

Prairie View A&M University

Digital Commons @PVAMU

All Theses

7-1936

Factors Affecting Vocational Education for Negroes in Houston Texas

William Maxwell

Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pvamu.edu/pvamu-theses>

Recommended Citation

Maxwell, W. (1936). Factors Affecting Vocational Education for Negroes in Houston Texas. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.pvamu.edu/pvamu-theses/256>

This Undergraduate Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @PVAMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @PVAMU. For more information, please contact hvkoshy@pvamu.edu.

TITLE

FACTORS AFFECTING VOCATIONAL EDU-
CATION FOR NEGROES IN HOUSTON
TEXAS

By -

WILLIAM MAXWELL

A THESIS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SUBMITTED IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF -

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

in the

DIVISION OF MECHANICAL ARTS

of the

PRAIRIE VIEW STATE NORMAL
AND INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE

Prairie View, Texas
July 1936

WRITER'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge that I am very grateful to Mr. C. L. Wilson and Mr. I. P. Terrel for helping me to secure material and the supervising of this thesis.

I am also grateful to Mr. J. J. Abernethy for correcting and the arrangement of this thesis. Many helpful suggestions were given by the above members of Prairie View State College.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is not merely to compile the factors affecting vocational education for Negroes in Houston, but to relate as continuing story, the circumstances, endeavors, and achievements that mark the struggles and the progress of Vocational education for Negroes in Houston. Therefore in the organization of the subject matter, the writer has followed a logical development of vocational activities in Houston. He has striven to reflect from page to page facts that lie beneath the surface and thereby furnish a thesis that will sustain attention and interest.

In the preparation of this thesis, a careful study of many business and vocational establishments was made and many authorities were consulted including books of like character.

The writer is indebted to several colored as well as white friends for information and helpful criticisms.

The Writer

PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to point out the advantages of an education for youths. Especially in some vocation that will be suitable to his needs or taste. So that he may be able to meet all of the advantages and opportunities that might arise during a life time. So many boys and girls have never given any vocation a serious study before going into it. They just drop out of school and start working on the first job that is presented to them, and soon they become tired of it, and therefore are handicapped to do any thing that might be pleasing to their taste.

- 1. Importance to society.
- 2. What are its advantages and problems?
- 3. What educational or other preparation is necessary or desirable?
- 4. What are the requirements for entering and succeeding in the occupation?
- 5. What income may be expected at first and later?
- 6. What effect has the occupation on the social, civic, physical, recreational, and moral life of

METHOD USED FOR THE STUDY OF
AN OCCUPATION

1. Importance to society.
2. What things are actually done by person who is in this calling? (1) Make a list of them; (2) Outline a typical day's work.
3. What are the main advantages of the occupation?

(a) Service to humanity?	(h) Friends and Associates?
(b) Chance to learn?	(i) Hours?
(c) Demand for workers?	(j) Vacations?
(d) Steady work?	(k) Good living?
(e) Growing importance of the vocation?	(l) Healthful work?
(f) Interesting work?	(m) Moral conditions?
(g) Promotions?	(n) Other points?
4. What are its disadvantages and problems?
5. What educational or other preparation is necessary or desirable?
6. What are the requirements for entering and succeeding in the occupation?
7. What income may be expected at first and later?
8. What effect has the occupation on the social, civic, physical, recreational, and moral life of

FACTORS AFFECTING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
OF NEGROES IN HOUSTON, TEXAS.

the worker?

Contents

1. Preface.
2. Significance of Vocational opportunities for Negroes in Houston.
3. Classifying the Houston Negro High School Student.
 - (a) Why some students drop out in the 5th. or 9th. grade.
 - (b) The advantages of a High School Education, if schooling must stop there.
 - (c) Meaning of "blind alley jobs."
4. Gradual evolution of vocational opportunities for Negroes in Houston.
5. Procedure:

Interview the following firms, which employ skilled or common Negro laborers: Southwestern Bell Telephone Co., Schumacher Co., S. P. Shop, Houston Packing Company, Meyer Co. (Food), Sugar Foot Co., Spears Dairy, Houston Harris County Relief, United States Post Office, Shell Petroleum Company, Sinclair Oil Refinery Co.
6. Compile facts that may be used in setting up a program for vocational education and guidance in the schools of Houston for Negroes, in day as well as

FACTORS AFFECTING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
OF NEGROES IN HOUSTON, TEXAS.

