

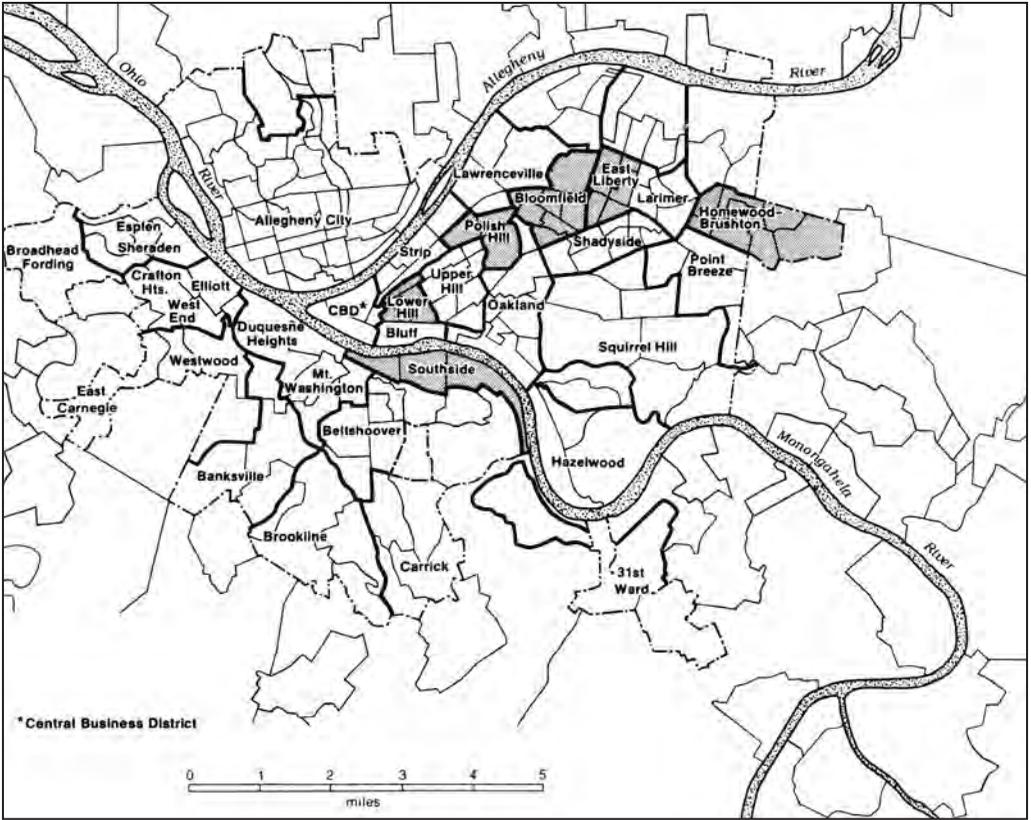
War, Politics, and the Creation of the Black Community

Pittsburgh's African American community had its origins in the late colonial and revolutionary struggles to build a new republic in North America. African American men and women played an important role in the early national and antebellum growth of Pittsburgh as a commercial center in western Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley. While some black men gained jobs as strikebreakers and made inroads into the steel industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the years between the world wars witnessed the Great Migration, the dramatic growth of the city's black population, and an increase in manufacturing employment. African Americans transformed themselves into a predominantly urban-industrial working class, which facilitated the expansion of the black middle class; they also built their own city within the city and escalated their fight for full citizenship rights. Pittsburgh's black community made the transition from an alliance with industrial elites and the Republican Party at the end of the nineteenth century to an alliance with the organized, predominantly white, labor movement and the Democratic Party by the end of World War II.¹

Steel Making, Class, Ethnicity, and Race

The foundation of the African American experience in Pittsburgh has always been employment, and this employment has shifted over time, reflecting the changing character of Pittsburgh's distinct worlds of work and social relations. Between the Civil War and World War I, Pittsburgh emerged at the center of industrialization in western Pennsylvania and the nation. Located at the confluence of the Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio rivers, Pittsburgh offered a wealth of water power, iron ore, and coking coal for steel making. By the turn of the twentieth century, industrialists in western Pennsylvania operated nearly a thousand coal mines and more than thirty thousand beehive coke ovens. In 1901, industrialists and bankers consolidated their holdings; formed the giant U.S. Steel Corporation; and transformed the Pittsburgh district into the industrial capital of the United States. Pittsburgh manufacturers built dozens of new plants and established the Pittsburgh stock exchange by 1911. Known locally as "Pittsburgh's Wall Street," the Pittsburgh stock exchange enabled industrialists and financiers to invest in a variety of businesses—including aluminum, oil, chemicals, steel, ship-building, and construction—that served local, regional, and national markets. Before the onset of World War I, the Pittsburgh region alone produced over 40 percent of the nation's steel.²

Industrialists exploited the region's resources not only through an aggressive program of capital investments, but through an equally energetic campaign of recruiting European immigrants to fill their industrial labor needs. Although industrialists like Andrew Carnegie made generous contributions to southern black colleges and developed close relations with black leaders like Booker T. Washington, they maintained a view of black workers as "inefficient, unsuitable, and unstable" to meet the labor requirements of machine production.³ Instead, people from south, central, and eastern Europe fueled the city's industrial expansion. Pittsburgh's population rose from fewer than 50,000 in 1860 to an estimated 534,000 by 1917. The Polish population increased from less than 3,000 in 1890 to over 20,600 in 1910, while the number of Italians rose from just over 2,000 to over 14,000 in the same time period. For the Poles and Italians, respectively, this population growth represented an increase of 318 and 219 percent between 1890 and 1900, and another 74 and 117 percent between 1900 and 1910. Because so many of these people disembarked at the Pittsburgh terminal of the Pennsylvania Railroad, some scholars



Map of early-twentieth-century African American communities in Pittsburgh.

Source: John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900–1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 12.

later described the area around the Pennsylvania station and the three rivers as “Pittsburgh’s Ellis Island.”⁴

Immigrants and their children increased the city’s manufacturing workforce from 24,000 in 1859 to nearly 155,000 in 1899. By 1900, an estimated 40 percent of the city’s male workforce held jobs in manufacturing; 27 percent in trade and transportation; and 28 percent in domestic and personal service. As the industrial workforce expanded, ethnic and racial stratification intensified. By 1907, compared to their American-born and Irish and German counterparts, the new workers entered the least skilled, most difficult, and lowest paid segments of the Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania labor force. At U.S. Steel’s Homestead mill, 40 percent of American-born whites, 46 percent of British-born whites,

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51 percent of Scots, and 24 percent of Irish workers occupied skilled jobs. Conversely, only 2 percent of the Polish, 1 percent of the Italians, and less than 2 percent of other immigrant groups worked in skilled positions.⁵

In the early postbellum years, the iron industry had become increasingly specialized, as blast furnaces, forges, and rolling and finishing mills had moved away from small, centralized shops to larger establishments specializing in one or another operation. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, Pittsburgh's industrial and financial elites—Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, Henry Phipps, James Hillman, and Richard and Thomas Mellon—increased capital investments in blast furnaces and rolling mills; applied new mass production technology; and introduced labor-saving cost accounting and management techniques. New processes like the Bessemer converter, open hearth furnace, and steam and electric power enabled manufacturers to reintegrate diverse production processes. Management also hired more foremen and supervisory personnel and increased oversight of the workplace from the top down.⁶

As manufacturers heightened their control over the work process, white employees challenged management's authority at the point of production and increased their demands for economic justice: higher wages, better working conditions, and more equitable treatment in the workplace. Building upon their antebellum experience in the Sons of Vulcan union (formed in 1858), iron puddlers joined other craftsmen and organized the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers in 1876. In their negotiations with owners, workers adopted the strike as their principal weapon in the struggle for economic democracy. Dramatic and violent conflicts broke out in the "Railroad War" of 1877 and the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892.⁷

White workers gradually bridged their ethnic and nationality differences and waged a unified struggle for their rights, but the Sons of Vulcan and the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers unions restricted membership to whites only. Seasoned, skilled black men could not obtain union cards and young black workers could not gain access to apprenticeship and training programs. According to one white steel unionist, compelling whites to work with black men "was itself cause sufficient to drive . . . [white workers] into open rebellion."⁸

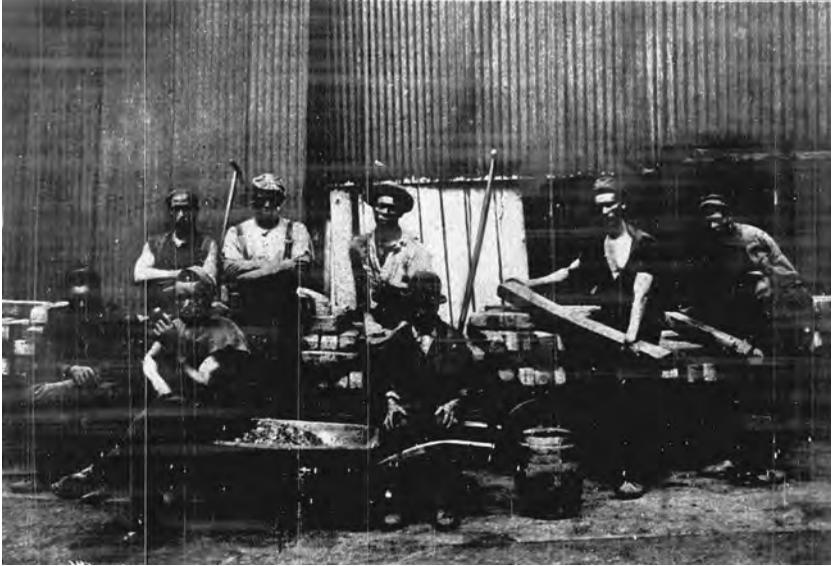
African Americans sought a measure of control over their own labor through the instrument of strikebreaking. As early as 1880, *Harper's*

New Monthly Magazine featured Pittsburgh's black steelworkers in all phases of the steel-making process.⁹ Employers understood how slavery had offered black men training in the art of iron making. At the Tredgar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia, the number of slaves increased from less than one hundred in 1860 to nearly one thousand during the Civil War. Black iron- and steelworkers mastered skilled jobs as puddlers, rollers, roughers, and iron and steel heaters. When U.S. Steel took over the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company in 1907, African Americans made up about 25 to 30 percent of its labor force in the Birmingham District of Alabama. As early as 1881, the steel employers' magazine *Iron Age* commented favorably on the skills of southern black boilers, heaters, and rollers in the steel industry. Less than ten years later, the magazine noted, "wherever the Negro has had a chance to acquire the necessary skill . . . he has shown himself capable."¹⁰

