

THE PHILADELPHIA NEGRO
A Social Study

W. E. B. DUBOIS

With a new Introduction by
ELIJAH ANDERSON

Together with a Special Report on
Domestic Service by
ISABEL EATON

PENN

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Philadelphia

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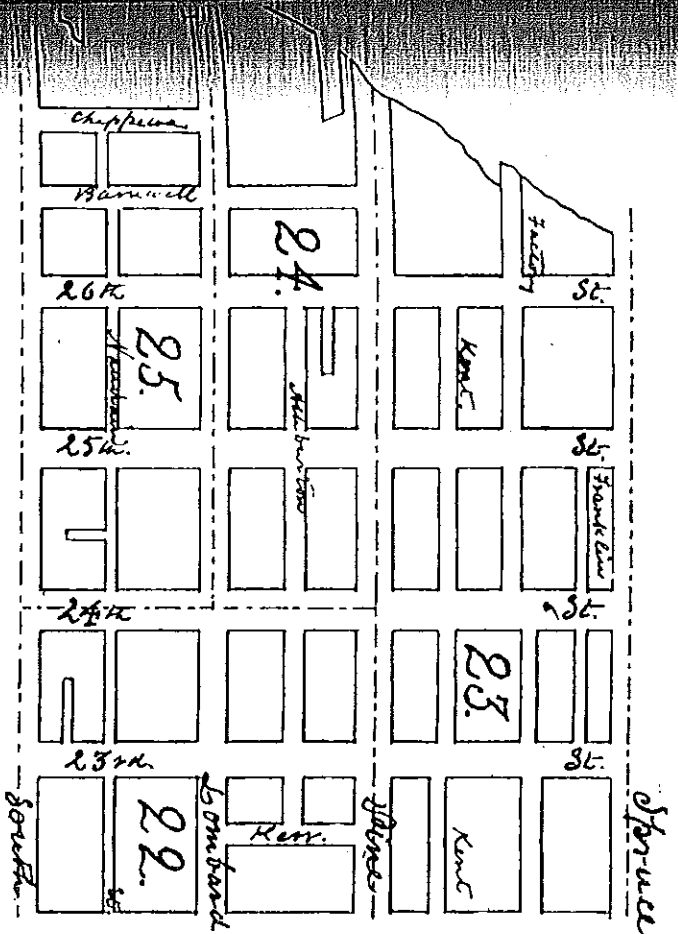
