African-American Experience in Youngstown 1940-1965

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Abstract

The twentieth century has seen many changes in American society. The United States has gone from a predominately rural society to a predominately urban society. The city of Youngstown, Ohio, was a part of this population shift, and by 1930, the population reached 170,000, while a decade later in1940 the population decreased slightly to 167,720. With the onset of World War II, Youngstown's steel industry needed many unskilled workers, which helped to bring about the last major wave of migration into the Mahoning Valley. One of the largest groups of people who came to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s was African-Americans from the South. The purpose of this study is to determine whether African-Americans, especially the migrants, were able to build a viable community in Youngstown, how well they handled the effects of segregation and discrimination in the city, and how the city of Youngstown compared to other cities in the North in their treatment of African-Americans.

There are many aspects of the African-American community that must be considered when doing a study such as this. Chapter one of this thesis will deal with the migration itself and the factors that led the migrants to leave the South for Youngstown and other urban cities of the North. Next, chapter two examines the effects of discrimination in the area of public facilities on the African-American community and how the black community responded. The next chapter discusses the development of community organizations that were created between 1940 and 1965 in an effort to develop a strong African-American community in the city. The final two chapters analyze the black community in the areas of

housing and employment respectively, and the effect racism and discrimination had on blacks in those areas.

Introduction

Over the course of the twentieth century, there were many changes in American society. In 1900, the country was a predominantly rural society. By the 1950s, the United States evolved into a predominately urban society. The city of Youngstown, Ohio, was a part of this evolution. By the 1940s, the population of Youngstown grew to well over 160,000 people. The war in Europe during this period created a need for unskilled workers in the steel industry of the Mahoning Valley, and helped to bring about the last wave of migration into the Youngstown area. The National Origins Act of 1924, the Great Depression, and World War II cut off the supply of immigrants, which deprived the local steel mills of a major source of unskilled workers. One of the largest groups of people to come to Youngstown during this period was African-Americans from the South. This group of migrants came to Youngstown seeking a better way of life for themselves and their children. The purpose of this study in migration is to determine whether African-Americans in Youngstown, especially the migrants, were able to build a viable community in Youngstown, how well they handled urban life, and the effect racism had on the African-American community during the period of 1940-1965.

There are many aspects of the African-American community that must be considered in such a study. First, the study will look at who the migrants were and why they migrated to the Mahoning Valley during the 1940s and 1950s. Besides World War II, there were also a number of other push and pull factors which led African-Americans to leave their homes in the South for the industrial

North. To be sure, this investigation will demonstrate characteristics of the migrants such as their age, level of education, and class level.

This thesis will next look at how the African-American community dealt with segregation and discrimination in public facilities during the 1940s and 1950s. It was during the 1940s that the black community in Youngstown challenged the local ban on its use of municipal swimming pools. This issue was one of the most controversial to face the city during this period. In addition, blacks were also restricted in where they could sit in local movie theaters. Lastly, the city's newspaper, the *Vindicator*, had its own segregated section for African-Americans known as "Interesting News and Notes about Colored People". It will be shown how the African-American community responded to all the overt and covert forms of discrimination in their community.

Furthermore, the thesis will look at black steelworkers and to what degree they were victims of discrimination. Oral interviews of retired steelworkers and a number of secondary sources are used to determine the extent of racism and discrimination against blacks in local steel mills. These same sources were also used to determine whether the United Steelworkers of America locals were of any assistance to the African-American steel worker. Employment in the steel mills was a major factor that led to the tremendous influx of African-American migrants into the Mahoning Valley during the decades of the 1940s and 1950s. The migrants hoped that employment in the steel mills would lead to a more stable financial future for themselves and their families.

The issue which became of utmost importance to cities across the United States during the early 1950s was urban renewal. Slum areas throughout the United States were torn down. The people who were most affected and displaced by slum clearance and urban renewal were blacks. The purpose behind urban renewal was to demolish all blighted and deteriorating buildings in urban areas and replace them with new buildings and highways. This chapter will also cover the problem of segregated housing in the city of Youngstown and the forces that led to the city becoming one of the most segregated in the United States.

Despite the fact blacks faced discrimination and racism in every facet of their lives during this period, they succeeded in building a strong community. During this time, African-Americans established many organizations, centers, and groups to aid in the building of a strong black community. Organizations such as the local NAACP and the National Urban League were at the forefront of the struggle for civil rights for blacks in the Mahoning Valley. In addition, there were a number of African-American churches established during the 1920s that by the 1940s and 1950s provided strong leadership and aided the migrants in their adjustment to life in the city of Youngstown.

The years 1940-1965 were chosen to begin and end this thesis because of their importance in the history of Youngstown and the entire country. The second great migration in the twentieth century of African-Americans to the North took place during this period. In 1940, the war in Europe was beginning to escalate. By December 1941, it had became a global conflict with the United States brought into the fray. The city of Youngstown sent a large number of

young men to fight in the war, which created a need for unskilled workers in its steel mills. Thus, World War II led to one of the largest influxes of African-Americans ever to migrate to the city of Youngstown. Close to 20,000 African-Americans came from such states as Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi.

The year 1965 was chosen as the year to end this thesis because it was the close of the second great migration of African-Americans during the twentieth century. The year 1965 was also a watershed year for the passing of civil rights legislation. President John F. Kennedy saw the importance of civil rights in United States domestic policy prior to his death on November 22, 1963. After his assassination, his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, took up the cause of civil rights. The unfortunate death of President Kennedy made the passage of such legislation easier. The new civil rights laws affected the entire country, including Youngstown. Congress now made discrimination against blacks, women, and other minorities illegal.

Finally, many primary and secondary sources were used to write this thesis. The secondary sources included such books as Arnold Hirsch's book on migration to Chicago from 1940-1960, *Making The Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960.* The primary sources that were used to write this thesis were newspapers such as *The Youngstown Vindicator* and *The Buckeye Review*, the city directory, census material, oral interviews and church and court records. Records from the NAACP and the National Urban League were also used as primary source material for this study.

Chapter 1

The Second Great Migration

During the twentieth century there were two large-scale migrations of African-Americans from the South that changed the face of America. The first, which took place between 1915 and 1930, is known as the Great Migration. More than a million and a half blacks migrated to the industrial cities of the North during this period. The second great migration of African-Americans, which began in 1940, has not been studied as closely, but was even larger than the first. An estimated five million people migrated to the urban cities of the North during this second great migration.[1] Seven thousand blacks migrated to Youngstown between 1940 and 1950 and another ten thousand migrated to the city between 1950 and 1960.[2]

The chapter on the second great migration was included in this thesis to examine what it was, how it impacted the city of Youngstown, and also to give a general description of who the migrants were and why they came to this city. It is essential to give some background information on the two periods of migration during the twentieth century because it was during this time that the African-American population of Youngstown increased so dramatically, and helped to make the urban North what it is today. There were millions of blacks who migrated to the urban north and they brought with them their talents, hopes, and aspirations of a better life than what they had in the South.

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[1] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) 1.

[2] Census Bureau, *Census of Population* 1960, Volume 1, part 37, Ohio. Table 10, 451.

Youngstown, Ohio, which was an important steel producing center during the 1940s, was one of the cities in which a large number of migrants made their home. Seventeen thousand blacks migrated to Youngstown between 1940 and 1960. Conversely, during the first great migration between 1910 and 1930, 12,616 blacks migrated to Youngstown.[3] This increase in the black population during the two great migrations helped to change Youngstown socially, politically, and culturally. This chapter will cover the factors which led to this migration and the characteristics of the migrants.

Blacks who came to Youngstown during the first and second migrations learned about their destination through word of mouth or by letter from relatives already living in the city. In contrast, African-Americans who migrated to Pittsburgh not only learned about the city by word of mouth but also by the city's black owned newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier.* In his book, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30,* Peter Gottlieb stated, "The *Courier* circulated nationwide in the 1920s bringing news about Pittsburgh's black community to towns and rural settlements hundreds of miles distant from the city."[4] The newspaper enabled the migrants to learn about job openings and other information about the city before they arrived. The *Buckeye Review*, Youngstown's first black owned newspaper, was not established until 1937, but its circulation never reached the level of the *Courier.*

There were many factors which led to the African-American migration to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s. The first was World War II, which

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[3] Census Bureau, *Census of Population 1960*, Volume 1, part 37, Ohio. Table10. , 451.

[4] Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-30* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 42.

created a need for unskilled workers in northern factories during the war, including the steel mills of Youngstown, Ohio. The big three steel mills of Youngstown during the 1940s were Youngstown Sheet and Tube, Republic Steel and Carnegie Steel, which later became the United States Steel Corporation in 1950.[5]

The group of migrants who came to Youngstown between 1940-1965 came to the city looking for employment in the steel mills. However, there were some exceptions like Pastor Ernest Rheins, the retired pastor of Holy Trinity Baptist Church who was college educated. At the age of forty-four Pastor Rheins brought his family to Youngstown in 1960 from Jefferson County Florida, to accept the position of Pastor at Holy Trinity.[6] Leroy Adams was nineteen years old when he came to Youngstown in 1948 from Statesville, North Carolina. He was a steelworker for Republic Steel for thirty-seven years. Shortly after his arrival, he brought his seventeen-year-old wife, Ethel, to Youngstown where they began their family, which eventually included two sons and two daughters.[7] Leroy and Ethel Adams more closely fit the profile of most migrants upon their arrival in northeastern Ohio during the 1940s and 1950s.

The promise of better wages was a major factor that brought African-Americans to the Mahoning Valley. Most migrants had relatives or friends who had already settled in Youngstown during the Great Migration of 1915-1930. As was stated previously, this was a time when a million and a half African-

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[5] Robert Bruno, *Steel Worker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) 9.

[6] Ernest Rheins, interview by Michael Beverly, 19 February 1999, transcript, Oral History Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH. Herin Cited as YSU Oral History Program.

[7] Leroy and Ethel Adams, Michael Beverly, 15 June 1998, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

Americans migrated to northern cities like Chicago, New York, Cleveland, and Youngstown. These migrants sent letters to their southern relatives telling them of the high wages they received in the industrial North. When the sharecroppers realized that there were few opportunities for them to climb out of poverty in the South, many decided to make the journey North.[8]

Sharecroppers in the South usually received little or no money working as farmers. Since they received wages only after they picked their crops, they had to pay the landowner back out of their wages for tools and food they used during the year. Sharecroppers were only able to receive these supplies by putting them on a bill at the store, which the landowner usually owned. If the crops were poor that year, the farmer could end up owing the landowner money instead of receiving any wages at all. This cycle often continued year after year until the sharecropper was in perpetual debt. As a result, the sharecropper was indebted to the landowner for the rest of his life. Thus, migrating to Ohio was a way to escape for those who believed they would be in debt to the landowner for the rest of their lives. The thought of earning high wages in Ohio provided an important incentive to the migrants to move north because they believed they would live a more comfortable life in Youngstown.[9]

The promise of a better education for their children was another factor which led African-Americans to come to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s. During this period, schools in the South were segregated. Mary Abron who came to Youngstown in 1951 from Greensboro, Alabama, stated,

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[8] Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 159.

[9] Ibid.

> When I was there, Hale county Training School was black, and the white school was down on the other end of town. Therefore, we did not have any interaction there other than when we had a football game. Hale County did not have a field and the white school did, so that is where our own football games were played.[10]

Abron added that the black teams used the field only to play other black teams.

White schools received more money, so they were able to provide their students with better books and better facilities. In some towns during this period, black schools only received books which had already been used for a number of years in the all-white schools. Clearly, these books were in very poor shape by the time they reached the all black schools.[11] It was also during this period that few blacks were encouraged to obtain their high school diploma. When asked how many years they went to school, Leroy Adams stated, "I went to the tenth grade," and his wife Ethel stated, "I went to the eighth grade."[12]

There were also few black children who received encouragement to become professionals like a doctor or a lawyer. Lonnie Simon, retired pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, stated, "The reason being, they would say that there would be no reason for us to take an academic course because there would be no place in the job market for our skills."[13] Pastor Simon, despite the fact that he was not encouraged to take academic courses in high school, went on to finish high school and in 1946 came to Youngstown from Cardale, Pennsylvania, to earn

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[10] Mary Abron, interview by Michael Beverly, 8 September 1998, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[11] Lemann, 1.

[12] Leroy and Ethel Adams, interview by Michael Beverly, 15 June 1998, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[13] Lonnie Simon, interview by Michael Beverly, 15 February 1999, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

enough money to go to college.[14] His family was originally from Mulga, Alabama, which is in Jefferson County near Birmingham. They migrated to Pennsylvania when he was very young so his father could become pastor at a church in Cardale.[15] Blacks came to Youngstown because they believed their children would receive a good education which would enable them to obtain a well paying job.

