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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 percent. 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.

parently rose about 175 percent.[17] The uncertainty surrounding both figures is so large that it is unsafe to say more than that the increase in weekly earnings in domestic service was probably somewhat less and almost certainly no larger than in manufacturing.

The Webbs entertained an even more favorable conclusion (on even less evidence) regarding the rise of servants' wages in England in the nineteenth century, and their reaction is interesting.[18] They argued that it was improper to infer, as some economists did, that competition leads to satisfactory wages and labor unions are unnecessary. The domestic servant, the Webbs replied, is a very special case: all the bargaining advantages are on her side. For example, "in the all-important matter of carrying out the bargain, it is the mistress, with her lack of knowledge, her indifference to details, and her preoccupation with other affairs, whose own ease of body and mind is at the mercy of the servant's hundred and one ways of making herself disagreeable." A footnote makes it clear that Beatrice Webb wrote these passages, and she claims for them an authority (although she was possibly an atypical housewife) that, as she says, the untutored male cannot challenge.

*Geographical Pattern of Money Earnings*

The pattern and extent of the geographical differentials in servants' earnings are brought out by a map showing the mean annual earnings of full-time female servants in each state in 1939 (Chart 3).

| REGION | MEAN EARNINGS | MEDIAN EARNINGS |
|---|---|---|
| Northeast | $527 | $504 |
| West | 473 | 419 |
| North Central | 375 | 335 |
| South | 248 | 205 |

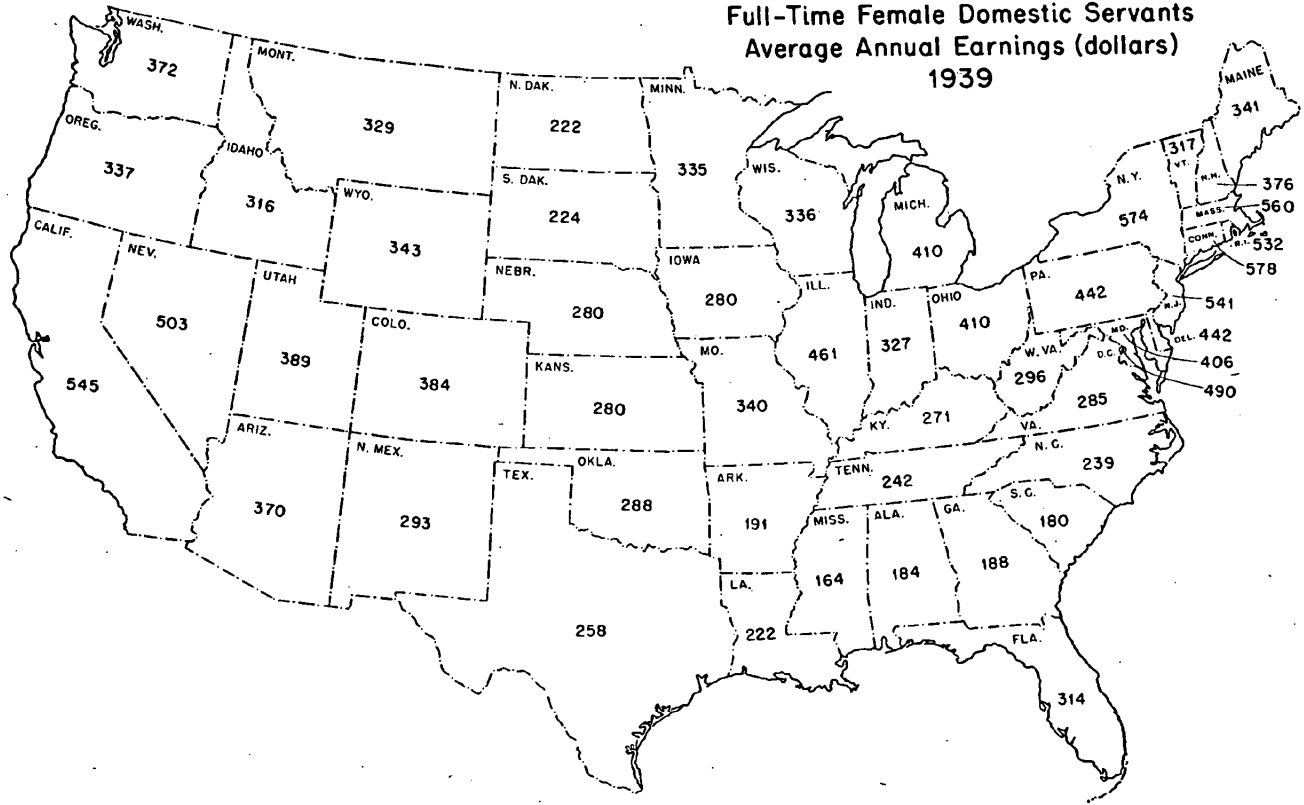
The general pattern has apparently persisted for some time, prob-

