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"You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing With Your Wife": Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II

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There were a lot of women workers on board, mostly white. Whenever I passed the white women looked at me, some curiously, some coyly, some with open hostility. Some just stared with blank hard eyes. Few ever moved aside to let me pass. . . . Now and then some of the young white women gave me an opening to make a pass, but I’d never made one: at first because the coloured workers seemed as intent on protecting the white women from the coloured men as the white men were, probably because they wanted to prove to the white folks they could work with white women without trying to make them . . .

—Bob Jones in Chester Himes, If He Hollers Let Him Go, 1945

RACIALIZED BODIES DOMINATE CHESTER HIMES’ HOMEFRONT NOVEL of social rage just as they provided a terrain of struggle in the wartime industry that forms its setting.1 Obsessed with manhood and color, protagonist Bob Jones chafes under cultural notions of gender and race. This angry young African American migrant from Cleveland is a leaderman at a Los Angeles shipyard. Yet whites constantly undermine his authority as a supervisor. A white woman secretary keeps his blueprints locked away. A white Georgian foreman refuses to release a white woman tacker to Jones’s all-black crew. Madge, “a peroxide blonde with a large-featured, overly made-up face” from Texas, taunts him through her whiteness, sure that white men “had to protect her

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from black rapists.”2 Her insulting refusal to work for Jones (she calls him “nigger”) provokes him to curse her (“screw you then, you cracker bitch!”), leading to his demotion.3

At the novel’s climax, Madge locks Jones into a cabin berth, crying “rape” when inspectors discover them. Though rejecting the sexual overtures of this southern temptress, he becomes ensnared anyway in the rape-lynching complex that has colonized his mind as well as the imagination of white co-workers.4 The novel ends when Madge withdraws her charge of rape—“a patriotic gesture comparable only to the heroism of men in battle,” the shipyard President explains, that would avoid the racial conflict ever threatening to disrupt industrial output.5 Jones is forced to enter the army, a no-choice plea bargain for possessing a concealed gun.

Jones views himself trapped by forces of whiteness blocking his dream “to be accepted as a man—without ambition, without distinction, either of race, creed, or colour. . . without any other identifying characteristics but weight, height, and gender.”6 This was the promise of federal employment policy during the war: an executive order against discrimination passionately embraced by African Americans.7 The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice (FEPC) omitted sex as a covered category, sharing the mode of thought expressed by Jones whose listing of acceptable “identifying characteristics” naturalizes gender even as he questions the significance of racial difference. In keeping with the cultural pluralism of American social science, Jones holds contradictory positions. On the one hand, race is nothing but biology, so unimportant when it comes to the rights of citizenship. On the other hand, African Americans possess a culture and history that generates both racial pride and victimization. So race matters most of all.8

Caught in fantasies of revenge, marking his manhood through violence, Jones vacillates over accepting the integrationist accommodation proposed by his light-skinned and “better class” social worker girlfriend. He feels betrayed by the American creed of “liberty and justice and equality,”9 the set of national ideals upon which A. Philip Randolph based black demands for defense jobs and the end of the Jim Crow army, which Gunnar Myrdal placed at the center of The American Dilemma.10 Blackness negates Jones’s masculinity, challenged on the highways and in the ship’s hole, symbolized by the workman’s overalls and hardhat that “made me feel rugged, bigger than the average citizen,
stronger than a white-collar worker—stronger even than an executive.” Difference mocks African American male claims to citizenship—claims that Himes associates with the masculine itself.

*If He Hollers Let Him Go* echoes the shopfloor and sidewalk conflict experienced by working people in the crowded production centers of the second World War. It dramatizes the pysical hurt among African American men that fatter wartime paychecks failed to assure. “Fair” employment—that is, without discrimination—did not necessarily bring dignity. It was not the same as “equal” employment—similar job placements—in a society still burdened by legalized segregation and cultural constructions that differentiated people by their race and gender. Racialized understandings of manhood and womanhood—of the black male rapist, the pure white female, and the uncleanly black woman—provided an arena for the wartime debate over fair employment, one connected to larger structures of power and authority.

Central to this story are the ways that the specter of social equality haunted the federal government’s wartime mobilization. With the end of reconstruction and the reimposition of white rule in the former Confederacy, sexualized language served as a powerful means to sustain white supremacy. Defenders of lynching deployed it, justifying mob violence in defense of white female purity. Southern historians have noted, as Nell Irvin Painter contends, that “sex was the whip that white supremacists used to reinforce white solidarity.” This discourse relied upon fears of despoliation and tarnishment; its talk of miscegenation suggested that whites and blacks belonged to different species. Too often, white women themselves embraced their role as signifiers of purity, posing actual as well as symbolic obstacles to interracial action at the ballot box and on the job. Often presented through the question, “Would you want your daughter to marry a ‘Negro?’” social equality for its distractors represented the pollution of white bodies. It meant a lessening of white male ability to control access to women, especially their own, a control that justified disenfranchisement and segregation.

With the migration of southerners of both races out of the region, this system of knowing reinforced racial hierarchies derived from the processes of working-class formation that had elevated “white” over “black.” Wartime patriotism offered an avenue for eastern and southern European ethnics to become American; like the Irish before them, part of that process involved becoming white and differentiating themselves from African Americans. Moreover, the politics of total war in the
1940s, which gave untold powers to the federal government, threatened racial separation and states’ rights, setting the stage for political assaults against fair employment in terms of the bodily intimacy dreaded by segments of white America. Rhetorical assaults became physical. Shipyard diarist Katherine Archibald described this attitude on the part of white workers: “[t]he ancient fear of despoliation of women of the privileged race by men of inferior blood, which has played so large a part in the establishment and elaboration of caste systems in all societies, prevailed.”

The field investigations and complaints of discrimination to the FEPC during the war, like Archibald’s participant enthnology and Himes’s imaginative novel, serve as lenses into the complex dynamics of race and gender within class society. Though scholars often attempt to disaggregate the working of “race” from “gender,” these constructions have existed in conjunction with one another to transform profoundly the ways that each works alone. Insight into “the inseparable unity of race and gender” derives from black women’s studies which long has recognized the racial construction of gender, class, and sexuality. But this paradigmatic definition of one category of anaysis in terms of the others is even more interactive than usually noted. Race itself is gendered, as historian Tessie Liu contends; it “functions through controlling sexuality and sexual behavior.” Constructed through gendered representations, race in turn reconstructs gender identities and class hierarchies. The concept of racialized gender reflects this interaction. It not only assumes differences based on race among women and men and differences based on gender among groups defined by race, ethnicity, or nationhood. It further stands as “a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated,” to extend the insight that historian Joan Scott brought to discussions of gender, deriving its meaning from political struggle and in turn offering a language through which politics operates and people comprehend their lives.