The first black workers arrived at the Pittsburgh Bolt Company on 3 March 1875. Puddlers had been on strike for several months. In late February, the *Pittsburgh Leader* commented on the southern recruitment efforts of local companies, "A short time ago, the Pittsburgh Bolt Company sent representatives to Virginia, and other firms are doing likewise. An executive of theirs said an abundance of colored puddlers could be had." Upon arrival of the black puddlers, some four hundred angry white men and boys marched on the mill. Local policemen refused to disperse the crowd, claiming they were not empowered to act unless violence occurred, but the company soon gained cooperation of the police chief and the governor of Pennsylvania, who threatened to bring in the infantry. The crowd dispersed and black workers remained on the job. Black workers also crossed the picket lines at the Black Diamond Steel Works (1875), the Solar Iron Works (1887–1889), Carnegie Steel, later U.S. Steel (1892, 1901), and the McKees Rocks Pressed Steel Car Company (1909). Most of these men had been trained in the mills of the South.¹¹

The number of black steelworkers in Pittsburgh and Allegheny City (now Pittsburgh's North Side) increased from virtually nil at the end of the Civil War to nearly eight hundred by 1910. During that time span, Pittsburgh's overall black population jumped from under three thousand to nearly twenty-six thousand, an increase of about 3 percent of the region's total population to about 5 percent (see appendix to this volume, table 1; hereinafter, all table references in appendix). In 1901, an overly enthusiastic writer for the *Colored American Magazine* concluded, "Na-

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African Americans at the Black Diamond Steel Works, Mill #1, c. 1901.

Source: Oliver G. Waters, "Smoky City: Part I," *Colored American Magazine* 3, no. 6 (Oct. 1901): 419.

tionality and color probably play less part here in the matter of employment than in any other city. The prime questions are: Do you want work? And can you put out the goods."¹²

Although African Americans entered the iron and steel industry as strikebreakers, they were not anti-union; they balanced their strike-breaking activities with efforts to organize their own labor unions or to join predominantly white ones on their own terms. Black boilers formed the Garfield Lodge No. 92 at the Black Diamond Steel Works. Complementing the Pittsburgh local was the formation of Sumner Lodge No. 3 in Richmond, Virginia. When black workers struck the Black Diamond Works in 1881–1882, employers turned to Richmond for replacement workers, but the Sumner Lodge foiled the effort.¹³

During the 1880s, African Americans joined the Knights of Labor assembly of Pittsburgh. One African American, Jeremiah Grandison, later represented the group at the founding convention of the American Federation of Labor in 1886. In his speech before the group, Grandison focused attention on the fundamental principles of the labor movement. "Our object," he said, "as I understand it, is to federate the whole laboring element of America. I speak more particularly with the knowledge of my

own people, and declare to you that it would be dangerous to mechanics to exclude from this organization the common laborers." Grandison warned white union men that employers might employ black workers in a variety of "positions they could readily qualify to fill."¹⁴ After he became editor and partner of the black weekly newspaper called the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Robert L. Vann regularly urged black workers to form their own unions to counteract discrimination by organized white labor. "The Colored," he said, must "organize themselves into a substantial union of their own . . . and thus get control of their own labor."¹⁵

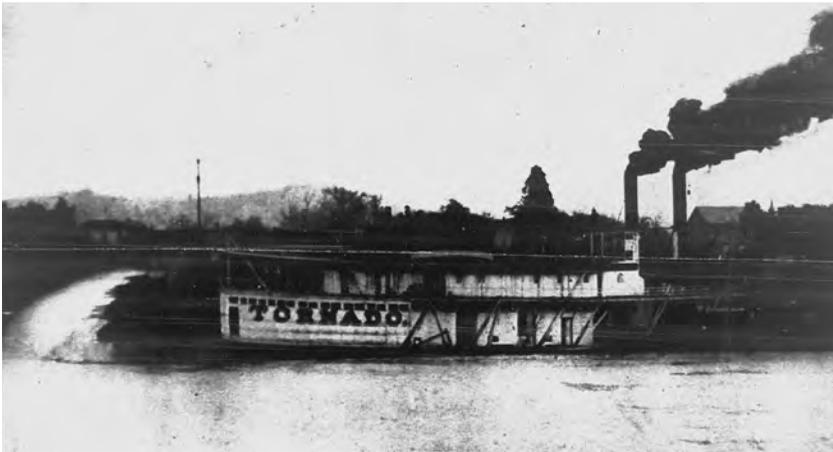
Pittsburgh's first generation of black iron and steel men worked in a variety of skilled as well as general labor steelmaking occupations. By 1910, well-educated and skilled blacks made up about 27 percent of Pittsburgh's black iron and steel workforce. The Black Diamond Steel Works and the Clark Mills employed African Americans as plumbers, engineers, die grinders, rollers, roughers, finishers, puddlers, millwrights, and heaters. John Harley, a black graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, became a draftsman at the Crucible Steel Company. William Dennon, also a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, joined the engineering department at the Farrell plant of U.S. Steel. William Nelson Page, another early employee in the steel industry, served as private secretary to W. G. Glyde, general manager of sales for Carnegie Steel. Some skilled black workers supervised their less skilled white counterparts. Richard R. Wright, a close contemporary observer of African American life in Pennsylvania, noted that the two chief rollers at one plant were blacks and that several white men worked under their supervision. Indeed, for a brief moment, according to a 1910 survey of wages in the Pittsburgh district, African American iron and steelworkers earned a higher average weekly wage at \$14.98 than their Polish counterparts who earned \$12.21 per week.¹⁶

Despite making substantial inroads into the industrial sector during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, blacks made up only 3 percent Pittsburgh's total workforce by the onset of World War I. American-born whites made up 29 percent and immigrants accounted for 68 percent of all steelworkers, some 300,000 by 1910. Most black men and women worked in general labor, domestic, and personal service jobs in Pittsburgh and the outlying mill and coal towns of western Pennsylvania. Manufacturing, transportation, and trade provided employment for fewer than 50 percent of black men and less than 8 percent of black women (see table 2). In 1897, African Americans joined immigrant work-

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ers in helping to construct Andrew Carnegie's Pittsburgh, Bessemer, and Lake Erie Railroad. African Americans made up the majority of workers who excavated the huge Bessemer tunnel near the town of Unity, eight miles east of Pittsburgh. Following completion of the tunnel and the railroad project, African Americans took a variety of "odd jobs" to make ends meet. In an interview with Bettie Cole, Mattie Rucker Braxton, born in 1885 in Amherst, Virginia, described such work among blacks in western Pennsylvania: "I came to Sewickley in 1907. . . . When I came here, colored people worked in private famil[ies], worked on the roads and the dams, and drove horses. Wasn't no millwork for colored folks then."¹⁷

Some pre-World War II blacks parlayed their expertise and earnings in domestic service and general labor into prosperous business enterprises. John T. Witt, for example, was born in Winchester, Virginia, before the Civil War. Witt's family migrated to Ohio shortly after his birth, and Witt moved to Pittsburgh as a young man in 1864. He obtained work with a wealthy white family and, by the turn of the twentieth century, operated his own catering business and owned his own home in the suburb of Homewood. Cumberland "Cum" Posey Sr. developed the commercially successful Posey Coal Dealers and Steam Boat Builders Company. His father's employment in the household of a large river boat owner provided Posey access to work on the boat. There, he acquired the



This late 1890s river steamer, *Tornado*, was built by the African American engineer and entrepreneur Cumberland ("Cum") W. Posey Sr.

Source: Thomas S. Ewell, "The Smoky City, Part III: Social and Business Life," *Colored American Magazine* 3, no. 9 (Dec. 1901): 144.

initial skills, knowledge, and motivation necessary to become an engineer and launch his own lucrative business venture.¹⁸

Women figured prominently in the development of black businesses. In his analysis of turn-of-the-century black businesses, Thomas S. Ewell, a writer for the *Colored American Magazine*, noted that African American women were “a constant inspiration to the life and work” of pre-war black entrepreneurs. Indeed, though less commercially successful than men, some women operated their own beauty, restaurant, and boarding house service establishments.¹⁹ Nonetheless, before World War I, few African Americans, men or women, transformed domestic and general labor jobs into lucrative businesses. Such opportunities increased during the industrial growth of the 1920s. The pattern of African American household and general labor, supplemented by a comparatively small number of steel industry jobs, increasingly gave way to work in the industrial sector with the onset of the Great Migration.

The Great Migration and the African American City within the City

The first Great Migration fueled Pittsburgh’s black population growth and community development. Strikebreaking as a mode of labor recruitment declined during the interwar years as higher wages in the steel industry, networks of family and friends, and the labor demands of two world wars attracted increasing numbers of southern blacks to Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania. The city’s African American population rose from under 27,000 at the onset of World War I to over 82,000 by the end of World War II. This represented an increase from 4.8 to 9.3 percent of the city’s total population (see table 1). Nonetheless, black workers helped to break the Great Steel Strike of 1919. In fact, according to the Interchurch World Movement’s account, a major cause of the strike’s dismal failure “was the successful use of strike breakers, principally negroes, by the steel companies, in conjunction with the abrogation of civil liberties.” Some company officials bluntly stated that black workers “did it.”²⁰

While strikebreaking remained a big source of work for African Americans, industrial firms intensified their regular recruitment of black workers during and after World War I. In August 1923, eleven plants of the Carnegie Steel Company employed some 6,000 black workers. Other area firms also hired significant numbers of black workers, among them: Jones and Laughlin (3,000 black employees), Pressed Steel Car Company (1,700), Westinghouse Airbrake (465), and Pittsburgh Plate Glass Com-

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pany (350). By 1930, unlike in the pre–World War I years, over 65 percent of African American men worked in the manufacturing, transportation, or trade sectors of the economy (see tables 3 and 4). The percentage of black men in the region’s steel industry labor force increased from less than 3 percent of the region’s steel industry labor force before World War I to a peak of 14 percent during World War II. By the late 1920s, over 300 black women also worked in manufacturing and mechanical industries. They labored mainly in the garment industry as dressmakers and seamstresses, and in selected occupations in the iron and steel industry as well.²¹ During the war years, black industrial workers earned between \$3.50 to over \$5.00 per eight-hour day compared to no more than \$2.50 per twelve-hour day in southern cities, and little more than \$1.00 per day for southern agricultural workers. Black household workers also sometimes earned over \$3.50 per day. One employer of domestic labor complained that: “Hundreds of [domestic] jobs go begging at \$15 per week.”²²

