

# Employment Mobility and the Belated Emergence of the Black Middle Class<sup>†</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

As the Covid-19 pandemic takes its disproportionate toll on African Americans, the historical perspective in this working paper provides insight into the socioeconomic conditions under which President-elect Joe Biden’s campaign promise to “build back better” might actually begin to deliver the equal employment opportunity that was promised by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Far from becoming the Great Society that President Lyndon Johnson promised, the United States has devolved into a greedy society in which economic inequality has run rampant, leaving most African Americans behind. In this installment of our “Fifty Years After” project, we sketch a long-term historical perspective on the Black employment experience from the last decades of

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<sup>†</sup> Like several recent working papers of ours for INET, this essay is the draft of a chapter for a book in preparation by William Lazonick, Philip Moss, and Joshua Weitz, *Fifty Years After: Black Employment in the United States Under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*. The essays grow out of our “Fifty Years After” project launched in early 2016 and funded by the Institute for New Economic Thinking. The authors are grateful to Thomas Ferguson and Louis Ferleger for comments on all these papers and welcome remarks from interested readers.

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the nineteenth century into the 1970s. We follow the transition from the cotton economy of the post-slavery South to the migration that accelerated during World War I as large numbers of Blacks sought employment in mass-production industries in Northern cities such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. For the interwar decades, we focus in particular on the Black employment experience in the Detroit automobile industry. During World War II, especially under pressure from President Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Committee, Blacks experienced tangible upward employment mobility, only to see much of it disappear with demobilization. In the 1960s and into the 1970s, however, supported by the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Blacks made significant advances in employment opportunity, especially by moving up the blue-collar occupational hierarchy into semiskilled and skilled unionized jobs. These employment gains for Blacks occurred within a specific historical context that included a) strong demand for blue-collar and clerical labor in the U.S. mass-production industries, which still dominated in global competition; b) the unquestioned employment norm within major U.S. business corporations of a career with one company, supported at the blue-collar level by mass-production unions that had become accepted institutions in the U.S. business system; c) the upward intergenerational mobility of white households from blue-collar employment requiring no more than a high-school education to white-collar employment requiring a higher education, creating space for Blacks to fill the blue-collar void; and d) a relative absence of an influx of immigrants as labor-market competition to Black employment. As we will document in the remaining papers in this series, from the 1980s these conditions changed dramatically, resulting in erosion of the blue-collar gains that Blacks had achieved in the 1960s and 1970s as the Great Society promise of equal employment opportunity for all Americans disappeared.

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## Transcending the employment restrictions of the post-slavery South

Two related developments provide crucial historical background for understanding the restricted employment conditions and potential for upward socioeconomic mobility of African Americans at the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1965: the mass internal migrations of Blacks from Southern agriculture to industrial employment in other regions of the United States and the growing importance of the large-scale industrial corporation as a major employer of blue-collar labor.<sup>2</sup>

As late as 1910, 89 percent of the Black population of the United States lived in the South.<sup>3</sup> As can be seen in Table III.1, significant shifts of the Black population from the South to other parts of the United States occurred in two waves: the first migration in the 1910s and 1920s and the second migration in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The movement of six million Blacks from the South to the rest of the United States between 1916 and 1970 is known as “The Great Migration.” By the time the EEOC was beginning to function in the late 1960s, the proportion of all African Americans residing in the South had declined to less than 55 percent.

In the South, Black employment had been heavily concentrated in sharecropping arrangements in the cotton economy, with the prospects of employment mobility in the region severely delimited by the politics of Jim Crow. In the Northeast, Midwest, and West of the United States, Blacks continued to face intense racial discrimination but without the enforced segregation that existed in the South. When they migrated to other regions, Blacks avoided agricultural employment (over decades, the sector would increasingly recruit Hispanics as low-paid labor). Instead, they gravitated to the cities of the Northeast and Midwest, where they found new employment opportunities, predominantly as low-paid laborers in the mass-production industries.

For Blacks, the restrictions on employment mobility in the Old South reflected the post-slavery legacy of the plantation economy and the post-Reconstruction legacy of white privilege through state laws and local terror. While the military defeat of the Confederacy and the reforms of Radical Reconstruction had abolished the chattel slave system and, in principle, accorded Blacks full legal rights as citizens,<sup>4</sup> the Panic of 1873 and the national economic depression that ensued undermined the power of the Republican Party and hence federal support for Reconstruction, paving the way for a new system of racial caste established under the Redeemer counterrevolution.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the emergence and growth of the modern industrial corporation, see Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Industrial Enterprise*, MIT Press, 1962; Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, Harvard University Press, 1977. For the transformations of employment relations in the mass-production corporations, see William Lazonick, *Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor*, Harvard University Press, 1990; William Lazonick, *Sustainable Prosperity in the New Economy? Business Organization and High-Tech Employment in the United States*, Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2009. For a review of literature on the Great Migration, see Stewart Emory Tolnay, “The African American ‘Great Migration’ and Beyond.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 2003: 209-232.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Census 2000 Special Reports*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2002, p. 83; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States,” Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Working Paper No. 56, September 2002, at <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, History Book Club, 2005, chs. 11-12. See also Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, Bloomsbury, 2016, ch. 1.

**Table III.1. Black population in the South and the United States, 1850-2010**

|  | Blacks in the United States, millions | Blacks in the South, millions | Blacks as % of the U.S. Population | Southern Blacks as % of the South Population | Southern Blacks as % of All Blacks |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1850   | 3.6                                   | 3.4                           | 15.7                               | 37.3   | 92.2                               |
| 1860   | 4.4                                   | 4.1                           | 14.1                               | 36.8   | 92.2                               |
| 1870   | 4.9                                   | 4.4                           | 12.7                               | 36.0   | 90.6                               |
| 1880   | 6.6                                   | 6.0                           | 13.1                               | 36.1   | 90.6                               |
| 1890   | 7.5                                   | 6.8                           | 11.9                               | 33.8   | 90.3                               |
| 1900   | 8.8                                   | 7.9                           | 11.6                               | 32.3   | 89.7                               |
| 1910   | 9.8                                   | 8.7                           | 10.7                               | 29.8   | 89.0                               |
| 1920   | 10.5                                  | 8.9                           | 9.9                                | 26.9   | 85.2                               |
| 1930   | 11.9                                  | 9.4                           | 9.7                                | 24.7   | 78.7                               |
| 1940   | 12.9                                  | 9.9                           | 9.8                                | 23.8   | 77.0                               |
| 1950   | 15.0                                  | 10.2                          | 10.0                               | 21.7   | 68.0                               |
| 1960   | 18.9                                  | 11.3                          | 10.5                               | 20.6   | 59.9                               |
| 1970   | 22.6                                  | 12.0                          | 11.1                               | 19.0   | 52.9                               |
| 1980   | 26.5                                  | 14.1                          | 11.7                               | 18.7   | 53.1                               |
| 1990   | 30.0                                  | 15.8                          | 12.1                               | 18.5   | 52.8                               |
| <b>Black or African American alone</b>                   |                                       |                               |                                    |  |                                    |
| 2000   | 34.7                                  | 18.9                          | 12.3                               | 18.8   | 54.5                               |
| 2010   | 38.9                                  | 22.0                          | 12.6                               | 19.2   | 56.5                               |
| <b>Black or African American alone or in combination</b> |                                       |                               |                                    |  |                                    |
| 2000   | 36.4                                  | 19.5                          | 12.9                               | 19.5   | 53.6                               |
| 2010   | 42.0                                  | 23.1                          | 13.6                               | 20.2   | 55.0                               |

Notes: The South region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, as well as the District of Columbia. See U.S. Census Bureau, Regions and Divisions of the United States, at [https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us\\_regdiv.pdf](https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf).

Data for 2000 and 2010 are for “Black or African American alone or in combination”; previously, in taking the census, the distinction between alone or in combination was not made.

Sources: 1850-1990: Gibson and Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race”; 2000 and 2010: Sonya Rastogi, Tallese D Johnson, Elizabeth M. Hoeffel, and Malcolm P. Drewery, Jr., “The Black Population: 2010,” U.S. Census Briefs, U.S. Census Bureau, at <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, “State Intercensal Tables: 2000-2001, at <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/intercensal-2000-2010-state.html>.

In the 1890s and 1900s, Jim Crow laws proliferated throughout Southern states, limiting the political rights of Blacks and greatly restricting their access to education, housing, and legal protection.<sup>6</sup> Racist social norms, mob violence, and domestic paramilitary organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the White League, and the Red Shirts reinforced the formal caste system. According to a recent estimate by the Equal Justice Initiative, between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950 there were approximately 4,400 “racial terror lynchings,” the chief function of

<sup>6</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Oxford University Press, Commemorative Edition, 2002 (first published by Oxford University Press, in 1955); John Hope Franklin, “History of Racial Segregation in the United States,” *Annals of the American Academic of Political and Social Science*, 304, 1956: 1-9.

which was to reestablish a system of social control through the public spectacle of gruesome violence.<sup>7</sup> And as was infamously displayed in the attack on “Black Wall Street” in Tulsa, Oklahoma on May 31 and June 1, 1921, even if African Americans drew upon their own communities to build prosperity, a white-racist massacre could destroy that economic progress literally overnight.<sup>8</sup>

Among the most egregious mechanisms used to exploit Black labor was the convict lease system.<sup>9</sup> Though the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution had formally abolished the right of private persons to own slaves, the amendment maintained the state’s right to enslave prisoners who had been convicted of a crime.<sup>10</sup> From the 1890s until World War II, Blacks in the South were frequently subject to arbitrary arrest by white officials on dubious charges, such as vagrancy and making “insulting gestures.”<sup>11</sup> Lacking legal recourse, once arrested, imprisoned Blacks were rented by local jailers and state officials to plantation owners and industrial concerns for use as cheap and expendable labor.<sup>12</sup> Well known for its use of the convict lease system was Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company (later to become a subsidiary of US Steel). In January 1888, the company entered into an exclusive contract with the State of Alabama in which the firm agreed to use all available convict labor provided by the state. The deal provided the company with cheap labor for the coal mines and a source of revenue for the state.<sup>13</sup>

In the transition to the post-slavery economy, the production of cotton took on increasing significance for both Black and white planters and farmers. At the center of this shift was the crop-lien system, under which local merchants provided credit to cotton planters and tenant farmers. The tenant or sharecropper was bound by the lien laws to pay off any debts in order to exit the share-tenant agreement. As a result, tenant farmers and sharecroppers were frequently caught in a cycle of debt and backward labor-intensive farming, thereby denying them the prospect of acquiring mechanical skills and accumulating wealth.<sup>14</sup> According to the United States 1910 Census more than half of the over five million employed African Americans worked in agriculture, with another quarter working in personal and domestic services.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, third edition, 2017, pp. 4-5, at <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.

<sup>8</sup> Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, Louisiana State University Press, 1982; Kimberly Fair, “The Devastation of Black Wall Street,” *JSTOR Daily*, July 5, 2017, at <https://daily.jstor.org/the-devastation-of-black-wall-street/>. See also Chris M. Messer and Patricia A. Bell, “Mass Media and Governmental Framing of Riots; The Case of Tulsa, 1921,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 40, 5, 2010: 851-870; Chris M. Messer, “The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence,” *Journal of Social History*, 44, 4, 2011: 1217-1232.

<sup>9</sup> Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South*, Verso, 1996; Anderson, *White Rage*, p. 28; Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America*, University of California Press, 2019, pp. 53-54.

<sup>10</sup> United States Senate, Constitution of the United States, Amendment XIII, Section I at [https://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution\\_item/constitution.htm#amdt\\_13\\_\(1865\)](https://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm#amdt_13_(1865)).

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, *White Rage*, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981*, International Publishers, 1981, p. 120; see also W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, Simon & Schuster, [1935] 1992, pp. 698-699.

<sup>14</sup> See Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*, Oxford University Press, 1976; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*, Cambridge University Press, 1977 (second edition, 2001); Jay R. Mandle, *The Roots of Black Poverty: The Southern Plantation Economy After the Civil War*, Duke University Press, 1978. See also Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War*, Basic Books, 1986; Jay R. Mandle, *Not Slave, Not Free: The African American Experience Since the Civil War*, Duke University Press, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, p. 121.

In the 1970s and 1980s, economic historians debated the extent to which economic conditions for Blacks progressed in the half century after the end of slavery.<sup>16</sup> There was economic development in the South that diversified beyond the plantation economy, and there was certainly far more freedom of movement for Blacks than under slavery. But in their 1977 book, *One Kind of Freedom*, which represents a thoroughgoing analysis of debt peonage in the post-bellum South, Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch observe that

emancipation removed the legal distinction between the South's two races, but it left them in grossly unequal positions. The blacks lacked assets; they lacked education; they lacked skills....When necessary, a campaign of violence was launched to prevent blacks from acquiring assets, education or skills. But violence was only the most visible way in which racial suppression worked. The most powerful and damaging way was indirect. Southerners erected an economic system that failed to reward individual initiative on the part of blacks and was therefore ill-suited to their economic advancement.<sup>17</sup>

Reviewing the debate among economic historians on the economic progress of Blacks in the post-slavery South, Jay Mandle states:

In the decades before World War I the Black labor force, as had been the case under slavery, predominantly found work in the South's cultivation of cotton. Regionally, industrially, and occupationally a high degree of continuity with slavery prevailed. To the extent that these measures identify the economic roles filled by the Black population in the United States, they clearly point to the fact that by 1910 not much had changed.<sup>18</sup>

Outside of the South, profound economic and social transformations were underway. For a decade from the mid-1890s, the "Great Merger Movement" swept through American industry.<sup>19</sup> By the late 1910s, the foundation of the U.S. economy had been transformed into a relatively small number of large, integrated industrial firms, coordinating mass production and distribution on a scale unrivaled in human history.<sup>20</sup> Pittsburgh with its steel industry, Detroit with its automobile industry, and Chicago with its meatpacking industry became magnets for Blacks migrating from the South.

Whites also migrated from the South to the Northeast and Midwest, but from the 1880s, the larger-scale white migration consisted of Europeans fleeing violence and poverty in the southern and eastern regions of the old continent. Until, first, the outbreak of World War I and, then, the Immigration Act of 1924 sharply restricted new entrants, Europeans streamed into the United States through New York's Ellis Island, providing a steady supply of labor for the expanding

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<sup>16</sup> Gavin Wright, "The Strange Career of the New Southern Economic History," *Reviews of American History*, 10, 4, 1982: 164-180; Jay R. Mandle, "Continuity and Change: The Use of Black Labor After the Civil War," *Journal of Black Studies*, 21, 4, 1991: 414-427; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, "*One Kind of Freedom*: Reconsidered (and Turbocharged)," *Explorations in Economic History*, 38,1, 2002: 6-39.

<sup>17</sup> Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom*, p. 186. The authors cite this passage in their retrospective essay Ransom and Sutch, "*One Kind of Freedom*: Reconsidered (and Turbocharged)," p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Mandle, "Continuity and Change," pp. 416-417.

<sup>19</sup> Ralph Lowell Nelson, *Merger Movements in American Industry, 1895-1956*, Princeton University Press, 1959, chs. 3 and 4; Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, pp. 331-339.

<sup>20</sup> Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, ch. 11. See also Richard C. Edwards, "Stages of Corporate Stability and the Risks of Corporate Failure," *Journal of Economic History*, 35, 2, 1975: 428-457.

industrial economy.<sup>21</sup> The rise of the mass-production industries created new employment opportunities for Blacks migrating from the South, but African American citizens got the jobs that the European immigrants did not want.

That is not to say that white immigrants integrated seamlessly into American society. Elite concerns over the immigration of ethnic minorities has been a feature of American society since its colonial era.<sup>22</sup> For example, largely as a result of the Great Famine (1845-1849), from 1847 through 1854 1.2 million Irish emigrated to the United States (44 percent of all immigrants over these eight years), where, as the poorest and least educated of the nation's white population, they were frequently greeted with economic exploitation, discrimination, and violence.<sup>23</sup> By the early 1900s, however, the Irish had gained a degree of economic and political security through alliances with inner-city political machines, such as New York City's Tammany Hall, where votes were exchanged for jobs.<sup>24</sup>

Though at first strategically advantageous, this system of patronage also served to relegate the ethnic Irish to primarily blue-collar work—a problem that became aggravated with the massive influx of southern and eastern European immigrants in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.<sup>25</sup> These immigrants were concentrated in transport, mining, metal manufacturing, and textiles.<sup>26</sup> The mass upward mobility of second- and third-generation ethnic Europeans from blue-collar work to white-collar occupations would not occur until the expansion of U.S. industry during and after U.S. involvement in World War II.

### ***The first Black migration and entry into mass-production employment***

In the late 1910s and early 1920s, a series of historical developments converged which would further transform the demographic geography of the United States. The outbreak of World War I cut off the supply of European immigrant labor, with more restrictions placed on immigrant employment in the war industries.<sup>27</sup> European immigration had averaged almost 1.1 million people per year in 1913 and 1914 but fell to 198,000 in 1915, 146,000 in 1916, 133,000 in 1917, and then only 31,000 in 1918 and 25,000 in 1919.<sup>28</sup>

Aided by labor agents from organizations such as the National Urban League, Northern industrialists responded to the labor shortage with massive recruitment campaigns in the Black

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<sup>21</sup> David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America*. Oxford University Press, 1971; Charles Hirschman and Elizabeth Mogford, "Immigration and the American Industrial Revolution from 1880 to 1920," *Social Science Research*, 38, 4, 2009: 897-920; Jia Lynn Yang, *One Mighty and Irresistible Tide: The Epic Struggle over American Immigration, 1924-1965*, W.W. Norton, 2020

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Benjamin Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 13, 4, 1970: 469-475 [published in 1751].

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949, p. 32. For an in-depth study of the employment of the Irish in the New England cotton textile industry in the late 1840s and 1850s, see William Lazonick and Thomas Brush, "The 'Horndal Effect' in Early U.S. Manufacturing," *Explorations in Economic History*, 22, 1, 1985: 53-96.

<sup>24</sup> Steven P. Eric, *Rainbow's End: Irish Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985*, University of California Press, 1988, ch. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Hirschman and Mogford, "Immigration and the American Industrial Revolution."

<sup>27</sup> William J. Collins, "When the Tide Turned: Immigration and the Great Black Migration," *Journal of Economic History*, 57, 3, 1997: 607-632.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, p. 32.

press, targeting cheap Southern labor. The boll-weevil infestation of the previous years left Southern agricultural workers reeling, pushing thousands off the land and into Southern cities in search of work.<sup>29</sup> The availability of higher-paying industrial jobs in Northern cities provided Southern Blacks with the first substantive opportunity to escape the chronic poverty, overt discrimination, and the sanctioned violence of Jim Crow.<sup>30</sup>

Among the first to leave were those best positioned to do so by virtue of their accumulated skills and savings. By 1910 a minority of Blacks had gained entry to Southern industry as unskilled laborers working in dirty and dangerous occupations in lumber, mining, rail transportation, and iron and steel foundries. Not only did these workers have greater familiarity with industrial production, but they were more likely to live in or around Southern cities, granting them access to public schools and an active press in which Northern employers advertised. Northern employers were highly selective and agreed to reimburse prospective employees for their move only after they had begun work. Many migrants financed their move by drawing on savings and selling whatever property they could.

Arriving in Northern cities, Black workers generally entered the lowest rungs of the occupational hierarchy. Nonetheless, for Black workers accustomed to the low wages of the Southern economy, these positions provided better pay and greater security than had previously been available to them.<sup>31</sup> With the end of World War I, war industries experienced a period of retrenchment and reconversion as veterans returned to domestic employment. Lacking managerial and union power, numerous Black workers were laid off, often being replaced by returning white veterans.<sup>32</sup> The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924—two eugenics-inspired laws, which set immigration limits by country of origin as a means of maintaining the racial character of the U.S. population—signaled the formal end of the stream of European immigrants that had begun in the 1880s,<sup>33</sup> and prompted another wave of internal migration from the South to North.

Although, in the North, most Blacks remained confined to low-wage, unskilled service occupations, in the prosperous conditions of the last half of the 1920s larger firms in mass-production industries offered blue-collar workers, including a growing number of African Americans, higher wages and the promise of stable employment.<sup>34</sup> In addition, as majority-Black communities emerged in the North, Black-owned businesses grew to provide goods and services that were difficult for Blacks to obtain from white-owned firms. Included were retail and personal

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<sup>29</sup> Fabian Lange, Alan L. Olmstead, and Paul W. Rhode, "The Impact of the Boll Weevil, 1892-1932," *Journal of Economic History*, 69, 3, 2009: 685-718; Leah Platt Boustan, *Competition in the Promised Land: Black Migrants in Northern Cities and Labor Markets*, Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> Emmett Jay Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, Oxford University Press, 1920, ch. 2; Stewart Emory Tolnay and Elwood M. Beck, "Racial Violence and Black Migration in the American South, 1910 to 1930," *American Sociological Review*, 57, 1, 1992: 103-116; Boustan, *Competition in the Promised Land*, chs. 1 and 2.

<sup>31</sup> See George E. Haynes, "Negroes deserting South for North," *New York Times*, November 12, 1916.

<sup>32</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, p. 132.

<sup>33</sup> Yang, *One Mighty and Irresistible Tide*, chs. 1 and 2.

<sup>34</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, chs. 9-10; Collins, "When the Tide Turned"; Joe T. Darden, "The Effect of World War I on Black Occupational and Residential Segregation: The Case of Pittsburgh," *Journal of Black Studies*, 18, 3, 1988: 297-312; Gareth Canaan, "'Part of the Loaf': Economic Conditions of Chicago's African-American Working Class during the 1920's," *Journal of Social History*, 35, 1, 2001: 147-174.



services, such as barber shops and beauty salons, local transportation as well as banks and insurance companies.<sup>35</sup>

Despite finding relative prosperity, Blacks in Northern cities again encountered substantial discrimination and violence at the hands of local officials, citizens' groups, and white mobs. Following the release of D. W. Griffith's 1915 artistically groundbreaking, though historically inaccurate and overtly racist, cinematic epic, *The Birth of a Nation*, the Ku Klux Klan experienced a national resurgence, including in many Northern cities where the Klan gained membership as a response to the arrival of millions of Catholic and Jewish Europeans and Southern-born Blacks.<sup>36</sup>

The growing automobile industry was particularly attractive to migrating African Americans.<sup>37</sup> The widespread employment of Blacks in the automobile industry began with the labor shortages following the outbreak of World War I. Like many Northern industrial firms, automobile manufacturers sought to restore the supply of workers through extensive recruitment campaigns which targeted the low-cost labor of the South. In response to these efforts, tens of thousands of Southern Blacks moved north in the hope of securing the industry's promise of higher wages.<sup>38</sup>

The influx of migrants from the South coincided with a transformation of the production process in the industry that was highly favorable to these masses of unskilled workers. While in the early years of the century the automobile industry was craft-based, consisting of a network of small shops, from Ford's introduction of the assembly line at its Highland Park plant in 1914, demand increased for operatives possessing the stamina, speed, strength, and discipline necessary to maintain the pace of high-throughput production. Between 1910 and 1924, with the growing importance of the assembly line, the percentage of skilled automobile workers declined from roughly three-fourths of the total to between five and ten percent.<sup>39</sup> Assembly-line production was monotonous and demanding. Although a new assembly-line worker could get up to speed on the job in a few months, turnover was very costly because of the decline in productivity and the damage to materials that the insertion of green workers into the highly mechanized production processes entailed.<sup>40</sup> Being neither unskilled common laborers nor skilled craft workers, these mass-production workers became known as semiskilled operatives.

As the assembly line came to dominate the production process, the companies that led in its introduction became among the most profitable in the nation. These profits gave management the ability to offer competitive wages to employees as a means of incentivizing them to maintain high levels of throughput despite the repetitive and exhausting nature of their work. When in 1914 the Ford Motor Company opened the Highland Park plant to produce the Model T, it attracted job

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<sup>35</sup> Louis A. Ferleger and Matthew Lavalley, "Lending a Hand: Black Business Owners' Complex Role in the Civil Rights Movement," *Enterprise & Society*, 21, 2, 2020: 494-515. Ferleger and Lavalley discuss the important political and organizing role that Black-owned businesses played in their communities, particularly during the civil-rights era.

<sup>36</sup> Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*; Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*, Oxford University Press, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, Oxford University Press, 1979; Joyce Shaw Peterson, "Black Automobile Workers in Detroit, 1910-1930," *Journal of Negro History*, 64, 3, 1979: 177-190; Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Herbert R. Northrup, *The Negro in the Automobile Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1968, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Joyce Shaw Peterson, "Auto Workers and Their Work, 1900-1933," *Labor History*, 22, 2, 1982: 213-236, cited at p. 220.

<sup>40</sup> Lazonick, *Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor*, chs. 7-9.

seekers from around the nation by its offer of the “five-dollar day,” twice the going daily wage.<sup>41</sup> It was actually a profit-sharing scheme that was dependent on Ford’s attaining and maintaining a large share of the growing car market. Moreover, workers only qualified for the additional money to bring their current wage to five dollars if they adhered to a strict regimen of moral and upstanding living that was monitored by Ford’s newly formed Sociology Department. The policy ran into problems by the early 1920s after Ford lost considerable market share to General Motors (GM), which, having recruited many of Ford’s leading engineers, innovated in car models and introduced the most advanced assembly lines to manufacture them.<sup>42</sup>

Detroit, headquarters to both Ford and General Motors as well as from 1925 Chrysler, emerged as by far the most important location for the automobile industry. The city’s Black population grew from 5,700 in 1910 to 40,800 in 1920 to 120,000 in 1930.<sup>43</sup> In 1920, manufacturing or mechanical occupations employed 79 percent of Black men in Detroit. In 1930, 14 percent of Detroit’s autoworkers were Black, compared with seven percent nationwide.<sup>44</sup> The vast majority of the Black workers were employed as unskilled laborers as distinct from semiskilled operatives or skilled craft workers.

Ford became the leading employer of Blacks, increasing the number on the payroll from 50 in 1916 to 2,500 (out of 57,000 Detroit-area employees) in 1920. By 1926, Ford’s River Rouge Complex employed 10,000 Blacks, about 10 percent of its total labor force.<sup>45</sup> According to Joyce Peterson, 60-70 percent of the Blacks at River Rouge worked in the foundry, where jobs were the dirtiest, most dangerous, and lowest paid in comparison with the company’s other manufacturing operations. One advantage of employing Blacks instead of whites in the foundry was that Blacks, with less alternative employment opportunity, were less likely to quit to take other jobs, especially in a period such as the 1920s when the economy was booming.<sup>46</sup> The productivity of a mass-production company depended upon the availability of a stable labor force that could be relied upon to show up for work and maintain levels of work effort necessary to maintain high rates of throughput.<sup>47</sup>

While most Blacks labored in the foundry, Ford Motor Company was unique among automakers in the 1920s in making it possible for Blacks to enter the more attractive semiskilled operative and skilled craft jobs. As Peterson states:

The Rouge plant was the only one in the entire auto industry to employ blacks in all manufacturing operations, including the final assembly line. The admission of blacks into a few skilled positions at Ford was backed up by admitting a few black workers to the Ford Trade School, the Apprentice

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen Meyer III, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921*, SUNY Press, 1981.