Racialized notions of manhood and womanhood and white masculine power lay behind what white southern writer Lillian Smith understood as the psycho-sexual underpinnings of segregation. “Sex moves arm in arm with the concept of segregation,” Smith argued. “The secret history of race relations in the South, the fears and the dreads, are tied up with the secret habits of southerners,” especially the white man’s attempt to recapture the pleasures associated with “his ‘mammy.’” Those who defended segregation and dreaded social
equality also associated sexuality, bodies, and race. Southern newspapers responded to FEPC hearings with charges that the goal was “to see that Negroes are put in all sorts of positions where they, as white-collar workers, may associate with white men and women who work in similar capacities, and thus to break down social barriers.” Southern politicians, like Birmingham’s Eugene “Bull” Connor, warned President Roosevelt that “any effort now by any person connected with the federal government officially, or socially to destroy segregation and bring about amalgamation of the races will hinder the Southland in its war efforts.”

Bodies stood as both physical and symbolic sites. As philosopher Susan Bordo reminds us, the mind-body dualism that associates women with bodies developed along with racist ideology that turned the non-European into a savage or primitive, “sexually animalistic, and indeed more bodily than the white ‘races.’” As a legacy of enslavement, such bodies, particularly of black women, became “property, to be ‘taken’ and used at will . . . denied even the dignity accorded a wild animal; its status approaches that of mere matter, thing-hood.” Indeed, colonial laws first defined the status of slave through differentiating African from English women. Such ideologies have the impact, as theorist Iris Marion Young has explained, of defining a group as the other, known by bodily characteristics considered “as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated, or sick.” Endemic to a group’s “experience of racial oppression,” Young contends, is being designated “as having ugly bodies, and being feared, avoided, or hated on that account.”

During World War II, African Americans sought equality of treatment, the end of legal segregation and unequal facilities, an integrated army, and better paying defense jobs. But they struggled to be heard against a discourse that displaced demands for economic equity into openings for sexual intimacy. This article deviates from the dominant economistic reading of industrial conflict during the second World War by focusing on what cultural theorist Robyn Wiegman has called “the transformation of the economic into the sexual” through analysis of confrontations sparked by bodily closeness on shopfloors, streetcars, and other public spaces. Some of these involved white women who refused to share toilet and dressing facilities with black ones; some were rank and file workers defying their unions; employer strategies to divide the laboring force encouraged others. In doing so, it begins to
study white resistance to the African American quest for equality by moving from the workplace through the neighborhood to confront “fears of sexual mixing and its consequences.”

Though bound by the rules of segregation, blacks and whites in the South had lived in closer proximity than elsewhere in the nation. Many white Northerners and Westerners had little contact with African Americans. Wartime population shifts and labor needs pierced such boundaries and generated interaction, especially in such expanded production centers as Los Angeles, California’s East Bay, and Detroit, precisely at a time when accelerated entrance of white women into factories also challenged women’s and men’s proper places. Still, as subordinate workers, wives, canteen hostesses, and other objects of the male gaze, white and black women often stood as bodies through which black as well as white men constructed their own masculinity.

In emphasizing the connections among sexuality, race, and gender, this portrait leaves to others the task of disaggregating worker and management responses by region, union, and industry. Instead, it relies on critical race and gender theory, cultural analysis, and social history to move beyond the terms of the existing scholarly debate over the relationship between race and class. That debate often treats gender as separate, sometimes parallel, but rarely central to understanding the nexus between race and class, themselves both engendered identities and categories of analysis.

The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice

Through Executive Order 8802, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the FEPC in June 1941 to end discrimination in employment related to the war effort. FEPC targeted African Americans and other racial minorities, Jews and other religious minorities, and non-citizens or those not of United States nationality. However, African Americans filed more than 90 percent of the complaints. FEPC did not include women as a separate category, only as members of other, covered groups. A subsequent Executive Order, 9346, reconstituted the Committee as an independent agency in May 1943 under the Office of Emergency Management; this occurred after an earlier transfer of FEPC to the War Manpower Commission (WMC) in 1942.

FEPC was a weak agency; it worked by complaint only and could not impose sanctions or file its own court cases. It held public and
private hearings, attempting to jawbone adherence to the Presidential order. It often failed to upgrade the jobs of black workers or even get them hired. But its dedicated biracial staff of administrators and field officers tirelessly investigated business, unions, the military, and government, including the Federal Employment Service, creatively bringing recalcitrants to the attention of agencies that had enforcement teeth. Thus the Atlanta Journal complained in 1944, “So adroit are its maneuvers that it is usually out of the picture when any trouble it has started is full-blown. It calls on other governmental agencies to enforce its decrees and whip dissenters in line.” In actuality, the WMC and other agencies usually placed a higher priority on wartime efficiency over non-discrimination, fearing the consequences of white walkouts in protest over black hires. Labor shortages, rather than the FEPC, probably accounted for the tripling of the number of African Americans in war work to 8 percent of the entire workforce. FEPC was less a powerful remedy than a symbolic threat to the racial structure of employment. For it legitimatized black demands and emboldened protest.

Throughout its lifetime (1941–1946), the FEPC faced challenges from opponents. Southern Democrats filibustered its appropriations and blocked legislation to create a permanent agency; conservative northern Republicans agreed that it undermined “freedom of contract,” linking government regulation of industry with government interference with personal association. A Mississippi congressman expressed this connection when he declared: “the relation between the employer and the employee is intimate”; one from Louisiana spoke of forcing “employers of the Nation, particularly in the South, to intermix the Negro along with his white employees.”