[17] The percentage increase is the same whether calculated from average annual earnings reported in the Census of Manufactures or by splicing Paul Douglas' series of weekly earnings (*Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926;* Macmillan, 1930; p. 130) to that of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (*Handbook of Labor Statistics,* 1941, II, 14).

[18] See *Industrial Democracy* (London, 1902), pp. 674 ff. W. T. Layton was the first to measure the trend of servants' wages in England, Changes of the Wages of Domestic Servants during Fifty Years, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society,* LXXI (1908), 515-24. His various series indicate that servants' wages rose about 140 percent from 1824 to 1900, while wages of women in factories rose 70 percent.

CHART 3

## Full-Time Female Domestic Servants
## Average Annual Earnings (dollars)
## 1939



ably since the latter part of the nineteenth century along the eastern seaboard.[19]

The effects of race and size of community on servants' earnings are difficult to segregate from the effects of regional location. The census reports do not allow a direct calculation of the mean earnings by race or by size of community except for cities over 250,000, so two complementary approaches were used to estimate the effects of these complicating factors.

The first approach consisted of correlating, on a state basis, average earnings of full-time female servants in rural areas and cities of less than 250,000 with (1) the percentage of female servants in cities over 10,000, and (2) the percentage of non-white servants. The statistical analysis confirms the expectation that earnings are higher in a state, the greater the proportion of servants who live in cities over 10,000, and the smaller the proportion of servants who are non-white.[20] These findings go far to explain the observed regional pattern, as we can see by comparing the four regions (again excluding cities over 250,000). Of course one cannot conclude from this evidence that all regional variation would dis-

| REGION | MEAN EARNINGS | PERCENTAGE OF SERVANTS | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Non-White | In Cities over 10,000 |
| Northeast | $489 | 16.2 | 50.5 |
| West | 436 | 9.5 | 43.1 |
| North Central | 337 | 9.6 | 40.4 |
| South | 225 | 79.8 | 40.5 |

[19] The 1899 study described in Appendix B yields the following averages of wages per week: Northeast, $3.34; West, $4.13; North Central, $2.97; South, $2.22.

The difference in the order of the Northeast and West in 1899 and 1939 is partly explicable in terms of reduced immigration. The wage structure in 1860 seems to have been very different in one respect: in the East wages were highest in Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi, etc. (see E. W. Martin, *The Standard of Living in 1860;* University of Chicago Press, 1942, p. 413). The explanation is probably that ordinary domestic service in the South was provided by slaves.

