Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement

Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein

Most historians would agree that the modern civil rights movement did not begin with the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Yet all too often the movement's history has been written as if events before the mid-1950s constituted a kind of prehistory, important only insofar as they laid the legal and political foundation for the spectacular advances that came later. Those were the "forgotten years of the Negro Revolution," wrote one historian; they were the "seed time of racial and legal metamorphosis," according to another. But such a periodization profoundly underestimates the tempo and misjudges the social dynamic of the freedom struggle.[1]

The civil rights era began, dramatically and decisively, in the early 1940s when the social structure of black America took on an increasingly urban, proletarian character. A predominantly southern rural and small town population was soon transformed into one of the most urban of all major ethnic groups. More than two million blacks migrated to northern and western industrial areas during the 1940s, while another million moved from farm to city within the South. Northern black voters doubled their numbers between 1940 and 1948, and in the eleven states of the Old South black registration more than quadrupled, reaching over one million by 1952. Likewise, membership in the National Association for the Advancement

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[1] Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History*, 55 (June 1968), 90–106; Steven Lawson, "The Second Front at Home: World War II and Black Americans," paper delivered at the Sixth Soviet-American Historians Colloquium, Sept. 24–26, 1986, Washington (in Nelson Lichtenstein's possession). This view has recently been reinforced by the television documentary "Eyes on the Prize," which begins abruptly in 1954. Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965* (New York, 1986). However, a few sociologists have broken with the orthodox periodization: Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984); and Jack Bloom, *Class, Race and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington, 1987).

of Colored People (NAACP) soared, growing from 50,000 in 355 branches in 1940 to almost 450,000 in 1,073 branches six years later.[2]

The half million black workers who joined unions affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) were in the vanguard of efforts to transform race relations. The NAACP and the Urban League had become more friendly toward labor in the depression era, but their legal and social work orientation had not prepared them to act effectively in the workplaces and working-class neighborhoods where black Americans fought their most decisive struggles of the late 1930s and 1940s. By the early forties it was commonplace for sympathetic observers to assert the centrality of mass unionization in the civil rights struggle. A Rosenwald Fund study concluded, not without misgivings, that "the characteristic movements among Negroes are now for the first time becoming proletarian"; while a *Crisis* reporter found the CIO a "lamp of democracy" throughout the old Confederate states. "The South has not known such a force since the historic Union Leagues in the great days of the Reconstruction era."[3]

This movement gained much of its dynamic character from the relationship that arose between unionized blacks and the federal government and proved somewhat similiar to the creative tension that linked the church-based civil rights movement and the state almost two decades later. In the 1950s the *Brown* decision legitimated much of the subsequent social struggle, but it remained essentially a dead letter until given political force by a growing protest movement. In like manner, the rise of industrial unions and the evolution of late New Deal labor legislation offered working-class blacks an economic and political standard by which they could legitimate their demands and stimulate a popular struggle. The "one man, one vote" policy implemented in thousands of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections, the industrial "citizenship" that union contracts offered once-marginal elements of the working class, and the patriotic egalitarianism of the government's wartime propaganda—all generated a rights consciousness that gave working-class black militancy a moral justification in some ways as powerful as that evoked by the Baptist spirituality of Martin Luther King, Jr., a generation later.[4] During the war the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) held little direct authority, but like the Civil Rights Commission of the late 1950s, it served to expose racist conditions and spur on black activism wherever it undertook its well-publicized investigations. And

[2] Harold M. Baron and Bennett Hymer, "The Negro in the Chicago Labor Market," in *The Negro in the American Labor Movement*, ed. Julius Jacobson (New York, 1968), 188. See also Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York, 1986), 239–57. For a discussion of black proletarianization, see Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915–1945* (Urbana, 1985); Steven Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969* (New York, 1975), 134; Henry Lee Moon, *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* (Garden City, 1949), 146–96; and Dalfiume, "Forgotten Years," 99–100.

[3] Dalfiume, "'Forgotten Years,'" 100; Harold Preece, "The South Stirs," *Crisis*, 48 (Oct. 1941), 318.

[4] James A. Gross, *The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board: National Labor Policy in Transition, 1937–1947* (Albany, 1981), 5–41; Gary Gerstle, "The Politics of Patriotism: Americanization and the Formation of the CIO," *Dissent*, 33 (Winter 1986), 84–92. Racist discrimination in hiring, promotion, and seniority were hardly eliminated by the new CIO unions; see Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American History*, 73 (Dec. 1986) 669–701.

just as a disruptive and independent civil rights movement in the 1960s could pressure the federal government to enforce its own laws and move against local elites, so too did the mobilization of the black working class in the 1940s make civil rights an issue that could not be ignored by union officers, white executives, or government officials.[5]

This essay explores two examples of the workplace-oriented civil rights militancy that arose in the 1940s—one in the South and one in the North. It analyzes the unionization of predominantly black tobacco workers in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and the ferment in the United Auto Workers in Detroit, Michigan, that made that city a center of black working-class activism in the North. Similar movements took root among newly organized workers in the cotton compress mills of Memphis, the tobacco factories of Richmond and Charleston, the steel mills of Pittsburgh and Birmingham, the stockyards and farm equipment factories of Chicago and Louisville, and the shipyards of Baltimore and Oakland.[6]

Winston-Salem in the War

Winston-Salem had been a center of tobacco processing since the 1880s, and the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company dominated the life of the city's eighty thousand citizens. By the 1940s whites held most of the higher paying machine-tending jobs, but blacks formed the majority of the work force, concentrated in the preparation departments where they cleaned, stemmed, and conditioned the tobacco.[7] The jobs were physically demanding, the air was hot and dusty, and in departments with machinery, the noise was deafening. Most black workers made only a few cents above minimum wage, and benefits were few. Black women workers experienced frequent verbal and occasional sexual abuse. Reynolds maintained a determined opposition to trade unionism, and two unsuccessful American Federation of Labor (AFL) efforts to organize segregated locals had soured most black workers on trade unionism.

But in 1943 a CIO organizing effort succeeded. Led by the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), a new union drive championed black dignity and self-organization, employing several young

[5] Herbert R. Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics of FEPC* (Glencoe, 1959); Louis Kesselman, *The Social Politics of FEPC: A Study in Reform Pressure Movements* (Chapel Hill, 1948); William Harris, "Federal Intervention in Union Discrimination: FEPC and West Coast Shipyards during World War II," *Labor History*, 22 (Summer 1981), 325–47.

[6] Horace Huntley, "Iron Ore Miners and Mine Mill in Alabama: 1933–1952" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1977); Michael Honey, "Labor and Civil Rights in the South: The Industrial Labor Movement and Black Workers in Memphis, 1929–1945" (Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 1987), 422–75; Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); Rick Halpern, "Black and White, Unite and Fight: The United Packinghouse Workers' Struggle against Racism," paper delivered at the North American Labor History Conference, Oct. 1985, Detroit (in Lichtenstein's possession); Dennis C. Dickerson, "Fighting on the Domestic Front: Black Steelworkers during World War II," in *Life and Labor: Dimensions of American Working-Class History*, ed. Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher (Albany, 1986), 224–36; Toni Gilpin, "Left by Themselves: A History of United Farm Equipment and Metal Workers, 1938–1955," draft, Ph.D diss., Yale University, 1988 (in Toni Gilpin's possession).

