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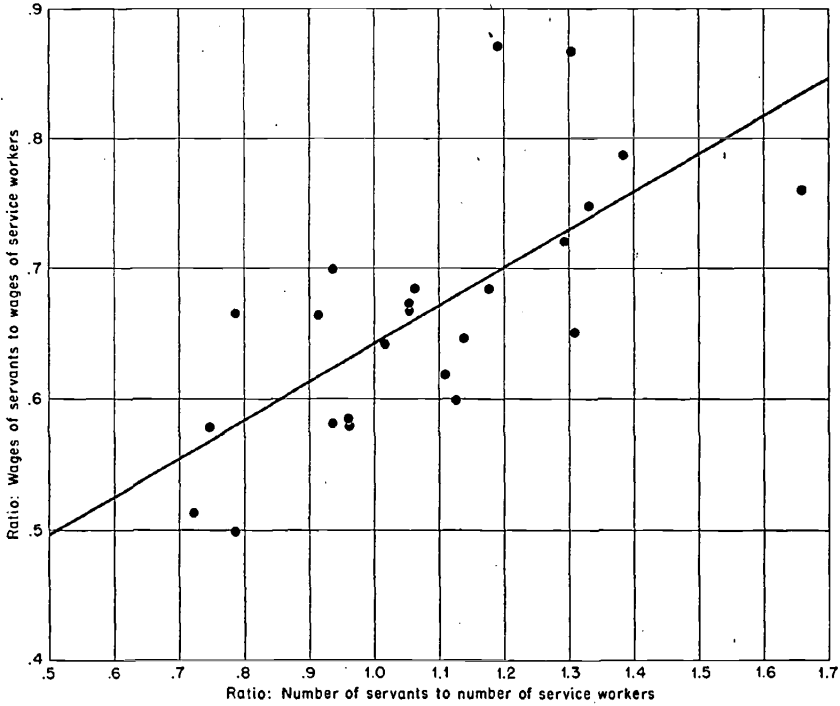
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CHART 6

Relation between Ratio of Servants' to Service Workers' Wages
and Ratio of Number of Servants to Service Workers
Large Non-Southern Cities, 1940



of ethnic factors is dominant only when southern cities are included; in the North and West wage rates are as or more important.

5 CONCLUSION

It is venerable Anglo-Saxon tradition to view the servant problem with alarm. Even in Utopia Thomas More felt the need for bondsmen purchased from societies where they had committed crimes—a policy, it will be recalled, subsequently adopted in the American colonies. It is to be feared that many would still favor this and related solutions of the 'problem'.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ In 1926 the Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization issued a pamphlet (*Housework in Canada*) to entice more immigrant women into Canadian homes. The pamphlet paints a glowing picture of life in Canada; there was even an attraction, one suspects, in the parting admonition: "Do not accept from strangers the offer of a ride in a motor car."

The perennial complaint of a servant shortage is ambiguous. Does it mean—as one often suspects—that a good servant cannot be hired at the wage rate one's parents paid? By this sentimental criterion there is a shortage of almost every type of laborer. Or does it mean that the market mechanism does not work—that the offer of the going rate of wages does not secure a servant because servants do not move to the highest bidder? This complaint—which would be far from unanimous—would have economic significance because it would imply that wages do not allocate servants: there is, however, little empirical support for it. Although many servants doubtless acquire sentimental ties and do not respond to higher offers elsewhere, we have seen that to an unusual extent the occupation has been staffed with young women, for whom such ties are weak. If there is a servant problem, it is primarily the problem of offering enough to draw persons into domestic service.

That the American family has not continued to desire the same amount of domestic service as at the beginning of the century is clear from the fall in the ratio of servants to families and the failure of servants' wages to rise much, if at all, relative to national income per worker. The one-third decline in the ratio of servants to families in four decades may be put into somewhat more significant, if also more approximate, terms by comparing the number of paid and unpaid persons engaged in household work (Table 19). It is attributable to both peculiarities in supply and a diminution of demand. The peculiarity of supply is that the number of servants seems to be governed in large part by ethnic factors.

TABLE 19
Number of Paid Servants and Unpaid Women in Households
by Decades, 1900-1940

| | 1900 | 1910 | 1920 | 1930 | 1940 |
|--------------|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | |
| Servants | 1,650 | 2,030 | 1,590 | 2,190 | 2,220 |
| Unpaid women | 18,933 | 20,664 | 24,723 | 29,341 | 35,254 |
| | PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL | | | | |
| Servants | 8.0 | 8.9 | 6.0 | 6.9 | 5.9 |
| Unpaid women | 92.0 | 91.1 | 94.0 | 93.1 | 94.1 |

Number of servants from Table 1, arbitrarily increased 15 percent to offset understatement; 'unpaid women' are females over 17 not in the labor force.

Well over half are negroes and immigrants, in part because they lack the educational and other requirements for most commercial employments, in part because of discriminatory employment practices elsewhere, in part because the social disapproval of domestic service has kept most native white women out of this field. The diminution of demand per family is due to the smaller size of families, abandonment of many activities by the household, and the introduction of technological improvements. These factors have apparently outweighed those which serve to increase the demand for servants: increased urbanization; more wives in the labor market; and the rise of real income per family.

The future course of employment in domestic service in the United States may be prophesied on either of two bases. By a restrained extrapolation of past prophecies it is safe to say that within a generation the last unmarried domestic will be lured to Hollywood for a commemorative film. On the basis of past trends in employment and the probable development of technology within the household one may assert—with less safety—that after a postwar expansion employment will gradually decline until a generation hence there will be perhaps a million domestic servants to view that film some Thursday night.

APPENDIX A

The Number of Servants

No one familiar with occupational and employment data will be surprised by a tale of difficulties encountered in obtaining even five decennial figures for domestic servants. The great number of employer units and the customary exemption of domestic servants from social legislation contribute heavily to the conspiracy of statistical silence. For continuous and comprehensive figures the occupational data in the decennial censuses must be used.

Except in 1940 there were no domestic servant categories. The 1930 Census is the basis for our estimates since the 1940 and 1910 Censuses departed widely from preceding classifications. In 1930