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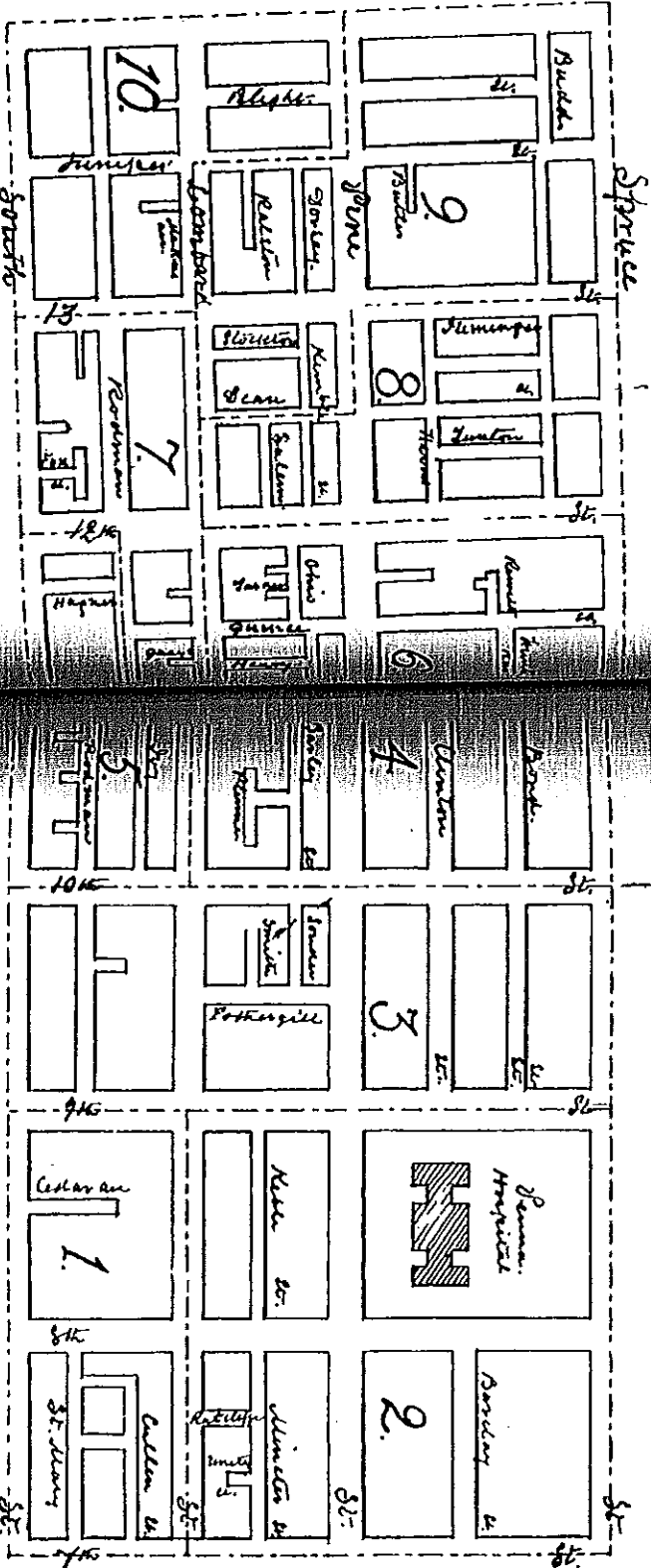
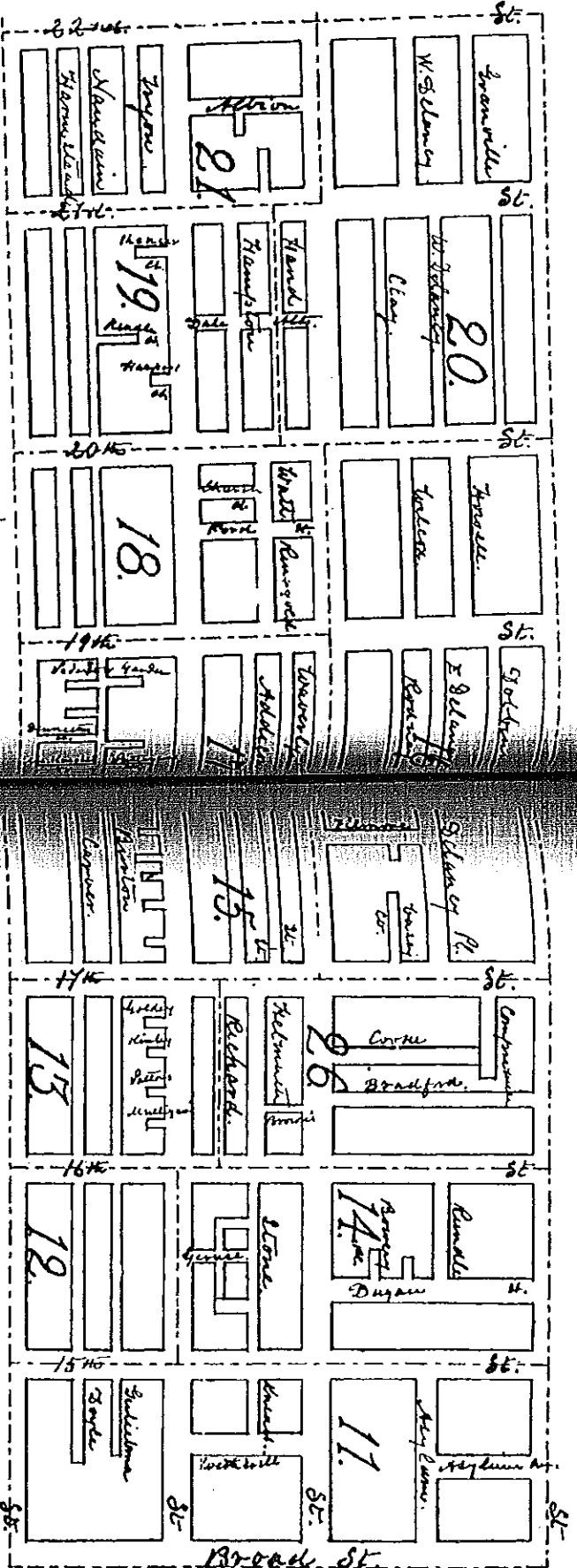
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SEVENTH
WARD



Taken from publications of the American Academy, No. 150, July 2, 1895.
[The large figures refer to voting precincts.]