[20] Let $X_1$ be average 1939 earnings of full-time female servants, $X_2$ the percentage of servants who are non-white, and $X_3$ the percentage of servants in cities over 10,000; in all cases excluding servants in cities over 250,000. The regression equation with the corresponding standard errors are:

$$X_1 = 204.1 - \underset{(.32)}{1.58}\, X_2 + \underset{(.81)}{4.38}\, X_3.$$

The coefficient of multiple correlation is .731; the other correlation coefficients are:

$r_{12} = -.482$ $\quad$ $r_{12.3} = -.596$

$r_{13} = .527$ $\quad$ $r_{13.2} = .627$

$r_{23} = .045$ $\quad$ $r_{23.1} = .402$

appear if full account could be taken of race and size of community.[21]

The second approach in estimating the importance of regional variations is a direct analysis of earnings of servants in cities over 250,000. The over-all pattern agrees with the previous findings (see Table 8): earnings were larger, the larger the city; and they were smaller, the larger the percentage of non-white servants. There is no evidence of systematic regional differences when comparisons are confined to cities of similar size and similar ethnic composition of servants.[22]

TABLE 8

Mean Annual Earnings of Female Servants
by Size of City and Percentage of Non-White Servants, 1939

| | PERCENTAGE OF NON-WHITE SERVANTS | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0-20 | 20-40 | 40-60 | 60-80 | 80-100 |
| SIZE OF CITY | | | | | |
| | ANNUAL EARNINGS | | | | |
| 250,000- 500,000 | $452 | | $438 | $389 | $298 |
| 500,000-1,000,000 | 547 | $488 | 411 | | 465 |
| 1,000,000 & over | | 521 | 622 | 511 | |
| | NUMBER OF CITIES | | | | |
| 250,000- 500,000 | 9 | | 7 | 1 | 6 |
| 500,000-1,000,000 | 4 | 2 | 1 | | 2 |
| 1,000,000 & over | | 3 | 1 | 1 | |

Our finding that regional differences in earnings, other than those correlated with race and size of community, are relatively unimportant for servants is in keeping with other studies of occupational incomes. In addition to the general explanation that American labor is highly mobile, in the case of servants differences in living costs are relatively less important because a quarter to a third of all servants receive food and lodging from their employers.[23] On the other hand, it is worth noticing that the employers of servants are very immobile: probably in no other line of private employment

[21] Regional regressions were not computed because the state is a crude unit of analysis and the results would still be ambiguous.

[22] The ratio of the variance between regions to the variance within regions is 1.86, with 7 and 18 degrees of freedom respectively. This ratio lies at the 10 percent level. San Antonio was omitted from the calculations (but not from the averages in Table 8) because the ethnic composition of its servants cannot be measured (see below).

[23] In 1930, 524,000 families without lodgers had one or more servants 'living in' (*Census of Population, 1930,* VI, 26). In 1940, in urban and rural non-farm regions about 675,000 servants lived in (*ibid., 1940,* IV, Part 1, p. 26).

does the wage structure have less influence on the location of the employer.

*Inequality of Earnings*

We commonly look upon domestic servants as relatively homogeneous in training and tasks, and if this attitude were shared by the housewives who hire servants we would expect to find relatively little dispersion of earnings. Yet in the Northeast there is greater equality in the heterogeneous groups of service workers (including charwomen and artists' models), clerical workers (including librarians and check girls ["except hat"]), and manufacturing operatives (including folders in envelope factories and shoppers for factories) (Chart 4).[24] Another bit of evidence is the comparison of weekly wages of servants in middle and upper income group families (Table 9): the wages paid by the upper income group are from 70 to 200 percent higher.

TABLE 9

Weekly Wages Paid to Full-Time Domestic Servants by Employers at Two Income Levels, 1935-1936

| | WAGES PAID BY FAMILIES WITH INCOMES OF | |
|---|---|---|
| | $2,500 to $3,000 | $7,500 to $10,000 |
| Atlanta, Ga. | $4.17 | $8.04 |
| Chicago | 5.13 | 8.83 |
| Columbus, Ohio | 3.63 | 8.12 |
| New York | 6.09 | 10.14 |
| Omaha, Neb. | 3.41 | 10.59 |
| Portland, Ore. | 3.86 | 7.48 |
| Providence, R. I. | 4.75 | 9.05 |
| 3 Middle-size East Central cities | 3.76 | 5.69* |

From Family Expenditures in Selected Cities, 1935-36 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin 648*).

