

So Few Undesirables

Race, Residence, and Occupation in Sioux City, 1890–1925

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Sioux City is the metropolis of the northwest where the farmer, the rancher and the captain of industry join hands to make a market for the world's greatest agricultural region. The city has a population of 86,000, over 96 percent of whom are white. The foreign element, composed for the most part of Scandinavians and British subjects, form a stable class of citizens, hardworking and thrifty. Perhaps no other city the size of Sioux City has so few undesirables.¹

THIS BOAST in the 1924 *Sioux City Directory* was part of a long tradition of boosterism in Sioux City. Sioux City boosters in the nineteenth century took pride in building elaborate corn palaces and hosting the "World Series of 1891," when the Sioux City Huskers defeated the Chicago Colts, four games to two. Meanwhile, a very real economic boom had provided the economic basis for a population surge of mostly native-born whites, from 19,000 in 1885 to a purported 50,000 in 1893.²

I am indebted to my friends who made suggestions helpful in researching and writing this article—Scott Sorensen, Marvin Bergman, and Vicki Page—and to my wife, Cheryl, and my son, Justin, for their assistance with the graphs and statistical information.

1. R. L. Polk & Co., *Sioux City Directory*, 1924, 7; see also *ibid.*, 1927, 2.
2. Scott Sorensen and B. Paul Chicoine, *Sioux City: A Pictorial History* (Sioux City, 1982), chaps. 4 and 5; William Silag, "A Mercantile History of Sioux City in the 1880s," *Palimpsest* 65 (January/February 1984), 26–32; Chester H. Kirby, "The World's Series of 1891," *Palimpsest* 3 (November 1922), 364–73; J. E. B. [John Ely Briggs], "Depression of 1893," *Palimpsest* 3 (October 1922), 343–44.

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The depression of 1893 interrupted the boom, and the Sioux City economy languished until the beginning of the twentieth century, when a new boom christened Sioux City "Little Chicago" in the West. Local promoters hoped to ride to prosperity aboard the increasing number of railroad cars carrying freshly dressed meat from the "Big Three" packinghouses: Cudahy, Armour, and Swift. By the 1920s the packinghouses employed two thousand workers and processed more than three hundred carloads of hogs, cattle, and sheep daily.³

The possibility of jobs in the packinghouses attracted blacks as well as "new" immigrants to Sioux City, especially during and after World War I. Yet Sioux City boosters in the mid-1920s remained proud that their city had "so few undesirables." By that time the city's white population, borrowing from the example of race relations in the South, had formed definite ideas about who they considered undesirable.

In the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, northern whites and blacks sought to define, and thereafter maintain, their relative positions within northern communities. The terms of the definitions had been set by the southern experience in the wake of Reconstruction. Historian Joel Williamson has organized southern white attitudes toward blacks into three general categories. "Radicals" were especially prominent in the South during the first two decades of the twentieth century. For them, the "new" Negro, freed from the restrictions of slavery at the end of the Civil War, was retrogressing rapidly toward his natural state of savagery and bestiality. Radicals wanted only complete separation of whites and blacks. "Liberals" were more willing to accept blacks as part of white society even though they were unsure of the blacks' potential for contributing to society. But Liberals were vastly outnumbered by "Conservatives" or "Moderates." Conservatives, according to Williamson, "always began, proceeded, and ended upon the assumption of Negro inferiority. The Negro problem for Conservatives was simply a matter of defining the nature of Negro inferiority and of accommodating society thereto." Liberals and Moderates objected to Radical

3. H. H. McCarty and C. W. Thompson, *Meat Packing in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1933), chap. 11, "Sioux City."

purveyors of the image of the Negro as beast; they thought Radicals tended to whip the masses into frenzies of racial hatred that endangered the foundations of the social fabric. Although they failed to change popular opinion in the South, Liberals and Moderates did exercise some restraining influence on Radical influence in the North.⁴

Northern whites, including those in Sioux City, adopted the Moderate consensus that developed in the late nineteenth century. Sioux City whites dissented from the extreme manifestations of Negrophobia, but few of them questioned the assumption that blacks were inferior to whites or that they should remain separate. While whites maintained a relatively strict color line regarding relationships, occupations, and residential areas, they still regarded their relationships with black people as more just and progressive than southern race relations. But since Sioux City blacks found opportunities for employment in a limited variety of jobs requiring little or no experience or skill and low on the scale of socioeconomic status, and since blacks lived in well defined sections of town, it is not surprising that the white community's psychological and physical fences became more firmly fixed in the first quarter of the twentieth century despite periodic challenges to the prevailing Moderate consensus.

WHITES AND BLACKS who moved to Sioux City at the end of the nineteenth century brought Jim Crow arrangements with them on the steamboats and railroads that transported them to the city. Blacks, in small numbers during the 1870s and 1880s, had first settled in the lower-priced, multioccupancy dwellings near the Missouri River and railroad tracks, and most blacks had found employment as porters and laborers in downtown businesses.⁵ Despite Sioux City's rapid population increase in

4. Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York, 1984), 6. Williamson used the terms *Conservative* and *Moderate* interchangeably; I have elected to use the term *Moderate* to label the Sioux City consensus.