Jim Crow laws and the system of segregation was another reason why blacks left the South to come to Youngstown. Jim Crow laws had been made legal in the South with the *Plessey vs. Ferguson* decision of 1896. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the separation of the races was legal and constitutional as long as all facilities were equal. That meant that as long as white facilities and black facilities were the same, the races could be separated. State and local governments created separate schools for black and white students from elementary school to college. There were separate hospitals, separate seating on trains, and even segregated water fountains and restrooms. Public facilities in the South were definitely separate, but they were seldom equal. Blacks, by the turn of the twentieth century, were firmly entrenched in second-class citizenship by the power structure of the South with the blessing of the United States Supreme Court.[16]

Segregation was a way of life for every Southerner from the cradle to the grave. Black midwives delivered African- American babies and when African Americans died, they were buried in all- black cemeteries. Blacks and whites also

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Lemann, 15.

lived in their own sections of town. The only time blacks were able to enter the white section of a Southern town was when they went there to work as a maid, gardener, or were doing some other kind of work for a white family. This was the only time there was any type of social interaction among the races.[17] Otherwise, they lived separate lives. There are some blacks that believed segregation had some good points which benefited blacks in the South. Ernest Rheins stated,

> Now I like segregation for one reason. Segregation taught us how to take what we had and make what we want out of it. In segregation, we had our own banks, we had our own churches, we had our own schools, and we had our own everything. So that gave us a pretty good boost as black people.[18]

Racial violence also led blacks to leave the South for the North to a place where they believed the races tolerated one another. They felt that if they came to a place like Youngstown, they would be free of any intimidation. Racial violence is something which has been used against blacks since they were brought to this part of the world under the system of slavery. James Davidson in *Nation of Nations* states, "Of the one hundred eighty-seven lynchings averaged each year of the 1890s, some eighty percent occurred in the South, where the victims were usually black."[19] This sort of violence and intimidation continued into the 1940s and beyond throughout the South. In 1946, Davidson stated, "White citizens in

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[17] Ernest Rheins, interview by Michael Beverly. 8 September 1998, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[18] Ibid.

[19] James W. Davidson, *Nation of Nations: A Concise Narrative of the American Republic* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1996), 526.

rural Georgia lynched several black veterans who had shown the determination to vote."[20]

The South used all sorts of methods to keep blacks from voting like the poll tax, the literacy test, and even murder. Blacks were not allowed to serve on juries and harsher sentences were handed down to blacks than whites even when they committed the same crimes.[21] Ernest Rheins, in speaking about some of his experiences with racism when he was pastoring at a church in Florida stated, "Plenty of times I used to be, when I was pastoring, walking to church. White people did not like to see you dressed up. Plenty of times, we would look back and see dust coming, a car coming. You did not know who. They would come up and shoot at you."[22] There were laws in the South which outlawed interracial marriage. A black man could put his life in jeopardy by merely looking at a white woman the wrong way. The nation was shocked in 1955 when fourteen- year old Emmitt Till was brutally murdered in Mississippi for alledgedly making a flirtatious remark to a white woman.[23]

A final factor which led blacks to leave the South during the 1940s and 1950s was the automatic cotton picker. This invention ultimately led to the demise of the system of sharecropping. For well over a hundred years, cotton had been the South's most important crop. African-American slaves and, later, sharecroppers were the people who planted, tended, and picked the cotton when

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[20] Ibid.,p.786.

[21] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 320.

[22] Rheins, Interview

[23] Franklin,459.

harvesting time came.[24] During the 1940s, the automatic cotton picker was invented and it picked the crops faster and more cheaply. The invention brought to an end the need for blacks to pick the cotton, and ended the system of sharecropping. The now displaced workers looked to the North as a source for employment.

There were a number of factors that led to the African-American migration to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s. It was during this period that the Mahoning Valley was the third largest steel producer in the country behind Pittsburgh and Chicago. World War II created a need for unskilled workers in the steel mills of Youngstown.[25] Higher wages and the fact they could now escape the system of sharecropping was another reason the migrants came to the city. African-Americans were also trying to escape segregation and the Jim Crow laws that kept them trapped as second-class citizens. The widespread use of the automatic cotton picker destroyed the system of sharecropping. The fact that sharecropping was now coming to an end also was bringing to an end a way of life for the sharecroppers. They were farmers in search of a better way to provide for their families. The steel mills of Youngstown were looking for unskilled workers and the migrants were looking for jobs that paid well. Thus, during the 1940s and 1950s African-Americans came to the city by the thousands.

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[24] Lemann, 5.
[25] Mel Watkins, *Dancing With Strangers,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 23.

Chapter 2

Segregation in Youngstown

Life in the South was different in the 1940s from what it is like today. Today, there are huge metropolitan areas like Atlanta, Georgia, that have elected black mayors like Andrew Young. Cities and towns throughout the South are electing African-American mayors, congressmen, and other officials. There are also black professionals and business owners who are well respected in their communities. During the 1940s, the system of segregation was firmly entrenched in the American South. The races were kept completely separate in every facet of Southern society. People have the misconception that segregation was unique to the South during this period. Segregation was also part of the lives of people who lived in the Midwest, Northeast, and the eastern seaboard and West as well. There were two forms of segregation which existed during this period in the United States: dejure, which is legal segregation and defacto, which is segregation by custom or "in fact".[1]

Both dejure and defacto segregation were a part of the everyday lives of Southerners. There were laws that banned interracial marriage. There were also numerous devices that prevented blacks from voting like the poll tax, which was a tax imposed on the poor requiring them to pay a fee for voting. Most African-Americans who were sharecroppers were too poor to afford to pay a tax to exercise their right to vote. The literacy test was also another device designed to keep blacks from voting. The literacy test in some cases required the voter to

[1] Mel Watkins, *Dancing With Strangers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 279.

memorize the state's constitution, an impossible task for anyone but especially for most sharecroppers because of their lack of education.[2]

Conversely, the Northern states did not typically have laws on their books that kept blacks and whites separated. Defacto segregation was a more subtle form of segregation that nevertheless kept the races separate. To be sure, this is the form of segregation the migrants encountered when they came to Youngstown. Although there were no written laws which legally kept blacks and whites separated, the races were kept separate and unequal. Blacks and whites only encountered each other in passing on the street or perhaps at their place of work.

This chapter on segregation and discrimination in Youngstown sets out to discuss the racism the migrants encountered when they came to the Mahoning Valley. It is a very important aspect of the history of Youngstown that must be examined. Racism and discrimination affected both blacks and whites politically, socially, and economically. It is also necessary to reveal how blacks responded to this discrimination. The reason for this is the fact that if there was a strong response against discrimination, it would be clear evidence that there was a strong African-American community in the city.

First, blacks could not sit with whites in downtown movie theaters. Governor Bowers, a retired steelworker stated, "Downtown you had your theaters. Palace, Warner, Paramount. Palace, Warner, Paramount them was the biggest

[2] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 264.

theaters. They were segregated. You sat upstairs. Whites sat downstairs."[3] It was understood when blacks went to downtown movie theaters, they were always to sit in the balcony which was known as "the buzzards nest" or "nigger heaven."[4] When whites entered downtown movie theaters, they were to sit downstairs. If blacks broke the unwritten rule and sat downstairs, the usher would tell the violator of Youngstown custom to move to the balcony. Governor Bowers' family came to Youngstown during the great migration of 1915-1930.

The discrimination blacks suffered in Youngstown only mirrored the discrimination and racism African-Americans suffered in cities across the urban North. In Cleveland, by the 1920s discriminatory practices had become a way of life. In his book, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* Kenneth Kusmer stated, "Discriminatory practices were not limited to hotels and restaurants. Theaters often refused to admit Negroes, segregated them within the theater, seated them in the balcony, or charged them higher prices."[5] Segregated seating practices in movie theaters were practiced in both Cleveland and Youngstown.

In the area of racism and discrimination in recreational facilities, the cities of Cleveland and Youngstown were also similar. African-Americans were not allowed the free use of the amusement parks located in both cities. In Cleveland, blacks were restricted in their use of the city's two main amusement parks, Luna Park and Euclid Beach Park. African-Americans were able to enjoy these two

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[3] Governor and Katherine Bowers, interview by author, 13 August 1998. transcript, Oral History Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH. Herein cited as YSU Oral History Program.

[4] Mel Watkins, *Dancing With Strangers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 133.

[5] Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 179.

parks only a limited number of days during the summer.[6] The restrictions on blacks in recreational facilities were not unique to Cleveland, it was also the case in the city of Youngstown.

Idora Park, the famous amusement park located on the south side of town, also had its restrictions on black and white intermingling. For example, the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company held its annual field day and picnic at Idora Park on Labor Day. The company's African-American employees were permitted to use the dance hall for only one hour during the day from noon to 1p.m. There are many who believe the reason Idora Park's management converted its swimming pool into Kiddieland was to prevent blacks and whites from swimming together. Richard Shale states in his book *Idora Park: The Last Ride of Summer* that the reason for the conversion was "to diffuse racial tensions stemming from interracial swimming. Two suits charging racial discrimination had been filed against the Idora Roller Skating Rink in early April 1949; and the owners may have seen the pool as a potential source of trouble." Shale went on to suggest another reason for the conversion was shrinking revenue due to the six municipal pools being operated in Youngstown in 1949.[7]

Governor Bowers stated, "You only went out to Idora Park, and Idora Park was segregated. Yes, it was really segregated. They would let you ride, but you could not swim, You could not go to the dances."[8] Idora Park was a very well known amusement park. People from all over Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and

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[6] Ibid, 180.

[7] Richard Shale, *Idora Park: The Last Ride of Summer* (Jefferson: Amusement Park Journal, 1999), 79.

[8] Bowers, Interview.

other parts of the country would come to the park to enjoy its rides and entertainment. The Idora Park ballroom was very well known for its live performances. Bands from all over the country performed at the ballroom. Whites were able to enjoy the bands, but it was understood that blacks were not welcomed there. Eventually, during the 1940s,the park divided the ballroom with a rope and allowed blacks to dance on one side of the ballroom while whites danced on the other side.[9]

When the migrants arrived in Youngstown during the 1940s, they lived with relatives and friends who had already come in the previous migration. When asked with whom he lived when he first came to Youngstown in 1948, Leroy Adams stated,

> My father was living here. He worked here for a long time in steel, and so he had been here for I do not know how many years. Then I just moved here after I got married. We moved up and we lived with him. And I got a job where he worked.[10]

Mary Abron stated she lived with her aunt on Shehy Street when she first arrived in Youngstown in 1951.[11]

There were 1,500,000 African-Americans who migrated North during the great migration 1915-1930. The black population increased dramatically in Youngstown from 6,662 in 1920 to 14,552 in 1930 or a 118.4% increase.[12] It was this group which planted the seeds of community for African-Americans during the period of 1915-1930. A number of organizations were established during this

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[9] Watkins, 133.

[10] Leroy and Ethel Adams, interview by author. 15 June 1998. transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[11] Mary Abron, interview by author, 8 September 1998. transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[12] Census Bureau, *Census of Population*, Volume 3, part 2, Montana- Wyoming. Table 21, 525.

period which laid the foundation for a strong African-American community in Youngstown. The Roberts Deliberating Club was an example of community building. It was founded in 1920 to provide its members with knowledge of parliamentary procedure, so they could use this skill in assuming proper representation and as a means of exercising their rights in debates. The Roberts Deliberating Club also fought for civil rights for African-Americans in Youngstown.

The Civic League was organized in 1915 with the purpose of improving the quality of life for black families. The Civic League created the Well Baby Clinic to provide free health care for black babies who were born to the migrants and other black families living in the Youngstown area. The Youngstown branch of the NAACP was organized January 13, 1919, to fight racial segregation and discrimination against blacks living in the Mahoning Valley.[13] Thus, the foundation of an African-American community had already been laid when the new wave of migrants arrived during the 1940s. Black civic organizations like these helped create a viable African-American community in Youngstown and fought against de facto segregation in the city during the middle part of the twentieth century.