In addition to the labor recruitment efforts of manufacturing companies, networks of family and friends helped to pave the way for black migration to Pittsburgh. One woman persuaded her husband to move to Pittsburgh instead of Cincinnati: “I wrote him a letter back. My older sister had come to Pittsburgh, and I took her as a mother because I had lost my mother. And I wrote him back, and said, ‘I don’t want to stay in Cincinnati. I want to go to Pittsburgh.’ Next letter I got, he had got [a] job in Pittsburgh and sent for me.”²³ In a letter to the Pittsburgh Urban League, one man wrote for himself and seven others seeking jobs in the industrial North, “We Southern Negroes want to come to the north . . . they [white southerners] ain’t giving a man nothing for what he do . . . they is trying to keep us down.” From South Carolina, a woman wrote for her two sons: “[I have] two grown son[s] . . . we want to settle down somewhere north . . . wages are so cheap down here we can hardly live.”²⁴

African Americans who arrived in Pittsburgh had acquired substantial urban experience in other southern and northern cities. In his pioneering study of the Great Migration to Pittsburgh, historian Trent Alexander found that most black migrants came to Pittsburgh from “multiple-generation urban roots—both they and their parents were born in urban areas. Most of the rest of the migrants (almost a third) came from multiple-generation rural families.” According to marriage certificates in Allegheny County, nearly 55 percent of African Americans who applied for marriage licenses during the 1930s had migrated to Pitts-

burgh from towns of over ten thousand people, and more than a quarter arrived in Pittsburgh from towns of one hundred thousand or more.²⁵

While most blacks in Pittsburgh had grown up in poverty in the rural and urban South, they often expressed shock and disappointment at the physical environment and geography of their current home. In the words of one migrant, “Man, it was ugly, dirty,” the “streets were nothing but dirt streets.” While the hills made walking and travel difficult, clouds of smoke and soot blanketed the city during peak work hours. In a letter to his pastor back home, another migrant wrote, “Some places look like torment [hell] or how they say it look.” Still another newcomer declared the South “is clean. Everything is white, beautiful. . . . Everything was black and smoky here.” Some were struck by the technology of steel making: “One thing [that] impressed me very much was to look at the steel, the iron. All that I had seen in previous years was all finished and hard and everything. To come [to Pittsburgh] and see it running like water—it was amazing.” A migrant from the iron and steel city of Birmingham, Alabama, had a different response: “I felt very much at ease. . . . Pittsburgh wasn’t strange. It was like Birmingham. They’re both mineral towns. There’s lots of coal and steel in both of them.”²⁶

Despite earning higher wages in the industrial sector, African Americans took jobs at the bottom of the labor force and faced an ongoing pattern of “last hired” and “first fired.” Employers placed over 90 and sometimes 100 percent of the new workers in jobs classified as “unskilled.” This pattern prevailed at Carnegie Steel, Jones and Laughlin, National Tube, Crucible Steel, and others. African Americans worked in the most difficult, dangerous, low-paying, and dirty categories of industrial labor. They fed the blast furnaces, poured molten steel, and worked on the coke ovens.²⁷

Black workers’ jobs exposed them to disproportionate levels of heat, deadly fumes, and disabling and serious injuries. In 1919, blacks made up 4.6 percent of the state’s iron, steel, and manufacturing employees, but registered 8.5 percent of all victims of accidents. While 26 percent of blacks in metal industries suffered severe injuries or death, the figures were 24 and 22 percent, respectively, for immigrants and American-born whites. By 1930, laborer jobs accounted for the top ten occupations among Pittsburgh’s black men. Not a single white-collar, professional, clerical, skilled craft, or even “semi-skilled” operative position figured among the top ten occupations for black men (see table 5). Conversely, among all

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men, the top ten jobs included clerks (ranking first), salesmen, retail dealers, semi-skilled operatives, carpenters, and machinists (see table 6).²⁸

Although some African American women gained access to jobs in the industrial sector, manufacturing offered limited opportunities for black women. In 1920, over 87 percent of black women continued to work in jobs defined as domestic and personal service. This figure increased to 90 percent as the Depression got underway (see tables 3 and 4). Moreover, African American women had the highest labor force participation rate of any women in the city. Whereas 32 percent of black women worked outside the home, only 16 percent of immigrants and 27 percent of American-born white women entered the wage earning labor force by the late 1920s. In 1930, personal service occupations accounted for seven of the top ten occupations among black women (see table 7). For their part, white women gained increasing access to jobs as teachers, social workers, telephone operators, typists, receptionists, and office secretaries (see tables 3 and 8). In 1930, although personal service was the leading occupation for all women, it accounted for only one of the top ten occupations among white women (see table 8).²⁹

Black workers endured frequent layoffs and found it exceedingly difficult to make ends meet. Facing the industrial downturn of the early 1920s, one Pittsburgh migrant sought to get his old southern farm labor job back: "I want you to save me my same place for me, for I am coming back home next year, and I want my same farm if you haven't nobody on it."³⁰ In 1928 and 1929, following the reemployment boom of the mid-1920s, the Pittsburgh Urban League discouraged black migration to the city, emphasizing "how difficult it is to find work in Pittsburgh today." By 1931, while black men accounted for only 7 percent of Allegheny county's male population, they made up 22 percent of the men seeking employment at the County's Emergency Association.³¹

The color line in the workplace encouraged and was in turn encouraged by racial discrimination in the larger residential, institutional, and community life of the city. At the height of the Great Migration, Pittsburgh realtors converted railroad cars, basements, boathouses, and warehouses into living quarters for black workers and their families. Moreover, steel companies often housed single young men in bunkhouses or segregated camps, where they occupied rooms with so-called "hot beds," i.e., two, three, or four men to a bed on double or triple shifts. In his study of the impact of World War I on housing among blacks in Pittsburgh, sociologist Joe Darden concludes that blacks, "regardless of income, had great

difficulty either renting or buying good houses in non-segregated areas.”³² A national representative of the YWCA observed poor housing conditions and congestion as nearly “universal” and “critical” in Pittsburgh’s black community. Similarly, Abraham Epstein, in his pioneering study of African American migration to Pittsburgh during the era of World War I, described black neighborhoods “as congested beyond capacity by the influx of newcomers.” Consequently, new black settlements had opened up “in hollows and ravines, on hill slopes and along river banks, by railroad tracks and in mill-yards.”³³

The Hill District rapidly expanded as the primary residence of the city’s black population. During World War I and the industrial boom of the 1920s, the third and fifth wards gained nearly 14,000 new black residents, but lost about 7,600 European immigrants and their children. New zoning laws reinforced the racially segregated housing market and made it increasingly difficult for blacks to inhabit structures defined as “fit for human habitation.” At the time, however, both white proponents and opponents of zoning legislation downplayed the racial implications of such laws. In 1923, for example, public hearings on the Pittsburgh zoning measure focused on issues of height limitations for buildings, the effects of crowding on public health, and “individual rights” as they related to class, but not on racial discrimination. Predominantly “colored areas” also emerged in Braddock (Port Perry), Duquesne (Castle Garden), and other surrounding mill towns of western Pennsylvania.³⁴

Pittsburgh’s public school system had abandoned *de jure* segregation in 1881. Nonetheless, only a handful of schools in the Hill District and elsewhere allowed black and white students to attend the same schools. In 1926, out of 106 elementary schools in the city, only 20 admitted any black students. Between 1881 and 1933, no black teachers were hired even on a part-time basis. In 1934, when Hill District resident Thomas Harrison inquired about the employment of black teachers, N. R. Criss, solicitor for the board, replied in no uncertain terms, “colored teachers never will teach white children in the City of Pittsburgh. Such a step would be suicidal and would bring upon the Board of Education the condemnation of the entire community.”³⁵ Frank Bolden, a *Pittsburgh Courier* correspondent and a 1937 graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, recalled, “if you wanted to teach on any level and you were black, you left Pittsburgh. If you didn’t want to leave Pittsburgh, you didn’t teach.”³⁶

Racial inequality in other aspects of the city’s culture and politics mirrored discrimination in the schools, housing, and labor market. Dur-

ing the 1920s, an estimated 125,000 whites enrolled in newly founded chapters of the Ku Klux Klan in Pittsburgh, Homestead, Wilksburg, Carnegie, and other towns along the Ohio, Monongahela, and Allegheny rivers. The Klan's application for membership asked prospective members to enlist as a "soldier" in "the Pennsylvania State Klavaliars." Some recruits had as much as twelve years of military experience. In an official communiqué, the KKK Realm of Pennsylvania later cited this period as a high-water mark of Klan activities in the state and region: "Klansmen and former Klansmen from every section of this Province . . . express the desire to see the Klan regain the position that it held [in] 1926, 27 and 28."³⁷

Local law enforcement officials reinforced racial hostility through disproportionately high rates of arrests and incarceration of African American residents. In the steel town of Duquesne, for example, when white residents called police about the conduct of blacks in a local boardinghouse in 1926, police soon raided the place and arrested and fined black workers for "shooting craps." The local newspaper, *Duquesne Times*, further inflamed racial hostility in the community by suggesting, "white citizens should physically retaliate against the colored *visitors* [our italics] and their offensive acts."³⁸ On another occasion, in 1926, the police sought to enforce a 10:00 p.m. curfew at one Jones and Laughlin plant. According to an "incident report" on the matter in the papers of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, "police drove them [black men] to bed with guns."³⁹

In 1933, police arrested thirty black men and women in the town of Industry, Beaver County. When those arrested could not pay the fines levied, they were placed in the county jail overnight. The next day they were loaded onto three trucks and transported some one hundred miles south, just short of the West Virginia border. Authorities forced the men and women off the trucks "in a driving rain" and ordered them to walk across the state line into West Virginia. One contemporary observer described this incident as the "Beaver Shanghai episode of 1933."⁴⁰

Virtually every institution serving the public discriminated against blacks in some form or fashion. Public accommodations and commercial establishments—restaurants, theaters, swimming pools, department stores, and skating rinks, to name only a few—either excluded African Americans from service altogether or offered provisions on a segregated and unequal basis. Downtown Pittsburgh department stores denied black patrons the customary courtesy of trying on garments, for example.