[7] Nannie M. Tilley, *The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860–1929* (Chapel Hill, 1948); Nannie M. Tilley, *The R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company* (Chapel Hill, 1985).

black organizers who had gotten their start in the interracial Southern Tenant Farmers Union. Their discreet two-year organizing campaign made a dramatic breakthrough when black women in one of the stemmeries stopped work on June 17. A severe labor shortage, chronic wage grievances, and a recent speedup gave the women both the resources and the incentive to transform a departmental sit-down into a festive, plant-wide strike. The UCAPAWA quickly signed up about eight thousand black workers, organized a committee to negotiate with the company, and asked the NLRB to hold an election.[8]

The effort to win union recognition at Reynolds sparked a spirited debate about who constituted the legitimate leadership of the black community in Winston-Salem. Midway through the campaign, six local black business and professional men—a college professor, an undertaker, a dentist, a store owner, and two ministers—dubbed "colored leaders" by the *Winston-Salem Journal*, wrote a long letter to the editor urging workers to reject the "followers of John L. Lewis and William Green" and to remain loyal to Reynolds. In the absence of any formal leadership, elected or otherwise, representatives of Winston-Salem's small black middle class had served as spokesmen, brokering with the white elite for small concessions in a tightly segregated society. The fight for collective bargaining, they argued, had to remain secondary to the more important goal of racial betterment, which could only be achieved by "good will, friendly understanding, and mutual respect and co-operation between the races." Partly because of their own vulnerability to economic pressure, such traditional black leaders judged unions, like other institutions, by their ability to deliver jobs and maintain a precarious racial equilibrium.[9]

The union campaign at Reynolds transformed the expectations tobacco workers held of the old community leadership. Reynolds workers responded to calls for moderation from "college-trained people" with indignation. "Our leaders," complained Mabel Jessup, "always look clean and refreshed at the end of the hottest day, because they work in very pleasant environments. . . . All I ask of our leaders is that they obtain a job in one of the factories as a laborer and work two weeks. Then write what they think." W. L. Griffin felt betrayed. "I have attended church regularly for the past thirty years," he wrote, "and unity and co-operation have been taught and preached from the pulpits of the various Negro churches. Now that the laboring class of people are about to unite and co-operate on a wholesale scale for the purpose of collective bargaining, these same leaders seem to disagree with that which they have taught their people." Others rejected the influence of people who "have always told us what the white people want, but somehow or other are particularly silent on what we want." "We feel we are the leaders instead of you," asserted a group of union members.[10]

[8] Robert Korstad, "Those Who Were Not Afraid: Winston-Salem, 1943," in *Working Lives: The Southern Exposure History of Labor in the South*, ed. Marc Miller (New York, 1980), 184–99; and Robert Korstad, "Daybreak of Freedom: Tobacco Workers and the CIO, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 1943–1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1987), 2–50; Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, 373–414.

[9] *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 14, 1943, p. 6; *ibid.*, July 25, 1943, p. 6; Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions* (Chapel Hill, 1939), 372–424.

[10] *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 14, 1943, p. 6; *ibid.*, July 16, 1943, p. 6; *ibid.*, July 17, 1943, p. 6; *ibid.*, July 25, 1943, p. 6

Reynolds, the only major tobacco manufacturer in the country not under a union contract, followed tried and true methods to break the union. Management used lower-level supervisors to intimidate unionists and supported a "no union" movement among white workers, whose organizers were given freedom to roam the company's workshops and warehouses. That group, the R. J. Reynolds Employees Association, sought a place on the NLRB ballot in order to delay the increasingly certain CIO victory. Meanwhile, the white business community organized an Emergency Citizens Committee to help defeat the CIO. In a well-publicized resolution, the committee blamed the recent strikes on "self-seeking representatives of the CIO" and warned that continued subversion of existing race relations would "likely lead to riots and bloodshed."[11]

In earlier times, this combination of anti-union forces would probably have derailed the organizing effort. But during World War II, black workers had allies who helped shift the balance of power. The NLRB closely supervised each stage of the election process and denied the company's request to divide the work force into two bargaining units, which would have weakened the position of black workers. When local judges sought to delay the election, government attorneys removed the case to federal court. In December 1943 an NLRB election gave the CIO a resounding victory. But continued federal assistance, from the United States Conciliation Service and the National War Labor Board, was still needed to secure Reynolds workers a union contract in 1944.[12]

That first agreement resembled hundreds of other wartime labor-management contracts, but in the context of Winston-Salem's traditional system of race relations it had radical implications, because it generated a new set of shop floor rights embodied in the seniority, grievance, and wage adjustment procedures. The contract did not attack factory segregation—for the most part white workers continued to control the better-paying jobs—but it did call forth a new corps of black leaders to defend the rights Reynolds workers had recently won. The one hundred or so elected shop stewards were the "most important people in the plant," remembered union activist Velma Hopkins. They were the "natural leaders," people who had "taken up money for flowers if someone died or would talk to the foreman [even] before the union." Now the union structure reinforced the capabilities of such workers: "We had training classes for the shop stewards: What to do, how to do it. We went over the contract thoroughly." The shop stewards transformed the traditional paternalism of Reynolds management into an explicit system of benefits and responsibilities. They made the collective bargaining agreement a bill of rights.[13]

The growing self-confidence of black women, who constituted roughly half of the

[11] Robert A. Levett to David C. Shaw, Aug. 22, 1944, in R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Case 5-C-1730 (1945), Formal and Informal Unfair Labor Practices and Representation Cases Files, 1935–48, National Labor Relations Board, RG 25 (National Archives); *Winston-Salem Journal*, Nov. 17, 1943, p. 1.

[12] "Directive Order, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and the Tobacco Workers Organizing Committee," Oct. 18, 1944, Case No. 111-7701-D, Regional War Labor Board for the Fourth Region, RG 202 (National Archives).

[13] "Discussion Outline for Classes in Shop Steward Training," Highlander Folk School, n.d. (in Robert Korstad's possession); Velma Hopkins interview by Robert Korstad, March 5, 1986, *ibid.*

total work force, proved particularly subversive of existing social relations. To the white men who ran the Reynolds plants, nothing could have been more disturbing than the demand that they negotiate on a basis of equality with people whom they regarded as deeply inferior—by virtue of their sex as well as their class and race. When union leaders like Theodosia Simpson, Velma Hopkins, and Moranda Smith sat down at the bargaining table with company executives, social stereotypes naturally came under assault, but the challenge proved equally dramatic on the shop floor. For example Ruby Jones, the daughter of a railway fireman, became one of the most outspoken shop stewards. Perplexed by her newfound aggressiveness, a foreman demanded, "Ruby, what do you want?" "I want your respect," she replied, "that's all I ask."[14]

By the summer of 1944, Local 22 of the reorganized and renamed Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA) had become the center of an alternative social world that linked black workers together regardless of job, neighborhood, or church affiliation. The union hall, only a few blocks from the Reynolds Building, housed a constant round of meetings, plays, and musical entertainments, as well as classes in labor history, black history, and current events. Local 22 sponsored softball teams, checker tournaments, sewing circles, and swimming clubs. Its vigorous educational program and well-stocked library introduced many black workers (and a few whites) to a larger radical culture few had glimpsed before. "You know, at that little library they [the city of Winston-Salem] had for us, you couldn't find any books on Negro history," remembered Viola Brown. "They didn't have books by Aptheker, Dubois, or Frederick Douglass. But we had them at *our* library."[15]

The Communist party was the key political grouping in FTA and in Local 22. FTA president Donald Henderson had long been associated with the party, and many organizers who passed through Winston-Salem shared his political sympathies. By 1947 party organizers had recruited about 150 Winston-Salem blacks, almost all tobacco workers. Most of these workers saw the party as both a militant civil rights organization, which in the 1930s had defended such black victims of white southern racism as the Scottsboro boys and Angelo Hearndon, and as a cosmopolitan group, introducing members to the larger world of politics and ideas. The white North Carolina Communist leader Junius Scales recalled that the "top leaders [of Local 22] . . . just soaked up all the educational efforts that were directed at them. The Party's program had an explanation of events locally, nationally, and worldwide which substantiated everything they had felt instinctively. . . . It really meant business on racism." The party was an integrated institution in which the social conventions of the segregated South were self-consciously violated, but it also accommodated itself to the culture of the black community. In Winston-Salem,

[14] Ruby Jones interview by Korstad, April 20, 1979, *ibid.*

[15] *Worker's Voice*, Aug. 1944; *ibid.*, Jan. 1945, p. 2; *ibid.*, April 1945, p. 2; Viola Brown interview by Korstad, Aug. 7, 1981 (in Korstad's possession). The United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) changed its name to reflect the increasing number of tobacco locals within it.

therefore, the party met regularly in a black church and started the meetings with a hymn and a prayer.[16]