<sup>42</sup> David C. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, chs. 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> Peterson, “Black Automobile Workers in Detroit,” p. 177.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, ch. I; Peterson, “Black Automobile Workers”; Carole Marks, “Black Workers and the Great Migration North,” *Phylon (1960-)*, 46, 2, 1985: 148-161; Thomas N. Maloney and Warren C. Whatley, “Making the Effort: The Contours of Racial Discrimination in Detroit’s Labor Markets, 1920-1940,” *Journal of Economic History*, 55, 3, 1995: 465-493, cited at pp. 466-468; Christopher L. Foote, Warren C. Whatley, and Gavin Wright, “Arbitrating a Discriminatory Labor Market: Black Workers at the Ford Motor Company, 1918-1947,” *Journal of Labor Economics*, 21, 3, 2003: 493-532.

<sup>46</sup> Foote et al., “Arbitrating a Discriminatory Labor Market.”

<sup>47</sup> Lazonick, *Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor*, chs. 7-9.

School, and the Ford Training School. The numbers were insignificant, but these schools provided practically the only places in Detroit where blacks could be trained as skilled workers.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, in the 1920s, employment relations at Ford deteriorated as the company lost market share.<sup>49</sup> In charge of personnel at Ford was Harry Bennett, a gangster whose thugs (numbering as many as 8,000) in the Ford Service Department did not hesitate to beat workers whom they considered to be out of line.<sup>50</sup> Ford continued to produce the open-body Model T while General Motors employed former Ford engineers to develop the closed-body chassis and introduce a variety of auto innovations, ranging from the electric starter (instead of a hand crank) and quick-drying paints in a variety of pigments (instead of Ford's sole color "choice" of black).<sup>51</sup> In 1927, Ford ceased selling the Model T as the company introduced the closed-body Model A. But Ford had to shut down River Rouge for six months for retooling, and as a result, in a booming car market, its sales of passenger vehicles plummeted from 1,484,911 in 1927 to 273,741 before recovering to 1,435,880 in 1929. In sum, in the 1920s the industrial company that was by far the largest employer of Blacks in the United States had also become one of the worst places to work in terms of both personnel management and employment stability.

Employment relations were far better at General Motors, which expanded its car sales steadily in the 1920s, from 193,275 in 1921 to 1,482,004 in 1929. GM passed on a portion of its success to its employees in the form of higher pay and more job stability, lifting the wages of auto workers higher than in any other comparable industry. While U.S. manufacturing wages fell by 6.0 percent over the course of the decade, wages in the auto industry rose by 23.7 percent.<sup>52</sup> Semiskilled workers who showed themselves to be attentive and hardworking found expanding opportunities for stable and well-paid employment, even without the leverage of union bargaining.

### ***Depression, the New Deal, World War II, and the second migration***

That all changed with the downturn in the economy that began in 1930 and, as it turned out, evolved into the decade known as the Great Depression. From 1931 through 1940, the lowest national civilian unemployment rate was 14.3 percent in 1937 and the highest was 24.9 percent in 1933.<sup>53</sup> In 1929, Detroit firms employed 475,000 autoworkers; by the end of 1931, almost half of them had been laid off.<sup>54</sup> In 1933, wages and salaries in U.S. manufacturing were less than half their 1929 levels and in automobiles and steel well under 40 percent.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Peterson, "Black Automobile Workers," p. 180. See also Joyce Shaw Peterson, *American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933*, SUNY Press, 1987; Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, ch. I.

<sup>49</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, ch. III.

<sup>50</sup> Amy Wilson, "The rise and fall of Harry Bennett," *Automotive News*, June 2, 2003, at <https://www.autonews.com/article/20030602/SUB/306020843/the-rise-and-fall-of-harry-bennett>

<sup>51</sup> William J. Abernathy, *The Productivity Dilemma: Roadblock to Innovation in the Automobile Industry*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

<sup>52</sup> Peterson, "Black Automobile Workers," p. 242.

<sup>53</sup> Technical note, "Labor Force, Employment, and Unemployment, 1929-1939, Estimating Methods," *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1948: 50-53.

<sup>54</sup> David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 73. See also Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Giant Enterprise: Ford General Motors and the Automobile Industry*, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Lester V. Chandler, *America's Greatest Depression, 1929-1941*, Harper & Row, 1970, p. 35.

Migration slowed during the Great Depression as jobs became scarce. Blacks were hit particularly hard as a result of the downturn.<sup>56</sup> However, the social networks and community organizations established in many cities and, in particular, branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League did much to sustain a continued, if much slower, flow of Blacks from the South and support them in finding employment in their new locales.<sup>57</sup> In the post-war decades as well, the presence of these organizations would continue to support the movement of Southern Blacks to Northern cities that offered employment opportunities.<sup>58</sup>

During the early 1930s, as mass layoffs turned into long-term unemployment, production workers at major industrial corporations looked to union representation to protect their conditions of work and pay. In 1935, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) was founded in Detroit under the auspices of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). From the start, however, the affiliation of the UAW with the AFL was a poor fit. Established in 1886, the AFL was an association of craft unions that admitted members according to their command of specialized trade skills and then sought to get an employer to agree to a “closed shop” by hiring only union members to access those skills. In sharp contrast, most of the workers who joined the UAW, as well as members of other mass-production unions based in tires, steel, textiles, and mining, among others, were semiskilled operatives or unskilled laborers. Within the AFL, the mass-production unions banded together in the Committee for Industrial Organization, led by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers. In 1936, the AFL suspended the Committee unions, which remained bound together as the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).<sup>59</sup>

In 1935, as a centerpiece of the New Deal legislation, the Roosevelt administration won the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), also known as the Wagner Act. The NLRA gave workers at a company the right to choose a union to represent them in collective bargaining and compelled the employer to bargain over issues related to wages and layoffs with the union selected by a majority of the employees in the bargaining unit. The pathbreaking win under the NLRA was General Motor’s recognition of the UAW as the bargaining representative for its workers. They brought GM to the bargaining table for a contract by staging a 44-day sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan, that ended in February 1937. The following month, after a 17-day sit-down strike, Chrysler also agreed to accept the UAW as the workers’ representative in collective bargaining. After the UAW-CIO was suspended by the AFL, the UAW-AFL emerged as a more company-friendly alternative. GM, Chrysler, and Ford all tried unsuccessfully to have the UAW-AFL become the workers’ bargaining representative. In 1941, however, Ford entered into a contract with the UAW-CIO, which then became simply the UAW.<sup>60</sup>

The new mass-production unions fought successfully to establish seniority as a fundamental principle of employment. A 1938 article in *Monthly Labor Review* summed up the multi-faceted importance of the seniority principle to the new system of collective bargaining:

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<sup>56</sup> William A. Sundstrom, “Last Hired, First Fired? Unemployment and Urban Black Workers During the Great Depression,” *Journal of Economic History*, 52, 2, 1992: 415-429.

<sup>57</sup> Townsend Price-Spratlen, “Livin’ for the City: African American Ethnogenesis and Depression Era Migration,” *Demography*, 36, 4, 1999: 553-568.

<sup>58</sup> Townsend Price-Spratlen, “Urban Destination Selection among African Americans during the 1950s Great Migration,” *Social Science History*, 32, 3, 2008: 437-469.

<sup>59</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, chs. 15-16.

<sup>60</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*.

The growth of mass-production industries and the increased union activities have made the question of seniority one of the dominant issues in industrial relations. The emphasis on youth and speed in many industries has often led to the adoption of seniority as a protection for the older workers. By granting increased job tenure on the basis of length of service, employment advantages are given to the older, more experienced workers. Seniority is also a defense against discriminatory firing, whether based on personal prejudice or intended to break up union organization. Because of its mechanical, impartial operation, seniority also affords protection in rehire. In the absence of a closed or preferential shop, it is a protection against union discrimination by the employer. When hiring is done through the union it precludes favoritism by union officials. Where the system is automatic and easily understood, it may be a factor in reducing the number of disputes and misunderstandings between employees and management.<sup>61</sup>

Management was not necessarily averse to the seniority principle and could even welcome it. In the 1920s, in the absence of collective bargaining, the better-managed mass producers had offered employment security and pay raises as a means of maintaining a stable, attentive labor force that would show up for work regularly and keep pace with the high-throughput machines.<sup>62</sup> With the advent of collective bargaining under the NLRA, the seniority principle fit with the prevailing personnel-management approaches of the leading mass producers and found widespread acceptance from the 1940s with the return of conditions of strong demand for labor.

The adoption of the seniority principle, however, increased the skepticism of the new unions by African Americans working in the mass-production industries.<sup>63</sup> As it was, the AFL craft unions were known for their systematic exclusion of Blacks.<sup>64</sup> Having excluded Blacks from membership, white workers often viewed them as potential or actual strikebreakers.<sup>65</sup> With the advent of the UAW, the key questions for African American community leaders and prospective UAW members were whether the new union would support the promotion of Blacks from foundry work to the assembly line, and whether, once promoted, the granting of seniority would be color blind.<sup>66</sup>

Black workers were not an important presence in the 1937 sit-down strikes at GM and Chrysler. Meanwhile, in resisting unionization, Ford, the largest employer of Blacks in Detroit, made an extra effort to win the loyalty of its African American employees so that they would rebuff UAW organizing. Once Ford had reluctantly recognized the UAW in 1941, however, its favorable treatment of Blacks was reversed.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> "Seniority Agreements in Collective Agreements," *Monthly Labor Review*, 47, 6, 1938: 1250-1260, quoted at p. 1250.

<sup>62</sup> Lazonick, *Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor*, ch. 8. See also Laura J. Owen, "Worker Turnover in the 1920s: What Labor Supply Arguments Don't Tell Us," *Journal of Economic History*, 55, 4, 1995: 822-841; Laura J. Owen, "Worker Turnover in the 1920s: The Role of Changing Employment Practices," *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 4, 3, 1995: 499-530; Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, revised edition, Psychology Press, 2004, ch. 6.

<sup>63</sup> For the case of the Detroit-based automobile industry, see Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*; Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit*, chs. 7-9.

<sup>64</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, chs. 5-15.

<sup>65</sup> Warren C. Whatley, "African-American Strikebreaking from the Civil War to the New Deal," *Social Science History*, 17, 4, 1993: 525-558.

<sup>66</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*; Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit*.

<sup>67</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, ch. II.

David Brody has argued that the permanence of the new industrial unions in the mass-production industries was not secured until U.S. entry into World War II as tight labor markets and wartime demand compelled management to build cooperative relations with their shop-floor employees.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, the race-based composition of the U.S. civilian labor force changed as millions of working-age men were drafted into the armed services while major industries were converted and expanded to accommodate the demands of war production. As employment opportunities opened up with wartime industrial conversion, millions of poor Southern Blacks and whites again left to find work in booming industrial cities, dwarfing the migration from the South that had begun with the start of World War I. As shown in Table III.1 (above), between 1940 and 1950, the proportion of all African Americans in the South dropped from 77.0 percent to 68.0 percent.

As whites left civilian blue-collar employment to join the military, the percentage of Black workers employed above the lowest skill-categories increased, while the overall gap between the wages of white and Black workers narrowed.<sup>69</sup> Blacks working in war production fared better than Blacks who did not.<sup>70</sup> Due to government pressure to reduce discrimination in promotion, Blacks in the automobile industry increasingly moved out of the foundry as they gained access to the assembly line.<sup>71</sup>

But employment mobility from semiskilled to skilled jobs within the war industries remained closed to Black workers.<sup>72</sup> The majority of craft unions were unwilling to admit Blacks and held closed-shop agreements with management. Blacks were unable to gain any significant foothold in training schools because they were not craft union members and had no job offers. In response to the inability of Blacks to make significant gains in craft employment in the war industries, in 1941 A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the only Black-led AFL chartered union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, conferred with leaders of the NAACP and the National Urban League. The coalition threatened the Roosevelt administration with a March on Washington that would insist that Blacks be given “the right to work and fight for our country.”<sup>73</sup>

President Roosevelt responded to the pressure of the coalition in July 1941 with Executive Order 8802, requiring all government agencies and firms involved in the war effort to hire on non-discriminatory lines. The fact is that mobilization for war required the upgrading of the capabilities of Black industrial workers who had the aptitude to perform the jobs that required specialized skills. The Roosevelt administration created the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to enforce the non-discriminatory training and promotion of Blacks. Upon receiving word of the President’s actions, Randolph and his allies called off the March. Despite the obstruction of

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<sup>68</sup> Brody, *Workers in industrial America*, ch. II; Edward Greer, “Big Steel: Black Politics and Corporate Power in Gary, Indiana,” *Monthly Review Press*, 1979, ch. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas N. Maloney, “Wage Compression and Wage Inequality Between Black and White Males in the United States, 1940-1960,” *Journal of Economic History*, 54, 2, 1994: 358-381; William J. Collins, “Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets,” *American Economic Review*, 91, 1, 2001:272–286; Anna Aizer, Ryan Boone, Adriana Lleras-Muney, and Jonathan Vogel, “Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes: Evidence from WWII,” NBER Working Paper Series, Working Paper 27689; August 2020, at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w27689>.

<sup>70</sup> William J. Collins, “African-American Economic Mobility in the 1940s: A Portrait from the Palmer Survey,” *Journal of Economic History*, 60, 3, 2000: 756–781. Aizer et al. suggest that more progress in wages and movement out of the lowest skilled jobs occurred in cities that received larger amounts of wartime production expenditures. Aizer et al., “Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes.”

<sup>71</sup> See Northrup, *The Negro in the Automobile Industry*, ch. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Herbert Hill, “The Importance of Race in America Labor History,” *Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 9, 2, 1995: 317-343, cited at p. 318.

<sup>73</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, p. 240.

antagonistic businessmen, politicians, union leaders, and training school administrators, from March 1942 to November 1944 the percentage of Black workers employed in war production rose from 2.5 percent to 8.0 percent. Overall, from April 1940 to April 1944 employment of Black men in the U.S. civilian labor force increased from 2.9 million to 3.8 million, while employment of Black women grew from 1.5 million to 2.1 million.<sup>74</sup>

The promotion of Blacks did not go unnoticed by white workers who felt threatened by their advance. As recounted by August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, there were about a dozen “hate strikes” in the Detroit automobile industry during the first six months of 1943, with white workers walking off the job to protest the allocation of skilled positions to Blacks.<sup>75</sup> The most serious of these hate strikes occurred at the Packard plant in June 1943 when 25,000 white workers staged a wildcat strike to protest after, under FEPC pressure, Packard had hired a dozen Black females to run drill presses. According to Meier and Rudwick, “Packard had been among the slowest companies [in the Detroit automobile industry] in modifying its employment policies, and its personnel director, C. E. Weiss, was probably the most unabashedly bigoted executive in the industry...The UAW quite accurately charged Packard management with encouraging white employee resistance to Black upgrading and deliberately fostering hate strikes.”<sup>76</sup> In the end, it was the UAW leadership who, after four days, convinced the strikers to go back to work while preserving the jobs of the Black women.<sup>77</sup>

Faced with overt racist antagonism, Black workers and their allies responded with continued militancy. In 1944, for example, when the superintendent of a Pittsburgh steel mill passed over several qualified Black candidates for promotion in favor of two white workers from outside departments, Black workers staged a walk-out, intending to leave the coke ovens idle. The men returned only after receiving a call from the Philadelphia FEPC.<sup>78</sup>

By the end of 1945, however, over one-third of Blacks hired during the war-era buildup had been laid off. Kevin Boyle argues that, despite a rhetorical commitment to fight discrimination by UAW leadership, within only a few years white-majority locals had succeeded in reinstating discriminatory practices, reducing Black representation in the industry to its prewar levels.<sup>79</sup> Meier and Rudwick contend, however, that “by and large the United Automobile Workers; seniority rules operated to the Negroes’ benefit, and, once the painful transition to peacetime was over, blacks found that they retained the foothold in semi-skilled machine production and assembly-line work which they had won during the war.”<sup>80</sup>

Although Blacks benefited from U.S. entry into World War II, whites gained far more, so that the overall economic effects tended to exacerbate rather than relieve racial inequality. The war also caused decreased social acceptance of and increased legal sanction against the U.S. racial caste

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<sup>74</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, p. 243; See also William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2013, chs. 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, p. 162.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-174.

<sup>78</sup> Merl E. Reed, “Black Workers, Defense Industries, and Federal Agencies in Pennsylvania, 1941-1945,” *Labor History*, 27, 3, 1986: 356-384, cited at p. 380.

<sup>79</sup> Kevin Boyle, “‘There are No Union Sorrows that the Union Can’t Heal’: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the United Automobile Workers, 1940-1960,” *Labor History*, 36, 1, 1995: 5-23, cited at p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, p. 215.

system. Aware of the propaganda value of the convict lease system to the Axis powers, for example, President Roosevelt called upon then Attorney General Francis Biddle to address the issue. In the immediate aftermath of the attack by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Biddle issued Circular No. 3591 to federal prosecutors, “direct[ing] the attention of the United States Attorneys to the possibilities of successful prosecutions stemming from alleged peonage complaints which have heretofore been considered inadequate to invoke federal prosecution.”<sup>81</sup> A series of federal court cases followed that served to dismantle the convict-lease system in the South, including a notable case against U.S. Sugar Company for the use of prison slave labor in their Florida sugarcane fields.<sup>82</sup>

The normative effects of U.S. engagement in World War II were addressed by the economist Gunnar Myrdal in his study, *An American Dilemma*, published in 1944. Writing in 1942, Myrdal asserted that despite the existence of “a small minority” of middle and upper-class Blacks, “the masses of American Negroes” remained “destitute.”<sup>83</sup> Notwithstanding the dismal realities of the economic status of African Americans, for Myrdal, the war against the Axis powers and the racial ideologies to which they were committed were “accelerating” the “struggle” against the American caste system. Though the war did not eliminate the racial caste system in the United States, it did place “the stamp of public disapproval...upon it.”<sup>84</sup> Both Northern and Southern whites were, therefore, forced into a defensive position in which they were made to deny or rationalize their participation in racial discrimination.<sup>85</sup>

Whatever progress Blacks maintained in access to semiskilled blue-collar jobs in the years after the war, they were largely unable to benefit from the momentous legislation to support postwar upward mobility to white-collar status that the Roosevelt administration bestowed on military personnel returning to civilian life. On June 22, 1944, President Roosevelt signed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act into law. Commonly known as the GI Bill, the measure provided returning veterans with access to finance to buy homes, start businesses, and attend college. The Bill also granted veterans access to job-placement programs, all along formally race-neutral lines.

Blacks were, however, severely underrepresented in the armed services during the war, and hence did not have equal access to the GI Bill’s benefits. This disparity was partly the result of military admissions tests, which filtered out prospective service personnel on the basis of health, literacy, and aptitude. Having been subject to systematic discrimination in education, housing, job training, and employment, many Blacks were unable to meet the admissions standards. Blacks who were admitted to the armed services were assigned to segregated units and given menial jobs, denying them the opportunity to develop useful employment skills.<sup>86</sup>

The GI Bill was implemented via existing local institutions, and funds were allocated on an individual basis. In practice, this meant that the benefits of the programs reflected the opportunity structure of the institutions available to any given veteran. White employees staffed nearly all

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<sup>81</sup> Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, Anchor Books, 2009, pp. 377-378.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 380-382.

<sup>83</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Harper & Brothers, 1944, p. 205.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1009.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1010-1015.

<sup>86</sup> Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*, W.W. Norton & Company, ch. 4.



Veterans Administration centers, leaving returning Black veterans at “the discretion of parochial intolerance.”<sup>87</sup> The realities of institutional discrimination affected Black veterans across the country. Of the 67,000 home mortgages insured through the GI Bill in New York and northern New Jersey suburbs, for example, only 100 were given to non-whites.<sup>88</sup>

According to a study by Sarah Turner and John Bound, the ubiquity of racial discrimination in employment and the poor funding of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) meant that Blacks returning to the South were confronted with a paucity of educational opportunities and assistance. These individuals thus received little if any educational or employment benefits from their national service. In Georgia and Alabama, for example, there were only around a dozen Black employment and educational counselors to assist Black veterans, while Mississippi had none whatsoever.<sup>89</sup> As of 1943-1944, white colleges and universities, both public and private, received approximately 92 percent of all GI Bill expenditures. And at public institutions, whites received over 94 percent of total funding. Hardly an historical aberration, HBCUs had been all but passed over during the massive expansion of the American university system in the first half of the twentieth century. As a result, few HBCUs offered training beyond the level of a bachelor’s degree. For Black veterans seeking an engineering or doctoral degree, the option was simply unavailable to them at an HBCU.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, for Black veterans returning to the South, admission to an HBCU was a relatively privileged experience. According to a study by Keith Olson, approximately 20,000 Black veterans were denied admission to HBCUs. And a corroborating study, which surveyed 21 HBCUs, found that 28 percent of all veteran applicants were denied entry to colleges and universities at the national level. Meanwhile, 55 percent of Black veterans were not admitted to HBCU’s explicitly due to these institutions’ insufficient capacity.<sup>91</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that, as Turner and Bound observe, “regardless of the level or type of training, we find little evidence that military service and the availability of education benefits changed skill acquisition of black veterans from the South.”<sup>92</sup> Blacks who attended integrated Northern universities saw notable gains in educational attainment, while white veterans experienced the greatest of all. Turner and Bound conclude that “for those more likely to be limited to the South in their collegiate choices, the GI Bill exacerbated rather than narrowed the economic and educational differences between blacks and whites.”<sup>93</sup>

### ***Employment discrimination and civil rights in the postwar years***

By the end of World War II, U.S. industrial corporations occupied a position of unprecedented strategic advantage. With Europe and Japan in ruins, U.S. industry faced no substantial global competition. Investment in productive capabilities by the “investment triad” of government, business, and households brought the workforce back to full employment, increased aggregate demand, and generated a range of technological and administrative innovations that would support

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>89</sup> Sarah Turner and John S. Bound, “Closing the Gap or Widening the Divide: The Effect of the GI Bill and World War II on the Educational Outcomes of Black Americans.” *Journal of Economic History*, 63, 1, 2003: 145-177, cited at p. 151.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-154.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 172; see also Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White*, ch. 5.

the modern industrial economy for decades to come.<sup>94</sup> Meanwhile, the second and third generations of ethnic European immigrants were becoming increasingly integrated into the American socioeconomic and cultural mainstream, having benefited from New Deal social programs, GI Bill provisions, and the expansion of U.S. industry.<sup>95</sup>

In the postwar decades, the employment practices of large corporations were characterized by a gainful salary, on-the-job training, the norm of a career with one company, healthcare coverage, and a defined-benefit pension. The white males who overwhelmingly benefited from these employment opportunities formed the foundation of the most expansive middle class in American history. During the 1950s this new middle class received widespread attention in books such as C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*.<sup>96</sup>

White males had an extremely dominant, but not exclusive, monopoly on membership in the new middle class. In his landmark, if controversial, study, *Black Bourgeoisie*, E. Franklin Frazier argued that a small but identifiable Black middle class had emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. In Frazier's view, the movement of Blacks out of the South had established a foothold within U.S. industry, leading to a notable occupational differentiation within the Black workforce by 1940. As a result of the expansion of government agencies and business firms during World War II, the political pressure generated by the proposed 1941 March on Washington, and the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Laws, a minority of Black men and women had gained access to secure jobs with decent wages, a process that continued at a reduced pace into the 1950s.<sup>97</sup>

The bulk of the controversy surrounding Frazier's book concerned his indictment of the Black middle class, who Frazier argued inhabited a "world of make-believe" in which the gains of a self-reliant Black middle class were grossly inflated, while status in "Negro society" was attained through the ability to emulate the values and consumption patterns of middle-class whites. For Frazier, the chief impediments to Black economic self-determination were found in "the simple but fundamental sociological fact" that Blacks had been historically denied the ability to develop experience and tradition in business.<sup>98</sup> For those who had done so, the expansion of their businesses was inhibited by the overall deprivation of the Black community in which they attempted to operate. Frazier argued that the notion of a separate Black economy was simply not feasible.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Matt Hopkins and William Lazonick, "Who Invests in the High-Tech Knowledge Base?" Institute for New Economic Thinking Working Group on the Political Economy of Distribution Working Paper No. 6, September 2014 (revised December 2014), at <https://www.ineteconomics.org/research/research-papers/who-invests-in-the-high-tech-knowledge-base>; William Lazonick, "The Investment Triad and Sustainable Prosperity," in Peter Creticos, Larry Bennett, Laura Owen, Costas Spirou, and Maxine Morphis-Riesbeck, eds., *The Many Futures of Work: Rethinking Expectations and Breaking Molds*, Temple University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>95</sup> See Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What that Says About Race in America*, Rutgers University Press, 1994; David R. Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*, Basic Books, 2005. For an important amendment to Roediger's interpretation of the historical development of white working-class identity see Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 170-171.

<sup>96</sup> C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Class*, Oxford University Press, 1953; William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man*, Simon & Schuster, 1956.

<sup>97</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, Free Press, 1957, ch. 2; see also Elton Rayack, "Discrimination and the Occupational Progress of Negroes," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 43, 2, 1961: 209-214; Martha J. Bailey and William J. Collins, "The Wage Gains of African-American Women in the 1940s," *Journal of Economic History*, 66, 3, 2006: 737-777; Raaj Tiagi, "Occupational Mobility of Black Migrants in the West during the 1950s," *Labor History*, 56, 1, 2015: 58-68.

<sup>98</sup> Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, p. 165.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-173.

Indeed, he maintained: “The employment of Negroes by *large corporations* has overshadowed even the exaggerated achievements of Negro businessmen.”<sup>100</sup> And though, “the employment of Negroes in the field of marketing or distribution by large American corporations is a phase in the integration of the Negro into American life...no Negro businessmen [had yet been] taken into the white business groups which own and control the life of the American community.”<sup>101</sup>

Despite the growth of the Black middle class, the vast majority of the Black workforce was confined to unskilled employment, often lacking union protection. Moreover, with the return of white veterans from the war, many Black workers had again lost the gains enjoyed in the war years. As Thomas Sugrue has detailed in his study of post-war Detroit, the reconversion and retrenchment of the war industries, racial discrimination in housing and employment, and federal funding of the interstate highway system that facilitated the movement of industry from the inner cities to the suburbs had disproportionate and adverse effects on the employment prospects of the Black population.<sup>102</sup>

As the migration from the South progressed, the geographic disparity in the destination selection of Black and white migrants increasingly widened. While Southern-born Blacks were 11 percent more likely than their white counterparts to move to a central city in 1920, this figure had reached 23 percent by 1940, later growing to 45 percent near the migration’s end in 1970.<sup>103</sup> Urban housing segregation was the result of many factors. Discrimination, harassment, and violence at the hands of white realtors, local officials, citizens’ groups, and vigilantes in white neighborhoods all contributed to this outcome.