One question that became controversial during the 1940s was that of municipal pools in Youngstown. There were swimming pools on every side of town including: East Side pool in Lincoln Park, North Side Pool on Belmont Avenue, South Side Pool located on South Avenue and Marion Street, and also West Side Pool on Belle Vista Avenue on the west side of town. Again, there was

[13] "Buckeye Review Salutes," *The Buckeye Review*, 16 September 1988, 1.

no law that prohibited blacks from swimming in the pools. However, there was an understanding that blacks were not allowed to enjoy these public facilities.[14]

The African-American community did not let this custom go unchallenged. During the 1940s groups like the Future Outlook League, which was led by Bertrand Carlson, took small groups of African-Americans, mostly teenagers, to city swimming pools to challenge discrimination in public facilities. The Future Outlook League was a civil rights organization, which fought against segregation and discrimination in Youngstown. The FOL in Youngstown was a branch of the state organization headquartered in Cleveland during the 1940s. Bertrand Carlson, the president of the local FOL was an employee of the Youngstown Water Department.[15]

Whenever the FOL led a group of bathers to a swimming pool, typically, the same events occurred. First, the African-American bathers would enter the pool. Next, white swimmers left the pool and complained to the pool manager about blacks being in the pool. Lastly, the pool manager closed the pool and told the police that African-American bathers were creating a disturbance. In 1940, at North Side Pool, police charged Tony Grove a twenty-one year old member of the FOL with creating a disturbance and resisting arrest. Police said he was fighting at the edge of the cement beach and tried to strike officers when they attempted to calm him. The police arrested Grove but subsequently released him.[16]

In July 1940, police closed the North Side Pool again after pool manager Arthur Teele stated, "a crowd of colored persons, estimated at 200, gathered

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[14] " Man, 2 Girls And Boy Face Mob Action," *Vindicator* 23 June 1949, 4.
[15] " New North Side Pool Closed As Bathers Fight," *Vindicator,* 8 July 1940, 1.
[16] Ibid.

outside the pool between 2 and 3p.m. and a few of them bought tickets. When the ticket holders went to enter the pool they held the doors open while nearly 100 persons rushed through."[17] There were also reports that a knife was drawn by one of the African-American swimmers. Bertrand Carlson, who was present at the swimming pool, contradicted what Arthur Teele stated. Carlson told a reporter for the *Vindicator* that "about fifty colored swimmers were admitted and that nearly thirty who had purchased tickets were denied admittance, along with several white swimmers." "He said there was no attempt to crash the gates, that he saw no evidence of fighting and did not hear of anyone drawing a knife."[18]

That same month, John LeBase, a resident of the city, wrote a letter to J. Maynard Dickerson, the editor and owner of the city's only black newspaper *The Buckeye Review*. In the letter, LeBase commended Dickerson for an article he wrote in his newspaper supporting interracial swimming in the city. LeBase went on to caution Dickerson and the African-American community about moving too fast in the fight for interracial swimming in Youngstown. LeBase stated,

> As I see it, we now have the time of a lifetime to get interracial swimming established, because we have the mayor (William B. Spagnola) and thru him the police force with us if we do not offend him; and we have at least one vote on the park board. But if we get large numbers of white people angry at our cause we may lose the mayor, for after all he feels himself the mayor of the whole town and in that case we may end as Struthers has, with no colored swimming, after their last year's trouble.[19]

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[17] "Police Close N. Side Pool," *Vindicator* 15 July 1940, 1.

[18] Ibid, 2.

[19] John Lebase to J. Maynard Dickerson, July 16, 1940, verticle file, Mahoning Valley Historical Society.

John Le Base's letter reveals that African-Americans in Youngstown were well organized in their fight against discrimination and segregation in the city. The letter also reveals the fact that some African-Americans were fearful of what could happen if they pushed too fast in their attempt to gain equal rights. Katherine Bowers stated,

> It was not where you could just speak up and speak out. "I do not like the way this is going" or, "We are going to get together and do it." Most black people was, "I am alright where I am, so do not stir up no mess. The less mess you stir up the better we are." You had a few that were radical or that were able to stand up for what they believed in, but for the most part, in order to survive, you just did not say we are going out to march today. I am going to march on that group. You had people who did that, but most people were hesitant to get into that.[20]

Blacks during this period, Mrs. Bowers went on to say, were afraid of losing their jobs and being thrown out of their homes if they were paying rent to a white person.

The city government responded to the crisis over interracial swimming pools in 1941 by seeking federal aid for the construction of a swimming pool built specifically for the use of the African-American community. Mayor Spagnola stated, "the pool will be equal in size and facilities to the best swimming pools in the city."[21] By the late 1940s, the city built John Chase Pool for blacks on the north side of town near the West Lake Housing Project.[22]

The building of Chase pool created a new set of problems for the city. White lifeguards refused to work at the new pool because it was built for African-

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[20] Governor and Katherine Bowers, interview by author, 13 August 1998, transcript, YSU Oral History Program..

[21] "City to Ask U.S Aid For Negro Pool," *Vindicator*, 7 July 1949, 10.

[22] "Bathing Pools Trouble Free," *Vindicator*, 24 June 1949, 4.

Americans. During the years leading up to the 1949 decision to hire white lifeguards to work Chase pool, staff stationed at Chase and Lincoln pool on the east side of town were stationed there all summer. White staff that worked at the other pools rotated so they worked at every pool in Youngstown except for Chase and Lincoln even though Lincoln was not built specifically for African-Americans.[23]

In 1949, the city Park and Recreation Commission decided to rotate all lifeguard staffs, black and white, at all municipal pools. This angered the white lifeguard staffs and in a meeting in city council chambers, Richard Wright, chief spokesman for the lifeguards stated, "We will not work in John Chase pool."[24] Wright continued: "We feel we shouldn't be used as guinea pigs for an experiment."[25] As a result of the pressure, the city park and recreation commission recanted its decision to rotate all city lifeguard staffs and went back to the rotation plan it had used in 1948.[26] Therefore, staffs at Lincoln and Chase pools were stationed there throughout the summer and staffs at all other pools were rotated. By allowing the white lifeguards to force them to reverse their decision to rotate all lifeguards to all swimming pools, the City Park and Recreation Commission gave sanction to the continuation of de facto segregation in all public facilities in Youngstown.

The press was very supportive of the city's policy of no interracial swimming in the city. The *Vindicator* wrote an editorial in 1949 stating,

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[23] "Commission Alters Plan On Rotation, *Vindicator*, 20 June 1949, 1.
[24] "Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

"Negroes are naturally patient," urging blacks to be patient and eventually whites would come to accept the idea of interracial swimming in the city.[27] The fight for interracial swimming for a while took a back seat to World War II. After the war was over, however, the African-American community again took up the cause of integrating public facilities. One reason for this increase in black agitation for civil rights was the fact that returning African-American soldiers believed they had risked their lives and fought to maintain freedom for the United States and the rest of the world. They believed when they returned to America they deserved the same rights as any other American citizen.[28]

Mel Watkins in his book, *Dancing With Strangers* ,wrote about his childhood friend Al Bright, a professor of Art at Youngstown State University, and his experience with discrimination at a city swimming pool. In 1951, Al Bright was the only African-American on his Little League baseball team which won the Little League championship that year. Coaches, parents, and players decided to celebrate by going to South Side Park and having a picnic by the swimming pool. When Bright tried to enter the park, the lifeguard stopped him because blacks were not allowed to swim in the pool. The only swimming pool where blacks were welcomed was the newly built John Chase Pool. The coaches and parents had to set up a blanket on the outside of the fence and bring food out to him.[29]

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[27] "The Swimming Pool Problem," *Vindicator*, 7 July 1949, 8.

[28] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery To Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 444.

[29] Watkins, 127.

Some of the players and parents came out and sat with Bright for a while until finally the parents convinced the lifeguards this restriction was unfair and Al should be able to enjoy the swimming pool like everyone else. Finally, the park supervisor gave in to the coaches and parents. There were stipulations that were set, however, before Bright could enter the pool. First, everyone else would have to get out of the pool. Next, Bright could not touch the water so he sat in a rubber raft while a lifeguard led him around the pool to make sure he did not touch the water.[30]

Articles written by the *Vindicator* during the 1940s indicate that the newspaper in fact was a supporter of segregated swimming pools and the 1949 refusal on the part of white lifeguards to work at Chase Pool. In 1949, the newspaper indicated what it believed to be the real reason behind the problems of the 1949 opening of municipal pools. "The actual reason is the attempt on the part of certain persons and groups to force mixed swimming in all pools by both Negroes and whites."[31] The *Vindicator* criticized the city park commission for proposing that its white and black lifeguards alternate their places of work stating, "The park commission was reported to have ordered its white and Negro guards to alternate their places of work. This can only be interpreted as giving public sanction to the attempt to force both races to swim together."[32] The *Vindicator* continued, "But the fact remains that mixed swimming presents a problem in Youngstown. It is a problem that the people must decide carefully and calmly. It

[30] Ibid., p.127.
[31] "Commission Alters Plan On Rotation," *Vindicator*, 20 June 1949, 1.
[32] Ibid., 1.

cannot be solved in a hurry by a few acting behind closed doors and representing so far as this great public issue is concerned no one but themselves."[33]

It was during this period of time that the *Vindicator* not only supported segregated swimming pools in the city, but also segregation within its own newspaper. The paper printed a column that was geared toward its African-American readers called "Interesting News and Notes for Local Colored Folks." This column told of African-American births, deaths, and even if an African-American family had gone on vacation. The editors of the newspaper believed this was very liberal minded on their part and even boasted that this article proved they were behind every ethnic group in Youngstown, including African-Americans.[34] In fact all the newspaper did by printing a separate article for African-Americans was prove they supported segregation in the community, including separate articles in its newspaper.

Ironically, there was racial discrimination and segregation in the Young Men's Christian Association in the city of Youngstown. It is strange that the YMCA practiced segregation and discrimination because the Y was a Christian based organization and the basis of the Christian faith is love and tolerance of the entire human race no matter the color of a person's skin. There was an African-American YMCA located on West Federal Street and a main YMCA located in downtown Youngstown. Again, de facto segregation barred African-Americans from participating in any activity at the downtown branch of the Y.[35] Blacks in

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[33] Ibid., p.1.

[34] "NAACP Body Raps Vindicator For Stand On Swimming Pools," *Vindicator*, 17 July 1949, B4.

[35] Lonnie Simon, interview by Michael Beverly, 15 February 1999, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

Cleveland were also restricted in their use of that city's YMCA. African-Americans in Cleveland were only permitted to use the YMCA which was located on Cedar Street during the early twentieth century.[36]

Lonnie Simon became a victim of discrimination at the Y in Youngstown in the 1940s he stated,

> I went to the YMCA downtown to seek accommodation and the fellow I talked to asked me if I really wanted to come to the downtown Y? I said "yes", he said "well you know that there is a colored Y. up there on Federal Street." I said "well I'm aware of that," and he said "well why would you want to come down here?" Then I said, "isn't this the Young Men's Christian Association?" There was that segregation policy, that is why they had the colored YMCA up on Federal Street and the Y downtown was white.[37]

In 1955, the Mahoning County CIO Council began to pressure the YMCA about its discriminatory practices against African-American men. In 1955, the Mahoning County CIO passed a resolution attacking the policy of the central YMCA of barring black membership.[38] The resolution went on to state that the CIO Council opposed the Community Chest and its continuation of giving any funds to any organization that had a discriminatory policy.

Subsequently, because of the public outcry of the NAACP and the CIO Council the central YMCA ended its practice of having separate Ys in 1974. It was a bittersweet victory for the African-American community. When the central YMCA ended its discriminatory practices, it closed the African-American YMCA on Federal Street because there was no need to have two. The West Federal

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[36] Kusmer, A Ghetto Takes Shape, 180.
[37] Ibid.
[38] "YMCA Policy On Negroes Hit By CIO Council," *Vindicator*, 20 April 1955, 3.

YMCA had been very successful in uplifting the black community. Dr. S.S. Booker was the executive director of the West Federal YMCA and under his leadership, they held Sunday forums that featured nationally known African-American speakers who informed the audience on the condition of black America and solutions for its problems.[39]

The black Young Women's Christian Association was located on Belmont Avenue. It also became a center of activities in the black community. The YWCA organized the Intercollegiate Club during the 1940s for the purpose of promoting social events for African-American college students at Youngstown College. It was under the leadership of Alice Parham and Sarah Alice Phillips that the YWCA became an integral part of the African-American community.[40] The black YWCA was dissolved on January 31, 1953, and all positions within the agency were eliminated. The administration was merged with the central YWCA to eliminate separate memberships for blacks and whites. The African-American YWCA accomplished a great deal in the cause of uplifting black women in the community during its brief existence and was certainly at the forefront of community building in the African-American community.

By June 1950, city leaders and the *Vindicator* were slowly beginning to change their views on interracial swimming in the city of Youngstown Mayor Charles Henderson stated,

> Youngstown's pools are all available for the full use and enjoyment of all our fellow citizens regardless of race, creed, or color. This has always been the case, since it is a fundamental principle established by our Ohio constitution

[39] "Buckeye Review Salutes," *The Buckeye Review*, 16 September 1988, 1.
[40] Ibid.

> and the ordinances of Youngstown. This is sound law and good Americanism. Those who think wrongly that they have special privilege in public facilities, to the exclusion of others, will do well to heed the warning. If they are not willing voluntarily to recognize others' rights, they must be made to do so.[41]

In the same article, the *Vindicator* stated, "A Negro has as much right to swim in a city pool as anyone has. Let the playgrounds and swimming pools carry out their purpose of providing enjoyment for all, and not become sources of bitterness."[42]

Unfortunately, the swimming pool controversy did not fade away with these encouragements of racial tolerance by Mayor Henderson and the *Vindicator*. The problem of integrating the city's swimming pools and other public facilities would only be put on the back burner for the issue which took center stage in the 1950s was urban renewal and slum clearance. The migrants fled the South believing they were escaping segregation. What they found was only a more subtle form of segregation and discrimination that was just as strong and pervasive in the North and also relegated African-Americans to second-class citizenship.

De facto segregation, by its very nature of being unwritten, makes it even more difficult to overcome than de jure segregation. Thus, the city of Youngstown, like so many other cities in the North, believed conditions for blacks in the North were not nearly as bad for blacks in the South. The white people of Youngstown, if the *Vindicator* is any indication, believed things were fine and the

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[41] "Mayor Pledges Rights to All At Playgrounds," *Vindicator*, 16 June 1950, 1.
[42] Ibid., p.1.

races got along well with one another.[43] Contrary to what people believed, things were not fine. Moreover, there were a number of African-Americans who were discontented with their role as second-class citizens.