Contents

1. Preface.
2. Significance of Vocational opportunities for Negroes in Houston.
3. Classifying the Houston Negro High School Student.
 - (a) Why some students drop out in the 8th. or 9th. grade.
 - (b) The advantages of a High School Education, if schooling must stop there.
 - (c) Meaning of "blind alley jobs."
4. Gradual evolution of vocational opportunities for Negroes in Houston.
5. Procedure:

Interview the following firms, which employ skilled or common Negro laborers: Southwestern Bell Telephone Co., Schuhmacher Co., S. P. Shop, Houston Packing Company, Motor Co. (Food), Huges Tool Co., Spears Dairy, Houston Harris County Relief, United States Post Office, Shell Petroleum Company, Sinclair Oil Refinery Co.
6. Compile facts that may be used in setting up a program for vocational education and guidance in the schools of Houston for Negroes, in day as well as

night schools.

7. Result and Recommendations.

The vast number of pupils who drop out of school as soon as the law allows do not do so for financial reasons, but because they do not realize the value of education and are therefore indifferent to it. From observation, it is the general opinion that many young people go to college who would be better off in vocational school or in industry. No attempt has been made to give information on every occupation open to the Negroes of Houston, Texas.

It would be well-nigh impossible to accomplish this within the scope of a single paper. An effort has been made to present fifteen occupations discussed in such a way as to arouse definite interests and to stimulate a desire to find out more about them. If the Negro boys and girls of Houston are stimulated to acquire definite vocational information and to realize the need of self-knowledge more occupations will be opened to them which are now closed to them.

The daily newspapers, current magazines, and various other publications are producing an increasing amount of material on occupations and general guidance questions.

FACTORS AFFECTING VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR
NEGROES IN HOUSTON, TEXAS.

The vast number of pupils who drop out of school as soon as the law allows do not do so for financial reasons, but because they do not realize the value of education and are therefore indifferent to it. From observance, it is the general opinion that many young people go to college who would be better off in vocational school or in industry. No attempt has been made to give information on every occupation open to the Negroes of Houston, Texas.

It would be well-nigh impossible to accomplish this within the scope of a single paper. An effort has been made to present fifteen occupations discussed in such a way as to arouse definite interests and to stimulate a desire to find out more about them. If the Negro boys and girls of Houston are stimulated to acquire definite vocational information and to realize the need of self-knowledge more occupations will be opened to them which are now closed to them.

The daily newspapers, current magazines, and various other publications are producing an increasing amount of material on occupations and general guidance problems.

The Negro boys and girls fall in these five groups:

- Group I. Those who have no thought other than that of finishing high school and going on through college.
- Group II. Those who plan to finish high school and then go to work.
- Group III. Those who are quite undecided about staying in school after they finish high school or the ninth grade.
- Group IV. Those who have not thought anything about it. If a pretty good job turns up they will take it; if not, they just go on to school.
- Group V. Those who have definitely decided to stop as soon as they finish the year or as soon as the state-school law allows it.

The average Negro boy and girl in Houston, Texas, is being bitten by the bug of independence, the desire to get out from under mama's or papa's rule. Perhaps big sister or big brother stopped school in the eighth grade or ninth grade; naturally the younger sisters and brothers see no reason why they should go on. Sometimes a friend to a boy or girl is working and knows of a job in the same Company. So often

we hear: "Say, Jack, would you like a good job? I know a hot one. Man it pays \$7.00 a week, after you have worked awhile you will be getting \$8.00 or \$9.00." The Negro boy or girl does not stop to consider, it might pay better from the financial side alone to stay in school for a while. More than likely this job was a shoe shine job or a janitor's job. The boy or girl failed to consider that shoe shining or continually cleaning after some one else would cease to be interesting after the first week.

Jobs of that nature are "blind-alley" jobs that they leads to no-where. Someone else does all your thinking. You say, I can change my job if this one gets too hard or too tiresome. Without any training or a high-school education, jobs are hard to find. In these days when business life is strenous and competition severe, you must know how to do some one thing well in order to get anywhere.

Facts taken from a table prepared by the United States Bureau of Education, comparing the wages of a number of children who left school at the age of fourteen with those who went on through high school and left at the age of eighteen. According to the statistics,

at twenty-five years of age the average boy who remained in school until he was eighteen had received a total of \$2,000 more salary and was then receiving \$900 a year more than the average boy who had left at fourteen. This is equivalent to an investment of \$18,000 at 5% interest. Is it worth while to stay in school? The average Negro boys or girls have not stopped to ask whether there are occupations where education beyond the eighth or ninth grade is not necessary for success? Will education help the ashman? The ditch digger? The janitor? The chauffeur? The maid? The cook? The yard man? The washer-woman? The farmer? It may seem that here is one occupation where further education is unnecessary. Investigations made show that farmers who have been trained for that work have a larger earning capacity. So it is worth while to stay in school.

