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# Sociological Survey

of the

## Negro Population

of

Springfield, Mass.



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## Introductory Note

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The results of a sociological survey of the Negro population of Springfield recently made by the St. John's Institutional Activities are herewith submitted to the public in the hope that the information thus given may be of public service.

The motive which prompted the survey was the desire for a larger and more accurate knowledge of the social condition of Springfield Negroes as the basis of a closer adaption of the work of the St. John's Institutional Activities to the social needs of this people.

The facts and figures here given are not free from error nor do they constitute a complete record of the present general condition with which they deal. They do constitute, however, in the main, what is perhaps as accurate and faithful an index of this condition as patient and intelligent effort is able to produce.

A large part of 10 weeks was devoted by four workers to gathering and to the classification and study of the data of which this report is a partial summary.

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St. John's Congregational  
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We wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the colored people as a whole who, with few exceptions, have cordially co-operated with us in our efforts and likewise to the various departments of the city government for help and guidance in securing information from the public records in the custody of these departments.

The results of such a study, it would seem, are of more than local significance; first, because within the past five years, an epoch-making exodus of Negroes from the South has taken place, producing marked social changes among Negroes in the North; and secondly, because the situation here in Springfield is fairly typical of the general situation throughout the North.

WILLIAM N. DEBERRY,  
President St. John's Institutional Activities.

March 15, 1922.

## EDITORIAL

from the  
**Springfield Daily Republican**

January 31, 1922

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Rev. Dr. DeBerry's report on a survey of the Negro population of Springfield, which was printed in The Republican yesterday, is an important civic document which should not be passed over without thoughtful consideration. Dr. DeBerry is able as a result of the inquiry which has been carried on under his direction to take a hopeful view of the situation, and this view readers of his report will share. All things considered, the Negro is doing well in this city, and there is every promise of a still better record in the future. Such a development, however, is largely dependent upon understanding and sympathetic co-operation by people of the white race.

Springfield is particularly fortunate in having in the notable Institutional Activities of the church of which Dr. DeBerry is pastor a center for racial self-help and the development of race leaders. The large increase in the Negro population from the South has made possible the growth of business enterprises, and the encouraging tendencies, noted in the survey, toward home ownership and toward engaging in farming in suburban districts are of similar significance.

The report also calls attention to the commendable readiness of the newcomers to avail themselves of the privileges of the public schools. In all this the showing is one of initiative and progress, despite handicaps.

Dr. DeBerry presents as "vital" the question whether the improved industrial status of the Negro resulting from war conditions is to be maintained; whether he has definitely risen above being merely a "hewer of wood and drawer of water." The answer is bound up with the question of fair play. If some permanent gain has not been made a heavy burden of proof that the Negro has not shown himself competent in his wider sphere will rest upon those who deny it to him.

Undue emphasis should not be placed upon the apparent increase of crime among the Negroes of Springfield. Back of the condition are causes common to all races. Nevertheless the state of things which Dr. DeBerry points to as existing particularly in the so-called North-end section is a challenge to law-abiding citizens generally and to the law-enforcing authorities in particular. There is no sufficient reason why "prolific breeders of crime" in a small area marked by "a motley congestion of people of many races" should exist in this city.

## Sociological Survey

### Population

The number of Negroes in Springfield on January 1, 1922, was 3069 or  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the total population of the city as a whole. Of this number there were 989 men, 1077 women and 1003 children. There were 726 families, quite widely distributed throughout the city which for the convenience of our canvass was divided into three general sections or districts designated A, B, and C. District A is bounded by the Chicopee line on the North, St. James avenue on the east, the Boston & Albany railroad on the south and by Fulton street and Birnie avenue on the west. In this district there were 238 families.

District B is the territory bounded by the Boston & Albany railroad on the north, Federal, Walnut and Oakland streets on the east, Sumner avenue on the south and Pecousic avenue and Water street on the west. In this district there are 158 families.

District C, in which lives the largest number of Negroes, is bounded

by the Boston & Albany railroad on the north, Parker street on the east, Allen street and Sumner avenue on the south, and by Oakland, Walnut and Federal streets on the west. In this district there are 330 families.

It is interesting to note the rate of increase by migration in the Negro population of the city during the past 15 years.

The number coming to Springfield in the last 15 years is 1861; in the last 10 years, 1676; in the last 5 years, 1289.

According to the above, 69 per cent of all those who have migrated to Springfield in 15 years have come within the last five years, or the period of the exodus. Of the 1289 who took up their residence here during this last-named period, 992 came from the southern states.