Some of the present characteristics of the chief alleys where Negroes live are given in the following table :

	Govett's Court.	Hines' Court.	Allen's Court.	Hoestman's Court.	Lombard Row.	Turner's Court.	Alley off Carver Street.	McCann's Court.	Cross Alley.
General Character	Poor.	Poor.	Very Poor.	Squalid.	Fair.	Wretched.	Fair.	Poor.	Bad.
Width, in feet	3	3-6.	6	12	9	3-12	6	12	12
Paved with	Bricks.	Bricks.	Bricks.	Bricks.	Bricks.	Bricks.	Bricks.	Bricks.	Asphalt.
Character of Dwelling	Poor.	Back Yard Tenements	Back Yard Tenements	Back Yard Tenements	Fair.	Old Wooden Houses.	Old Brick Tenements	Old Brick Tenements	Wood and Brick.
Number of Stories in Houses	3	3	3	2 and 3.	3	1 to 3.	3	2 to 3.	2 to 3.
Inhabitants	All Negroes.	All Negroes.	All Negroes.	All Negroes.	Negroes and Jews.	All Negroes.	Jews and Negroes.	All Negroes.	Jews and Negroes.
Cleanliness, etc.	Fair.	Fair.	Dirty.	Dirty.	Fair.	Fair.	Fair.	Fair.	Dirty.
Width of Sidewalk . . feet.	4	5	6	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.
Lighted by	No Lights.	No Lights.	No Lights.	1 Gas Lamp.	1 Gas Lamp.	1 Gas Lamp.	1 Gas Lamp.	1 Gas Lamp.	No Lights.
Privies in Common or Private	Common.	2 for whole Alley.	½ for each House.	5 in open Court.	Private.	Common.	Common.	Common.	Common.
Remarks.		Emigrants from 5th Ward shums.	Poor and Doubtful Characters.	Very Poor People.	Respectable Homes mingled with Gamblers and Prostitutes.	Many Empty Houses; Poor and Doubtful People.	Blind "Alley"; Fairly Respectable.	Poor People and some Questionable.	Some Bad Characters.

The general characteristics and distribution of the Negro population at present in the different wards can only be indicated in general terms. The wards with the best Negro population are parts of the Seventh, Twenty-sixth, Thirtieth and Thirty-sixth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Twenty-fourth, Twenty-seventh and Twenty-ninth. The worst Negro population is found in parts of the Seventh, and in the Fourth, Fifth and Eighth. In the other wards either the classes are mixed or there are very few colored people. The tendency of the best migration to-day is toward the Twenty-sixth, Thirtieth and Thirty-sixth Wards, and West Philadelphia.

46. Social Classes and Amusements.—Notwithstanding the large influence of the physical environment of home and ward, nevertheless there is a far mightier influence to mold and make the citizen, and that is the social atmosphere which surrounds him: first his daily companionship, the thoughts and whims of his class; then his recreations and amusements; finally the surrounding world of American civilization, which the Negro meets especially in his economic life. Let us take up here the subject of social classes and amusements among Negroes, reserving for the next chapter a study of the contact of the Whites and Blacks.

There is always a strong tendency on the part of the community to consider the Negroes as composing one practically homogeneous mass. This view has of course a certain justification: the people of Negro descent in this land have had a common history, suffer to-day common disabilities, and contribute to one general set of social problems. And yet if the foregoing statistics have emphasized any one fact it is that wide variations in antecedents, wealth, intelligence and general efficiency have already been differentiated within this group. These differences are not, to be sure, so great or so patent as those among the whites of to-day, and yet they un-

doubtedly equal the difference among the masses of the people in certain sections of the land fifty or one hundred years ago; and there is no surer way of misunderstanding the Negro or being misunderstood by him than by ignoring manifest differences of condition and power in the 40,000 black people of Philadelphia.