Perhaps the greatest source of discrimination, however, were the policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the United States Housing Authority (USHA). The FHA and USHA were created in 1934 and 1937 as a part of the wave of New Deal legislation. While the FHA set housing construction, underwriting, and loan standards, the USHA funded local housing agencies for the intended purpose of providing quality, low-cost housing for the working poor by replacing slum units with public housing. FHA policies gave thousands of whites first time access to homeownership in newly constructed suburban neighborhoods, providing them with a critical means to accumulate wealth over their lifetimes.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 171, our emphasis.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 172-173. Black-owned businesses were very much a part of social and political life in Black communities, however. They were also a notable, though comparatively small, source of middle-class employment, particularly in Southern cities such as Atlanta. See Ferleger and Lavalley, “Lending a Hand”; Brian S. Feldman, “The decline of Black business.” *Washington Monthly*, March/April/May 2017, at <https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/marchaprilmay-2017/the-decline-of-Black-business/>. For studies of the role of Black-owned businesses in generating employment and income within Black communities, both during the 1960s and 1970s and in the period since then, see Timothy Bates, “Profitability in Traditional and Emerging Lines of Black Business Enterprise,” *Journal of Urban Economics*, 5, 2, 1978: 154-171; Timothy Bates, “Urban Economic Transformation and Minority Business Opportunities,” *Review of Black Political Economy*, 13, 3, 1984: 21-36; Timothy Bates, “The Changing Nature of Minority Business: A Comparative Analysis of Asian, Nonminority, and Black-Owned Businesses,” *Review of Black Political Economy*, 18, 2, 1989: 25-42; Timothy Bates, “The Urban Development Potential of Black-Owned Businesses,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 72, 2, 2006: 227-237; Thomas D. Boston, “The Role of Black-owned Businesses in Black Community Development,” in Paul Ong., ed, *Jobs and Economic Development in Minority Communities: Realities, Challenges, and Innovation*, Temple University Press, 2006: 161-175. The latter two sources document the decline of traditional Black-owned businesses in personal services and small-scale retail, and the emergence during the 1990s of larger Black-owned businesses in business services that were capable of securing federal contracts.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>103</sup> Katherine J. Curtis White, Kyle Crowder, Stewart Emory Tolnay, and Robert M. Adelman, “Race, Gender, and Marriage: Destination Selection During the Great Migration,” *Demography*, 42, 2, 2005: 215-241, cited at p. 223.

Meanwhile, Blacks were denied access to FHA loans, justified by a series of overtly racist policy decisions. Owning property has long been a practical and symbolic measure of middle-class status in the United States. The combined effects of FHA and USHA policies subsidized the mass movement of white Americans from the working to middle class, while Blacks were funneled into massive public housing units located in neighborhoods that had been vacated in the centers of cities, further consolidating the historical development of the inner-city Black ghetto.<sup>104</sup> The creation of the interstate highway system reinforced this geographic segregation as the mobilization of the profound developmental capacity of the U.S. federal government in support of motor-vehicle transportation and suburbanization stripped inner-city Black neighborhoods of a sustainable industrial base.

At the 1939 World's Fair in New York, General Motors displayed an exhibit titled "Futurama," consisting of a miniature superhighway system in which 50,000 automated toy cars raced between model farms and cities. The model appealed to a diverse array of interest groups, including automotive, oil, rubber, asphalt, and construction industries, trucking and bus transportation companies, local car dealers, bankers and advertising agencies, real estate and home builders' associations, and labor unions that would gain from the expansive infrastructure project. These groups coalesced in the American Road Builders Association, and in 1953 the group began an extensive public-relations campaign to garner public support for the effort.

The desire for economic growth and the threat of nuclear attack also provided the federal government with a rationale for undertaking the project. Not only would the proposed interstate highway system spur growth by reducing the transportation costs of poor roads borne by businesses, but it would allow for greater movement of troops and materiel in the event of a military invasion, a threat that featured prominently in the minds of policy makers in the early years of the Cold War. As the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* argued in their 1951 publication, "Defense through Decentralization," by dispersing existing city populations into smaller satellite cities and suburbs the United States could mitigate the possibility of annihilation by nuclear attack.<sup>105</sup>

In 1956 the Interstate Highway Act was signed into law, approving 41,000 miles of construction, which would later be expanded to 42,500. In justifying his signature, President Eisenhower made no mention of the possible effects on city populations.<sup>106</sup> But the accessibility of the highway system provided the means for many whites and upwardly mobile Blacks to exit from inner cities, leaving unemployed or underemployed Blacks and their dependents behind, a form of social stratification that has persisted for the past six decades.<sup>107</sup> And as available research suggests, the chronic exposure to concentrated poverty across generations has profound negative effects on

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<sup>104</sup> See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, Oxford University Press, 1985, chs. 11-12. See also Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Liveright Publishing, 2016. For earlier developments in the construction of inner-city Black ghettos see Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*, University of Chicago Press, 1967; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930*, Harper and Row, 1966; John R. Logan, Weiwei Zhang, and Miao David Chunyu, "Emergent Ghettos: Black Neighborhoods in New York and Chicago, 1880-1940," *American Journal of Sociology*, 120, 4, 2015: 1055-1094.

<sup>105</sup> See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 248-250; Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989*, revised edition, University of Tennessee Press, 1990, chs. 2-7.

<sup>106</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, p. 249.

<sup>107</sup> Patrick Sharkey, "Spatial Segmentation and the Black Middle Class," *American Journal of Sociology*, 119, 4, 2014: 903-954.

childhood cognitive development, thereby inhibiting the future employment prospects of these children.<sup>108</sup> The historically disparate funding of inner-city schools in cities such as Chicago has likewise exacerbated this problem, both denying millions of Black children access to a quality education and engendering an understandable culture of distrust among many Black families toward school officials.<sup>109</sup>

Among the reasons for restrained employment mobility of Black workers was President Harry Truman's informal policy of non-enforcement of FEPC rules. In the view of Philip Foner, by the early 1950s the FEPC had been "reduced to impotence" through Truman's continuous refusal to back the rhetoric of anti-discrimination with legal action.<sup>110</sup> After Truman's intervention to stop the FEPC from issuing a decision to order the Capital Transit Company to halt its policy of refusing to hire Blacks on the streetcar lines of Washington, DC, the Black attorney, Charles R. Houston, resigned from the committee citing, "a persistent course of conduct on the part of the Administration to give lip service to the matter of eliminating discrimination in employment on account of race, creed or national origin since V-J Day, while doing nothing substantial to make the policy effective."<sup>111</sup> By 1953, Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers, exclaimed to his union constituency that "in the absence of a federal FEPC and amidst increasing practices of discrimination at the hiring gate, minority workers were slowly but surely being pushed back to their prewar earnings and employment status."<sup>112</sup>

During the twenty years after World War II, therefore, as whites were benefiting from U.S. economic development, Blacks were being, once again, left behind. Government spending on knowledge and infrastructure supported the upward mobility of whites, while the internal employment practices of the major business corporations consolidated the white-male norm of a career with one company for both high-school-educated blue-collar workers and, increasingly, college-educated white-collar workers. In her book, *Racial Integration in Corporate America, 1940-1990*, Jennifer Delton documents the fragmented and isolated attempts, with little widespread impact, of a number of pioneering companies, led by liberal-minded executives, to implement fair labor practices that could enhance employment opportunity for African Americans. Preferring voluntary experiments to federal legislation, these companies sought to achieve the integration of Blacks by "adopting and promoting antidiscrimination policies; establishing relations with black colleges and institutions; desegregating facilities; educating white workers, managers, and executives about the principles of fair employment; hiring blacks into white positions; formulating strategies for integration; participating in studies of biracial employment; testifying on behalf of integration; and changing established employment practices that inhibited integration."<sup>113</sup>

Delton argues that these experiments "laid the groundwork for integration so that when federal law finally required companies to integrate their workforces in 1964, many companies were not only prepared but willing to comply." But for these models of corporate employment behavior to have a marked impact on Black inclusion in the U.S. business corporation required the translation

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<sup>108</sup> Patrick Sharkey and Felix Elwert, "The Legacy of Disadvantage: Multigenerational Neighborhood Effects on Cognitive Ability," *American Journal of Sociology*, 116, 6, 2011: 1934-1981.

<sup>109</sup> Kathryn M. Neckerman, *Schools Betrayed: Roots of Failure in Inner-City Education*, University of Chicago Press, 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, p. 269.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>113</sup> Jennifer Delton, *Racial Integration in Corporate America, 1940-1990*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 6-7.

of the civil-rights movement into federal law. Indeed,” Delton continues,” the most surprising aspect of this story is how quickly large employers in the 1960s moved to comply with government orders to hire and advance minorities.”<sup>114</sup>

### *Expanding employment, civil rights and the creation of the EEOC*

By the 1950s, discontent with the Jim Crow system had begun to boil over. With the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954 and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, the “stamp of public disapproval” was swiftly transforming into a full-fledged attack on the American racial caste system. Observing the developing civil-rights movement, C. Vann Woodward and Howard Zinn compared the mounting challenge to Jim Crow with the Abolitionism and Reconstruction-era reforms of the previous century.<sup>115</sup> As the movement matured into the early 1960s, voting-rights organizations directing their energies at the Jim Crow South began to cohere with the longstanding labor, legal, and civic organizations of the North.<sup>116</sup> In March of 1961 political pressure on the federal government led President Kennedy to sign Executive Order 10925, which required government contractors to take “affirmative action” to ensure that job applicants and employees were dealt with “without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin.”<sup>117</sup>

In the late 1950s, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund established commissions of elite multi-national business and foundation leaders to oversee a set of special studies to evaluate the state of the U.S. economy, foreign policy, military security, and civil society in the face of the Cold War.<sup>118</sup> The reports from the special studies encouraged raising the growth rate of the U.S. economy and opening up international trade. They were also sympathetic to the cause of civil rights as part of fortifying U.S. democracy.<sup>119</sup> The membership of the commissions included many of the elites who would become President Kennedy’s cabinet members and close advisors. Many of them stayed in the Johnson administration as well. The reports represented a developing climate within the elite of the Democratic party that would promote the Kennedy and Johnson growth policies that helped make room for Blacks to move into better jobs within the economy as well as the development of the civil-rights policies and Great Society programs that supported that movement.

The formation of the civil-rights coalition was pushed ahead by the strained relations between Black workers and union members, including the ineffectiveness of the AFL-CIO for dealing with

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 7

<sup>115</sup> C. Vann Woodward, “The Political Legacy of Reconstruction,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 26, 3, 1957: 231-240; Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, South End Press, 1964.

<sup>116</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, “Affirmative Action from Below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945-1969,” *Journal of American History*, 91, 1, 2004: 145-162. Sugrue provides a case study of the mounting civil rights actions in Philadelphia with parallels in other Northern cities.

<sup>117</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Executive Order 10925—Establishing the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity,” March 6, 1961, *The American Presidency Project*, University of California Santa Barbara, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-10925-establishing-the-presidents-committee-equal-employment-opportunity>.

<sup>118</sup> The full set of reports is contained in Rockefeller Brothers Fund, *The Prospect for America: The Rockefeller Panel Reports: The problems and opportunities confronting America—in foreign policy, in military preparedness, in education, and in economic and social affairs*, Doubleday 1961. The special studies program was initiated by Nelson Rockefeller in 1956 when he was president of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The membership as well as a description of the different panels is given in The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, *The Special Studies Project*, at <https://www.rbf.org/75/special-studies-project>. For the support provided to movements for racial equality by the “industrial” philanthropies, including the Carnegie Corporation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Ford Foundation, see Delton, *Racial Integration*, pp. 93-98.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics*, Hill and Wang, 1986: 51-55.

discrimination against Blacks. Tensions surrounding racial exclusion had plagued the AFL-CIO since its inception in 1955.<sup>120</sup> In May of 1960, under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph, Black trade unionists from across the country responded to their marginal status within the union by forming the Negro American Labor Council (NALC). By 1961, tensions between white and Black union members heightened with the release of an NAACP report evaluating the performance of the union leadership throughout its first five years. The report was scathing. In the assessment of its authors, the AFL-CIO had shown little more than “piecemeal and inadequate” efforts to address the longstanding, “institutionalized pattern of anti-Negro employment practices that [remained] traditional with large sections of organized labor and industrial management.”<sup>121</sup>

AFL-CIO and Jewish Labor Committee leadership responded to the report with overt hostility. Finding little redress within the white union hierarchy, at the NALC convention in 1962, members agreed to organize a March on Washington in late 1963. Widely regarded as the high-water mark of the civil-rights movement, the March was led by a unified front of Black organizations from across the country, including the NALC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Also centrally involved in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which took place on August 28, 1963, was Walter Reuther, president of the UAW (which, at the time, was still affiliated with the AFL-CIO). A key UAW organizer from the 1930s, including the GM sit-down strike in 1936-1937, Reuther headed the UAW from 1946 until his death in a plane crash in 1970.<sup>122</sup> He had long been an ardent advocate for fair employment practices in the automobile industry. From 1959, he had become closely allied with Martin Luther King, Jr. in the civil-rights movement, marching with him in rallies and demonstrations in Detroit and the South. At the March on Washington, Reuther addressed the 200,000 demonstrators from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, delivering his call for equal opportunity in America between speeches by John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality.<sup>123</sup>

Organized by the leading nonviolent theorist of the time, Bayard Rustin, the program and organization of the March came to represent a wide range of concerns, reflecting the social, political, and economic disparities unique to both North and South. Chief among these were:

[the creation of a] massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers— Negro and white—on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages, a national minimum wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living...a broadening Fair Labor Standards Act to include all areas of employment which are presently excluded, [and] a federal Fair Employment Practices Act barring

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<sup>120</sup> Herbert Hill, “Racism Within Organized Labor: A Report of Five Years of the AFL-CIO, 1955-1960,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 30, 2, 1961: 109-118.

<sup>121</sup> NAACP report on the AFL-CIO quoted in Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, p. 331.

<sup>122</sup> See Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, University of Illinois Press, 1997.

<sup>123</sup> Elisabeth Reuther Dickmeyer, *Putting the World Together: My Father Walter Reuther: The Liberal Warrior*, LivingForce Publishing, 2004, chs. 26 and 34; March on Washington (Program), 08/28/1963; Bayard Rustin Papers; John F. Kennedy Library; National Archives and Records Administration, at <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=96#>.



discrimination by federal, state, and municipal governments, and by employers, contractors, employment agencies, and trade unions.<sup>124</sup>

Earlier in the spring of 1963, increasingly militant organizers from the Congress of Racial Equality and the NAACP, joined by Reverend Leon Sullivan and the Committee of 400,<sup>125</sup> launched a series of protests in Philadelphia against the lack of access by Blacks to work on city construction projects.<sup>126</sup> At this time, the construction industry was a good target in Philadelphia, and elsewhere. Federal and state monies supported substantial new construction through programs for urban renewal, new federal, state and municipal buildings, housing development and highway construction. Because the construction was supported with government money, the work was done largely by unionized construction workers. Except for some of the lowest level jobs, the building trade unions in Philadelphia as elsewhere were almost entirely white, with little expectation on the part of the union leadership or rank and file that discrimination against Blacks was going to change. The practice of hiring by referral and the chokehold on skill development and union membership, achieved through the largely union controlled apprenticeship system, made the building trades difficult to penetrate.<sup>127</sup>

The protests lasted for two months during which, as Thomas Sugrue describes it, “protesters marched in front of Mayor James Tate's modest North Philadelphia row house, staged a sit-in at city hall, shut down construction of the city’s Municipal Services Building, battled with police and white unionists at the site of a partially built school, and unleashed an intense debate about racial politics, discrimination, and employment.”<sup>128</sup> Protests focused on major construction projects and spread to several other cities, contributing to pressure on the federal government to act toward the goal of promoting civil rights.<sup>129</sup> The AFL-CIO and local union leadership objected loudly to what they saw as the unjust characterization of their unions. In June of 1963, President Kennedy signed Executive Order 11114, which mandated “affirmative action” to encourage non-discrimination in federally contracted construction projects.<sup>130</sup> This order extended Executive Order 10925 by concentrating action on the construction industry.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> A. Philip Randolph Institute, “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963, Lincoln Memorial Program,” Smithsonian Institution, at [https://www.si.edu/object/march-washington-jobs-and-freedom-august-28-1963-lincoln-memorial-program:nmah\\_529628](https://www.si.edu/object/march-washington-jobs-and-freedom-august-28-1963-lincoln-memorial-program:nmah_529628). Demands are numbered in original and legal Acts are italicized. See Jones, *The March on Washington*, ch. 5; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, ch. 22; Mathew Forstater, “From Civil Rights to Economic Security: Bayard Rustin and the African-American Struggle for Full Employment, 1945-1978,” *International Journal of Political Economy*, 36, 3, 2007: 63-74.

<sup>125</sup> Leon Sullivan, a Baptist minister in Philadelphia, along with 400 ministers formed the Committee of 400 in 1959 to launch boycotts of companies that did not hire African Americans. The first boycott was a successful effort against the Tastykake Company. Sugrue, “Affirmative Action from Below,” p. 153.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>127</sup> Roger Waldinger and Thomas Bailey, “The Continuing Significance of Race: Racial Conflict and Racial Discrimination in Construction,” *Politics and Society*, 19, 3, 1991: 291–323; Sugrue, “Affirmative Action from Below,” p. 159. The classic works on the nature of hiring and skill development in the construction sector during this period are John T. Dunlop, “The Industrial Relations System in Construction,” in Arnold Weber, ed., *The Structure of Collective Bargaining*, Free Press, 1961: 255-278; D. Quinn Mills, *Industrial Relations and Manpower in Construction* MIT Press, 1972.

<sup>128</sup> Sugrue, “Affirmative Action from Below,” p. 145.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Executive Order 11114—Extending the Authority of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity,” June 22, 1963, *The American Presidency Project*, University of California Santa Barbara, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11114-extending-the-authority-the-presidents-committee-equal-employment>.

<sup>131</sup> Kennedy, “Executive Order 10925.”



On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. Title VII of the Act expanded the Executive Order signed earlier by President Kennedy, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin.<sup>132</sup> The following year, on July 2, 1965, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established to monitor and enforce non-discrimination in large firms and government contractors.<sup>133</sup> Then, in September of that year, President Johnson issued Executive Order 11246, augmenting Executive Order 10925, by forbidding federal contractors doing over \$10,000 in government business from practicing discrimination, requiring government contractors and agencies to take affirmative action in the pursuit of equal employment opportunity and creating the Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCC) to enforce the order.<sup>134</sup>

Neither President Kennedy's Executive Order 11114 nor President Johnson's Executive Order 11246 stemmed the confrontations. Throughout the next several years, protests focused on the non-hiring of Blacks in the building trades in general and government-funded construction sites in particular continued in Philadelphia and a host of Northern cities.<sup>135</sup> The attempts to integrate the building trades was fought with near adamant force by the unions, from the leadership in the AFL-CIO to locals. Miniscule progress was made in opening up skilled jobs to Blacks.<sup>136</sup>

In 1967, with increased pressure from the NAACP, heightened scrutiny of building trade unions from the U.S. Department of Labor and rising tensions over hiring on government-funded construction projects in St. Louis, San Francisco and Cleveland, President Johnson established the Philadelphia Plan, which required affirmative action on all federally funded construction projects in Philadelphia along with pre-award staffing tables that assured increased Black hires.<sup>137</sup> Further, federal officials were to make visits to construction sites to assure that the proposed staffing had been put in place.

The Philadelphia Plan was the first anti-discrimination employment policy to move from good intentions to a requirement that enforceable racial quotas be submitted before a federal award was made. Predictably, the opposition was enormous, both from the AFL-CIO and from within the administration.<sup>138</sup> The Philadelphia Plan was deemed illegal in 1968.<sup>139</sup> In 1969, President Richard Nixon issued the Revised Philadelphia plan that substituted flexible "goals and timetables" for what had been interpreted as quotas under the original plan.<sup>140</sup> Opposition from the AFL-CIO, the

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<sup>132</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, at <https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964>.

<sup>133</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Timeline of Important EEOC Events," U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, at <https://www.eeoc.gov/youth/timeline-important-eeoc-events>.

<sup>134</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, "History of Executive Order 11246," at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/about/executive-order-11246-history>.

<sup>135</sup> Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below," pp. 163-165.

<sup>136</sup> Sugrue documents rhetorical anti-discrimination efforts and token hiring of Blacks by the unions during these years. Very little hiring of Blacks resulted from these actions, and that which was done did not quell the protests. Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below," p. 168.

<sup>137</sup> David Hamilton Golland, "The Philadelphia Plan (1967-1970)," *BlackPast*, May 26, 2014, at <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/philadelphia-plan-1967/>.

<sup>138</sup> Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below," p. 170

<sup>139</sup> J. Larry Hood, "The Nixon Administration and the Revised Philadelphia Plan for Affirmative Action: A Study in Expanding Presidential Power and Divided Government," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 23, 1, 1993: 145-167, cited at p. 147. The problem with the original Philadelphia Plan was the requirement of racial manning tables prior to the award of a contract, which was deemed to interfere with competitive bidding.

<sup>140</sup> Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below," pp. 171-172; Hood, "The Nixon Administration and the Revised Philadelphia Plan," pp. 148-149.

unions themselves and contractors continued unabated.<sup>141</sup> Evidence suggests that little progress was made over the five years.<sup>142</sup>

### ***The EEOC and Black upward employment mobility in the 1960s and 1970s***

On the eve of the passage of the Voting Rights Act, in August 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s public rhetoric was shifting from the injustice of the Jim Crow order to a broader indictment of the U.S. political economy. At a series of events in and around Washington, DC, Dr. King proclaimed "economic freedom" as a central object of the Civil Rights movement, famously remarking, "What good does it do to be able to eat at a lunch counter if you can't buy a hamburger?"<sup>143</sup>

In response to the mass mobilization for equal employment opportunity on November 13, 1964 a group of economists and public policy experts under the leadership of Herbert R. Northrup attended a conference, "Equal Opportunity—The Job Aspect," at the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce of the University of Pennsylvania. The conference brought together academics and industry representatives for the purpose of identifying and providing solutions to the various impediments to equal employment opportunity.<sup>144</sup> In September of 1966, as one of the first steps in recently appointed Ford Foundation President McGeorge Bundy's effort to provide broad funding in support of black empowerment, the Ford Foundation awarded a grant of \$180,000—the equivalent of over \$1.4 million in 2020 dollars—to the Wharton School "to analyze factors in employers' responses to pressures for integrated work forces, including the type of labor needed, relations with unions, and the personal backgrounds of management personnel."<sup>145</sup>

Published between 1968 and 1974, *The Racial Policies of American Industry* series (RPAI) encompasses 31 volumes, each detailing the employment progress of Black workers within a single industrial sector in the first years of EEOC oversight. The significance of these studies is not, however, solely confined to their empirical breadth. What the authors of the RPAI understood was that the economic progress of African Americans would not come solely from regulating the forces of supply and demand on the labor market, but, more fundamentally, from career progress in business organizations, supported by government investment in education. They recognized, as did the EEOC more generally as manifested by the type of data on internal hierarchical and functional occupational categories that it collected (and still compiles to this day), that it was sustained career employment within a business enterprise, and especially a larger corporation, that had created the white middle class in the immediate postwar decades.<sup>146</sup> Equal opportunity meant opening up these in-house career paths to Blacks.

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<sup>141</sup> Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below," pp. 171-172; Hood, "The Nixon Administration and the Revised Philadelphia Plan," pp. 151-152.

<sup>142</sup> Paul Frymer, "Affirmative action in American labor unions: necessary but problematic for the cause of civil rights," *Revue Française d'études Américaines*, 111, 2007: 73-87, cited at p. 77.

<sup>143</sup> Special to the New York Times, "Economic freedom for Negroes stressed by Dr. King in Capital: Crowds hear leader proclaim new cry of civil rights movement, while urging home rule in Washington," *New York Times*, August 5, 1965.

<sup>144</sup> Herbert R. Northrup and Richard L. Rowan, *The Negro and Employment Opportunity: Problems and Practices*, The University of Michigan, 1965, pp. v-x.

<sup>145</sup> Ford Foundation, *Annual Report, October 1, 1965 to September 30, 1966*, Ford Foundation, 1966, p. 24; Steven Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law*, Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 35. See Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013 for a critical analysis of Ford Foundation philanthropy in this period.

<sup>146</sup> See Lazonick, Moss, and Weitz, "The Equal Employment Opportunity Omission."

The RPAI studies make clear that, despite considerable institutional barriers and the long-lasting effects of discrimination, in the early years of the EEOC hundreds of thousands of high-school-educated blue-collar Black workers gained access to the unionized semiskilled jobs that provided career stability, health coverage, and defined-benefit pensions. This type of “career-with-one-company” employment had enabled masses of white males with no more than high-school educations to provide their households with middle-class living standards in the immediate postwar decades.

Before considering the evidence in the *RPAI* series and related publications, we first review the overall changes in the Black workforce from 1960 to 1974. We will then discuss in detail selected industries from the RPAI series, emphasizing the varied opportunities and obstacles to employment integration present in each industry and leading companies therein.

With the launch of the EEOC in 1965, Black workers remained disproportionately stuck at the lowest-paid job levels of the occupational hierarchy of American industry. Though some Blacks had made inroads into higher-paying blue- and white-collar jobs, the pace of progress remained very slow, particularly for movement into skilled occupations. In a 1966 issue of the *Monthly Labor Review*, Joe L. Russell observed that as of 1965 Black workers remained “disproportionately concentrated in the less skilled blue-collar and service occupations...Moreover,” he argued, “...because of the changing occupational structure in the American economy...if nonwhite workers are to continue to improve their employment situation in the future, they will have to gain a larger proportion of the white-collar and skilled occupations even faster than heretofore.”<sup>147</sup>

From the creation of the EEOC to the oil crisis of 1973-74, the Black labor force experienced among the most significant employment gains of the twentieth century. Aided by an explosion in demand for semiskilled manufacturing labor and reinforced by the external pressure of the civil-rights movement, anti-discrimination legislation, and regulatory oversight, Black men and women gained widespread access to stable, well-paying jobs in major U.S. industries. A brief review of the existing literature does much to underline the extraordinary achievements of this period.

One of the earliest and most widely cited analyses of Black economic mobility in the postwar era was conducted by Richard B. Freeman. Among the major findings of Freeman’s analysis is that, within the Black workforce, between 1964 and 1972, Black males under the age of 35 showed the greatest gains in income and educational attainment. In addition, Freeman finds that while Black males over the age of 35 saw only minor improvements, Black women across age cohorts experienced notable gains, with younger Black women gaining access to clerical occupations and older Black women leaving domestic services and entering higher paying jobs as service workers and operatives. In Freeman’s view, the results of his study indicate that the government intervention resulting from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was chiefly responsible for the observed gains in employment and income. On the other hand, Freeman views the relatively minor gains experienced by older Black men as the result of their lack of experience in growing employment sectors as well as an absence of on-the-job training for these more senior members of the labor force.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Joel L. Russell, “Changing Patterns in Employment of Nonwhite Workers,” *Monthly Labor Review*, 89, 1966: 503-509, quoted at p. 503.

<sup>148</sup> Richard B. Freeman, “Changes in the Labor Market for Black Americans, 1948-72,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 1, 1973: 67-131.