5. The residential and occupational classification system used throughout this article relies on the system developed by Alba M. Edwards. In 1937 he compiled the *Alphabetical Index of Occupations by Industries and Social-Economic Groups* used by the Bureau of the Census. Dr. Vicki Page and I used

the late 1880s, its black population remained small, and by 1910 white Moderates, with the acquiescence of a black elite class, easily settled into the established pattern of northern race relations.⁶

Black laborers provided strong arms and backs for much of the labor in Sioux City's turn-of-the-century development. The city brought in nearly five hundred blacks to build boardwalks, spread asphalt for streets, and lay the city's pipelines. One black laborer, Cass Davis, became known to Sioux City whites as "the waterman" because he hauled water from the Missouri River to sell.⁷

Early white chroniclers of blacks in Sioux City ascribed the "happy ducky" stereotype of the plantation Negro to these late nineteenth-century black laborers. New Deal Works Progress Administration historian S. E. Gilbert, in "The History of the Negro in Sioux City from 1855 to 1900," for example, described black laborers who sang "Negro melodies" and exclaimed "Hot

this index to record the occupation of every black resident (designated by a lowercase "c" following their names) listed in the *Sioux City Directory* from 1876 to 1925. We also recorded the place of residence of all of the 4,234 entries. With the aid of a computer, we were able to amass data on occupation and residence year by year throughout this half-century.

6. Sioux City's black population was small throughout the period, but so was the pre-World War I black population of other northern cities; as late as 1910 Chicago's black population was only 2 percent of the total population, Detroit's was 1.2 percent, and Cleveland's was 1.5 percent. See Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago, 1967); David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, IL, 1973); and Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana, IL, 1976). Kusmer maintains that the ghettos and racist conditions prevalent in New York and Chicago were not typical of other American cities. Ghettos came into existence only after turn-of-the-century racism provided new definitions and approaches to racial relations. Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1969), reprinted from the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 46 (January 1948), 3-90, argues that although blacks formed separate institutions in Des Moines, "There was no distinct Negro residential district until after the turn of the century" (48-50). According to Earl Raab and Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Prejudicial Society," in Gary T. Marx, ed., *Racial Conflict: Tension and Change in American Society* (Boston, 1971), 37, where blacks and whites lived in close proximity and had more than casual contacts on a daily basis, whites were more likely to hold blacks in higher esteem.

7. S. E. Gilbert, "The History of the Negro in Sioux City from 1855 to 1900," Blacks in Iowa Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

Dog" as they dumped and spread load after load of hot asphalt for the streets. They "worked away with that human expression of happiness for which the race is noted. . . . Everybody enjoyed the sight."⁸

By the turn of the century these laborers, along with other unskilled workers, especially domestics and service workers, constituted 92.6 percent of the black labor force. They also made up the vast middle level of the socioeconomic hierarchy within the small black subcommunity that thrived near the downtown business district. Below them on the socioeconomic scale was a group of black outcasts, some living just marginally within the law. This group included prostitutes, 13.1 percent of whom were black women.⁹

Gradually, black businesses, such as barber shops, carpet-cleaning establishments, laundries, dance halls, restaurants, and gambling houses, developed and flourished within the downtown business district. The businessmen and small-scale entrepreneurs who operated these establishments, along with other "better quality" folk, such as clergy and other profession-

8. Ibid.

9. In addition to the books by Spear, Katzman, and Kusmer cited in note 6 above, a number of other studies of black subcommunities in northern cities provide points of reference for the study of blacks in Sioux City. See especially John Bodnar, Michael Weber, and Roger Simon, "Migration, Kinship, and Urban Adjustment: Blacks and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1930," *Journal of American History* 66 (December 1979), 548-65; David A. Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line, 1860-1915* (Urbana, IL, 1976); Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York, 1963); The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago, 1922); John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana, IL, 1982); James E. DeVries, *Race and Kinship in a Midwestern Town: The Black Experience in Monroe, Michigan, 1900-1915* (Urbana, IL, 1984). The most recent and comprehensive study of Packingtown in Chicago is James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Urbana, IL, 1987); see especially 47-51, 54-58. Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana, IL, 1985), offers a fine historiographical essay, "Afro-American Urban History: A Critique of the Literature," in which he notes that recent studies of black urban life acknowledge the importance of occupational status and class structure in their analyses. He observes (276) that "questions of economic and class relations" offer greater insight into black urban life than seeing blacks merely as victimized ghetto residents.

als, and those who had better paying jobs as laborers, exemplified the elite within the black community. Black entrepreneur Henry Riding, for example, whose hotel on Second Street near the Northwestern Depot became the local residence for many black laborers, eventually accumulated enough wealth from his hotel to purchase most of the downtown property north of the river road in the vicinity of the West Hotel on Nebraska Street. This black elite, few in number and occupying low socioeconomic status in comparison to whites, maintained the traditionally established rapport with whites in Sioux City either through integrated contacts with whites, or through white business patronage.¹⁰