The Communist party's relative success in Winston-Salem was replicated in other black industrial districts. In the South a clear majority of the party's new recruits were black, and in northern states like Illinois and Michigan the proportion ranged from 25 to 40 percent. The party's relative success among American blacks was not based on its programmatic consistency: during the late 1940s the NAACP and other critics pointed out that the wartime party had denounced civil rights struggles when they challenged the Roosevelt administration or its conduct of the war effort, but that the party grew more militant once Soviet-American relations cooled.[17] However, the party never abandonded its assault on Jim Crow and unlike the NAACP, which directed much of its energy toward the courts and Congress, the Communists or their front groups more often organized around social or political issues subject to locally initiated protests, petitions, and pickets. Moreover, the party adopted what today would be called an affirmative action policy that recognized the special disabilities under which black workers functioned, in the party as well as in the larger community. Although there were elements of tokenism and manipulation in the implementation of that policy, the party's unique effort to develop black leaders gave the Communists a special standing among politically active blacks.[18]

Tobacco industry trade unionism revitalized black political activism in Winston-Salem. Until the coming of the CIO, NAACP attacks on racial discrimination seemed radical, and few blacks risked associating with the organization. A 1942 membership drive did increase branch size from 11 to 100, but most new members came from the traditional black middle class: mainly teachers and municipal bus drivers. The Winston-Salem NAACP became a mass organization only after Local 22 conducted its own campaign for the city branch. As tobacco workers poured in, the local NAACP reached a membership of 1,991 by 1946, making it the largest unit in North Carolina.[19]

Unionists also attacked the policies that had disenfranchised Winston-Salem blacks for more than two generations. As part of the CIO Political Action Committee's voter registration and mobilization drive, Local 22 inaugurated citizenship

[16] Junius Scales interview by Korstad, April 28, 1987 (in Korstad's possession); Ann Matthews interview by Korstad, Feb. 1986, *ibid.* See also Junius Irving Scales and Richard Nickson, *Cause at Heart: A Former Communist Remembers* (Atlanta, 1987), 201–19; and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Hammer N' Hoe: Black Radicals and the Communist Party in Alabama, 1929–1941" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1987), 296–311.

[17] Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions* (Bloomington, 1980), 234; Painter, *Narrative of Hosea Hudson*, 306–12; Nat Ross, "Two Years of the Reconstituted Communist Party in the South," *Political Affairs*, 26 (Oct. 1947), 923–35; Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca, 1964), 84–168; Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther* (New York, 1949), 223–25.

[18] Saul Wellman interview by Lichtenstein, Nov. 10, 1983 (in Lichtenstein's possession); Mark Naison, *The Communist Party in Harlem* (Urbana, 1984), 23–34.

[19] William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1980), 29–30; Lucille Black to Sarah March, March 28, 1945; Winston-Salem, 1945–55, file, box C140, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress); Gloster Current to C. C. Kellum, Nov. 19, 1947, *ibid.*; Memorandum, Feb. 9, 1942, North Carolina State Conference file, box C141, *ibid*; Membership Report, July 31, 1946, *ibid.*

classes, political rallies, and citywide mass meetings. Union activists challenged the power of registrars to judge the qualifications of black applicants and insisted that black veterans vote without further tests. The activists encouraged the city's blacks to participate in electoral politics. "Politics IS food, clothes, and housing," declared the committee that registered some seven hundred new black voters in the months before the 1944 elections.[20] After a visit to Winston-Salem in 1944, a *Pittsburgh Courier* correspondent wrote, "I was aware of a growing solidarity and intelligent mass action that will mean the dawn of a New Day in the South. One cannot visit Winston-Salem and mingle with the thousands of workers without sensing a revolution in thought and action. If there is a 'New' Negro, he is to be found in the ranks of the labor movement."[21]

Organization and political power gave the black community greater leverage at city hall and at the county courthouse. NAACP and union officials regularly took part in municipal government debate on social services for the black community, minority representation on the police and fire departments, and low-cost public housing. In 1944 and 1946 newly enfranchised blacks helped reelect Congressman John Folger, a New Deal supporter, against strong conservative opposition. In 1947, after black registration had increased some tenfold in the previous three years, a minister, Kenneth Williams, won a seat on the Board of Aldermen, becoming the first black city official in the twentieth-century South to be elected against a white opponent.[22]

Civil Rights Militancy in Detroit

The social dynamic that had begun to revolutionize Winston-Salem played itself out on a far larger scale in Detroit, making that city a center of civil rights militancy in the war years. Newly organized black auto workers pushed forward the frontier of racial equality on the shop floor, in the political arena, and within the powerful, million-member United Auto Workers. Despite increasing racism among white workers, union goals and civil rights aims largely paralleled each other in the 1940s.

In 1940 about 4 percent of all auto workers were black; the proportion more than doubled during the war and rose to about one-fifth of the auto work force in 1960. Although proportionally less numerous than in Winston-Salem, blacks were nevertheless central to the labor process in many of Detroit's key manufacturing facilities. Excluded from assembly operations and skilled work, blacks dominated the difficult and unhealthy, but absolutely essential, work in foundry, paint shop, and wet sanding operations.[23]

[20] *UCAPAWA News*, Aug. 1, 1944, p. 2.; *ibid.*, Sept. 1, 1944, p. 5; *Worker's Voice*, Oct. 1944, p. 3; *ibid.*, March 1946, p. 4. For politics in the preunion era, see Bertha Hampton Miller, "Blacks in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 1895–1920: Community Development in an Era of Benevolent Paternalism" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1981), 6–74; *Worker's Voice*, Oct. 1944, p. 3.

[21] *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 3, 1944.

[22] Board of Aldermen, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Minutes, vol. 30, p. 278 (City Hall, Winston-Salem, N.C.); *ibid.*, vol. 32, p. 555.

[23] Herbert R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York, 1944), 186–88; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York, 1979), 3–7.

Ford Motor Company's great River Rouge complex contained the largest concentration of black workers in the country. More than half of its nine thousand black workers labored in the foundry, but Henry Ford's peculiar brand of interwar paternalism had enabled blacks to secure some jobs in virtually every Ford department. The company therefore proved a mecca for black workers. Those who worked there proudly announced, "I work for Henry Ford," and wore their plant badges on the lapels of their Sunday coats. Ford reinforced his hold on the loyalty of Detroit's black working class by establishing what amounted to a separate personnel department that recruited new workers on the recommendation of an influential black minister. That policy, which continued until the early 1940s, strengthened the pro-company, anti-union attitude of most churchmen and reinforced the hostility shown the early CIO by leaders of the Detroit Urban League and the local NAACP branch.[24]

UAW leaders recognized that unless black workers were recruited to the union they might undermine efforts to consolidate UAW power in key manufacturing facilities. The danger became clear during the racially divisive 1939 Chrysler Corporation strike when management tried to start a back-to-work movement spearheaded by black workers, and it proved even more apparent during the 1940–1941 Ford organizing drive, when black workers hesitated to join the union. During the April 1941 Ford strike, several hundred scabbed inside the plant. In response, UAW leaders made a concerted effort to win over elements of the local black bourgeoisie who were not directly dependent on Ford's patronage network. The ensuing conflict within the Detroit NAACP chapter was only resolved in favor of the UAW after Ford's unionization. Thereafter black workers, whose participation in union activities had lagged well behind those of most whites, became among the most steadfast UAW members. The UAW itself provided an alternative focus of power, both cooperating with and challenging the black church and the NAACP as the most effective and legitimate spokesman for the black community.[25]

Many talented, politically sophisticated black officers and staffers emerged in the UAW during the mid-1940s, although never in numbers approaching their proportion of union membership. Blacks were a majority in almost every foundry and in most paint shops, so locals that represented manufacturing facilities usually adopted the United Mine Workers formula of including a black on the election slate as one of the top four officers. Locals with a large black membership also elected blacks to the annual UAW convention, where the one hundred and fifty to two hundred black delegates in attendance represented about 7 or 8 percent of the total voting roll. And almost a score of blacks also secured appointment as highly visible UAW international representatives during the early 1940s.[26]

Ford's River Rouge complex overshadowed all other Detroit area production facilities as a center of black political power. Although most blacks had probably voted

[24] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 8–22.