Groups like the Future Outlook League fought for the integration of public facilities in the city of Youngstown. Nathaniel Lee and the NAACP were involved in the struggle for civil rights. The Intergroup Goodwill Council, an organization created to develop goodwill between blacks and whites, fought to raise the social status of African-Americans during the 1940s and 1950s. The problem with far too many people in the city of Youngstown was the fact they believed communists and other radicals were influencing blacks to fight against the status quo in the city. The reason behind African-American discontent was discrimination and segregation. During the late 1940s African-American soldiers were returning home and they were demanding the same rights enjoyed by every other American. In addition, the migrants who came to the city during this period were trying to escape racism so there were many who joined the struggle for equal rights.

Finally, the white people of Youngstown did not understand that there was something definitely wrong with the way things were here. To be sure, one who is ill cannot ever become well if he or she does not recognize the fact they are sick. Because of this situation, the people of Youngstown did not recognize they were in fact practicing segregation and discrimination that was just as strong as that in the South. Segregation and discrimination would go on to be a problem in perhaps a lesser form; but it was still indeed a problem in the late 1950s and1960s

[43] "The Swimming Pool Controversy," *Vindicator*,20 June 1949, 8.

when segregated swimming pools and theaters slowly ended under the pressure of such groups as the NAACP and the Future Outlook League.

Chapter 3

Community Organizations

Between 1940 and 1965 African-Americans made marginal gains in the areas of integration and employment. Nevertheless, they established organizations to uplift and empower the black community. During the late 1930s, a group of well-meaning black and white community leaders recognized a need for a supervised recreational and educational facility during after school hours for children who lived on the upper east side of Youngstown, an area known as the Sharon Line or McGuffey Heights. The people who were involved in this endeavor to help African-Americans in this section of town included Judge Henry P. Breckenbach, a Juvenile Court judge, John H. Chase, a director of playgrounds and namesake of John H. Chase pool, Attorney Paul L. Booth, and Mrs. Birdie Welcher who would later serve ten years as the president of the future center.[1]

The site selected for the center was formerly a Presbyterian manse. It was considered the best site available for the building. The building came to be known as the McGuffey Center. During its early years of the 1940s, the center was kept open by the efforts of Attorney Booth and Mrs. Welcher. By 1942, it had become a part of the Community Chest and received a budget of $1,000. The McGuffey Center continued to grow and, by 1951, it was incorporated as a full-fledged non-profit organization with a full time executive to oversee the day-to-day operations. The McGuffey Center is still in operation today and is still

[1] McGuffey Center, " McGuffey: Make Equal Opportunity A Reality," n.p., n.d.

serving the social, cultural, and recreational needs of the east side of Youngstown.[2]

The focus of this chapter will be on African-American community building which took place in the city of Youngstown between 1940-1965. Before this period, the old-stock African-American community, many of whom came to Youngstown during the first great migration, had already sown the seeds of community. During the first great migration blacks established businesses, churches, and organizations like the NAACP in order to build a strong community. Subsequently, during the second great migration there were many more organizations established which supports the idea that there was a strong black community in Youngstown. Businesses, churches, and civic organizations are the integral parts of what constitutes a community.

One of the most important factors affecting members of the African-American community was the neighborhood in which blacks lived. When the migrants came to Youngstown, they depended on their families who were already living in the city to help them get adjusted to their new environment. Governor and Katherine Bowers talked about their relatives coming from the South and living with them or other relatives until they were able to find a job and get established.[3] Leroy and Ethel Adams also talked about how they lived with relatives when they first came to Youngstown until they got on their feet.[4]

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[2]Ibid.

[3] Governor and Katherine Bowers, interview by author. 13 August 1998. transcript, Oral History Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH. Herein Cited as YSU Oral History Program.

[4] Leroy and Ethel Adams, interview by author. 15 June 1998, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

The neighborhood was important because it offered the migrants help in times of financial need or if someone was sick. Katherine Bowers stated,

> Everybody shared. If you were at my house and it was suppertime, then you ate. If one of the women in the neighborhood got sick, the other women, whether you were black or white, went there. They raised the children, washed and ironed, cooked, cleaned house, whatever had to be done until your got back on your feet because as poor folks we did not have insurance like HMO. When you got sick, your neighbors were there to pitch in for you. It was a neighborhood thing, especially this side of town because black and white was raised up together side by side.[5]

The fact that relatives were already in Youngstown made the migrants' adjustment to the city easier.[6] The migrants were also aided by the fact the city was not as large as other northern cities like New York or Chicago. African-Americans who came to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s blended in with the rest of the African-American community. The city of Youngstown was not a big adjustment for migrants who came from southern cities like Birmingham, Alabama or Richmond, Virginia. Southern cities like these were comparable to Youngstown in terms of size and population.

The neighborhood was also a source for discipline and morals for the African-American community. Adults during this period of study did not hesitate to discipline their own children in public and also other neighborhood children. If a child was caught misbehaving, he or she could be spanked by any adult in the neighborhood and later by their parents. This form of discipline within the

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[5] Governor and Katherine Bowers, interview by author. 13 August 1998. transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[6] Ibid.

neighborhood created a family type atmosphere within the community.[7] Parents were not offended by another adult within the neighborhood disciplining their child because they usually knew everyone who lived in the neighborhood, which made them a part of the family.

The African-American church was also important to the community because it was located within the neighborhood. For instance, New Bethel Baptist Church, which was located in the Monkey's Nest during the 1940s through the early1960s, was important to the community. The congregation of New Bethel moved to the south side of town in 1964 on Hillman Street where it still is providing the community with strong leadership. There were other important churches like Antioch, Tabernacle, and Union Baptist on the north side of town. Neighborhoods on the south side of town were led by Friendship, Third Baptist, and later New Bethel after it relocated to that side of town from Monkey's Nest. Mount Zion on Wilson Avenue, Ebenezer, and New Hope Baptist church led east side neighborhoods. The church provided the black community with leadership and stability, which demonstrated that the community was both healthy and strong.

The church was a unifying force in the black community. It was an institution in the community which brought the old-stock African-American community and the newly arrived migrants together to discuss and respond to issues which were confronting the black community. The pulpit was not only a place to spread the word of God, but also a place to address the problems facing the minority community in the city. The church also provided blacks with

[7] Ibid.

recreational activities such as church picnics, in which the congregation was able to gather together during their leisure time.[8]

The black church was an integral part of most African- American communities in the Midwest. In Pittsburgh, according to John Bodnar's *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960,* the Hill District contained 45 churches alone. [9] These churches served as the stabilizing force in Pittsburgh's black neighborhoods as Youngstown's black churches had served for its African-American community. The churches of Pittsburgh tended to focus on religious matters rather than social concerns. According to John Bodnar, "Black churches proliferated in the black neighborhood but, like those studied by Allan Spear in Chicago continued to represent spiritual rather than social interests."[10]

In addition to the black church in Pittsburgh, there were other organizations that were important in creating a strong African-American community in that city. For example, there was the Urban League's women's and girls' clubs, and the black YMCA, which also brought the old-stock African-American community and the newly arrived migrants together.[11] The fact that Pittsburgh had a black YMCA which was located in the Hill District of Pittsburgh reveals another similarity between the city of Youngstown and Pittsburgh.[12] The organizations that were established were an important aid in the migrants'

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[8] Ernest Rheins, interview by author, 19 February1999, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[9] John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 199.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration To Pittsburgh, 1916-30.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 197.

[12] Ibid.

adjustment to the urban North. Migrants were able to establish friendships through these establishments which helped blacks survive their new environment.

The creation of the youth branch of the NAACP supported the fact that the African-American youth were also involved in community building in Youngstown. Future attorney Floyd Haynes was the leader of this organization during the 1930s. The youth branch was very much involved in the fight for integration of public facilities, fair employment, and the end to discrimination in the city. The youth branch of the NAACP in the city became one of the largest and most active in the state of Ohio.[13]

The Junior Civic League was another organization which was organized and run by the youth in the black community. The Junior Civic League was organized in 1951. In1955, the league started the Cinderella Ball to raise money for various organizations within the city. The Cinderella Ball also helped to raise money for scholarships that were desperately needed for the underprivileged youth in the city to go to college and further their education. To be sure, there are many people who believe the African-American youth were not active in community building in the city. However, given the many organizations which were created during the 1940s and 1950s, the African-American youth of Youngstown were very much involved in community building.[14]

The Youngstown Chapter of Links, Inc. was organized December 3, 1955. The founding members of Links Inc. in Youngstown were Anita Brown, Margaret Smith, and Grace Hill Walker. Links focused on four primary areas to improve

[13] "Buckeye Review Salutes," *The Buckeye Review*, 16 September 1988.
[14] Ibid.

the black community: the arts, services to youth, national trends, and international trends. The founders of Links believed they could enrich the lives of the African-American community if they could provide blacks with these services.[15]

The group of black business people who probably made the strongest impact on the black community was the black funeral home owners. When African-Americans in the city were unable to obtain loans from local banks during this period, they were able to go to funeral home owners who sometimes served as the bankers for the black community. One of the most prominent funeral home directors was McCullough Williams II, the owner of the McCullough Williams funeral home, which was located on Belmont Avenue. In 1957, Williams was elected to serve on city council in Youngstown. Williams was elected as the third ward councilman. Throughout this period Williams provided the black community with strong leadership in the struggle for civil rights in the city and was also able to maintain a successful business.[16]

There were also other notable funeral home directors who provided leadership for the black community. Horace Emerson, who was the owner of the H.G. Emerson Funeral Home, was also the owner of the first African-American owned cemetery, which was located on Liberty Road, on the east side of town and called Mount Hope Cemetery. Other black owned funeral homes during this period which contributed to the growth of the African-American community were Manley Funeral Home, F.D. Mason's Funeral Home, and Underwood Funeral

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Herbert L. Armstrong, *A Rediscovery of The Past* (Youngstown: Afro-American Bicentennial Committee, 1976) 39.

Home. Margaret Linton, who was a director of Linton Funeral Home on the north side of town, was both a leader in business and civic activities in the city.[17]

African-American women played a very important role in creating a viable black community in Youngstown. In 1958, The Youngstown Club of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs Inc. (NBPW) was organized by Margaret Linton, who served as its first president. The NBPW sponsored the Ebony Fashion Fair and donated all proceeds to the local cancer fund in its first year of existence. In subsequent years, the NBPW donated money to various charities like the Mahoning County Welfare Board for Retarded Children, College Aid to Needy Students, The Blind Society, and the Tuberculosis Clinic. These African-American women played an integral role in community building in the city.[18]

The Youngstown Chapter of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute was organized in 1962. Its purpose was to provide programs to extend democracy to those who had been traditionally disenfranchised from participating in the American political system. Its members believed that a broad based coalition of forces who believed in social progress for minorities, the poor, and working people should be created, with the labor movement occupying the most important role in the alliance. It was a multiracial organization which was committed to social change. The institute believed in the black trade union and sought to

[17] Ibid., 40.
[18] "Buckeye Review Salutes," *The Buckeye Review*, 16 September 1988.

increase the role of the black trade unionists in the black community and the labor movement itself.[19]

The 1930s saw the creation of the city's only black newspaper to give an alternative view of the city from an African-American perspective. Attorney J. Maynard Dickerson founded the *Buckeye Review* in 1937. He used his newspaper to speak out against discrimination and segregation in public facilities in Youngstown. The newspaper was also used to celebrate the richness and accomplishments of the African-American community. The *Buckeye Review* was a very important voice for the African-American community and still is a source of vital information in the black community.[20]

In addition, the African-American community made gains in the field of education between 1940 and 1965. African-American children were allowed to go to any public school in their district. There were no schools ever created specifically for black or white children[21]. If there were schools that were predominantly black or white, it was the result of segregated neighborhoods in the city (which will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis). As blacks continued to settle in these neighborhoods, the schools there became predominantly black.

During the early part of the twentieth century, there were few opportunities for black employment as educators in the Youngstown public school system. The first African-American teacher to be hired for employment in the city was Mary Lovett Belton in 1939 at Butler School. Three other African-

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Armstrong, 51,

American teachers were hired during the 1940s, including Dorothy Hubbard Wigfall, Elizabeth Caldwell, and Annie Black Martin. Mary Belton and Annie Martin were also the first African-Americans to reach the elementary school administration level as elementary school advisors.[22]

Dr. James Ervin, who became a teacher in Youngstown during the 1940s, also became the first black junior high teacher and later the first assistant junior high principal at Hayes Junior High in 1962. Dr Herbert L. Armstrong, hired as a teacher during the 1950s, became the first African-American elementary school principal in 1965. Bernice Gatewood Armour was one of only a few African-Americans hired as secondary teachers during the 1950s. Others who followed in the 1960s were Everett McCollum and Rose Freeman. African-Americans would not reach the level of high school principal until the 1970s.[23]

Joseph Conley was a migrant who came to Youngstown at the age of thirteen with his family from Lennox, Tennessee. Like so many other migrants, Conley's father came to the city to work in the steel mills. Conley described his arrival in Youngstown: "Well when we first came to Youngstown, we lived on the south side of Youngstown and we stayed with a family there. They had space in their attic on their third floor.[24]

When asked to compare the racism of people in Youngstown and the people of Tennessee, Conley stated, "The racial tolerance here, interestingly enough I couldn't tell the difference, when I came to Youngstown. There were

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[22] Ibid, 51.
[23] Ibid., 53.
[24] Joseph Conley, interview by Michael Beverly, 10 July 2001. transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

certain places where you weren't welcome in to eat, especially in the downtown area. And one of the things that really stood out was down at Idora Park, the amusement park had a swimming pool and blacks were not allowed to swim in that swimming pool."[25] In addition, when he was a student at Rayen High School Conley noted, "So then when I went to Rayen for high school the tracking was so severe that I was in the top half of the class and I took Latin, I had two years of Latin and two years of German and algebra and trigonometry, and I didn't see another black kid all day."[26] Conley credits his older sister Willie for encouraging him to take academic courses. During this period, African-American students were encouraged to take only business and vocational courses in high school.