For some of the same reasons, successful black barbers also secured prestige among the black elite of the late nineteenth century and cemented the traditional relationship with the white community. The barbershop of Sam Beecham, George Pidgin, and "Big Lou" Cloyd, for instance, lured clients with a cunningly worded advertisement: "Pedal teguments lubricated and artistically illuminated for the infinitesimal remuneration of 10 cents per operation" (shoe shines 10 cents). Patrons, appreciative of a barber's light touch and the repartee many barbers became famous for, applied the special nickname "professor" to master barbers. Professor Tom Wright's twelve-chair well-equipped barber shop employed both black and white barbers; and Professor W. E. Gibson, "whose father was said to have been one of the judges of the Supreme Court in the state of Pennsylvania and a barber by trade," had a reputation for being a powerful orator and leader in the black community.¹¹

By the early years of the twentieth century, the established black residents downtown and along West Seventh Street became increasingly protective of their position within the

10. Gilbert, "The History of the Negro." The coal-mining community of Buxton, in southeast Iowa, with its large black population, provides an example of black entrepreneurial activity and leadership. See Stephen H. Rye, "Buxton: Black Metropolis of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 41 (Spring 1972), 947; and Dorothy Schwieder, Joseph Hraba, and Elmer Schwieder, *Buxton: Work and Racial Equality in a Coal Mining Community* (Ames, 1987).

11. Gilbert, "The History of the Negro"; Iowa Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration, *Woodbury County History* (Sioux City, 1942), 111. See also David Gordon Nielson, *Black Ethos: Northern Urban Negro Life and Thought, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT, 1977), 54.

larger community, and the black elite joined their white counterparts in generally avoiding any development that threatened to upset the established Moderate consensus based on acceptance of segregation. When the black community gathered on January 1, 1909, to celebrate the anniversary of the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, for example, prominent black spokesperson J. W. Norris called for maintenance of the city's Jim Crow arrangements. "The colored people cannot command the respect of the whites unless first proving themselves worthy," he said, "and they cannot prove themselves worthy unless they are segregated."¹²

Sioux City's vocal spokesperson for amalgamation of the races, Rev. J. Cornelius Reid, provided additional reinforcement for the Moderate consensus even as he prepared to leave the community. Reid had arrived in Sioux City in 1906 to serve as pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church. In 1908 he established and edited the *Afro-American Advance*, the only black newspaper in Sioux City between 1902 and 1928. By the end of the next year, however, financial and factional disputes within his congregation forced him to resign. In his farewell sermon he advised his congregation "to cultivate a more friendly relationship with those white citizens who show themselves friendly and desire to help those among us who are willing to help themselves. I shall ever remember the staunch [*sic*] friends I have made among the substantial element of this city regardless of creed or race." He thanked "the white citizens for their generous support of my administration, especially the business men, press and ministers of the gospel."¹³

12. *Sioux City Journal*, 2 January 1909.

13. *Sioux City Journal*, 6 December 1909. In March 1910 Reid assumed the pulpit of the Second Baptist Church of Ottumwa, Iowa, where the black population was more than two thousand, and where racial tension was more strained than in Sioux City due to a recent lynching. But he maintained the policy of accommodation that he had pursued in Sioux City. Shortly after his appointment Reid observed that "the recent unfortunate occurrence of one of my race in Ottumwa is still remembered with unwholesome effect. My aim will be to keep the better side of the negro people before the public." *Sioux City Journal*, 18 March 1910. Unfortunately, neither Reid's *Afro-American Advance* (1908-1912) nor the *Searchlight* (1899-1902), the other black Sioux City newspaper from the period, have survived; they would undoubtedly provide invaluable insights on race relations in Sioux City.

One other incident symbolized the triumph of the Moderate accommodationist philosophy in Sioux City. On March 10, 1911, Booker T. Washington visited Sioux City and gave a lecture under the auspices of the Northwestern Iowa Teachers' Association. In his two-hour address heard by "a cosmopolitan audience" of approximately 2,600 people, Washington reasserted his familiar theme that "one of the most striking facts of negro progress is what he is doing for his own educational improvement." A *Journal* editorial subsequently praised Washington as "a prophet out of the wilderness" who provided support for the key to the race question in America.¹⁴

The social behavior as well as the rhetoric of Sioux City's black leaders illustrated their acceptance of the Moderate consensus. Successful in business or professional life and sensitive about black customs that accentuated their differences from whites, this black elite emulated the language, dress, goals, and, ultimately, values of their northern white counterparts. G. C. "Papa" Carr, for instance, owned a hotel in the heart of downtown, and "his plug hat, slick clothes, polished shoes, button hole bouquet and genteel actions" were recognized by white historians as being among "the colorful features of the early days."¹⁵

Newly arrived southern blacks, less bound by established imperatives of interracial etiquette, represented a threat to the established black community no less than they did to the white community. Rev. Reid appealed repeatedly to white authorities to respect the rights of "respectable colored people," or "colored men of character." When he moved to Ottumwa in 1910, he reaffirmed his aim "to keep the *better side* of the negro people before the public."¹⁶ If the black elite feared that less "respectable" blacks—the new migrants from the South—might poison their relatively comfortable relations with the white community, however, they possessed little power to act on their fears.