Banks, insurance companies, hospitals, and medical facilities, including the University of Pittsburgh Medical School, also restricted services to the city's black community. During the 1930s, one woman told a WPA interviewer that it made her "blood boil" to observe how white physicians treated black patients. "They don't seem to think our people have any feelings . . . there was one woman lying in a bed, and they all stood around her and questioned her so everybody in the ward could hear, and they laughed and they pointed at her."⁴¹ Leading insurance companies not only maintained segregated black and white offices in the city, but restricted black clients to a narrow range of services. One company provided only two types of insurance for black people, while offering whites some thirty distinct services and options. Moreover, the company sold policies to black clients at "higher than normal rates."⁴²

As the wall of segregation and racial discrimination spread across the city and region, African Americans intensified their community-building activities. During the early to mid-twentieth century, they built one of the nation's most vibrant urban communities in Pittsburgh's Hill District. In their pioneering historical documentary of the area, filmmakers and journalists Chris Moore, Nancy Levin, and Doug Bolin described the Hill as Pittsburgh's "Little Harlem." Contemporary residents often referred to the Hill as a "dynamic," "thriving," and "bustling" area. Some called it "the crossroads of the world," where there was "never a dull moment" and where "people never went to bed." In other words, African Americans in Pittsburgh constructed their own "black metropolis" and transformed "segregation," a mean experience, into "congregation," a sense of brotherhood, sisterhood, and community.⁴³

Religious, fraternal, business, and professional institutions proliferated under the impact of the Great Migration. The city's Euclid Avenue AME church increased from just over 300 members before World War I to 1,500 in 1926. Membership at the Ebenezer Baptist Church leaped from 1,500 at the outset of the period to an estimated 3,000 by the late 1920s. Central Baptist Church enrolled 500 new members during the war years; John Wesley AME Zion Church added some 1,200 new parishioners during the 1920s. By the late 1920s, African Americans maintained forty-five churches in the Hill District alone. These churches included seventeen Baptist denominations and eighteen storefronts serving a diverse constituency. Twenty-five of these churches counted a membership of 12,400; twenty-one owned an estimated \$1.62 million in church property; and, together, the total of forty-five black churches recorded an an-



Founded in the early nineteenth century, Pittsburgh's Old Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church was the first AME body organized west of the Allegheny Mountains. This building served the church through the early twentieth century and was finally demolished in the 1950s.

Source: Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles "Teenie" Harris Collection, photo #2001.35.14520. Photograph © 2009 Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

nual collection of \$175,422 in 1928. At twenty-five of these Hill District churches, some 10,000 people regularly attended Sunday services.⁴⁴

Christianity was not the only religious tradition forged by African Americans in Pittsburgh. In 1913, Timothy Drew, a North Carolina-born African American, adopted the name Noble Drew Ali and established the Moorish Science Temple in Newark, New Jersey. During the war and early postwar years, Noble Drew Ali aimed to link black people to the Koran and the teachings of Allah in Pittsburgh and other cities of the East and Midwest. By the mid-1920s, however, the Moorish Science Temple increasingly gave way to the influence of the Ahmadiya Movement in Islam, which spread to the United States from India. As historian Laurence Glasco notes, compared to the Moorish Science Temple, the Indian Ahmadi "introduced more traditional Muslim rituals into



The Ohio, Monongahela, and Allegheny rivers served as sites of baptism, a key rite of passage in the African American community. Such ceremonies would increasingly move to inside pools during the years after World War II. Here, two deacons assist Rev. James M. Allen of Calvary Baptist Church to conduct a baptism in the Allegheny River, 1969.

Source: Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Collection, photo #2001.35.21609. Photograph © 2009 Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

the services” of Pittsburgh’s black Muslim community. Other influences on Pittsburgh’s black Islamic community included the Islamic Mission of America and later the Nation of Islam.⁴⁵

Fraternal orders, mutual benefit societies, and social clubs included the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, the Grand United Order of True Reformers, the Masons and Elks, and local chapters of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), to name only a few. These organizations and their auxiliaries provided helpful sickness and death benefits for members and their families and education opportunities for their children. Under their motto, “Lifting as We Climb,” the NACW provided one- to four-year college scholarships; achievement awards to encourage academic excellence; and study groups to analyze and address the social and political conditions of the city’s



Opened in 1899, as the Hill District branch of the Carnegie Library, this building would later house the First Mosque of Pittsburgh as the African American population increased.

Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, African American Historic Sites Survey of Allegheny County. Courtesy of Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, James D. Van Trump Library.

black population. In his study of social conditions in the Hill District, Ira DeAugustine Reid identified over a dozen active black women's clubs and concluded, in "proportion to their membership," that these clubs had done more "in a community way than any other group."⁴⁶

A group of men's clubs—the Loendi Club, the Frogs, and others—complemented the cultural, economic, and community development work of black fraternal orders and the women's clubs. Fraternal orders and social clubs also offered African Americans crucial centers of leisure time pursuits, cultural expression, and political autonomy. Contemporary observers often commented on the role of such organizations within the larger context of a Jim Crow social order. A WPA interviewer summarized the significance of these groups for Pittsburgh's black community: "In them, large numbers of people find opportunities to achieve eminence, a desire and a need deep-seated in every human being. In these groups a man may become a Grand Patriarch, a Grand Sword-Bearer, a Noble Grand, or a Grand Pursuivant, a most worshipful Grand Master,



Alongside churches and fraternal organizations, Pittsburgh's early twentieth-century African American community established a variety of secular organizations with their own separate facilities. This is a photograph of the original building of the Loendi Club.

Source: Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles "Teenie" Harris Collection, photo #2001.35.5514.
Photograph © 2009 Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

or Thrice Potent Grand Master, and in the auxiliaries a woman may be a Daughter Grand, or a Worthy Councilor . . . such things are for many members, to touch glamour and to achieve exaltation."⁴⁷

Various entrepreneurial activities symbolized the emergence of a more cohesive and self-sufficient black community. The *Pittsburgh Courier* vigorously promoted the growth of Pittsburgh's black "city within

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the city.” Originally from North Carolina, Robert L. Vann attended the University of Pittsburgh Law School and became its first African American graduate in 1909. A year later, he became editor and part owner of the *Courier*. Like other black newspapers during the period, the *Courier* repeatedly urged blacks to “concentrate” their earnings, “make capital,” and hire, produce, and sell for themselves. In Vann’s view, capital accumulation, businesses, and professional enterprises represented the keystones of African American institutional, intellectual, cultural, and community development. During the late 1920s, the *Courier* moved into a new \$54,000 office building on Centre Avenue in the Hill District. *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh* praised the *Courier* as a “successful, well-managed business,” providing jobs for some eighty skilled and professional employees.⁴⁸

African Americans also founded the Home Finders League, the Mutual Real Estate Investment Company, and the Steel City Bank. Formed in 1919 under the leadership of Rev. J. C. Austin, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, the Steel City Bank claimed some five thousand depositors before it collapsed in 1925. The Home Finders League, closely aligned with the Steel City Bank, purchased nearly \$300,000 in real estate and enabled some blacks to move into their own homes before its demise. Following the collapse of those two, Hill District blacks formed the Mutual Real Estate Investment Company and purchased a three-story apartment complex at the intersection of Wylie Avenue and Morgan Street just months before the stock market crash of 1929.⁴⁹

Cumberland “Cum” Posey Jr. and W. A. “Gus” Greenlee, manager and part owner of the Homestead Grays, spearheaded the growth of professional black baseball in Pittsburgh. Gus Greenlee also operated a lucrative numbers game during the 1920s and purchased another black team, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, in 1930. Greenlee recruited star players like Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige and built his own stadium on Bedford Avenue in the Hill District. At a time when the Pittsburgh Pirates excluded black players, Greenlee not only helped to transform baseball into a major leisure-time and cultural activity for the African American community, but a significant employer of black workers as well. In an interview with historian Ancella Livers, Harold C. Tinker Sr., who played professional and sandlot baseball, underscored the double-duty role that black baseball played in Pittsburgh’s black community: “We had a pride underneath. . . . We were helping people. That’s what my pride came from. We used to make people rejoice who were down. During the era of



The Pittsburgh Crawfords and the Homestead Grays emerged as outstanding teams in the National Negro League. The Crawfords won the 1935 Negro National League World Series. Here are the Pittsburgh Crawfords outside the Crawford Recreation Center, n.d.

Source: Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Department. All rights reserved.

the Crawfords that was the bad time, '27, '28, and I used to see people at baseball games forget all about their troubles. They were turning hand-springs and jumpin', hollerin.' And just the fact that people were making people happy for a few hours, it did something to me. And I was just as proud as if I was making a thousand dollars a week."⁵⁰

Hill District residents fondly recalled the positive role of the policy game in the community life of the city. Some ministers, and later historians like Rollo Turner and Rob Ruck, described the city's black "numbers kings" as "honest," "dynamic, generous, and compassionate" human beings. They helped a lot of people. As one black woman recalled, the policy operators were not men "who made money and kept it in their pockets." Similarly, historian Rob Ruck concluded, the Grays and Crawfords "prospered within a black community that supported them with cheers and spare change and looked to them for recreation and a source of identity."⁵¹

Nightclubs and after-hours spots rounded out the cultural life

of black Pittsburgh during years between the World Wars. African American musicians performed at clubs like the Hurricane Lounge, the Musicians Club, and the renowned Crawford Grill on Wylie and Centre avenues in the Hill District. In addition to a variety of popular local bands, nationally acclaimed black artists like Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, and others also performed in the city's black community. One local musician, Judge Warren Watson, later explained the appeal of Pittsburgh's black night life: African Americans in Pittsburgh "were hard-working mill workers five days a week. On Friday night, they wanted to go out and get a single and a beer and have a good time, something maybe Saturday, and sober up on Sunday and get ready to go back to the mill and breathe in all this heat [and] dust."⁵²

Buoyed by their expanding network of community-based institutions and informal cultural interactions, African Americans increased their demands for full citizenship rights. From the end of the Civil War through the Great Depression, the Republican Party retained a commanding sway over politics in Pittsburgh, western Pennsylvania, and the state. The powerful partnership of Republicans Christopher Magee and William Flinn, the so-called Magee-Flinn machine, attracted black votes not only because of the Republican reputation as the party of Lincoln and African American freedom, but because it also delivered lower-rung patronage jobs to African American supporters. As early as 1911, the Magee group "broke all precedents" and appointed a black man, William Randolph Grimes, as the assistant solicitor for the city of Pittsburgh. This position represented the highest political post blacks had ever occupied in the city's history. A year later, African Americans gained significant employment as laborers removing "the HUMP," a three-block-long hill that obstructed vehicular and pedestrian traffic in the triangle area of the Central Business District.⁵³