Twenty years ago the occupations common among the Negroes of Houston, were hand laundering, yard men, ditch diggers, chauffeuring, cooking and a few school teachers. It was a familiar sight to see an old Negro stooping over a broom or mop, cleaning up the floors in the banks, post office or depot. How well some of the men and women of today, remember when they used to

carry the white people's clothes to them on Friday and Saturday evenings. The streets would be lined on Monday mornings with Negroes coming home with bundles of dirty clothes on their heads, children with coaster wagon full of clothes, and sometimes two children sharing the burden equally.

Cooking is a gift to the Negroes as singing is to them. So often we see signs at the eating places that invite one in to enjoy a meal that Old Mamy cooked. Needless to say there were any other jobs with as many laborers as that of Negro cooks.

Chauffeuring was common to a certain extent, but the Negro was not only a chauffeur, he was a handy man. He was a combination of chauffeur, yardman and what-have-you.

Ditch digging was also common among the Negroes of Houston. It is needless to say that Houston was not nearly as improved or developed then as it is to-day. Naturally there was more ditch digging to be done then, than there is to-day. The streets were being improved, sewers were being laid and water lines being laid. The schools of Houston were fair. The Negroes had little manual training and domestic art in their schools that for back. Only literary work was emphasized to the

children. Naturally there was an over supply of school teachers. The average Negro, when he had finished high school was ready to stop his education there. It is quite obvious that he did not want to cook, dig ditches, cut and attend to yards, or chauffeur anyone around, if anything, he wanted someone to chauffeur him around.

To-day there are any number of occupations open to the Negroes of Houston. There are Negro maids, nurses, cooks, teachers, chauffeurs, yardmen, ditch diggers, drivers for wholesale houses, delivery boys for white drug stores, porters, where there used to be white porters, United States letter carriers, United States railway mail clerks, at the S. P. Shop, mechanics, men who work in the car shop, boiler shop, blacksmith shop, round houses, ten shop, pipe fitters. At Hughes Tool Company there are Negroes in the following departments: heat treat department, foundry shop, forging shop, shipping department and receiving department, filling station attendants, red caps, pullman porters, firemen, longshoremen, brakemen, preachers, barbers, elevator operators, dairy men, grocer men, electricians, plumbers, social (case) workers, nursery school workers, music teachers, doctors, dentists, morticians,

stenographers, photographers, pharmacists, bootblacks, miliners, beauty specialists, and auto mechanics.

As Houston develops, it is quite noticeable that the schools for Negroes develop along with it. There are over three hundred Negro teachers employed with three senior high schools, twenty four junior high schools and elementary schools.

In 1924 domestic art was emphasized in the Negro schools. Each senior high school teaches, manual arts, cooking, sewing, laundrying, drawing and auto mechanics. As the expression goes, more white collar jobs are being opened up to the Negro daily. Negroes are becoming newspaper conscious, insurance conscious, secret lodges are spread out among the Negroes. The Houston Negro has come to the place where the thinking is did by Negro; consequently he patronizes the Negro when ever he can. It is very pleasing to see the number of Negroes making a success of their business endeavors.

The following pages are taken from interviews from some of the firms of Houston, who employ skilled Negro laborers. It is surprising to note the number of firms who give the young Negroes of Houston a chance by taking them in as apprentices. The Negroes of Houston should find work of some kind to his liking with so many

fields open to him, and more and more opening every day.

COMPANY INC.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Type of business Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. Inc.

2. Approximate value \$15,000,000

3. Number of employees: Skilled- 1. Male 550 White Total 24 Col.

2. Female _____

4. Does the work require skilled workers-- Yes ✓ No _____

5. What would you recommend for the solution of our employment problem? College graduates stand a better chance of being employed.

6. COMMENT OR REMARKS:

Yes, we have more telephones at this time than we have ever had before, also putting a large amount of them in everyday.

SOUTHWESTERN BELL TELEPHONE

COMPANY INC.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Type of business Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. Inc.
2. Approximate value \$16,000,000
3. Number of employees: Skilled- 1. Male Total 24 Col. ^{530 White}
2. Female _____
4. Does the work require skilled workers-- Yes No _____
5. What would you recommend for the solution of our employment problem? College graduates stand a better chance of being employed.
6. COMMENT OR REMARKS:

Yes, we have more telephones at this time than we have ever had before, also putting a large amount of them in everyday.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Type of business Schuhmacher Wholesale Grocers Co. Inc.
2. Members in firm - (state number) 3 owners
3. Number of employees: Skilled - 1. Male 20 Colored
2 Female _____
4. Is there a definite need for a vocational training program in this city? - Yes ✓ No _____
5. Do you see a future expansion and marked growth in your business? Yes

laborers - pick up iron, boiler paper. No training. Apprentices, white, understudy.