14. *Sioux City Journal*, 11, 12 March 1911. Washington had received approval from the *Journal* as early as 28 March 1900. Washington visited Buxton, Iowa, in 1902. See Mrs. Kingsbury, "The Negroes in the River Towns," 20, Blacks in Iowa Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

15. Gilbert, "The History of the Negro."

16. *Sioux City Journal*, 24 February 1907, 18 March 1910 (emphasis added).



An elegantly dressed black man poses alongside a city bus in front of the Hotel Garretson, c. 1890. Courtesy of SCPM.

The white community, of course, faced no such limitations. When local authorities arrested Wesley Jenkins, a black migrant from the South, and charged him with stealing a counter, Jenkins told the judge that “cops picked on poor Negroes.” The *Journal* recorded his story with a typical rendering of black dialect.

Ah didn't steal no countah, jedge, . . . Ah was jes' pursuin' mah way peacefully when Ah sees dis boahd. It wasn't no countah, it was jes' a long boahd dat looked lik' a countah. Ah saw it blockin' up de street an' thought Ah'd jes remove the obstrucshun. Ah was walkin' home wid dat boahd—not a countah, youah honah—on mah shouldah, when dese coppers spotted me. Dey made me right face about and take de thing back. All de way back ovah the viaduct they kep' poundin' on de boahd an' yellin': Hep! Hep! Shoot you, niggah, if you doan' keep step. Dey made me tote it all 'round town. Ah wanted to bring dat boahd to the stashun an' show you dat it warn't no countah, but dey wouldn't let me.

Jenkins, after residing for a few months in Sioux City as a laborer for the city's asphalt company, astutely described the class division within the black community. "Dese offishers are allus pickin' on a poor coon," he complained. "If Ah wore a skew-dewey collah an' a plug hat lak' some oder niggahs, dey wouldn't bothah me."¹⁷

White treatment of transient blacks revealed the white community's desire for order and for control over the black subcommunity. When 106 black transients from St. Louis and Kansas City arrived in Sioux City on the Burlington Railroad in 1906, the community reacted. City police watched the transients closely and made hasty provisions for two extra coaches to be added to another train in an effort to get them on their way.¹⁸

Sioux City authorities attempted to monitor not only the size, but also the composition of its black community. In 1910 the Reverend W. M. Smith, a black evangelist, was charged with vagrancy. In police court, Smith produced a sensation because of his "broad, negro dialect," thus triggering many Sioux Cityans' antipathy for "plantation coons." Smith maintained that, after a severe race riot in his own southern town, he and about forty other blacks had been dragged to a railroad car and shipped north. Sioux City officials responded in kind, ordering Smith and his companions out of town.¹⁹

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, then, the structure of Sioux City's black subcommunity and the vigilance of its white community had succeeded in establishing and reinforcing a Moderate consensus on race relations that was similar to that of other midwestern cities. The arrival of occasional black migrants from the South threatened that consensus and foreshadowed the larger threat posed by the Great Migration of blacks into those same cities in the next decade.

17. *Sioux City Journal*, 7 December 1905. See also the account of a case involving two black men accused of breaking into a sealed boxcar on the Willmar and Sioux Falls Railroad, in *Sioux City Journal*, 9 December 1908. A similar dichotomy between established and new residents in black subcommunities occurred in other northern cities. See Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 99-108; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 83-84, 136-39, 148-65.

18. *Sioux City Journal*, 20 December 1906.

19. *Sioux City Journal*, 16 September 1910.

The effect in Sioux City may have been less dramatic than it was in Chicago, Cleveland, or Detroit, but it followed the same general pattern of race relations.

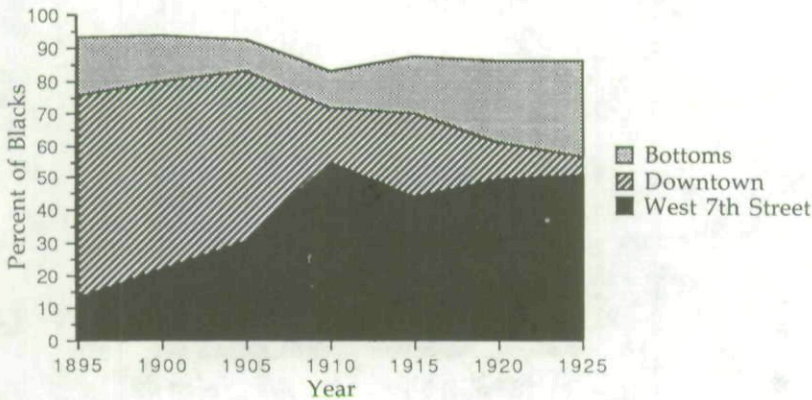
DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES and changes in the workforce, especially during and after World War I, further challenged the Moderate consensus in Sioux City. Ultimately, however, the changes failed to dismantle the established Moderate consensus on race relations.

