Volume Title: Domestic Servants in the United States, 1900-1940

Volume Author/Editor: George J. Stigler

Volume Publisher: P DGT

Volume ISBN: 0-87014-339-5

Volume URL: http://www.nber.org/books/stig46-1

Publication Date: 1946

Chapter Title: Appendices to "Domestic Servants in the United States, 1900-1940"

Chapter Author: George J. Stigler

Chapter URL: http://www.nber.org/chapters/c2738

Chapter pages in book: (p. 37 - 44)

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

four occupations containing chiefly domestic servants were chosen: "Launderers and laundresses (not in laundries)"; "nurses (not trained)"; "cooks"; and "other servants". The members of these occupations working in agriculture, manufacturing, etc., and, within domestic and personal service, those working in hotels, boarding houses, and restaurants are separated by the Census; the remaining workers are chiefly in domestic service.[1] Despite their approximate character, the figures are reliable enough to indicate general magnitudes and broad movements.

One substantial occupational group, 'housekeepers' (see the accompanying figures), although it consists primarily of domestic

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Housekeepers and Stewards					
Total	155,153	189,273	221,612	256,746	484,535
In homes				(190,000)	ca. 396,160

servants, is excluded from our series because of its erratic behavior—the 1940 figure cannot be compared with earlier years—and because a large number of housewives are improperly included. "Notwithstanding the fact that in 1930, in 1920, and in 1910 the enumerators were given specific instructions to return as *housekeepers* only those women who were keeping house for wages, at each census the enumerators returned as housekeepers so many housewives doing housework in their own homes, and so many servants who were in no sense housekeepers, that, after a rigid exclusion of the most improbable cases, it is believed that so many housewives and servants were classified as housekeepers that the statistics for 'Housekeepers and stewardesses' are very inaccurate."[2] Readers can easily modify our figures by including whatever portion of housekeepers they deem correct. The total for 1930 is compared below with Alba M. Edwards' independent estimate.

For 1910, when the industrial classification was rougher, corresponding figures were based on the assumption that domestic

[1] Each series nevertheless contains some workers who are not in domestic service. For example, "nurses (not trained)" includes some hospital employees, and "other servants" includes hashers in lumber camps and employees of clubs. Contrariwise, certain domestic servants are excluded, e.g., domestic laborers, gardeners, housekeepers, chauffeurs, and furnace tenders. See Bureau of the Census, *Classified Index of Occupations* (1930), pp. 197 ff.

[2] *Census of Population, 1930*, V, 9.

servants formed (by sex) the same percentage of domestic servants plus servants in hotels, boarding houses, and restaurants as in 1930. In 1920 a similar hypothesis was applied (using an interpolated percentage), this time necessarily using occupational in place of industrial data. The 1900 occupational classification differed radically, but by use of the guide to comparable occupations made in 1910, estimates were similarly provided.[3]

The cycle in the series between 1900 and 1930 suggests some changes in enumeration, especially in 1910 or 1920. The number of foreign-born white and negro female servants in the four (occupational) groups run as follows:

	1900	1910	1920	1930
Negro	552,751	795,036	697,389	1,010,498
Foreign-born white	374,651	416,324	266,064	307,066

The 1920 declines in both series seem over-large, especially since the northward movement of negroes continued; and the rise to 1930 of foreign-born white servants is surprising in the light of the decline of immigration relative to the preceding decade. The Census Bureau also believes that the 1910-20 movement was not entirely real because in 1920 it abandoned the emphatic 1910 instruction to enumerators to ascertain the occupation of every person.[4]

In 1940 a separate industrial category, domestic service, was established; unless otherwise stated, the textual discussion on female domestic servants in 1940 is based directly on it. But since for various reasons this category is incomparable with preceding censuses, the 1940 total used to establish continuity of numbers was developed exactly as in 1930 (i.e., housekeepers are excluded, untrained nurses included, etc.) and an estimated 3,836 were added for the missing 10-13 age group.

Mr. Edwards has recently given 1930 figures on domestic service that are intended to be comparable with the 1940 Census.[5] His figures also show virtual equality of numbers in 1930 and 1940, but at a much higher level: 2.5 million. About two-fifths of the difference between his figures and our 2 million is directly attributable

[3] See *ibid., 1910*, IV, 54.
[4] See *ibid., 1920*, IV, 23.
[5] *Comparative Occupation and Industry Statistics, 1940 and 1930.*

to his inclusion of housekeepers. Most of the other three-fifths is due to differences in approach: we included only occupations clearly in domestic service; Mr. Edwards apparently excluded only occupations clearly outside domestic service. Waiving the inclusion of housekeepers, our figures are probably low, Edwards' high. Our method is much simpler and requires fewer assumptions when applied to earlier censuses, and this seems persuasive in a study of trends.