These congressmen fought against the agency as an attempt to “saddle social equality upon Dixie,” as the African American Pittsburgh Courier described Southern white opinion. Senator Richard Russell (D-Georgia) in 1946 attacked FEPC as a “measure . . . which would have a tendency to bring about social equality and intermingling and amalgamation of the races.” A Texas Democratic candidate for Congress condemned the agency for having 60 percent of its personnel as “negroes. Some of the black executives have white women for secretaries,” he charged. Others lamblasted FEPC for making white and black women use the same bathrooms. Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge charged “Negroes of the North, finding a lot of craven politicians amenable to their desires, have succeeded in creating a
condition under which white and colored persons are mixed indiscrimi-
nately in various departments at Washington.” FEPC was unsettling the
natural order of things, further abetting a social liberalism symbolized
by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s support for civil rights.34

This defensiveness against “social equality” suggests how wartime
conditions threatened the racialized gendered regime, in part by under-
mining the southern system of cheap labor. Black migration to war
production centers cut the supply of field workers, but so too did money
sent home from defense work and the military. Black women became
less dependent on field work just as the greater options of black men led
them to demand more control over tenancy. Labor shortages meant that
white farm wives took to the fields during harvest time. Black women
also left domestic service, which led to rumors of “Eleanor Clubs” or
“Disappointment Clubs” with the “motto ‘A white woman in every
kitchen by Christmas.’” Such clubs would allow members “to ‘get even’
with their former white employers for past grievances.”35

During a time when the behavior of African American soldiers—
their courage in combat and their dating of British, Australian, and
other “white” women—further upset inherited expectations, the
homefront also offered possibilities for disruption and protest, spaces to
contest sexualized representations of African Americans and challenge
the use of social equality as a barrier to economic equality.36 The
“Double Victory” campaign, after all, connected battlefront and
homefront, defeat of the Nazis with victory against Jim Crow.37

The Homefront as a Site of Intimacy

Men as well as women had their bodies racialized in the contest over
fair employment during World War II. Congressional investigation of
the “checkerboarding” of the merchant marine, or sending to sea
racially mixed crews, illuminates how the discourse of social equality
justified job discrimination. In some workplaces, like mines, black and
white men labored beside each other, but ships were particular places of
intimacy, with homosocial—if not homoerotic—undertones.38 Secre-
tary of the Navy Frank Knox, who refused to use black men for
anything other than mess crews, rejected the idea that “Negro and white
sailors should be compelled to live together.”39 The Seafarers’ Interna-
tional Union admitted black members, but complained to a special
investigative committee under the conservative Virginia Democrat
Howard W. Smith that the War Shipping Administration (WSA) deliberately sent out black and white men for the same ships. This bypassed the union’s “rotary hiring hall system,” which union spokes-
men called, “fair and equitable in every way, which enables whites to share ships’ quarters with whites and Negroes with Negroes.” The union claimed equal wages, working conditions, and membership rights for African Americans, but black workers suffered from occupa-
tional segregation by race and held lesser paying jobs in the Steward’s Department. Because their task was to cook and serve food, they did not eat with the rest of the crew.40

Yet the union charged the WSA with

misrepresenting or concealing the facts when it recruits boys from American homes and then tries to compel them to depart abruptly from old-time family traditions to share eating and sleeping quarters on American ships with members of another race, particularly when such a condition is not at all necessary and is disruptive of rather than helpful to the war effort.41

Or as one congressional opponent of the FEPC put it, “human nature” meant that white men “have set ideas as to how they want to sleep or how they want to live. They haven’t any prejudice against the colored men.”42 In this tale, not only did racial separation (in the form of separate but equal) aid the war by maintaining full efficiency, but “family,” “tradition,” and “American” stood apart from men of African descent. Economic power, as well as social authority, was at stake.

All parties to the seafarers’ dispute felt, as another congressman explained, “the colored men ought to have the right to work just like the white man.”43 Defenders of the union claimed equality of opportunity, while asserting that the circumstances of shiplife determined which men went to which ship. Administration officials clashed with congressmen over this interpretation of “equality.” One Assistant Deputy Administra-
tor of the WSA dodged inquiries over whether the FEPC executive orders “require[d] in any way the social intermingling of different races” by arguing that FEPC sought “full manpower utilization,” but felt unable to answer if there was “any emphasis at all . . . on social equality.” However, the Atlantic Coast Regional Representative admitted that “the order does not require” social intermingling, though “full utilization of manpower” included “employment” which took place “aboard ship” as well as “ashore” and “in the Government.” Men who work on ships lived on them at the same time. Congressional inquisitors
pushed him to admit that such employment would lead to social
equality. In this case, equal opportunity and "social intermingling"
merged into each other. But Representative Claire Hoffman (R-Mich.)
was unsatisfied that social equality was anything but another name for
intermarriage. A hearing about men on ship degenerated into questions
about whether men and women of different races could choose to marry
each other. The (il)logic became: men on ships lead to miscegenation.44

Rumors of social equality countered African American assertiveness.
During the Spring of 1944 in Dallas, "a large group of Negroes," whose
votes had ushered in the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) at
their plant, became dissatisfied with both the union contract and the
pace of War Labor Board (WLB) deliberations over an equal pay
complaint. They went to the WLB offices, "acting in their own
behalf"—"an extraordinary occurrence" in Texas, according to the
FEPC regional director. They protested in a context in which "rumors,
the dissemination of leaflets, news articles tending to rile up the
people" poisoned relations between white and black workers. Employ-
ees heard "that a Negro worker passed a note to a white woman worker
in which he asked her to meet him after work." White workers could
read the leaflet, "Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Negro?"
which had "been spot dropped all over Texas." The FEPC sought to
defuse tensions prior to the July Democratic National Convention, but
the presence of black men and white women at the same workplaces
offered kindling to those who desired to enflame white racial interests
in the face of black economic demands.45

Senator Theodore Bilbo (D-Miss.) was such a flame thrower. A
segregationist who had planned with some black nationalists to remove
African Americans to Liberia, Bilbo fumed against blacks "forc[ing]
the white employees in the departments in Washington to eat with them
and use the same toilet facilities." "The most disgusting thing in
Washington life," he charged, "is to see nice sweet girls from North
Dakota being forced to use the same stools and toilets used by the
Negroes who come from the slums of Washington, a large percentage
of them affected by Negro diseases." The FEPC, he argued,

is not intended to do away with discrimination. It is a smooth, deliberate plan,
and scheme to integrate the Negro race into the life of the American laboring
world. It is one step in the great drive for social equality, social commingling,
social intermingling, intermarriage—interbreeding, if you please!46
A Louisiana congressman similarly condemned a CIO Canteen for servicemen in the nation’s capital because women of both races served as hostesses. "How can anyone," he declared, ‘be a party to encouraging white girls into the arms of Negro soldiers at a canteen dance while singing ‘Let Me Call You Sweetheart’?"47

Fear of bodily closeness was real. It sparked workplace confrontations that interrupted war production and brought charges of discrimination before the FEPC. Shortages of housing and transportation intensified gender mixing among the races in public spaces as well as workplaces. As one white bus rider in Alabama complained,

‘you have paid your fare to be transported to work, only to have some negro hanging over you’ with ‘his body touching you from time to time’—or worse, ‘hanging over the white women and girls.”48