When being hired, applicant must have recommendation and experience.

Car shop, coach shop, machine shop, round house. Colored mechanics, Negro pipe fitters.

Negro apprentices if interested get raise every six months when apprentice.

Build locomotives.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Type of business Southern Pacific Shop
2. Do you employ any Negroes in your business enterprise?
Yes ✓ **No** **No.** 700 **Males**
3. Does the work require skilled workers? Yes
4. Do you have difficulty in getting skille workers? Yes
5. Are Negroe reliable and industrious? Yes
6. Is there a definite need for vocational training program in this city? **Yes** ✓ **No**
7. Comment:

Laborers - pick up iron, tools paper. No training. Apprentice. white, understudy.

When being hired, applicant must have recommendation and experience.

Car shop, coach shop, machine shop, round house, Colored mechanics, Negro pipe fitters.

Negro apprentice if interested get raise every six months when apprentice.

Build locomotives.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Type of business Social Service Bureau (Houston, Harris County Relief.)
2. Do you employ any Negroes in your business enterprise?
Yes ✓ No No. of Male 3 Female 10
3. Does the work require skilled workers? Yes (Trained Case Workers.)
4. What difficulty do you have in working Negroes? None
5. Are Negroes reliable and industrious? Yes
6. Is there a definite need for a vocational training program in this city? Yes ✓ No
7. Comment:

Social work is a new field which is gradually being opened to Negroes of the south. The Negroes in the social field in Dallas and Fort Worth are not as numerous as in social work in Houston. There are case workers, one aid and one doing clerical work.

Q U E S T I O N N A I R E

1. Type of business United States Post Office.
2. Approximate value Government owned and operated.
3. Do you employ any Negroes in your business enterprise? Yes ✓ No _____
4. Does the work require skilled workers Yes (Classified workers - Civil Service Examination.)
5. Are Negroes reliable and industrious? Yes
6. May I ask, is your work of such nature that you will be willing to employ some of the high school graduates in your work program? Yes ✓ No _____
7. Is there a definite need for a vocational training program in this city? Yes ✓ No _____
8. How many retired mail carriers? 10

9. Comment:

Men are chosen who are highly recommended, good character, honest and high marks in the Civil Service examinations which are held once each year.

In recent years a deal of stress has been given to teaching the boys and girls in the Negro schools of Houston varied vocations. It is a familiar sight to see the boys leaving school with some article they have made in the carpenter shop. They are taught cabinet making in all of the senior high schools and junior high schools during the exhibit at Phyllis Wheatly High school in May 1936, there were on display three radios, which had been constucted in the carpentering department. They were as beautiful as anything displayed in the leading furniture stores of Houston. There were on display library tables with inlaid pieces in the tops; there were floor lamps, table lamps, dressing tables. In fact the display looked like a leading furniture store show of the latest things in furniture. So often we see the girls carrying some household piece of linens and et cetero to be laundried in school. The children are taught how to dye, remove stain and dry clean. It can be noted that so many Negroes are owning and operating cleaning and pressing shops successfully. Cooking, sewing and milinery are taught both girls and boys should they desire to enter such classes. Style shows are being given at all times by

the teachers and pupils. The pupils are also taught commercial course in the high schools, auto mechanics, drawing, and music.

Most of the vocational teachers are Houston products, that at one time were scholastics in the Houston Negro Schools. These new fields are gradually being opened up to the Negroes of Houston. The schools must enlarge their vocational program so that the Negro scholastics will remain in school. If the students cannot find vocations to their liking, they naturally take the next course and that is get out and work. The Negroes have very sensibly come to the conclusion that there are too many literary teachers, and preachers. The students are also taught business and management. Business is a field that the Negroes have to open up themselves. More and more everyday we see new business endeavors being opened up. The city has several new and beautiful flower shops, funeral homes, eating houses. It is with regret that we mention the there is no theaters owned and operated by the Negroes of Houston. One was operated and owned by Negroes, but has been sold to the whites. The Negroes of Houston are business shy. There have been several business failures in recent years. It is the writers opinion that there are enough

Negroes with small amounts of cash money, (to pool their money) and have one of the finest play houses in the south. We, as a race, have not learned to pool our money.

There has not been enough stress on business in the Negro schools of Houston, Texas. There are too few Negro business in Houston, Texas for the Negro population which is nearly 80,000. The Negroes of Houston own a deal of property in and around Harris County.