The data for Great Britain for 1921 and 1931 are taken directly from *Population of England and Wales* (1921 and 1931). As no industrial classifications were given in earlier censuses, a procedure analagous to that used in making the American estimates was followed. That is, the ratios of those in domestic service to all members of an occupational group were computed for the important occupations in 1931 and 1921 and extrapolated back to 1911 and 1901 on the basis of occupational data. The largest occupations used in these estimates are "other domestic indoor servants", "coachmen", and "gardeners".

The German data are from the *Statistiches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* (1898, 1937); the area of enumeration is uniformly that of January 1, 1934. The number of families in 1895 was reduced to this geographical basis in proportion to total population, and the number in 1907 was interpolated. The series, W 158 and W 159 in the Census classification, include also a few persons not usually considered domestic servants (e.g., tutors). For a list of occupations, see *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* (Bd. 402, pp. 117-8).

Appendix B

Wage Data

Almost every student of the labor market complains at one time or another about the inadequacy of wage data and the ambiguity of their interpretation. Such remarks applied to (say) manufacturing or railroads must strike the student of domestic service as hypercritical and ungrateful. If economic theorists had the propensity

for idle speculation they are popularly charged with, they would be wise to choose domestic servants to illustrate their doctrines: it would eliminate all fear of empirical refutation.

Our knowledge of servants' wages stems from questionnaires sent to employment agencies, newspaper advertisements, and a few questionnaires directly to employers and employees. The questionnaires to employment agencies, which have been collected annually or semi-annually for almost two decades (in connection with national income estimates by the National Bureau of Economic Research and the Department of Commerce), are unfortunately suspect on four counts. First, they necessarily come from fairly large cities, where wage levels are higher than in smaller places. Second, the domestic servant market is not highly organized, and the wage rates for new hirings of experienced personnel need not reflect general wages any better than market quotations reflect prices in a field where long term contracts are common. Indeed one would expect these employment agency series to lead the market in both up and down swings. Moreover, the bias in the types of servant and employer who use the better employment agencies, though unknown, is certainly conducive to high wage quotations.[1] Third, as the extent of unemployment is unknown, earnings cannot be measured, and indeed even the distribution of servants between those 'with room and board', 'with board', etc., is unavailable. Finally, the samples themselves are relatively small.

The second source of information on servants, newspaper quotations, has certain attractions. The data may be collected in fairly small cities, the samples may be multiplied almost indefinitely, one expects more representative values than from employment agency quotations, etc. But certain of these advantages turn out to be dubious: for example, the average 1939 income of servants who worked 12 months was about $625 in New York City whereas the

[1] On the basis of employment agency reports, Kuznets estimates the average income (including room and board) of domestic servants in 1938 to be $668. In 1939, according to the Census, the mean money income of female servants was $364 for those who worked 12 months and $263 for all experienced servants. The inclusion of men servants and of room and board for perhaps a third of all servants could not explain more than half of the difference.

current newspaper offers were less than $500 a year.[2] Yet since the general demand for servants was probably improving, one would expect newspaper rates to be above, not below, average earnings in the field. An alternative explanation, of course, is a systematic overstatement of earnings to Census enumerators. Another objection to newspaper advertisements is that in early years most were 'situation' wanted, in recent years 'help' wanted, and there is a variable gap between them.[3] A final objection from our viewpoint is that only one long series of wage offers has been compiled.[4]

The two important sources of information on wages at the beginning of the century are the replies to questionnaires issued by Lucy Salmon at Vassar College, and by Gail Laughlin for the United States Industrial Commission. Professor Salmon and her students sent out "practically at random" 5,000 questionnaires to employers in 1889 and 1890.[5] In all ascertainable respects the results confirm the expectation that the sample is strongly biased in the direction of overstating current wages. The 1,025 employers who replied had an average of 2.5 servants each, and one family in seven had at least one servant per person; over half of the replies were from New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. The average weekly wage of women servants was $3.23, or $168 per year, so it "seems possible, for the average household employee to save annually nearly $150. . . .". The geographical wage pattern is similar to that given by Miss Laughlin.

