

Kansas City Negroes Aid Themselves at the Paseo Y.M.C.A  
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A negro woman led a small boy up to the front door of the Y.M.C.A. Building at 1834 Paseo a few weeks ago and literally pushed him inside.

“Maybe these folks can do something with you,” she said severely to the small boy, who was looking stubborn and keeping still. “If they can’t I’m through with you.”

She left a little money for the small boy’s uplift and departed, voluble with doubts. The young negro men at the Y.M.C.A. are a hopeful crowd. He was a sturdy small boy, and he would look you squarely in the eye, and abundant energy is a good fault, even though it does take Satanic outlets at times. If there were just some way of getting him.

And presently it developed that the small boy was extremely fond of swimming. A grin of pure rapture overspread his countenance when he saw the big pool of clear green water in the basement—and thereafter the small boy’s interest was assured. He’s bossing a Bible class now and swimming in races with fellows twice his size, and following the big straight military Hardy, “gym” instructor, who used to play on a real college football team with surprising precision.

He raps out his orders in good style, this man Hardy; and he’s training them not to shuffle their feet, and to hold up their heads and their shoulders, and yet he has time to give a pat on the back to the fat boy who has such a hard time getting over the “horse” and who reduces the entire room, including the “ragging” piano player, to gleeful laughter.

It is all very new, this negro Y.M.C.A. It’s only been open two months and comparatively few people know about it. Also, there is a good deal of fantastic misinformation current on Vine Street. A lodging house keeper will tell you that the rooms are kennels and the beds bunks hollowed out of the wall. As a matter of fact, the rooms, with their oak furniture, electric lights, steam heat and clean beds, and a big window in each room are hard to beat anywhere in town. They rent for \$1.50 to \$2.50 a week, and there is no accommodation for negroes in town to compare with them. It is interesting, too, to see the pride the men take in keeping the rooms clean.

FIGHTING THE ROOMING EVIL.

“Here’s a room,” says R.B. De Frantz, executive secretary, “that Fred Harvey people keep for dining car men. They have a man in here every night, and they say it really makes a difference in the work the chap does next day.”

The Pullman Company is considering a similar arrangement for the benefit of out-of-town porters.

There are accommodations in the big brick building for eighty-five men; at present there are about twenty-five living there, but of course the negro Y.M.C.A. has only been open a few weeks. The plant boasts an excellent cafeteria, where savory food is cleanly served.

The work the negroes are doing and planning to do is exceedingly interesting and practical.

The president, H.O. Cook, and the executive secretary, De Frantz, both tell you that one of the principal evils they hope the Y.M.C.A. dormitory will combat is that of young men roomers in negro homes. They are a frequent source of immorality, and part of the gospel these two men are continually preaching to their people is: "Take a small house, no bigger than you need for yourself and your family. You owe it to your daughters." They cite instance after instance of the roomer evil.

#### MAKING MEN GOOD BUTLERS.

The classes for negro men in the evening are really just getting under way. They are attempting about all things to be practical. It is true that the negro Du Bois has real literary worth and that Paul Lawrence Dunbar is numbered among the poets; but the world also wants more good butlers. So the Paseo Y.M.C.A. has classes to help men become good butlers. Negroes who have made good at it instruct the pupils. And they teach them not only the manual service required, but courtesy, and how to greet a guest and make him welcome.

"It is a thing our people are in danger of forgetting," says De Frantz. "We try, too, to impress upon a man the dignity of service. That it is just as dignified to be a good butler as to be a banker—and a lot better to be a good butler than a crooked banker. A man's job is very much in the way he looks at it. We want them to look at it right."

Next year they are hoping to have a motor car at the Y.M.C.A., a motor car that can be dismantled, so that negro chauffeurs and those who hope to be chauffeurs can learn something about the mechanism of the car. Plenty of negroes know how to drive a car; ever so many of them know very little about the car itself and the "why" of things.

Not the least interesting thing about Kansas City's negro Y.M.C.A. in the amount of money the negroes raised themselves for its construction. There are twenty-five thousand negroes in Kansas City. They have paid in \$23,000 toward the building and they expect to pay \$2,000 more before the building is formally dedicated. In no city in the country have negroes raised so large an amount in proportion to the population. And the story of how the money came in and the people who gave it commands one's admiration.

#### HOW THE NEGROES RAISED MONEY.

From a houseman, a furnace tender and odd job man, who never made more than \$40 a month in his life, came \$150. Pullman porters used to come in with dime banks—the kind that hold \$5—and make payments on their subscription. An old woman with an address on West Ninth Street gave \$25—and it developed she was working in a hotel and making \$4 a week. But she paid is all, fifty cents, \$1, \$2 at a time.

"I had two boys myself once," she told the Y.M.C.A. workers, "and they went wrong. And I got to thinking maybe if there was a place like this, other boys might be kept from going the way my boys did. And other mothers might be saved feeling like I have."

No easy gifts, these. Earned by the sweat of the face and saved by people to whom saving is not easy.

A negro woman went through the building the other day, and when she went away she laid \$5 down on the counter.

“Here,” she said, “I owe you this, I reckon.”

They didn’t understand. She had subscribed \$5 toward the building and had paid it.

“When your solicitor came around,” the woman said, laughing, “I said to him, “Here’s \$5, and if you ever get a building I’ll give another five. I reckon on that other five’s mighty safe,” I said. “But I owe it to you now all right.”

There are a good many amusements that please the negroes. A piano in the big lobby, where they sing, and pool tables that are very much in demand of an evening, and downstairs tables where the boys play a sort of billiard croquet game. Best card of all, perhaps, is the gymnasium, with its running track, apparatus, and downstairs the big pool of filtered water.

Set in the heart of a negro district, the Paseo Y.M.C.A. has a big work to do. Its workers believe they are in the right place, that they have the right agency, and that they are going to achieve.