Similar to Freeman's findings are those of Stuart Garfinkle in a 1975 study analyzing the changing occupational distribution of women and Black workers from 1962 to 1974. As Garfinkle summarizes: "Black workers experienced substantial improvement in occupational status between 1962 and 1974, as large numbers of blacks moved into higher skilled and more highly paying occupations and black employment in less desirable occupations fell."<sup>149</sup> Black employment in the civilian labor force increased from 7.1 million in 1962 to 9.3 million in 1974, with Blacks as a proportion of all employees growing from 10.4 percent to 10.8 percent. Of the 2,183,000 additional Black employees in 1974 compared with 1962, 905,000 were clerical workers, 611,000 operatives, 588,000 professionals, and 431,000 craft workers. Black operatives, by far the largest occupational category, increased from 20.1 percent of all Black employees in 1962 to 22.0 percent in 1974, with their representation among all operatives rising from 11.8 percent to 14.7 percent.<sup>150</sup>

A challenge to Freeman's emphasis on the significance of government intervention as the principal cause of Black employment and income gains came from James Smith and Finis Welch. Comparing wage gains in the years before and after 1960, Smith and Welch claim that "the general pattern" indicates comparable improvements within the Black workforce prior to and after Civil Rights legislation. In their view, this finding points to the significance of migration and education, with affirmative action having had only a marginal effect on Black wage gains.<sup>151</sup> If affirmative action did lead to wage gains among any group of Black workers, they argue, it was largely confined to young, college-educated Black males.<sup>152</sup>

Lloyd Hogan and Harry Harris provide a systematic analysis of nationwide employment mobility within industries and occupational categories in the 1960s.<sup>153</sup> They find that over the course of the 1960s Black workers had made "their single greatest historical advance" into the stable, well-paying jobs "most prized in the American economy."<sup>154</sup> Tables III.2a and III.2b document the extent of these unprecedented gains. Between 1960 and 1970 Black women had made sizable inroads as professionals, technicians, managers, administrators, sales and clerical workers, and operatives, in many cases increasing their overall numbers by over 100,000 workers. The number of Black female clerical workers alone increased by 504,000, while the total number of Black female operatives increased by 237,000 in this ten-year period. Likewise, Black men gained increasing access to professional, technical, managerial, administrative, sales, craft, clerical, and operative jobs. Approximately 311,000 more Black men obtained employment as operatives, while roughly 261,000 more Black men gained employment as craft workers, a prized occupation among blue-collar workers, to which Blacks had long been deprived access.

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<sup>149</sup> Stuart H. Garfinkle, "Occupations of Women and Black Workers, 1962-74," *Monthly Labor Review*, 98, 11, 1975: 25-35, quoted at p. 25.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>151</sup> James P. Smith and Finis R. Welch, "Black/White Male Earnings and Employment: 1960-1970," *American Economic Review*, 67, 3, 1977: 323-338, cited at p. 336.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>153</sup> Lloyd Hogan and Harry Harris, "The Occupational-Industrial Structure of Black Employment in the United States," *Review of Black Political Economy*, 6, 1, 1975: 8-28

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

**Table III.2a. Distribution of Black male employment by occupation in the United States, 1960 and 1970**

| Occupation                               | Employment (000s), 1960 | Employment (000s), 1970 | Employment Change (000s), 1960-1970 | Percent Change, 1960-1970 |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Professional, Technical, Kindred         | 113                     | 237                     | 124                                 | 110                       |
| Managers and Administrators, except Farm | 63                      | 122                     | 59                                  | 94                        |
| Farmers and Farm Managers                | 154                     | 37                      | -117                                | -76                       |
| Sales Workers                            | 47                      | 83                      | 36                                  | 77                        |
| Craftsmen, Foremen, Kindred              | 357                     | 618                     | 261                                 | 73                        |
| Clerical and Kindred Workers             | 179                     | 327                     | 148                                 | 83                        |
| Operatives*                              | 887                     | 1,198                   | 311                                 | 35                        |
| Laborers, except Farm                    | 745                     | 640                     | -105                                | -14                       |
| Farm Laborers and Foremen                | 257                     | 140                     | -117                                | -46                       |
| Service Workers                          | 508                     | 632                     | 124                                 | 24                        |
| Private Household Workers                | 27                      | 18                      | -9                                  | -33                       |
| Total employment                         | 3,337                   | 4,052                   | 715                                 | 21                        |

\*Includes Transport Equipment Operatives

Source: Hogan and Harris, "Occupational-Industrial Structure," p. 9

**Table III.2b. Distribution of Black female employment by occupation in the United States, 1960 and 1970**

| Occupation                               | Employment (000s), 1960 | Employment (000s), 1970 | Employment Change (000s), 1960-1970 | Percent Change, 1960-1970 |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Professional, Technical, Kindred         | 175                     | 374                     | 199                                 | 114                       |
| Managers and Administrators, except Farm | 25                      | 48                      | 23                                  | 92                        |
| Farmers and Farm Managers                | 15                      | 6                       | -9                                  | -60                       |
| Sales Workers                            | 36                      | 84                      | 48                                  | 133                       |
| Craftsmen, Foremen, Kindred              | 16                      | 47                      | 31                                  | 194                       |
| Clerical and Kindred Workers             | 182                     | 686                     | 504                                 | 277                       |
| Operatives*                              | 310                     | 547                     | 237                                 | 76                        |
| Laborers, except Farm                    | 24                      | 49                      | 25                                  | 104                       |
| Farm Laborers and Foremen                | 69                      | 35                      | -34                                 | -49                       |
| Service Workers                          | 520                     | 843                     | 323                                 | 62                        |
| Private Household Workers                | 888                     | 591                     | -297                                | -33                       |
| Total employment                         | 2,260                   | 3,310                   | 1,050                               | 46                        |

\*Includes Transport Equipment Operatives

Source: Hogan and Harris, "Occupational-Industrial Structure," p. 9

However, Hogan and Harris argue, this progress "must be considered against a backdrop of overall black occupational and related deprivation."<sup>155</sup> Table III.3 demonstrates that as of 1970 Blacks remained in low-pay, low-skill work in industries such as personal services, eating and drinking places, lumber and wood products, hotels, and hospitals.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 15-23

**Table III.3. Employment of Blacks by industry, highest 25 industries by number of Blacks employed, 1970**

| Black Employment Rank | Industry                                    | Number of Blacks Employed | Black Share of Industry % | Share of Blacks Employment % |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1                     | Other Personal Services                     | 879,855                   | 31                        | 12.6                         |
| 2                     | Public Administration                       | 488,409                   | 12                        | 7.0                          |
| 3                     | Hospitals                                   | 444,452                   | 17                        | 6.4                          |
| 4                     | Education, Public                           | 427,036                   | 10                        | 6.1                          |
| 5                     | Construction                                | 392,649                   | 9                         | 5.6                          |
| 6                     | Agricultur, Forestry, Fishery               | 263,050                   | 9                         | 3.8                          |
| 7                     | Wholesale Trade                             | 209,236                   | 7                         | 3.0                          |
| 8                     | Other Durable Goods Manufacturing           | 170,160                   | 6                         | 2.4                          |
| 9                     | Other Professional Services                 | 162,267                   | 8                         | 2.3                          |
| 10                    | Primary Ferrous Metal                       | 157,428                   | 14                        | 2.3                          |
| 11                    | Food & Kindred Products                     | 151,968                   | 11                        | 2.2                          |
| 12                    | Other Nondurable Goods                      | 140,591                   | 13                        | 2.0                          |
| 13                    | Lumber & Wood Products                      | 137,002                   | 18                        | 2.0                          |
| 14                    | Motor Vehicle Equipment                     | 136,368                   | 13                        | 2.0                          |
| 15                    | Other Health Services                       | 133,368                   | 14                        | 1.9                          |
| 16                    | Other Transportation                        | 128,982                   | 11                        | 1.9                          |
| 17                    | Apparel Products                            | 123,753                   | 12                        | 1.8                          |
| 18                    | Education, Private                          | 123,109                   | 8                         | 1.8                          |
| 19                    | Welfare, Religions, Nonprofit Organizations | 122,317                   | 11                        | 1.8                          |
| 20                    | Electrical Machinery                        | 121,352                   | 6                         | 1.7                          |
| 21                    | Other Retail Trade                          | 121,329                   | 11                        | 1.7                          |
| 22                    | Eating & Drinking Places                    | 119,101                   | 20                        | 1.7                          |
| 23                    | Textile Mill Products                       | 114,641                   | 12                        | 1.6                          |
| 24                    | Hotel & Lodging Places                      | 104,324                   | 16                        | 1.5                          |
| 25                    | Business Services                           | 95,391                    | 7                         | 1.4                          |
| 26                    | Utilities & Sanitary Services               | 93,962                    | 9                         | 1.4                          |
| 27                    | Other Finance/Real Estate                   | 92,340                    | 7                         | 1.3                          |
| 28                    | Trucking & Warehousing                      | 91,377                    | 9                         | 1.3                          |
| 29                    | Machinery, except Electrical                | 84,374                    | 4                         | 1.2                          |
| 30                    | Fabricated Metals                           | 82,452                    | 7                         | 1.2                          |
| 31                    | Communications                              | 79,336                    | 7                         | 1.1                          |
| 32                    | Chemicals & Allied Products                 | 74,665                    | 8                         | 1.1                          |
| 33                    | Banking & Credit Agencies                   | 67,615                    | 6                         | 1.0                          |
| 34                    | Insurance                                   | 60,190                    | 5                         | 0.9                          |
| 35                    | Printing, Publishing, Allied Products       | 59,885                    | 5                         | 0.9                          |
| 36                    | Food Stores                                 | 56,651                    | 10                        | 0.8                          |
| 37                    | Entertainment & Recreation                  | 52,375                    | 8                         | 0.8                          |
| 38                    | Stone, Clay, Glass Products                 | 51,943                    | 9                         | 0.7                          |
| 39                    | General Merchandise Stores                  | 50,886                    | 8                         | 0.7                          |
| 40                    | Paper & Allied Products                     | 50,601                    | 8                         | 0.7                          |
| 41                    | Auto Repair Service                         | 50,046                    | 9                         | 0.7                          |
| 42                    | Auto Dealer & Gas Station                   | 50,046                    | 8                         | 0.7                          |
| 43                    | Railway & Railway Express                   | 48,512                    | 8                         | 0.7                          |
| 44                    | Other Repair Services                       | 44,752                    | 7                         | 0.6                          |
| 45                    | Furniture & Fixtures                        | 43,067                    | 13                        | 0.6                          |
| 46                    | Rubber & Plastics                           | 41,993                    | 8                         | 0.6                          |
| 47                    | Other Transportation Equipment              | 41,980                    | 10                        | 0.6                          |
| 48                    | Aircraft & Parts Manufacturing              | 35,416                    | 5                         | 0.5                          |
| 49                    | Primary Nonferrous                          | 27,496                    | 8                         | 0.4                          |
| 50                    | Mining                                      | 22,074                    | 4                         | 0.3                          |
| 51                    | Ordnance                                    | 21,071                    | 8                         | 0.3                          |
| 52                    | Apparel & Accessory Stores                  | 15,256                    | 9                         | 0.2                          |

Source: Hogan and Harris, "Occupational-Industrial Structure," pp. 16-17.

Moreover, despite a longstanding decline in Blacks employed in agricultural and domestic labor, as of 1970 Blacks remained heavily concentrated among household workers, maids, janitors, laborers, and cooks, as shown by the data on Black employment by occupation in Table III.4. (We previously presented some of these data in Table II.8 of our earlier working paper in this series,<sup>157</sup> with 39 occupations ranked by the percentage share of Blacks in the occupation, as distinct from the 25 occupations ranked by the number of Blacks in the occupation as shown in Table III.4.)

**Table III.4. Employment of Blacks by occupation, highest 25 occupations by number of Blacks employed, 1970**

| Black Employment Rank | Occupation                        | Number of Blacks Employed (000s) | Black Share of Occupation % |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1                     | Laborer, except Farm              | 688                              | 20                          |
| 2                     | Private Household Worker          | 613                              | 52                          |
| 3                     | Janitor and Sexton                | 274                              | 23                          |
| 4                     | Maid and Cleaner                  | 240                              | 38                          |
| 5                     | Driver, Truck                     | 186                              | 13                          |
| 6                     | Hospital Attendant                | 183                              | 25                          |
| 7                     | Cook                              | 160                              | 19                          |
| 8                     | Laborer, Farm                     | 151                              | 20                          |
| 9                     | Teacher, Elementary               | 135                              | 9                           |
| 10                    | Laundry and Drycleaning Operative | 114                              | 32                          |
| 11                    | Assembler                         | 114                              | 12                          |
| 12                    | Salesmen & Sales Clerks, Retail   | 96                               | 4                           |
| 13                    | Typist                            | 94                               | 10                          |
| 14                    | Secretaries                       | 91                               | 3                           |
| 15                    | Sewer and Stitcher                | 85                               | 10                          |
| 16                    | Mechanic, Automobile              | 76                               | 9                           |
| 17                    | Packer & Wrapper                  | 72                               | 14                          |
| 18                    | Teacher, High School              | 66                               | 7                           |
| 19                    | Postal Clerk                      | 65                               | 22                          |
| 20                    | Nurse, Registered                 | 65                               | 8                           |
| 21                    | Waiter                            | 64                               | 6                           |
| 22                    | Foremen                           | 59                               | 4                           |
| 23                    | Deliverymen and Routemen          | 58                               | 10                          |
| 24                    | Office Machine Operator           | 57                               | 10                          |
| 25                    | Shipping Clerk                    | 55                               | 13                          |

Source: Hogan and Harris, "Occupational-Industrial Structure," pp. 21-23

Blacks found increasing work as operatives across a number of industries and as practical nurses, postal clerks, and shipping and file clerks. These semiskilled blue-collar and entry-level white-collar occupations provided higher wages, better benefits, and more employment stability. A rising proportion of high-school-educated Blacks now had the sustained earning power to buy homes, gain access to health insurance, send their children to college, and save for retirement, all hallmarks of middle-class status.

<sup>157</sup> Moss et al., "Employment and Earnings of African Americans," p. 20.

Recent analysis of EEO-1 data further confirms the employment gains made by Black workers in the early years of the EEOC. Kevin Stainback and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey document that between 1966 and 1972 white men moved disproportionately into high-skilled white-collar jobs, while Black and white women made significant inroads into clerical and sales occupations. Black men, meanwhile, made their most considerable gains in semiskilled operative positions.<sup>158</sup>

Table III.5 shows EEO-1 industry-level employment data at various points in time between 1964 and 1970 provided by the RPAI studies. These data show the industries in which the largest total number of Black men, on the one hand, and Black women, on the other, were employed as operatives during the early years of the EEOC. While Black men gained widespread access in automobile, electrical, and steel production, Black women were most concentrated in electrical, apparel, and textile manufacturing.

**Table III.5. Black operative employment in EEO-1 reporting industries by gender, 1964-1970**

| Industry                  | Black male employees | % Black | Black female employees | % Black |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| Automobile (1966)         | 98,313               | 21.3    | 44,851                 | 11.9    |
| Electrical Manuf. (1969)  | 31,742               | 11.0    | 39,976                 | 11.6    |
| Steel (1966)              | 30,648               | 17.9    | 10,496                 | 4.1     |
| Textile (1966)            | 21,597               | 10.9    | 5,799                  | 10.5    |
| Chemical (1966)           | 20,858               | 10.6    | 4,851                  | 15.0    |
| Aerospace (1966)          | 13,566               | 11.0    | 4,445                  | 16.2    |
| Furniture (1970)          | 12,169               | 15.3    | 3,217                  | 13.0    |
| Paper (1966)              | 12,143               | 8.1     | 2,629                  | 5.5     |
| Trucking (1966)           | 11,265               | 5.7     | 2,202                  | 5.8     |
| Lumber (1966)             | 10,793               | 13.8    | 1,461                  | 20.8    |
| Railroad (1969)           | 8,068                | 5.7     | 1,384                  | 9.1     |
| Dept Stores (1969)        | 6,894                | 16.9    | 1,254                  | 15.2    |
| Supermarkets (1970)       | 6,635                | 15.6    | 1,183                  | 9.2     |
| Meat (1968)               | 6,535                | 17.7    | 1,130                  | 11.0    |
| Rubber Tire (1968)        | 6,423                | 13.0    | 747                    | 12.8    |
| Apparel (1970)            | 6,237                | 13.4    | 446                    | 10.4    |
| Shipbuilding (1969)       | 5,618                | 35.4    | 117                    | 28.3    |
| Petroleum (1968)          | 4,427                | 7.3     | 107                    | 5.0     |
| Insurance (1966)**        | 2,954                | 28.3    | 103                    | 19.1    |
| Tobacco (1968)            | 2,692                | 23.4    | 71                     | 5.2     |
| Air Transport (1966)      | 2,178                | 9.2     | 67                     | 15.9    |
| Farm Equip. Manuf. (1964) | 2,048                | 7.2     | 48                     | 11.2    |
| Drug Manufacturing (1968) | 1,466                | 10.4    | 39                     | 13.6    |
| Offshore Maritime (1970)  | 816                  | 11.9    | 12                     | 2.4     |
| Drug Stores (1969)        | 289                  | 24.4    | 10                     | 23.3    |
| Banking (1968)            | 180                  | 11.9    | 3                      | 5.2     |

Source: Racial Policies of America Industry series

These employment gains for Blacks in the U.S. labor force in the 1960s occurred within a specific historical context in which a number of socioeconomic factors played mutually reinforcing roles, permitting the civil-rights movement in general and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in particular to have positive impacts on Black employment mobility. Overall, as we have discussed, there was strong demand for blue-collar and clerical labor in the U.S. mass-production industries, which still

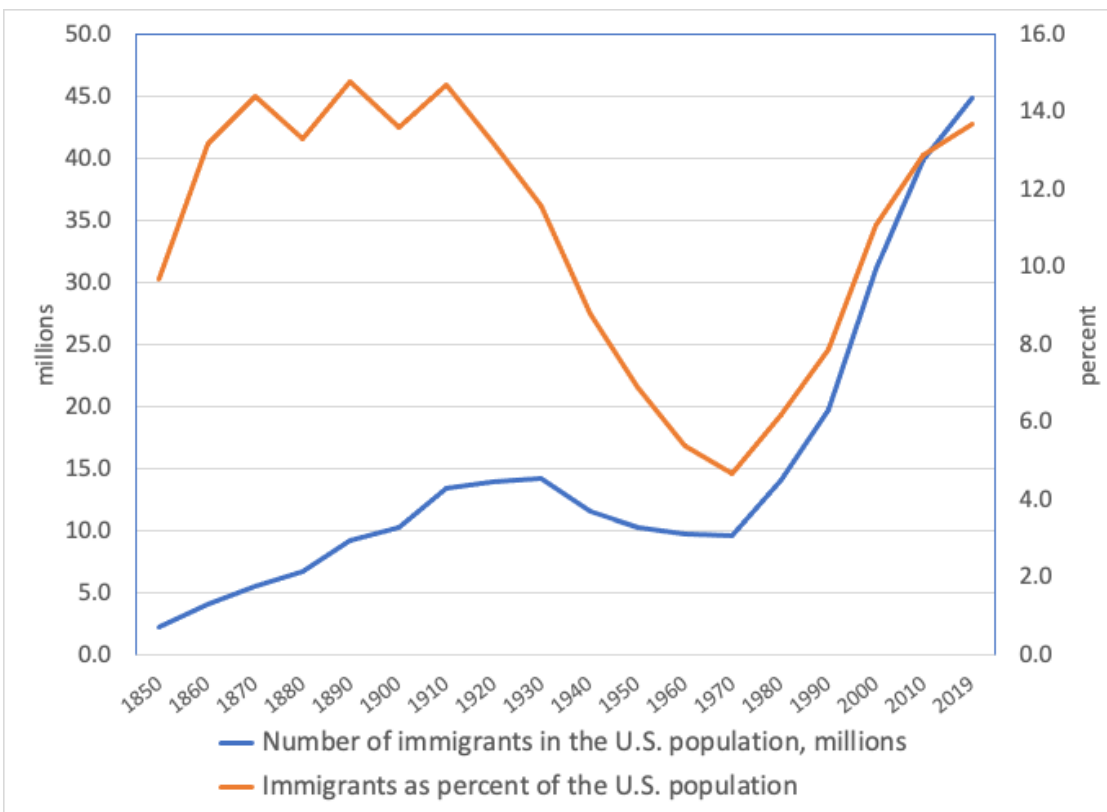
<sup>158</sup> Kevin Stainback and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, *Documenting Desegregation: Racial and Gender Segregation in Private-Sector Employment Since the Civil Rights Act*, Russell Sage Foundation, 2012, pp. 96-99.



dominated in global competition. Among the leading business corporations within these industries, the unquestioned employment norm was a career with one company, supported at the blue-collar level by mass-production unions that had become accepted institutions in the U.S. business system.

Given the middle-class status that, supported by unions, white blue-collar workers had attained in the postwar decades as well as government investments in education, including free or inexpensive public higher education, the socioeconomic trajectory for white households was upward intergenerational mobility from blue-collar employment requiring no more than a high-school education to white-collar employment requiring a higher education. Moreover, a relative absence of new immigrants as labor-market competitors also created space for Blacks to fill the strong demand for blue-collar and clerical jobs. As shown in Figure III.1, continuing a long-run trend in restricted immigration to the United States that had begun in the 1910s, the 1960s saw a decline in immigrants as a proportion of the U.S. population, reaching a record low of 4.7 percent in 1970.

**Figure III.1. Immigrants in the U.S. population, numbers and percentages, 1850-2019**



Source: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, “U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-Present,” Migration Policy Institute, 2020, at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time>

Drawing on the rich information and insights in the various volumes of the RPAI series, we will now detail how these political, social, and economic forces for the emergence of a Black blue-collar middle class played out in the automobile, electrical manufacturing, steel, rubber tire, aerospace, chemical, textile, and apparel industries.

## *The automobile industry*

Earlier in this paper, we discussed the central importance of the automobile industry in the growth of industrial employment in the U.S. economy in the first half of the twentieth century. With Detroit as its epicenter, it was the most important industry that drew Black migrants from the South into industrial employment. Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing into the 1950s, with the growth of the industry, auto manufacturers began to decentralize production, moving facilities to Western, Midwestern, and Southern locations.<sup>159</sup> Especially as the industry moved into Southern localities, UAW leadership failed to challenge local customs, continuing to pay lip service to non-discrimination, while providing tacit consent to the mass exclusion of Blacks from semiskilled and skilled jobs.<sup>160</sup>

In the 1960s several historical currents converged, resulting in a highly favorable situation for Black workers in the automobile industry. Following a mild recession in 1961, the Big Three auto companies—GM, Ford, and Chrysler—underwent a period of rapid recovery and expansion. Between 1961 and 1966 total employment at the Big Three increased from 693,186 to 953,585.<sup>161</sup>

Responding to pressure from the civil-rights coalition, the Kennedy administration strengthened anti-discrimination oversight and called on major auto companies to join Plans for Progress, signed by President Kennedy in 1961 with large government contractors “to secure equal employment opportunity for every American of every race, color, and belief.”<sup>162</sup> The companies obliged. A year after the creation of the EEOC, in 1966, inspections became a regular occurrence, serving to drive home the commitment. As Northrup observes:

The rise in civil rights emphasis in the 1960’s, by a happy coincidence, came at a time of great prosperity in the automobile industry. Moreover, it happened when a natural turnover was occurring in the industry. Many employees hired around World War II, or earlier, were seeking retirement under the liberalized early, and regular retirement programs in the industry... The need for Negroes to obtain jobs and the need of an industry for new workers were never better coordinated.<sup>163</sup>

As shown in Table III.6, by 1966 over 100,000 African Americans were employed as operatives at the Big Three, having finally gained widespread access to semiskilled production jobs.<sup>164</sup> Operative positions in automobile plants offered relatively uneducated and inexperienced workers among the highest manufacturing wages and best benefits packages in the country.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Thomas J. Sugrue, “‘Forget About Your Inalienable Right to Work’: Deindustrialization and Its Discontents at Ford, 1950-1953,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 48, Fall, 1995: 112-130.

<sup>160</sup> Boyle, “There are No Union Sorrows.”

<sup>161</sup> Northrup, *The Negro in the Automobile Industry*, p. 34.

<sup>162</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Remarks on signing Plans for Progress,” July 12, 1961, *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum Archives*, at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-035-026.aspx>.