Rumors of black “‘bumpers’ and ‘pushers’ clubs” circulated among whites in Detroit and other cities, some spread by “an upper-middle class white group.”49 A Los Angeles shipfitter recorded a conversation with his AFL representative who justified a “Negro Auxiliary” by reminding him, “Our unions give social affairs. You wouldn’t want one of ‘em dancing with your wife, would you.”50

A schism actually developed “over the question of interracial social functions” at the P. R. Mallory Plant in Indianapolis in late 1944 when Local 1005 of the United Electrical Workers (UE-CIO) planned a union dance. The company personnel director feared that “such functions” would “crystallize the sentiments of a good many white workers, not only against mixed social gatherings, but also against the Negro workers as a whole” and thus “jeopardise the continued success of the Mallory upgrading program for Negro workers.” As with Communist unionists at other UE plants, here militant support of integration challenged the practices of the white workforce, in this case one more politically and socially conservative than the International.51 But not all black workers lobbied for integration; most had “refrained from attending, by tacit agreement,” previous dances. The FEPC investigator noted:

Although its members have voiced very little opposition to the employment and upgrading of Negroes, and there has been surprisingly little racial friction in work situations, they have not yet reached the stage where they can face the social equality bugaboo with equanimity. They tend to feel that only people with communistic leanings openly favor such equality."52
White local union officers sought to “maneuver” both the company personnel manager and black members of the union bargaining committee to sabotage interracial dances; they connected “social equality” to communists and both to the loss of control over their local to a more radical, distant International. This association they shared with southern opponents of FEPC, who later would condemn the CIO’s “Operation Dixie” by linking social equality, trade unionism, and communism. In contrast, the FEPC and the International representative agreed that “no CIO local can put itself in the position of favoring segregation in any form,” and thus rejected either racially separate meetings to determine the make-up of social functions or segregated functions themselves. Despite a postponed union dance and separate company Christmas parties, P. R. Mallory continued to employ black workers, hiring about 500 black women (out of 800 women) in early January for a new battery division.

From management’s perspective, forced integration might disrupt shopfloor routines. From that of labor militants, lack of integration reinforced divisions within the union that would curtail a solidarity which might be needed against the company. By separating themselves socially, workers undermined the equality promised by the CIO and the quest for a more democratic America. Though the CIO tried to promote a “culture of unity” through dances and other social events, as historian Lisabeth Cohen has argued, rank and file unionists did not necessarily include African Americans in that culture. Black social scientists St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton discovered resistance even in the late 1930s to “social extensions of economic contact.” As “an Italian president of a steel workers’ women’s auxiliary” informed “another white woman”:

> My husband and I have said to each other, you give them a foot and they’ll take a yard. If you ask them to your dances they’ll come and they don’t just dance with each other but some of them will try to dance with white people. If they do, the white women will just stop going to the dances.

> Though recognizing African Americans as fellow “workers” and “that, really, they are human,” she felt guilty—“not liberal enough”—for thinking “there’s something about colored men that just makes you afraid. I don’t know what it is, but you have a certain fear . . . there’s something about them—that black skin.” Black women, however, evoked in her no comparable fears. Whites focused on the black body,
describing black coworkers in terms of neatness, cleanliness, voice pitch, overall deportment, and physical proximity to their own bodies.56

"Race mixing," when it involved black men and white women, could lead to violence. In the overcrowded Bay Area, newspapers carried "a lurid story of a Green Glove Rapist," wrongly presumed to be black.57 A local liberal received "an anonymous phone call ... that a white woman had been attacked in West Springfield [Massachusetts], which should be evidence that the Jamaicans were harmful" prior to the arrival of such migrant workers there.58 Talk of rape sparked a riot in Beaumont, Texas.59 Radio reports that "a Negro had attempted to rape a white girl on a bus, and had been caught and beaten up by some white men" fanned the Detroit race riot on 20 June 1943, a few days after the Beaumont confrontation. For their part, African Americans had heard "that some white man—a Southerner, of course—had thrown a negro woman and her baby off the Belle Isle bridge."60

The Detroit riot probably began on the contested space of public transportation, the scene of other incidents of self-assertion among African Americans and white brutality against blacks.61 A fight started on a bus traveling from the Belle Island Park to Detroit that was crowded "with sailors, unescorted white girls (mostly factory workers on a holiday) and young negro men." According to a federal government report, racial overcrowding and female sexuality touched off the melee:

One of the girls, the story goes, was a bit high; all were singing. Finally the tipsy girl jumped up and yelled, "I want to dance." A Negro boy sitting nearby jumped up, grabbed her, and started to dance with her, provoking no objection from the girl. This incensed the sailors. They made the driver stop the bus, and, according to the story, pulled the Negro out and heaved him over the bridge railing into the water, about one hundred feet below.62

White men sought to reassert control over their women by maintaining the color line.

In particular, white servicemen sought to defend their masculinity, challenged in their minds by black men's new public assertiveness. Whites complained about black servicemen "roaming Chicago streets every weekend with no place to go at night to sleep," hanging out in parks, on the streets, and in taverns. Such charges ignored discriminatory access to off-base facilities and instead expressed the subtext of the menacing black man as a rationale for blaming such men for their temporary homelessness.63 Senator James Eastland (D-Miss.) drew
such a picture during a 1945 filibuster against the FEPC when he charged black soldiers of "disgrac[ing] the flag of their country" by raping French women.64

Black men also sought to protect their women against abuse by white men. Military police had to join civil officers "to disperse a crowd . . . when city policemen tried to arrest a negro woman" in Savannah near the railroad station. Following a strike over the upgrading of black male workers at a General Motors engine plant outside of Indianapolis, "Zoot Suit" youth rescued a black woman from plain-clothes policemen who were trying to pick her up as a prostitute. This incident sparked an evening of street skirmishes between black men, white male bystanders, and white policemen.65 In other cities Zoot Suiters sought to shield their women against "predatory" white men. Their countercultural style defied the notion of wartime sacrifice for a white man's war—their clothes required more cloth than rationing allowed. They asserted an independent manhood.66

Black men suffered from what historian George Lipsitz has called "the connections between masculine self-affirmation, racial identities, and control over women." Author Chester Himes had failed to find a good job, but his wife was codirector of USO activities. He remembered:

It hurt me for my wife to have a better job than I did and be respected and included by her white co-workers, besides rubbing elbows with many well-to-do blacks of the Los Angeles middle class who wouldn't touch me with a ten-foot pole. That was the beginning of the dissolution of our marriage. I found that I was no longer a husband to my wife; I was her pimp. She didn't mind, and that hurt all the more.