Conley went on to Youngstown College where he earned his teaching certificate. He could only recall one incident in which he believes he was a victim of discrimination at the college. This was caused by a professor in an elementary mathematics class. Conley stated,

> It seemed as if she had set herself or had designated herself as the person who would discourage black people from going into this profession. So she would pick on black people in the class, she would grade us differently and I knew that she was doing that so I compared my paper with a white person and she had marked mine wrong and marked their's right. So we had a real confrontation with her and so we went to the dean and the school did do something about it, but that was the only time.[27]

Despite the incidents of discrimination Conley experienced in his life, he went on to have an exemplary career in the field of education in the city. He began his career as a teacher in the Youngstown public school system in 1965.

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Conley, Interview.

Conley received his first administrative position as an assistant principal in 1971 and went on to become the principal at Hayes Jr. High. In 1994 he became superintendent of the Youngstown public school system until 1996 when he retired. Presently, Conley has come out of retirement and is serving as principal of (kindergarten to fourth grade) at Eagle Heights Academy.[28]

Frankie Halfacre, who is a part owner of WGFT radio in Youngstown, also had some bittersweet days as a student at Rayen High School. Halfacre's family is an old stock African-American family; his family has lived in the area for many generations. He is a descendant of the Stewart family, which has lived in the area since the mid- nineteenth century. In his interview Halfacre stated, "Fortunately I went to Rayen High School and Rayen was really something. You didn't have to take a test to get into college when you graduated from Rayen."[29] Halfacre's unpleasant memories deal with his participation in sports. He recalls an incident which involved one of his teammates on the track team. He stated, "Unfortunately, one time I remember that Dicky Atkinson was running the 440 and he won and they turned around and said he didn't win. The second place guy won and the guy that came in second wasn't a person of color."[30] Joseph Conley also had memories of football games that were close in score but usually ended with the predominantly white school winning the game.[31]

To be sure, African-Americans made great strides in developing their community during this period. The African-American church led the way in the

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Frankie Halfacre, interview by author. 6 July 2001. transcript, YSU Oral History Program.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Conley, Interview.

development of community in Youngstown as it did doing in cities like Pittsburgh and Cleveland. The McGuffey Center has served the after- school recreational and educational needs of the African-American youth for many years on the upper east side of town. Various organizations like the Junior Civic League and the Youngstown Chapter of Links, Inc. also have effectively served the needs of the black community. In the years between 1940 and 1965 blacks became teachers and administrators of the public school system.

Despite the fact there were now African-American teachers and administrators, black children were still discouraged from taking the academic route in school and encouraged to take business and vocational courses instead. There were many African-Americans who became successful despite the fact they were not encouraged to take the academic courses in high school. There were many other migrants and old stock African-Americans who became leaders in the community. The problems in the area of education were not the ones problems facing African-Americans. Another major problem was housing where blacks constantly faced segregation and discrimination.

Chapter 4

Urban Renewal in Youngstown

Following World War II, cities across the United States began a concept that would change the face of America. The concept was that of urban renewal which came to the fore in the 1950s and was designed to solve the problem of urban blight in America. The major cities of the North, such as New York, Chicago, and Cleveland, had to figure out what they were going to do with the deluge of African American migrants who were pouring into their cities every year.[1] Cities such as Milwaukee, Columbus, and Youngstown were also facing the same problems, only on a smaller scale. These people were arriving every day and were for the most part living in substandard housing when they arrived. Moreover, the neighborhoods into which they were moving became overcrowded, which led to these neighborhoods becoming slums. City leaders in Youngstown and across the nation had to make decisions on what to do with them.

In any study dealing with the experiences of a particular ethnic group, the location of the neighborhoods in which they lived must be identified. When the migrants arrived in Youngstown, they lived with either friends or relatives until they were able to find a job. After the migrants found employment, they tended to settle in neighborhoods in which there were a large number of blacks living. The purpose of this chapter is to reveal whether or not the migrants settled in these neighborhoods by choice or whether there were other forces at work that

[1] Arnold Hirsch, *Making The Second Ghetto: Race and Housing In Chicago 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 16.

subsequently created black enclaves in the city. In addition, urban renewal and slum clearance within the African-American community will be dealt with to determine what effects they had on the black community.

There were close to 20,000 African-Americans who came to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s.[2] This is a large number for a city the size of Youngstown which had a total population in 1950 of 168,330.[3] The migrants, as was stated earlier, lived with relatives and friends until they were able to find a job and were able to live on their own. Most of the migrants, after they moved out of the home of their relatives or friends, settled in the same neighborhood because housing was limited for African-Americans in the city of Youngstown.

The reasons housing was so limited for blacks were lack of money, segregation, and discrimination. Governor and Katherine Bowers noted that blacks could not live just anywhere in Youngstown:

> You definitely did not. The lower south side, you could buy in there. On the east side, it was more a mixed neighborhood. You could live just about anywhere you wanted to. West side, forget it. You still cannot really live on certain areas in the west side. The lower part of the west side you can live on. North side, I would say if you pass Madison Avenue, Expressway now, above that there were very few blacks.[4]

Frankie Halfacre reinforced the Bowers comment stating,

> No, in fact if you're familiar with Youngstown the West Lake Terrace were south and north of Madison Avenue. South of Madison was all black, North of Madison was all white and if you crossed the street, you had a fight.

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[2] Census Bureau, *Census of Population* 1960, Volume1, part 37, Ohio. Table 10, 451.

[3] Ibid.

[4]Katherine and Governor Bowers, interview by Michael Beverly, 13 August 1998, transcript, Oral History Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH. Herein Cited as YSU Oral History Program.

> Lexington Settlement was on the north side of the projects so we had many battles going back and forth to the settlement with the white kids and even their parents.[5]

The Lexington Settlement was an after school program which served the same needs for kids on the north side of town as the McGuffey Center did on the east side of town.

A 1958 interview with McCullough Williams, the third ward councilman at the time, gives a clear picture of where blacks could live in Youngstown during the 1950s. In his interview with the *Vindicator* Williams stated, "Blacks lived in what were known as Negro neighborhoods between Mahoning Avenue to LaClede. Bounded by Oak Hill and Glenwood on the South Side. Argo to Kincaid bounded by Salt Springs Road and Waverly on the West Side." He went on to state that blacks could live on "West Federal to Norwood excluding Fairgreen, bounded by Belmont and Wirt. Also, from Wood to Grace bounded by Belmont and Elm. Lastly, from Riverbend area and the old West Federal Street on the North Side. Most areas on East Side are or will be available."[6]

Evidence leaves little doubt that Youngstown was very much a segregated city during the 1940s and 1950s. Blacks and whites may have worked in the same steel mills, but they did not go home to the same neighborhoods. During the 1940s even the city's low-income housing project was segregated. The federal government began building West Lake Terrace Housing Project during the late 1930s, and by 1940 it was opened for occupancy for people with low incomes.[7]

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[5] Frankie Halfacre, interview by Michael Beverly, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[6] Philomena Jurey, "Leaders Point To Housing As Major Problem of Negroes," *Vindicator*, 29 July 1958, 5.

[7] "Housing Project Delights New Tenants," *Vindicator*, 18 February 1940, 5.

Other ethnic neighborhoods during this period included: Smokey Hollow which is located off Rayen Avenue behind what is now Meshel Hall on the campus of Youngstown State University across from Choffin Vocational school, Sharon Line or McGuffey Heights which is located on the upper east side, and Monkey's Nest which was located on the north side of town in the River Bend section.[8] Monkey's Nest stands out in the minds of many because of its name. Many people believe the name Monkey's Nest was a racial insult aimed at African-Americans living in this neighborhood, but that does not seem to be the case.

There are a number of stories that have been handed down to explain the origins of the name Monkey's Nest. One such story stated that a European woman who lived in this section of town was raising monkeys which somehow got free and ran through a wooded area.[9] In 1935, Milan Richard Karas, who was doing a social work study for the Caldwell Settlement, discovered what is probably the origin of the name Monkey's Nest. Karas wrote in his account at the turn of the century about Tom Collins who owned a saloon on Bridge Street in the Caldwell District which is Monkey's Nest. Collins kept monkeys on display as an aid to several influential patrons who lived in other parts of the city and, at times, were unsure if they could find his establishment. Karas went on to also give the exact location of Monkey's Nest in his study. Monkey's Nest, he stated,

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[8] "Chic It Wasn't, but Monkey's Nest Was Home, and More, to Its People," *Vindicator*, 14 August 1977, B3.

[9] "Chic It Wasn't, but Monkey's Nest Was Home, and More, to Its People," *Vindicator*, 14 August 1977, B3

"bounded on the North by West Federal Street between Westlake's Crossing and Worthington Street and ran to the Mahoning River."[10]

There is no evidence that the origin of the name Monkey's Nest came about as a result of African-Americans living there. The neighborhood received its name prior to its becoming predominantly black, which did not occur until after World War II. James Stone, who was born around the turn of the twentieth century stated, "In 1911, it was known even then as Monkey's Nest. There were only a few black families living there. Most of the people there were Europeans and Mexicans."[11] African-Americans did not settle in this part of the city in great numbers until much later, after the name had become a permanent fixture in the city.

Monkey's Nest was an area that underwent an urban transition like most neighborhoods in cities throughout the United States. During the early part of the twentieth century, European immigrants such as Slovaks settled in this part of town. As time went on and African-Americans from the South moved to this part of the city, the first and second-generation immigrants from Europe began to move out.[12] Some of the immigrants had found jobs in the steel mills and after years of working there, they were able to earn enough money to move to other neighborhoods, leaving this poor working class neighborhood to the African-American migrants. Subsequently, the Monkey's Nest became a predominately black neighborhood.

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[10] "43-Year-Old History of Monkeys Nest Unearthed," *Vindicator*, 19 February 1978, B3.

[11] "Chic It Wasn't, but Monkey's Nest Was Home, and More, to Its People," *Vindicator*, 14 August 1977, B3.

[12] Mel Watkins, *Dancing With Strangers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 148.

The concentration of African-Americans in certain parts of the city like the Monkey's Nest or Sharon Line did not happen by accident. There were many forces involved that led to the city of Youngstown becoming one of the most segregated cities in the United States. First, there were the realtors and bankers who made a concerted effort to keep African-Americans confined to certain sections of the city. It was very hard for African-Americans to get a loan from a bank to buy a home in a white middle class neighborhood. Katherine Bowers understood she could not get a loan to buy a house in a white middle class neighborhood. She stated, "No, there was no need to go into no bank. The bank was not going to loan you no money."[13] This was the first factor that led to the creation of African-American enclaves in the city of Youngstown.

Second, realtors, loan associations, and banks apparently drew lines within the city in which African-Americans would be able to buy homes, a practice known as red lining. Mel Watkins the author of *Dancing With Strangers* stated,

> Later I'd discover, lines had been drawn, In the case of housing at least, racial agreements had been established in Youngstown. Until the mid 1950s, for example, Negroes were restricted from buying property east of Hillman Avenue, the street that established one end of the block on which I lived. Realtors, even loan associations and banks, apparently conspired to maintain that border directing Negroes to other, mostly less desirable housing, usually in near downtown sections, which had been abandoned by European immigrants.[14]

Restrictive covenants also restricted blacks to certain parts of the city. A restrictive covenant is an agreement in which a white homeowner agrees that if he or she ever sells their home they would not sell it to an African-American or any

[13] Bowers, Interview.
[14] Watkins, 148.

other minority that is deemed unfit to live in the neighborhood.[15] The United States Supreme Court in the 1948 case of *Shelley v Kraemer* ruled that the restrictive covenants were illegal and unenforceable.[16] While restrictive covenants were now illegal, it did not solve the problem of lending institutions and banks refusing to loan money to African-Americans who could indeed afford to buy a home in a white, middle class neighborhood.

The fact that migrants were moving into African-American enclaves in the city created a shortage of housing in those neighborhoods. Thus, old stock African-American families began slowly buy homes on the lower parts of the north and south sides of town. These neighborhoods came to be known as transitional neighborhoods. A transitional neighborhood was one in which blacks moved into neighborhoods which were predominantly white while whites move out of these same neighborhoods to escape the oncoming invasion as seen by some whites during the period.

