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## Numbers and Steel

Homestead, Pa. Has World's Largest Steel Mill and Biggest "Numbers Racket" in U. S.

Where Pittsburghers Used to Play their Numbers in the Good Old Days



Photo of the ex-Wall Street of Pittsburgh, showing left, Bill Snyder's old place at 70 Fullerton (strangers couldn't enter). Center, 1401 Wiley Avenue, where Gus Greenlee once ruled. Arrow shows salesman in act of writing. Right, the most famous "figurerie" in the old days where "Woogy" Harris was boss. In October, 1930, it was estimated that a total of \$35,000 a day was played on the digits.

### Game Conducted Openly, Bankers Collect, Spiritualists Sell Tips, and Runners Go from House to House Canvassing. Corner Store will Place a Bet. Dice Rolled Every Noon and Evening.

By JOHANNIS JACOB

Perhaps no suburb of Pittsburgh is as well known to the public as the little town of Homestead—a place of some twenty thousand souls. Whereas, Pittsburgh gets the credit or blame for all that occurs in Allegheny County, much of the actual work goes on in Homestead. In this little town we find the largest single steel plant in the world; the center of vice for the Pittsburgh district—this being the only place in the county where colored folk have the absolute control of the numbers racket.

Western Pennsylvania was not smitten by the numbers bug until the spring of 1929, but she accepted the racket with glad hands, for the present economic depression had just started. So great was the reception of the numbers racket that we find that there was no effort made to check the invasion and in the course of time we find everyone from school children to persons holding high public offices trying his hand at a game that paid six hundred to one. It is reported that one small town had its pool operated by the town officials and in certain places in Pittsburgh the lowest bet one could make was five dollars.

When the numbers started in Homestead the townsmen had much trouble with their backers, for the colored backers usually paid all bets and the whites paid only those that they saw fit to pay; and in a short time we find that the colored backers were doing seventy-five per cent or more of the numbers business in Homestead, and, despite the protests of the white bankers, the business grew among the Afro-Americans, and before the withdrawal of the New York Clearing House reports, the business done by the Nordics was very, very insignificant and the colored business had spread to an area of about twenty-five miles.

With the clearing house numbers abolished, the racket became a local one—a number was given out in Homestead that was good for the

large area that Homestead served. The local racket was a break, for they could collect on three different numbers, on the "morning roll," "noon roll," and "evening roll." The numbers were obtained from three dice that were rolled in the morning, noon and night, and, to gain the confidence of the people, the public was invited to witness the "roll," and if any outsider saw fit to throw the dice, the privilege was granted. However, in a short time, it was seen that three "rolls" were too many, so the number was cut to two—the noon roll and the evening roll. The noon roll formerly occurred at one o'clock, but at present the dice are thrown at twelve o'clock to insure publication in the local evening newspaper. The evening roll comes off at nine-thirty; no newspaper reports this number, but the same is telephoned throughout the district. The roll at the present time is the most famous numbers gamble and those who depend upon it are able to bet a number on Sundays and holidays as well as any other day.

Strange as it may seem, the noon roll and the evening roll are conducted by different individuals and as far as the onlookers are concerned, there has been no upheaval concerning leadership among these colored bankers and from all appearances, there won't be any.

Persons who bet on the stock market, races and the Chicago Clearing House enrich the coffers of Pittsburgh bankers, but the local numbers kings welcome these bankers into their midst, for the men from the big city come to their rescue when a number hits them very hard. All of the bets made on the above named collected in Homestead are hastily transported to Pittsburgh.

Throughout the town each banker has a number of "stations." Most of these stations are operated by colored bankers—the only ones operated by whites are those in the exclusive white residential sections. Many of the stations operated by Afro-Americans are classified as business houses

—smoke shops. These smoke shops usually sell light lunches, confectionery and a few staple goods. Space is reserved for young boys who are granted the privilege of gambling with the owner of the place, exacting a cut from all games. The law never interferes with such places because the operator of such a place is usually being compensated for some wrong the town has done him, or he is paying a larger protection price to the law enforcing officials. Special counters are set aside for numbers players—there a bet may be written by the person playing the number or it may be taken care of by clerks. Dream books are available for one who is doubtful about what to play. Adding machines are near at hand to quicken the tabulation of the amount of money due. A blackboard is kept in a conspicuous place so that anybody passing the place can easily see what number has played and all the figures that have come out for the week.

The "runners" are men who usually canvass the outlying districts. Some of these men carry their work on at night going as far as sixty miles from the starting point. Persons in these places know what time to expect the runner and by this method the work is carried on very easily. The banker supplies all of his distant runners with cars, but if a local runner has a good business, an automobile is furnished him also. These runners are paid good salaries—in fact, any person holding a responsible position is good for a salary of not less than one hundred and fifty dollars a month.

Another group of persons reaping a harvest from the numbers are the spiritualists. During the life of the New York Clearing House, spiritualists gave out tips that hit within a week and as a result schools of spiritualism were established throughout the town and many people enrolled for the course, and not all of them were colored. Those folks who did not enroll for the course aided this racket by paying large sums for "hot tips." One of these established schools was an absolute success and the leader, who was a former garage man, became wealthy over night with many hundreds of people paying homage to him. At the present time, especially on Friday nights, many colored homes in Homestead are used for readings and the presence of so

many influential Nordics makes it difficult for the late coming colored folks to gain entrance.

There are a number of people who make a living in Homestead by selling numbers on the streets, supposedly hot tips. It is a common occurrence for a person to be stopped on the streets and asked if there is any interest in numbers on the part of the pedestrian, and there are others who make a house-to-house canvass with numbers in certain parts of the town and, from close observation, all of them seem to be keeping the wolf from the door.

Homestead's chief numbers backers are men who have been identified

with the underworld for a long time and they have been fair enough with the public with numbers, so they are respected as much as anybody else in town. Numerous attempts have been made by Nordics to break this grip, but the white citizens of Homestead have blocked all attempts—in fact, it looks as though, that if the colored bankers do not control the numbers racket, there will be none in Homestead. In the past, white bankers have failed to pay off when they have been hit heavily, but on no occasion has a reputable colored banker been guilty of such conduct; hence the control of the numbers racket in Homestead by colored bankers.

### South Baltimore Children Get New Shoes



Photo taken in basement of Leadenhall Baptist Church, Baltimore, Md., where 272 shoes were given away during the Christmas holidays. At the left is Mrs. Ethel Davis. At the extreme right is the Rev. S. H. James, pastor.