The Negroes of Springfield represent, according to places of birth, 33 states and 9 foreign countries. The states thus represented by more than 100 persons are as follows:—

Georgia, 337; Virginia, 328; Massachusetts, 301; South Carolina, 198; North Carolina, 185; Connecticut, 102.

Of the 2066 adults, 1288 were born in the South, 659 in the North or West, 90 in foreign countries and 29 in parts unknown.

## Race Relations

Since the days of the "underground railway," of which Springfield was a station where refugee Negro slaves were harbored and aided in their flight to freedom, a cordial feeling of friendship has existed here between the two races. This friendly feeling has been fostered by the fact that so large a proportion of Springfield's Negro citizens have been men and women of very worthy character and conduct. Springfield is as free, perhaps, from racial animosities and prejudice as any other American city with as many Negro residents.

## Industrial Status

The late World war had a profound and almost revolutionary effect upon the industrial status of the Negro in the North. This status, which in the main was that of the "hewer of wood and drawer of water," had undergone little or no change during the half-century of the black man's freedom.

The industrial and economic exigencies which developed with our entering the war opened new doors of opportunity to the Negro in the North, where the sphere of his industrial activity was suddenly enlarged and varied. For the first time in the history of labor in this

section, the Negro group was permitted to rise above the restricted sphere of menial service and accorded a welcome and a place in the wider sphere of skilled and ordinary employment. Whether he will long maintain this new and more favorable position is the vital question which cannot as yet be answered. A just estimate of the possibilities involved cannot be based upon the abnormal conditions which obtain during the present industrial crisis. We must await the country's return to industrial normality before we can know whether this recent industrial advance in the North is a transient or a permanent result of the war.

The following statement of facts relating to the industrial status of the race in this city, will, nevertheless, provide interesting food for thought. At the time of our investigation, 1426 Negroes were engaged in gainful occupations in Springfield. Nine hundred and sixty-four of this number were men and 462 women.

Of the whole number 73.5 per cent were employed at either common labor or some form of menial service. The proportion of men thus employed was 70 per cent, while that of the women was 82 per cent.

The employment classification of men was as follows:—

Laborers, 345; janitors, 82; porters, 62; hotel service, 51; chauffeurs and automobile mechanics, 43; clerks, 24; elevator operators, 18; hod carriers, 17; cooks, 17; machinists, 17; painters, 15; firemen, 15; masons, 13; butlers, 12; tailors, 11; mechanics, 10; barbers, 10; carpenters, 10; clergymen, 9; musicians, 9; expressmen, 8; farmers, 8; meat packers, 7; printers, 7; watchmen, 7; proprietors of clubs, 6; managers of poolrooms, 6; students, 6; custodians, 5; furniture dealers, 5; restaurant and ice-cream, 5; caterers, 5; proprietors of lodging houses, 4; engineers, 4; mail carriers, 4; oilers, 4; molders, 4; shoemakers, 3; real estate agents, 3; foremen, 3. Paper hangers, 3; doormen, 3; blacksmiths, 3; stewards, 3; grocers, 2; employment bureaus, 2; physicians, 2; lawyers, 2; chair caners, 2; laundrymen, 2; vaudeville entertainers, 2; furniture finishers, 2; cement workers, 2; sales agents, 2; upholsterers, 2; contractors, 2; meat cutters, 2; ice-cream maker, 1; undertaker, 1; jitney business 1; postal clerk, 1; chiropodist, 1; dentist, 1; mill wright, 1; billposter, 1; patternmaker, 1; mattress maker, 1; candy maker, 1; lather, 1; case maker, 1; rug maker, 1; boiler maker, 1; canvas mender, 1; chemist, 1; grinder, 1; messenger, 1;

dry cleaner, 1; furrier, 1; harness maker, 1; air piper, 1; insurance broker, 1; steamfitter, 1; welder, 1; electrician, 1; gas maker, 1; draftsman, 1; secret service, 1; director and teacher of music, 1.

The employment classification of women was as follows:—

Domestic service, 288; laundresses, 83; dressmakers, 27; hair dressers, 10; clerks, 9; hotel service, 7; nurses, 7; elevator operators, 7; matrons, 6; office assistants, 4; caterers, 2; janitors, 2; factory workers, 2; grocer, 1; proprietor of tearoom, 1; proprietor of rooming house, 1; employment bureau, 1; vaudeville entertainer, 1; school teacher, 1; social worker, 1; usher, 1.