There were real estate agents who took advantage of white fears of a predominantly black neighborhood. Whites' biggest fear was that their property value were going to drop and crime would rise. Mel Watkins stated,

> Decades before video rental emporiums dotted the landscape, blockbusters were not in the entertainment business: real estate agents had discovered that they could turn a quick profit by bringing poor or minority families into middle class white neighborhoods, inflaming residents fears with tales of decreased property values, then selling houses at inflated prices to other poor or minority buyers.[17]

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[15] Hirsch, 30.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Watkins, 43.

In the end, there were many real estate agents who saw neither black nor white. They only sought to make themselves wealthy by playing on the fears of whites and taking advantage of African-Americans desperate for housing.

Another factor that led to the existence of black enclaves was the fact that many blacks lacked the necessary income to buy a home in a middle class neighborhood. The migrants who moved into the city during the 1940s and 1950s were largely uneducated. To be sure, since the vast majority were not high school graduates it greatly limited the choices they had as far as jobs were concerned. These unskilled workers were left with no other choice but to seek employment in the steel mills. People who are employed as unskilled laborers do not earn high incomes like skilled professionals. As a result, the migrants' lack of income left them with no other alternative but to buy homes in low-income neighborhoods.

In addition, black enclaves sprung up in the city because the problem of segregated housing was not addressed. There was never a concerted effort on the part of community leaders to make sure segregation would not become a problem in Youngstown. In fact, it was city leaders who sanctioned segregation within the city. It was the mayor and other city leaders who proposed the idea of a segregated swimming pool for blacks.[18] The construction of Chase pool in 1945, in the Brier Hill area on the north side of town, clearly shows that city leaders were not interested in integrating public facilities at this time.[19]

During the decade of the 1950s, city leaders across the United States examined the state of affairs in their cities. They recognized the fact that parts of

[18] "City to Ask U.S. Aid for Negro Pool," *Vindicator*, 17 May 1941, 9.
[19] "Material to Build Wright Pool May be Available in 2 Weeks," *Vindicator,* 25 August 1945,1.

their cities were deteriorating, especially where the poor resided. Cities across the United States started programs to clear away all slum areas in their cities. Poor people who lived in these neighborhoods would have to be uprooted and moved to another part of these cities.[20]

The city of Chicago served as a model for urban renewal during the 1950s in the United States. In his book *Making The Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* Arnold R. Hirsch states, "It was not that Chicago represented a rigid pattern of urban and ghetto renewal that was mechanistically replicated in city after city. Chicago was, however, a persistent pioneer in developing concepts and devices that were later incorporated into the federal legislation defining the national renewal effort."[21] The concepts and devices that were used to bring about urban renewal for the most part separated the races. Hirsch revealed that in Chicago,

> A major result of urban renewal was thus the creation of integrated enclaves on the fringes of a still growing ghetto. The presence of lower class blacks, or the threat of ghetto engulfment, was used, in effect, to extract housing gains for the black middle class. The poor were relegated to existing slums or public housing and they were kept at arm's length.[22]

It is clear that it is difficult to compare Youngstown to Chicago because of the enormous size difference. In 1950, Youngstown had a total population of 168,330. The black population alone in the city of Chicago in 1950 was 492,265 or 13.6% of the total population. The total black population of Youngstown was

[20] Hirsch, 148.
[21] Ibid, xiv.
[22] Ibid, 260.

21,459 or 12.7% of the city's population.[23] While there was a huge difference in total population of the two cities, the percentage of blacks was similar. There were also other similarities between the two. They were both located in the Midwest, and shared similar customs and beliefs.[24] Black migration also greatly increased the black populations in both Chicago and Youngstown. In addition, both experienced a housing shortage because of this increase in population, and they had to develop a plan to provide their residents with housing in a part of each city that would not anger its white residents. Lastly, cities in the Midwest like Youngstown were undergoing urban renewal to stop the deterioration of their cities.

Both federal and state legislation began the process of urban renewal in cities like Chicago and Youngstown. In 1947, the Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act served as a model for later federal legislation providing guidelines, on how to redevelop blighted areas in cities across the United States like Chicago and Youngstown. The federal Urban Community Conservation Act of 1953 helped to expand the power of the city and helped them to begin their renewal programs.[25] During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, areas which were considered slum areas were cleared away to make way for new housing. Many of the new developments were low-income housing projects for the new migrants in cities like Youngstown and Chicago.

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[23] Census Bureau, *Census of Population 1950*, Volume 1, Number of Inhabitants, Table37, 451.
[24] Watkins, 24.
[25] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 101.

African-Americans were unable to fight any decisions about which neighborhoods were cleared away and where the low-income housing projects would be built. The reason is that they lacked the economic and political power to resist the decisions made by city leaders. People like historian August Meier have argued that African-Americans in Youngstown lacked the leadership in the African-American community to challenge the decisions that were made by city leaders.[26] The fact was that African-Americans were so desperate for adequate housing, they did not want to jeopardize the building of the new housing projects.[27] African-Americans in Chicago faced the same problem and accepted the new housing projects even if it meant they were built in African-American neighborhoods. Furthermore, there were many African-Americans who wanted to stay in their own neighborhoods because they believed with good reason that whites did not want them in their neighborhood.

Whenever African-Americans attempted to move into white neighborhoods, they were met with hostility. Katherine Bowers stated,

> I know one lady that moved I think she moved on Norway, Norwood, or somewhere up on the North side. She was a fortuneteller. Her name was Pearl Spencer. Everybody, black and white, went to her. All they knew that this black woman had put this down payment on the house, and they went in there and just put paint all over everything. She gave it up. She told them she did not want no part of it.[28]

Pearl Spencer was the wife of a Youngstown police officer whose name was Earl Spencer.

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[26] Watkins, 142.
[27] Bowers, Interview.
[28] Bowers, Interview.

White resistance to African-Americans moving into their neighborhoods in Youngstown was a problem throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. The family of Rufus Gilliam attempted to integrate a neighborhood on Colby Street on the east side of town and was met with intense hostility. A brick was thrown into their window in the middle of the night with a note on it stating, "Nigger beware: Next time it will be worse (signed) K.K.K."[29] Rufus Gilliam was an employee at Youngstown Sheet and Tube, one of the largest steel mills in the city. Gilliam was married and the father of two sons. His eldest son Artis, at the time, was a seventeen-year-old golden gloves champion, and is presently first ward councilman in Youngstown.[30]

This attack on the Gilliam family occurred seven weeks after the family moved onto Colby Street. Three days after the first attack, a letter was sent to the Gilliam family with a bullet on it. The handwriting on the letter was illegible but on the side of the bullet, K.K.K. was clearly written.[31] Federal authorities were notified about the threats against the Gilliam family, but they turned the case over to local detectives because they said it was they who began the investigation. The city did provide the family with police protection. Police cruisers were ordered to spot-check Colby Street to make sure no harm befell the family.[32]

White resistance to African-Americans moving into white neighborhoods in Chicago was also a problem during this period. The same hostility that blacks faced in Youngstown met black Chicagoans as well. As the black belt expanded

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[29] "Note Tied To Brick Tossed Into Negro's Family Home," *Vindicator*, 25 January 1960, 1.
[30] Ibid.
[31] East Side Negro Family Receives Bullet in Mail," *Vindicator*, 28 January 1960, 1.
[32] Ibid.

in Chicago whites fled to the suburbs. The whites that remained in the inner city were determined that their neighborhoods remain white. Some of the residents of these neighborhoods resorted to violence to keep blacks from moving in. The acts of violence by racists in Chicago were the same acts perpetrated in Youngstown to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods. The first step was to attack the house by throwing bricks through a window. Sometimes if that did not work, they would physically attack the person who was attempting to move into the house.[33] Although the resistance to keep white neighborhoods free of African-Americans was stiff, blacks kept moving into these neighborhoods despite the violence.

The same steps of racial succession which took place in Chicago also happened in Youngstown. As African-Americans began to move into white areas of the city, whites fled to the suburbs. They moved to such suburban towns as Boardman, Austintown, and Poland, to flee the oncoming influx of African-Americans into their neighborhoods. White fears of decreased property values, and of blacks moving into their sections of town bringing with them crime and vice, led whites to seek refuge in the suburbs. White racists who remained believed that their only hope of keeping blacks out was to resort to violence.[34]

In Washington, D.C., blacks faced a very different set of circumstances than blacks in Chicago or Youngstown. To be sure, they dealt with discrimination and racism, but they also dealt with a different physical setting than many northern cities. African-Americans in Washington, D.C., lived in what were known as alley communities. The type of alley that became the most

[33] Hirsch, 36.
[34] Watkins, 148.

common was the blind or hidden alley. The alleys were very narrow and some of them only had one outlet.[35] What the alleys in Washington, D.C., had in common with the ghettoes in Chicago and Youngstown was that many of their inhabitants were unskilled, uneducated, and had all migrated from the South looking for a better way of life.

This influx of new residents into cities like Chicago and Youngstown created a housing shortage. The housing shortage was further augmented by the urban renewal and freeway projects of the 1950s and 1960s. David T. Stephens in his article "The Statistical and Geographical Abstract of American Population," stated, "Black residential areas coincide with the oldest housing meaning that substandard units are more likely to occur in their neighborhoods."[36] These are the areas of Youngstown city leaders sought to raze, further increasing the housing shortage. Monkey's Nest and the neighborhoods which surrounded it were cleared away during the 1950s and 1960s, and they were replaced with freeways. The freeway projects were supposed to increase economic activity and provide easier access to different parts of the city. Stephens went on to say, "Black neighborhoods were targeted by programs that sought to solve social problems with physical solution, by razing blighted neighborhoods."[37]

The first of a number of low-income housing projects to be built in Youngstown during the 1950s and 1960s was the Kimmel Brook Housing Project. The city proposed that the Kimmel Brook be built on the city's east side just off

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[35] James Borchert, *Alley Life In Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklore In The City, 1850-1970,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 18.

[36] David T. Stephens, "The Statistical and Geographical Abstract of African-American Population," 1991 5 February 1991, 14.

[37] Ibid.

Albert Street in 1952. The lower east side during this period was going through a racial succession. Whites were slowly moving out of these neighborhoods while blacks were beginning to move in. The city bought eighteen acres off Albert Street from St. Stephen's Club for $27,000 for the purpose of building the housing project.[38]

The St. Stephens Club refused to give up its land without a fight and took the city to court. In January 1953, a Mahoning County common pleas court and a visiting appellate court upheld the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority's right to appropriate the club's land at the settlement price of $27,000.[39] Groups of residents around the Victor Street areas where the project was supposed to be built fought against its construction. Sylvan H. Cohen, chairman of the housing committee of the NAACP, pointed to the Westlake Housing Project as an example that a housing project could improve a community. In a statement in the *Vindicator* Cohen stated, "Westlake Terrace is living proof as to how well kept housing projects can be and how it can add to the property values of a community."[40] Despite the fight put up by Victor Street residents and the St. Stephens Club in trying to stop the construction of the Kimmel Brook Housing Project by the late 1950s, people began moving into the three hundred-unit complex.

Other housing projects that were built during this period included Victory, East Way Terrace, and later the Plazaview housing projects on the east side of town. Westlake Terrace came into existence during the late 1930s and later a low-

[38] "NAACP Chapter Here Supports East Side Housing Project," *Vindicator,* 26 January 1953, 11.
[39] Ibid.
[40] "Kimmel Brook Urged," *Vindicator*, 6 January 1954, 4.

income housing project was built in the Brier Hill section of the city on the north side.[41] Thus, all low-income housing projects were either built on the north side of town or on the east side of town in neighborhoods already undergoing a racial transition.

During the same period the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority was overseeing the construction of its low-income housing projects, the city of Chicago was doing the same. In the late 1930s, the Ida B. Wells Housing Project was built in Chicago, which coincided with the building of the Westlake Housing Project in Youngstown.[42] The city of Chicago began constructing housing projects in the 1930s with the same purpose in mind that city leaders had in the city of Youngstown, to clear slums and provide housing for the urban poor.[43] The projects which were built in Chicago were built in the ghetto. Later, the city of Chicago built the massive Robert Taylor Homes, which by government support, as in other cities like Cleveland and Youngstown, concentrated their black populations in designated areas of their cities.[44]

To be sure, the neighborhoods on the lower south side were also undergoing a racial transition. However, a low-income housing project was never built on the south or on the west side of town. The black population on the south and west sides of town grew slower than that of the north and east sides of town.[45] Perhaps this is why none of the low-income housing projects were built on those

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[41] "Housing Projects Delights New Tenants," *Vindicator*, 18 February 1940, 1.
[42] Hirsch, *Making The Second Ghetto*, 10.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid, 262.
[45] "Study: Races Mostly Live Apart," *Vindicator*, 29 May 2001, 2.

sides of town. Low-income housing projects were usually built in neighborhoods that were already undergoing a racial transition.