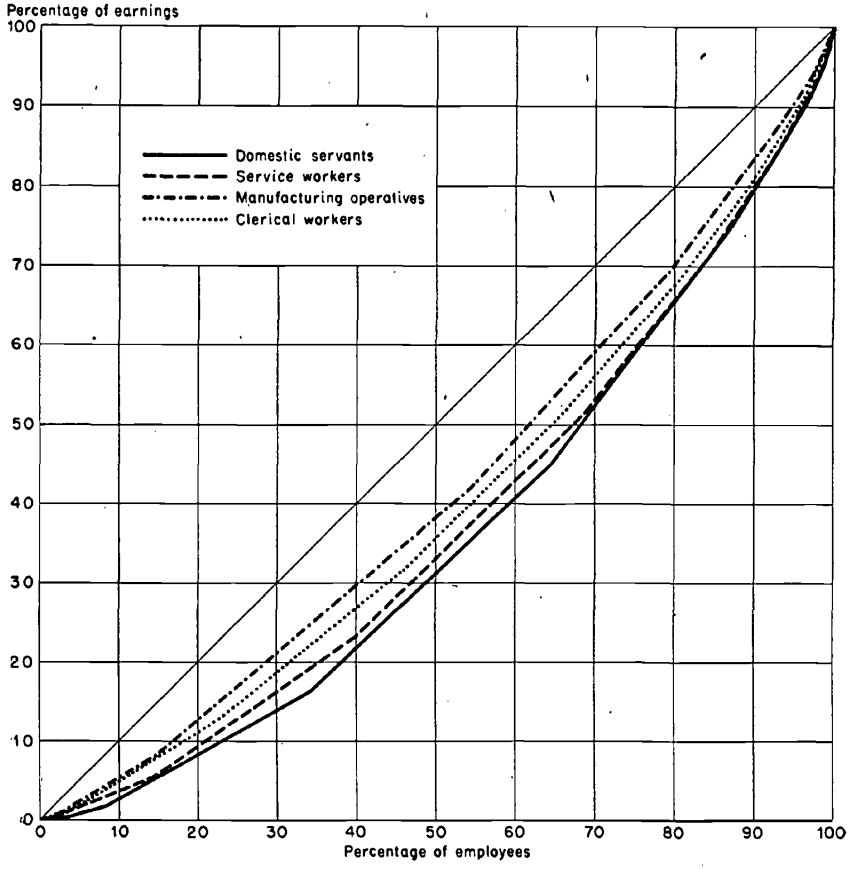
*Incomes of $5,000 and over.

[24] A Lorenz curve is constructed by plotting the cumulative percentage of aggregate wages received by workers against the cumulative percentage of workers, ranked from those receiving lowest to those receiving highest wages. A diagonal making a 45° angle with the base is commonly taken to represent perfect equality, and the greater the distance between the actual curve and this line the greater the inequality.

The national distribution for servants is much less equal than the regional distributions because of the large number of servants in the South, where wages are low; the distribution is also less equal in the South. In order to eliminate the large number of entrepreneurs and unpaid family workers in other occupations, the frequencies in each $0-99 income group were reduced to the same proportion of the $100-199 frequencies as ruled among servants.

CHART 4

## Lorenz Curves of the Distribution of Annual Earnings of Women in Selected Occupations Northeastern States, 1939




Two explanations of this considerable dispersion of servants' earnings are possible. On the one hand, we may retain our belief in servants' homogeneity and attribute the wide differences in earnings to the unorganized market for servants (in the sense of lack of information, facilities for bargaining, etc.), the inexperience of the bargainers, and the personal relationships (leading to generosity) that constitute an obstacle to competitive bargaining. Or we may infer that the differences in quality of various servants are (to the employer) much greater than casual observation would

suggest. The correct explanation no doubt lies between these poles, but where we do not know.