<sup>163</sup> Northrup, *The Negro in the Automobile Industry*, p. 33.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

**Table III.6. Total and Black employment, combined Big Three automobile companies, 1966**

| Occupation                  | All Employees  |                |             | Male Employees |                |             | Female Employees |              |            |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|------------|
|                             | Total          | Black          | % Black     | Total          | Black          | % Black     | Total            | Black        | % Black    |
| Officials and Managers      | 74,395         | 903            | 1.2         | 74,061         | 903            | 1.2         | 334              | 0            | 0.0        |
| Professionals               | 51,053         | 301            | 0.6         | 50,380         | 287            | 0.6         | 673              | 14           | 2.1        |
| Technicians                 | 24,499         | 297            | 1.2         | 23,316         | 268            | 1.1         | 1,183            | 29           | 2.5        |
| Sales, Office, and Clerical | 93,365         | 3,545          | 3.8         | 57,650         | 2,768          | 4.8         | 35,715           | 777          | 2.2        |
| Craftsmen                   | 129,123        | 3,846          | 3.0         | 129,042        | 3,842          | 3.0         | 81               | 4            | 4.9        |
| Operatives                  | 515,843        | 104,112        | 20.2        | 460,702        | 98,313         | 21.3        | 55,141           | 5,799        | 10.5       |
| Laborers                    | 32,352         | 8,922          | 27.6        | 31,649         | 8,826          | 27.9        | 703              | 96           | 13.7       |
| Service Workers             | 26,755         | 7,269          | 27.2        | 24,898         | 6,855          | 27.5        | 1,857            | 414          | 22.3       |
| <b>Total Employees</b>      | <b>947,385</b> | <b>129,195</b> | <b>13.6</b> | <b>851,698</b> | <b>122,062</b> | <b>14.3</b> | <b>95,687</b>    | <b>7,133</b> | <b>7.5</b> |

Source: Northrup, *The Negro in the Automobile Industry*, p. 36

Regional employment patterns varied considerably, however. Detroit-area plants had the highest concentration of Black workers, who constituted between 30 and 50 percent of the total work force depending on the facility.<sup>166</sup> But such high levels of representation did not extend beyond Michigan. Table III.7 provides a breakdown of Black employment in Big Three plants on the West Coast and Black employment at Ford and GM plants in the South.<sup>167</sup>

**Table III.7. Total Black employment for Big Three plants on the West Coast and in the South, 1966**

| West Coast Occupations      | All Employees |              |             | Male Employees |              |             | Female Employees |          |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|------------------|----------|------------|
|                             | Total         | Black        | % Black     | Total          | Black        | % Black     | Total            | Black    | % Black    |
| Officials and Managers      | 2,036         | 35           | 1.7         | 2,036          | 35           | 1.7         | 0                | 0        | 0.0        |
| Professionals               | 765           | 4            | 0.5         | 748            | 4            | 0.5         | 17               | 0        | 0.0        |
| Technicians                 | 341           | 7            | 2.1         | 308            | 7            | 2.3         | 33               | 0        | 0.0        |
| Sales, Office, and Clerical | 3,168         | 183          | 5.8         | 2,325          | 177          | 7.6         | 843              | 6        | 0.0        |
| Craftsmen                   | 1,518         | 39           | 2.6         | 1,518          | 39           | 2.6         | 0                | 0        | 0.0        |
| Operatives                  | 15,929        | 2,739        | 17.2        | 15,891         | 2,739        | 17.2        | 38               | 0        | 0.0        |
| Laborers                    | 1,186         | 159          | 13.4        | 1,180          | 158          | 13.4        | 6                | 1        | 0.2        |
| Service Workers             | 841           | 137          | 16.3        | 841            | 137          | 16.3        | 0                | 0        | 0.0        |
| <b>Total Employees</b>      | <b>25,784</b> | <b>3,303</b> | <b>12.8</b> | <b>24,847</b>  | <b>3,296</b> | <b>13.3</b> | <b>937</b>       | <b>7</b> | <b>0.0</b> |

| South Occupations           | All Employees |              |            | Male Employees |              |            | Female Employees |           |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------|------------|----------------|--------------|------------|------------------|-----------|------------|
|                             | Total         | Black        | % Black    | Total          | Black        | % Black    | Total            | Black     | % Black    |
| Officials and Managers      | 3,512         | 28           | 0.8        | 3,511          | 28           | 0.8        | 1                | 0         | 0.0        |
| Professionals               | 1,280         | 8            | 0.6        | 1,263          | 7            | 0.6        | 17               | 1         | 5.9        |
| Technicians                 | 260           | 7            | 2.7        | 220            | 6            | 2.7        | 40               | 1         | 2.5        |
| Sales, Office, and Clerical | 5,798         | 166          | 2.9        | 4,702          | 155          | 3.3        | 1,096            | 11        | 1.0        |
| Craftsmen                   | 2,786         | 12           | 0.4        | 2,786          | 12           | 0.4        | 0                | 0         | 0.0        |
| Operatives                  | 26,008        | 3,232        | 12.4       | 25,983         | 3,231        | 12.4       | 25               | 1         | 4.0        |
| Laborers                    | 2,992         | 447          | 15.0       | 2,990          | 447          | 15.0       | 2                | 0         | 0.0        |
| Service Workers             | 1,470         | 359          | 24.4       | 1,469          | 358          | 24.4       | 1                | 1         | 100.0      |
| <b>Total Employees</b>      | <b>44,106</b> | <b>4,259</b> | <b>9.7</b> | <b>42,924</b>  | <b>4,244</b> | <b>9.9</b> | <b>1,182</b>     | <b>15</b> | <b>1.3</b> |

Source: Northrup, *The Negro in the Automobile Industry*, pp. 47-48

Employment mobility was primarily limited to operative positions. As Table III.6 shows, by 1966 Blacks accounted for only three percent of the 129,123 craft workers employed by the Big Three. There were several reasons for this disparity. The longstanding exclusion of Blacks by UAW locals and the limited access to training and education continued to stifle the movement of Blacks into craft work. Echoing Frazier's earlier assessment, Northrup wrote: "Lack of experience, and lack of association directly or through the work of parents, with machinery and with industrial behavior, a poor education in northern city slums or in southern segregated schools, all greatly complicate

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>167</sup> As of 1966 Chrysler had no Southern plants.

the Negro automobile workers' learning experiences..."<sup>168</sup> These obstacles were further aggravated by company policies, which admitted only the highest-scoring candidates for craft positions. With many Black workers coming from impoverished backgrounds, they often lacked the mathematics skills and high-school educational requirements necessary for admittance to apprenticeship programs.<sup>169</sup>

Northrup remained optimistic, however. "As Negroes continue to hold down jobs in large numbers, their confidence and abilities will grow," he wrote. "It would appear...the years ahead will see increased participation of Negroes in skilled, office, and salaried positions while they increase their share of production jobs." Nevertheless, his analysis was not without misgivings. In a moment of prescient speculation, he noted: "A downturn in the industry's sales could reduce the proportion of Negroes at least temporarily, and so could a movement away from cities."<sup>170</sup>

### ***The electrical manufacturing industry***

At the time of the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the electrical manufacturing industry was among the largest sectors of employment in the United States. The industry was dominated by a handful large firms, known as the Big Four—General Electric, Western Electric, Westinghouse, and RCA.<sup>171</sup> The rapid growth of the middle class after World War II created a booming demand for household appliances, televisions, and various electronic components. In response, the consumer electronics industry expanded production, adding 226,000 assembly workers between 1950 and 1960.<sup>172</sup>

Blacks had first gained a foothold in the industry during World War II when the mobilization for war production, accompanied by pressure from the FEPC, created the opportunity for increased Black employment. But the low seniority of Black workers within union ranks left them more vulnerable than whites to layoffs. A succession of downturns in the postwar years bore hard on Black workers, with many failing to regain their jobs in times of recovery.

Postwar anti-communism further aggravated their tenuous position. Communist Party members had been among the most fervent proponents of racial inclusion in organized labor. The passage of the Labor Management Relations, or Taft-Hartley, Act of 1947 required union members to file affidavits declaring themselves unaffiliated with the Communist Party. And in 1949 the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers, one of a handful of major electrical industry unions, was expelled from the CIO for its Communist Party affiliation. By 1960, Blacks made up only 3.3 percent of the production work force in electrical manufacturing.<sup>173</sup>

By the mid-1960s, however, the combined effects of employment expansion and pressure for affirmative action turned the industry into the second largest employer of Black operatives in the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-41.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>171</sup> Theodore Vincent Purcell and Daniel P. Mulvey, *The Negro in the Electrical Manufacturing Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1971, pp. 4-5.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 19; see also Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1923-1960*, University of Illinois Press, 1983, pp. 128-131; Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions*, Princeton University Press, 1978, chs. 10-12.

country. Between 1947 and 1969, employment in the industry nearly doubled, rising from 1,035,000 to 2,038,000.<sup>174</sup> When the Civil Rights Act was signed into law in 1964, all members of the Big Four signed the Plans for Progress pledge to take affirmative action in the hiring of Black workers.

Table III.8 shows the increase in operative employment by race and gender between 1964 and 1969. In this five-year period. The number of Black operatives in the industry increased by 3.2 times. In 1964, Blacks were 6.1 percent of all operatives; in 1969, 11.5 percent. The large numbers of Black women employed by the industry reflected the overall demand for female assemblers, itself a result of the miniaturization of electronics components, requiring intricate wiring work in the assembly of many consumer electronics products.<sup>175</sup>

**Table III.8. Electrical manufacturing industry operative employment by race and gender, 1964, 1966, 1967, 1969**

|             | All Operatives |        |         | Male Operatives |        |         | Female Operatives |        |         |
|-------------|----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|--------|---------|-------------------|--------|---------|
|             | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total           | Black  | % Black | Total             | Black  | % Black |
| <b>1964</b> | 395,825        | 24,235 | 6.1     | 186,118         | 10,937 | 5.9     | 209,707           | 13,298 | 6.3     |
| <b>1966</b> | 689,789        | 57,672 | 8.4     | 311,308         | 26,361 | 8.5     | 378,481           | 31,311 | 8.3     |
| <b>1967</b> | 792,630        | 78,758 | 9.9     | 344,628         | 33,508 | 9.7     | 448,002           | 45,250 | 10.1    |
| <b>1969</b> | 664,749        | 76,593 | 11.5    | 289,418         | 31,742 | 11.0    | 375,331           | 44,851 | 11.9    |

Establishments: 1964, 1,588; 1966, 2,901; 1967, 3,436; 1969, 3,533.

Source: Purcell and Mulvey, *The Negro in the Electrical Manufacturing Industry*, pp. 119-122.

Despite the gains of the previous decade, by the late 1960s incipient threats to continued employment growth loomed. The reliance of the industry on government contracts left it open to retrenchment, particularly in the area of war production. As of 1969, war contracts amounted to 20 percent of the electronics industry's total sales. And that same year commitments from the Pentagon for future production had appreciably declined. Moreover, Japanese industry was becoming a global competitor in consumer electronics, a high-growth industry in that nation's postwar development.<sup>176</sup>

According to future projections, however, electronics manufacturing was poised to remain a potential agent of Black employment mobility well into the coming decades. By 1980, electrical capacity was poised to double in size. This development would fuel increased demand for electrical capital goods, while population growth, higher incomes, and the expansion of the middle-class was expected to promote the continued manufacture of consumer electronics.<sup>177</sup> For Theodore Purcell and Daniel Mulvey, the future of Black employment mobility within the industry depended above all else "on the extent and durability of its management commitment and initiative."<sup>178</sup>

### ***The steel industry***

Not all industries were experiencing employment growth in the Civil Rights years, however. Between 1957 and 1966 total employment in the steel industry declined from 623,834 to 575,547,

<sup>174</sup> Purcell and Mulvey, *The Negro in the Electrical Manufacturing Industry*, p. 12.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

even though there was an increase in the number of white-collar workers. While the number of white-collar workers rose from 115,400 to 128,835, blue-collar employment fell from 508,434 to 446,712.<sup>179</sup>

These shifts in the level and composition of employment were the result of many factors. Despite a nearly 50-percent increase in raw steel production between 1950 and 1966 and a booming automobile industry, U.S. steel producers were under severe pressure from foreign imports.<sup>180</sup> Japan, Italy, West Germany, France, the Soviet Union, and China were all challenging U.S. producers with increased production and cheaper labor costs.<sup>181</sup> U.S. steel producers responded to the pressure with massive capital expenditures, including \$2 billion in 1966 alone, to upgrade mills to increase productivity.

In spite of their efforts, the rate of return on investment fell from 10.1 percent in 1957 to 6.7 percent in 1966.<sup>182</sup> Unlike in the automobile and electrical manufacturing industries, therefore, Blacks looking to move from unskilled to semiskilled jobs found conditions to be unpropitious in the steel industry. Table III.9 shows operative employment in the basic steel industry for 1963, 1964, and 1966. We note that, despite minor gains in the relative share of Black operatives, total Black operative employment remained generally static in this period. As Richard Rowan summarized the situation: “The great thrust of the civil rights movement occurred at a time when the industry was suffering some of its worst economic ills.”<sup>183</sup>

**Table III.9. Steel industry operative employment by race and gender, 1963, 1964, 1966**

|             | All Operatives |        |         | Male Operatives |        |         | Female Operatives |       |         |
|-------------|----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|--------|---------|-------------------|-------|---------|
|             | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total           | Black  | % Black | Total             | Black | % Black |
| <b>1963</b> | 172,088        | 29,357 | 17.1    | 170,285         | 29,289 | 17.2    | 1,803             | 68    | 3.8     |
| <b>1964</b> | 181,042        | 31,986 | 17.7    | 179,370         | 31,913 | 17.8    | 1,672             | 73    | 4.4     |
| <b>1966</b> | 172,683        | 30,719 | 17.8    | 171,328         | 30,648 | 17.9    | 1,355             | 71    | 5.2     |

Note: Includes 21 companies in 1963, 1964, and 1966, with 93 plants in 1963, 94 in 1964, and 94 in 1966.

Source: Rowan, *The Negro in the Steel Industry*, pp. 56, 57, & 59

Despite its precarious state, however, by 1966 the steel industry was among the largest employers of Black male manufacturing workers in the country. The three largest firms were U.S. Steel, Bethlehem Steel, and Republic Steel. Together, these companies produced 47.8 percent of all U.S. steel in 1966, with the bulk of production coming out of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan.<sup>184</sup> Blacks had worked as laborers in steel mills since before World War I. The mass movement of Blacks into the industry did not occur, however, until the boom years of World War II. And despite the tendency for employment declines during postwar retrenchment, Black men suffered only minor losses in the steel industry moving into the 1950s, mainly because females bore the brunt of cutbacks.<sup>185</sup> Both employers and unions expressed deep antagonism to the employment of women in the steel industry. The labor shortages of the war years forced some firms to employ a small number of women, but with the war’s end women were quickly purged

<sup>179</sup> Richard L. Rowan, *The Negro in the Steel Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1968, pp. 8-10. See also Judith Stein, *Running Steel America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism*, University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

<sup>180</sup> See Rowan, *The Negro in the Steel Industry*, p. 13, for raw steel production between 1950 and 1966.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>184</sup> See Rowan, *The Negro in the Steel Industry*, p. 15 for steel firms and p. 18 for production by state.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-45.

from the employment rolls. In the words of one employer, “since World War II, we have tried to rid our plants of female labor.”<sup>186</sup>

Despite declining profits and employment, the wages of steel workers were high and on the rise by the mid-1960s—no doubt a reflection of the high rate of unionization within the industry. Mass-production unionism entered the steel industry with the formation of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in 1936, and its transformation into the United Steelworkers of America (USW) in 1942. By 1967 the USW boasted a membership of roughly 1,200,000. Many Black workers clearly benefited from the wage premium generated by the power of the USW. However, the union’s record on confronting racial discrimination was generally poor.<sup>187</sup>

By the time of the EEOC’s creation, the industry was being undercut by foreign competition and blue-collar jobs were declining. Exacerbating the paucity of employment opportunity for Black entry into steel employment, the vast majority of workers in the industry were long-term employees working under the protection of strict seniority rules that to a large extent determined the possibility of promotion. Meanwhile, many of the Black workers who were hired lacked established qualifications with limited if any experience outside of unskilled or all-Black departments. Thus, despite minor inroads into entry-level white-collar occupations, in an industry with declining blue-collar employment, the vast majority of Black steel workers were relegated to positions which they had occupied prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>188</sup>

### ***The rubber tire industry***

As of 1968, with some historical variation, between 50 percent and 75 percent of the market share of the rubber tire industry had been dominated by the Big Four—B. F. Goodrich, Uniroyal (formerly United States Rubber), Goodyear, and Firestone. Of the Big Four, three were headquartered in Akron, Ohio and one was based in New York City.<sup>189</sup> Having seen its peak in 1946, by the early 1960s the rubber tire industry had undergone significant downsizing in employment.<sup>190</sup> In Akron alone, employment had fallen from 64,300 in 1953 to 35,700 in 1967, with the bulk of the losses concentrated among production workers.<sup>191</sup> An increase in white-collar employment helped to offset the loss of blue-collar jobs. Among blue-collar workers, operatives continued to dominate, constituting almost half of all employment.<sup>192</sup>

Nearly all rubber plants were organized by the United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum, and Plastic Workers of America (URW), which had a membership of 210,000 in 1968. In spite of the union’s widespread presence, its organizational structure was highly localized, affording relatively little central authority to its leadership.<sup>193</sup> As a response to the high wages achieved by the URW, beginning with the industrial buildup of World War II, employers began to invest heavily in new technology, while shifting production facilities to the low-wage South where the Jim Crow system

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-117.

<sup>189</sup> Herbert R. Northrup, *The Negro in the Rubber Tire Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1969, pp. 5-7.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

prevailed. Though some new plants were built in the Midwest and along the West Coast, they were frequently constructed away from central cities.<sup>194</sup>

Thus, Blacks of modest means and minimal skills found little access to the industry's ranks. As of 1968, only 6,423 Black men and 446 Black women had gained employment as operatives in the rubber tire industry. Despite substantial government pressure, both as customer and equal opportunity enforcer, the movement of plants to the South, the localized structure of the URW, the increasing technical skills required for employment, and the decline of blue-collar jobs left few practical inroads for Black workers seeking to advance their station in the rubber tire industry.<sup>195</sup>

### *The aerospace industry*

As in automobile and electrical manufacturing, the initial push for equal employment opportunity in the aerospace industry occurred in the context of a period of rapid employment expansion. The stimulus for growth came from three sources: the escalation of the U.S. invasion of South Vietnam, the expansion of the space program, and an increased demand for civilian airliners.<sup>196</sup> Of the three, military procurement through the Department of Defense (DoD) was by far the most important. Indeed, between 1960 and 1967 DoD contracts accounted for 60 percent to 75 percent of the aerospace industry's annual contracts.<sup>197</sup>

As chief customer, the DoD held immense sway over the actions of aerospace contractors. Moreover, the demand for equal employment opportunity coincided with a decided change in the governance structure of the Pentagon. When President Kennedy took office in January 1961, then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara undertook a series of reforms at the DoD intended to establish firm civilian control over the military apparatus. Drawing on his experience as president of the Ford Motor Company, McNamara, in effect, reorganized the DoD to function as the central management body of the vast network of military contractors. Under this new regime, all activities of contractors, or sub-firms, were subject to DoD approval, including employment contracts, overtime pay, and product design.<sup>198</sup>

By 1966 aerospace had become a highly unionized industry. The dominant unions were, first, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) and, second, the UAW. In Northrup's assessment, these unions played a largely passive role in workforce integration. As we have addressed previously, UAW leadership had long been supportive of equal employment opportunity. Variation among locals, however, had served to impede meaningful action. This failure had led to some minor protests of the UAW, for example, by CORE at a Los Angeles office in 1966, demanding fair promotions for Blacks. The IAM, on the other hand, had its roots in the railroad shops of nineteenth-century Atlanta, Georgia. From its creation until World War II, the IAM was an avowedly whites-only union. When it was revealed during the war that members frequently recited a secret pledge vowing to limit admittance to capable whites, however, the ritual became a source of great embarrassment and was repealed. Though the overt racism of the union

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-129.

<sup>196</sup> Herbert R. Northrup, *The Negro in the Aerospace Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1968, p. 31.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Seymour Melman, *Pentagon Capitalism: The Political Economy of War*, McGraw-Hill, 1970.



began to subside, the IAM's leadership showed no support for affirmative action and failed to intervene when locals were in open opposition.<sup>199</sup>

Unlike the automobile or electrical manufacturing industries, aerospace firms had little room for large numbers of unskilled or semiskilled employees. Because of the high skill level required by the industry, Black workers seeking to move from unskilled to semiskilled blue-collar jobs were at a notable disadvantage. For Northrup, "the industry [was] caught between the pressures for social progress and the need for zero defects."<sup>200</sup> Table III.10 and Table III.11 show the occupational breakdown of Black workers in the aerospace industry for 1964 and 1966. Here we note that, despite considerable obstacles to Black employment mobility, the number of operatives rose from 7,521 to 13,566 for Black men and from 1,240 to 4,851 for Black women. Blacks comprised 23 percent of the increase in operatives over this period, as their representation among operatives grew from 7.8 percent to 11.9 percent. Though much smaller in size, important gains are also observed in craft and office and clerical occupations.

**Table III.10. Total and Black employment, U.S. aerospace industry, 1964**

| Occupation             | All Employees |        |         | Male Employees |        |         | Female Employees |       |         |
|------------------------|---------------|--------|---------|----------------|--------|---------|------------------|-------|---------|
|                        | Total         | Black  | % Black | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total            | Black | % Black |
| Officials and Managers | 60,541        | 172    | 0.3     | 59,895         | 169    | 0.3     | 646              | 3     | 0.5     |
| Professionals          | 162,706       | 1,130  | 0.7     | 159,529        | 1,094  | 0.7     | 3,177            | 36    | 1.1     |
| Technicians            | 56,363        | 929    | 1.6     | 51,658         | 876    | 1.7     | 4,705            | 53    | 1.1     |
| Sales Workers          | 887           | 1      | 0.1     | 852            | 1      | 0.1     | 35               | NA    | NA      |
| Office and Clerical    | 111,239       | 1,923  | 1.7     | 44,286         | 1,077  | 2.4     | 66,953           | 846   | 1.3     |
| Craftsmen              | 132,402       | 3,826  | 2.9     | 128,571        | 3,674  | 2.9     | 3,831            | 152   | 4.0     |
| Operatives             | 112,394       | 8,761  | 7.8     | 94,037         | 7,521  | 8.0     | 18,357           | 1,240 | 6.8     |
| Laborers               | 5,772         | 837    | 14.5    | 4,487          | 806    | 18.0    | 1,285            | 31    | 2.4     |
| Service Workers        | 12,244        | 2,480  | 20.3    | 11,000         | 2,258  | 20.5    | 1,244            | 222   | 17.8    |
| Total Employees        | 654,548       | 20,059 | 3.1     | 554,315        | 17,476 | 3.2     | 100,233          | 2,583 | 2.6     |

Note: NA=not available

Source: Northrup, *The Negro in the Aerospace Industry*, p. 36

**Table III.11. Total and Black employment for U.S. aerospace industry, 1966**

| Occupation             | All Employees |        |         | Male Employees |        |         | Female Employees |       |         |
|------------------------|---------------|--------|---------|----------------|--------|---------|------------------|-------|---------|
|                        | Total         | Black  | % Black | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total            | Black | % Black |
| Officials and Managers | 71,328        | 292    | 0.4     | 70,638         | 289    | 0.4     | 690              | 3     | 0.4     |
| Professionals          | 179,436       | 1,435  | 0.8     | 175,513        | 1,375  | 0.8     | 3,923            | 60    | 1.5     |
| Technicians            | 63,999        | 1,209  | 1.9     | 57,284         | 1,128  | 2.0     | 6,715            | 81    | 1.2     |
| Sales Workers          | 720           | 2      | 0.3     | 673            | 2      | 0.3     | 47               | NA    | NA      |
| Office and Clerical    | 130,261       | 3,692  | 2.8     | 51,289         | 1,986  | 3.9     | 78,972           | 1,706 | 2.2     |
| Craftsmen              | 164,991       | 7,595  | 4.6     | 158,623        | 7,050  | 4.4     | 6,368            | 545   | 8.6     |
| Operatives             | 155,167       | 18,417 | 11.9    | 122,869        | 13,566 | 11.0    | 32,298           | 4,851 | 15.0    |
| Laborers               | 8,065         | 1,804  | 22.4    | 6,344          | 1,619  | 25.5    | 1,721            | 185   | 10.7    |
| Service Workers        | 14,055        | 3,124  | 22.2    | 12,015         | 2,792  | 23.2    | 2,040            | 332   | 16.3    |
| Total Employees        | 788,022       | 37,570 | 4.8     | 655,248        | 29,807 | 4.5     | 132,774          | 7,763 | 5.8     |

Note: NA=not available

Source: Northrup, *The Negro in the Aerospace Industry*, p. 37

### *The chemical industry*

As of 1968, the chemical industry employed over one million workers with sales of \$46.5 billion, 5.4 percent of U.S. GNP. By the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the industry had evolved into a

<sup>199</sup> Northrup, *The Negro in the Aerospace Industry*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

small set of extremely large firms, producing a vast array of basic products for industrial consumers, including plastics, solvents, synthetic rubbers and fibers, and pesticides to name but a few. The two largest firms in the industry were E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Union Carbide. Together these companies boasted approximately \$6 billion in annual sales and employed nearly 215,000 workers, nearly one quarter of the industry's overall labor force.<sup>201</sup> In 1966 nearly 600,000 of the industry's employees worked in production, including 277,000 as operatives.

Due to the technical nature of chemical production, high levels of education and job training were necessary requirements for long-term employment. Moreover, automation was projected to increase, likely reducing the number of semiskilled jobs and raising skill requirements for those who remained. The production process and nature of employment, therefore, posed substantial impediments to Black employment mobility in the industry.<sup>202</sup> Throughout the 1960s, wages were higher than the manufacturing average, though slightly below those for equivalent jobs in steel, autos, and aerospace. And as of 1963, benefits were equivalent to 11.1 percent of wages and salaries for all manufacturing compared to 14.2 percent for the chemical industry.<sup>203</sup>

Blacks had gained a foothold in the chemical industry as far back as the 1930s. When the industry expanded during World War II, the total number of Black workers increased. But the vast majority remained confined to unskilled laborer positions. By 1960 little had changed. Moreover, in the absence of improvements in education and job skills, the ongoing automation of production represented a real threat to the continued presence of Blacks in the industry.<sup>204</sup>

Numerous leading chemical-industry executives had been hostile to the encroachment of government on business, with those at DuPont in a class all their own. In the first years of the New Deal, the DuPont brothers had used their substantial wealth to found the American Liberty League to promote a counter-offensive against the business regulations and social welfare policies of the Roosevelt administration.<sup>205</sup> By the late 1930s, however, the League had been reduced to failure. Thereafter, former DuPont executive Jasper Crane channeled considerable funds to anti-regulatory groups, ranging from founding the neoliberal think tank, the Mont Pelerin Society, to the "Spiritual Mobilization" of Reverend James Fifield, who attacked the New Deal welfare state as a "grievous sin," antithetical to God's order.<sup>206</sup>

Though subsequent executives held more moderate positions, many remained antagonistic toward equal employment opportunity. Nevertheless, in 1963, the company made public its intent to join Plans for Progress. But management's professed commitment to affirmative action did not negate the very real problems related to the technical nature of the industry. Testing requirements were quite high in the industry. And despite a shortage of qualified white candidates, DuPont managers had difficulty attracting qualified Black college graduates. Because of the company's reluctance,

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<sup>201</sup> William Howard Quay, Jr., *The Negro in the Chemical Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1969, pp. 4-6.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

<sup>205</sup> See Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal*, W.W. Norton & Company, 2009, ch. 1.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 2-4; Kim Phillips-Fein, "Business Conservatives and the Mont Pelerin Society," in Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plewhe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, Harvard University Press, 2009: 280-301; Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, Basic Books, 2015, p. 12.