[25] *Ibid.*, 39–87.

[26] Shelton Tappes interview by Herbert Hill, Oct. 27, 1967, Feb. 10, 1968 (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mich.).

Black members of the United Automobile Workers meet during an organizing drive at Ford Motor Company in 1941. Oscar Noble is speaking. Shelton Tappes sits at his right.
Courtesy Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

against the UAW in the NLRB elections of May 1941, the unionization process, particularly radical in its reorganization of shop floor social relations at the Rouge, helped transform the consciousness of these industrial workers. With several hundred shop committeemen in the vanguard, workers intimidated many foremen, challenged top management, and broke the company spy system. "We noticed a very definite change in attitude of the working man," recalled one supervisor. "It was terrible for a while . . . the bosses were just people to look down on after the union came in." For the next decade, Rouge Local 600 proved a center of civil rights militancy and a training ground for black leaders. The Rouge foundry sent more than a score of black delegates to every UAW convention, provided at least half of

Richard T. Leonard, a United Auto Workers official, addresses a meeting of Local 600 during the 1941 strike against Ford Motor Company. *Courtesy Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.*

all black staffers hired by the UAW, and customarily supplied Local 600 with one of its top officers. Foundryman Shelton Tappes, a 1936 migrant from Alabama, helped negotiate a then-unique anti-discrimination clause into the first UAW-Ford contract and went on to serve as recording secretary of the sixty thousand-member local in the mid-1940s.[27]

The Rouge was also a center of Communist party strength in Detroit. The radical tradition there had remained unbroken since World War I when the Industrial Workers of the World and other radical union groups had briefly flourished. Skilled workers from Northern Europe had provided most members during the difficult interwar years, but after 1941 the party recruited heavily among blacks, and at its peak in the late 1940s it enrolled 450 workers, almost half from the foundry. The Rouge was one of the few workplaces in the country where Communists, black or white, could proclaim their political allegiance without immediate persecution. As late as

[27] Robert Robinson interview by Lichtenstein, Oct. 9, 1983 (in Lichtenstein's possession); Ed Lock interview by Peter Friedlander, Dec. 1976, *ibid.*; Walter Dorach interview by Lichtenstein, Oct. 14, 1982, *ibid.*; Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 106–7.

1948 Nelson Davis, the black Communist elected vice-president of the nine thousand-man Rouge foundry unit within Local 600, sold several hundred subscriptions to the *Daily Worker* every year. But even here, Communist influence among black workers rested on the party's identification with civil rights issues; indeed many blacks saw the party's foundry department "club" as little more than a militant race organization.[28]

With almost one hundred thousand black workers organized in the Detroit area, black union activists played a central role in the civil rights struggle. They demanded the hiring and promotion of black workers in metropolitan war plants, poured into the Detroit NAACP chapter, and mobilized thousands to defend black occupancy of the Sojourner Truth Homes, a federally funded project that became a violent center of conflict between white neighborhood groups and the housing-starved black community. In those efforts black activists encountered enormous resistance not only from plant management and the Detroit political elite but also from white workers, midlevel union leaders under direct pressure from white constituents, and conservatives in the black community. But as in the civil rights movement of the early 1960s, black militants held the political initiative, so that powerful white elites—the top office holders in the UAW, company personnel officers, and the government officials who staffed the War Labor Board and War Manpower Commission—had to yield before this new wave of civil rights militancy.[29]

As in Winston-Salem, mass unionization transformed the character of the black community's traditional race advancement organizations. Under pressure from Local 600 leaders like Tappes, Horace Sheffield (his rival for leadership of the foundry), and the pro-union minister Charles Hill, the NAACP and the Urban League became more militant and activist. Black community leadership still came largely from traditional strata: lawyers, ministers, doctors, and teachers, but the union upsurge reshaped the protest agenda and opened the door to new forms of mass struggle. The NAACP itself underwent a remarkable transformation. In the successful effort to keep the Sojourner Truth housing project open to blacks, NAACP officials had for the first time worked closely with the UAW militants who organized the demonstrations and protests that forestalled city or federal capitulation to the white neighborhood groups that fought black occupancy. That mobilization in turn energized the local NAACP, as almost twenty thousand new members joined, making the Detroit branch by far the largest in the nation. Black workers poured in from the region's recently unionized foundries, tire plants, and converted auto/aircraft facilities, and from city government, streetcar lines, restaurants, and retail stores.[30]

[28] Wellman interview; Paul Boatin interview by Lichtenstein, Oct. 12, 1982 (in Lichtenstein's possession); Keeran, *Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions,* 33–67; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Activities, *Communism in the Detroit Area,* 82 Cong., 2 sess., March 10–11, 1952, pp. 3036–45; 3117–35.

[29] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit,* 175–206; Alan Clive, *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor, 1979), 144–51.

[30] "20,000 Members in 1943," *Crisis,* 50 (May 1943), 140–41; Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942* (Philadelphia, 1984), 75–99, 111–13.

By 1943 the Detroit NAACP was one of the most working-class chapters in the country. Its new labor committee, the largest and most active group in the branch, served as a forum for black workers to air their grievances and as a pressure group, urging companies and the government to advance black job rights. With UAW support, the labor committee sponsored an April 1943 march and rally that brought ten thousand to Cadillac Square to demand that managers open war industry jobs to thousands of still-unemployed black women in the region. Although the NAACP old guard repulsed a direct electoral challenge from UAW members and their sympathizers, the chapter added two unionists to its executive board and backed protest campaigns largely shaped by UAW militants: mass rallies, picket lines, and big lobbying delegations to city hall, Lansing, and Washington. By the end of the war the ministerial leadership of the black community was in eclipse. Horace White, a Congregational minister, admitted: "The CIO has usurped moral leadership in the [Negro] community."[31]

On the shop floor, black workers sought to break out of traditional job ghettos in the foundry and janitorial service, precipitating a series of explosive "hate" strikes as white workers walked off the job to stop the integration of black workers into formerly all-white departments. The strikes were almost always failures, however, not only because federal officials and UAW leaders quickly mobilized to cut them off but also because they failed to intimidate most black workers. During the war there were probably as many demonstrations and protest strikes led by black workers as racially inspired white walkouts.[32] For example, at Packard, scene of one of the most infamous hate strikes of the war, black workers eventually triumphed over white recalcitrance. A racialist personnel manager, a divided union leadership, and a heavily southern work force heightened racial tensions and precipitated several white stoppages that culminated in June 1943 when more than twenty-five thousand whites quit work to prevent the transfer of three blacks into an all-white department. But black workers were also active. Under the leadership of foundryman Christopher Alston, a Young Communist League member, they had earlier shut down the foundry to demand that union leaders take more forceful action against recalcitrant whites; and in the months after the big wildcat hate strike, those same blacks conducted strikes and protests that kept the attention of federal officials and local union leaders focused on their problems. Their militancy paid off; by the end of 1943 about five hundred blacks had moved out of the Packard foundry and into heretofore all-white production jobs.[33]

Although newly assertive second-generation Poles and Hungarians had come to see their jobs and neighborhoods as under attack from the equally militant black community, top UAW officials championed civil rights during the war. In the after-

[31] "20,000 Members in 1943," 141; "All out for Big Demonstration against Discrimination," file 1943, box C86, NAACP Papers; Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 114–17; Howe and Widick, *UAW and Walter Reuther*, 103.

[32] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 136–56.