And yet well-meaning people continually do this. They regale the thugs and whomongers and gamblers of Seventh and Lombard streets with congratulations on what the Negroes have done in a quarter century, and pity for their disabilities; and they scold the caterers of Addison street for the pickpockets and paupers of the race. A judge of the city courts, who for years has daily met a throng of lazy and debased Negro criminals, comes from the bench to talk to the Negroes about their criminals: he warns them first of all to leave the slums and either forgets or does not know that the fathers of the audience he is speaking to, left the slums when he was a boy and that the people before him are as distinctly differentiated from the criminals he has met, as honest laborers anywhere differ from thieves.

Nothing more exasperates the better class of Negroes than this tendency to ignore utterly their existence. The law-abiding, hard-working inhabitants of the Thirtieth Ward are aroused to righteous indignation when they see that the word Negro carries most Philadelphians' minds to the alleys of the Fifth Ward or the police courts. Since so much misunderstanding or rather forgetfulness and carelessness on this point is common, let us endeavor to try and fix with some definiteness the different social classes which are clearly enough defined among Negroes to deserve attention. When the statistics of the families of the Seventh Ward were gathered, each family was put in one of four grades as follows:

Grade 1. Families of undoubted respectability earning sufficient income to live well; not engaged in mental

service of any kind; the wife engaged in no occupation save that of house-wife, except in a few cases where she had special employment at home. The children not compelled to be bread-winners, but found in school; the family living in a well-kept home.

Grade 2. The respectable working-class; in comfortable circumstances, with a good home, and having steady remunerative work. The younger children in school.

Grade 3. The poor; persons not earning enough to keep them at all times above want; honest, although not always energetic or thrifty, and with no touch of gross immorality or crime. Including the very poor, and the poor.

Grade 4. The lowest class of criminals, prostitutes and loafers; the "submerged tenth."

Thus we have in these four grades the criminals, the poor, the laborers, and the well-to-do.¹⁴ The last class represents the ordinary middle-class folk of most modern countries, and contains the germs of other social classes which the Negro has not yet clearly differentiated. Let us begin first with the fourth class.

The criminals and gamblers are to be found at such centres as Seventh and Lombard streets, Seventeenth and Lombard, Twelfth and Kater, Eighteenth and Naudain, etc. Many people have failed to notice the significant change which has come over these slums in recent years; the squalor and misery and dumb suffering of 1840 has passed, and in its place have come more baffling and sinister phenomena: shrewd laziness, shameless lewdness, cunning

¹⁴ It will be noted that this classification differs materially from the economic division in Chapter XI. In that case grade four and a part of three appear as the "poor;" grade two and the rest of grade three, as the "fair to comfortable;" and a few of grade two and grade one as the well-to-do. The basis of division there was almost entirely according to income; this division brings in moral considerations and questions of expenditure, and consequently reflects more largely the personal judgment of the investigator.

crime. The loafers who line the curbs in these places are no fools, but sharp, wily men who often outwit both the Police Department and the Department of Charities. Their nucleus consists of a class of professional criminals, who do not work, figure in the rogues' galleries of a half-dozen cities, and migrate here and there. About these are a set of gamblers and sharpers who seldom are caught in serious crime, but who nevertheless live from its proceeds and aid and abet it. The headquarters of all these are usually the political clubs and pool-rooms; they stand ready to entrap the unweary and tempt the weak. Their organization, tacit or recognized, is very effective, and no one can long watch their actions without seeing that they keep in close touch with the authorities in some way. Affairs will be gliding on lazily some summer afternoon at the corner of Seventh and Lombard streets; a few loafers on the corners, a prostitute here and there, and the Jew and Italian plying their trades. Suddenly there is an oath, a sharp altercation, a blow; then a hurried rush of feet, the silent door of a neighboring club closes, and when the policeman arrives only the victim lies bleeding on the sidewalk; or at midnight the drowsy quiet will be suddenly broken by the cries and quarreling of a half-drunken gambling table; then comes the sharp, quick crack of pistol shots—a scurrying in the darkness, and only the wounded man lies awaiting the patrol-wagon. If the matter turns out seriously, the police know where in Minster street and Middle alley to look for the aggressor; often they find him, but sometimes not.¹⁸

The size of the more desperate class of criminals and their shrewd abettors is of course comparatively small, but it is large enough to characterize the slum districts. Around this central body lies a large crowd of satellites

¹⁸ The investigator resided at the College Settlement, Seventh and Lombard streets, some months, and thus had an opportunity to observe this slum carefully.