Black workers with high levels of education were frequently hired by other companies whose management had committed to equal opportunity long before DuPont.<sup>207</sup>

Table III.12 and Table III.13 show the total employment of Black workers in the chemical industry in 1964 and 1968, disaggregated by occupation and gender. Blacks made their greatest gains as operatives, up from 6,764 in 1964 to 10,794 in 1968. In Quay’s view, however, “[u]nless Negro educational opportunities improve and company training covers more employees, the operative grouping could become closed to many Negro applicants...In view of the current emphasis on civil rights, companies moving in this direction may be expected to put considerable resources into training black employees.”<sup>208</sup>

**Table III.12. Total and Black employment in the U.S. chemical industry, 1964**

| Occupation             | All Employees |        |         | Male Employees |        |         | Female Employees |       |         |
|------------------------|---------------|--------|---------|----------------|--------|---------|------------------|-------|---------|
|                        | Total         | Black  | % Black | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total            | Black | % Black |
| Officials and Managers | 40,586        | 73     | 0.2     | 40,083         | 72     | 0.2     | 503              | 1     | 0.2     |
| Professionals          | 35,162        | 124    | 0.4     | 33,871         | 113    | 0.3     | 1,291            | 11    | 0.9     |
| Technicians            | 22,496        | 263    | 1.2     | 19,973         | 244    | 1.2     | 2,523            | 19    | 0.8     |
| Sales Workers          | 7,930         | 21     | 0.3     | 7,646          | 21     | 0.3     | 284              | NA    | NA      |
| Office and Clerical    | 40,349        | 564    | 1.4     | 13,349         | 283    | 2.1     | 27,000           | 281   | 1.0     |
| Craftsmen              | 71,241        | 1,330  | 1.9     | 68,847         | 1,329  | 1.9     | 2,394            | 1     | 0.0     |
| Operatives             | 93,445        | 6,764  | 7.2     | 77,948         | 6,317  | 8.1     | 15,497           | 447   | 2.9     |
| Laborers               | 17,707        | 4,515  | 25.5    | 16,112         | 4,457  | 27.7    | 1,595            | 58    | 3.6     |
| Service Workers        | 9,300         | 2,180  | 23.4    | 8,313          | 1,993  | 24.0    | 987              | 187   | 18.9    |
| Total Employees        | 338,216       | 15,834 | 4.7     | 286,142        | 14,829 | 5.2     | 52,074           | 1,005 | 1.9     |

Note: NA=not available

Source: Quay, *The Negro in the Chemical Industry*, p. 75

**Table III.13. Total and Black employment in the U.S. chemical industry, 1968**

| Occupation             | All Employees |        |         | Male Employees |        |         | Female Employees |       |         |
|------------------------|---------------|--------|---------|----------------|--------|---------|------------------|-------|---------|
|                        | Total         | Black  | % Black | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total            | Black | % Black |
| Officials and Managers | 43,766        | 188    | 0.4     | 43,197         | 182    | 0.4     | 569              | 6     | 1.1     |
| Professionals          | 37,528        | 311    | 0.8     | 35,863         | 259    | 0.7     | 1,665            | 52    | 3.1     |
| Technicians            | 23,543        | 583    | 2.5     | 20,194         | 466    | 2.3     | 3,349            | 117   | 3.5     |
| Sales Workers          | 6,610         | 48     | 0.7     | 6,400          | 47     | 0.7     | 210              | 1     | 0.5     |
| Office and Clerical    | 39,914        | 1,266  | 3.2     | 12,138         | 423    | 3.5     | 27,776           | 843   | 3.0     |
| Craftsmen              | 69,076        | 2,016  | 2.9     | 68,502         | 1,943  | 2.8     | 574              | 73    | 12.7    |
| Operatives             | 109,094       | 10,794 | 9.9     | 88,163         | 9,056  | 10.3    | 20,931           | 1,738 | 8.3     |
| Laborers               | 17,731        | 3,970  | 22.4    | 14,745         | 3,715  | 25.2    | 2,986            | 255   | 8.5     |
| Service Workers        | 9,045         | 2,077  | 23.0    | 7,956          | 1,828  | 23.0    | 1,089            | 249   | 22.9    |
| Total Employees        | 356,307       | 21,253 | 6.0     | 297,158        | 17,919 | 6.0     | 59,149           | 3,334 | 5.6     |

Source: Quay, *The Negro in the Chemical Industry*, p. 77

“The Negro in the chemical industry has served to illustrate a most critical social dilemma,” concluded Quay:

The acceptance of the historical evidence that white society has been a major contributor to the deprivation of the Negro, and realization that the black minority must have an effective role in making the decisions which affect their lives are both necessary conditions to solve these problems which affect us all, regardless of race.

<sup>207</sup> Delton, *Racial Integration*, pp. 256-260.

<sup>208</sup> Quay, *The Negro in the Chemical Industry*, p. 42.

Business does have a social responsibility. In a complex, technologically exploding society, free enterprise can exist prosperously only in a stable and affluent environment. The function of the business firm is to produce goods and services as efficiently and profitably as possible, but this role is irrelevant if social conditions generate violence, poverty, and repression.<sup>209</sup>

### *The textile industry*

From its origins in the mill towns of nineteenth-century Rhode Island and Massachusetts until the late-nineteenth century, textile manufacturing had been centered in the industrial Northeast. Beginning in the 1890s, following the introduction of highly productive ring-spinning machines and automatic looms, the industry began to shift to the South,<sup>210</sup> where mill-owners sought the advantages of access to a low-wage, generally unorganized labor force and the overall reduction in overhead attributable to cheap transportation and lower taxes.<sup>211</sup> In the 1920s, this process continued as the industry faced serious duress as, in the presence of cut-throat competition, prices fell and wages remained stagnant.<sup>212</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s, however, there was a consolidation of the industry under a number of brand-name manufacturers, mostly headquartered in the South.<sup>213</sup>

By the 1960s the textile industry had grown into the most prominent manufacturing industry in the South. Approximately one million workers were employed in textiles in the late 1960s, making it among the largest industrial employers in the United States at that time.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, the nature of the work was highly favorable to the movement of workers from unskilled to semiskilled positions. Of the roughly one million textile workers, 61 percent were operatives, with most jobs amenable to both men and women and job skills that could be easily mastered in a matter of just six months. In the mid-1960s technological change was having little effect on job classifications.<sup>215</sup>

Early attempts to unionize Southern mill workers had widely resulted in failure, mostly notably including the defeat of the CIO-led Operation Dixie, launched in the South in 1946.<sup>216</sup> By the mid-1960s, with rare exceptions, the textile industry remained unorganized. The absence of collective bargaining inhibited the ability of workers to increase their wages and negotiate benefits, but it also meant that when the pressure for equal opportunity arose there was no need to confront an entrenched seniority system protecting an openly hostile white workforce.<sup>217</sup>

The passage of the Civil Rights Act caused a sea change in the composition of the blue-collar labor force in the Southern textile industry. Until the mid-1960s, Blacks were almost entirely relegated

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<sup>209</sup> Quay, *The Negro in the Chemical Industry*, p. 74.

<sup>210</sup> Irwin Feller, "The Diffusion and Location of Technological Change in the American Cotton-Textile Industry, 1890-1970," *Technology and Culture*, 15, 4, 1974: 569-593.

<sup>211</sup> See Wright, *Old South, New South*, pp. 147-155.

<sup>212</sup> Gavin Wright, "Cheap Labor and Southern Textiles, 1880-1930," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 96, 4, 1981: 605-629.

<sup>213</sup> Solomon Barkin, "The Regional Significance of the Integration Movement in the Southern Textile Industry," *Southern Economic Journal*, 15, 4, 1949: 395-411.

<sup>214</sup> Richard L. Rowan, *The Negro in the Textile Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24 for the percentage of operatives; and p. 11 on the characteristics of job skills

<sup>216</sup> Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, Temple University Press, 1985; Michael Goldfield, "The Failure of Operation Dixie: A Critical Turning Point in American Political Development?" in Gary M. Fink and Earl E. Reed, eds., *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History*. University of Alabama Press, 1994.

<sup>217</sup> Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor*, pp. 31-33.

to unskilled positions, reflecting the overall pattern of vertical segregation in the Southern workforce. The occupational caste structure was enforced primarily through informal social norms, rooted in negative stereotypes. Chief among such beliefs was the idea that Blacks were pathologically incapable of handling factory work, thus serving to rationalize their status as unskilled workers.<sup>218</sup>

Table III.14 shows operative employment by race and gender for 1964, 1966 and 1968. According to Richard Rowan’s data, over this five-year period alone the total number of Black operatives employed in Southern textiles increased nearly ninefold, from 2,490 to 21,294. In seeking to explain this dramatic transformation, Rowan noted the significance of government pressure, especially after the Civil Rights Act.<sup>219</sup> However, in his view, the primary source of the change was the tightening of the Southern labor market. Indeed, in his assessment: “Unlike the situation in other industries...Negroes would have been hired in textile mills without government pressure in the 1960’s. The labor market brought the major change.”<sup>220</sup>

**Table III.14. Textile industry operative employment by race and gender in the South, 1964, 1966, and 1968**

|      | All Operatives |        |         | Male Operatives |        |         | Female Operatives |       |         |
|------|----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|--------|---------|-------------------|-------|---------|
|      | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total           | Black  | % Black | Total             | Black | % Black |
| 1964 | 46,819         | 2,490  | 5.3     | 23,810          | 2,265  | 9.5     | 23,009            | 225   | 1.0     |
| 1966 | 161,288        | 12,525 | 7.8     | 78,391          | 9,720  | 12.4    | 82,897            | 2,805 | 3.4     |
| 1968 | 164,809        | 21,294 | 12.9    | 78,448          | 14,116 | 18.0    | 86,361            | 7,178 | 8.3     |

Source: Rowan, *The Negro in the Textile Industry*, pp. 75-77

For nearly two decades, Rowan’s study remained the sole systematic treatment of Black employment in the textile industry. As later studies were conducted, they further confirmed and elaborated the dramatic increase of Black workers in Southern mills that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>221</sup> More recent scholarship has demonstrated, however, that Rowan’s belief that tight labor markets were the primary cause of mill integration was deeply flawed. The works of Timothy Minchin and Gavin Wright demonstrate clearly that, despite their need for labor, Southern employers remained profoundly averse to hiring Blacks. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act, however, prospective Black employees were given a means of legal redress to challenge their exclusion from higher-paying jobs. Only after employers had been forced to hire Blacks did they realize their value as employees.<sup>222</sup>

Despite the relatively low pay of Southern mill work, the opening of new job opportunities to Southern Blacks provided a direct means of escaping poverty. According to EEOC records collected by Minchin, the move from domestic services to production work in textiles could mean

<sup>218</sup> Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South*, Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 106-107. On the self-fulfilling process of social stratification between dominant and marginalized social groups more generally, see Robert K. Merton, “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *The Antioch Review*, 8, 2, 1948: 193-210.

<sup>219</sup> Rowan, *The Negro in the Textile Industry*, p. 69.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>221</sup> Mary Frederickson, “Four Decades of Change: Black Workers in Southern Textiles, 1941-1981,” in James Green, ed., *Workers’ Struggles, Past and Present*, Temple University Press, 1983: 61-82; James J. Heckman and Brook S. Payner, “Determining the Impact of Federal Antidiscrimination Policy on the Economic Status of Blacks: A Study of South Carolina,” *American Economic Review*, 79, 1, 1989: 138-177.

<sup>222</sup> Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980*, University of North Carolina Press, 1999, ch. 2; Wright, *Sharing the Prize*, pp. 106-125.

an increase in weekly pay from \$25 in the previous employment to \$90 in the mill. As one mill worker recalled, the transition to textile work allowed him to earn enough money to buy a house and send three of his children to college.<sup>223</sup>

### *The apparel industry*

By the mid-1960s, many characteristics of the apparel industry appeared to be favorable to Black employment mobility. From World War II until the early 1970s, the industry consistently employed between one million and one-and-a-half-million people. Approximately 87 percent of apparel workers worked in production, and two-thirds of these positions were unskilled or semiskilled. Thus, for Black workers with little experience in industry, skill barriers were minimal.<sup>224</sup> However, these advantages masked fundamental problems inhibiting the industry's potential role as an instrument of economic advancement. Major obstacles included low wages, little room for advancement beyond production work, and the introduction of foreign competition.

The apparel industry had long been centered in the immigrant communities of the industrial Northeast, with New York City boasting the highest rate of employment by a substantial margin. During the labor shortages of World War I and World War II, Blacks gained a noticeable, if meager, presence in the industry in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Due in part to its close interconnection with the textile industry, however, beginning in the 1920s, the industry began to shift production to the South. Seeking to boost credibility with their constituents, many Southern politicians offered apparel manufacturers state-subsidized facilities in exchange for jobs. Because of Jim Crow disenfranchisement, however, Black jobs held no political value. Blacks were therefore routinely excluded from employment consideration by state employment agencies and apparel companies.<sup>225</sup>

Unionization varied widely in the industry. Shops in Northern cities producing high-end garments had relatively high levels of unionization, while shops producing cheaper clothing were generally not unionized. The two most prominent unions in the industry were the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW), both of which had developed in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and were dominated by Eastern and Southern European immigrants. Despite efforts on the part of the ILGWU to organize Southern apparel factories, by the early 1960s the vast majority of Southern workers remained unorganized. Racist attitudes were among the foremost obstacles to unionization in the South. One ILGWU organizer recalled, for example, that "supervisors [told employees] that if [a] union came in, they would have to work with Negroes. This stopped the [ILGWU] campaign dead in its tracks."<sup>226</sup> Where unionization did succeed, it generally reflected the racial attitudes of the region, with white workers dominating the union hierarchy and privileging themselves over Blacks.<sup>227</sup>

The bifurcation of the industry between North and South was also reflected in its organizational structure. The North remained dominated by small shops, often employing under 50 people. In the

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<sup>223</sup> Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, p. 32.

<sup>224</sup> Elaine Gale Wrong, *The Negro in the Apparel Industry*, University of Pennsylvania, 1974, pp. 12-13.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-49.

<sup>226</sup> Michelle Haberland, *Striking Beauties: Women Apparel Workers in the US South, 1930-2000*, University of Georgia Press, 2015, p. 95.

<sup>227</sup> See Wrong, *The Negro in the Apparel Industry*, p. 19 and pp. 50-60; Haberland, *Striking Beauties*, ch. 3.

South, however, large workplaces producing relatively cheap garments dominated. Because of the predominance of small shops in the North, the Executive Orders of Presidents Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson had little effect on much of the industry. Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act, however, Black employment in the Southern apparel industry increased dramatically. Table III.15 shows EEOC data for the total number of apparel operatives in large establishments by race and gender for 1966, 1967, 1969, and 1970. In this four-year period employment of Black female operatives, who were 86 percent of all Black employees in large apparel shops, increased from 27,707 to 39,976, with their proportion of all female operatives rising from 8.4 percent to 11.6 percent.

**Table III.15. Total and Black operative employment in the apparel industry by race and gender, 1966, 1967, 1969, and 1970**

|      | All Operatives |        |         | Male Operatives |       |         | Female Operatives |        |         |
|------|----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|-------|---------|-------------------|--------|---------|
|      | Total          | Black  | % Black | Total           | Black | % Black | Total             | Black  | % Black |
| 1966 | 373,432        | 32,347 | 8.7     | 44,017          | 4,640 | 10.5    | 329,415           | 27,707 | 8.4     |
| 1967 | 408,871        | 39,822 | 9.7     | 48,242          | 5,645 | 11.7    | 360,629           | 34,177 | 9.5     |
| 1969 | 346,166        | 38,795 | 11.2    | 40,369          | 5,672 | 14.1    | 305,797           | 33,123 | 10.8    |
| 1970 | 392,609        | 46,213 | 11.8    | 46,605          | 6,237 | 13.4    | 346,004           | 39,976 | 11.6    |

Source: Wrong, *The Negro in the Apparel Industry*, pp. 138-141

The author of the RPAI study of the apparel industry, Elaine Gale Wrong, enunciated a comparable conclusion to Rowan’s with regard to the cause of the rapid increase of Black employment in Southern textile plants:

We believe that the evidence for the apparel industry likewise supports the primary role of the labor market factor. The period involved was one of the very tight labor markets throughout the South as all industry expanded in that region. Low wage industries, particularly textiles and apparel, found their labor supply depleted, as experienced workers transferred to higher paying industries, such as electrical machinery and electronics, metal working and machinery, aerospace and automobiles. In order to obtain a labor supply, apparel employers had no choice but to abandon the discriminatory hiring policies of the 1950’s and early 1960’s...The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the federal executive orders applicable to equal employment...gave the industry the excuse to do what was necessary for its existence as well as for its expansion.”<sup>228</sup>

Evelyn Blumberg and Paul Ong draw a similar conclusion in their 1994 study of the “racial recomposition” of the apparel industry from the 1950s to 1990. They argue: “Changes in racial norms as a consequence of the civil rights movement combined with a tight southern labor market to open employment opportunities for southern blacks.”<sup>229</sup> They show that this trend continued into the 1990s, resulting in a relative increase of Black workers in the industry from five percent in 1960 to 28 percent by 1990.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-123.

<sup>229</sup> Evelyn Blumberg and Paul Ong, “Labor Squeeze and Ethnic/Racial Recomposition in the U.S. Apparel Industry,” in Edna Bonacich, Lucie Cheng, Norma Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and Paul Ong, eds., *Global Production: The Apparel Industry in the Pacific Rim*, Temple University Press, 1994: 309-327, quoted at p. 318.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

Yet, more recent studies of Southern textiles posit that the influence of civil rights legislation and federal litigation should not be understated. Michelle Haberland places strong emphasis on the role of the ILGWU in integrating the Southern apparel shops. The alignment of anti-union and white supremacist groups made an alliance between Black workers and apparel unions a logical coalition. As Black workers entered apparel shops under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the ILGWU appealed to them under the banner of racial cooperation. A union-civil-rights alliance therefore, held benefit for both groups, serving to expand the influence of the union and Black workers. “For many African American women workers,” Haberland writes, “union activity and membership were a virtual branch of the civil rights movement.”<sup>231</sup>

As Black workers continued to increase their ranks into the 1970s, however, the industry faced increasing foreign competition. Writing in 1974, Wrong noted: “Whatever the overall merits of free trade, it appears obvious that the flood of imports in apparel...has impacted disproportionately on Negroes and other minorities...the higher cost operations in the northern cities have been especially hard hit by this competition, thus reducing the potential for urban minority employment.”<sup>232</sup> Indeed, from 1969 to 1979, the U.S. apparel industry would lose over seven percent of its work force as international competitors increased their market share.<sup>233</sup>

### ***African American employment in the government sector***

The government sector has long offered better employment opportunities for African Americans, and other minorities, than the business sector.<sup>234</sup> Government agencies have provided more access to jobs in general, more access to professional and managerial jobs in particular, and better pay for given levels of education and experience. Historically, this progress began with the federal government, but gradually spread into state and local government as well. The combination of national policy pressure to open employment to Blacks and a growing economy that supported the movement of African Americans into better jobs in some key industrial sectors in the 1960s and 1970s was also present in the state and local government sectors. In addition, the federal government allocated substantial new moneys to education for minority areas, community development, job training, and social services during the 1960s and 1970s, which also resulted in the creation of significantly more jobs, and managerial and professional jobs in particular, for African Americans than had been available in the past.

As with the situation in industrial manufacturing, the favorable conditions that led to the expansion of job opportunities for Blacks in the government sector diminished in the late 1970s and dropped sharply in the 1980s. Current data show that the government sector continues to be a relatively better source of managerial and professional jobs for Blacks than the business sector; a given level of education and experience nets a higher return for Blacks working in the government sector compared with the business sector.<sup>235</sup> The Great Recession of 2007-2009 hit the government sector

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<sup>231</sup> Haberland, *Striking Beauties*, p. 105.

<sup>232</sup> Wrong, *The Negro in the Apparel Industry*, p. 127.

<sup>233</sup> Haberland, *Striking Beauties*, p. 141.

<sup>234</sup> See Moss et al, “Employment and Earnings of African Americans.”

<sup>235</sup> David Cooper, Mary Gable and Algernon Austin, “The Public-Sector Jobs Crisis: Women and African Americans Hit Hardest by Job Losses in State and Local Governments,” Economic Policy Institute, Briefing Paper #339, May 2012, at <https://www.epi.org/publication/bp339-public-sector-jobs-crisis/>.



as well as the business sector, and the losses to Blacks employed in the government sector were relatively more severe than for whites.<sup>236</sup>

### ***Government employment: The U.S. Postal Service***

The U.S. Postal Service led the way in employing African Americans. In colonial America, slaves delivered the mail, but formal employment of Blacks in the Postal Service really began during the Reconstruction period when many Blacks were installed as postmasters, letter carriers, and postal clerks in Southern cities.<sup>237</sup> With the end of Reconstruction in the late nineteenth century, it became increasingly difficult for Blacks to maintain higher-level jobs such as postmaster, and access to better paying jobs in the government sector diminished. President William Taft officially ended the practice of appointing Black postmasters, although Blacks still held jobs as letter carriers and postal clerks.<sup>238</sup> Taft then segregated the U.S. Census Bureau, a practice that Woodrow Wilson extended to the entire federal government.<sup>239</sup>

Access to jobs within the Postal Service increased during the administrations of Warren Harding and Herbert Hoover, who also made efforts to desegregate other departments of the federal government. The gains continued throughout World War II and after with both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy applying pressure to expand access to government jobs for Blacks. By the mid-1960s, the Post Office was the largest single employer of African Americans.<sup>240</sup> Postal workers and mail carriers are two occupations with high Black representation in 1970.<sup>241</sup> Blacks have continued to have favored access to jobs in the Postal Service. In 2019, the occupational category of postal service clerks was the second highest in terms of Black representation and the category of postal service mail carriers was highly ranked as well.<sup>242</sup>

### ***The surge in government employment following the Civil Rights Act***

State and local government jobs began to be an important source of better-paid employment opportunities for Blacks in the 1950s. Black employment in the state and local sector accelerated from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Government employment grew relatively rapidly during this time, and Blacks landed a relatively greater fraction of government jobs. The expansion of government employment, particularly at the state and local levels, was remarkable from 1964, the year the Civil Rights Act was passed, until 1975, the high-water mark for government employment growth during this period. In 1964, the proportion of all non-agricultural employment that was government employment, including both federal and state and local government, was 16.6 percent;

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<sup>236</sup> Moss et al, "Employment and Earnings of African Americans," which draws on Cooper et al., "The Public-Sector Jobs Crisis," Figure B.

<sup>237</sup> Deanna Boyd and Kendra Chen, "The History and Experience of African Americans in America's Postal Service," Smithsonian National Postal Museum, at <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/AfricanAmericanhistory/index.html>.

<sup>238</sup> In his study of the evolution of the class structure of Blacks in Philadelphia, Elijah Anderson indicates that postal workers were among the more educated members of the Black middle class in that city. Elijah Anderson, "The Emerging Philadelphia African American Class Structure," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 568, 2000: 54-77, cited at p. 58.

<sup>239</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, "The Rise of Segregation in the Federal Bureaucracy, 1900-1930," *Phylon (1960-)*, 28, 2, 1967: 178-184.

<sup>240</sup> Boyd and Chen, "The History and Experience of African Americans," p. 8.

<sup>241</sup> Hogan and Harris report, using 1970 Census data, that there were 65,000 Black postal clerks representing 22.1 percent of all postal clerks, and 30,000 mail carriers, 11.7 percent of all mail carriers. Hogan, and Harris, "The Occupational-Industrial Structure of Black Employment," Table 7.

<sup>242</sup> Moss et al, "Employment and Earnings of African Americans," Table II.6.

state and local government employment by itself comprised 12.4 percent of all non-agricultural employment. In 1975 the percentage for total government was 19.2 and for state and local government employment 15.5. From 1964 to 1975, total non-agricultural employment grew by 48.7 percent, while total government employment increased by 60.7 percent and state and local employment by 73.8 percent.<sup>243</sup>

By 1960, the government sector was more important as a source of jobs for Blacks than it was for whites; 14.6 percent of Blacks were employed in government jobs compared with 12.8 percent of whites. The Black advantage rose dramatically from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. By 1976, the figures were 26.5 percent for Blacks and 16.4 percent for whites. Between 1960 and 1976, government-sector employment accounted for 54.8 percent of the increase in total employment of Blacks compared with 25.9 percent for whites.<sup>244</sup> The growth in government-sector unionism during this period enhanced the pay and benefits enjoyed by Blacks as government employees.<sup>245</sup>

The pressure to employ African Americans provided by the Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 11246 issued by President Johnson in 1965 advantaged Blacks in gaining government jobs,<sup>246</sup> while the composition of government spending during this period, in large part triggered by Great Society programs, also tilted employment toward Blacks. While federal government employment did not grow significantly during the 1960s and 1970s, federal spending on Great Society social welfare programs and educational programs for minorities and minority districts carried out by state and local governments did.<sup>247</sup> The proportion of the total revenue of state and local governments that came from the federal government was 13.8 percent in 1960, but shot up to 21.7 percent in 1976.<sup>248</sup> Social welfare spending as a fraction of the expenditures of all governments also rose significantly, from 20 percent of all expenditures in 1960 to fully 30 percent in 1976.<sup>249</sup> The social welfare and education functions of state and local government provided relatively more access to Blacks in the early 1960s than other state and local government functions, and that advantage grew in the 1970s.

Jobs for Blacks as well as for whites in education grew markedly during this period because of the baby boom, but non-education social welfare functions as a source of employment for Blacks

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<sup>243</sup> Authors' calculations from numbers in Council of Economic Advisers, *Economic Report of the President 2000*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000, p. 359 Table B-44; Council of Economic Advisers, *Economic Report of the President 2008*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008, p. 281, Table B-46.

<sup>244</sup> Michael K. Brown and Stephen P. Erie, "Blacks and the Legacy of the Great Society: The Economic and Political Impact of Federal Social Policy," *Public Policy*, 29, 3, 1981; 299-330, cited at p. 305.

<sup>245</sup> Unionization of government employees during this period grew substantially. The right of employees of the federal government to unionize was guaranteed by Executive order 10988, signed by President Kennedy in 1962. Over the decade of the 1960s, 22 states passed laws to allow government workers to unionize. Joseph A. McCartin, "'A Wagner Act for Public Employees': Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976," *Journal of American History*, 95, 1, 2008: 123-148.

<sup>246</sup> Executive Order 11246 disallowed discrimination by federal contractors in hiring and employment practices. It also required federal contractors with more than 50 employees to take "affirmative action" to increase minority employment until the workforce was representative of the available labor pool for the relevant jobs. This executive order was a foundation for anti-discrimination policy and programs from the mid-1960s onward.

<sup>247</sup> U.S. Congress, "Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged," Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, at <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/essa-act-of-1965.pdf>; Office of Head Start, "History of Head Start," at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/history-of-head-start>. Both passed in 1965, these programs were the major sources of federal funds to state and local government to expand education for African Americans.

<sup>248</sup> U.S. Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1978*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978, p. 297, Table 482.

<sup>249</sup> Authors' calculations from *ibid.*, p. 289, Table 471.

increased much faster.<sup>250</sup> In 1960, 28.0 percent of government jobs held by Blacks were in education and 21.1 percent were in non-education social welfare compared with 32.9 percent and 13.2 percent for whites. By 1976, 36.5 percent of government jobs for Blacks were in education and 23.4 percent in non-education social welfare, while for whites the figures were 43.7 percent and 12.9 percent.<sup>251</sup>

State and local governments submit data on employment by race and ethnicity to the EEOC, using form EEO-4. These data demonstrate the importance of social welfare jobs for African Americans.<sup>252</sup> Using these data to look across state and local government functions, N. Joseph Cayer and Lee Sigelman show that in 1973, while the largest penetration by minorities was in sanitation and sewage, the next three largest areas of employment were in housing, hospitals and public welfare. By 1975, the representation of minorities in each of these functions increased, while it did not in the other governmental functions.<sup>253</sup>

The government sector has provided Blacks with superior employment opportunities than the business sector. President Johnson's Great Society agenda to address poverty and racial injustice led to a spate of legislation funding a long list of programs aimed at dealing with educational, social, and economic problems in minority communities.<sup>254</sup> These programs led to a substantial expansion of government employment that gave many African Americans access to administrative, professional and technical jobs that could take them into the middle class. In 1960, the government sector accounted for 51.9 percent of Blacks in professional, administrative or technical occupations compared with 23.4 percent of whites; in 1976 these proportions were 53.8 percent for Blacks and 28.0 percent for whites. Government employment accounted for 54.8 percent of the increase from 1960 to 1976 in professional, administrative and technical jobs for Blacks, but only 34.3 percent for whites. Of all Blacks working in professional, administrative and technical jobs in 1976, 44.5 percent were working in government-sector social welfare occupations, while the proportion for whites was 19.4 percent.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Brown and Erie, "Blacks and the Legacy of the Great Society," p. 307. Non-educational social welfare employment included, at the federal level, jobs in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Department of Labor, Housing and Home Finance Administration, and Veterans Affairs for 1960, with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Community Services Administration added for 1976. State and local social welfare employment included jobs in welfare, housing, employment security, and education.

<sup>251</sup> Authors' calculations using figures from Brown and Erie, "Blacks and the Legacy of the Great Society." p. 307.

<sup>252</sup> Since 1973, the EEOC has collected data from all state and local government agencies with 100 or more employees.