*Hours of Work*

Of the various explanations offered for the dislike of domestic service, one of the most common is the length and irregularity of the hours. The conditions at the beginning of the period are more or less reliably reported (see the accompanying tabulation) in a fashion that brings out also their characteristic uncertainty.[25] A

| REPORTER | AVERAGE HOURS ON DUTY On Call | Busy |
|---|---|---|
| Employers | 11 hr. 59 min. | 9 hr. 05 min. |
| Employees | 13 " 00 " | 12 " 12 " |

survey in Maine in 1908 indicates a median and mode of 10 hours on duty—as reported by employers.[26] If these hours seem long by recent standards, they were less so in contemporary eyes. In manufacturing hours worked per week averaged 60. Women worked an average of 55 to 60 hours per week in retail stores, hotels, and restaurants.[27] Hours in commercial employments were reported exclusive of meal times; those in domestic service seem usually to have included meal times.

Turning to the end of the period, there are detailed census data on hours worked during the week, March 24-30, 1940—a trifle early, let us hope, for spring cleaning. The median hours and the percentage of workers with short and long hours in domestic service and certain industries that are plausible employment alternatives are presented in Table 10. The general impression of the length of hours is confirmed: the median hours are equal in domestic service, hotels and lodging places, and eating and drinking places, but all are about a fifth longer than in the other industries. Both

[25] See Gail Laughlin, Domestic Service, *loc. cit.*, p. 756.

[26] This is based on 117 cases where hours were reported; 34 additional replies did not specify hours; and 67 used a phrase of former days, "as many as duties require". See *Maine Report of Industrial and Labor Statistics* (1910), p. 333.

[27] See Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin 116* (1912), pp. 15, 33 ff.; *Bulletin 160* (1914), pp. 14, 23; *Bulletin 91* (1910), p. 893. In hotels and restaurants they worked 7 days per week more commonly than 6. As the dates indicate, these studies were made more than a decade after the beginning of the century when hours may already have declined somewhat.

TABLE 10

Hours Worked by Women in Selected Industries, March 24-30, 1940

| INDUSTRY | MEDIAN HOURS | PERCENTAGE WORKING | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Less than 40 hours | 60 or more hours |
| Domestic service | 48.3 | 25.2 | 24.8 |
| Hotels and lodging places | 48.2 | 14.7 | 13.1 |
| Laundering, cleaning and dyeing | 40.9 | 21.0 | 4.1 |
| General merchandise and variety stores | 42.7 | 17.4 | 1.8 |
| Eating and drinking places | 48.1 | 20.4 | 10.9 |
| All female workers | 40.8 | 26.4 | 7.9 |

Census of Population, 1940, *The Labor Force,* III, Part I, p. 260.

extremely short and long hours are common in domestic service. In general the evidence suggests that hours in domestic service have fallen in about the same proportion as hours in these competing employments. The widening gap between hours in domestic service and the general average of female employment is due in large part to social legislation which has never covered servants.

## 4 Factors Affecting the Income of Servants

The ratio of servants to families fell a third between 1900 and 1940. Nevertheless, the increase in servants' wages has not exceeded that in manufacturing, and may have fallen short of the rise in national income per worker.[28] These facts imply a decrease in the desire of American families to hire servants. What are the facts that have contributed to this decrease?

We begin by describing changes in the characteristics of the employer, the American family, then indicate relevant technological changes in household operation and shifts of activities to the market. Finally, we examine the effects of family income, number of servants, and wages in competing employments.

### *Changing Characteristics of Families*

Of the family characteristics described in Table 11 one is dominant in importance and clear in its effects: the more than doubling of

[28] The increase in national income per member of the labor force (employed and unemployed) rose about 140 percent from 1899 to 1939, compared with 130 percent in money earnings of full-time female servants (*Economic Almanac,* National Industrial Conference Board, 1941-42, p. 334).