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A possible explanation of these wide differences among nations is associated with Thorstein Veblen: "The need of vicarious leisure, or conspicuous consumption of service, is a dominant incentive to the keeping of servants."⁸ That is, the *equality* of the distribution of income, rather than the amount, may be a factor of considerable importance. A society with relatively many families at both ends of the income scale would provide both a large supply of servants and a large demand. Unfortunately this conjecture cannot be tested either internationally or nationally, because of lack of data on income distributions.⁹

2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANTS

Racial Composition

The low social status of domestic service, the absence of vocational or educational requirements, and the discrimination practiced in other lines of employment seem adequate to explain the fact that immigrants and negroes have constituted more than half of female servants since 1900 (see Table 3)—and no doubt an even larger proportion before. During the first decade of this century, when immigration ran high, more than a fifth of the female servants were foreign-born, and a third negro; in 1940 nearly half were negro. The effects of social attitudes and occupational requirements are documented by a comparison of ratios of servants to all women in the labor force: even in 1900 this ratio was twice as high for immigrants and negroes as for native white females, and it is now nearly five times as high for negroes as for whites. A striking illustration of the strength of the aversion to domestic service is that children of immigrants enter domestic service in the same proportion

⁸ *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Modern Library, 1934), p. 62, also pp. 55-67. Only the childless Veblen would write:

"In the modern [1899] industrial communities the mechanical contrivances available for the comfort and convenience of everyday life are highly developed. So much so that body servants, or, indeed, domestic servants of any kind, would now scarcely be employed by anybody except on the ground of a canon of reputability carried over by tradition from earlier usage." (*ibid.*, pp. 64-5).

⁹ A relatively large number of servants are employed in southern cities where the inequality of incomes (measured by the distribution of rents) is great, but information necessary to segregate the effect of inequality is lacking (see Sec. 2).

TABLE 3
Nativity of Female Servants
United States by Decades, 1900-1940

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
	PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION				
Native white	42.8	37.4	36.8	37.7}	54.4
Foreign-born white	23.0	21.4	17.4	14.7}	
Negro	34.0	41.0	45.6	47.4	45.3
Other	.2	.2	.2	.2	.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

	PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES OF EACH NATIVITY IN LABOR FORCE WHO WERE SERVANTS				
Native white	22.3	15.0	9.6	10.4}	11.0
Foreign-born white	42.5	34.0	23.8	26.8}	
Negro	41.9	39.5	44.4	54.9	54.4
Other	24.8	22.9	22.9	19.4	16.0
Total	30.5	24.0	17.9	19.8	17.2

Covers the four occupational classes in Table 1. The estimated number of Mexicans in 1930 was taken from 'other races' and divided between native and foreign-born white (in the previously existing proportions) in order to maintain comparability with other census years.

as native women, although their parents enter in twice the proportion.¹⁰

The large decline in the proportion of domestic servants who are foreign-born white revealed in Table 3 reflects the well-known decline in immigration. At the beginning of the century immigration averaged more than three-quarters of a million persons per year; it rose to almost a million before World War I, then fell sharply (see Table 4). In the 1920's the annual level was below half a million and in the 'thirties became a small trickle. On the average, one-tenth of all immigrants reported their occupation as servant. The proportion of servants is based upon pre-immigration occupation, of course, but considerable persistence of occupation is to be expected and many additional recruits were doubtless drawn from the large number of women and children without previous occupation. In the foreseeable future we can expect no additional recruits

¹⁰ For example, the percentage that 'servants and waitresses' (in 1900) and 'servants' (in 1920) are of all women in the labor force varies with nativity (Census of Population, *Occupations*, 1900, p. 11; Census of Population, IV, 1920, 358).

NATIVITY	1900	1920
Native white, native parents	18.2	6.7
Native white, foreign parents	21.5	7.1
Foreign-born white	37.8	18.7

TABLE 4
Average Annual Immigration, United States, 1891-1940

	IMMIGRANTS (000)	PREVIOUSLY SERVANTS (000)	PERCENTAGE SERVANTS ARE OF IMMIGRANTS
1891-1895	(425)*
1896-1900	313	32	10.3
1901-1905	767	87	11.3
1906-1910	992	98	9.8
1911-1915	892	110	12.3
1916-1920	255	22	8.8
1921-1925	528	56	10.5
1926-1930	294	30	10.3
1931-1935	44	3	6.2
1936-1940	62	4	6.2
Total (excl. 1891-95)	20,731	2,207	10.6

Compiled from reports of the Commissioner-General of Immigration and the Department of Labor.

*Excluded from total.

to foreign-born servants, who averaged about a third of a million during the first three decades of the century.

The future course of the number of female negro servants is less easy to forecast. Our general knowledge of the northward migration of the negro and the probability that this migration increases the aggregate number of servants would have led most people to prophecy a continued increase of negro servants in the 'thirties. Actually there was about the same number of female negro servants in 1940 as in 1930, and also the same number of female negroes in the labor force—which is particularly surprising since the number of white women in the labor force was 25 percent higher in 1940 than in 1930.

It may be that the 'thirties marked merely a temporary pause in the growth of negro servants. The generally depressed conditions in the labor markets apparently discouraged northward migration—Table 5 indicates a sharp retardation¹¹—and increased the com-

¹¹ Unfortunately, there is no earlier study with which to compare the census study of migration between 1935 and 1940. The net interregional migration of non-white females during these five years was small. The corresponding net loss was divided fairly equally among the South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central Regions. See U. S. Census, *Internal Migration, 1935 to 1940*, p. 19.