Calamities that predated the new wave of black migration provoked some of the demographic changes. In May 1892 the Floyd River flooded the downtown area, devastated the railroad and meatpacking districts, and swept away many of the homes in the South Bottoms. Then on Christmas Eve, 1904, the Pelletier Department Store fire destroyed \$1.7 million worth of property in two downtown blocks. Following these disasters, the Hotel Garretson was remodeled into an office building, and the Simmons Hardware Company of St. Louis erected a new building at Fourth and Water Streets. During this rebuilding, white businesses displaced previously black areas of town. White developers then increased pressure on the city government to force the remaining black section of downtown to relocate to the West Seventh Street area. After the new building for the Sioux City Telephone Company was occupied, for example, T. Arthur Thompson, president of the company, insisted that the mayor and the police department clear out the area to "make room for respectable business enterprises."²⁰

The culmination of this decade-long concerted effort to move blacks out of the downtown area, reinforced by the psychological fence building in the community, relegated blacks to the West Seventh Street area of the city. In 1890 about two-thirds of Sioux City's black population lived downtown, while less than 5 percent lived in the West Seventh Street area. By 1910 only 16.9 percent of the black population lived downtown, while more than half lived on the West Side (see fig. 1).

20. *Sioux City Journal*, 13 August 1905; Sorensen and Chicoine, *Sioux City*, 102, 103, 106.

FIGURE 1
BLACK RESIDENTIAL AREAS



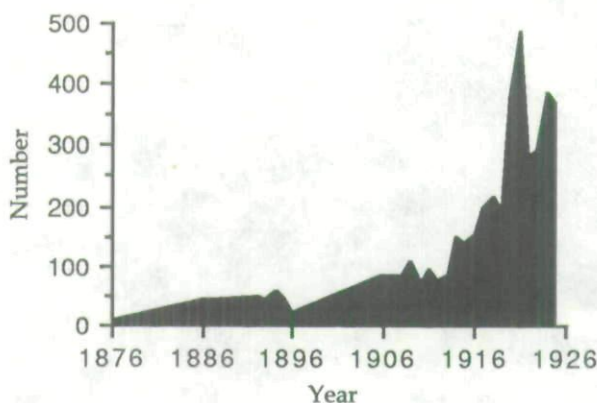
SOURCE: *Sioux City Directory*, 1895-1925

NOTE: No *Directory* was available for 1900. Also, the undesignated area at the top of the graph represents blacks living in other areas of town and blacks whose residence could not be determined.

In the following decade a new middle class of black meatpacking plant workers emerged to challenge the established socioeconomic structure in Sioux City. Sioux City whites managed to retain a semblance of control over the size and composition of the black subcommunity until World War I, when the black population changed rapidly. The presence of packinghouses encouraged an increase of the black population from 305 in 1910 to 1,139 in 1920; a particularly sharp rise occurred in 1919 and 1920 (see fig. 2). These newly arrived blacks had migrated from Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, Fort Worth, and other packing centers seeking similar jobs in the North. When they arrived in Sioux City, they encountered socioeconomic, psychological, and physical barriers that prevented them from securing high paying jobs and residence in the "better" sections of the city.²¹

21. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3d ed. (New York, 1974); Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1965), 408-12. The packinghouse worker community in South Omaha provides a parallel for Sioux City. See William P. Dillingham, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industry*

FIGURE 2
BLACK HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS



SOURCE: *Sioux City Directory*, 1876–1925

Residential segregation continued as new black arrivals settled in the South Bottoms, a working-class district close to the meatpacking plants. The proportion of blacks living downtown continued to decline as new black immigrants filled the Bottoms (see fig. 1). A demographic breakdown reveals that just over half of the 58 black meat industry workers in 1920 lived in the Bottoms. That proportion remained nearly steady

(Washington, DC, 1911), part 2, "Slaughtering and Meat Packing," part 4, "Slaughtering and Meat Packing in South Omaha." The early centralization of meat packing is discussed in Margaret Walsh, *The Rise of the Midwestern Meat Packing Industry* (Lexington, KY, 1982), 75–79. The early migration of blacks to the Midwest is covered in W. Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport, CT, 1976), especially chap. 1, "The Migration of Blacks to the West." Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 32–40, analyzes the places of birth of blacks living in Iowa, 1870–1930. The black population concentrated in zones where rooming—and lodging—houses were a relatively large proportion of the structures, compared to the largely single-family dwellings in the white zone. See E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago, 1939), 238. Blacks were not the only people to encounter such barriers. At about the same time, Sioux City, like other northern industrial cities, absorbed a wave of immigrants from eastern Europe, many of whom were Jewish, who had their own experiences with residential and occupational segregation. See Bernard Shuman, *A History of the Sioux City Jewish Community* (Sioux City, 1969).

as the number of black packinghouse workers increased to 158 by 1925. By contrast, only about one-third of the black population as a whole lived in the Bottoms.