[33] Richard Deverall to Clarence Glick, "UAW-CIO Local 190 Wildcat Strike at Plant of Packard Motor Co.," Richard Deverall Notebooks (Catholic University of America, Washington); "Negro Workers Strike to Protest 'Hate Strike,'" *Michigan Chronicle*, Nov. 18, 1944, Fair Employment Practices vertical file (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 162–74.

math of the great Detroit race riot of 1943, in which the police and roving bands of whites killed twenty-five blacks, the UAW stood out as the only predominantly white institution to defend the black community and denounced police brutality. During the hate strikes, UAW leaders often sought the protection of a War Labor Board back-to-work order in order to deflect white rank-and-file anger onto the government and away from themselves. But officials like UAW Vice-president Walter Reuther made it clear that "the UAW-CIO would tell any worker that refused to work with a colored worker that he could leave the plant because he did not belong there."[34]

Intraunion competition for black political support encouraged white UAW officials to put civil rights issues high on their agenda. During the 1940s black staffers and local union activists participated in an informal caucus that agitated for more black representatives in the union hierarchy and more effort to upgrade black workers in the auto shops. Initially chaired by Shelton Tappes of Local 600, the group was reorganized and strengthened by George Crockett, an FEPC lawyer the UAW hired to head its own Fair Employment Practices Committee in 1944. The overwhelming majority of UAW blacks, however, backed the caucus led by Secretary-Treasurer George Addes and Vice-president Richard Frankensteen, in which Communists played an influential role. The Addes-Frankensteen caucus endorsed the symbolically crucial demand for a Negro seat on the UAW executive board and generally supported black-white slates in local union elections. The other major UAW faction was led by Walter Reuther and a coterie of ex-socialists and Catholics, whose own internal union support came from workers in the General Motors plants (Flint and Western Michigan), in the South, and in the aircraft fabricating facilities of the East and Midwest. Support for Reuther's faction was particularly strong among the more assimilated Catholics and Appalachian whites in northern industry. Reuther denounced proposals for a black executive board seat as "reverse Jim Crow," but his group also advocated civil rights, not so much because they expected to win black political support, but because the rapid growth of a quasi-autonomous black movement had made militancy on civil rights the sine qua non of serious political leadership in the UAW.[35]

A Moment of Opportunity

By the mid-1940s, civil rights issues had reached a level of national political salience that they would not regain for another fifteen years. Once the domain of Afro-

[34] Capeci, *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit*, 78–82, 164–70; Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit*, 164.

[35] "Addes-Frankensteen to Support Proposal for UAW Board Member," Sept. 25, 1943, *Michigan Chronicle*, Fair Employment Practices vertical file (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); "[Reuther] Slaps Addes for Stand on Race Issues," Oct. 2, 1943, *ibid.*; "UAW Leaders Assail 1,400 Hate Strikers," April 29, 1944, *ibid.*; "Split in Ranks of Officials Aid to Cause," Sept. 16, 1944, *ibid.*; "Reuther Urges Support of NAACP Membership Campaign," *Detroit Tribune*, June 1, 1946, *ibid.*; George Crockett inteview by Hill, March 2, 1968 (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); William Dodds interview by Lichtenstein, June 12, 1987 (in Lichtenstein's possession); Martin Halpern, "The Politics of Auto Union Factionalism: The Michigan CIO in the Cold War Era," *Michigan Historical Review*, 13 (Fall 1987), 66–69.

American protest groups, leftist clergymen, and Communist-led unions and front organizations, civil rights advocacy was becoming a defining characteristic of urban liberalism. Thus ten states established fair employment practice commissions between 1945 and 1950, and four major cities—Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia—enacted tough laws against job bias. Backed by the CIO, the Americans for Democratic Action spearheaded a successful effort to strengthen the Democratic party's civil rights plank at the 1948 convention.[36]

In the South the labor movement seemed on the verge of a major breakthrough. *Fortune* magazine predicted that the CIO's "Operation Dixie" would soon organize key southern industries like textiles. Black workers proved exceptionally responsive to such union campaigns, especially in industries like lumber, furniture, and tobacco, where they were sometimes a majority of the work force. Between 1944 and 1946 the CIO's political action apparatus helped elect liberal congressmen and senators in a few southern states, while organizations that promoted interracial cooperation, such as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and Highlander Folk School, experienced their most rapid growth and greatest effectiveness in 1946 and 1947.[37]

The opportune moment soon passed. Thereafter, a decade-long decline in working-class black activism destroyed the organizational coherence and ideological elan of the labor-based civil rights movement. That defeat has been largely obscured by the brilliant legal victories won by civil rights lawyers in the 1940s and 1950s, and by the reemergence of a new mass movement in the next decade. But in Winston-Salem, Detroit, and other industrial regions, the time had passed when unionized black labor was in the vanguard of the freedom struggle. Three elements contributed to the decline. First, the employer offensive of the late 1940s put all labor on the defensive. Conservatives used the Communist issue to attack New Deal and Fair Deal reforms, a strategy that isolated Communist-oriented black leaders and helped destroy what was left of the Popular Front. The employers' campaign proved particularly effective against many recently organized CIO locals with disproportionate numbers of black members. Meanwhile, mechanization and decentralization of the most labor intensive and heavily black production facilities sapped the self-confidence of the black working class and contributed to high rates of urban unemployment in the years after the Korean War.

Second, the most characteristic institutions of American liberalism, including the unions, race advancement organizations, and liberal advocacy organizations, adopted a legal-administrative, if not a bureaucratic, approach to winning citizenship rights for blacks. The major legislative goal of the union-backed Leadership

[36] Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics," *Journal of Southern History*, 37 (Nov. 1971), 597–616. See also Peter J. Kellogg, "Civil Rights Consciousness in the 1940s," *Historian*, 42 (Nov. 1972), 18–41.

[37] "Labor Drives South," *Fortune*, 34 (Oct. 1946), 237; *Wage Earner*, April 12, 1946, p. 3; *New York Times*, April 21, 1946, p. 46; *Final Proceedings of the Eighth Constitutional Convention of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, November 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 1946, Atlantic City, New Jersey* (Washington, n.d.), 194; Barbara Sue Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia, 1988).

Conference on Civil Rights in the 1950s was revision of Senate Rule 22, to limit the use of the filibuster that had long blocked passage of a national FEPC and other civil rights legislation. The UAW and other big unions cooperated with the NAACP in the effort, but the work was slow and frustrating and the struggle far removed from the shop floor or the drugstore lunch counter.[38]

Finally, the routinization of the postwar industrial relations system precluded efforts by black workers to mobilize a constituency independent of the leadership. Focusing on incremental collective bargaining gains and committed to social change only if it was well controlled, the big unions became less responsive to the particular interests of their black members. By 1960 blacks had formed oppositional movements in several old CIO unions, but they now encountered resistance to their demands not only from much of the white rank and file but also from union leaders who presided over institutions that had accommodated themselves to much of the industrial status quo.[39]

Postwar Reaction: Winston-Salem

Like most labor intensive southern employers, R. J. Reynolds never reached an accommodation with union labor, although it signed contracts with Local 22 in 1945 and 1946. Minimum wage laws and collective bargaining agreements had greatly increased costs of production, especially in the stemmeries, and the black women employed there were the heart and soul of the union. Soon after the war, the company began a mechanization campaign that eliminated several predominantly black departments. When the factories closed for Christmas in 1945 new stemming machines installed in one plant displaced over seven hundred black women. The union proposed a "share the work plan," but the company was determined to cut its work force and change its racial composition by recruiting white workers from surrounding counties. The black proportion of the manufacturing labor force in Winston-Salem dropped from 44 to 36 percent between 1940 and 1960.[40]

The technological offensive undermined union strength, but by itself Reynolds could not destroy Local 22. When contract negotiations began in 1947, the company rejected union demands for a wage increase patterned after those won in steel, auto, and rubber earlier in the spring. Somewhat reluctantly, Local 22 called a strike on May 1. Black workers and virtually all of the Negro community solidly backed the union, which held out for thirty-eight days until a compromise settlement was reached. But, in a pattern replicated throughout industrial America in those years,

[38] Paul Sifton to Victor G. Reuther, "Revised Civil Rights Memorandum," June 13, 1958, Civil Rights Act of 1958 file, box 25, Joseph Rauh Collection (Library of Congress).

[39] Sumner Rosen, "The CIO Era, 1935–55," in *The Negro in the American Labor Movement*, ed. Julius Jacobson (New York, 1968), 188–208; Herbert Hill, "The Racial Practices of Organized Labor: The Contemporary Record," *ibid.*, 286–357.

[40] *Worker's Voice*, Jan. 1947, p. 2; Tilley, *R. J. Reynold's Tobacco Company*, 485–88; Everett Carll Ladd, *Negro Political Leadership in the South* (Ithaca, 1966), 61. See also Howell John Harris, *The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison, 1982), 96, 157.