New England and West North Central states	+2,365
Middle Atlantic and East North Central states	+47,196
Mountain and Pacific states	+13,034

TABLE 5

Female Negroes in the Labor Force and in Domestic Service
Selected States, North and South, by Decades, 1900-1940
(thousands)

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
FEMALE NEGROES IN LABOR FORCE					
5 Southern states ^a	703	1,044	725	747	622
5 Northern states ^b	74	117	157	266	303
FEMALE NEGRO SERVANTS					
5 Southern states ^a	189	264	226	319	326
5 Northern states ^b	58	89	99	174	166

The servant occupations are laundresses not in laundries, untrained nurses, cooks, and 'other servants'.

^a Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana.

^b New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois.

petition by white women for jobs as domestic servants. One may expect further northward migration of southern negroes if high employment continues after the war, and of these migrants perhaps a majority will serve an apprenticeship as domestic servants. It is worth observing indeed that domestic service has been an important training ground for the female labor force. The nativity characteristics just discussed suggest that the untrained worker, and often the worker who does not know English well, acquired general educational and social training in domestic service.¹²

Geographical Distribution

Table 6 suggests and Chart 2 confirms the existence of three levels of use of domestic service. In the South there is a servant for every 10 families, in the northeastern states one for every 14, and elsewhere one for every 20. Since negroes and immigrants have supplied a majority of servants, high levels in the South and along the eastern seaboard are to be expected.

¹² The point is supported by the youth of the servants: In 1900 at least 49.2 percent of female servants were under 25; by 1940, only 29.8 percent. (The percentage was undoubtedly higher in 1900; this estimate is necessarily based upon the assumption that e.g., laundresses in laundries had the same age distribution as laundresses in private homes.) See Census of Population, *Occupations* (1900), p. 16; Census of Population, *The Labor Force* (1940), p. 199.

The formal education of domestic servants was lower in 1940 than that of any other large group of employed women. The median number of years of school completed by servants was 7.9, as against 10.8 for all women, 12.3 for clerical workers, and 8.6 for manufacturing operatives (Census of Population, 1940, *Occupational Characteristics*).

TABLE 6
Domestic Servants and Families, Regional Distribution, 1940

	R E G I O N *				U. S.
	Northeast	North Central	South	West	
Servants (000)	697	585	1,092	205	2,579
Families (000)	9,547	11,023	10,353	4,166	35,089
Servants per 1,000 families	73.0	53.1	105.5	49.2	73.5

The data for servants are those of the 1940 industry classification and hence differ from the occupational data used in Tables 1, 2, and 3 in order to get comparability through time.

*The states in the Northeast are indicated in Figure 2; the Census definition of the South includes West Virginia and Oklahoma; the West covers states lying wholly west of Kansas. The Census regions are used in all subsequent discussion except the statistical analysis of the demand for servants.

Servants are to be found chiefly in cities,¹³ but the number per family does not vary consistently with size of community. The 1940 Census does not give summary labor force information for cities with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants. In larger cities, servants increase relative to the number of families as community size increases in the Northeast and West, and decrease in the South and North Central states (see Table 7). The greater provision of personal

TABLE 7
Domestic Servants per 1,000 Families
by Region and Size of Community, 1940

SIZE OF COMMUNITY	R E G I O N				U. S.
	Northeast	North Central	South	West	
100,000- 500,000	58.7	65.9	169.2	48.8	90.6
500,000-1,000,000	65.0	61.4	144.2	56.1	80.6
1,000,000 & over	77.0	49.7	...	70.8	67.8

services by the market in large cities would explain the pattern in the North Central states, and the higher incomes in larger communities would explain the pattern in the Northeastern states. But it is difficult to believe that both explanations are important and

¹³ One must use the 1940 occupational data to show the extent of urbanization. Only half as many servants are on farms as there would be if the ratio of servants to families were constant. Of course many part-time farm servants are probably recorded as agricultural workers in the Census.

TYPE OF COMMUNITY	PERCENTAGE OF	
	Servants	Families
Urban	69.5	59.1
Rural-nonfarm	20.0	20.7
Farm	10.5	20.2

consistent, for they imply that average income rises more rapidly with community size in the northeastern than in the North Central states. An alternative, and perhaps more plausible, explanation is that the large cities in the Northeast and West have relatively large immigrant populations.

3 THE WAGES AND HOURS OF SERVANTS

Increases in Wages, 1899-1939

A detailed study of the movements of servants' wages would be of great interest if only because domestic service is the one very large occupation whose wages have never been significantly affected either by employee or employer combinations or by social legislation. Information on wages is unfortunately so inadequate, however, that cyclical movements must be ignored and only the terminal years of our period can be studied.¹⁴

There is only one comprehensive study of servants' wages in the early period: a sample of the money wage rates paid general household servants in 33 states about 1899.¹⁵ According to it, the mean weekly wage was \$3.16. In 1939 the average weekly money earnings of full-time female servants in these same states was \$7.22.¹⁶ If the early data on servants' wages are representative—and this is questionable—servants' money wages increased about 130 per cent. The value of 'in kind' income increased less, if we judge by the smaller rise in the cost of living indexes, but the change in the proportion of servants who received such income at the two dates is unknown, although its direction was very probably downward.

The increase in weekly earnings in other industries employing large numbers of women is equally difficult to determine. The average weekly earnings of all wage earners in manufacturing ap-

¹⁴ The data on servants' wages are discussed in Appendix B.

¹⁵ See Gail Laughlin, *Domestic Service, Report of the United States Industrial Commission, XIV* (1901); this study is described in Appendix B.

¹⁶ All female servants cannot properly be compared with female servants doing general housework, although it is not certain which way such a comparison is biased. The Laughlin study covers only urban areas, where in 1899 there were relatively fewer servants (but probably with relatively high wages), for this and other reasons discussed in Appendix B, the increase in wage rates is probably underestimated.