Newly arrived blacks in the Bottoms actually measured their status by their ability to move to the older established West Side. Ruth Bluford Anderson, who lived in the Bottoms during the late 1920s, recalled that "the Negroes 'with money' lived on the West side." Anderson also offered a vivid description of her childhood surroundings. "Stockyards, packing houses, and cheap frame houses constituted an eyesore when compared to the beautiful suburbs near Morningside College." For playground equipment, children "got bladders from the packing plant, blew them up, and kicked them around long before they saw a football."²²

In addition to the obstacles faced by newly arrived blacks when they sought a place to live, they also encountered barriers when they sought jobs, or tried to advance into better paying jobs. White attitudes about black employment had always been ambivalent. Whites wanted blacks employed—they did not want a large unemployed black population—but at the same time they sought to restrict black employment opportunities. A cartoon entitled "At the Minstrel's," which appeared in the *Journal* in 1910, used humor to minimize a consequence of restricting black employment opportunity. The Interlocutor says, "I hear that your brother has gotten to be a great matinee idol, Mr. Bones." Mr. Bones answers, "Yes, indeed. He's idle all de time dese days."²³

In the nineteenth century Jim Crow arrangements and job proscription had blocked job opportunities for most blacks in Sioux City, and the job ceiling imposed by whites had helped define the black community. The entry of black workers into

22. Ruth Bluford Anderson, *From Mother's Aid Child to University Professor: The Autobiography of an American Black Woman* (Iowa City, 1985), 7; Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants since 1880* (Berkeley, CA), 297-99; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915* (Washington, DC, 1918), 769; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932* (Washington, DC, 1935).

23. *Sioux City Journal*, 10 April 1910.



At the Minstrel's.

Interlocutor—I hear that your brother has gotten to be a great matinee idol, Mr. Bones.

Mr. Bones—Yes, indeed. He's idle all de time dese days.

Sioux City Journal, 10 April 1910.

the labor force of the local meatpacking industry, and the use of blacks as strikebreakers, caused a crisis in the black socioeconomic hierarchy and in the white community. Previously relegated primarily to domestic work, personal service, and unskilled labor, blacks did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity to work in the meat industry. Work in the packinghouses offered them relatively steady employment at wages significantly higher than most jobs open to them.²⁴

The opportunity for increased income as meat workers resulted not only from the industry's labor needs during the war, but also from the use of blacks as strikebreakers. The role of strikebreaker was, to a large degree, forced on blacks. Often it was the only time they would be hired, and just as often the packers replaced them after the strike was settled. Neverthe-

24. Nielson, *Black Ethos*, 58–59; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 164–74; Barrett, *Work and Community*, 208–10, 258–59; August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1970), especially chap. 9, "The Development of Negro Business and the Rise of a Negro Middle Class."

less, a strike, from the black perspective, afforded a rare chance to obtain a job otherwise denied them by the color line.²⁵

The meatpackers denied soliciting black laborers from other areas to break strikes. They asserted that there were plenty of unemployed blacks in the community, so there was no need to import blacks from the South. But white employers were not averse to employing blacks to break strikes. The packers used blacks to break the Chicago stockyard strike of 1904, and the steel corporations recruited an estimated thirty thousand blacks to help break the Great Steel Strike of 1919.²⁶

The meatpackers also used black strikebreakers in Sioux City during the 1904 meat industry strike. Among other issues, the beef luggers had asked for a pay increase for their fifty-four-hour work week. Historian of the meat industry Jimmy M. Skaggs pointed out that "the packers rejected out of hand pay raises for the unskilled, offering instead a two-cent [per hour] cut." When the workers went out on strike, the packers continued operations using black strikebreakers. A few strikebreakers even managed to keep their jobs for a short time after the strike ended. But Sioux City Meatpacking Union members at Armour turned against the black strikebreakers who had been employed during the strike. The white strikers believed that blacks were responsible for their failure to get higher wages. After the strike ended, whites, out of frustration and anger, retaliated by severely beating Thomas Roberts, a black beef lugger from South Omaha.²⁷

25. August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, "Attitudes of Negro Leaders Toward the American Labor Movement from the Civil War to World War I," in Julius Jacobson, ed., *The Negro and the Labor Movement* (Garden City, 1968), 27-48. For black workers in general after World War I, see William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers since the Civil War* (New York, 1982), chap. 3; Lieberman, *A Piece of the Pie*, 351; David Brody, *The Butcher Workmen: A Study of Unionization* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), 57; Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York, 1931), especially chap. 7, "Strike Breaking and Race Consciousness," and chap. 12, "The Negro in the Stockyards"; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Social Structure* (New York, 1944), 1123.

26. William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York, 1970), 89; Robert Higgs, *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865-1914* (Stanford, CA, 1977), 86-87.

27. Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Prime Cut: Livestock Raising and Meatpacking in the*

Responding to this unrest, the mayor posted officers to serve on guard duty during shift changes at the Armour Packing Plant. The black workers averted trouble, however, when a number of them later went to the police station and said they intended to leave the city. Mayor William G. Sears reported that he interviewed many of the white workers, who "gave no intimations of being dissatisfied except that they did not care to work with the Negroes." Armour representative John N. Duke added that the violence was no indication of dissatisfaction with wages, "but [with] the introduction of colored labor in a gang of white men." Duke also assured Sioux Cityans that the trouble "was but a passing breeze. The fact is that the white men do not care to work with negroes and we respect their wishes."²⁸