Government agencies report the total number of employees in each of several salary ranges within each functional category by gender within race/ethnic groups. The EEOC publishes aggregated tables for each year in *Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in State and Local Government*. Since 1993, the data have been collected biennially in odd-numbered years.

<sup>253</sup> N. Joseph Cayer and Lee Sigelman, "Minorities and Women in State and Local Government: 1973-1975," *Public Administration Review*, 40, 5 1980: 443-450, cited Tables 4 and 5.

<sup>254</sup> Notable among this legislation was the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which funded among other programs, the Job Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps the Community Action Program, the Model Cities Program, Upward Bound, and the Legal Services Program. Also important was the Primary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which targeted monies to minority communities. See Joseph A. Califano Jr., "Seeing Is Believing - The Enduring Legacy of Lyndon Johnson," LBJ Presidential Library, May 19, 2008, at <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/lyndon-baines-johnson/perspectives-and-essays/seeing-is-believing-the-enduring-legacy-of-lyndon-johnson>.

<sup>255</sup> Brown and Erie, "Blacks and the Legacy of the Great Society," pp. 308-309. Brown and Erie include education in the social welfare category. See also John F. Zipp "Government Employment and Black-White Earnings Inequality, 1980-1990," *Social Problems*, 41, 3, 1994: 363-382.

## ***Public education***

Beyond the Postal Service, education was one of the first areas of employment in local government that could offer middle-class level earnings to African Americans, as teachers and administrators. Educated Blacks, and in particular Black women, but also to a lesser degree Black men, have had more access to jobs as elementary and secondary school teachers than to comparable jobs in the business sector.<sup>256</sup> Before the effect of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954 began to be felt fully in the court-ordered desegregation efforts of the 1960s and 1970s, much of the employment of Black public school teachers was in relatively segregated, predominantly Black public schools. Black employment in education during the 1960s and 1970s is particularly interesting because Civil Rights pressure to employ more Blacks occurred in the aftermath of *Brown v. the Board of Education* and at the same time as the baby boom hit the public schools.

Three forces affecting employment opportunity for Blacks as public-school teachers were at work from 1960 to 1980. First, Black teachers and administrators began losing their jobs following *Brown v. Board of Education* as school districts anticipated that white parents would not want their children educated by Black teachers.<sup>257</sup> Second, as part of the Great Society programs, the federal government substantially expanded its role in local spending for education through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Head Start and a variety of preschool and remedial education programs funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity.<sup>258</sup> Finally, educating the baby boom greatly increased the demand for teachers, white and Black. The rise in public elementary and secondary enrollments during the period from 1950 to 1980 is extraordinary.<sup>259</sup>

The net result of all these factors is given in Table III.18. The numbers show that the proportion of teaching jobs held by Blacks increased in the 1970s but declined in the 1980s, remaining at the same percentage into the 1990s. The percentages were not appreciably different in 2008.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> In 1960, there were 97,000 Black elementary school teachers, representing 9.6 percent of all elementary school teachers, and 35,600 Black secondary school teachers, 6.8 percent of all secondary school teachers. U.S. Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1968*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, Table 327, pp. 227-228. These percentages are similar to the data reported by Hogan and Harris from the 1970 Census: 135,000 Black elementary school teachers, representing 9.4 percent of the total, and 66,000 Black high school teachers, 6.6 percent of the total. The other occupations in the 1970 Census data that probably necessitated a college education and for which Blacks had some modest representation were Librarian (8,000, 6.5 percent Black), Clergyman (13,500, 6.1 percent Black), and Official, Public Administration (11,400, 4.8 percent Black). Taken together, these occupations represented less than 16 percent of the elementary and secondary school teacher jobs held by Blacks.

<sup>257</sup> See Deirdre Oakley, Jacob Stowell, and John R. Logan, "The Impact of Desegregation on Black Teachers in the Metropolis, 1970–2000," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39, 9, 2009: 1576–1598; Linda C. Tillman, "(Un)Intended Consequences The Impact of the Brown v. Board of Education Decision on the Employment Status of Black Educators," *Education and Urban Society*, 36, 3, 2004: 280-303; Michael Fultz, "The Displacement of Black Educators Post-Brown: An Overview and Analysis," *History of Education Quarterly*, 44, 1, 2004: 11-45; Mildred J. Hudson and Barbara J. Holmes, "Missing Teachers, Impaired Communities: The Unanticipated Consequences of Brown v. Board of Education on the African American Teaching Force at the Pre-collegiate Level," *Journal of Negro Education*, 63, 3, 1994: 388-393.

<sup>258</sup> Brown and Erie, "Blacks and the Legacy of the Great Society," p. 303.

<sup>259</sup> Thomas B. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, January 1993, p. 35, Figure 6, at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf>.

<sup>260</sup> U.S. Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2010, Table 608.

**Table III.18. Black public-school teachers, 1960, 1970, 1977, 1983, 1992**

|                        | Number of teachers (000s) | Number of Black teachers (000s) | Percentage of teachers who are Black |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>1960</b>            |                           |                                 |                                      |
| Elementary             | 1,011                     | 97                              | 9.6                                  |
| Secondary              | 521                       | 36                              | 6.9                                  |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>1,532</b>              | <b>133</b>                      | <b>8.7</b>                           |
| <b>1970</b>            |                           |                                 |                                      |
| Elementary             | 1,559                     | 150                             | 9.6                                  |
| Secondary              | 1,011                     | 68                              | 6.7                                  |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>2,570</b>              | <b>218</b>                      | <b>8.5</b>                           |
| <b>1977</b>            |                           |                                 |                                      |
| Elementary             | 1,818                     | 207                             | 11.4                                 |
| Secondary              | 1,157                     | 93                              | 8.0                                  |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>2,975</b>              | <b>300</b>                      | <b>10.1</b>                          |
| <b>1983</b>            |                           |                                 |                                      |
| Elementary             | 1,350                     | 150                             | 11.1                                 |
| Secondary              | 1,209                     | 87                              | 7.2                                  |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>2,559</b>              | <b>237</b>                      | <b>9.3</b>                           |
| <b>1992</b>            |                           |                                 |                                      |
| Preschool/Kindergarten | 481                       | 61                              | 12.7                                 |
| Elementary             | 1,643                     | 171                             | 10.4                                 |
| Secondary              | 1,172                     | 89                              | 7.6                                  |
| Special Education      | 269                       | 27                              | 10.0                                 |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>4,216</b>              | <b>392</b>                      | <b>9.3</b>                           |

Sources: *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1968*: Table 327, pp. 227-228; *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1974*: Table 571, pp. 352-355; *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1978*: Table 681, p. 420; *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1985*: Table 676, p. 402; *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1992*: Table 644, p. 405.

While it is impossible to net out the effect of each of the different factors, the politics following *Brown v. the Board of Education* as well as of the Civil Rights Act and the federal funding that ensued generated increased access for African Americans to professional jobs in education. As with employment in the business sector, the auspicious developments of the 1960s and the 1970s that led to greater access to better jobs for African Americans in state and local government agencies and civil-society organizations were not sustained.

### ***The Vietnam War at home and abroad***

While thousands of Black workers were advancing into stable, well-paid jobs that could have easily led to further upward mobility, both personally and across generations, developments were underway that would not only undermine the political gains of the civil-rights movement but also, by dismantling the system of employment relations that had supported the American middle class throughout the postwar decades, destroy the continued prospects for employment advancement for numerous Black workers. The political and economic crisis of the 1970s would usher in a period of profound transformation in business and government, the roots of which are found in events that had occurred alongside the gains of the Civil Rights era.

Though the mass movement of Blacks from the agricultural economy of the South to the industrial North had facilitated considerable employment mobility, it also left many African Americans vulnerable to the harsh realities of urban joblessness as affluent residents and employment opportunity moved into the outer suburbs. In a 1999 study, Robert Fairlie and William Sundstrom found that between 1940 and 1960, the period of the most substantial internal migration from South to North, the unemployment rates between Black and white workers widened considerably. They attribute this gap to a pattern of migration in which Blacks were moving into areas in which unemployment was increasing and employment opportunities were changing in ways that disadvantaged poorly educated, less-skilled workers.<sup>261</sup> While this trend slowed during the 1960s due to the expansion of employment and external pressure on businesses for equal opportunity employment, the movement of jobs from city centers to surrounding suburbs continued to have a deleterious effect on the job prospects of Blacks across America's cities.<sup>262</sup>

By the early 1960s, concern of a looming crisis in inner-city Black communities had reached the highest levels of the U.S. government. In May 1961, President Kennedy created the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, intended to address crime and delinquency among inner-city minority youth, most particularly teenaged Black males. Initially meant as a part of a wide-ranging program to address both poverty and crime in major cities, by the late 1960s the attention to structural causes had been eclipsed by punitive policies, focusing on individual behavior. In fact, only a week before the Voting Rights Act was sent to Congress, President Johnson presented the legislature with the Law Enforcement Assistance Act, which first established direct federal involvement in state and local police, courts, and prisons. This legislation, as Elizabeth Hinton argues, laid the foundation for the growth of mass incarceration in the decades to come.<sup>263</sup>

Since the end of the slave economy of the Old South, numerous public officials, policy makers, and academics had attempted to link racial and ethnic minorities with pathological criminality.<sup>264</sup> But while the criminal activities of ethnic whites were more often explained by emphasizing structure over agency, Black criminality was frequently attributed to the negative idiosyncrasies of Black behavior and culture.<sup>265</sup> From 1964 to 1968 a wave of urban unrest swept through America's cities, serving to shift the national discussion again toward the problem of urban violence and crime. In response, on July 29, 1967, President Johnson issued Executive Order

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<sup>261</sup> Robert W. Fairlie and William A. Sundstrom, "The Emergence, Persistence, and Recent Widening of the Racial Unemployment Gap," *Labor Relations Review*, 52, 2, 1999: 252-270.

<sup>262</sup> See Pierre De Vise, "The Suburbanization of Jobs and Minority Employment." *Economic Geography*, 52, 4, 1976: 348-372; John F. Kain, *Essays on Urban Spatial Structure*, Ballinger, 1975; Bennett Harrison, *Urban Economic Development: Suburbanization, Minority Opportunity, and the Condition of the Central City*, The Urban Institute, 1974

<sup>263</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*, Harvard University Press, 2016. For an earlier critique of the war on poverty, see Richard Quinney, *Critique of the Legal Order: Crime Control in Capitalist Society*, Transaction Publishers, 2002, pp. 132-137.

<sup>264</sup> The debate surrounding the infamous "Moynihan Report," with the author's emphasis on family structure as the nucleus of Black social pathology, clearly underscores the prevalence of such a perspective throughout modern American history. For an assessment of the Report and the debate it provoked, see William Julius Wilson, "The Moynihan Report and Research on the Black Community," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 621, 1, 2009: 34-46.

<sup>265</sup> See Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, Harvard University Press, 2011.



11365, which called for a bipartisan inquiry into the causes, content, and possible remedies to the violence.<sup>266</sup>

Following a lengthy investigation, on March 1, 1968, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders under the leadership of Otto Kerner published its findings. While the causes of the uprisings were numerous, the authors of the report concluded that the primary source was “surely the continuing exclusion of great numbers of Negroes from the benefits of economic progress through discrimination in employment and education, and their enforced confinement in segregated housing and schools.”<sup>267</sup> Citing a survey of participants in the Newark, New Jersey uprising, for example, the authors noted that “self-reported rioters” were more likely to express job dissatisfaction in responsibility and pay, which the majority believed to be the result of racial discrimination.<sup>268</sup>

By 1968 the country was in the midst of a contentious and often violent presidential campaign. In April of that year, Martin Luther King was assassinated while aiding a sanitation-workers strike in Memphis, Tennessee. It was part of King’s effort to organize a Poor People’s Campaign, which sought to push the federal government to end the U.S. aggression against Vietnam and address the underlying causes of the urban uprisings. The campaign pressured the federal government to establish a national agency to provide employment and job training to all who were capable and in need of work. In outlining his proposal for the campaign, King directly appealed to the aid provided to white immigrants in earlier decades:

Although everyone knew in the past decade that millions of Negroes would have to leave the land without schooling, no national planning was done to provide remedies. White immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were given free credit and land by the government. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a plethora of social agencies helped them to adjust to city life. The economy readily absorbed white workers into factories and trained them to skills. There were obstacles and privations for white immigrants but every step was upward; care and concern could be found.<sup>269</sup>

Dr. King’s murder sparked another burst of urban violence. Seeing an opportunity, Presidential candidate Richard Nixon and his running-mate Spiro Agnew seized on the fears of white voters, running on a “law and order” platform. “We are trifling with social dynamite,” wrote Nixon only a month after King’s murder, “if we believe that the young people who emerge from these brutal societies in the central cities will come out as satisfied and productive citizens.”<sup>270</sup> Nixon’s appeals to white racial anxieties proved a successful campaign strategy.<sup>271</sup> And in the first years of his

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<sup>266</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Executive Order 11365—Establishing a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders,” July 29, 1967, *The American Presidency Project*, University of California Santa Barbara, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11365-establishing-national-advisory-commission-civil-disorders>.

<sup>267</sup> United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and Otto Kerner, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, March 1, 1968*, Bantam Books, 1968, p. 203.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>269</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Crisis in America’s Cities: An Analysis of Social Disorder and a Plan of Action Against Poverty, Discrimination, and Racism in Urban America,” presented at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, August, 15, 1967, p. 3, at <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/crisis-americas-cities#>. See also Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, ch. 24.

<sup>270</sup> Richard Nixon quoted in Hinton, *War on Poverty*, p. 139.

<sup>271</sup> See Ian Haney Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism & Wrecked the Middle Class*, Oxford University Press, 2014, chs. 1-2.

presidency Nixon turned away from efforts to reduce poverty while expanding the crime control measures instituted under President Johnson.<sup>272</sup>

Concerns over inner-city crime were not limited to whites, however. Recent work by Michael Javen Fortner details that anxiety over drug use, crime, and radical activism was present among working- and middle-class Blacks as well, who, like their white counterparts, perceived these varied forms of disorder as threatening to their interests.<sup>273</sup> Perhaps of greatest concern was the increasing presence of the heroin trade in urban communities, most particularly New York City. When the blue-collar middle-class jobs of the postwar era disappeared from America's cities, the spread of an increasingly punitive legal regime, largely rationalized by the crime and violence associated with the domestic drug trade, not only functioned to funnel millions of African Americans into a massive network of jails and prisons, but also, as prisons guards and related personnel, provided among the few new opportunities for comparatively stable, gainful employment for high-school-educated workers, be they Black or white.<sup>274</sup>

The history of the illicit heroin trade in the United States dates to the 1920s when the federal government first instituted mass prohibition of narcotics and alcohol. As a result of the prohibition, local ethnic gangs, then largely Irish, Jewish, and Italian, grew into national syndicates, fueled by the enormous profits generated by the sale of illegal drugs.<sup>275</sup> Alfred McCoy has outlined the history of the global heroin trade since World War II, when U.S. military intelligence agencies expanded their operations and allied with organized crime to finance and provide ground support for covert actions. In the early years of the Cold War, CIA officials, concerned primarily with undermining Soviet and Chinese global influence, both ignored and facilitated the production and trade of heroin by their allies.<sup>276</sup> In McCoy's view, the sudden influx of high-grade heroin into the United States at the height of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, heroin and cocaine during U.S. Afghan operations in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the Reagan administration's covert operations in Central and South America throughout the 1980s were direct results of the dual policies of formal drug prohibition, which served to channel profits and power to criminal syndicates, while providing informal state protection to criminal organizations deemed useful to U.S. security services.<sup>277</sup>

New York City was hit particularly hard by the postwar drug trade, with its Black neighborhoods receiving the worst of the effects. As Fortner observes: "After the end of World War II, international drug trafficking resumed and wreaked havoc upon African American communities in New York City. The confluence of the malignant and robust heroin trade and the depressed and racialized market for low-skilled labor caused many poverty-stricken African Americans...to sell the drug in order to make a living."<sup>278</sup> In the late 1960s, the effects of the drug trade in New York City reached unprecedented heights, leading to a surge in addiction, crime, and drug-related deaths. While white communities experienced an increase in property crime, specifically car theft, African

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<sup>272</sup> See Hinton, *War on Poverty*, ch. 4.

<sup>273</sup> See Michael Javen Fortner, "The 'Silent Majority' in Black and White: Invisibility and Imprecision in the Historiography of Mass Incarceration," *Journal of Urban History*, 40, 2, 2014: 252-282; Michael Javen Fortner, *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment*, Harvard University Press, 2015.

<sup>274</sup> See Lazonick et al., "The Unmaking of the Black Middle Class."

<sup>275</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, Lawrence Hill Books, 2002, pp. 26-31.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 1-4.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, chs. 5-9.

<sup>278</sup> Fortner, *Black Silent Majority*, p. 260.



Americans living in impoverished neighborhoods were threatened by a wave of violent crime, particularly burglary and homicide.<sup>279</sup>

The major federal response came in 1970 with the passage of the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act. The Act created the federal drug schedule and centralized previous drug prohibition policies, establishing the underlying framework for the modern era of federal drug enforcement. Among the first drugs to be classified as Schedule I substances, indicating a high potential for abuse and of no medical value, were heroin, LSD, and cannabis. Since the Act's passage, there has been much debate surrounding the reason for the inclusion of cannabis, and to a lesser extent LSD, in the Schedule I category. While former Nixon administration officials and assorted proponents of the so-called War on Drugs continue to deny its racial and political motives, a mounting body of evidence suggests that such claims are at best misinformed and at worst cynical rhetorical cover for a deliberate campaign to target antiwar and Black activists.<sup>280</sup> In addition to the ample documentary evidence of President Nixon's racist worldview, there is also an expansive literature on the efforts of government agencies to undermine Black liberation organizations during and after his tenure in the White House, including by means of disinformation campaigns, group infiltration, imprisonment, and targeted assassination, as in the case of Fred Hampton.<sup>281</sup> In 1969, for example, Nixon's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, recorded Nixon as stating: "You have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks... The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to."<sup>282</sup>

In 1971, Nixon announced the first of what would become three iterations of the modern War on Drugs. Through the allocation of federal funds to halt international imports and domestic sales and use, Nixon sought to expand the enforcement provisions of the 1970 Act in order to reduce both the supply of and demand for illegal narcotics, chief among them heroin.<sup>283</sup> The following year, on January 28, 1972, President Nixon issued Executive Order 11641, thereby signing the drug war into law.<sup>284</sup> Then, in 1973, eyeing a potential presidential run, then New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller pushed through a series of tough-on-crime statutes, now widely known as the Rockefeller drug laws, establishing draconian penalty guidelines for the sale and possession of illegal drugs.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Fortner, "The 'Silent Majority' in Black and White," p. 257.

<sup>280</sup> See John Ehrlichman quoted in Dan Baum, "Legalize it All: How to Win the War on Drugs," *Harper's Magazine*, April 2016, at <https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/>; Hilary Hanson, "Nixon aides suggest colleague was kidding about drug war being designed to target black people," *Huffington Post*, March 25, 2016, at [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/richard-nixon-drug-war-john-ehrllichman\\_n\\_56f58be6e4b0a3721819ec6](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/richard-nixon-drug-war-john-ehrllichman_n_56f58be6e4b0a3721819ec6).

<sup>281</sup> See Adam Nagourney, "In tapes, Nixon rails about Jews and Blacks," *New York Times*, December 10, 2010, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/11/us/politics/11nixon.html>. See Nelson Blackstock, *COINTELPRO: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom*, Vintage Books, 1975; Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Dissent in the United States*, South End Press, 1990, ch. 5.

<sup>282</sup> Haldeman quoted in Hinton, *War on Poverty*, p. 142.

<sup>283</sup> Richard Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control," June 17, 1971, *The American Presidency Project*, University of California Santa Barbara, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-drug-abuse-prevention-and-control>.

<sup>284</sup> Richard Nixon, "Executive Order 11641—Concentration of Law Enforcement Activities Relating to Drug Abuse," January 28, 1972, *The American Presidency Project*, University of California Santa Barbara, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11641-concentration-law-enforcement-activities-relating-drug-abuse>.

<sup>285</sup> Fortner, *Black Silent Majority*, ch. 5.

But it was not merely domestic use that concerned President Nixon. As the drug trade ravaged New York City's Black neighborhoods, heroin use among GIs in South Vietnam exploded. By the late 1950s, the Golden Triangle region in Southeast Asia had achieved self-sufficiency in the production of opium. It was not until late 1969 and early 1970, however, when Golden Triangle heroin laboratories recruited chemists from Hong Kong, that they were able to shift from the production of low-grade no. 3 heroin to the highly potent no. 4. The production of no. 4 heroin proved a strategic move for the syndicates. While a minor American presence had been established in South Vietnam as early as the mid-1950s, in 1965 the U.S. military invaded the small Southeast Asian nation on a massive scale. And by 1968 over 550,000 American troops were stationed in the country. In early 1970, an army of street peddlers, barracks' maids, and roadside dealers were deployed in a widespread sales campaign targeting American GIs. According to one study, by mid-1971 25,000 to 37,000 GIs, 10 to 15 percent of low-ranking service members, were estimated to be heroin users.<sup>286</sup>

### *The crisis of managerial capitalism*

As access to stable, well-paid jobs opened to Black workers in the 1960s and 1970s, the economic system that had created and sustained the postwar middle class was beginning to deteriorate. By the 1970s, the massive corporate conglomerates that had formed in the previous decade were performing poorly. The introduction of Japanese competition in the automobile, electrical manufacturing, and steel industries further aggravated this tenuous situation. Heavily diversified into unrelated lines of business and with corporate decision-making far removed from the production processes, many U.S. corporate executives failed to mount a serious challenge to their Japanese competitors.<sup>287</sup> The fundamental source of Japanese competitive advantage in mass-production manufacturing, however, was the integration of the skills and efforts of blue-collar workers into the organizational learning processes that enabled Japanese companies to generate high-quality products that could then capture large market shares, driving down unit costs.<sup>288</sup>

The introduction of international competition was paralleled by mounting pressure from domestic organizations. From 1965 to 1981 wildcat strikes by government and business sector workers reached levels not seen since the early 1930s.<sup>289</sup> As student radicalism grew, activists began targeting companies like Dow Chemical, Bank of America, and IBM for their involvement in war production and their support of repressive political movements. The consumer movement, launched in 1965 with Ralph Nader's book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, became in the 1970s a broad-

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<sup>286</sup> McCoy, *Politics of Heroin*, pp. 222-223, concerning heroin purity and GI addiction; Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1993, pp. 17-18.

<sup>287</sup> William Lazonick and Mary O'Sullivan, "Maximizing Shareholder Value: A New Ideology for Corporate Governance," *Economy and Society*, 29, 1, 2000: 13-35, cited at pp. 15-17; William Lazonick, "Corporate Restructuring," in Stephen Ackroyd, Rose Batt, Paul Thompson, and Pamela Tolbert, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Organization*, Oxford University Press, 2004: 577-601. See also Jack Baranson, *The Japanese Challenge to US Industry*, Lexington Books, 1981.

<sup>288</sup> Lazonick, *Competitive Advantage on the Shop Floor*; William Lazonick, "Organizational Learning and International Competition," in Jonathan Michie and John Grieve Smith, eds., *Globalization, Growth, and Governance*, Oxford University Press, 1998: 204-238.

<sup>289</sup> Cal Winslow, "Overview: The Rebellion from Below, 1965-1981," in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below in the Long 1970s*, Verso, 2010: 1-36.

based demand for corporate social responsibility, placing the health and safety needs of people ahead of an obsessive pursuit of corporate profit.<sup>290</sup>

Meanwhile, government regulation of large corporations continued to expand in scope and power.<sup>291</sup> Between 1967 and 1973, over 25 federal laws were enacted that brought into existence new federal agencies that regulated America's corporate giants.<sup>292</sup> From 1972 to 1980 the Supreme Court ruled in fourteen cases clarifying and strengthening discrimination law, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, which granted the EEOC the power to initiate lawsuits against employers. And in 1974 the EEOC and OFCC began to share data on discrimination complaints.<sup>293</sup> The 1972 extension of EEOC oversight provided direct and significant support for unskilled Black workers, helping them gain entry into clerical, craft, operative, and sales occupations in industries subject to EEOC oversight, particularly in the South.<sup>294</sup>

But the Oil Shock of 1973-74 fractured the postwar economic order. The rising cost of oil affected nearly all aspects of the American economy. Automotive transportation, home heating, and a plethora of manufacturing industries were all heavily reliant on the commodity. Between 1972 and 1974 the American stock market lost roughly half its total value, and by May 1975 unemployment had reached 9.2 percent, its highest point since 1941.<sup>295</sup> Moreover, although President Nixon's 1971 New Economic Policy had instituted a series of wage and price controls, raw agricultural products had been excluded from the measures, allowing the price of food to skyrocket.<sup>296</sup>

In the midst of the crisis many began to question the merits of the prevailing Keynesian order. Seeing an opportunity in the crisis, free-market economists centered at the University of Chicago attacked the social-welfare regulations that had been established in the New Deal era and expanded during the 1960s as a leading source of the country's economic problems. The Chicago School of economics had been established in the immediate aftermath of World War II by ideological opponents of economic planning who viewed New Deal reforms as antithetical to the functioning of a free society. Utilizing the neoclassical theory of the market economy embraced by the mainstream of the economics profession, Chicago School economists argued for the primacy of the market as the ideal form of social organization in nearly all areas of society. Finding their ideas appealing, conservative business elites channeled money to these academics in the hope that their ideas would spread, serving eventually to dismantle undesirable government regulations. But the prosperity of the postwar decades served to legitimize the prevailing orthodoxy. It was not until the system began to fail in the 1970s that extreme free-market ideology gained traction as a viable and desirable solution.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*, Grossman Publishers, 1965; Ralph Nader, Mark Green, and Joel Seligman, *Taming the Giant Corporation: How the Largest Corporations Control Our Lives*, W.W. Norton, 1976.

<sup>291</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, ch. 7.

<sup>292</sup> Michael Pertschuk, *Revolt Against Regulation: The Rise and Pause of the Consumer Movement*, University of California Press, 1982, pp. 52-53.

<sup>293</sup> Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey, *Documenting Desegregation*, pp. 118-121.

<sup>294</sup> Kenneth Y. Chay, "The Impact of Federal Civil Rights Policy on Black Economic Progress: Evidence from the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 51, 4, 1998: 608-632.

<sup>295</sup> Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies*, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 121.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>297</sup> On the historical development of neoliberal ideas and the Chicago School of economics, see Mirowski and Plehwe, *Road from Mont Pelerin*; Robert Van Horn, Philip Mirowski, and Thomas A. Stapleford, eds., *Building Chicago Economics: New Perspectives on the History of America's Most Powerful Economics Program*, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Nancy

In 1970, the leading Chicago School economist Milton Friedman published a widely read article in *The New York Times Magazine* in which he railed against demands for social justice and government regulation, arguing that the singular responsibility of corporate managers was to increase their company's profits for the benefit of shareholders.<sup>298</sup> Four years later, Michael C. Jensen and William Meckling, two Chicago School graduates employed at the University of Rochester, made good on a request by their colleague Karl Brunner to expand Friedman's article for the forthcoming conference, the Interlaken Seminar on Analysis and Ideology. In their article, "Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behavior, Agency Costs, and Ownership Structure," Jensen and Meckling argued that corporate managers were misallocating corporate resources, often for their personal benefit.<sup>299</sup> To reduce managerial inefficiency, they argued profits should be distributed to shareholders who would then allocate resources to their most efficient uses via the market mechanism. And in order to incentivize managers they proposed stock-based pay.