Local 22 members kept spirits high with gospel and union songs during their thirty-eight-day strike against the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company in 1947.
Courtesy Winston-Salem Journal.

Communist influence within the union became the key issue around which management and its allies mounted their attack. The *Winston-Salem Journal* soon denounced Local 22 as "captured . . . lock, stock and barrel" by the Communist party, warning readers that the strike would lead to "open rioting." This exposé brought Local 22 officers under the scrutiny of the House Committee on Un-

Tobacco workers picket at a plant entrance during the 1947 strike by Local 22 against the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. *Courtesy Winston-Salem Journal.*

American Activities (HUAC), which held a highly publicized hearing on the Winston-Salem situation in the summer of 1947.[41]

Communist party members contributed to the volatility of the situation. In the late 1940s, Local 22 found itself politically vulnerable when foreign policy resolutions passed by the shop stewards' council followed Communist party pronouncements. The party's insistence on the promotion of blacks into public leadership positions sometimes put workers with little formal education into union leadership jobs they could not handle. Moreover, the party's obsession with "white chauvinism" backfired. After the 1947 strike, Local 22 made a concerted effort to recruit white workers. Some young veterans joined the local, although the union allowed most

[41] *Winston-Salem Journal*, May 19, 1947, p. 1; Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, 400–401; U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings Regarding Communism in Labor Unions in the United States*, 78 Cong., 1 sess., July 11, 1947, pp. 63–122; *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 12, 1947, p. 1.

to pay their dues secretly.[42] The party objected, remembered North Carolina leader Junius Scales, "'If they got any guts,' they would say, 'let them stand up and fight,' not realizing, as many black workers and union leaders realized, that for a white worker to just *belong* to a predominantly black union at that time was an act of great courage."[43]

With its work force increasingly polarized along racial and political lines, Reynolds renewed its offensive in the spring of 1948. Black workers remained remarkably loyal to the union leadership, but the anticommunist campaign had turned most white employees against the union and eroded support among blacks not directly involved in the conflict. The company refused to negotiate with Local 22 on the grounds that the union had not complied with the new Taft-Hartley Act. The law required union officers to sign an affidavit swearing they were not members of the Communist party before a union could be certified as a bargaining agent by the NLRB. Initially, all the CIO internationals had refused to sign the affidavits, but by 1948 only Communist-oriented unions such as FTA still held out. When Reynolds proved intransigent, there was little the union could do. FTA had no standing with the NLRB, and it was too weak to win another strike.[44]

At the same time, Local 22 began to feel repercussions from the conflict within the CIO over the status of unions, like the FTA, that had rejected the Marshall Plan and endorsed Henry Wallace's Progressive party presidential campaign in 1948. A rival CIO union, the United Transport Service Employees (UTSE), sent organizers into Winston-Salem to persuade black workers to abandon Local 22. In a March 1950 NLRB election, which the FTA requested after complying with the Taft-Hartley Act, UTSE joined Local 22 on the ballot. The FTA local retained solid support among its black constituency, who faithfully paid dues to their stewards even after the contract had expired and in the face of condemnation of their union—from the company, the CIO, and HUAC. Even the black community leader Alderman Williams asked workers to vote against the union and "send the Communists away for good." Yet Local 22 captured a plurality of all the votes cast, and in a runoff two weeks later it won outright. But when the NLRB accepted the ballots of lower-level white supervisors, the scales again tipped against the local.[45]

Local 22 disappeared from Winston-Salem's political and economic life, and a far more accommodative black community leadership filled the void left by the union's defeat. Beginning in the mid-1940s, a coalition of middle-class blacks and white business moderates had sought to counter the growing union influence within the black community. They requested a study of local race relations by the National Urban League's Community Relations Project (CRP). Largely financed by Hanes

[42] Jack Fry interview by Korstad, Oct. 16, 1981 (in Korstad's possession).

[43] Harvey A. Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO* (Westport, 1981), 286–87.

[44] *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 15, 1947, p. 14; Robert Black interview by Korstad, March 4, 1985 (in Korstad's possession).

[45] *Winston-Salem Journal*, March 18, 1950, p. 1; *ibid.*, March 22, 1950, p. 1; *ibid.*, March 25, 1950, p. 1; *ibid.*, April 6, 1950, p. 1; Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, 404–12.

Hosiery president James G. Hanes, the CRP study appeared in late 1947 and called for improved health, education and recreational facilities, but it made no mention of workplace issues. The Urban League foresaw a cautious, "step by step approach" and proposed that an advisory committee drawn from the black middle class discuss community issues with their white counterparts and help city officials and white philanthropists channel welfare services to the black community. The *Winston-Salem Journal* called the CRP's recommendations a "blueprint for better community relations" but one that would not alter "the framework of race relations."[46]

The Urban League's program helped make Winston-Salem a model of racial moderation. Blacks continued to register and vote in relatively high numbers and to elect a single black alderman. The city high school was integrated without incident in 1957, while Winston-Salem desegregated its libraries, golf course, coliseum, and the police and fire departments. But the dynamic and democratic quality of the black struggle in Winston-Salem would never be recaptured. NAACP membership declined to less than five hundred in the early 1950s, and decision making once again moved behind closed doors. When a grievance arose from the black community, a group of ministers met quietly with Hanes; a few phone calls by the white industrialist led to desegregation of the privately owned bus company in 1958.[47]

A similar story unfolded in the plants of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. After the destruction of Local 22, the company blacklisted several leading union activists, yet Reynolds continued to abide by many of the wage standards, benefit provisions, and seniority policies negotiated during the union era. The company reorganized its personnel department; rationalized procedures for hiring, firing, and evaluating employees; and upgraded its supervisory force by weeding out old-timers and replacing them with college-educated foremen. To forestall union activity, Reynolds kept its wages slightly ahead of the rates paid by its unionized competitors.[48]

In February 1960, when sit-ins began at segregated Winston-Salem lunch counters, the voices of black protest were again heard in the city's streets. But the generation of blacks who had sustained Local 22 played little role in the new mobilization. College and high school students predominated on the picket lines and in the new protest organizations that confronted white paternalism and challenged the black community's ministerial leadership. NAACP membership rose once again; more radical blacks organized a chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Public segregation soon collapsed.[49]

The subsequent trajectory of the freedom struggle in Winston-Salem was typical of that in many black communities. Heightened racial tensions set the stage for a

[46] Reginald Johnson to Lester Granger, memorandum, Jan. 28, 1946, Community Relations Project, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, file, box 27, series 6, National Urban League Papers (Library of Congress); *Winston-Salem Journal*, Nov. 16, 1947, sec. 3, p. 1.

[47] Ladd, *Negro Political Leadership*, 121–27, 134–35; Black to March, Jan. 25, 1950, 1946–55, file, box C140, NAACP Papers; Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, 410; Aingred Ghislayne Dunston, "The Black Struggle for Equality in Winston-Salem, North Carolina: 1947–1977" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1981), 59.

[48] Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, 412–14, 454–58, 463–71.

[49] Dunston, "Black Struggle for Equality," 61–161.

1967 riot and a burst of radicalism, followed by the demobilization of the protest movement and years of trench warfare in the city council. The political career of Larry Little, the son of Reynolds workers who had been members of Local 22, highlighted the contrasts between the two generations of black activists. Little moved from leadership of the North Carolina Black Panther party in 1969 to city alderman in 1977, but despite the radicalism of his rhetoric, crucial issues of economic security and workplace democracy were not restored to the political agenda in Winston-Salem. Because black activists of his generation confronted the city's white elite without the organized backing of a lively, mass institution like Local 22, their challenge proved more episodic and less effective than that of the previous generation.[50]

The Limits of Liberalism in Postwar Detroit

A similar demobilization took place in Detroit after the war. There the union, as well as the companies, helped undermine the independent working-class base black activists had built in the six years since UAW organization of the Ford Motor Company. Racial issues were not of primary importance in the factional conflict of 1946 and 1947 that brought Walter Reuther to the presidency of the UAW. The victory of his caucus was based both on rank-and-file endorsement of Reuther's bold social vision, especially as exemplified in the General Motors strike of 1945–1946, and in the Reuther group's anticommunism, which struck an increasingly responsive chord after passage of the Taft-Hartley Act.[51] Nevertheless, the Reuther victory greatly diminished black influence and independence within the UAW and the liberal-labor community in which the union played such an important role. Reuther was as racially egalitarian as his opponents, but the political logic of his bitterly contested victory—he won less than 10 percent of black delegate votes in 1946—meant that Reuther owed no organizational debt to the growing proportion of union members who were black.