Like his protagonist Bob Jones, Himes experienced "the fear of being unable to support and protect his wife in a world where white men could do both." Wanting "to be the 'man' in bed that he could not be in a war plant," he felt "castrated" by the pressure.67

These fears and apprehensions occurred against a backdrop of sexual harassment and brutality toward African American women that fully matched the vile rhetoric of Southern Democratic Congressmen. The Pittsburgh Courier noted the hypocrisy of Bilbo's call for racial purity when respectable black women in Washington, D.C., "schoolteachers, professionals, war-widows, co-eds . . . are so molested by white men (to whom all colored women are simply objects of prey) that they cannot walk a single block . . . without being invited to 'come go for a nice
A serviceman’s wife had to leave a better paying job at the Pennsylvania Railway after refusing the advances of the white foreman. White men raped black schoolgirls and soldiers’ wives; they beat and sometimes killed black women. But they never received punishment equal to the long prison sentences and occasional lynching that black men still faced for even calling a white woman on a phone. These white assailants included policemen and landlords intent on enforcing southern racial and social hierarchies. A partial exception to the degrading treatment of black women came with the response to the Abbeville, Alabama kidnap and rape of Recy Taylor, “22-year-old mother and wife of a U.S. soldier.” After northern radicals and southern liberals created a cause celebre, the governor promised “to press charges.” The rhetorical protection of white women continued to mask attacks on black women into the 1940s. But such incidents also suggest that wartime rhetoric and economic change encouraged black women to challenge the place set aside for them in the white South.

Shopfloor Confrontations

Southern white males certainly defined physical proximity between white women and black men as objectionable. At a Birmingham, Alabama sheet metal mill, white union members struck for a day because “the clocking lines for Negroes and whites had been placed too close together.” As the committeeman for the steelworkers union noted, black men “had no business in the line with the white ladies and wished they would segregate them.” Although black workers had other things on their minds—“to get out and take a bath and go home”—than sharing a line with “ladies” (the customary appellation for white women), “Negro Sam” reportedly told him, “if one stubbed his toe and happened to brush against a white woman they could not make her or any one believe it was not done on purpose.” White men defended white womanhood, their control of the shopfloor, and their hold on skilled jobs. The company responded by segregating facilities.

White women themselves objected to working with both black men and women. According to the vice-president of the Mobile-based Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company, white “young bucks and girls” attacked black men upgraded to welding jobs on 24 May 1943. The company had hired white women over black men and women after they had “scraped the bottom of the barrel as far as [white]
men are concerned." Such women would come to constitute 11.6 percent of the workforce, numbering over 3,000. They became socialized into aspects of the work culture of the shipyards. So perhaps it was not surprising that "Women Joined Men in Clubbing and Stoning Negro Ship Workers," reported the liberal New York daily PM. They used "bricks and iron bars." "A white lady," one black man noted, "hit me over the head with a broom handle." In surveying the incident, a national official of the Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America suggested that white women had started the violence by "belabor[ing] colored women with sticks and stones and then white men began to beat colored male workers." Among the precipitating rumors was one that "a Negro welder had killed a white woman the night before." The Mobile Register blamed "indiscreet mingling of white and negro workers." What appeared as economic conflict expressed fears of proximity and took violent physical form.

A more peaceful incident occurred in St. Louis at the U.S. Cartridge Company that same month. Management and trade union officers often predicted that white women would stop work with the introduction of black workers; here they did. White women walked off the job when the company transferred some fifty to seventy black floormen and material handlers from the segregated black building to their unit. Local black activist David Grant blamed management for segregating the plant in the first place. Before a congressional committee, he explained that

management . . . could not get any white men. They were not available. In other words, they had created this situation. These women, who had been working in this plant, had their minds set on the condition as it existed, and they would not work with these Negroes in there. So they quit work.

Black male workers, in turn, refused to labor under a white foreman.

There were economic consequences to separating black and white bodies. Segregation undermined seniority and had a negative effect on the employment and retention of black women, who had been the last hired. Mrs. Beatrice Marshall complained to the FEPC that a newspaper advertised in September 1943 for "2,000 women wanted to make bullets. No experience. No training period. Good pay." But women meant white women for personnel told her that they were not hiring anymore for building 202; they were not recruiting women for the "colored" building. Bertha Brown likewise suffered from the company's
policy of segregation when she was laid off, although she had more seniority than some whites. Truly plant-wide seniority (seniority was plant-wide except for building 202) would have placed black and white women in much closer proximity and might have forced white women to work next to black men, what had led to the May walkout by the white women. Significantly, the company differentiated the kind of ammunition it had white and black workers make, so that their expertise was not exactly interchangeable. This segregation of black workers on their own product in their own division/building resembled the strategy deployed by other companies that separated women workers and relegated their seniority to divisions established only for the duration of the war. Employers and unions could thus by-pass the issue of “equal pay for equal work” by claiming different work. In late December 1944, FEPC ordered U.S. Cartridge to hire and promote black workers, but by then, the war and heightened production were nearly over. These examples illustrate how management reinforced white shopfloor resistance; its decisions maintained racial separation.

The Toilet As A Site of Struggle

The toilet and bathroom, places for the most private bodily functions, became sites of conflict; their integration starkly symbolized social equality. Atlanta segregationists attempted to block the opening of a regional office of the FEPC in November 1943 by refusing office space to the FEPC’s biracial staff, who would not only interview black plaintiffs there but also share the building’s toilets with other federal agencies. After pressure from regional congressmen failed and the office opened, newspaper and political harrassment persisted. Cries of “‘brazen negress’ and ‘carpetbaggers’“ greeted the hiring of an African American woman secretary. Talmadge fanned white opinion when he spoke of the introduction of “a flat-nosed mulatto” and reported, “the white girls were stunned at first.” After appealing to his successor, Governor Ellis Arnall, to stop a travesty, Talmadge claimed that “the white women painted a large sign on the rest room door that said ‘White Only,’ but this ‘BRAZEN LITTLE NEGRO’ ignored it.” A new toilet built for FEPC black employees ended the commotion. A former FEPC official told historian Merl Reed that the Regional Director “became so exasperated that he sent to Eleanor Roosevelt memoranda drafted on toilet paper.”
Concepts of purity that distinguished white women from African Americans lay behind discriminatory acts.\textsuperscript{81} White workers based moral judgments on physical appearance; as one woman admitted, “I always thought colored people were not clean and smelled bad and weren’t as good as white people.” Manuals for managers attempted to counter notions fanned by racist southern politicians “that Negroes have a peculiar body odor; that it is unpleasant to remain in close proximity to them” and “that there is an extraordinarily high incidence of social disease among Negroes.” Syphilis rates were high among whites as well as blacks in areas of “low economic status.” Still some employers acted as if high black rates of syphilis were “a well-known scientific fact.” A hospital in Oakland, California, for example, refused to hire “experienced Negro girls” as dieticians because “Negroes couldn’t pass Wassermann tests.” A New York State handbook reminded managers that “the possibility of acquiring a venereal disease by contact with a toilet is exceeding remote.” Such manuals also pointed out that black women and men not only cleaned public and private toilets but care for children, prepare food, and “handle much of the linen and make up the beds of many white Americans.” A domestic’s touch could be ignored in ways that bodily closeness at the job apparently could not; private service work reinforced racialized gender hierarchies in ways that public intimacy undermined them.\textsuperscript{82}