Jensen and Meckling's article concerns the governance structure of the firm, with a sole focus given to the relationship between senior managers and shareholders. However, the intent of the article and many thereafter directly concerned the role of the state and claims of the workforce and citizenry on corporate resources. Above all Jensen and Meckling blamed government regulation as the source of corporate "inefficiency." For example, in 1982 paper they argued, "Corporations control substantial accumulations of wealth. Politicians and bureaucrats can expand their own role in life if they can transfer rights to decide the use of that wealth from the corporations to government."<sup>300</sup> Continuing, they concluded,

Special interest groups of various sorts have joined forces with politicians to severely limit managerial decision rights. The special interest groups thereby transfer wealth from parties to the corporate contract to themselves, and politicians enhance their role in society by transferring decision rights to the government...We believe the attack on the corporation lies behind the poor performance of the stock market during the last 18 years.<sup>301</sup>

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MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*, Viking, 2017; Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, Harvard University Press, 2018; Philip Mirowski, Dieter Plehwe, and Quinn Slobodian, *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism*, Verso Books, 2020.

<sup>298</sup> For a critique of Friedman's argument, see William Lazonick, "Innovative Enterprise and Sustainable Prosperity," AIR Working Paper, January 2019, pp. 29-30, at <http://www.theairnet.org/v3/backbone/uploads/2019/03/Lazonick-IESP-20190118.pdf>; William Lazonick and Matt Hopkins, "How 'Maximizing Shareholder Value' Minimized the Strategic National Stockpile: The \$5.3 Trillion Question for Pandemic Preparedness Raised by Ventilator Fiasco," Institute for New Economic Thinking Working Paper No. 127, July 21, 2020, pp. 29-30, at <https://www.ineteconomics.org/research/research-papers/how-maximizing-shareholder-value-minimized-the-strategic-national-stockpile-the-5-3-trillion-question-for-pandemic-preparedness-raised-by-the-ventilator-fiasco>.

<sup>299</sup> Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling, "Theory of the Firm: Managerial Behavior, Agency Costs, and Ownership Structure," *Journal of Financial Economics*, 3, 4, 1976: 305-360; see Marion Fourcade and Rakesh Khurana, "The Social Trajectory of a Finance Professor and the Common Sense of Capital," *History of Political Economy*, 49, 2, 2017: 347-381, with Brunner's request to Jensen and Meckling at p. 354.

<sup>300</sup> Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling, "Reflections on the Corporation as a Social Invention," in Robert Hessen, Michael C. Jensen, M. Bruce Johnson, William H. Meckling, and Thomas Gale Moore, *Controlling the Giant Corporation: A Symposium*, University of Rochester, 1982: 82-95, quoted at p. 86.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

And in 1983, Jensen and Meckling specifically attacked “various antidiscrimination programs which limit the employment policies of organizations and require employers to discriminate against white males and in favor of blacks, Mexicans, Indians, females, the aged, and so on.”<sup>302</sup>

### ***Poor employment prospects of Vietnam veterans in the 1970s***

Until 1948, the U.S. military remained a formally segregated institution. By the time of the U.S. invasion of South Vietnam, however, formal segregation within military ranks was nearly twenty-years in the past. Yet, in the twenty-five-year period from U.S. entry into World War II until the Vietnam War, civilian involvement in military service had transformed dramatically. While in the 1940s and into the 1950s, the vast majority of Americans had direct family ties to someone who had served in the U.S. military, by the Vietnam era the proportion of the draft-age population that was actively enlisted had declined from 70 percent to 40 percent, with only 10 percent serving in Vietnam.<sup>303</sup> “Precisely when the enlisted ranks were becoming increasingly integrated by race,” writes Vietnam War historian Christian Appy, “they were becoming ever more segregated by class. The military may never have been truly representative of the general male population, but in the 1960s it was overwhelmingly the domain of the working class.”<sup>304</sup>

Through the combined effects of a class-based opportunity structure and informal racial discrimination outside and within the military, draft-age Black men were less likely to be granted medical exemptions, student deferments, or to become reservists or guardsmen. Blacks were more likely to be trained for combat, to be placed in low-level jobs, and to reenlist in order to gain a reenlistment bonus as a means of augmenting their family’s income, thereby increasing their likelihood of serious physical and mental harm or death.<sup>305</sup> A survey of enlistees in 1964, for example, found that 21 percent of whites compared to 37 percent of Blacks gave “self-advancement” as their most important reason for enlisting.<sup>306</sup> In the first years of the war, Blacks accounted for over 20 percent of all combat deaths, a figure nearly twice that of their representation in the U.S. population at the time.<sup>307</sup> Only after college deferments were reduced in 1967 did the class bias of the enlisted begin to shift to include more college graduates.<sup>308</sup>

Perhaps the most shameful example of the exploitation of poor Americans in the course of the war was Project 100,000. In 1963, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan became troubled to find that nearly half of those who failed the Armed Forces Qualification Test were from families with annual incomes of less than \$4,000 per year and at least six children. In his view, their rejection from military service was “a form of ‘de facto job discrimination’ against ‘the least mobile, least educated young men.’”<sup>309</sup> The following year, he proposed a plan by which the military would reduce its entrance standards and provide education and training for under-qualified recruits. Two

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<sup>302</sup> Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling, “Democracy in Crisis,” Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney, Australia, February 3, 1983, p. 5; For a discussion of the broader context in which shareholder value ideology was formulated see Mark S. Mizruchi and Howard Kimeldorf, “The Historical Context of Shareholder Value Capitalism,” *Political Power and Social Theory*, 17, 2005: 213-221; see also MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*; Slobodian, *Globalists*, on the intersection between neoliberalism and racism.

<sup>303</sup> Appy, *Working-Class War*, p. 18.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-31.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31

years later, as the demand for soldiers increased with the mounting invasion, Secretary of Defense McNamara created Project 100,000 to realize Moynihan's proposal, thereby increasing the draft pool and providing training and education to what he called America's "subterranean poor." In practice, however, the project proved a disaster for its recruits, 40 percent of whom were Black. Six percent of the 240,000 Project 100,000 soldiers who enlisted between 1966 and 1968 were provided assistance to raise their reading skills to a fifth-grade level, while forty percent were trained for combat. Of the 400,000 total recruits, approximately half were sent to Vietnam, with mortalities twice the rate of all U.S. forces.<sup>310</sup>

Those who returned from service were received with the paltriest benefits since the original signing of the GI Bill. As Paul Starr notes in his 1973 volume, *The Discarded Army*, a central outcome of the World War II GI Bill was the provision of scholarship money and cost-of-living expenses for poor and working-class veterans, allowing these individuals to further their education when, in the Bill's absence, they would most certainly have lacked the means to do so.<sup>311</sup> Funding for the GI Bill began to decline in the 1950s, however, and by the time of the Vietnam era, was markedly inadequate to supplement the costs of post-high-school education for underprivileged veterans. Because of the disproportionately high percentage of Blacks from economically disadvantaged families, the government's frugality served to undercut a potentially invaluable tool for educational and career advancement. As of 1973, for example, 46 percent of white veterans compared to only 25 percent of Black veterans had used their GI Bill education benefits. And in 1980 a Veterans Administration survey concluded that while college completion rates for white veterans claiming education benefits was 60.2 percent, the figure for Black veterans was only 36.4 percent.<sup>312</sup>

The economic malaise of the 1970s only aggravated the situation of returning veterans. By the early 1970s, unemployment among Black male veterans between the ages of twenty and twenty-four was estimated to be nearly 30 percent compared to less than six percent for white veterans of the same age cohort.<sup>313</sup> Looking at the civilian earnings of Vietnam veterans born between 1942 and 1952, Mark Berger and Barry Hirsch found that between 1968 and 1977 there was in fact a small earnings penalty for veterans with educational attainment at or above a high-school diploma. In particular, they found no evidence whatsoever of a gain in earnings for younger nonwhite veterans. They observe:

In contrast to the veterans of earlier periods who have realized earnings premiums relative to nonveterans, Vietnam-era veterans fared relatively poorly in the labor market throughout much of the seventies. Returning veterans not only were penalized for forgone training and lost seniority, but also reentered the civilian labor market during a period when earnings opportunities had deteriorated for baby-boom cohorts, veterans and nonveterans alike.<sup>314</sup>

An increase for Vietnam-era veterans' benefits was the subject of continual foot-dragging by Democrats and Republicans alike. In the Nixon and Ford administrations in particular GI benefits were seen as conflicting with efforts to reduce inflation. Veterans were thus in a near constant

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>311</sup> Paul Starr, *The Discarded Army: Veterans After Vietnam, The Nader Report on Vietnam Veterans and the Veterans Administration*, Charterhouse, 1973, pp. 241-242.

<sup>312</sup> Mark Boulton, *Failing Our Veterans: The GI Bill and the Vietnam Generation*, NYU Press, 2014, p. 111.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>314</sup> Mark C. Berger and Barry T. Hirsch, "The Civilian Earnings Experience of Vietnam-Era Veterans," *Journal of Human Resources*, 18, 4, 1983: 455-479, quoted at p. 476.

struggle to pressure law makers to increase their monthly subsidy in pace with the rising cost of living.<sup>315</sup> While in 1949 GI benefits amounted to 53.9 percent of monthly manufacturing wages, in 1975 they amounted to only 34.3 percent.<sup>316</sup>

### *Stagnant careers and the transition to a new economy*

The changing structure of the U.S. economy in the 1970s impacted both blue-collar and white-collar workers. Educational attainment had increased significantly for both Blacks and whites in the previous decade. But in the 1970s the demand for college-educated workers declined. Somewhat surprisingly, educated Blacks fared reasonably well in the course of the downturn due to the continued pressure from government on business for equal opportunity. However, higher-level Black workers in large corporations remained disproportionately confined to occupations dealing directly with the Black community, and as a result discrimination within the traditional lines of promotion persisted. Given the high levels of unemployment in the 1970s, white-collar Blacks were vulnerable to layoffs should these specialized departments be downsized or eliminated.<sup>317</sup>

The position of Black clerical workers was also tenuous. Using data from the National Longitudinal Surveys, Marilyn Power and Sam Rosenberg compared the career trajectories of 145 Black female clerical workers with 416 white female clerical workers between 1972 and 1980. They found that white women experienced a greater degree of occupational mobility than Black women, with white women more likely to move into managerial and administrative positions and Black women more likely to advance into technical and professional work. Black women also tended to have a lower occupational rank as clerical workers and, among those who had obtained higher-ranking clerical jobs, they were less likely to rise further, with many finding it difficult to preserve their occupational status.<sup>318</sup>

Meanwhile, in cities across the country, job opportunities for professional, technical, and administrative workers increased, while the manufacturing industries that had brought middle-class living standards to large numbers of blue-collar Black workers declined. In a 1989 paper, John Kasarda details that between 1970 and 1980 job opportunities for individuals with less than a high-school education dropped dramatically in cities such as Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, New York, St. Louis, and Washington, DC as manufacturing plants moved into surrounding suburbs. "After 1970," Kasarda states, "the bottom fell out of urban industrial demand for poorly educated blacks...particularly...in goods-producing industries."<sup>319</sup> Pointing to the acceleration of industrial decline in the late 1970s, Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison maintain: "Faced with the challenge of old plant and equipment that had been inadequately maintained or upgraded, and confronted by workers whose costs of living (and therefore wage requirements) were also being driven up by inflation, American industrial managers...resorted to truly draconian measures.

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<sup>315</sup> See Boulton, *Failing Our Veterans*, chs. 4-6.

<sup>316</sup> Peter Mattila, "G. I. Bill Benefits and Enrollments: How Did Vietnam Veterans Fare?" *Social Science Quarterly*, 59, 3, 1978: 535-545, cited at p. 544.

<sup>317</sup> See Richard B. Freeman, *The Overeducated American*, Academic Press, 1976, p. 156.

<sup>318</sup> Marilyn Power and Sam Rosenberg, "Black Female Clerical Workers: Movement toward Equality with White Women?" *Industrial Relations*, 32, 2, 1998: 223-237, cited at p. 236.

<sup>319</sup> John D. Kasarda, "Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 501, 1989: 26-47, quoted at p. 35.

Wholesale rationalization and industrial restructuring were undertaken.”<sup>320</sup> Mitchell Eggers and Douglas Massey found that between 1970 and 1980 in 59 large Standard Metropolitan Areas across the United States, the reduced availability of operative employment functioned to increase Black unemployment, in turn, increasing the poverty rate.<sup>321</sup>

Despite the employment gains that preceded the first oil crisis, the disparity between white and Black wealth remained enormous. In their analysis of wealth and assets among Black and white families in which heads of household were between the ages of 24 and 34 in 1976 and 1978, Francine Blau and John Graham found that Black families, on average, held only 18 percent of the wealth of equivalent white families. Because this disparity could not be solely attributed to income differences, they maintain that it was likely the outcome of intergenerational wealth transfers.<sup>322</sup>

From the late 1970s, however, the employment opportunities that Blacks had gained since the early 1960s came under pressure, creating a larger income gap between Black and white. Since the earliest days of the Cold War, a key component of U.S. grand strategy had been to support the economic growth and stability of foreign allies through trade imports as means of inhibiting the further spread of Marxist-Leninist regimes. Influential policy organizations and government agencies such as the National Security Council and the U.S. State Department, for example, had supported the importation of Japanese and European goods as a means of preventing “economic deterioration” that could “create fertile ground for communist subversion.”<sup>323</sup> Acting on the erroneous belief that U.S. industry was too strong to be undermined by foreign competition, U.S. policy makers thus turned a blind eye to the mounting challenge of foreign mass-produced imports.<sup>324</sup>

The manufacturing sector had long been the center of America’s union movement. In the 1970s, however, the economic and political crisis led to a severing of the postwar alliance between labor and management. Rising inflation resulted in unpredictable labor costs due to the cost-of-living-adjustments (COLA) written into union contracts. Beginning in 1977, COLA coverage in union contracts had begun to decline, particularly within apparel, primary metals, nonelectrical machinery, electrical machinery, and transportation equipment manufacturing.<sup>325</sup> The decline in COLA coverage appears to have coincided with declines in unionization rates within major manufacturing sectors. Two lengthy analyses of Current Population Survey data surveying unionization coverage within industries between 1973 and 1981 support this conclusion.<sup>326</sup> Table

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<sup>320</sup> Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*, Basic Books, 1982, p. 35; see generally, chs. 2-3.

<sup>321</sup> Mitchell L. Eggers and Douglas S. Massey, “A Longitudinal Analysis of Urban Poverty: Blacks in U.S. Metropolitan Areas Between 1970 and 1980,” *Social Science Research*, 21, 1992: 175-203

<sup>322</sup> Francine D. Blau and John W. Graham, “Black-White Differences in Wealth and Asset Composition,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 105, 2, 1990: 321-339.

<sup>323</sup> Quoted in Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, p. 7

<sup>324</sup> William Lazonick, “Labor in the Twenty-First Century: The Top 0.1% and the Disappearing Middle Class,” in Christian E. Weller, ed., *Inequality, Uncertainty, and Opportunity: The Varied and Growing Role of Finance in Labor Relations*, Cornell University Press, 2015: 143-192; Lazonick et al., “The Unmaking of the Black Middle Class.”

<sup>325</sup> Stuart E. Weiner, “Union COLA’s on the Decline,” *Economic Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, 71, June, 1986: 10-25, cited at p. 16

<sup>326</sup> See Edward C. Kokkelenberg and Donna R. Sockwell, “Union Membership in the United States, 1973-1981,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 38, 4, 1985: 497-543; William T. Dickens and Jonathan S. Leonard, “Structural Changes in Unionization: 1973-1981,” NBER Working Paper Series, Working Paper No. 1882, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, April 1986.



III.19 shows three-year moving averages calculated by Edward Kokkelenberg and Donna Sockwell of the percentage of unionized workers in selected industries.

**Table III.19. Three-year moving averages of percent unionization in selected industries, 1974-1980**

| Industry    | Census Sub-Industry Classification         | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 |
|-------------|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Steel       | Blast Furnace, Steel Works, Rolling Mills  | 73.0 | 72.2 | 71.8 | 71.2 | 69.9 | 68.9 | 69.2 |
|             | Other Primary Iron and Steel               | 56.8 | 56.2 | 55.2 | 55.2 | 57.0 | 57.6 | 58.5 |
| Auto        | Motor Vehicles and Motor Vehicle Equipment | 71.9 | 71.8 | 72.0 | 71.2 | 69.3 | 67.1 | 66.0 |
| Electronics | Radio, T.V., and Communication Equipment   | 38.2 | 36.2 | 35.9 | 34.2 | 33.5 | 31.8 | 32.6 |
|             | Electrical Machinery Equipment             | 33.1 | 32.8 | 30.8 | 29.6 | 28.2 | 26.7 | 25.7 |
|             | Office and Accounting Machines             | 22.3 | 19.4 | 12.6 | 11.9 | 13.3 | 12.1 | 12.2 |
|             | Electronic Computing Equipment             | 5.6  | 6.4  | 7.1  | 6.6  | 6.0  | 6.0  | 6.3  |
|             | Household Appliances                       | 50.7 | 51.1 | 50.5 | 51.3 | 50.8 | 50.8 | 49.7 |
| Apparel     | Apparel and Accessories                    | 36.2 | 33.7 | 31.8 | 30.0 | 30.7 | 29.7 | 29.1 |
| Textiles    | Miscellaneous Fabricated Textiles          | 29.5 | 28.0 | 24.2 | 21.3 | 23.9 | 24.2 | 27.7 |
|             | Miscellaneous Textile Mill Products        | 39.5 | 34.8 | 37.7 | 27.7 | 24.8 | 21.5 | 23.0 |
|             | Yarn, Thread, and Fabric Mills             | 11.8 | 10.9 | 8.1  | 7.2  | 7.2  | 9.2  | 10.4 |
|             | Dyeing and Finishing Textiles              | 32.9 | 28.1 | 32.3 | 28.0 | 29.1 | 29.5 | 30.3 |
|             | Knitting Mills                             | 15.5 | 14.5 | 11.8 | 12.6 | 13.0 | 15.9 | 15.5 |

Source: Kokkelenberg and Sockwell, "Union Membership," pp. 524-526, Table 3

Table III.20 shows peak employment years for male and female Black operatives in the apparel, textile, automobile, electrical, and steel industries in EEO-1 reporting firms. All peak years occurred in a six-year period between 1973 and 1979. As we detail in our next working paper of this series,<sup>327</sup> in the early 1980s, manufacturing workers overall, and Black workers in particular, would undergo a period of unprecedented job loss brought on by a combination of international competition and the deregulation of financial markets by Reagan administration officials.

<sup>327</sup> Lazonick et al., "The Unmaking of the Black Middle Class." For a recent discussion of this reversal from upward to downward socioeconomic mobility that pays no attention to changes in corporate employment relations and Black employment opportunity, see Robert D. Putnam with Shaylyn Romney Garrett, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, Simon & Schuster, 2020; Shaylyn Romney Garrett and Robert D. Putnam, "Why did racial progress stall in America?" *New York Times*, December 4, 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/opinion/race-american-history.html>.

**Table III.20. Peak Black operative in selected industries by gender, 1973-1979**

| <b>Industry</b>          |        | <b>1973</b> | <b>1974</b> | <b>1975</b> | <b>1976</b> | <b>1977</b> | <b>1978</b> | <b>1979</b> |
|--------------------------|--------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Apparel                  |        |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|                          | Total  | 105,150     | NA          | 93,915      | NA          | NA          | 104,562     | 103,037     |
|                          | Male   | 48,533      | NA          | 42,940      | NA          | NA          | 45,291      | 45,104      |
|                          | Female | 56,617      | NA          | 50,975      | NA          | NA          | 59,271      | 57,933      |
| Textiles                 |        |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|                          | Total  | 64,830      | NA          | 58,548      | NA          | NA          | 76,227      | 68,894      |
|                          | Male   | 7,971       | NA          | 5,722       | NA          | NA          | 7,183       | 6,145       |
|                          | Female | 56,859      | NA          | 52,826      | NA          | NA          | 69,044      | 62,747      |
| Automobile               |        |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|                          | Total  | 541,366     | NA          | 554,322     | NA          | NA          | 628,083     | 593,524     |
|                          | Male   | 480,009     | NA          | 474,123     | NA          | NA          | 515,441     | 476,428     |
|                          | Female | 61,357      | NA          | 80,199      | NA          | NA          | 112,642     | 117,076     |
| Electrical Manufacturing |        |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|                          | Total  | 94,386      | NA          | 84,167      | NA          | NA          | 90,639      | 114,074     |
|                          | Male   | 41,141      | NA          | 31,729      | NA          | NA          | 32,720      | 48,077      |
|                          | Female | 53,245      | NA          | 52,438      | NA          | NA          | 57,919      | 65,997      |
| Steel                    |        |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|                          | Total  | 185,973     | NA          | 198,579     | NA          | NA          | 183,273     | 175,438     |
|                          | Male   | 181,859     | NA          | 194,288     | NA          | NA          | 176,756     | 166,254     |
|                          | Female | 4,114       | NA          | 4,291       | NA          | NA          | 6,517       | 9,174       |

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry (EEO-1), 1973-1979*, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Most of these changes predated Reagan, with the turmoil of the 1970s preparing the way for his attack on the labor movement. It was under the Carter administration that the tensions between management and labor had begun to boil over. In 1978, a second major oil crisis further exacerbated these tensions. And on July 17 of that year, then president of the UAW, Douglas Fraser, resigned from the Carter administration’s Labor-Management Group, citing a “one-sided class war” on the part of corporate executives.<sup>328</sup>

Indeed, drawing on a complex of historical and documentary sources, Lane Windham has shown how, in the aftermath of the social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, African Americans and women, having gained first-time access to gainful and stable blue-collar employment, sought to exercise their new status to gain union representation in precisely the manner that the white males of the New Deal coalition and postwar era had done before them. Unlike white males of the previous generation, however, women and minorities faced a confluence of destabilizing economic and political developments that ultimately shifted the balance of power further in the direction of employers, not vice versa.<sup>329</sup>

Under the strain of renewed global competition and in the presence of an expanding deregulatory regime, employers undertook a relentless campaign of union-busting tactics, including the purging of union-supporters from employment rolls, the hiring of temporary and contract workers, and the mass offshoring of jobs. Windham shows how, during the 1970s, the door to union representation that had been closed for women and minorities opened as an entranceway to the postwar U.S.

<sup>328</sup> Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, pp. 189-190; see also Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*, Verso, 1988, ch. 7.

<sup>329</sup> Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor’s Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide*, University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

corporate economy that had been and then closed once more in their faces as the power of workers disappeared. In Windham’s assessment, the 1970s marked nothing less than “the birth of a new economic divide.”<sup>330</sup>

Observing the trajectory of upward socioeconomic mobility of white Americans in the post-World War II decades, it was reasonable to expect that in the last decades of the twentieth century Black households would also, in turn, experience upward intergenerational mobility. But as we now know—and as we document in detail in two forthcoming INET working papers—from the 1980s in the United States, blue-collar employment increasingly provided a precarious pinnacle for a downwardly mobile population rather than a platform for a more secure and rewarding future.

In particular, in our forthcoming working papers, we analyze three transformations in employment relations—which we call rationalization, marketization, and globalization<sup>331</sup>—that unfolded from the 1980s, with each change eroding channels of individual and intergenerational employment mobility that had provided pathways to the “American dream.” Rationalization entailed permanent plant closings, often in the face of superior manufacturing capabilities, emanating especially from Japan. Marketization meant the end of the career-with-one-company employment norm as, for white-collar employees, “New Economy” companies valued a highly educated, younger labor force with open-system capabilities over career employees with decades of corporation-specific experience. Marketization also increasingly involved outsourcing manufacturing activities to lower-wage firms. Globalization saw U.S. companies access a worldwide labor force of highly educated personnel, while offshoring their outsourced production jobs to emerging economies in which labor costs were low but where broad-based K-12 educational investments in the labor force had been made.

Over the decades, these changes in employment relations have had a devastating impact on American blue-collar workers, whatever their race or ethnicity. But as these transformations gained force in the 1980s, it was Blacks who were most vulnerable, in large part because of their dependence on employment as blue-collar workers in mass-production industries in which job losses were most prevalent and in which they tended to be “last hired, first fired.” For the “American dream” to remain intact in the 1980s and beyond, U.S. government agencies and major business corporations needed to collaborate to “build better”—to borrow part of President-elect Joe Biden’s campaign slogan—through a commitment to supporting upward mobility, based on affordable higher education and a new employment system of lifelong learning.

Instead, as work disappeared, to echo William Julius Wilson,<sup>332</sup> what Blacks found awaiting them were dead-end, low-paid service sector jobs, while the expansion of the War on Drugs helped to enable the descent from mass production to mass incarceration. The downward mobility of blue-collar Blacks from the 1980s, with declining life expectancy toward the end of the decade, would increasingly become the fate of blue-collar whites, as government and business failed them too. But compared to the heroin and crack epidemics of the earlier decades during which Blacks were stigmatized and disproportionately jailed as the most visible participants in the distribution and consumption of illicit drugs, the subsequent opioid crisis and the resulting surge in “deaths of despair,” afflicting mainly whites, has been met with a far more empathic response from law

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>331</sup> See Lazonick, “Labor in the Twenty-First Century.”

<sup>332</sup> William Julius Wilson, “When Work Disappears,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 111, 4, 1996-1997: 567-595.

enforcement.<sup>333</sup> More than that, fifty years after the creation of the EEOC, the shared fate of downward socioeconomic mobility of large portions of the white and Black populations would feed into a national racial divide with dire political as well as economic consequences.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics*, Princeton University Press, 2016, chs. 6-7; Shannon M. Monnat, “The Contributions of Socioeconomic and Opioid Supply Factors to Geographic Variation in U.S. Drug Mortality Rates,” Institute for New Economic Thinking Working Paper No. 87, January 2019, at <https://www.ineteconomics.org/research/research-papers/opioid-supply-mortality-rates>; Julie Netherland and Helena B. Hansen, “The War on Drugs that Wasn’t: Wasted Whiteness, ‘Dirty Doctors,’ and Race in Media Coverage of Prescription Opioid Misuse,” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 40, 2016: 664-686; Sean E. Goodison, Michael J. D. Vermeer, Jeremy D. Barnum, Dulani Woods, and Brian A. Jackson, “Law Enforcement Efforts to Fight the Opioid Crisis Convening Police Leaders, Multidisciplinary Partners, and Researchers to Identify Promising Practices and to Inform a Research Agenda,” Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative, RAND Corporation, 2019, at [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3064.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3064.html).

<sup>334</sup> Shannon Monnat and David L. Brown, “How Despair Helped Drive Trump to Victory,” Institute for New Economic Thinking, November 16, 2017, at <https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/how-despair-helped-drive-trump-victory>

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