A growing tendency of recent years and one which deserves greater encouragement, is the tendency among colored people to secure homes and land in the suburbs and outlying country districts. These districts offer not only wholesome surroundings in which to rear children but also industrial opportunities in small farming, truck gardening and poultry raising. This tendency doubtless points the way to a partial solution of the problem of the industrial adjustment of the rapidly increasing numbers of Negroes in the North.

## Business and Professional Activity

The growth of business enterprises among Springfield Negroes is a comparatively new development. Not until the recent extraordinary increase in numbers effected by the exodus referred to above was there more than a dozen places of ordinary business among them. Today there are 51 such places maintained and operated by Negroes with varying degrees of success.

The following is the list covered during our canvass:—

Real estate (individual dealers and companies), 5; grocers, 2; barber shops, 8; second-hand furniture stores, 3; ice-cream parlors, 2; express and trucking, 6; restaurants, three; insurance brokerage, 1; sign painting, 1; carpentry and jobbing, 1; contracting mason, 1; tailoring, 3; hair dressing, 1; shoe making and repairing, 2; print shops, 2; automobile garage, 1; parking place, 1; variety store, 1; jitney transfer, 1; poolrooms, 4; catering, 1; private sanitarium, 1.

The Mutual Housing Company, organized in 1907, is the oldest co-operative enterprise engaged in the real estate business.

The Douglass Realty and Loan Company, with an authorized capital stock

of \$50,000, was organized in 1920. It has an office at 289 Main street.

A weekly newspaper, the Springfield Herald, was recently established and is published by a stock company composed of Negroes.

As in business, so in the professions, the number exclusively engaged is as yet small. But it increases steadily in proportion to the growth of the racial group. The professions are represented as follows: Lawyers, 2; physicians, 2; dentist, 1; clergymen, 9; school teacher, 1; teacher of music, 1.

### **Religious, Fraternal and Welfare Organizations**

There are six regularly organized churches with an aggregate membership of 1871. These are the Third Baptists on William street, Bethany Baptist on Eastern avenue, Mount Calvary Baptist on Auburn street, the Loring-street African Methodist Episcopal on Loring street, St. Mark's Colored Methodist Episcopal on Auburn street and St. John's Congregational at the corner of Hancock and Union streets.

There are at least three other religious missions conducted by Negroes.

Next to the churches, the fraternal and benevolent orders are to be placed

as centers of social life and interest. The oldest of these organizations, the Springfield Mutual Beneficial Association, was organized in 1864. The Sumner lodge of Free and Accepted Masons was organized in 1866 and then followed the Golden Chain Lodge of Odd Fellows in 1873.

In more recent years, the following fraternal bodies have been formed: The Elks' Lodge, the Knights of Pythias, the Good Samaritans and the Gallilean Fishermen.

The Odd Fellows own the building at 89 Oak street, a part of which is devoted to the uses of the lodge.

There are several clubs of women the activities of which are along social benevolent and literary lines. Prominent among these are the Frances E. W. Harper, the Book Lovers' and Mothers' clubs.

Among the welfare organizations are the Springfield branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People with a membership of more than 500 and the Negro Political Union. Both of these organizations exert a wide influence among the people.

There are also two institutions organized and incorporated for purely social service, but affiliated with the churches out of which they grew. The St. Mark's Community House at 47



Seventh street is conducted as a rooming house and social center for men. Other social work is carried on in connection with this House including clubs, classes and a free dental clinic.

The St. John's Institutional Activities, by which this survey was made, has its office at 643 Union street.

Organized in 1911 as the social service department of St. John's Congregational church and incorporated in 1914 as an independent welfare agency, it has acquired a national reputation for the character and scope of the work it is doing in the community. The seven departments of this work include a home for working girls and women, a night school of domestic science, a free employment bureau, a housing department providing homes for 25 families, a farm and summer recreation camp, a club house and social center for boys and young men and a department of music, making a specialty of the folk songs of the Negro people.

It has a staff of six paid workers and a yearly budget of approximately \$13,000.

Both the St. Mark's community house and the St. John's Institutional Activities are members of the Springfield Community Chest Association by which the annual budgets of some 20 or more welfare organizations of the city are provided.

## Ownership of Real Estate

The assessed valuation of real estate owned by Negroes in Springfield, exclusive of church property, as taken from the assessors' records, was on January 1, 1922, \$526,520, or a per capita ownership of \$171.

In this connection, the prejudice which has operated so often and so keenly against Negro tenants has served as an incentive to the possession of homes among them. It is this prejudice which makes the housing problem of Negroes in Springfield one of the most trying and difficult of all the problems with which they are confronted as a people.

