

Racial Factors in the Employment of Women

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Employers in Hawaii generally express a racial preference in choosing employees. Obviously the type of work to be done is an important factor in selecting workers, for so-called "racial characteristics" seem to make one group more adaptable to one industry than to another. Frequently physical characteristics, such as size, weight, or strength, provide a justification for some of the occupational choices but the majority of the stated preferences are based upon more subtle factors such as custom or tradition. The choices are often influenced by the employers' familiarity and understanding of a race or upon a personal belief that the different groups possess distinctive traits. These beliefs have some foundation in the case of the first generation immigrants but there is less basis for distinction among the second and later generations. Many of the island-born and island-reared Orientals develop a stature comparable to that of the Caucasian or European races and certainly the fairly uniform educational and environmental patterns are creating a great similiarity of conduct, ideas, and beliefs. The writer's personal observations and experiences, covering a period of five years during which time a yearly average of more than 3,000 girls and women have been interviewed, raise doubts as to how deep seated these "racial characteristics" are, but the differences between the races are still important enough to seriously affect their success in the various occupations. The following are some of the common observations of employers with reference to racial factors in the employment of women in Honolulu.

HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYMENT

The Japanese are generally considered by employers as best suited for household work. They are usually quiet, scrupulously neat and clean in appearance, not given to gossip (at least not beyond their own racial group) and do not find detail and routine as monotonous as do the more temperamental members of other races. In the opinion of a great many household employers, the second-generation Japanese girl is not so satisfactory as the first generation. The Hawaiian-born girl has been given outside interests through school contacts. She has, if a high school girl, been made somewhat aware of her own personality and the opportunities for self-expression through community activities, especially those of a social and religious nature. Consequently, she is interested and happy only on that type of job which gives her some time to follow individual interests.

The Chinese and Chinese-Hawaiian are greatly in demand but they do not figure prominently in the field. They are fewer in number and more attractive occupations are open to them. They are generally thought to be very successful with children, the aged and adaptable in cases of illness.

The Portuguese are unpopular and generally unsuccessful. The distinctive characteristics cited by employers are emotional instability, an inclination to be talkative and intimately interested in the employer, his family and circle of friends, argumentative, and a shade too independent to suit most employers. On the other hand, if the position provides the op-

portunity for sufficient social and recreational expression, many Portuguese work with an industry and an initiative superior to that of the Oriental worker. Considerable antagonism is felt by the Portuguese toward the Oriental races because of the practically unanimous preference of the household employer for the Oriental. As a rule the Portuguese believe that Oriental popularity is a consequence of the supposed willingness of the Oriental to work for a lower wage. There is, however, no differential in the wage received.

Employers find the pure Hawaiian and the Caucasian-Hawaiian inclined to be inattentive to detail and routine duties and likely to lose interest in the situation. In the care of children and invalids their calm and sunny dispositions could create a large demand for their services if it were not offset by their brief span of interest and attention.

The Caucasians of Nordic, German and English descent are the nurses, governesses, housekeepers, but rarely the menial servants. The island tradition in favor of the Oriental and Hawaiian servant has created in the minds of employers a feeling that a Caucasian has neither the docile disposition nor the servant attitude, but must be treated as an equal socially to her employer. Hence, she is given positions of responsibility having a social rating higher than that of the so-called domestic.

Taken as a whole, the demands of the employers in this occupation present something of a paradox: They look for the servile attitude of the immigrant while at the same time and in the same person they require the ability to speak English and to be readily adaptable to modern household equipment. The modern Occidental pattern of living has been acquired by our Oriental peoples at the expense of the former obsequious and deferring attitude of servant towards

master.

OTHER OCCUPATIONS OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES

Commercial laundries and bakeries present a curious contrast as to racial selection. Portuguese and Asiatic-Hawaiian women are highly desired in these industries. The attributes of both groups which make them desirable for this type of work are a sturdiness of physique and a gregariousness such as to render the close proximity of other workers satisfying. Quoting the remarks of one manager, "The Orientals are too small to operate most of the standard built machinery. They are more difficult to train because they want to ask questions. The white girls are too independent and resent being asked to do anything other than their regular duties. Neither can the white women or the races of smaller stature stand up under the steady repetition of the same movements day after day." But the picture is reversed in the offices of these plants. Here the Oriental girls are found busily and quietly at work on the routine duties of typing daily records and reports and keeping accounts. Office managers have repeatedly expressed their appreciation for the accuracy and thoroughness of the work of Orientals, but also stating that their present inability to become reliable secretaries is due to their limited command of the English language. This also, generally bars them from positions as switchboard operators, information and order clerks.