Despite the attempt by some managers to alleviate fears, “the cleanliness taboo” generated resistance to using the same toilet, shower, and locker room facilities, especially on the part of white women.\textsuperscript{83} Sometimes these resisters merely threatened to leave work to see if they could push management to remove black women, but “had no intention of really going through with their threat because they knew it might jeopardize their own jobs,” as happened at a Buffalo, New York aircraft factory.\textsuperscript{84} Other times they shut down production. Fifteen hundred United Automobile Union members walked out in the spring of 1944 when Chevrolet Motors refused “to rehire seven woman workers who had balked at working alongside four Negro women,” who presumably would use the same toilets. When more than half the labor force of the U.S. Rubber Company in Detroit struck a few months before, they demanded that black women machinists “be transferred” or the company provide separate toilets for them. In contrast, lack of racial friction at Pullman’s railroad operations may have derived from company adherence to segregated toilets and related facilities.\textsuperscript{85}
The hearing before the WLB over the December 1943 strike at the Baltimore Western Electric plant illuminates the racialized gendered subtext behind contests over employment discrimination. Toilet integration was central to this job action. Though only 200 out of 6,000 eligible employees participated in the strike vote, the presence of picket lines dropped attendance to about 30 percent of the workforce, with almost all black workers crossing the lines. The U.S. army took over this plant deemed vital to the war effort.86

Western Electric’s Superintendent of Industrial Relations emphasized economic reasons for integrated facilities—the need to maintain a flexible workforce that could be transferred between buildings. The lawyer for the Employees Association argued that shared toilets undermined production goals since white workers refused to accept them. He suggested that separate facilities “could be established without violating the Executive Order, and . . . the union would take action in behalf of Negroes if the company failed to set up facilities for them which would be equal to those established for whites.” But later he justified the majority’s “astounding” willingness to interrupt production with the stereotyped scare: “It goes without saying that among the colored race venereal disease is greater than among whites.”87

Eugene Barnes, an African American member of the Employees Association, placed the conflict in perspective when he argued that the union—run by officers who called only one meeting a year—merely existed to maintain the power of its leaders. The Association “had stimulated the petition among the workers and had told many persons that they were voting for separate facilities and not for a strike.” The goal was “to keep the colored employee out of their department altogether.” With vital war production undermined, the company built locker units with attached washrooms and toilets at opposite sides of the building, assigning blacks to one unit and whites to another even though no designating racial signs limited use of toilets. The company would give tests for venereal disease, but the cafeteria would remain integrated. An FEPC investigator concluded that black employees “felt rather bitter about the treatment which they received from the white employees.” The FEPC argued, “such installing of segregated duplicate facilities cannot but lead to discriminatory employment practices and would be in violation of [the] Executive Order.” Members of the African American Non-Partisan Committee at the plant “privately” opposed the establishment of the separate facilities in the spring of
1944. But faced with the prospect of a strike when the army left, the company succumbed to white community norms and ignored the FEPC finding that separate was discriminatory.88

The experience of discrimination was gendered. Previously crowded into service and agricultural labor and thus thought of as a non-industrial workforce, African American women labored against stereotypical images of their bodies, against representations as Mammy or Sapphire.89 Not only did they receive “the left-over and undesirable jobs in war industries,” but they confronted barriers of “physical types . . . and intangibles not imposed on white female workers.” Personnel managers drew upon the picture of the fat black woman to reject applicants. As one such woman recalled, “one time they say we was to old and the next time we were too fat. I only weight 165—5 feet 3 inch—46 years and still these [white] women weight 200 pound and some much older then 50 years.”90 African American women had to engage in additional maintenance or survival labor, a form of self and community care work, to reproduce themselves as neater, pleasanter, more cooperative than their white counterparts, to make whites feel more comfortable around them. They had to dress well and act respectable in public, whether engaging in the activities of everyday life or protesting discrimination.91

Regarded as different, black and white women saw each other as racialized bodies, not merely gendered ones, and so would develop insults that impugned the womanhood of the other. One group of black women at General Electric refused to work after a white woman inspector allegedly “called a colored woman worker either ‘Black Son of a Bitch’ or ‘Black Heifer.’” The army feared “possible violence.”92 At the Fisk Tire and Rubber Company, Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, a white woman “alleged that the colored girl was in a state of pregnancy. The girl happens to be unmarried,” the FEPC regional director reported, “and the rumor spread like wildfire through the shop. It affected the girl so badly that she went to her doctor and procured a certificate stating that she was not in a state of pregnancy.”93 Given feelings of racial superiority, that white women rejected black women having any authority over them hardly surprises. At a California draft board, a white man was promoted supervisor rather than a black woman because white women rejected the notion of “a Negro [telling] white people what to do.”94 The belief that women could not get along with each other—that “we needed a man to keep peace and harmony
between the girls"—reflected the reality of some workplaces and offered an excuse for discrimination in others. Men continued to predominate as supervisors, with gender-mixed black crews coming under male leadership.

The Specter of Social Equality

Worker responses to wartime integration occurred in a political context in which demagogic politicians vilified the FEPC. Working people worried about social equality. "As the friendships became more intimate the white employee speculated as to how friendly he might become with a Negro employee without admitting him to 'social equality,'" participant observer Bernice Reed noted of a West coast aircraft factory. "A white female employee" wondered, "If I go to X's house to visit his wife and babies will that be socializing? I wouldn't call that socializing, would you, just to go by to see his babies?" Most interracial friendships stopped at the plant gate, but Reed concluded that "management accommodated to integration of Negro employees less readily than non-supervisory employees."