Miss Laughlin issued a similar number of questionnaires through women's clubs, which fortunately should be even more random

[2] The average income of full-time female domestic servants was $623 if the few servants receiving $5,000 or more were assumed to receive $5,500. The March 1939 help wanted advertisements in the *New York Times* average $60 a month for cooks, $44.88 for cook-housework, $33.43 for housework, and $39.23 for nursemaids. No reasonable weights will reconcile these figures with the Census average.

[3] The following examples are based on advertisements in the *New York Times* for servants to perform housework and do some cooking:

WAGE	1943	MARCH 1939	1932
Asked	92.50	60.83	74.09
Offered	89.02	44.88	62.50

[4] A. C. Hanson and P. H. Douglas, Wages of Domestic Labor in Chicago, 1890-1929, *Journal of American Statistical Association,* March 1930, pp. 47-50.

[5] See *Domestic Service* (2d ed., Macmillan, 1901).

than the enrollment at Vassar.[6] The period during which the data were collected is not stated and 1899 is merely a plausible guess. Two features of the sample indicate an upward bias, although less so than in the Salmon study: the 653 employers who replied had an average of 1.9 servants; and the large percentage of foreign-born white servants (54.6) suggests that a majority of the replies came from eastern cities. In addition, data were collected from employees found through the better employment bureaus. The bias may be less than one expects: for New York State Miss Laughlin reported an average of $3.54 per week; the March 1899 *New York Times* 'situation wanted' requests averaged from $31.50 per month for cooks down to $21.50 for waitresses; the few 'help wanted' offers ran lower, but above $3.54 per week. A tabulation of wages received from previous employers is available for 1900 from applicants at employment agencies; the weekly rates exceed $6 but the monthly rates with board average about $16.[7] In computing average wage rates from Miss Laughlin's state averages, the number of domestic servants of each type in each state in 1910 were used as weights.

Appendix C

Statistical Analysis of the Demand for Servants

The three variables used in the statistical analysis of demand for servants in 1939 are:[1] number of full-time female servants employed per 1,000 families; annual wages of full-time female servants; income payments per family. The various statistical constants that describe the relations between these variables are listed in Table A; the figures in parentheses under the regression coefficients are their standard errors.

There appear to be considerable regional differences in the de-

[6] *Report of the United States Industrial Commission*, XIV, 743 ff.
[7] New York Bureau of Labor Statistics, *18th Report, 1900*, p. 1013.
[1] The number of full-time servants consists of those working 12 months plus a proportionate share of the number working part of the year. These data and those on earnings are from Census of Population, 1940, *The Labor Force*. Income payments are from Income Payments to Individuals, by States, *Survey of Current Business*, June 1943.

Summary of Statistical Constants in
Analysis of Demand for Servants, 1939

X_1 servants per 1,000 families X_2 mean annual wage X_3 income per family

Regressions and Multiple Correlations

United States (48): $X_1 = 30.34 - .278\,X_2 + .046\,X_3.$ R$=.510$
                                      (.074)   (.015)

Southern States (14): $X_1 = 81.25 - .365\,X_2 + .055\,X_3.$ R$=.589$
                                      (.156)   (.023)

Northern & Western States (34): $X_1 = 12.72 - .096\,X_2 + .028\,X_3.$ R$=.507$
                                      (.051)   (.011)

Correlation Coefficients

	UNITED STATES	SOUTHERN STATES	NORTHERN AND WESTERN STATES
r_{12}	—.316	—.026	.303
r_{13}	—.170	.149	.417
r_{23}	.947	.955	.947
$r_{12.3}$	—.487	—.577	—.316
$r_{13.2}$	.421	.589	.426
$r_{23.1}$	.955	.970	.947

mand for servants. A statistical analysis indicates that the relation among the three variables in the South (defined here, and in Figure 2, as states where more than half the servants are negroes) differs somewhat from that in the rest of the country. The regional analyses, also given in Table A,[2] do not exhaust the possible regional differences, for even within the North and West the northeastern states seem to have relativly high and the western relatively low demands.

[2] The individual regression coefficients do not differ significantly in the statistical sense, but an analysis of variance (see L. H. C. Tippett, *The Method of Statistics*; London, 1937; Sec. 8.3) supports the significance of the difference.