Despite evidence of material gain through their alliance with the Republican machine, African Americans expressed increasing dissatisfaction with the party's record on civil rights and took steps to elect members of their own group to public office. In 1919, African Americans elected Robert H. Logan to city council. While he served only one term, his victory accented the efforts of Pittsburgh blacks to transform segregation into a base of political empowerment and counter the Republican Party's neglect of its black constituency. According to Robert Vann of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Logan's election represented "a solid bloc" effort of black voters. After suffering defeat in his own bid to become judge of the

Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County in 1921, Vann expressed even greater urgency for black voters to mobilize in their own interests: "It is better to elect a Negro generally speaking than ANY white man . . . [far] better to have a Negro speaking in [the race's] behalf than any white man." By 1927, Pittsburgh blacks had formed the Third Ward Voters' League under the leadership of Walter C. Rainey, and soon claimed a membership of some five thousand black voters. Black people outnumbered whites in the third ward and expressed a determination to create more jobs and public offices for blacks through aggressive participation in electoral politics.⁵⁴

The civil rights campaigns and programs of the NAACP and Urban League strengthened the electoral activities of the African American community. Established in 1915, the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP had its origins in local and national protests against screenings of the racist film, *Birth of a Nation*. The local branch waged struggles against racial injustice in all areas of African American life in the Pittsburgh region. In 1921, Rev. J. C. Austin, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, became president of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP. Under Austin's leadership, the group pushed for the employment of black teachers, the admission of black students to previously all-white schools, passage of new state civil rights laws, an end to labor union discrimination, and termination of police harassment of black workers. Police arrested migrants as vagrants, the branch protested, for the purpose of forcing them "back to the flames of the torturing South."⁵⁵

Formed in 1918, the Urban League of Pittsburgh (ULP) took the lead in helping black workers make the transition to life in the industrial city. John T. Clark directed the ULP from 1918 to 1926. He had earned his bachelor of arts degree from Ohio State University, taught high school in Louisville, Kentucky, and headed the housing department of the National Urban League headquarters in New York City. Alonzo Thayer, who served as director from 1927 to 1930, received degrees from Avery Normal Institute in Charleston, South Carolina, and Fisk University in Tennessee. Before coming to Pittsburgh, he also served as director of the Atlanta Urban League. The ULP not only played a mediating role in the black workers' relations with employers, landlords, and the schools, but also with law enforcement institutions as well. Local courts sometimes employed ULP staffers to investigate cases of criminal misconduct among southern newcomers and helped to reduce the number of African Americans incarcerated for certain crimes.⁵⁶

From the outset of the Great Migration, black women influenced the political and civil rights struggles of the black community. As president of the Negro Women's Equal Franchise Federation, Daisy Lampkin influenced the political life of blacks in Pittsburgh and the nation. Born in Washington DC in 1883, Daisy Adams Lampkin moved to Pittsburgh in 1909. She married restaurant proprietor William Lampkin and soon became active in local politics. By 1912, she had launched her political career as part of the suffrage movement. Lampkin participated in street-corner campaigns designed to organize black women into political clubs and, in 1915, she became the third president of the Negro Women's Equal Franchise Federation, founded in 1911. After participating in the campaign to gain women's suffrage, Lampkin held positions as local chair of the Allegheny County Negro Women's Republican League, vice-chair of the Negro Voters League, and vice-chair of the Colored Voters Division of the Republican National Committee. As historian Edna McKenzie has noted, "Only six years after American women gained the vote, she was elected as an alternate delegate at large to the national Republican Party convention, a stellar achievement for any black or woman of that era." In 1929, the national office of the NAACP praised Lampkin for her "outstanding" work with the Pittsburgh branch. Lampkin helped to make the Pittsburgh chapter "one of the strong branches of the association." Under her leadership, the branch had added two thousand new members in a recent membership campaign.⁵⁷

Despite substantial racial solidarity in their civil rights and political struggles during the 1920s, African American community-building activities entailed significant internal social and political conflicts. The Methodist and Baptist churches absorbed growing numbers of newcomers and experienced rising internal class and cultural tensions and conflicts. While the city's black elite (including disproportionate numbers of light-skinned blacks) most often belonged to the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian bodies, they were also prominent in the city's oldest black church, the Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church, located in the Hill District. Under the leadership of college- and seminary-trained black ministers, old elite residents also dominated Homestead's black Clark Memorial Baptist Church. Clark Memorial built a new church and a community center; adopted the newest techniques in administering the religious, social, and business affairs of the church; and experienced increasing cleavage between old and new residents. Even before the onset of World War I, some of the church's newcomers had articulated the

need for a place of worship of their own and founded the Second Baptist Church.⁵⁸

Unlike Clark Memorial, the ministers at Homestead's Second Baptist were not seminary trained. The church adhered closely to matters of the spirit in its worship services and it did not have a community center. While sermons at Clark Memorial stressed both spiritual and temporal issues, including "God's Idea of Segregation," those at Second Baptist talked about the church as a "Blessing in the World," a "New Heart," and the "Character of the Holy Spirit." Southern migrants shared stories about the cold treatment they received in established churches. Only in the churches with "down home" preaching and ways of greeting did newcomers feel comfortable or at home. As one woman put it, "The women, especially the older women—they were so friendly—they put their arms around me and made me feel so welcome." Another said he liked "the way they do, talk, and everything—so I joined." One college-educated black woman later told a Works Progress Administration field worker how old elite residents of the city refused to "mix with the new families. They weren't good enough. I remember my mother telling about her and her sisters peeking out the windows to see Southern people going by to church."⁵⁹

In the Civil Rights and political movements of the black community, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and, to some extent, the Communist Party offered African American workers alternatives to the Urban League, NAACP, and Republican Party. As early as 1928, black steelworker Ben Careathers took a prominent part in a labor rally for William Z. Foster, presidential candidate of the Communist Party. Handbills advertising the event also highlighted Careathers as one of the featured speakers. The *Pittsburgh Courier* explained the Communist Party's appeal to black workers: "The Communist stand on the Negro question differs from the one taken by the rest of the parties . . . [T]hey make the Negro question a special issue demanding full social and racial equality, for the Negroes, the abolition of all Jim Crow laws . . . [and] the removal of all discriminations against Negroes in the trade unions."⁶⁰

The UNIA proved even more attractive to African Americans than did the Communist Party. Under the banner of "Race First," Marcus Garvey and the UNIA advocated the unity of black people across geographical and national boundaries. Garvey visited Pittsburgh on several occasions and delivered speeches to sizable crowds. Following Garvey's

visit to the city in September 1919, the *Negro World* reported, the UNIA had “captured” Pittsburgh during a mass meeting at the Rodman Street Baptist Church, located at the intersection of Sheridan and Collins Avenue. Less than a year later, Garvey came to Pittsburgh again and soon told a New York assembly about his visit. In his words, he had yet to witness “in any section of the U.N.I.A. anything to beat the enthusiasm of Pittsburgh.”⁶¹

In the postwar years, after hearing Marcus Garvey speak on the need for race pride and independence for people of African descent, Matthew Dempsey, an unemployed steelworker, organized a local chapter of the UNIA in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. The Klan had recently burned crosses, held marches, and delivered inflammatory speeches against blacks and immigrants in the town. Dempsey also hoped to use the UNIA to combat discriminatory hiring practices in the steel industry. When the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company discovered the Garvey-inspired activities of Dempsey and another steelworker, management fired the two men. According to R. B. Spencer, an FBI agent from the Pittsburgh district, steel management officials were “very anxious to see Garvey tried and convicted in order that his influence among the Negroes at the Jones and Laughlin plant will disappear.”⁶²

While some black leaders actively discouraged the UNIA in the Pittsburgh region, others boldly supported the organization. Rev. J. C. Austin became the most prominent clergyman supporting the Garvey cause. He not only allowed members to use his church for meetings, but invited UNIA leaders to speak from his pulpit at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. In 1923, Austin also delivered the opening address at the UNIA’s International Convention, where he “received a loud and enthusiastic greeting” when he addressed the gathering as “my beloved yoke fellows in tribulation and co-partners in this struggle for freedom and justice.”⁶³ Despite advice from some of his fellow black clergymen to bar Garveyites from his church, Rev. G. W. Gaines at John Wesley AME Zion Church supported the activities of the UNIA and explained, “If radicalism meant telling the truth, he was glad to have Garvey with him.”⁶⁴

Intra-racial conflicts also played out in the leisure-time life of the African American community. Black professional and business people often criticized black wage earners for the way they used their newfound earnings and time off. One Urban League report blamed single men “with money to spare” for the spread of prostitution among urban blacks. In 1924, John T. Clark, executive director of the local Urban League, de-

scribed the same group of men as “the more irresponsible type.” These men made “more money than they ever have in their life,” Clark said, but they lacked proper “cultural wants for which to spend their money.” Therefore, in his view, they engaged in unhealthy leisure-time pursuits, including gambling and excessive drinking. In a column titled “Wylie Avenue,” the *Pittsburgh Courier* identified unlicensed night clubs as perhaps the most dangerous spots for “fights, brawls, and the worst form of disorders.”⁶⁵

Gender divisions also punctuated the community building, civil rights, and political activities of African Americans in Pittsburgh. In her study of gender conventions within Pittsburgh’s black community during the early to mid-twentieth century, Ancella Livers documents extensive evidence of gender discrimination within the black urban community. Black women sometimes openly remarked about the constraints black men placed on their efforts to assume leadership positions. In October 1929, in a letter to Walter White of the national office of the NAACP, Daisy Lampkin protested “men holding the leadership in the branches, and they [women] having all of the work to do.” She also said, “the men seem to have no interest, and function only when the women force them. The more I see of our men throughout the country, the more I wonder as to the future of our race.” The Pittsburgh Urban League developed numerous programs targeted to meet the special needs of black women. In its own professional staff positions, however, women received significantly less pay than their male counterparts. Similarly, the *Pittsburgh Courier* praised black women’s achievements but sometimes presented sexual stereotypes of black women in its columns.⁶⁶ Intra-racial tensions and conflicts persisted throughout the interwar years, but, during the Depression and World War II, African Americans bridged their differences and created their own New Deal in the city of Pittsburgh.