The promise of social equality—confused by its opponents with non-discrimination in the workplace—challenged the larger social and political hierarchies that gripped the nation. Shopfloor integration—where black and white, male and female bodies labored in close proximity—stood as the material and symbolic embodiment of social equality. In seeking to exclude African Americans from war jobs, white workers reacted to what they perceived to be more than an economic threat. Women as well as men recoiled from "black skin." Fear of the other, of different bodies, encapsulated wartime tensions, disruptions, and insecurities. This is not to argue that all or most white workers responded to racial pornography; racial demagogues had no monopoly on image painting. Alternative signifiers certainly existed and trade union leadership, from the CIO and especially from its left-led unions, at times provided a counterpoint to both local union racism and the fear of social equality.

Throughout the Jim Crow era, white supremacists had embodied opposition to social, political, and economic equality in the menacing figure of the black male rapist and the demeaning image of the uncleanly black woman. What was new during WWII was an official ideology of pluralist inclusion that facilitated the transformation of the
foreign born into the American but also delegitimated racism in the face of Nazism. The federal government, however tentative, became involved in combating workplace discrimination among employers as well as unions. State action further encouraged the aspirations of African Americans who demanded fair treatment from a country for which their men were dying. Black workers claimed the rights of citizenship on the job as well as in the community. They believed in fairness, and asked to be “treated as an American and not as a Negro,” to be just a man, as Bob Jones dreamed. Such a vision remained tied to the equation of masculinity with freedom that had distinguished the black liberation movement even before the abolition of slavery. It neglected black women’s distinct experiences, just as FEPC failed to include sex. Nonetheless, the wartime struggle for fair employment illuminates the simultaneity of race and gender in the self-construction, social perception, and, not the least, scholarly re-construction of identity that mark the quest for equity and justice at century’s end no less than during World War II.

NOTES

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3. Himes, If He Hollers, 27.

under the Century
Pascoe, Liberalism, WWII, pluralism, (Himes, American
Women's Fiction: masculinity, Daniel Brooks (Chapel
544; Dishonor: Crow: The
1983), 328–49; and Hall’s Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the
5. Himes, If He Hollers, 201.
6. Ibid., 153.
7. Himes notes the threat of the executive order in a conversation between Jones and
the plant’s manager, who insists, “We enforce it here . . . but your case doesn’t come
under that. . . . People who want to agitate might tell you that, but it isn’t so . . .”
(Himes, If He Hollers, 174). On the FEPC, see below.
8. On shifting interpretations of race as a category of biology and culture, see Peggy
Pascoe, “Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of ‘Race’ in Twentieth-
of identity, and the crucial role of the war in forging national unity out of cultural
pluralism, Gary Gerstle, “The Protean Character of American Liberalism,” American
9. Himes, If He Hollers, 151.
10. On Randolph, the March on Washington Movement, and black demands during
WWII, see Paula F. Pfeffer, A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement
(Baton Rouge, La., 1990); on African American influence on Myrdal, Walter A.
Jackson, Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial
11. Himes, If He Hollers, 8–9. For Himes’s celebration of violence, equated with
masculinity, Stephen B. Bennett and William W. Nichols, “Violence in Afro-American
12. Nell Irvin Painter, “‘Social Equality,’ Miscenogation, Labor, and Power,” in
The Evolution of Southern Culture, ed. Numan V. Bartley (Athens, Ga., 1988), 49;
Daniel Letwin, “Interracial Unionism, Gender, and ‘Social Equality’ in the Alabama
544; on the complicity of white women, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Gender and Jim
Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920
(Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996), 90–118; Dolores Janiewski, “Southern Honor, Southern
Dishonor: Managerial Ideology and the Construction of Gender, Race, and Class
Relations in Southern Industry,” in Work Engendered: Toward a New History of
American Labor, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 70–91; Dowd Hall, Revolt
Against Chivalry, shows white women as critics of this discourse. See also, Evelyn
Brooks Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black
Jan. 1944, 14.
14. Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow, reveals these connections.
15. David R. Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the
American Working Class (New York, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, How The Irish Became
White (New York, 1995); for the nationalization of the problem of race, Alan Brinkley,
“WWII and American Liberalism,” in The War in American Culture: Society and
Consciousness During World War II, ed. Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch
(Chicago, 1996), 315–17; for the whiteness of European immigrants during the war,
ibid., 118.
16. On the impact of the war on state power, especially when it comes to labor,
17. Katherine Archibald, Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Social Disunity (Berkeley,
Calif., 1947), 70.


27. On wartime boom towns and their tensions, see, for example, Marilynn S. Johnson, The Second Gold Rush:Oakland and the East Bay in World War II (Berkeley, Calif., 1993). Historians disagree on whether the war years challenged women’s place. For different interpretations, see D’Ann Campbell, Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 74–76, 107; Susan Hartmann, The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s (Boston, 1982), 77–82.


30. Atlanta Journal quoted in Reed, Seedtime, 115; for overall African American gains, Robert Weaver as quoted in George Lipsitz, Rainbow At Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s (Urbana, Ill., 1994), 73. These observations come from my readings in the massive Papers of the President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice (FEPC Papers), microfilm edition of Record Group 228, National Archives. See also Reed, Seedtime, 348.

31. For example, Representative Whittington (D-Miss.), 12 July 1945, Congressional Record—House, 7490; Representative Charles E. McKenzie (D-La.), 26 June 1945, Appendix to the Congressional Record, A 3083; for a Northern Republican opponent, Claire Hoffman (R-Mich.), 2 Feb. 1949, Congressional Record—House, 771.


33. Said during FEPC filibuster, as quoted by Smith, Killers of the Dream, 78.


40. Indeed, FEPC found that the union excluded blacks from some of their traditional jobs, such as firemen, much as the railroad brotherhoods were doing. Testimony of John Hawk, Sec.-Tres. in House of Representatives, U.S., Report of Proceedings, Hearing held before Special Committee to Investigate Executive Agencies, 25 Feb. 1944 (Washington, D.C., 1944), 2313, 2315–19. For FEPC findings, “Seafarers International Union (SIU) of North America,” summary, reel 2H Office Files: Ross, folder: “Final Report—Difficult Cases”; press release, draft for Sept. 1945, “President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice,” [on SIU], reel 3H, Office Files-Ross, folder: “Misc.,” both in FEPC Papers.


42. Comment by Representative Jennings, House of Representatives, U.S., Report of Proceedings, Hearing held before Special Committee of the House of Representatives to Investigate Acts of Executive Agencies Beyond the Scope of their Authority, 1 Mar. 1944 (Washington, D.C., 1944), 2392. For another account of such attitudes, see Malcolm Ross, All Manner of Men (New York, 1948), 114, 134.