Whites successfully maintained the employment color line until World War I, when the labor needs of the community changed radically. During the war, blacks took unskilled jobs vacated by white laborers. Sioux City boosters, and especially the meatpackers, again welcomed laborers, as they had during past boom periods, yet they adamantly attempted to maintain the color line and the Moderate consensus. At the same time, Sioux City blacks experienced rapid socioeconomic mobility, and a doubling of the black population occurred between 1919 and 1921 as many blacks secured employment in the meat industry (see figs. 2 and 3).²⁹

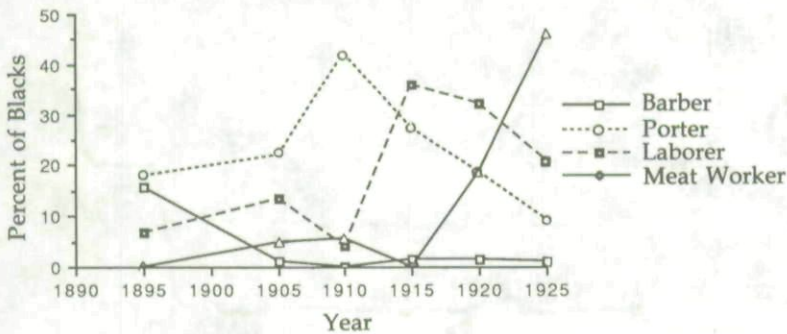
Employment opportunities for blacks in the packing industry continued after the war, due, incongruously, to labor strikes. During a strike beginning on December 5, 1921, the packers imported ten boxcars of black strikebreakers and used a switch engine to move them directly into the plant yard. The strike

United States, 1607-1983 (College Station, TX, 1986), 116. Sioux City and Omaha had higher labor markets at the onset of the 1904 strike. See David Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, 51, 57, 60.

28. *Sioux City Journal*, 1, 2 September 1905; Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States*, vol. 4, 1896-1932 (New York, 1935), 116, 120; Walter A. Fogel, *The Negro in the Meat Industry* (Philadelphia, 1970), 17-47.

29. Nielson, *Black Ethos*, 131; Spencer R. Crew, "The Great Migration of Afro-Americans, 1915-40," *Monthly Labor Review* (March 1987), 34-36.

FIGURE 3
BLACK OCCUPATIONS, AS A PERCENTAGE OF BLACK POPULATION



SOURCE: *Sioux City Directory*, 1895–1925

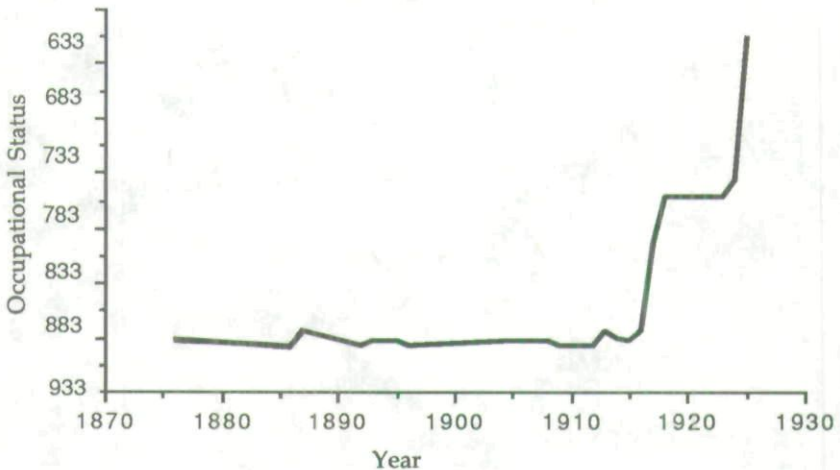
dragged on because the packers kept the plants in operation. Violence erupted, resulting in the deaths of two men—a striker and the sheriff's son. The unions realized that continuation of the strike was hopeless; it ended on February 2, 1922. The packers retaliated for the strike by destroying the unions and reemploying only 250 of the 1,200 strikers who applied for reemployment. The strike also offered the packers the opportunity to reconstitute the work force. Consequently, they reversed their policies hostile to employing black workers. In fact, they hired more immigrants and blacks because they believed these workers would split the work force and would be less inclined to offer strong support for the unions.³⁰

This reversal of policy had a dramatic impact on Sioux City's black work force. In 1916 only 0.6 percent of Sioux City's black workers were employed in the meat industry, but the figure rose to 17.7 percent in 1920, and 43.9 percent in 1925 (see fig. 3). A sharp increase in black occupational status accompanied this large increase in the number of blacks employed in the meatpacking industry (see fig. 4). As the black population

30. Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, 73. Black workers were not readily accepted in white-dominated labor unions. See Horace R. Clayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1939), 233–37, 239–65.

FIGURE 4

MEDIAN OCCUPATIONAL STATUS



SOURCE: *Sioux City Directory*, 1876-1925

NOTE: This graph is based on an adaptation of the Census Bureau's classification of jobs. Each occupation (4,234 cases) was arbitrarily assigned a number; the higher the number the lower the status of that particular occupation. Thus a bootblack whose income and status were low had a designation of 941, and a janitor whose status and income were also low, but whose income was more stable, had 903. Meatworkers had 633 because their income was so much higher than other black occupations. One drawback to this method, however, is that these classifications remained static for the years covered by this study, from 1876 to 1925. Therefore, while black barbers, for example, changed in status over time, their status remained 935. Yet they were highly regarded before about 1905, after which the prestige of barbering began to fall rapidly as white clients were less inclined to go to the black segregated community for the service, and black barbers turned to an almost exclusively Negro trade. When blacks entered meatworking during and shortly after World War I, they earned more money than other longer established occupations offered, such as porter (934) and unskilled laborer (780).

increased, it was also better able to attract and support a larger elite of black doctors, clergy, and entrepreneurs, making the distinctions between elite and laborers more apparent.

