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THE NEGRO IN BUSINESS

The conference of the National Negro Business League, which assembled in Boston in August of 1900, was unique. For the first time since the negroes were freed an attempt was made to bring together, from all over the United States, a company of representative business men and women of the race. Over three hundred delegates were present. They came from thirty states, and from an area which extended from Nebraska to Florida and from Texas to Maine.

Many of these men once were slaves. Others were younger men, born since the civil war and educated in the industrial schools and colleges; but they were almost all alike in one respect, that they had come up from the bottom and had gained whatever of property and position which they possessed by their own efforts. The business enterprises which they represented were manifold; their range and the success which these men have attained in them were object-lessons to the country. Another lesson, no less striking, was the conduct of the conference itself.

The New Orleans riots occurred while the preparations for the conference were being made. The streets of New York resounded to the cries of a negro-hunting mob just at the time when many of the delegates were leaving their homes to come to Boston. When the conference assembled, on the morning of August twenty-third, the newspapers were filled with accounts of the disturbances at Akron. And yet, throughout sessions which occupied two days and two evenings, in which at least two hundred persons spoke, there was not one single reference to the riots or to the conditions which gave rise to them. These were business men, come to Boston for a definite purpose with which politics had no connection, and they attended strictly to business. Nor was this the result of fear or intimidation. The position of the promoters of the league had been plainly stated beforehand and the policy of the gathering outlined.

I quote from one of the most widely published announcements of the meetings: "Those who are interested in the success of the league do not underestimate the importance of seeing to it that