Heretofore, Negro cooks and maids were unskilled laborers. The employers of maids and cooks, now demand that the cook and the maid must be trained in her field. The employer wants a cook now, who can select, and choose the best for less. No one wants an extravagant cook around. During the years of the depression, it paid everyone to be economical at all times.

Mrs. Nellie Dillon is now running a school in the city which trains Negro girls to be better cooks and maids. It is gratifying to note that the white people are selecting their help from this school. No one wants a loud ignorant Negro working for them. In making the survey to the different business the employer stated that they preferred Negroes with at least a high school training.

The following are suggestions that would lift

the standard of living for the Negroes of Houston.

(1) In some cities and towns the Young Men's Christian Association offers courses in commercial subjects and salesmanship as well as in various branches of industry. Why not Houston? (2) There is the Coöperation Industrial School. In New York, Boston, Cincinnati, and a number of other cities business firms coöperate with the high schools in furthering the education of their employees. Under arrangement two persons fill the same position. One of them attends school for two weeks while the other works, then comes back to the job while the first worker attends school for two weeks. In this way practical experience goes hand in hand with further schooling. This movement is growing. (3) Part-time trade schools are maintained by several hundred business firms for the benefit of their employees. These firms include banks, department stores, public-utility companies, and manufacturing companies of various kinds. (4) Evening schools have been established for those who cannot get educational training in the daytime. They are for adults rather than children. These four methods could be handled successfully in Houston.

In choosing an occupation, there are certain qualities a person must have. The following are fundamental

qualifications:

First, good health is one of the most important of these qualifications. Without it you are hampered from the start; with it, there are few obstacles you cannot overcome. To attain and keep good physical condition, you must make your exercises regular and be persistent in following the rules of good health.

A second fundamental qualification is honesty. It is difficult at times to do the unswerving honest thing, but how glad and how proud you will be later that you did it; and people will come to trust and to respect you instinctively. The adage "Honesty is the best policy" is out of date: honesty is the only policy if your life is to be successful one.

The third qualification is dependability. Dependability in small things lead to greater opportunities. It is a quality well worth cultivating.

Fourth, graciousness which is self explanatory.

Fifth, Courtesy. The importance of courtesy is recognized in the business world. The president of a Company once said: "Courtesy is the cheapest commodity in the world and yet the most far-reaching in its effect."

Sixth, Cleanliness. In selecting a number of

traits you desire to make a part of your character, you must not overlook the habit of cleanliness.

Seventh, Train the voice and last the ability to speak in public and good manners. Success depends to a great degree upon character and intelligent effort. The several fundamental qualifications which we have been considering you can make elements of your own character by using intelligent effort.

The Negroes of Houston should be taught while still students in day school to get acquainted with oneself. Before selecting a career you should be very sure to have the qualifications desirable in that career. For example, the student should be taught that they should not choose a vocation unless they are seasonably sure they are willing to work and like that type of work. A plan for self-study would consist of the following things: health, mental capacity, study one's own w abilities, attitude, rank yourself as to leadership, appearance, interest in subject, interest in hobbies or extracurricular activities, coöperation, moral attitude, language ability, manual dexterity, and be honest and thorough with yourself.

The Negroes of Houston are not taught to use their

spare time wisely. Domino shacks, pool halls, policy shops and dice halls attract a large number of high school boys and girls as well as men and women. During the depression, a number of men and women who had hobbies and used their spare time wisely, made nice incomes from these hobbies. As a rule, the Negroes of Houston are not hobby conscious, generally speaking. I am grateful to Armand J. Gerson for this statement, "If I had my life to live over again, I should definitely cultivate some talent or hobby as a preparation for the pleasant and wholesome occupation of leisure. I do not know whether it would be music, pictures, or some form of sport, but it would serve the important purpose of finishing needed relief and change from the occupations that fill one's working hours. However interesting one's daily work may be, it requires the relief of sensible relaxation. A man should be trained to play as hard as he works, and training to this end should begin in youth."

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bryant, Ira B. The Development of the Houston Negro Schools. Informer Publishing Company. Published Houston.
- Ernst, Clayton H. and White, Trentwell Mason. Opportunity Ahead. D. Appleton and Company. Published New York.
- Blackford, K. M. H. and Newcomb, A. A. The Right Job - How to Choose, Prepare for and Succeed in. Douthday, Doran and Company. Published New York.
- Fryer, Douglass. Vocational Self Guidance. J. B. Lippincott Company. Published Philadelphia.
- Sowers, J. I. The Boy and His Vocation. Manual Arts Press. Published Peoria.