

THE NEGRO IN BUSINESS.

It is said that if you want to find out whether the farmers of the country are prosperous do not consult the reports of the prices of wheat, cotton, corn, etc., in the great metropolitan dailies, instead read the local news in the country papers.

~~and~~ If you find that the farmers are paying off mortgages, improving their homes and buying farming implements you may conclude that they are making money. I likewise find that the reports in the colored papers are a pretty good index of what the Negro is doing in business. Such reports as the following are constantly recurring in Negro papers showing what the Negro is doing in every part of the country.

"Building brick structures. Colored men of Mississippi capital saying nothing and sawing wood". Under the above, a report from Jackson, Mississippi, stated that Dr. S. D. Redmond had completed a three-story brick building with a roof garden. "The ground is being broken", said the same report, "for a new two-story brick building. This will make four brick structures adjoining on Fair^{rich} Street, all owned by Negroes."

"H. V. Cashin, the well-known Negro lawyer of Decatur, Alabama, said another report, is building a two-story office building. The lower floor will be rented for stores, while the second floor will be occupied by Mr. Cashin as a law office." Says still another report, "The good colored people of Ocala, Florida, have two institutions of which they are proud: the Metropolitan Bank and the Metropolitan Realty Company. Each has a paid-in capital of \$25,000. These companies are housed in a beautiful three-story building owned by the bank."

I find that Negro business in Boston is greatly on the increase. Mr. John Daniels in his recent book, "A Study of the Boston Negro", after a careful investigation of Negro businesses says that their number is rapidly increasing. In the several Negro districts where ten years ago there were not more than 25 or 50 of these places there are today, exclusive of lodging houses, close to 150; while tucked in here and there in predominantly white neighborhoods are still others, probably half a hundred. The total number of Negro business places for Boston proper is thus about 250. In Cambridge there are at least fifty more and in the other suburbs an

equal number which brings the entire number for Greater Boston up to 300 or above. Although the majority of these businesses are small, a number of them are of good sized proportions. There are two good sized livery stables, one connected with a large undertaking business in the principal Negro section; the other is situated in the select Fenway District and has mostly a white trade. A downtown photograph studio owned by a Negro is also largely patronized by white people. There are a number of high grade tailor shops conducted by Negroes. The largest wig manufactory in New England is owned by Mr. Gilbert C. Harris on Washington Street. Mr. Harris came to Boston from Virginia in 1892 and found employment in a hair working shop. After his employer died he took over the business himself. He supplies all the wigs for the Castle Square and Bowdoin Square Stock Companies and a large proportion of those used by the well known producer, Henry W. Savage. He also has a large mail order trade. Mr. Harris owns his home and several other pieces of property.

The majority of the Negro merchants of Boston are owners of small grocery stores. One out of every half-dozen of these businesses, however, is of substantial proportions. On Shawmut Avenue is the wholesale and retail grocery store of Goode, Dunson & Henry. This is a concern that has grown gradually to its present size from small beginnings. It is an example of a specialized business conducted by Negroes that is able to compete with white firms successfully, not only for Negro trade but also for that of the white residents of that district. Through its wholesale department it supplies many of the small Negro grocery stores.

I find that the Negroes of Boston are branching into many lines of business. There is one man who has built up a good sized trade in new and second-hand furniture. Another is an importer of books. There are some dozen or more stationery and news shops. I understand that the longest established and best paying one is located on Howard Street in the West End. Boston has one Negro cigar manufacturer who is doing a prosperous business. Two years ago it was felt that there was opportunity in Boston for a Negro bank so the Eureka Banking Company was organized.

Undertaking is a business in which Negroes are succeeding in all parts of the country. The leading colored undertaker of Boston is Mr. Basil F. Hutchins. A

noteworthy thing about his business is that it has been built up almost entirely within racial lines. His main establishment is located in the midst of one of the principal Negro residence sections. He has a branch establishment in Cambridge and agents in other sections. He is the proprietor of one of the livery stables already mentioned and is one of Boston's leading Negro property owners.

