

## STATE LAWS AFFECTING WORKING WOMEN.

### INTRODUCTION.

During the last 30 years there has been an increasing amount of legislation passed by the various States with the aim of protecting and aiding women, especially working women. At present practically every State has one law or more of this type. In this report the majority of the laws that affect women who work have been charted. Also five maps have been made from these charts to give a picture of conditions for the country as a whole. In the maps depicting limitation of working hours it has been possible to show for each State only one hourly limitation. If there is more than one limitation the State is given credit for that which covers the greatest number of women. The particular laws considered are those that regulate the hours of women who work, provide a minimum wage for women workers, control the conditions under which home work may be carried on, and provide mothers' pensions so that needy mothers will not be dependent solely on their own efforts for the support of their families. The laws that regulate working conditions have not been included because of their great number and wide differences, which would make the charting of them extremely complicated and of great length. Laws providing that women workers must be furnished seats and those forbidding their employment in certain industries or occupations which are deemed injurious, also, are not considered. The two types of legislation which form the basis of these charts are (1) acts of the various State legislatures, which apply to specified industries or occupations, and (2) regulations of State industrial commissions or boards which usually have the force of law and which usually consider each industry or occupation separately.

### LAWS REGULATING THE LENGTH OF THE WORKING DAY OR WEEK.

There are only four States in the United States—Alabama, Florida, Iowa, West Virginia—that do not have some sort of a law regulating the hours of work for women. Indiana has only one limitation of hours—that prohibiting the employment of women at night in one occupation, manufacturing. All the other States have either definitely forbidden the employment of women for more than a certain number of hours per day or week, or have penalized all employment beyond certain specified hours by providing that it must be paid for at an increased rate.

# NEGRO WOMEN IN INDUSTRY.

## INTRODUCTION.

During the World War, when there was a wholesale recruiting of forces through which the great conflict might be speedily and victoriously ended, the opportunity and call came to Negro women to enter the growing army of American women workers.

This entrance of Negro women into industry brought with it some acute economic problems which called forth many perplexing questions. Were they to be used as a marginal class, merely filling the gap caused by the labor shortage, or were diversified and equal opportunities for employment and promotion open to them? Were Negro women grasping successfully their industrial opportunity, or were they failing to measure up to the usual standards in the work which it had fallen to their lot to do? In other words, Were they standing the test industrially in the quantity and quality of work which they produced as compared with their white coworkers? Was the question of the retention of Negro women when the reduction of workers came during the reconstruction period one of industry or one of race?

To secure information answering these and related questions the Women's Bureau detailed a member of its staff to the Division of Negro Economics to make an investigation of conditions among Negro women in industry in typical industrial centers during the months immediately following the close of the war. The facts and figures secured during this investigation form the basis for conclusions concerning the needs and problems which must be faced in order "to foster, develop, and promote the welfare of the wage earners of the United States; to improve their working conditions and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment."<sup>1</sup>

The data of this report could not have been so effectively gathered in the time available had it not been for the cordial assistance and cooperation of social agencies and individuals in all of the cities visited during the survey. Special appreciation is here expressed to employers for their courtesy in giving interviews and in opening the doors of their workrooms; to State employment officials, and a number of private welfare and philanthropic organizations for

<sup>1</sup> Organic act creating the United States Department of Labor.

granting unrestricted access to data in their files and for their cooperation in facilitating the actual investigation; and to leaders and other individuals whose interested responses were so helpful in throwing light on industrial or related conditions surrounding the life of Negro women workers.

#### SCOPE AND METHOD OF STUDY.

Since only a brief period of time, from September to December, 1920, was allotted for the field work of this report, it was deemed wiser to gather facts from selected places over an extended territory rather than to make an intensive study of any special locality. Visits were made, therefore, to points in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. In each locality the investigator visited as many plants as possible. Effort was put forth to include especially those industries which were typical of the locality or of conditions under which Negro women were working.

With few exceptions, the industries represented in the report are mechanical and manufacturing industries. Domestic and personal service occupations were not included unless they were definitely allied with some industry. The reason for this was threefold. In the first place, time would not permit an investigation of Negro women so employed, because the numbers are so great. Second, such occupations embrace distinct and separate problems whose analyses could not be adequately treated in a report on industry. In the third place, domestic and personal service does not represent new opportunities for Negro women, with the exception of employment as elevator operators and stock girls in department stores. Although there has been a widening of scope for Negro women in domestic and personal service, this could not be called an industrial advance. This report therefore includes mainly those occupations in which Negro women were working in factories on mechanical and manufacturing processes.