When the Reuther group consolidated their control of the union in 1947, there was a large turnover in the Negro UAW staff. Blacks with ties to the opposition, such as John Conyers, Sr., and William Hardin, two of the first black staffers, and the articulate lawyer, George Crockett, the de facto leader of the UAW's black caucus, were ousted from their posts. The young dynamo, Coleman Young, lost his job with the Wayne County CIO council. Tappes was hired as a UAW international representative in the early 1950s, but only after he had broken with the Communists and lost his base of support in the Rouge plant.[52]

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Reuther group understood that civil rights was a litmus test of labor liberalism. Reuther sat on the board of directors of the NAACP,

[50] *Ibid.*, 270–71.

[51] John Barnard, *Walter Reuther and the Rise of the Auto Workers* (Boston, 1983), 101–17; Martin Halpern, "Taft-Hartley and the Defeat of the Progressive Alternative in the United Auto Workers," *Labor History*, 27 (Spring, 1986), 204–26.

[52] Crockett interview; Tappes interview; Studs Terkel, *Division Street, America* (New York, 1971), 328–30.

and the UAW probably contributed more funds to that organization than all other trade unions combined. The UAW also proved a ready source of emergency funds for the Montgomery Improvement Association, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Students for a Democratic Society's early community organizing activities. Reuther was outraged that the AFL-CIO did not endorse the 1963 March on Washington; his union had provided much of the early funding, and he would be the most prominent white to speak at the interracial gathering.[53]

Reuther also maintained a high profile on civil rights issues within the UAW. As president, he appointed himself co-director of the union's Fair Employment Practices Department and used the FEPD post to denouce racial discrimination and identify himself with postwar civil rights issues. Reuther pushed for a fair employment practices bill in Michigan and led the successful UAW effort to integrate the American Bowling Congress. During the crucial months after he had won the UAW presidency, but before his caucus had consolidated control of the union, such activism helped defuse black opposition; when Reuther was reelected in 1947 he won about half of all black delegate votes.[54]

Despite this public, and well-publicized, appearance, the emergence of a more stable postwar brand of unionism undermined civil rights activism in the UAW. As in many unions, the Reuther regime sought to eliminate or to coopt potentially dissident centers of political power. Local 600 was such a center of opposition, where black unionists still within the Communist orbit continued to play an influential, if somewhat muted, role well into the 1950s. Immediately after the 1952 HUAC hearings in Detroit, which publicized the continuing presence of Communists in Local 600, the UAW International Executive Board put the huge local under its direct administration. Six months later, tens of thousands of Rouge workers reelected their old officers, but the influence and independence of the giant local nevertheless waned in the next few years. Leaders of the UAW defused much of the local's oppositional character by appointing many of its key leaders, including Tappes and Sheffield, to the national union staff.

Equally important, Ford's postwar automation and decentralization slashed the Rouge work force in half, eliminating the predominantly black production foundry. The same phenomenon was taking place in many of Detroit's other highly unionized production facilities, so that by the late 1960s a ring of relatively small and mainly white manufacturing facilities surrounded Detroit's million plus black population. Meanwhile, high levels of black unemployment became a permanent feature of the urban landscape after the 1957–1958 recession. Not unexpectedly, the size and social influence of the unionized black working class ceased to grow, al-

[53] Walter Reuther, "The Negro Worker's Future," *Opportunity*, 23 (Fall 1945), 203–6; William Oliver to Roy Reuther, "Status of UAW Officers and NAACP Memberships," Feb. 21, 1961, file 24, box 9, UAW Citizenship Department (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); Herbert Hill interview by Lichtenstein, June 20, 1987 (in Lichtenstein's possession).

[54] Martin Halpern, "The Disintegration of the Left-Center Coalition in the UAW, 1945–1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1982), 237–40, 273–74, 433–37; Tappes interview.

though this stagnation was masked by the militance of inner-city minority youth late in the 1960s.[55]

The UAW's Fair Employment Practices Department also defused civil rights activism in the union. After 1946 the department was led by William Oliver, a black foundryman from Ford's Highland Park factory. Unlike the politicized blacks from the Rouge, Oliver had no large reservoir of political support in the UAW, nor did he attempt to build one. During Oliver's tenure, the FEPD had a dual role: it represented the UAW to the national civil rights community, the NAACP, the Urban League, and the more liberal federal agencies and congressmen; and it processed discrimination complaints as they percolated up from black workers in the locals. Rather than serving as an organizing center for UAW blacks, the FEPD bureaucratized the union's civil rights activities. "We are a fire station" admitted Tappes, who served in the department during the 1950s and 1960s, "and when the bell rings we run to put out the fire."[56]

A UAW retreat from civil rights militancy also became evident in politics. From 1937 to 1949, the UAW sought to reshape Detroit's formally "nonpartisan" electoral politics along interracial class lines. Thus in 1945 and 1949 Richard Frankensteen and George Edwards, both former UAW leaders, fought mayoral campaigns that helped move integrated housing and police brutality to the center of local political debate. Both were defeated by conservative incumbents, but their labor-oriented campaigns nevertheless provided a focus around which civil rights forces could mobilize. However, after the CIO's "bitterest political defeat in the motor city," in 1949, the UAW ceased to expend its political capital in what many of its leaders now considered fruitless campaigns to take over city hall. The UAW continued to back the liberal governor G. Mennen Williams, but in the city proper the union made peace with conservatives like Albert Cobo and Louis Miriani, who had built much of their political base on segregationist homeowner movements.[57]

Neither the Communist party nor the NAACP was able to fill the void opened up by the UAW default. In the early 1950s many erstwhile leaders of the union's black caucus joined the Detroit Negro Labor Council (NLC), a Communist front organization. But the NLC faced relentless pressure from the NAACP, HUAC, and the UAW, which denounced the council as a "Communist-dominated, dual unionist organization which has as its sole objective the disruption and wrecking of the American labor movement."[58] Both the UAW and the NAACP made exclusion

[55] William D. Andrew, "Factionalism and Anti-Communism: Ford Local 600," *Labor History*, 20 (Spring 1979), 227–36; Dorach interview. See also Nelson Lichtenstein, "Life at the Rouge: A Cycle of Workers' Control," in *Life and Labor*, ed. Stephenson and Asher, 237–59.

[56] Tappes interview; Oliver to Roy Reuther, "Ford Plant, Indianapolis," Dec. 20, 1957, file 29, box 8, UAW Citizenship Department (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); Oliver to Walter Reuther, "Preliminary Analysis of Allegations Made against UAW by the NAACP Labor Secretary Which Were Unfounded," Nov. 1, 1962, file 10, box 90, Walter Reuther Collection, *ibid.*

[57] Dudley W. Buffa, *Union Power and American Democracy: The UAW and the Democratic Party, 1935–72* (Ann Arbor, 1984), 133–73; B. J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (Chicago, 1972), 151–55.