## Negro Pupils in the Public Schools

One of the chief causes of unrest and dissatisfaction among Negroes in the South is the lack of adequate educational facilities for their children. This lack was one of the major causes of the great exodus to which frequent reference has already been made.

A common and most commendable characteristic of the Negro parents who have settled in Springfield recently is the manner in which they have availed their children of the advantages offered

by our public schools. According to the registers of the 36 city schools, which by the courtesy of the school authorities we were permitted to consult, there were in these schools in November, 1921, 574 Negro pupils. Of this number, 286 were boys and 288 girls. In the senior high schools there were 45 and in the junior high 46. The largest number of Negro pupils in any one school was found at the Hooker school, where 110 are enrolled.

Other schools with goodly enrolments of Negro pupils are as follows: Barrows school 69, East Union street, 64, Buckingham 51, Howard street 47.

The number of Negro children in the city below school age was 271. The number of school age but not in school was 158.

### **Interest in Politics**

The anomalous political plight of large numbers of Negro citizens in many parts of the southern states, where they are denied the freedom of the ballot, lends special significance to the manner in which the race exercises its political rights in the North, where a full measure of civic freedom is enjoyed.

Again the fact that the political effect of the recent movement of large numbers of Negroes to the North is one of great and far-reaching possibilities invests the study of political conditions and tendencies here with special interest. A brief review of the situation in Springfield may therefore be illuminating by way of illustration.

On January 1 of the present year, there were in Springfield, according to responses to our questionnaire, 936 registered Negro voters. Of this number, 658 were men and 278 women. The total number of voting age and unregistered was 1025, of whom 284 were men and 741 women. An intelligent interest in politics is stimulated by the leadership and activity of the Negro Political Union, an organization of men and women which devotes much time and study to political and civic affairs.

The Negro voters have seven representatives on the Republican City Committee and are well represented by precinct officers at all elections.

In wards 2, 4 and 5 the Negro vote is sufficiently strong to hold the balance of power in close contests.

### **Negro Crime**

A sociological study of any racial group would be gravely deficient which

took no cognizance of its record of crime. The facts here involved, though unpleasant to consider, must also be noted if a true picture of the conditions is to be portrayed. It is the desire to present such a picture that prompts us to make the statistics of Negro crime a part of this report.

The total number of arrests among all races in Springfield for the year ending November 30, 1921, was, according to the police blotter, 4595. Of these 275, or about 6 per cent, were arrests of Negroes. The number of arrests among Negroes the preceding year was 167 and for the year 1919 the number was 163.

According to the above, the crime rate among Negroes in Springfield increased during the past year over that of the preceding year by 64 per cent. The explanation of this excessive increase in so short a period of time is doubtless to be found, first in the extraordinary growth in numbers resulting from the recent exodus, and second, in the fact that during the same period Springfield, like other parts of the country, has been in the grip of an industrial crisis by which so many people have become the victims of enforced idleness. This crisis has been accompanied by an abnormal rate of crime the country over which has not been confined to any single group or race of people.

Fully 70 per cent of the crimes committed by Negroes in this city within the past two years have occurred in what is known as the North-end section. Within a comparatively small area of this part of the city there is a motley congestion of people of many races and here also are to be found some of the most prolific breeders of crime in the form of unspeakable resorts which draw no color line.

### Death Rate and Diseases

When during the recent exodus, Negroes from the southern states moved in such numbers to the middle North and New England, there was serious doubt whether as a group they would be able to survive the rigors of winter weather in the northern latitudes. It is interesting, therefore, to note the health record of the colored population of Springfield for the past three years, the period during which it has increased in numbers about one-third by migrant additions from the South. The average death rate for the past three years was 17 per 1000, while the rate for the last single year (1921) was only 14 per 1000.

Let us compare this record with that of Negroes throughout the country as a whole. The death rate of Negroes

throughout the registration area of the United States, according to Bulletin 8 issued by the Bureau of the Census, is about 30 per 1000. The death rate here in Springfield is therefore about one-half as great as throughout the country as a whole. The most common cause of death among Negroes here, however, is the same as elsewhere in the country, namely, tuberculosis. The toll of death from other causes is about the same in proportion as among other races.

### Conclusion

In view of its unfortunate historical background and the tremendous handicaps which have beset the path of its social evolution and progress, the Negro race in this country is worthy the meed of maximum credit and praise.

Upon the unprejudiced mind the collective effect of the facts herewith submitted will be a favorable impression of Springfield's Negro population.

If, as we believe, the situation here is typical of the conditions and outlook throughout the North, we may take courage in the faith that the future is bright with promise.