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1900

The “National Negro Business League” is established

In southern states many African Americans lived in poverty as sharecroppers who did not own their own land. African Americans were limited in their career opportunities because of inadequate education, racism, and white competition. They were excluded from white owned businesses and unions. Salaried positions and trade work were often reserved for white men and European immigrants. African Americans were then forced to stay in the service industry unable to find employment elsewhere. 33 percent of African American men worked as servants or waiters as did over 50 percent of all African American women. Another 20 percent of men were employed as laborers, while the same percent of women worked as laundresses.

To create more opportunities, Booker T. Washington established the “National Negro Business League” that encouraged blacks to open their own businesses and employ other African Americans. This “League” allowed skilled blacks to be recognized for their talents.

¹ Educated African American men and women posed for a portrait.
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-124916]

² Laundress was an available job for many African American women.
Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

³ African American men were often employed as street sweepers or shoe shiners in the city.
Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

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Credits:

Crew, Spencer R. *Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915 – 1940*. Washington, D.C.:
Smithsonian Institution, 1987.

Franklin John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

Keywords/Topics:

Business, Work/Jobs

Questions:

1. What obstacles limited career opportunities for African Americans?
2. How did African Americans overcome these obstacles?
3. What types of jobs were available to African Americans?

Links to Internet Websites:

www.inmotionaame.org

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=443

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Negro_Business_League

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Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, [LC-USZ62-124916]

The “National Negro Business League” helped educated African Americans find employment in the fields of their choice. Often blacks were forced to open their own business as a means of employment or to employ other African Americans. This image is from the collection of W.E.B. Du Bois, showing a group posed for a Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900.

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Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

Women often washed clothes to supplement their family income. The women in this photograph appear to be taking a break from hanging clothes. Most African American women found employment as laundresses, housekeepers, or nannies.

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Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

Blacks were given the lowest and most menial jobs. Street sweeping was boring and dirty but many African American men did not have the opportunity to get better jobs.