and his family I will write them all as soon as I can. Well I guess I have said about enough. I will be delighted to look into your face once more in life. Pray for me for I am heaven bound. I have made too many rounds to slip now. I know you will pray for prayer is the life of any sensible man or woman. Well goodbye from your sister in Christ

P. S. My brother moved the week after I came. When you fully decide to come write me and let me know what day you expect to leave and over what road and if I dont meet you I will have some

[Pg 458]

one ther to meet you and look after you. I will send you a paper as soon as one come along they send out extras two and three times a day.

Chicago, Ill.

Dear Partner: You received a few days ago and I was indeed glad to hear from you and know that you was well. How is the old burg and all of the boys. Say partner is it true that T—— M—— was shot by a Negro Mon. It is all over the city among the people of H'burg if so let know at once so I tell the boys it true. Well so much for that. I wish you could

have been here to have been here to those games. I saw them and believe me they was worth the money I pay to see them. T. S. and I went out to see Sunday game which was 7 to 2 White Sox and I saw Saturday game 2 to 1 White Sox. Please tell J—— write that he will never see nothing as long as he stay down there behind the sun there some thing to see up here all the time, (tell old E—— B—— to go to (H——) Tell B—— he dont hafta answer my cards. How is friend Wilson Wrote him a letter in August. Tell him that all right I will see him in the funny paper. Well Partner I guess you hear a meny funey thing about Chicago. Half you hear is not true. I know B—— C—— hav tole a meny lie Whenever you here see them Pardie tell them to write to this a dress Say Pardie old H—— is moping up in his Barber shop. Guess I will come to you Boy Xmas. I must go to bed. Just in from a hard days work.
Your life long friend.

Dixon, Ill., Sept.-25-17.

Dear Sir: Time affords of writting you people now as we have raised to wages to three dollars a day for ten hours—eleven hrs. a day \$3.19 We work two wks day and two wks night—for night work \$3.90 This is steady work a year round We have been running ten years without stopping only for ten days repair. I wish you would write me at once.

Chicago, Illinois, 11/13/17.

Mr. H—— Hattiesburg, M iss.

Dear M——: Yours received sometime ago and found all well and doing well, hope you and family are well.

I got my things alright the other day and they were in good
[Pg 459]

condition. I am all fixed now and living well. I certainly appreciate what you done for us and I will remember you in the near future.

M——, old boy, I was promoted on the first of the month I was made first assistant to the head carpenter when he is out of the place I take everything in charge and was raised

to \$95. a month. You know I know my stuff.
Whats the news generally around H'burg? I should have been here 20 years ago. I just begin to feel like a man. It's a great deal of pleasure in knowing that you have got some privilege My children are going to the same school with the whites and I dont have to umble to no one. I have registered—Will vote the next election and there isnt any 'yes sir' and 'no sir'—its all yes and no and Sam and Bill. Florine says hello and would like very much to see you. All joins me in sending love to you and family. How is times there now? Answer soon, from your friend and bro.

Pittsburg, Pa., May 11, 1917.

My dear Pastor and wife: It affords me great pleasure to write you this leave me well & O. K. I hope you & sis Hayes are well & no you think I have forgotten you all but I never will how is ever body & how is the church getting along well I am in this great city & you no it cool here right now the trees are just peeping out. fruit trees are now in full bloom but its cool yet we set by big fire over night. I like the money O. K. but I like the South betterm for my Pleasure this city is too fast for me they give you big money for what you do but they charge you big things for what you get and the people are coming by cal Loads every day its just pack out the people are Begging for some whears to sta If you have a family of children & come here you can buy a house easier than you cant rent one if you rent one you have to sign up for 6 months or 12 month so you see if you dont like it you have to stay you no they pass that law becaus the People move about so much I am at a real nice place and stay right in the house of a Rve.— and family his wife is a state worker I mean a missionary she is some class own a plenty rel estate & personal Property they has a 4 story home on the mountain, Piano in the parlor, organ in the sewing room, 1 daughter and 2 sons but you no I have to pay \$2.00 per week just to sleep and pay it in advance & get meals

[Pg 460]

whear I work so I think I shall get me a place whear I work next week the lady said she would rather we stay in the house with them & give me a room up stairs than to pay so much for sleeping so she pays me eight Dols per week to feed now she says she will room me so if I dont take that offer I cant save very much I go to church some time plenty churches in this plase all kinds they have some real colored churches I have been on the Allegany Mts twice seem like I was on Baal Tower. Lisen Hayes I am here & I am going to stay ontell fall if I dont get sick its largest city I ever saw 45 miles long & equal in breath & a smoky city so many mines of all kind some places look like torment or how they say it look & some places look like Paradise in this great city my sister in law goes too far I stop here I will visit her this summer if I get a pass I cant spend no more money going further from Home I am 26 miles from my son Be sweet Excuse me for writeing on both sides I have so much to say I want to save ever line with a word and that aint the half but I have told you real facts what I have said I keps well so far & I am praying to contenance & I hope you & your dear sweet wife will pray for me & all of my sisters & Bros & give Mrs. C. my love & sis Jennie & all the rest & except a barrel ful for you and Hayes Pleas send me a letter of recommendation tell Dr., to sign & Mr. Oliver. I remain your friend.