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Help for the Negro



In his upward march since the days of slavery, the Negro in this country has progressed in many fields, particularly in retailing and the service trades. In 1935, latest year for which figures are available, there were 23,490 Negro-owned stores, with sales of \$48,987,000, and 22,172 Negro-operated service establishments, such as barbershops, shoeshine parlors, etc., with receipts totaling \$27,281,000. In the realm of finance, Negroes operate thirteen banks with resources of about \$10,000,000 and 46 life-insurance companies with well over \$300,000,000 of policies in force.

However, in all these fields the proportion of Negro business to the country's total is negligible in view of the fact that roughly 10 per cent of the population is Negro. To help the colored people make further progress toward economic security, the Commerce Department held a two-day conference in Washington last week on The Negro in Business, at which speakers of both races discussed various aspects of the problem. In view of the recent bitter criticism by colored organizations of racial discrimination in the hiring of workers by firms with defense contracts, one of the chief topics naturally proved to be the task of coordinating the Negro into the rearmament program.

Answering some of the criticisms, OPM Co-Chief Sidney Hillman told the conference of his organization's efforts to eliminate such discrimination, including his recent letter to all contract holders urging "full utilization of available and competent Negro workers" and the appointment of Robert C. Weaver, an OPM aide, to direct a newly created Negro Employment and Training Section. As evidence of progress already made, Hillman cited the employment of more than 2,500 Negro carpenters at \$8 to \$12 daily wages in the building of Army cantonments, the accelerated training and hiring of colored skilled workers in the iron and steel industry, and initial steps taken by aircraft manufacturers.