Another indication of the progress that the Negro is making in business is the rise of the Negro real estate dealer. I frequently find such reports in colored papers as the following from Morrisville, New Jersey: "The biggest real estate deal ever consummated here was closed last week. John W. Lewis, the colored real estate dealer, sold and contracted to build twelve houses which represented \$23,000. He also closed another deal in which he sold ten houses for \$21,000. He has plans for the erection of thirty new houses". William D. Neighbors of Chicago is an example of the successful young real estate dealer. Starting a few years ago with very little capital, he is now doing a real estate business of several hundred thousand dollars a year, is the owner of a newspaper and is the cashier of the American Bank.

Mr. J. H. Blodgett, contractor and builder, of Jacksonville, Florida, started business in that city twenty years ago with a capital of \$1.10. He now pays more taxes than any Negro in Florida. The remarkable thing is that Mr. Blodgett has never built a house for any body but himself. He deals almost entirely in houses for rent. He has built since 1902 over 230 houses in Jacksonville. He now owns, I understand, 121 houses, the rents of which amount to over \$2,500 a month.

In Boston and vicinity are a number of successful real estate dealers. One of these is Mr. Robert F. Coursey. He came to Boston some years ago from Canada and began work for a drug firm at \$8.00 per week. Later he did janitor work. Out of his savings he began to invest in real estate. He has been so successful that all his time is now required to give attention to his holdings. In speaking of his success, Mr. Coursey says: "In 1899, I went over my accounts and found that I had a balance to my credit of \$11,000. I bought my second house and a few months later mortgaged them both and purchased the third. This one I made into flats which made a fair percentage on the investment. I now began to realize that my capital was growing rapidly. Dur-

ing all of this time I still continued part of my janitor work, four years later buying my fourth house. This I also converted into flats and two years later invested in my fifth house valued at \$8,000. A year and a half later I made my sixth purchase consisting of two four-story apartment houses assessed for \$13,000. Very recently I made my seventh investment valued at \$8,000. I find that I am paying taxes on nearly \$50,000 worth of property."

The largest property owner of all the colored people of Greater Boston is Theodore Raymond, the real estate dealer of Cambridge. He is credited, I understand, on the Cambridge tax records with real property to the assessed value of \$190,000.

The third largest individual tax payer in Brockton, Massachusetts, is Mr. Watt Terry, the colored real estate dealer of that city. On December 18, 1913, the Brockton Times published the following statement in its news columns: "Mr. Watt Terry, of Main Street, real estate dealer, is Brockton's third largest individual tax payer, his assessment being exceeded only by that of George E. Keith and Ex-governor W. L. Douglas. Mr. Terry is assessed on \$475,400 valuation in real estate. He pays a tax of \$10,166.40 on forty-six parcels of real estate and personal property. His name was inadvertently omitted Wednesday from the Times' list of heavy tax payers." The Mr. George E. Keith here referred to is the managing director of the Walkover Shoe Company, and Ex-governor W. L. Douglas is at the head of the W. L. Douglas Shoe Company, well known throughout the country. Mr. Terry came to Brockton thirteen years ago with a capital, so he says, of 15¢. He worked a while as coachman, and then succeeded in getting a position as assistant janitor for the Young Men's Christian Association building. He then tried railroad portering for a few weeks, after which he secured a position in one of the Brockton shoe factories. While working here he became interested in making real estate deals. One day a fellow workman asked him if he knew where he could buy a piece of property for a home. Mr. Terry happened to know that another man had a piece of property for sale. In this way he began his career as a real estate dealer.

Fourteen year ago the thoughtful members of the race began to see the need of an organization that would bring together for consultation the colored people that were

engaged in business. At the same time they would secure information and inspiration from each other. In the year 1900, a number of colored men called a meeting at Boston of the Negro business men of the United States and organized the National Negro Business Men's League. I had already learned in my travels about the country that in almost every town and city, North and South, there were numbers of colored men engaged in business of some sort--many of them conducted drug stores, others were engaged in a small way in merchandizing; a number had been successful as real estate dealers and in this way were aiding and encouraging the members of the race to save their earnings and buy homes. As I was already convinced that what the members of my race most needed was to learn the lessons of thrift, get property and become a fixed, settled and dependable element in the communities in which they lived, I made up my mind, therefore, that an organization that would encourage and direct the progress of the race in these fundamental matters was necessary.