Forging a New Deal

During the Great Depression, white workers insisted that their interests take precedence over those of African Americans. Skilled tradesmen pledged to introduce for membership only, “sober, industrious white person[s].” In 1933, at Montefiore Hospital, an assistant superintendent trained a crew of white women elevator operators and dismissed black women for “gross inefficiency,” although some of the women had worked there since the facility opened in 1929, and none had worked there for less than a year. A year later, the Allegheny Steel Company in Breckenridge

replaced its black workers with whites. The company argued that black workers' gambling, bootlegging, and disturbances justified the decision.⁶⁷

In February 1934, African Americans made up 40 percent of the county's unemployed workers, and had over 43 percent of their numbers on relief compared to 15.7 percent for whites. At the same time, employers of household labor expressed a growing preference for white women and weakened African American women's access to traditional avenues of female employment. In a report to the national office, the Metropolitan YWCA of Pittsburgh acknowledged how young women from Centre Avenue in the Hill District "felt the full brunt of the depression. Low pay, long hours, discrimination and the ever present formula 'last to be hired, first to be fired.'" Among black Depression-era workers who retained their jobs, a Duquesne worker declared: "The colored has a hard way to go. They . . . bawl you out and make you work fast [!]"⁶⁸

The Urban League of Pittsburgh urged employers to retain black women domestic workers by setting up a four- to eight-week course designed to train young black women "how to cook, serve, tend children, drive a car, and in general to make the job of houseworkers attractive and respectable." Following graduation from high school during the mid-1930s, Thelma Lovette Sr., recalled taking a job as a dishwasher at the Ruskin Avenue Apartments in Oakland. She earned \$10 per week for over twelve hours of work per day. She washed dishes by hand for over one hundred people. Lovette soon moved out of dishwashing to "salad girl" and finally to "pastry cook." From her father, she said, "I learned that hard work will make you learn a lot of things."⁶⁹

Pittsburgh blacks complained along with their brothers and sisters across the country that they received a "Raw Deal" rather than a "New Deal" from their government. The Federal Housing Administration refused to guarantee mortgages in racially integrated neighborhoods, and New Deal economic and labor legislation—the Social Security Act, National Recovery Act, and the Wagner Labor Relations Act—excluded general laborers and domestic service employees from benefits like the minimum wage and hour codes. When African American workers, the NAACP, and National Urban League protested the exclusion of unskilled and semiskilled workers and proposed a nondiscriminatory clause in the new labor law, white labor leaders defeated the measure. According to Wagner's assistant, Leon Keyserling, "The American Federation of Labor fought bitterly to eliminate this clause and much against his will Senator Wagner had to consent to elimination in order to prevent scut-

ting of the entire bill.”⁷⁰ As late as 1939, the Allegheny County Works Progress Administration programs continued to discriminate against African Americans. According to Reginald A. Johnson, secretary of the ULP’s department of industrial relations, decisions made by foremen and minor supervisory staff for WPA projects “proved a handicap to the employment of Negroes” in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. In addition to establishing a domestic service training project for black workers, the ULP pushed for a quota or “percentage clause” for black employment on federal projects, particularly public housing projects.⁷¹

By the late 1930s, several factors enabled African Americans to transform what they called a “Raw Deal” into a “New Deal.” These forces included the emergence of the CIO, the Communist Party, increasing social services of New Deal programs, and the growing political unity of the black community itself. Although the Communist Party in Pittsburgh claimed only a few hundred members at the height of its influence during the late 1920s and early 1930s, a few blacks joined the party and took highly visible positions in party affairs. During the mid-1930s, the CIO’s Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) turned to the Communist Party for organizers, including black workers from the Pittsburgh district. In a rally on Pittsburgh’s North Side, Phillip Murray, director of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and vice president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), urged black workers to pour their heart, mind, body, blood, and soul into the “great crusade to organize the colored workers employed in the great steel industry.”⁷²

For its organizing drive in steel, the CIO soon recruited black Communists Ernest McKinney, Ben Careathers, and William Scarville. During the early Depression years, Ernest McKinney, the grandson of an active member of the UMWA, joined a splinter group of the Communist Party and participated in demonstrations on behalf of unemployed workers in Pittsburgh. Originally from the Chattanooga, Tennessee, area, Ben Careathers migrated to Pittsburgh before World War I; in succession he worked as a janitor and helper on the railroads, opened an upholstery shop, and joined the Socialist and then the Communist Party by the early 1930s. He also participated in the Communist Party’s unemployed councils. The black Pullman porter William Scarville also joined the Communist Party in Pittsburgh and became well known in the circle of white communists in western Pennsylvania. As Croatian immigrant and Communist Steve Nelson recalled: “One of the things about the Pittsburgh Party that impressed me most was the small group of black

Communists there. . . . It was out of respect for workers like Scarville that young Communists in Pittsburgh developed a fuller understanding of racism."⁷³

African American Communist Party members believed Communists offered the best hope for obtaining important leadership positions and overcoming racial injustice in America. In their view, compared to the two mainstream parties, the Communist Party was more committed to the eradication of racism and the extension of equal opportunity to black people. The Communist Party, Benjamin Careathers later recalled, provided blacks a strong platform for advocating for "peace, economic security, Negro rights, extension of democratic rights and the need for a Socialist reorganization of society." Careathers also gave the party credit for offering African Americans meaningful opportunities for leadership. With pride, he said, "Phillip Murray placed me on the staff of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. . . . In that capacity, I led the movement which broke through the company rule in Aliquippa which built the union there. I recruited into the union some 2,000 steel workers while I was an organizer."⁷⁴

The Communist Party's unique willingness to publicly expel members for "anti-Negro" and "anti-Semitic" bias also caught the attention of potential black recruits. For these and other reasons, the *Pittsburgh Courier* concluded, the Communist Party's "stand on the Negro question surely deserves attention and support on the part of every Negro worker." Partly inspired by the Communists, the National Negro Congress (NNC), formed in 1935, brought together a broad cross-section of black religious, civic, and political organizations. In 1936, the Pittsburgh chapter of the NNC sponsored a planning conference, including national leaders like T. Arnold Hill of the Urban League and A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), as well as Pittsburghers Robert L. Vann, Bishop William J. Walls of the Allegheny Annual Conference of the AME Zion Church, and Reverend T. J. King, then pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church. Black religious leaders offered their churches as a base for organizing black workers and promoting their movement into unions, while Robert L. Vann "pledged the full support of the *Pittsburgh Courier* to the steel drive and declared that it would expose in its pages those Negroes who betrayed the best interests of their people by supporting the bosses."⁷⁵

Vann captured the changing political consciousness of African Americans in Pittsburgh and the nation when he penned his renowned

1932 editorial urging blacks to abandon the party of Lincoln. "My friends," he said, "go turn Lincoln's picture to the wall. That debt is paid in full." Two years earlier, African Americans had already escalated their push for elective office in the city's Hill District when they rallied behind attorney Theron B. Hamilton for election to the state legislature from the city's first district on the Republican ticket, but Republican mayor Charles Kline rejected Hamilton. In order to counteract this growing challenge from blacks within the party, Republican leaders supported another black candidate, Walter E. Tucker. Hamilton remained on the ballot as an independent candidate, but both African American candidates lost to their white opponents, Joseph Marcus and J. R. Lynch, respectively, in the primary. The combined total of votes received by the black candidates, however, exceeded the votes for the two white candidates. In his assessment of the election, sociologist Rollo Turner described the election as an illustration of the "long-standing tactic of 'divide and conquer' used innumerable times by white politicians when their power or authority is challenged or threatened by a unified group of blacks." When the victorious white candidate for the legislature died just after the primary, the Republican Party endorsed Tucker who won in the general election. Thus, Tucker became the city's first black state representative. He covered the predominantly black third and fifth wards.⁷⁶

In 1931, the Robert H. Terrell Law Club passed a resolution (endorsed by the Keystone Civic and Political League of the Thirteenth Ward) urging African Americans to vote only for candidates who supported the interests of the black community, including the election of blacks to public office as aldermen, employment as policemen, and access to training in the medical field as physicians and nurses. During the same year, in the fifth ward, African Americans challenged Irish and Italian control of the ward and won. Robert H. Logan gained election to city council and Earl Sams became constable on the Republican slate.⁷⁷

In 1934, NAACP president and attorney Homer S. Brown was elected to the state legislature from the Hill District's third and fifth wards. A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh's Law School, Brown ran as an Independent, but he soon declared himself a Democrat, joined forces with Democratic governor George Earle, and pushed for a "Little New Deal for Pennsylvania" and its black citizens, particularly black workers. When the state legislature passed the McGinnis Labor Relations Bill, which sanctioned the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act (or Wagner Act), Brown did what national leaders had failed

to do; he obtained an amendment that penalized unions excluding members on the basis of color or race. Although the AFL put up a vigorous fight to defeat the amendment, the Brown provision gained support from the CIO and passed into law in May 1937.⁷⁸

Under Brown's leadership, the Pennsylvania legislature enacted a new equal rights law in 1935. The new law banned discrimination on the basis of color in a wide range of institutions: hotels, motels, and bar-rooms; public parks, bathhouses, and resorts; theaters, orchestras, and dance halls; libraries, schools, and colleges. According to a Pittsburgh WPA Project writer, one black attorney declared the bill was not only "a Declaration of Rights" for black people in the state, but also a victory for all minorities. This law, he said, "may yet be cited as much by Jews and aliens as by Negroes."⁷⁹ In February 1937, Brown spearheaded the state legislature's investigation of the hiring policies of the Pittsburgh Board of Education. Subpoenaed members of the board denied discriminating against blacks on the basis of race, but numerous testimonials showed otherwise. In May 1937, Homer Brown vigorously questioned Marcus Aaron, president of the board, about discrimination against qualified black teachers. Aaron denied any wrongdoing and sought to avoid discussing the question of race and employment:

Q: Do you know as a matter of the board's knowledge that there were colored students going through the college and none were appointed?

A: I do know that no colored teachers were appointed.

Q: Do you know that there were some who graduated but were never appointed?

A: No.

Q: Why were none of them appointed?

A: Because they were not recommended to the board for appointment. The statement I read makes the situation clear and I repeat that I have tried to bring out the point that public discussion on this point is harmful to those you are trying to help.

Representative Alfred E. Tronzo, a white member of the state legislature, followed on Brown by questioning Aaron with an equally pointed inquiry designed to expose racial injustice in public education:

Q: Do I get from that colored people should be more interested in making friends than in getting teaching positions?

A: Yes. I think there are a lot more important questions for them to discuss.

Q: Do you think that colored teachers would teach in mixed schools?

A: It depends on the number of white children in the schools and the attitude of the parents. I understand from the investigation which Dr. Graham has made in other cities that if colored teachers are placed in the schools, the parents ask for a change of schools for the children.

Q: Don't you think that that is a matter of education in itself?

A: I think it could be done but it cannot be done in a day.

Q: Should it not have been done back in 1917?