Although changes forced whites to work with blacks in the packinghouses, whites attempted to maintain a color line through workplace segregation. Blacks were segregated in the most unpleasant tasks, such as rendering and the kill floor. And despite the increase in black workers in the packinghouses, they remained a small minority of the total number of wage earners in slaughtering and meatpacking, and a small proportion of Sioux City's general population. Nevertheless, the

increase in the number of blacks employed in the meatpacking industry in Sioux City had a profound effect on the community. As workers in the meatpacking industry challenged the older communities' definition of "middle class," both the black and white communities were forced to redefine their attitudes about the black community's socioeconomic structure and the way it affected race relations in the city.³¹

SIOUX CITY'S WHITE POPULATION soon sensed that their psychological barriers had been breached. The general acceptance of Moderate ideas, along with the small number of blacks in Sioux City, had helped the community avoid the ignominy of more virulent forms of racism, such as lynchings and race riots, that infected other cities.³² Racial antipathies and stereotyping did appear to intensify, however, in reaction to black socioeconomic mobility and a growing black, immigrant, Catholic, and Jewish population in Sioux City. In 1924 the Ku Klux Klan marched four abreast down Morningside Avenue. In the same year, however, cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling, who began his career as a cartoonist for the *Sioux City Journal* in 1900, illustrated the persistence of the Moderate consensus in a

31. Black occupational status also increased in Des Moines and Cedar Rapids in the wake of World War I. See Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 60-61, 64-65. See also Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 44-46; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, chap. 7; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 164-65; and Spear, *Black Chicago*, chap. 5.

32. Sioux City blacks were not immune to the fear of the epidemic of lynchings that afflicted the country at the end of the nineteenth century. A nationwide rash of thirty lynchings in thirty days precipitated a meeting of thirty-five blacks and six whites at the African Methodist Episcopal Church on May 5, 1899. The group adopted a resolution protesting "the cowardly slanders which southern apologists utter when they say that lynchings occur only to protect womanhood." *Sioux City Journal*, 6 May 1899. Two years later James McGuire, a black, was arraigned in police court on the charge of sodomy with a thirteen-year-old messenger boy. Because of the talk of lynching during the day, the chief of police moved McGuire from the city jail to the county jail. Shortly after McGuire arrived, his cell mate, Matt Davey, made a break for liberty while working on the stone pile. After his recapture, Davey said he feared that a lynch mob breaking into the jail might mistake him for McGuire. The *Journal* titled its story about the incident "Coons Might Look Alike." *Sioux City Journal*, 29, 30 October 1901. For an account of all the known lynchings in Iowa between 1833 and 1908, see Paul W. Black, "Lynchings in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 10 (April 1912), 151-254.



cartoon he drew for the *Des Moines Register*. The cartoon showed Uncle Sam confronting a hooded clansman who carried a banner reading "100% Americanism." Uncle Sam observes, "My son, Americanism never needs to put on a mask." The caption of the cartoon commented, "A GOOD MOTTO, BUT WHY THE DISGUISE?" Reflecting the Moderate mentality, Darling affirmed that the idea of pure Americanism—including racial purity—was sound, but it should not be carried to extremes.³³

33. *Woodbury County History*, 148; Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie*, 299, 383; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York, 1978), 290-91; David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1965), 139-40; William H. Cumberland, *Wallace M. Short: Iowa Rebel* (Ames, 1983), 76-83; Kay Johnson,

By the 1920s the Klan march symbolized the realization by whites that stricter racial discrimination must be maintained in order to sustain a Jim Crow society. Discrimination, of course, had been a part of the Moderate consensus that was adopted early in the history of Sioux City race relations. That policy was reinforced by the rhetoric and social behavior of a group of elites within the black subcommunity as well as by the restrictions whites imposed on residential and occupational opportunities for blacks. The great influx of blacks during the second decade of the twentieth century and the tensions that accompanied their introduction into the work force of the meatpacking industry in Sioux City made blacks and whites more conscious of the assumptions that had long shaped race relations in the community. Thus it was that Moderate Sioux City boosters thought it important in the mid-1920s to brag about the racial composition of a city with a population "96 percent of whom are white" with "so few undesirables."

"The Ku Klux Klan in Iowa: A Study in Intolerance" (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1967). "Ding" Darling grew to maturity in Sioux City, having moved there at the age of ten. He left the *Journal* in 1906 to join the *Des Moines Register*. See John M. Henry, "A Treasury of Ding," *Palimpsest* (March 1972), 81-176; and David L. Lendt, *Ding: The Life of Jay Norwood Darling* (Ames, 1979).

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