43. Ibid., 2393.

44. Ibid., testimony of Marshall Dimock, 2406, and Craig S. Vincent, 2424–40, esp. 2425.

45. “Office Memorandum from Leonard M. Brin, Director, Region 10 to Will

46. “Legislation and Administration: Fair Employment Practice Committee”,” “Memo-
The FEPC Lynched,” article 13 in a series, New York Post, 16 Aug. 1945; on Bilbo
and Liberia, see his remarks in Congressional Record, 24 Apr. 1939, reprinted in “The
Man Bilbo—Friend of the Negro (That’s His Story),” article 10, New York Post, 13
Aug. 1945. Bilbo argued that removal of blacks would “do away with the necessity for
relief rolls and create ‘a job for every white man and woman in America.” For his
relationship with nationalist groups, see Brenda Plummer, Rising Wind: African
Americans and U.S. Foreign Policy (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996).

47. Harry McAlpin, “Mixed CIO Labor Canteen Draws Ire of Dixie Solon,” Chicago
Defender, 26 Feb. 1944.

979–81, for significance of the “sexual factor” in workplace confrontations between
blacks and whites.

49. Swan to McKnight, from report for 15 July [1944?], in reel 75H, folder:

50. Letter to U.S. FEPC from Gordon L’Allemsea [sic.], Los Angeles, 19 Nov. 1943,
FEPC Papers. Unions who refused to admit African Americans as equal members
established “auxiliaries” during the war as a response to employer hirings and
government pressure. Black workers filed complaints with the FEPC and in the courts
against such separate but unequal representation.

51. Gerald Zahavi, “Passionate Commitments: Race, Sex, and Communism at

52. Memorandum, to Elmer W. Henderson from Joy Schultz, “Subject: Racial
Problems Which Have Developed Recently at the P. R. Mallory Plant in Indianapolis,”
Papers.

53. Barbara S. Griffith, The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the
Defeat of the CIO (Philadelphia, 1988).

54. Memorandum, to Elmer W. Henderson from Joy Schultz, “Subject: Racial
Problems Which Have Developed Recently at the P. R. Mallory Plant.”

55. Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–
1939 (Cambridge, 1991), 333–49; St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton Black

56. Bernice Anita Reed, “Accommodation Between Negro and White Employees in
like to thank David Roediger for bringing this article to my attention.

57. Bay Area Council Against Discrimination, An Appeal to the Publishers of the
Bay Area’s Newspapers, Dellums Papers, carton 23, folder: “BACAD.”

58. “Racial Tensions Report,” Jan. 27, 1945, to Will Maslow from Edward Lawson,
Papers.

59. Lipsitz, Rainbow at Midnight, 81–82.

60. “The Detroit Race Riots (A memorandum by Turner Catledge),” 3–4, box 5, file:


63. Letter from Jonathan Daniels to Robert Weaver, 17 May 1944; Weaver to Daniels, 23 May 1944, box 5, file: “Chicago and Cleveland,” FEPC-FDR Library. Weaver found “practically no support for the allegations which have been made to you.”

64. He claimed that they “call[ed] the men of the families out into the yards, and hold guns on them while they went in and criminally assaulted the women members of the family.” See report of speech, “It Can . . . Did Happen Here On the Floor of the Senate,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 July 1945, 5.


72. Archibald describes similar jostling and uneasy proximity of black and white workers at the exits of Moore Dry Dock in Oakland, California. See *Shipyard Worker*,...
76. Division of Research, Bureau of Special Services, "Newspaper Clippings, May 10–June 16, 1944, No. 10," 12 July 1944: "Birmingham (Fairfield), Alabama, box 12, file: "OWI," FEPC-FDR Library; "Minutes of Meeting with Grievance Committee of the United Steelworkers of America Affiliated with the USA Local 1131," box SG12417, folder: 9, Governor Sparks Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History. Document provided by Bruce Nelson, who uses it to make a related point in "Organized Labor and the Struggle for Black Equality," 980–81.


74. For example, a Los Angeles transit company official "warned" at a FEPC hearing "that 90 percent of the 214 women operators and conductorettes would quit work if any Negro were upgraded." The Amalgamated agreed, but there was only one quit from the upgrading of about fifty black workers, still a low and perhaps not threatening number. "Opening Statement by Malcolm Ross, Chairman, President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice. Capital Transit Company Hearing, 15 Jan. 1945, U.S. Court of Appeals Courtroom, Washington, D.C.," 4–5, box 7, file: "Capital Transit," FEPC-FDR Library.


78. Ruth Milkman, Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II (Urbana, Ill., 1987), esp. 49–64, 104–27.


80. I am indebted to Merl Reed for this incident. See, Reed, Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement, 223–25.


82. Reed, "Accommodation Between Negro and White Employees," 81; Council for Democracy, "Experience in Negro Employment," typescript, 8; Council for Democ-

83. Numbers here are impressionistic. The New York State study, How Management Can Integrate Negroes in War Industries canvassed 32 personnel managers and drew upon investigations into about 175 companies by the state Committee on Discrimination in Employment (p.3); The Council for Democracy studied 150 industries, see title page, “Skilled Negro Labor.”


86. “Following material copied from report of Federal Bureau of Investigation,” file no. 98–700, James M. Teahen, Jr., 1–2; Memorandum to Mr. Will Maslow from Clarence M. Mitchell, 11 Nov. 1943, on “War Labor Board Panel Hearing on Case of Point Breeze Employees Association versus Western Electric Company,” 1, 5, both in box 8, file: “Point Breeze,” FEPC-FDR Library.


94. Letter to Regional Manager, Twelfth U.S. Civil Service District, San Francisco, California from Mrs. Thelma Johnson, 9 Nov. 1942; C. L. Dellums, “Facts Existing on Draft Board #73”; letter to Your Excellency Culbert L. Olson, Governor of California from Dellums, 15 Oct. 1942; letter to Colonel K. H. Leitch from Dellums, subject, “Chief Clerk of Local Board No. 73,” 31 Oct. 1942; letter to Governor Olson from Dellums, 4 Nov. 1942; letter to Leitch from Dellums, 9 Dec. 1942, all in Dellums Papers, file: “Local Draft Board #73.”

95. Letter to Colonel K. H. Leitch from C. L. Dellums, Subject: “Chief Clerk of Local Board #73,” 31 Oct. 1942, Dellums Papers, file: “Local Draft Board #73.” Dellums, a Vice-President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was a major leader in Bay Area civil rights activity; he served as a member of this Oakland, Cal. draft board. See also, Letter to Assistant Attorney General Tom C. Clark from J. Edgar Hoover, [6] Oct. 1943 on “Racial Unrest, Boeing Aircraft Corporation,” box 6, file: “Labor Department,” FEPC-FDR Library.