To state in another way, the object of this organization of business men and women is to bring together annually those of our race who are engaged in various branches of business, from the humblest to the highest, for the purpose of closer personal acquaintance, of receiving encouragement, inspiration and information from each other. Another object was to organize which local business organizations would be formed in all par try and these organizations made to serve the best interests of the race. Each year a national gathering of men and women engaged in business matters is held in some section of the country. At these meetings the successful business men and women are brought forward and given an opportunity to tell the story of their success. This serves as an inspiration to other persons and also gives some idea of the methods by which these persons have achieved success. Another thing accomplished is the bringing of these persons before the general public so that all may know something about the success of the Negro in business.

Under the direction of the National Negro Business League something like 500 local business leagues have been established in different parts of the country. In several states, state organizations have been formed. These local and state business leagues are greatly aiding and stimulating industry and thrift among the masses of my

race. When the National Negro Business League was organized in Boston, a canvass of the situation was made and it was found that in all the country there were but two banks owned and operated by Negroes. At the present time there are sixty-two such institutions, together with a large number of building, loan, and other kinds of saving organizations. These banks are capitalized at about \$1,600,000. They do an annual business of about \$20,000,000. The National Bankers Association is an auxiliary of the National Negro Business League and meets at the same time and place that the League does. Other organizations that have been established in connection with the Business League and as a result of its stimulation are: the National Association of Funeral Directors, the National Association of Negro Insurance Companies, the National Negro Bar Association, and the National Negro Press Association. All of these organizations have tended to greatly stimulate Negro business.

The past fourteen years have witnessed a greater development of Negro business than any time since emancipation. One of the striking features of the development of Negro businesses during this period has been the assembling of considerable sums of money. This has been done through the Negro banks, the insurance companies, and also through the secret societies. The latter are using much of their surplus money for business purposes. I understand that the New Haven, Connecticut, lodge of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows has recently erected in that city a \$40,000 lodge and business building. The Mosaic Templars, with headquarters at Little Rock, Arkansas, is another example of an Order that is using their surplus money for business purposes. In October of last year, this Order dedicated at Little Rock, Arkansas, a \$60,000 four-story office building and auditorium. In April, 1913, the Negro Odd Fellows of Georgia had at Atlanta the formal opening of their \$110,000 six-story office building. On an adjoining lot the order immediately began the erection of a \$100,000 auditorium and business building. It was dedicated April 14, 1914.

Insurance is another large field of Negro business endeavor. When the National Negro Business League met at Philadelphia last year the National organization of Negro insurance companies was effected. The twenty-two companies represented there had \$640,000 in assets and \$10,000,000 in risks which were in force. The Standard

Life Insurance Company with headquarters at Atlanta was the first old legal reserve life insurance company organized by colored men to write colored risks exclusively. The remarkable thing about the Standard Life is that by means of subscriptions from a comparatively small number of well-to-do Negroes the company was able to begin business with a paid-in capital of \$100,000, which amount was deposited with the Insurance Commission of the State of Georgia. This company is now operating in four states, namely: Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky; and has, I understand, applied for admission to Texas.

I find that each year Negroes are conducting larger and better organized businesses. Mr. H. S. Ferguson of St. Louis, Missouri, is an example of what the Negro can do in the restaurant business. I understand that he started in 1904 with a small restaurant and a cook. Now he has in St. Louis a string of well-equipped restaurants in which more than fifty persons are employed. The Windham Brothers, general contractors of Birmingham, Alabama, illustrate how a Negro may succeed in the building trades. The contracts of this firm, so I understand, amount to something between \$250,000 and \$300,000 a year. On an average the firm employs 100 men all the year round.