[58] *Proceedings, Fourteenth Constitutional Convention, International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), March 22–27, 1953, Atlantic City, New Jersey* (n.p., [1953]), 264; Philip Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker* (New York, 1981), 295–309.

of Communists from civil rights coalition work a high priority in the early 1950s, and the NLC dissolved in 1956. The NAACP, of course, maintained a cordial relationship with the UAW, but it also declined in postwar Detroit. After reaching a wartime peak of twenty-four thousand in 1944, membership dropped to six thousand in 1950, when there was much discussion of the need to "rehabilitate" what had once been the organization's largest unit. In the early 1950s national NAACP membership also fell to less than half its wartime level.[59]

When civil rights reemerged as a major issue in union and city politics in the late 1950s, the Reuther leadership often found its interests counterposed to the forces mobilized by the freedom movement of that era. By 1960 Detroit's population was about 30 percent black, and upwards of a quarter of all auto workers were Mexican or black. At the Rouge plant between 50 and 60 percent of production workers were nonwhite.[60]

Reuther's mode of civil rights advocacy seemed increasingly inadequate as the fears and conflicts of the early Cold War era receded. Two issues seemed particularly egregious. First, black participation in UAW skilled trades apprenticeship programs stood at minuscule levels, 1 percent or less. Second, no black sat on the UAW executive board, although blacks had been demanding that symbolically important post in UAW convention debates since the early 1940s. Failure to make progress on those problems genuinely embarrased white UAW leaders, but Reuther and his colleagues were trapped by the regime over which they presided. Reuther hesitated to take on the militant and well-organized skilled trades, then in the midst of a long-simmering craft rebellion against the UAW's industrial unionism. Nor could a black be easily placed on the UAW executive board. In no UAW region did blacks command a majority of all workers; moreover Reuther loyalists held all existing posts. Creating a new executive board slot seemed the only alternative, but that would dilute the power of existing board members and flatly repudiate Reuther's long-standing opposition to a specifically black seat on the executive board.[61]

In this context, and in the immediate aftermath of the Montgomery bus boycott, an independent black protest movement reemerged in Detroit politics with the founding of the Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC) in 1957. Initially TULC was little more than a caucus of UAW black staffers, but under the leadership of Horace Sheffield the organization challenged Reutherite hegemony. Despite the UAW's good reputation, Sheffield explained in 1960, a black-led organization was needed because "the liberal white trade unionists had long been 'mothballed,' . . . by the extensive growth of 'business unionism.'"[62] TULC opened a new chapter in

[59] Herbert Hill to Roy Wilkins, Dec. 23, 1949, Hill-1949 file, box C364, NAACP Papers; "Graphic Representation of Detroit Branch NAACP Campaigns, 1941 to 1948," Detroit file, box C89, *ibid.*; "Memorandum for Gloster Current on Rehabilitation of Detroit Branch," April 20, 1950, *ibid.*; Record, *Race and Radicalism*, 132–231; Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Confrontation: Black and White* (Chicago, 1965), 213.

[60] Widick, *Detroit*, 138–40; "UAW Fair Practices Survey—1963," file 12, box 90, Reuther Collection; Robert Battle to James Brown, "RE: Civil Rights Hearing," Dec. 13, 1960, file 13, box 50, *ibid.*

[61] William Gould, *Black Workers in White Unions* (Ithaca, 1977), 371–88; Jack Stieber, *Governing the UAW* (New York, 1962), 83–88; "UAW Fair Practices Survey—1963."

[62] Horace Sheffield, "Bitter Frustration Gave Added Impetus to Trade Union Leadership Council," *Michigan*

Detroit politics in the 1961 mayoralty race. The incumbent mayor, Miriani, had the support of virtually all elements of the Detroit power structure, including the UAW, but he was hated by most blacks and not a few whites because of his defense of Detroit's increasingly brutal and racist police department. Sheffield used the mayoral campaign of Jerome Cavanagh, a young liberal lawyer, to establish his own network among Detroit's black trade union officials and make the TULC a mass organization of over seven thousand members in 1962 and 1963. Thereafter, a number of black activists whose political roots went back to the anti-Reuther forces of the 1940s won elective office, sometimes over bitter UAW protest. They included John Conyers, Jr., who took Detroit's second black congressional seat in 1964, George Crockett, who won election as Recorders Court judge in 1966 and later went on to Congress, and Coleman Young, who become mayor in 1973.[63]

TULC proved less successful in remolding UAW politics. The organization's mushroom growth, combined with the growth of the civil rights movement, forced the UAW to put a black on its executive board in 1962. But for this position the Reuther leadership chose none of the blacks prominently associated with TULC militancy, but instead the relatively little known Nelson Jack Edwards, a black staff representative. Although black appointments to the UAW staff increased markedly in the 1960s, TULC failed to generate a mass movement among rank-and-file black workers. TULC represented the generation of black activists politicized in the 1940s, but many had spent the intervening years on union staffs or in local office so they no longer enjoyed an organic link with the younger black militants who were flooding into Detroit's auto shops.[64]

When the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and other black insurgencies swept through the auto industry in the late 1960s, the new generation had come to see UAW liberalism as indistinguishable from corporate conservatism. They were mistaken, but in 1968, that year of great expectations and smashed hopes, such distinctions seemed beside the point. Many TULC veterans found DRUM's wholesale condemnation of the UAW irresponsible, while the young militants thought their elders merely a reformist wing of Reuther's union leadership. A reported exchange conveys DRUM members' impatience with TULC veterans' loyalty to the union. Shelton Tappes is said to have told a group of black Chrysler workers who had been fired for staging an outlaw strike and were picketing Solidarity House, the UAW's official home: "If the TULC had done what it was orga-

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Chronicle, May 28, 1960, Horace Sheffield vertical file (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); B. J. Widick interview by Lichtenstein, Aug. 6, 1986 (in Lichtenstein's possession).

[63] Buffa, *Union Power*, 139–42; Widick, *Black Detroit*, 151–56; The UAW made an all-out, but ultimately unsuccessful, effort to stop George Crockett's reentry into mainstream political life. See Nadine Brown, "Crockett Supporters Charge Union 'Takeover' in First," *Detroit Courier*, Oct. 6, 1966, George Crockett vertical file (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); and Morgan O'Leary, "Hectic '49 Trial Haunts Crockett's Bid for Bench," *Detroit News*, Oct. 7, 1966, *ibid*

[64] Nelson Jack Edwards and Willoughby Abner, "How a Negro Won a Top UAW Post," *Detroit Courier*, April 4, 1964, vertical file, Trade Union Leadership Conference (Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs); "Reuther Outlines UAW Position on Sheffield Assignment," file 9, box 157, Reuther Collection; Hill interview; Widick interview.

nized for there wouldn't be any such development as DRUM." And one of the young pickets reportedly answered, "And if Reuther and the other bureaucrats had done what the *union* was organized for, there wouldn't have been any need for TULC."[65]

Conclusion

E. P. Thompson once asserted that most social movements have a life cycle of about six years. And unless they make a decisive political impact in that time, that "window of opportunity," they will have little effect on the larger political structures they hope to transform.[66] For the black freedom struggle the mid-1940s offered such a time of opportunity, when a high-wage, high-employment economy, rapid unionization, and a pervasive federal presence gave the black working class remarkable self-confidence, which established the framework for the growth of an autonomous labor-oriented civil rights movement. The narrowing of public discourse in the early Cold War era contributed largely to the defeat and diffusion of that movement. The rise of anticommunism shattered the Popular Front coalition on civil rights, while the retreat and containment of the union movement deprived black activists of the political and social space necessary to carry on an independent struggle.

The disintegration of the black movement in the late 1940s ensured that when the civil rights struggle of the 1960s emerged it would have a different social character and an alternative political agenda, which eventually proved inadequate to the immense social problems that lay before it. Like the movement of the 1940s, the protests of the 1960s mobilized a black community that was overwhelmingly working-class. However, the key institutions of the new movement were not the trade unions, but the black church and independent protest organizations. Its community orientation and stirring championship of democratic values gave the modern civil rights movement a transcendent moral power that enabled a handful of organizers from groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SCLC, and CORE to mobilize tens of thousands of Americans in a series of dramatic and crucial struggles. Yet even as this Second Reconstruction abolished legal segregation and discrimination, many movement activists, including Martin Luther King, Jr., recognized the limits of their accomplishment. After 1965 they sought to raise issues of economic equality and working-class empowerment to the moral high ground earlier occupied by the assault against de jure segregation.[67] In retrospect, we can see how greatly they were handicapped by their inability to seize the opportunities a very different sort of civil rights movement found and lost twenty years before.

[65] Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 423.

[66] Notes on E. P. Thompson, speech in support of European peace movement, July 8, 1983, Berkeley, California (in Lichtenstein's possession). The notion that protest movements have a limited time frame in which to make their impact felt is also put forward by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York, 1977), 14–34.

[67] David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, 1986), 431–624.