In all, 150 plants were visited, in 17 localities in nine States. These employed 70,409 persons. Of the workers 28,520 (40.5 per cent) were women, and 11,812 (16.8 per cent) were Negro women. The Negro women formed more than 40 per cent of all the women employed. The following table shows the number of establishments visited, the total number of workers employed therein, and the number and per cent of white and Negro women employed, by industry:

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TABLE 1.—Number of establishments investigated, number of workers, male and female, and number and per cent of white and Negro women, by industry.

Industry.	Number of establishments—			Number of workers			Number of women workers.		Per cent women form of total number of workers.			
	Employers males.	Employing females.		Male.	Female.	Total.	White.	Negro.	White.	Negro.	Total.	
		White.	Negro.									Total.
Clothing.....	14	26	30	30	239	1,473	1,712	783	710	44.6	41.5	86.1
Food products.....	12	12	13	13	9,564	3,810	13,374	3,031	779	22.7	5.8	28.5
Furniture.....	3	2	5	5	332	351	683	150	181	22.6	27.3	49.9
Glass.....	7	6	8	8	1,910	904	2,814	304	600	10.7	21.1	31.8
Leather products.....	2	3	3	3	320	109	429	82	27	19.1	6.3	25.4
Metal.....	10	11	12	12	17,298	1,816	19,114	1,010	806	5.2	4.2	9.4
Paper products.....	2	5	6	6	40	455	495	338	117	68.2	23.6	91.8
Peanuts.....	3	3	3	3	38	72	110	.....	72	.....	65.5	65.5
Textiles.....	7	6	10	10	3,541	2,750	6,291	1,910	840	30.4	13.4	43.8
Tobacco.....	36	16	39	39	7,018	12,955	19,973	6,424	6,531	32.2	32.7	64.9
Toys.....	2	2	3	3	83	115	198	55	60	27.8	30.3	58.1
Miscellaneous.....	7	12	18	18	1,476	3,730	5,206	2,641	1,089	50.7	20.9	71.6
Total.....	105	101	150	150	41,889	28,520	70,409	16,708	11,812	23.7	16.8	40.5

According to the census of 1910,<sup>2</sup> there were employed in the United States at that time, as laborers and semiskilled workers in the industries noted above, 16,835 Negro women. That Negro women secured a much larger place in industry during and since the war is indicated by the present investigation which, though covering only some of the principal industries in 17 cities of 9 States, found 11,812 Negro women to be employed. Figures are not available at the present time to show the total number of Negro women employed in manufacturing and mechanical occupations in the United States in 1920. The figures of this report, and the evolution in industry during and since the war, make it clear that there has been a marked transition of Negro women from domestic service and other home pursuits to factory work.

As far as possible, detailed facts were secured concerning all labor conditions surrounding the life of Negro women workers. Interviews were obtained with officials of each factory visited and inspection of the workroom was made. Negro women employed in the factories were interviewed, through arranged or accidental meetings. Leaders of social agencies and other persons who were in close contact with the local industrial and community conditions were called upon. The answers to some of the questions asked employers on the comparative efficiency, behavior, and reliability of Negro and white women workers were necessarily based only upon opinions, but these opinions are in themselves pertinent factors in the situa-

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of the Census, Negro population in the United States, 1790-1915, p. 521.

tion. So many peculiar problems have to be faced by Negro workers in their effort to secure an equal chance with laborers of other races for industrial opportunities and promotions that opinions of employers who have had experience with them are important and valuable. Other employers may or may not feel confident when they think of engaging them, largely because of these opinions.

One disadvantage of the investigation was that it was made during a period when the industrial retrenchment following the boom of war production was just in progress. Many plants were closed, and the policy of the managements of these plants toward Negro women workers could not be ascertained. A reduction of the working force was being made in other plants, and the general depression left much to conjecture concerning the industrial destiny of these Negro workers.

More than one-half (6,531) of the Negro women represented in this survey were employed in the tobacco industry, an industry in which they have held a monopoly of the heavy and dusty labor since the institution of the factory method of rehandling tobacco. Of this number of tobacco workers, 5,517 Negro women were working in the tobacco factories of the State of Virginia. An investigation made by the Women's Bureau in the autumn of 1919 revealed that of the 10,344 women employed in the tobacco industry of this State more than half were Negroes; of the 7,694 women employed in the three largest tobacco centers of the State, 4,504 were Negroes. So large a part of the working population of the industry in this State being of the Negro race, a follow-up study of these women was desirable. Accordingly, the conditions in the three largest tobacco centers of Virginia were studied during the fall of 1920. Not only were visits made to the factories in these three cities, but visits were made to 85 homes of Negro women workers in the same places. The facts and conditions discovered through these home visits are included in this report.