and feeders: young idlers attracted by excitement, shiftless and lazy ne'er-do-wells, who have sunk from better things, and a rough crowd of pleasure seekers and libertines. These are the fellows who figure in the police courts for larceny and fighting, and drift thus into graver crime or shrewder dissoluteness. They are usually far more ignorant than their leaders, and rapidly die out from disease and excess. Proper measures for rescue and reform might save many of this class. Usually they are not natives of the city, but immigrants who have wandered from the small towns of the South to Richmond and Washington and thence to Philadelphia. Their environment in this city makes it easier for them to live by crime or the results of crime than by work, and being without ambition—or perhaps having lost ambition and grown bitter with the world—they drift with the stream.

One large element of these slums, a class we have barely mentioned, are the prostitutes. It is difficult to get at any satisfactory data concerning such a class, but an attempt has been made. There were in 1896 fifty-three Negro women in the Seventh Ward known on pretty satisfactory evidence to be supported wholly or largely by the proceeds of prostitution; and it is probable that this is not half the real number;¹⁹ these fifty-three were of the following ages:

14 to 19	2
20 to 24	11
25 to 29	9
30 to 39	17
40 to 49	3
50 and over	2
Unknown	9
Total	53

Seven of these women had small children with them and had probably been betrayed, and had then turned to this

¹⁹ These figures were taken during the inquiry by the visitor to the houses.

sort of life. There were fourteen recognized bawdy houses in the ward; ten of them were private dwellings where prostitutes lived and were not especially fitted up, although male visitors frequented them. Four of the houses were regularly fitted up, with elaborate furniture, and in one or two cases had young and beautiful girls on exhibition. All of these latter were seven- or eight-room houses for which \$26 to \$30 a month was paid. They are pretty well-known resorts, but are not disturbed. In the slums the lowest class of street walkers abound and ply their trade among Negroes, Italians and Americans. One can see men following them into alleys in broad daylight. They usually have male associates whom they support and who join them in "badger" thieving. Most of them are grown women though a few cases of girls under sixteen have been seen on the street.

This fairly characterizes the lowest class of Negroes. According to the inquiry in the Seventh Ward at least 138 families were estimated as belonging to this class out of 2395 reported, or 5.8 per cent. This would include between five and six hundred individuals. Perhaps this number reaches 1000 if the facts were known, but the evidence at hand furnishes only the number stated. In the whole city the number may reach 3000, although there is little data for an estimate.⁷

The next class are the poor and unfortunate and the casual laborers; most of these are of the class of Negroes who in the contact with the life of a great city have failed to find an assured place. They include immigrants who cannot get steady work; good-natured, but unreliable and shiftless persons who cannot keep work or spend their earnings thoughtfully; those who have suffered accident and misfortune; the maimed and defective classes,

⁷ This includes not simply the actual criminal class, but its aiders and abettors, and the class intimately associated with it. It would, for instance, include much more than Charles Booth's class A in London.

and the sick; many widows and orphans and deserted wives; all these form a large class and are here considered. It is of course very difficult to separate the lowest of this class from the one below, and probably many are included here who, if the truth were known, ought to be classed lower. In most cases, however, they have been given the benefit of the doubt. The lowest ones of this class usually live in the slums and back streets, and next door or in the same house often, with criminals and lewd women. Ignorant and easily influenced, they readily go with the tide and now rise to industry and decency, now fall to crime. Others of this class get on fairly well in good times, but never get far ahead. They are the ones who earliest feel the weight of hard times and their latest plight. Some correspond to the "worthy poor" of most charitable organizations, and some fall a little below that class. The children of this class are the feeders of the criminal classes. Often in the same family one can find respectable and striving parents weighed down by idle, impudent sons and wayward daughters. This is partly because of poverty, more because of the poor home life. In the Seventh Ward 30½ per cent of the families or 728 may be put into this class, including the very poor, the poor and those who manage just to make ends meet in good times. In the whole city perhaps ten to twelve thousand Negroes fall in this third social grade.

