

# The House Servant's Directory: An African American Butler's 1827 Guide (Dover African-American Books)

Robert Roberts



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"In order to get through your work in proper time, you should make it your chief study to rise early in the morning; for an hour before the family rises is worth more to you than two after they are up." So begins Robert Roberts' *The House Servant's Directory*, first published in 1827 and the standard for household management for decades afterward. A classic survey of work, home life, and race relations in early America, the book was the result of many years of Roberts' personal and professional experiences. One of the first books written by an African-American and published by a commercial press, this manual for butlers and waiters offers keen insight into the social milieu, hierarchy, and maintenance of the antebellum manor.

As a servant to a prominent New England family, Roberts provided valuable insights into what was expected of domestic servants. His book contains an abundance of instructions for successfully completing household chores as well as suggestions for properly cleaning furniture and clothing; and for buying, preparing, and serving food and drink for dinner parties of all sizes (much of which is still useful information today). The text also contains suggestions for arranging servants' work routines, and advice to heads of families on how best to manage their domestic help -- extraordinary recommendations for master-servant relationships and highly unusual for the time.

Among the most famous of etiquette books to provide instruction on proper behavior for domestic servants in the early nineteenth century, Roberts' *Directory* remains a critical primary source in sociology and African-American history.

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