There have been many factors that have led to Youngstown becoming one of the most segregated cities in the United States. In 1991, Youngstown was ranked the thirteenth most segregated city in the United States by the Brookings Institution.[46] By 2000, Youngstown was ranked the tenth most segregated city in the United States.[47] These statistics were printed in a 2001 article in the *Vindicator* which discussed the factors which contributed to this ranking. The article noted that in order for there to have been an equal representation of blacks or whites across the entire metropolitan area in 1960 seventy five percent of blacks or whites in Youngstown would have had to move across census tracts.[48]

Finally, bankers and financial institutions played a major role in creating a segregated city in Youngstown. They refused to loan blacks the money to buy homes in white neighborhoods, even when they had the necessary income. When blacks were able to obtain a loan to buy a house in a white neighborhood, real estate agents created a panic among whites by telling them their property value would drop. These unscrupulous real estate agents made a great deal of money doing this because whites would sell their homes cheap and blacks would buy these homes at inflated prices.[49]

Economics was also another factor that created segregated neighborhoods in Youngstown. African-Americans simply could not buy homes in middle to

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Watkins, 41.

upper class neighborhoods because they lacked the income.[50] It was never in the minds of blacks to live in white neighborhoods just for the sake of getting away from other blacks. African-Americans wanted to live in a nice home in a clean and safe neighborhood whether it was predominantly black, white, or racially mixed. This is one of the factors that led to African-Americans migrating to Youngstown.

The decades of the 1940s and 1950s was a time of slum clearance and urban renewal in the United States. Chicago served as the model for cities like Youngstown. During the late 1950s, the Monkey's Nest, a black enclave, was demolished to make way for the freeway projects of this period, which displaced many African-American families. The combination of urban renewal, freeway projects, and African-American migration to Youngstown created a housing shortage.

Subsequently, the 1950s and 1960s saw a number of low-income housing projects like Kimmel Brook built to help solve the housing shortage and supply the city with affordable housing for the poor. City leaders in Youngstown, as in Chicago, were careful to build the low income housing projects in neighborhoods which were already undergoing a racial transition like the east side, which had become integrated by this time. The west side of town was not chosen as a site for a low-income housing project and even today is still predominantly white.

The decisions which were made during the 1950s on low-income housing site selections and the other factors which were discussed has resulted in a city

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[50] Robert Bruno, *SteelWorker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 35.

which was ranked the tenth most segregated city in the United States in 2000 by the Brookings Institution. Chicago, which served as the model for urban renewal, is today ranked as the most segregated city in the country, according to the Brookings Institution.[51] Blacks who were able to move into white neighborhoods were met with hostility. However, the migrants and the old stock African-Americans were able to endure these threats and harassments which opened the door for more blacks to move into these neighborhoods. This in turn forced whites to move further away from the increased presence of African-Americans in their everyday lives.

51 "Study Races Mostly Live Apart," *Vindicator*, 29 May 2001, 2.

Chapter 5

Discrimination in Employment

The migrants who came to Youngstown during the decades of the 1940s and 1950s were greeted with smoke and fire coming from the steel mills when they arrived. It must have looked like a city on fire to people who had grown up on farms. For the migrants, the system of sharecropping had not been much better than the system of slavery for their forebearers. Sharecroppers earned little or no money and in many cases were just as dependent on the landowner as their grandparents had been on the slave owner. Relatives and friends who had already made the journey from such states as Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina wrote letters to their relatives telling of the high wages they earned in the steel mills of the North.[1] During the 1940s and 1950s, Youngstown was one of the biggest producers of steel in the United States, and had plenty of unskilled job openings in their companies.[2] There was also hope of possibly obtaining a job in some other place of employment. When the migrants arrived, they found as the migrants who came before them that blacks were not always treated equally with whites in the job market of the Mahoning Valley.

The promise of better jobs was an important pull factor which brought the migrants to the Mahoning Valley between 1940-1965. Finding a good job was critical to the migrants' survival in Youngstown. One area of employment that

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[1] Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 159.

[2] Robert Bruno, *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works In Youngstown* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 9.

had to be dealt with is job mobility or the ability to advance and be promoted in your place of work. Also, the question of whether city officials and local unions were of any assistance to the migrants and black workers as a whole must be addressed. Finally, the issue of discrimination in employment will be dealt with as well as how the black community responded.

In 1950, third ward councilman Anthony Flask prepared a bill that created a local Fair Employment Practices Commission. The purpose of the FEPC was to act as a clearinghouse for complaints of discrimination in employment in Youngstown. This commission was set up for anyone who felt an employer discriminated against him or her; they could then file a complaint with the FEPC. In addition, if there was any suspicion that a company or business was discriminating against African-Americans or any other minority group, the FEPC would investigate.[3]

The FEPC bill gave the mayor the power to appoint seven members to the commission. Commission members served a maximum of three years. The proposal which was drawn up in 1950 called for Mayor Charles P. Henderson to appoint three members for three years, two for two years, and two for one year each. Subsequently, each member who was appointed served a full three-year term.[4] Members could be removed if they were negligent in their duties or if they committed a crime while on the commission.

In regard to African-Americans being employed by the city of Youngstown, blacks often received the worst jobs. McCullough Williams Jr., the

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[3] "FEPC Bill Prepared For Council," *Vindicator*, 17 June 1950, 1.
[4] Ibid.

third ward councilman stated, "It seems that there are a few jobs that are labeled as colored jobs. Our people get the laboring positions: They get what's left. Colored people apparently are not given any consideration for the better jobs in city departments such as supervisor, clerk, and others."[5] Williams stated his concerns because of the fact that nearly all the sanitation workers who worked for the city were black. This led to a probe of the hiring practices of the city of Youngstown by the FEPC.[6]

In June 1959, after months of investigating hiring practices, the FEPC found no evidence of discrimination on the part of the city. Attorney Nathaniel R. Jones, the executive director of the FEPC and a future judge stated,

> Negroes are working at a wider range of jobs in the municipal government than ever before. Though they are not as widely dispersed as would be desirable, the trend is definitely in the direction of greater utilization of minorities. This trend will undoubtedly be accelerated as more successfully take civil service examinations and qualify for appointment.[7]

The only problem Jones and the commission had with the hiring practices of the city was that the civil service commission required each applicant to submit a photograph with their application. Nathaniel Jones and the FEPC recommended this practice be abolished.[8]

African-Americans were indeed employed in the worst jobs with the city and were not given clean high paying jobs. As indicated, nearly the entire sanitation department in 1958 was black. McCullough Williams received a report

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5 "Would Probe City Hiring of Negroes," *Vindicator,* 30 October 1958, 6.
6 Ibid.
7 "FEPC Study Says Negroes Get City Jobs," *Vindicator*, 25 June 1959, 6.
8 Ibid.

that same year noting that all forty-six employees of the sanitation department were African-American.[9] As late as 1959, there were two departments which had not yet employed any African-American employees: fire and building inspection. In addition, in 1959, there were no blacks employed in the law and finance departments. There were claims that there were not sufficient numbers of African-Americans passing the civil service examination to increase the African-American representation being employed with the city. The city did not aggressively seek to resolve its lack of black employees.[10] The fire department did not hire its first African-American fireman until Jessie Carter joined the department in 1960.[11] The integration of city jobs was indeed a slow process.

African-Americans across the South were enticed to come to Youngstown by the thought of the money they could make in the steel mills. Governor Bowers revealed, "The cousins, they saw what they could make so they came up. Then when they got their jobs, they sent back and got their families and brought their families here."[12] The migrants would have to make the transition from the rural South to the urban North.

When the migrants came to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s, the three largest steel mills in the Mahoning Valley were Republic, United States Steel, and Youngstown Sheet and Tube. These steel mills offered the migrants a chance to make a lot more money than they could have ever imagined earning in

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[9] "Would Probe City Hiring of Negroes," *Vindicator*, 30 October 1958, 6.
[10] *The Vindicator,* 25 June 1959, 6.
[11] "Buckeye Review Salutes," *The Buckeye Review*, 16 September 1988.
[12] Katherine and Governor Bowers, interview by Michael Beverly, 13 August 1998, transcript, Oral History Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH. Herein Cited as YSU Oral History Program.

the South. Leroy Adams made $1.09 an hour when he first began working at Republic Steel in 1948. Ethel Adams commented, "He probably would not have made that in one day down there, at that time."[13] Before he came to Youngstown, Adams worked at a restaurant in a hotel in Statesville, North Carolina. He had already made the transition from farm work to making an hourly wage before he came to Youngstown but was still making a lot less money than he was able to make in the steel mills of Youngstown.[14]

Although the migrants earned more money in Youngstown, they still worked the dirtiest and least desirable jobs there. Kenneth Andrews, a retired steel worker, explained in Robert Bruno's *Steel Worker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown,* "The dirtiest, lowest paid job, which were just clean up, were black jobs... every now and then a black guy got something better. For the most part as a black worker, you got the worst jobs. Jobs that were all-white, like masons, machinist, pipe fitters, were kind of elitist."[15] In addition, Andrews stated, "Black and Hispanic workers were concentrated in the coke works, cinder plant, and blast furnace."[16]

Every person hired at local steel mills entered the mill as a laborer. The executives of the steel mills could always argue that the migrant was an unskilled worker and that is why he entered the factory as a laborer. In addition, the fact that whites worked on labor gangs when they began work strengthened steel

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[13] Leroy and Ethel Adams, interview by Michael Beverly, 15 June 1998, transcript, YSU Oral History Program.

[14] Ibid.

15Robert Bruno, *Steel Worker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 73.

[16] Ibid.

executives'argument that blacks were not discriminated against.[17] When each group of workers entered the steel mills, both were placed in labor gangs, but for the most part blacks remained in menial positions while whites were able to advance to the higher paid skilled positions. Governor Bowers noted how difficult it was for blacks to advance at Republic Steel, "They kept you out of the highest paying jobs, although they were not the best jobs in the world. That little clique kept you from coming in until they clamped down on them. Then, you was allowed to work in the better paying jobs."[18]

Segregation was not only a problem in housing in Youngstown but also in the steel mills. Robert Bruno argues that most steel mill departments were segregated by job again with blacks having the lowest paying, least desirable jobs. Blacks were more likely to be assigned to jobs as a laborer or a helper. When Leroy Adams worked at Republic Steel, he worked as a helper until he was finally able to become a burner and later an engineer. In the mason department, the higher paid bricklayer was nearly always white while blacks in the department were always the bricklayer helper. Despite the fact the bricklayer helper did a great deal of the work, the bricklayer received incentive pay and one-third more money, according to Robert Bruno's *Steel Worker Alley* [19]

African-Americans in some cases spent a number of years working as laborers in the steel mills. They were not placed in apprenticeship programs that could have trained them to become skilled craftsmen and enabled them to earn more money. There was no change in the steel mill policies of not promoting

[17] Ibid, 12.
[18] Bowers, Interview.
[19] Bruno, *Steelworker Alley*, 90.

African-Americans until the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It was only then that African-Americans were promoted to skilled positions and encouraged to get into the apprenticeship programs.[20]

In Pittsburgh, between the years 1940-1965 black workers experienced some successes and some failures in the area of job mobility. Blacks who were born in Pittsburgh experienced some movement, but southern born blacks experienced little or no movement at all.[21] In addition, the job mobility which occurred between 1930-1960 among old-stock African-Americans occurred almost totally within the blue-collar work world. First generation African-American workers were employed in service jobs, which included jobs such as janitors, cleaners, and porters. The second-generation African-American workers switched from the service industry to industrial jobs which were for the most part just as limiting as service jobs.[22] The discrimination in employment which was so prevalent in Youngstown was also present in Pittsburgh.

Blacks in Pittsburgh, as in Youngstown, were usually the last hired and the first fired.[23] African-Americans were generally excluded from Pittsburgh's labor unions which denied them protection against discrimination by employers in the city. When discussing black occupational mobility in industrial jobs, Bodnar stated, "They were categorized as unadaptable in every listed skilled position. Not surprisingly, blacks found it impossible to attain certain skilled industrial jobs

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[20] Bruno, *Steelworker Alley*, 73.

[21] John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 252.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid, 239.

such as craneman or roller."[24] In terms of employment, blacks in Pittsburgh and in Youngstown were generally at the bottom of the occupational ladder.

To be sure, African-Americans faced great difficulties even during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The Reverend Frederick R. Williams describes how in 1964 he and a group of black workers attempted to take a test to become electrical apprentices in the Youngstown steel industry. Republic Steel officials kept delaying the test to discourage the workers from getting into the apprenticeship program. Finally, the union called in a compliance officer from Washington D.C. who assured the workers that not only would they take the test, but they would also pass it. After they took the test and passed it, on the morning they were to begin their new job, Williams's wife received a phone call from the manager of the electrical department at 4a.m. in the morning. The manager warned Mrs. Williams that her husband could be electrocuted if he took the job and there were other dangers that could put his life at risk. Williams took the phone from his wife and told the personnel manager he would be in to work that morning. The other African-American workers who were to begin work that morning received the same phone call.[25]

When Frederick Williams and the other African-Americans in the apprenticeship program began work, they started as crane learners. The workers had to work their way up from there until they were placed into an electrical gang. When they reached this level, Williams said they were treated very poorly.[26] The

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Frederick R. Williams, interview by Donna DeBlasio, 27 September 1991, Ohio Historical Society, Youngstown Center of Industry and Labor, Herein Cited as OHS-YHCIL.

[26] Ibid.

belief of those in charge of the steel mills in Youngstown was that each race and ethnic group should be concentrated in certain jobs. Blacks and Hispanics were concentrated in the jobs that were unwanted by whites while whites were concentrated in the most desirable jobs in the steel mills.