Racial discrimination in the hotel and restaurant trades and in retail selling is largely determined by the nationality of the owners and managers—most of them preferring workers of their own race. In a few cases, Oriental girls in their picturesque attire are employed by a white proprietor to lend color and atmosphere. Except for the brief span of the N.R.A.

code regulations, a wage differential has been in general practice, the Oriental waitress and salesgirl receiving a lower wage than the Portuguese and other Caucasians. Proprietors capitalize on the driving ambition of the Japanese to get ahead which leads them to work for a smaller wage. The Hawaiian and Caucasian races are relatively quick to detect and resent any unfair practices such as insufficient wage for too arduous work or too long hours on duty.

The clothing trades, though small in the number of employees, present a cross section of all the racial groups. The specialized type of work performed by the several groups, however, differs owing to employer's preferences, to discrimination in rates of pay, and to racial characteristics. In the smaller shops of women's ready-to-wear, the alteration departments generally employ Oriental girls, who are directly under the supervision of the manager. But the larger shops use the Portuguese who work successfully without supervision. The Portuguese women from the old country have been well trained in needlework. The Portuguese girls who are engaged in the rather detailed work of the alteration of factory-made clothing seem to do so naturally without the aid of long courses of training used for the Orientals. Employers state that the Portuguese and the other Caucasians who have an aptitude for needlecraft show a keener style consciousness than do the Oriental. This is probably due in a large measure to the longer experience in the use of the Western style of clothing.

The Oriental women excel in the more severe types of sewing, such as the tailoring of marine clothing, shirt-making, and the making of plantation workers' outfits. This is mainly copy work from standard samples and requires little originality on the

part of the worker. It seems an ambition peculiarly of the Japanese parents that their daughters learn to sew. The family expenditures for clothing is much less when one or more in the family are skilled in sewing. Many girls make clothes for themselves and for other members of the family after the regular working hours and on Sunday. The great number of Japanese women who earn all or part of the family income by sewing has reduced the charge for such services to a very low figure. This situation causes antagonism on the part of clothing retailers and among other races whose living costs prevent them from working at an occupation so poorly paid.

THE EMPLOYEES' REACTION TO EMPLOYERS

Generally speaking, the Haole* is considered by all races to be the best employer. The foreign-born employer of any race or the employer who retains distinctive nationality traits, though born in this country is generally found to be difficult to work for.

Several attempts of an Oriental to employ Haoles has been unsuccessful. The Haole employee believes him to be more critical of the Haole than of the workers of his own race. The Oriental employer appears, to the Haole to be lacking in common courtesy towards his employees. Probably a part is owing to an attempt on the part of the employer to combat the traditional feeling of inferiority with relation to the Haoles. In these cases, the Haole employee is also faced with a language handicap which in itself breeds suspicion and misunderstanding.

In the case of the household worker, we find much unwillingness on the part of an Oriental to work in an Oriental home. This situation is fairly true with all groups other than

*Hawaiian term for people of North European ancestry.

the whites. Objections are made on grounds of long working hours, lower rates of pay, more strenuous work due to the larger families, and the lack of modern equipment. Also, the Oriental employers are more interested in the personal life of their workers and often assume the role of parents. This supervision is resented by the girl who has often gone to work partly to escape home control. Often Oriental employers request workers from other communities than their own so that the opportunities for gossip may be lessened. A Japanese business man in explaining his refusal to consider the appli-

cation of a Japanese girl well qualified for the position said, "I know her family well and she might discuss my business and myself at home." The Chinese household employer, to escape the same difficulty does not, as a rule, employ a Chinese girl in order that the family conversation may not be understood by the worker. The Oriental household worker, on the other hand, objects to the close moral scrutiny of an employer of her own race, and fears that any deviation from the parental code will be reported back to her home community.

WOMEN IN SELECTED OCCUPATIONS BY RACE FOR HONOLULU,
1930.

	All Classes*	Hawaiian	Caucasian Hawaiian	Asiatic Hawaiian	Portuguese	Porto Rican	Other Caucasian	Chinese	Japanese	Korean	Filipino
Dressmakers and seamstresses (not in factory)	260	11	5	5	30	1	25	8	168	6	1
Operatives Clothing Industries	249				36	1	5	35	160	11	1
Saleswomen	478	7	15	11	61		139	110	129	2	2
Laundresses (not in factory)	359	13	2	6	33	4	4		281	7	7
Laundry Operatives	215	68	12	17	72	5	16	6	16	1	1
Servants	2,030	89	63	49	129	49	65	111	1,401	24	24
Waitresses	263	5	3	1	22	4	26	31	161	5	3
Stenographers and Typists	733	18	99	27	55		440	29	57	3	1
Barbers, Hairdressers, and Manicurists	230	1			3		34	1	189		1

*Others Included.