Above these come the representative Negroes; the mass of the servant class, the porters and waiters, and the best of the laborers. They are hard-working people, proverbially good-natured; lacking a little in foresight and forehandedness, and in "push." They are honest and faithful, of fair and improving morals, and beginning to accumulate property. The great drawback to this class is lack of congenial occupation especially among the young men and women, and the consequent wide-spread dissatisfaction and complaint. As a class these persons are ambitious; the

majority can read and write, many have a common school training, and all are anxious to rise in the world. Their wages are low compared with corresponding classes of white workmen, their rents are high, and the field of advancement opened to them is very limited. The best expression of the life of this group is the Negro church, where their social life centres, and where they discuss their situation and prospects.

A note of disappointment and discouragement is often heard at these discussions and their work suffers from a growing lack of interest in it. Most of them are probably best fitted for the work they are doing, but a large percentage deserve better ways to display their talent, and better remuneration. The whole class deserves credit for its bold advance in the midst of discouragements, and for the distinct moral improvement in their family life during the last quarter century. These persons form 56 per cent or 1,252 of the families of the Seventh Ward, and include perhaps 25,000 of the Negroes of the city. They live in 5-10-room houses, and usually have lodgers. The houses are always well furnished with neat parlors and some musical instrument. Sunday dinners and small parties, together with church activities, make up their social intercourse. Their chief trouble is in finding suitable careers for their growing children.

Finally we come to the 277 families, 11.5 per cent of those of the Seventh Ward, and including perhaps 3,000 Negroes in the city, who form the aristocracy of the Negro population in education, wealth and general social efficiency. In many respects it is right and proper to judge a people by its best classes rather than by its worst classes or middle ranks. The highest class of any group represents its possibilities rather than its exceptions, as is so often assumed in regard to the Negro. The colored people are seldom judged by their best classes, and often the very existence of classes among them is ignored. This is

partly due in the North to the anomalous position of those who compose this class: they are not the leaders or the ideal-makers of their own group in thought, work, or morals. They teach the masses to a very small extent, mingle with them but little, do not largely hire their labor. Instead then of social classes held together by strong ties of mutual interest we have in the case of the Negroes, classes who have much to keep them apart, and only community of blood and color prejudice to bind them together. If the Negroes were by themselves either a strong aristocratic system or a dictatorship would for the present prevail. With, however, democracy thus prematurely thrust upon them, the first impulse of the best, the wisest and richest is to segregate themselves from the mass. This action, however, causes more of dislike and jealousy on the part of the masses than usual, because those masses look to the whites for ideals and largely for leadership. It is natural therefore that even to-day the mass of Negroes should look upon the worshippers at St. Thomas' and Central as feeling themselves above them, and should dislike them for it. On the other hand it is just as natural for the well-educated and well-to-do Negroes to feel themselves far above the criminals and prostitutes of Seventh and Lombard streets, and even above the servant girls and porters of the middle class of workers. So far they are justified; but they make their mistake in failing to recognize that, however laudable an ambition to rise may be, the first duty of an upper class is to serve the lowest classes. The aristocracies of all peoples have been slow in learning this and perhaps the Negro is no slower than the rest, but his peculiar situation demands that in his case this lesson be learned sooner. Naturally the uncertain economic status even of this picked class makes it difficult for them to spare much time and energy in social reform; compared with their fellows they are rich, but compared with white

Americans they are poor, and they can hardly fulfill their duty as the leaders of the Negroes until they are captains of industry over their people as well as richer and wiser. To-day the professional class among them is, compared with other callings, rather over-represented, and all have a struggle to maintain the position they have won.

This class is itself an answer to the question of the ability of the Negro to assimilate American culture. It is a class small in numbers and not sharply differentiated from other classes, although sufficiently so to be easily recognized. Its members are not to be met with in the ordinary assemblages of the Negroes, nor in their usual promenading places. They are largely Philadelphia born, and being descended from the house-servant class, contain many mulattoes. In their assemblies there are evidences of good breeding and taste, so that a foreigner would hardly think of ex-slaves. They are not to be sure people of wide culture and their mental horizon is as limited as that of the first families in a country town. Here and there may be noted, too, some faint trace of careless moral training. On the whole they strike one as sensible, good folks. Their conversation turns on the gossip of similar circles among the Negroes of Washington, Boston and New York; on questions of the day, and, less willingly, on the situation of the Negro. Strangers secure entrance to this circle with difficulty and only by introduction. For an ordinary white person it would be almost impossible to secure introduction even by a friend. Once in a while some well-known citizen meets a company of this class, but it is hard for the average white American to lay aside his patronizing way toward a Negro, and to talk of aught to him but the Negro question; the lack, therefore, of common ground even for conversation makes such meetings rather stiff and not often repeated. Fifty-two of these families keep servants regularly; they