A: I guess it should have been but I cannot tell you that the result would have been satisfactory.⁸⁰

In addition to state and local efforts to end discrimination against black teachers, the National Education Association (NEA) helped to create a climate for change. At its annual meeting, the NEA passed a resolution affirming that teachers should not be discriminated against on the basis of "race, color, belief, residency or economic or marital status." In 1937, under increasing local and national pressure from African Americans and their white supporters, the Pittsburgh Board of Education relented and hired its first black full-time teacher since 1881. The ULP's Committee on Teacher Appointment enthusiastically announced the school board's plans to appoint two black teachers to posts in the Pittsburgh Public Schools during the fall term. Observing a change of attitude on the part of the school board toward the hiring of black teachers, the ULP now believed its principal task would be to locate "properly qualified applicants," and to expand opportunities for teacher training for black students. A similar battle developed in the health field. Unlike the struggle for black teachers, however, the ULP's Health Committee concluded with a call for the development of "a Negro-controlled hospital" as "the most urgent need of our people in Pittsburgh."⁸¹

African Americans merged their local struggle for economic democracy with the national "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign. This movement aimed to harness black consumer power to a broader demand for jobs and citizenship rights. In 1933, blacks in Pittsburgh participated in a selective buying campaign against the Atlantic and Pacific (A&P) and Butler grocery stores. Three years later, they formed the

Housewives Cooperative League and continued to pursue “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” actions. Although two male Urban League officials, William E. Hill and Roy Garvin, initiated the formation of the organization, black women such as Daisy Lampkin, Frances Stewart, and Alma Illery soon took leadership of the organization. The Housewives League urged Pittsburgh’s black community to boycott businesses that excluded blacks from employment and/or provided segregated and unequal services. According to the minutes of the organization, the boycott would “open up new avenues of employment in the way of clerks and white collar jobs, and some skilled jobs, break down ‘Jim Crowism’ in Pittsburgh [and] abolish discourteous discrimination.”⁸²

Grassroots black activism strengthened African Americans in the electoral arena and enhanced their access to New Deal social programs. By the late 1930s, blacks in Pittsburgh enjoyed disproportionately more benefits from government social programs than whites. Although African Americans made up less than 10 percent of the population, black men and women, respectively, accounted for 23 and 18 percent of all workers receiving emergency relief employment. At the national level, nearly forty-five blacks held appointments in various New Deal agencies and cabinet departments. President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Robert L. Vann to a post in the office of the attorney general. Although Vann felt ill at ease in FDR’s administration and soon resigned, the “Black Cabinet,” as these black advisers were popularly known, enabled African Americans in Pittsburgh and elsewhere to improve their position on a variety of New Deal projects.⁸³

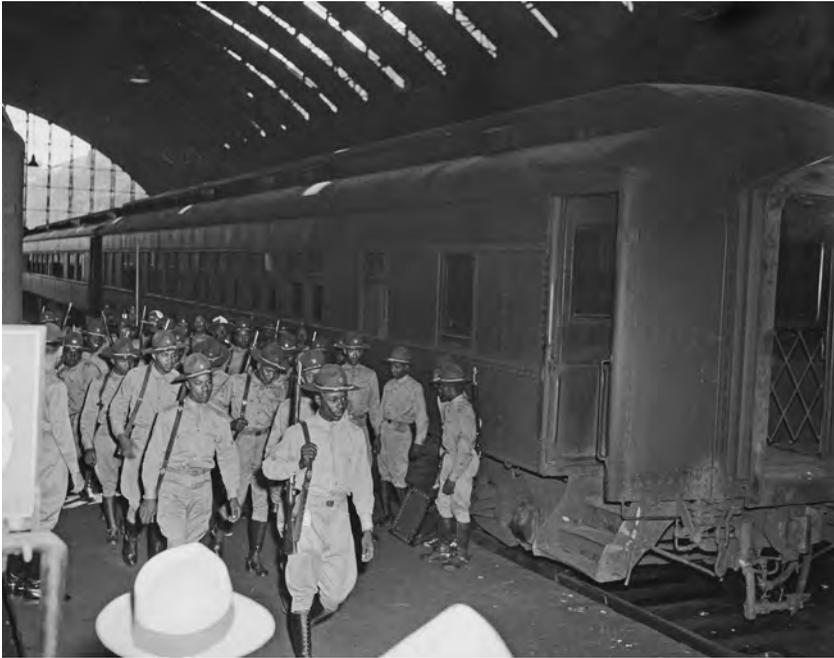
World War II and the Struggle for Full Citizenship Rights

Although African Americans in Pittsburgh gained increasing access to the fruits of New Deal social programs in the late 1930s, only the labor shortages of World War II allowed African Americans to regain and expand their foothold in the urban economy. More so than during World War I, African Americans resolved to fight injustice at home and overseas. Their determination received potent expression in the *Pittsburgh Courier’s* “Double V” campaign for “Victory Abroad and Victory [Against Discrimination] at Home.”⁸⁴

Beginning in the fall of 1941 and continuing through the war years, African Americans in Pittsburgh fought to break down discrimination in all areas of the city. The *Courier* regularly printed front-page stories on the struggle and often compared the fight in Pittsburgh to developments

in other cities. In August 1942, for example, the paper called attention to the movement to hire black conductors on street railway cars: “People of Pittsburgh: Do you know that in New York, Negroes are motormen on the city-owned subways? Do you know that Negroes act as motormen and conductors of public vehicles in Detroit, Cleveland, and other large centers?—Yet, in Pittsburgh—especially on Bedford and Centre Avenue cars, where a large percentage of the commuters are colored—NO NEGROES are being employed for these jobs!”⁸⁵

World War II veterans later remembered the shock of racial segregation below the Mason-Dixon Line. When the train carrying new recruits from Pittsburgh and other northern cities pulled out of Washington DC, one African American veteran recalled, black and white soldiers were segregated, although some of them had grown up together and were friends. “We put up a fuss but we had to do it.” Moreover, as the train



In Pittsburgh and elsewhere, World War II heightened the contradiction between black soldiers fighting for freedom overseas and facing the realities of Jim Crow at home. This photo shows members of the uniformed and armed Ninth U.S. Cavalry at a train station, ca. 1941.

Source: Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Collection, photo #2001.35.6691. Photograph © 2009 Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.



Tuskegee Airman James T. Wiley, wearing his light-colored U.S. Army uniform, c. 1944.

Source: Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Collection, photo #2001.35.38389. Photograph © 2009 Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

neared the town of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, the officer told black soldiers to lie down on the floor, warning them local whites would soon throw “bricks and pop bottles” through the windows, “and sure enough they did.” In a letter to the Homestead *Daily Messenger*, another black serviceman from Pittsburgh described on- and off-base discrimination at a southern military installation. In addition to harassment from local whites, the black soldier confronted racial segregation in public transportation facilities, as well as in hotels, theaters, restaurants, and other places of amusement and business. The editor of the *Daily Messenger* articulated the soldier’s frustration: “These boys, whether white or black, are Americans. They are willing and eager to take up arms so that freedom and democracy may come through victoriously against our enemies. Yet, . . . how democratic are southern states [?]”⁸⁶

Racial segregation and conflict also punctuated the streets, schools, and workplaces of wartime Pittsburgh, Homestead, and other towns and cities along the three rivers. Despite passage of the state’s equal rights

law of 1935, Pittsburgh owners of commercial establishments and public accommodations resisted enforcement of the measure. In the city's fifth ward alone, between 1939 and 1949, some twenty-seven cases of discrimination reached municipal and county courts. According to legal historian Martha Foy, the defendants in these cases included twelve combined drinking and eating places; six restaurants; two beer gardens; one swimming pool; one skating rink; and the bar of a hotel. Some proprietors of these establishments defended themselves by declaring "there would be trouble if white waitresses were called to wait on Negro diners." There were no convictions in these cases and plaintiffs often had to pay court costs or split costs with the accused.⁸⁷

One large amusement park openly defied public accommodation laws against racial discrimination. Management announced that it would "positively not allow Negroes" to use the dance halls or swimming pools, "except when there are Negro picnics." The proprietor expressed confidence there was not a jury in the state that would find him guilty. Within a year of the law's passage, the city council of Avalon, north of Pittsburgh, passed a law designating certain days for African American use of the municipal pool. Councilmen defended their actions on the premise the pool was not a public facility. The owner of a Pittsburgh skating rink not only continued to bar African Americans from use of the facility, but threatened violence against any blacks who attempted to use the rink. While judges generally upheld the state's equal rights law when such cases reached the courts, a visiting judge dismissed the skating case, arguing that the plaintiff, supported by the American Youth Council, a liberal, left-wing organization, had unlawfully instigated the confrontation as a test case. According to *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, while African Americans frequently won judgments against small establishments, the larger and more expensive places of leisure remained openly segregated or refused service to black people. Visiting black conventioners invariably had to find housing in private homes and black-owned or -operated hotels and boarding houses.⁸⁸

The Hill District continued to be a predominantly black community, and just after World War II, nearly 97 percent of Lower Hill residents rented their homes compared to about 75 percent in the Polish Hill area and just over 50 percent for Italians in Bloomfield. Most wartime newcomers, however, crowded into an area on the city's South Side called Beltzhoover, where the housing was poor for whites and even more so for

blacks. By the end of World War II, the percentage of housing throughout Pittsburgh described as substandard stood at 30 percent of all black units compared to 12.3 percent of white ones.⁸⁹

Steel plant expansion projects forced black and white workers to seek homes elsewhere under the pressure of wartime production. In Homestead, most blacks lived in the path of company plans to add several open-hearth furnaces, a plate mill, and a forge and machine shop to its operations. In January 1942, the company demolished more than 60 percent of the 1,200 homes in the area, and only about 10 percent of the 10,000 residents of the area remained. Similarly, in Duquesne, African Americans in the town's Castle Garden community were disproportionately affected by plans to add three electric furnaces, a conditioning plant, and a heat-treating mill. An estimated 2,900 people lost their homes. The unequal displacement of black workers from these areas placed tremendous pressure on the existing housing market.⁹⁰

The emergence of federally funded low-income housing projects alleviated some of the housing problems of Pittsburgh blacks, but reinforced racially segregated neighborhoods. Through the "neighborhood composition rule," federal policy makers sanctioned racially separate public housing projects for blacks and whites. Federal Housing Administration (FHA) guidelines prohibited the financing of racially integrated housing until the U.S. Supreme Court declared such rules unconstitutional in 1948. By 1945, African Americans made up about 40 percent of Pittsburgh's federally funded public housing projects, including Bedford Dwellings, Addison Terrace, Allequippa Terrace, and Wadsworth Terrace, among others. While some of these projects housed both black and white families, from the late 1930s through the 1950s, the Pittsburgh Housing Authority (PHA) maintained segregated housing within the projects. Thus, a building or set of buildings was set aside in each development for African American families while other buildings were set aside for white families. Despite this segregation, public housing represented a significant improvement for many black families over the old, dilapidated housing available for rent in the Hill District and other black enclaves during the Depression years.⁹¹