Governor Bowers also confronted discrimination when he attempted to move up into a better paying job at Republic Steel. He revealed,

> I had to fight this one guy. Now, I bidded on the job. Nobody else bidded on this job. This guy was younger than me, but he previously had been a heater in the strip mill. He came up to the bar mill. They tore my bid up. I had bidded on the job, but they tore the bid up and said I did not bid on the job. I said, "What happened? I know I bidded on the job. The union was no help then."[27]

Bowers added that the one who tore up his bid was the foreman.

African-Americans like Williams and Bowers fought discrimination within the mills. However, there were a number of forces that kept many from doing the same. Most important, if an employee complained too much, he stood a good chance of being fired. Second, if he was seen as a troublemaker he could be placed in a less desirable job than he was working at the time. There were many migrants who believed they were doing better financially in Youngstown than they could have ever done in the South. According to Governor Bowers, the fact they were making decent wages, and had a family depending on them prevented many of the black steelworkers from doing more to fight against discrimination within the steel mills.[28] There was also a lack of black foremen and blacks in management to take their grievances. In some cases, the only way a black

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[27] Bowers, Interview.
[28] Ibid.

employee could escape discrimination and harassment within a steel mill was to quit and try to obtain a job in another steel mill.

The only other source of help for the African-American worker was the union. Whites also dominated the steel unions of Youngstown. Reverend Williams revealed when he started at Republic Steel the only positions blacks could hold in the union were that of recording secretary and trustee.[29] Blacks, for the most part, had little faith in the union. Governor Bowers did not join the union on his own accord. Bowers stated that some of his co-workers signed his name to a union card and sent it in.[30] Arlette Gatewood, a retired steel worker who worked for Youngstown Sheet and Tube, felt the union did little to help the African-American worker. He believes the unions never filed the discrimination grievances on behalf of black workers.[31] As a result of this lack of support on the part of the union on behalf of the African-American worker, blacks were at the mercy of management.

The lack of union support for the black worker during this period was not only a problem in Youngstown, but throughout the nation. In 1955, at the merger meeting of the AFL-CIO, delegates pledged that all workers without regard to race, creed, color, national origin or ancestry should share equally in the full benefits of union organization. In 1961, Herbert Hill, labor secretary of the NAACP, declared that "the national AFL-CIO has failed to wipe out the broad pattern of racial discrimination and segregation in many affiliates."[32] As late as

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[29] Williams, Interview.
[30] Bowers, Interview.
[31] Arlette Gatewood, interview by Donna DeBlasio, 24 April 1991, OHS-YHCIL.
[32] "The Negro and The Unions," *Vindicator*, 17 February 1961, 10.

1961, there were still unions that excluded blacks and there were others who had segregated locals.

African-Americans in Youngstown during this period formed their own labor union under the name of the Youngstown Chapter of the Negro American Labor Council. The purpose of this union was to promote the status of the African-American worker. Charles Street, the recording secretary of Local 1617 of the United Steelworkers of America, and Curtis Boatwright, who at the time was a shop steward at the Youngstown Steel Door Co, were named chairman and secretary of the local African-American union respectively. The NALC was a part of a national body whose goal was to promote the interests of African-American workers in all facets of their lives. The local NALC patterned its constitution after the one in Detroit.[33]

To be sure, the local NALC was very active in helping black workers. In 1961, the NALC charged that job discrimination still prevailed and remained at a high level in Youngstown. NALC took its concerns to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. The commission put together a bill that strengthened the commission which administered the Fair Employment Practices Act. The commission also voted to subpoena application forms from various employment agencies in Youngstown and Canton. These steps were taken in an effort to help black workers in Youngstown.[34]

In 1965, the Youngstown chapter of NALC charged the AFL-CIO with being biased in its apprenticeship training programs. During that same year,

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[33] "Aim to Guard Men's Rights," *Vindicator,* 11 August 1960, 2.
[34] " Says Job Discrimination Still Prevails," *Vindicator*, 7 June 1961, 5.

NALC charged that Youngstown's anti-poverty program was also biased. NALC in 1965 attacked the administrators of the anti-poverty program for not having enough interest or understanding of the poverty problem in Youngstown during the mid-1960s. Ruth Turner, the national secretary of CORE, or the Congress on Racial Equality and executive secretary of Cleveland's' CORE, urged the local chapter of NALC to organize unemployed workers to boycott any employers who practiced discrimination.[35]

NALC is another example of a group in the African-American community that fought against all forms of discrimination in Youngstown. They were also able to make some gains for African-American workers in the steel mills. African-Americans during the 1960s were slowly becoming foremen, craftsmen, and supervisors. Generally, white workers refused to call blacks foremen. They called them "pushers". Major changes in the promotion of African-American workers did not occur until 1974 with the Consent Decree which came about because of a lawsuit in Fairfield, Alabama, where black and female workers sued the union and the steel companies for failure to file grievances. The Consent Decree gave women and minorities back pay and created a seniority and promotions system.[36]

Ironically, when African-Americans were finally promoted to craftsmen and placed in supervisory positions, the steel mills began closing in the late 1970s and 1980s. Youngstown Sheet and Tube closed its doors in 1979. United States Steel also closed in 1979 and in the 1980s Republic Steel went through

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[35] " Charge Bias in Training by AFL-CIO," *Vindicator*, 22 May 1965, 1.
[36] Arlette Gatewood, Interview by Donna Deblasio, 24 April 1991, OHS-YHCIL.

bankruptcy. By the end of the 1970s, over ten thousand people lost their jobs in the steel mills of the Mahoning Valley.[37] Some believe the reason steel executives gave into black promotions during the 1970s was because they would not be around for very long. Rick Bowers, the son of Governor and Katherine Bowers, stated, "The reason they gave in to them in the end is they knew the mill was closing. Like everything, you are the last to get the job; you are going to get fired in the end. My dad, he did not make steel wages until the mill was just about ready to close. Then, they gave it to him."[38] There is no hard evidence which supports Rick Bowers claims but his feelings reveals the lack of trust blacks had for steel mill executives.

Blacks have been a part of the Youngstown Police Department since 1909 with the hiring of Charles Williams. [39] Following the hiring of Jessie Carter as the city's first black fireman, there were other breakthroughs in African-American hirings during the 1960s. Before 1960, there were no African-American bank tellers or department store clerks. By the mid 1960s, blacks began to be hired as store clerks, and in 1965 the first bank teller was hired at the Peoples Bank.[40] In 1959, the street department also hired its first two African-American foremen. Integration was a slow process in the area of employment in Youngstown, but during the 1960s African-Americans began to appear in a variety of jobs.

Although there were many reasons why blacks came to Youngstown from the South during the 1940s and 1950s, the promise of better jobs was one of the

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[37] Bruno, 10.
[38] Bowers, Interview.
[39] Herbert Armstrong, *Afro-American Bicentennial Observation: A Rediscovery of the Past,* (Youngstown: Afro-American Bicentennial Committee, 1976), 26.
[40] George D. Beelen, *Celebrate 96,* n.p., n.d.

most important. The industry that the vast majority of migrants went to work in was the steel industry. To be sure, when African-Americans entered this industry, they were hired as laborers like all other workers. Blacks and other workers differed in that they were able to advance to clean good paying jobs while blacks remained in the dirtiest lowest paying jobs in the steel mill.

Unions, which were supposed to be an avenue for African-American workers to go if they felt discriminated against on the job, were a disappointment. Blacks, for the most part did not believe the unions supported them. In many cases the union did not file black workers grievances against the steel mills. As a result, African-American workers formed their own union, the Negro American Labor Council. The forming of this union reveals that there was strong leadership in the black community and they were not satisfied with the status quo.

The factor that kept blacks from advancing in the steel mill industry and other areas of employment was white hostility. Blacks were locked out of skilled and supervisory positions in the steel mills until the 1970s, when the mills were about to close. Despite the obstacles that blocked the African-American workers' advancement, they were able to survive and create a decent life for themselves and their families. Although they did not make as much money as much as other employees, many were able to buy homes and send their children to college.

Conclusion

African-Americans who migrated to the urban North between 1940-1965 were faced with the same challenges everywhere they settled. In cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Youngstown, blacks were discriminated against in the areas of housing, employment, and public facilities. They were able to overcome these obstacles by organizing and building institutions which enabled them to survive their sometimes hostile environment. The African-American church is one example of an institution that provided them with leadership and help when they were in need. Other organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League also aided blacks in their effort to adjust to the North. The culmination of the establishment of these organizations and others was the establishment of a strong and stable African-American community in Youngstown and other cities across the urban North.

Among the biggest problems that faced the African-American migrants when they arrived in Youngstown was white hostility. This hostility could be seen in almost every facet of everyday life in the city. Blacks were not allowed to use the city's public facilities freely like the public swimming pools. The swimming pool controversy lasted for more than two decades until the idea of blacks swimming in the pools was finally accepted, this following many years of near riots whenever a black attempted to violate the unwritten rule. During this period, to pacify white racists in the city, the city built John Chase pool for African-Americans in order to keep the races separated. By building the Pool, city leaders were following the same principles of southern segregationists of

separate but equal. They believed as long as facilities for blacks and whites were equal in quality, it justified segregation.

Blacks were also restricted in the areas of housing during this period. Banks and other lending institutions refused to loan them money to buy a home if the house was located in a white neighborhood. The city of Youngstown is still the tenth most segregated city in the United States. During the 1940s and 1950s blacks could not live anywhere they wanted in the city even if they had the money. When the migrants moved to the city, they tended to settle in neighborhoods already inhabited by other African-Americans. They did not move to these neighborhoods because they did not want to live among whites or any other group. It was because of segregation, discrimination, and lack of money that they settled in black neighborhoods and in many cases were forced to stay. It was common for different ethnic groups who moved to the city to settle in neighborhoods populated by people of their own ethnicity. For example, there was a large number of Italians who lived in the Brier Hill area of the city on the north side of town but eventually as they move up the economic ladder, they were able to move to other neighborhoods.

There were also other reasons why the migrants moved to neighborhoods like the Monkey's Nest, the Sharon Line, and Smokey Hollow. When the migrants came to Youngstown, they usually lived with relatives or friends until they got on their feet. It was common for migrants after they moved out of their relatives' homes to move into a house in the same neighborhood. Within these neighborhoods were churches that served as the anchor for the families who lived

there. They provided the people in the neighborhood food and support in times of need. The church also served as the religious and moral foundation for its members.

Despite blacks being locked out of white neighborhoods in Youngstown they, along with some liberal minded whites, established organizations to help meet the needs of the migrants and the entire African-American community. Organizations like the McGuffey Center and the Junior Civic League helped meet these needs. There were also other organizations such as those that aided the young and old economically, politically, and spiritually. The Future Outlook League fought against racism and discrimination. Organizations such as these, along with the black church, were sure signs that there was a strong viable African-American community in Youngstown.

To be sure, blacks were also discriminated against in the area of employment in the city. The city did not have a black bank teller or store clerk until the 1960s. In addition, the city did not have its first black fireman until 1960. As far as city jobs are concerned, blacks generally received the dirtiest and lowest paying. During the 1950s there was disproportionate number of blacks in the sanitation department. During the same decade there were no African-Americans employed in the law and finance departments.

In the steel mills of Youngstown, the Mahoning Valley's largest employer, blacks suffered the same hostility. Blacks were employed in the lowest paid positions in the steel mills. While there, white counterparts were able to move up within the companies to skilled positions that paid the most money. Blacks were

also kept out of supervisory and managerial positions. When the unions failed to aid blacks with their grievances against local steel mills, blacks formed their own union, the Negro American Labor Council. NALC was created to promote the African-American worker.

Despite the hostility, racism, and segregation, the migrants, for the most part believed they did the right thing in coming to Youngstown. It is easy to look back and question the migrants' decision to come to the city seeing the many injustices they experienced. Leroy Adams recognizes that life was better here, despite the many problems facing blacks, "See, when I come here, when I got hired in the mill, then I picked up benefits. Insurance and retirement and stuff like that. And, all I was doing down there was just a weekly job. No benefits or anything."[1]

The migrants were able to raise their standard of living when they came to Youngstown. They were able to blend in with the old stock African-American community in which they were able to establish clubs, businesses, and organizations, creating a stable African-American community. The vast majority of migrants who came to Youngstown during the 1940s and 1950s and worked in the steel mills were able to retire from the mills and receive retirement benefits. When asked if he believed he made the right decision in coming to Youngstown Lonnie Simon replied, "Yeah, I don't believe anything happens by accident." [2]

Finally, the migrants have contributed mightily not only to the African-American community but to Youngstown as a whole. Eugenia Atkinson who

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1Leroy and Ethel Adams, interview by Michael Beverly, transcript, Oral History Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH. Herein Cited as YSU Oral History Program.

2 Lonnie Simon, interview by author, transcript, 15 February 1999, YSU Oral History Program.

came to Youngstown during the 1950s, is now a trustee at Youngstown State University and is also the head of the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority. Joseph Conley who came to Youngstown during the 1940s at the age of thirteen with his parents went on to become a teacher, administrator, and the superintendent of Youngstown city schools. Lonnie Simon and Ernest Rheins went on to pastor two of the largest Baptist churches in the city. There have been many other migrants who have contributed a great deal to the black community and to the city as a whole.

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