live in well-appointed homes, which give evidence of taste and even luxury.¹⁸

Something must be said, before leaving this subject, of the amusements of the Negroes. Among the fourth grade and the third, gambling, excursions, balls and cake-walks are the chief amusements. The gambling instinct is widespread, as in all low classes, and, together with sexual looseness, is their greatest vice; it is carried on in clubs, in private houses, in pool-rooms and on the street. Public gambling can be found at a dozen different places every night at full tilt in the Seventh Ward, and almost any stranger can gain easy access. Games of pure chance are preferred to those of skill, and in the larger clubs a sort of three-card monte is the favorite game, played with a dealer who gambles against all comers. In private houses in the slums, cards, beer and prostitutes can always be found. In the public pool-rooms there is some quiet gambling and playing for prizes. For the new comer to the city the only open places of amusement are these pool-rooms and gambling clubs; here are crowds of young fellows, and

¹⁸ A comparison of the size of families in the highest and lowest class may be of interest:

Number in Family.	First Grade.		Fourth Grade.	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
One	22	8%	17	12%
Two	66	24%	58	42%
Three	54	19%	27	20%
Four	48		21	
Five	25	33%	6	24%
Six	18		6	
Seven	20		2	
Eight	7	12%	0	2%
Nine	5		1	
Ten	7		0	
Eleven	0	4%	0	0%
Twelve or more	5		0	
Total	277		138	

Average size of family, first grade, 4.07%; fourth grade, 2.08%. This certainly looks like the survival of the fittest, and is hardly an argument for the extinction of the civilized Negro.

once started in this company no one can say where they may not end.

The most innocent amusements of this class are the balls and cake-walks, although they are accompanied by much drinking, and are attended by white and black prostitutes. The cake-walk is a rhythmic promenade or slow dance, and when well done is pretty and quite innocent. Excursions are frequent in summer, and are accompanied often by much fighting and drinking.

The mass of the laboring Negroes get their amusement in connection with the churches. There are suppers, fairs, concerts, socials and the like. Dancing is forbidden by most of the churches, and many of the stricter sort would not think of going to balls or theatres. The younger set, however, dance, although the parents seldom accompany them, and the hours kept are late, making it often a dissipation. Secret societies and social clubs add to these amusements by balls and suppers, and there are numbers of parties at private houses. This class also patronizes frequent excursions given by churches and Sunday schools and secret societies; they are usually well conducted, but cost a great deal more than is necessary. The money wasted in excursions above what would be necessary for a day's outing and plenty of recreation, would foot up many thousand dollars in a season.

In the upper class alone has the home begun to be the centre of recreation and amusement. There are always to be found parties and small receptions, and gatherings at the invitations of musical or social clubs. One large ball each year is usually given, which is strictly private. Guests from out of town are given much social attention.

Among nearly all classes of Negroes there is a large unsatisfied demand for amusement. Large numbers of servant girls and young men have flocked to the city, have no homes, and want places to frequent. The churches supply this need partially, but the institution which will supply this want

better and add instruction and diversion, will save many girls from ruin and boys from crime. There is to-day little done in places of public amusement to protect colored girls from designing men. Many of the idlers and rascals of the slums play on the affections of silly servant girls, and either ruin them or lead them into crime, or more often live on a part of their wages. There are many cases of this latter system to be met in the Seventh Ward.

It is difficult to measure amusements in any enlightening way. A count of the amusements reported by the *Tribune*, the chief colored paper, which reports for a select part of the laboring class, and the upper class, resulted as follows for nine weeks:¹²

Parties at homes in honor of visitors	16
" " " homes	11
" " " with dancing	10
Balls in halls	10
Concerts in churches	7
Church suppers, etc.	7
Weddings	7
Birthday parties	7
Lectures and literary entertainments at churches	6
Card parties	4
Fairs at churches	3
Lawu parties and picnics	3

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These, of course, are the larger parties in the whole city, and do not include the numerous small church socials and gatherings. The proportions here are largely accidental, but the list is instructive.

¹² These weeks were not consecutive but taken at random.