Institutional and residential segregation strengthened the spread of racially segregated schools. During World War II, African Americans made up about 10 percent of all public school children, but experienced increasing separation from their white counterparts. At the city's Watt, McKelvey, and Franklin Elementary schools, for example, black children

made up nearly 99 percent of the total. Yet, by the end of the war, the Pittsburgh Board of Education had hired only two full-time black teachers. In June 1940, a recent graduate of the predominantly white Westinghouse High School said teachers were fair for the most part, although, as he put it, they “naturally liked the white children better.” At the Heron Hill Junior High School, a teacher discouraged another black student from preparing for a career in business and commerce, “because there was no opportunity for Negroes in Pittsburgh in that field and he would have to go south to get a job.”⁹²

African Americans routinely hit glass ceilings, no matter what kind of employment they pursued. One particularly revealing case was that of Gerald Fox, who spent most of the 1930s and 1940s working in almost every sector of Pittsburgh’s low-paid service and industrial jobs. After dropping out of high school, Fox became, in turn, a drugstore porter, a restaurant bus boy, a hotel bus boy and shoe shine, a fry cook, a country club bus boy, waiter, room service provider, and then bartender. During World War II, Fox got work in a munitions plant, working twelve hours a day in very hot temperatures. He eventually had to leave this industrial job because it was so physically debilitating.⁹³

In 1942, according to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s *Final Report of the Pennsylvania State Temporary Commission on the Conditions of the Urban Colored Population*, 50 percent of Pittsburgh firms barred blacks from employment or relegated them to the lowest rungs of their employment ladder. These firms included the Pennsylvania Bell Telephone Company, the U.S. Chromium Company, Westinghouse Air Brake Company, and the Pittsburgh Street Railway Company.⁹⁴ By war’s end, nearly 40 percent of all Allegheny County employers continued to bar black applicants. After Superior, Columbia, Bethlehem, and other area steel plants turned down black applicants in 1942, the Pittsburgh Urban League lamented, “there are still plants in this area which refuse to hire Negroes even at common labor.”⁹⁵ As late as May 1945, at the United Bronze Casting Company, a personnel manager turned a black applicant away, saying that white workers would not work with a black person because of “a prejudice among white workers which the company had not been able to overcome.” In 1942, the Pittsburgh Steel Band Company openly confined African Americans to jobs as “janitors and window washers.”⁹⁶

As alluded to previously, the city’s railway and bus system routinely denied African Americans jobs as motormen and drivers. In December

1944, in a meeting with civil rights organizations, Charles D. Palmer, transportation manager, told the group “flatly” that the company “would not hire Negroes.” For its part, the Pittsburgh Railways Union also resisted the employment of blacks on the premise that some 300 of its 2,400 men would immediately walk out on strike in protest. In March 1945, the War Manpower Office ceased to refer job seekers to the Pittsburgh Railway Company until the firm agreed to hire operators “regardless of race, creed, or color.”⁹⁷

African American women observed white women entering defense industry work, while they remained unemployed. In a letter to FDR, a Pittsburgh woman described the employment practices of two nearby defense industry plants, “They will hire the white girls but when the colored girls go there they always refuse them.”⁹⁸ In a letter to Patrick T. Fagan, area director of the War Manpower Commission, George E. Denmark, secretary of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, criticized the American Bridge Company for steadfastly refusing to employ black women in production jobs, even as growing numbers of white women gained training and employment in such jobs as “welders and burners.” Several black women—Thelma Oldston, Lillian Williams, Mildred Tucker, and Naomie Smith—had visited the company’s office three or more times but were disappointed that: “White women by the dozens of all ages, shapes, and sizes were being employed but there was no place for Negro women [except to clean lavatories].”⁹⁹ About forty black men in production jobs at the facility signed a petition urging the company, “to employ women of the Colored race.” The petition stated, “There are many Colored women equipped to perform duties in your company and also eligible for the training that you are giving to white [female] job applicants . . . Negro women . . . can do other jobs beside clean lavatories. They should be in production, too.”¹⁰⁰

Pittsburgh blacks responded to wartime injustices by joining the national March on Washington Movement (MOWM). Under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the MOWM emerged in 1941 following a meeting of civil rights groups in Chicago. The critical moment came when a black woman angrily addressed the chair: “Mr. Chairman . . . we ought to throw 50,000 Negroes around the White House, bring them from all over the country, in jalopies, in trains and any way they can get there, and throw them around the White House and keep them there until we can get some action from the White House.” A. Philip Randolph not only seconded the proposal but

offered himself and the BSCP as leaders: "I agree with the sister. I will be very happy to throw [in] my organization's resources and offer myself as a leader of such a movement."¹⁰¹

By early June, the MOWM had established march headquarters in Harlem, Brooklyn, Washington DC, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Pittsburgh, among other metropolitan areas. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters listed only about two hundred Pittsburgh-area porters among its membership, but the movement soon joined forces with local NAACP and Urban League chapters, churches, and fraternal orders. The *Black Worker*, the official organ of the BSCP, became the official newspaper of the MOWM. The paper's May issue reprinted the official call to march: "We call upon you to fight for jobs in National Defense. We call upon you to struggle for the integration of Negroes in the armed forces . . . of the Nation. . . . We call upon you to demonstrate for the abolition of Jim Crowism in all Government departments and defense employment. . . . The Federal Government cannot with a clear conscience call upon private industry and labor unions to abolish discrimination based upon race and color so long as it practices discrimination itself against Negro Americans."¹⁰²

President Franklin D. Roosevelt resisted the movement as long as he could, but the MOWM finally produced results. Roosevelt met A. Philip Randolph and Walter White of the NAACP on 18 June 1941. A week later, on 24 June 1941, FDR issued Executive Order 8802, banning racial discrimination in government employment, defense industries, and training programs. The order also established the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to implement its provisions. The government empowered FEPC to receive, investigate, and address complaints of racial discrimination in the national defense program.¹⁰³

In Pittsburgh, under the influence of FEPC and wartime production, African Americans exceeded their previous standing in the industrial labor force, gradually gaining greater access to skilled and semiskilled production jobs in industry with government contracts. In February 1943, the FEPC established an office in Pittsburgh and helped to make an even more diverse range of jobs available to black people. When the office opened, Walter S. Buchanan, cochairman of the committee, suggested that the FEPC would open up new areas of employment to African Americans, including jobs as motormen for the Pittsburgh Railway Company. The following year, in April 1944, Patrick T. Fagan announced that this goal had indeed been achieved. By August, five African Ameri-

cans operated “regular runs” for the company, with several more “in training.” At the Carnegie-Illinois Steel Company, in March 1944, Milo Manley, an FEPC examiner, enthusiastically reported the promotion of blacks “into jobs never before held by Negroes” in some departments.¹⁰⁴

The wartime black freedom struggle gained significant support from a small group of liberal white allies. Executive Order 8802 linked blacks in the Pittsburgh region even more closely to the Democratic Party and helped to situate blacks more firmly within the predominately white labor-liberal coalition. The CIO often supported the FEPC claims of black workers and helped them to break many barriers to higher-level employment. At its annual convention in 1941, for example, the CIO denounced racial discrimination as a “direct attack against our nation’s policy to build democracy in our fight against Hitlerism.” A year later, the organization established its own Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination and urged its affiliates to support national policy against discrimination: “When a decision to employ minority group workers is made, the union must be prepared to stand behind it.”¹⁰⁵

In addition to participation in the civil rights and political activities of the NAACP, Urban League, and CIO, white activists also helped to spearhead the formation of new civil rights organizations and initiatives such as the Pittsburgh Interracial Action Council (PIAC) and the race work of the Citizens Coordinating Committee of the National Defense Program. In 1941, according to Edward D. Porter, PIAC and NAACP member, white students at the University of Pittsburgh formed the PIAC after they observed the exclusion of a black veteran from service at a local restaurant. By the end of World War II, the organization claimed credit for helping to end racial discrimination at about twenty-five Pittsburgh-area restaurants.¹⁰⁶

As early as 1943, the Citizens Coordinating Committee of the national defense program urged the city’s railway system to employ African American workers as motormen. During his campaign for mayor in 1945, David L. Lawrence promised to establish a special council to foster peace and cooperation among the city’s diverse population. “When elected Mayor of Pittsburgh,” Lawrence said, “I shall immediately establish a Pittsburgh Unity Council with representatives of the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths, of labor and management, of Negroes, of youth, of education and of social and civic affairs.” Shortly after taking office, Lawrence kept his promise and set up the Civic Unity Council with power to

investigate cases of discrimination and offer remedies “so that conditions which cause racial tensions may be eliminated.”¹⁰⁷

At the end of World War II, the U.S. Congress failed to renew the FEPC. As the war came to a close, African Americans experienced a revival of explicitly racial advertising for job openings. Many area firms reverted “to type” and reestablished prewar hiring practices. Such industrial plants adopted, as the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported, “a ‘white only’ or ‘Christian’ only policy” following termination of their war contracts. The *Courier* also lamented, “many of these plants are in the process of reconversion and apparently have decided to ignore thousands of workers of various racial or religious creed who worked so faithfully during war production.” S. Chapman Wright, assistant War Manpower director for the region, confirmed that some war contractors had returned to their old policies. They could now “hire at the gate and [since they] hold no war contracts, they can tell us they don’t need us and there’s nothing we can do.” At the same time, the United States Employment Service (USES) decided to respect such “white only” requests from employers.¹⁰⁸

Labor and civil rights activism persisted through the war years, but its intensity waned as plans for demobilization got underway. By war’s end, according to activist Sophia B. Nelson, the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP had declined, “from an active one which entertained the Nat[ional] N.A.A.C.P. Conference in 1931” to one that could hardly convene a board meeting. In 1944, Edward Porter, chair of the NAACP’s local membership drive, blamed inactivity and lack of cooperation among officers of the organization for failure of the year’s membership campaign.¹⁰⁹ Two years later, when the federal government failed to renew the FEPC and the Pittsburgh branch office closed, an important pillar of the city’s interracial alliance for social justice disappeared. Labor and civil rights activists found it increasingly difficult to sustain their activities as the city and nation moved toward the cold war era.¹¹⁰