



1



2



3

1900

Career opportunities for African Americans

African Americans were limited in their career opportunities because of inadequate education, racism, and white competition. 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 for themselves, they established a “Negro Business Enterprise” that encouraged blacks to open their own businesses and employ other African Americans. This “Enterprise” allowed skilled blacks to be recognized for their talents.

¹ Laundress was an available job for many African American women.
Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

² African American men were often employed as street sweepers or shoe shiners in the city.
Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

³ African American Shoe Shiners
Library of Congress, George Grantham Bain Collection

1900 Career opportunities for African Americans

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?
4. Where blacks unskilled or were they not given opportunities to prove themselves?

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

1900 Career opportunities for African Americans



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, and nannies.

1900 Career opportunities for African Americans



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.

1900 Career opportunities for African Americans



Library of Congress, George Grantham Bain Collection

Here two young children get their shoes shined by an older African American man. The pay a shoe shiner received was as menial as the job itself. Ironically, the official title of shoe shiner in this photograph would have been “shoeshine boy”.