According to the Atlanta Constitution, the largest, finest, and most sanitary barber shop in the world is the Herndon Crystal Palace Barber Shop of this city. It is owned and operated by A. F. Herndon, a wealthy Negro. Mr. Herndon has operated a barber shop in Atlanta thirty-one years. He is also the president of the Atlanta Mutual Life Insurance Company which gives employment to some 500 persons and does about a quarter of a million dollars worth of business a year.

A number of Negro women are successfully conducting businesses and accumulating wealth. One of the most successful of these is Mrs. C. J. Walker of Indianapolis, Indiana, dealer in hair goods. Mrs. Walker's income from her business, I understand, is some \$35,000 a year.

Mr. C. W. Gilliam, of Okolona, Mississippi, is an example of the many successful Negro business men in the small towns. He started in business in 1893 as a grocer using the front part of his house for a store and the back for a dwelling to save rent.

One by one he added other merchandise to his stock, a few samples of dry goods here, a shelf of hardware there. Then the little store got too small, not only for dwelling and store, but for store alone. Up went a little department store 28 x 80 feet, a building with beautiful interior, finished metal ceiling, lighted by electricity. He employs six clerks and pays them from \$15 to \$30 a week. He runs a soda fountain, boot and shoe department, dry goods and hardware department, and carries ready made clothing for men and women.

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In closing this article I want to refer to another way ~~that~~ ^{business} Negroes are demonstrating their ability--the establishment of towns. There are throughout the country a number of exclusively Negro towns. The two most noted are Boley, Oklahoma, and Mound Bayou, Mississippi. The former which was established in 1903 is situated in the center of a rich farming country that is owned largely by Negroes. It is a growing town. Its population, including the immediate community, is some 4,000. It has a bank with a capital and surplus of \$11,500 and deposits, \$75,800. ~~There are in~~ ^{has} ~~the~~ town 25 grocery stores, a hotel, 7 restaurants, 4 drug stores, 4 cotton gins ranging in value from \$8,000 to \$15,000, a bottling works, a steam laundry, 2 newspapers, 2 hardware stores, a jewelry store, 4 general stores, 2 livery stables, 2 undertaking establishments, a lumber yard, and a bakery. There are in the town some four or five miles of paved sidewalks, a water works system valued at \$35,000, an electric light plant worth \$20,000, two industrial schools, a public high school and a public elementary school.

Mound Bayou, the most famous of all the Negro towns, was started about 1890 by Isaiah T. Montgomery, who had been a slave of Joseph Davis, a brother of the president of the Confederacy. The town is situated in the center of the Yazoo Mississippi delta on the main line of the Illinois Central Railway, about midway between Vicksburg and Memphis. It has a population of about 1,000 and is the center of an exclusively Negro colony of some 4,000 persons, the members of which own about 30,000 acres of land, which for the most part is cut up into farms containing from 40 to 80 acres. No white man has ever lived in this community since it was established except the man who introduced the telephone system and he remained only long enough to teach

some of the townspeople how to manage the exchange. There are some twenty stores and a number of small shops in the town which do an annual business of about a million dollars a year. The express business at Mound Bayou amounts to over \$250 a month. The railroad station is the tenth in importance between Memphis and Vicksburg. According to a writer in the Planters' Journal, the railroad traffic amounts to over \$40,000 a year. There are six churches and three schools in the town.

The business interests of the town and community center in the Bank of Mound Bayou organized March, 1904, with a capital stock of \$10,000. Since that time the bank has grown and has become an important business factor in that section of Mississippi. It now counts among its correspondents, banks in Vicksburg, Memphis, and Louisville, together with the National Bank of Commerce of St. Louis and the National Reserve Bank of the City of New York. An officer of the former institution, Mr. Eugene Snowden, in a letter to me referring to this and another Negro bank writes: "It has been my pleasure to lend them \$30,000 a year and their business has been handled to my entire satisfaction".

The most remarkable business achievement in Mound Bayou is the \$100,000 oil mill. The enterprise is the result of the efforts of the Mississippi State Negro Business League to build in the heart of the South a constructive industrial enterprise. It stands as a testimonial to the increasing ability of the Negro along business lines.