

LABOR CONFLICT AND RACIAL VIOLENCE

The Black Worker in Chicago

William M. Tuttle, Jr.

Starting in the early decades of this century and increasing rapidly during the First World War when European immigration dried up, southern blacks, mostly from rural communities, migrated to northern industrial cities. That process has continued through the subsequent decades. Blacks shared the challenge of cultural adaptation with white immigrants, but in quite particular ways. Prevailing racial ideology and caste beliefs put up unique blocks to their entry and gave it a special character. The opportunities, however limited, available to immigrant laborers and their children were not accessible to blacks. Employers often saw blacks as little more than an available cheap labor force that could be used to dampen efforts by white workers, both native and immigrant in birth, seeking self-protection. Weaker but still powerful craft unions also usually denied access to black workers.

In this analysis of the background to the 1919 Chicago race riots, William Tuttle uses unusually striking evidence to reveal the tensions between black and white workers that exploded into violence in Chicago and other northern cities after the First World War. Just how and why prevailing native racial ideology had penetrated into the value system of recent immigrants to the United States remains unstudied. Tuttle's evidence makes it clear, however, that it needs careful attention.

The following books are suggested for further reading:

ELLIOTT M. RUDWICK, *Race Riot at East St. Louis*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964.

WILLIAM TUTTLE, *Race Riot: Chicago and the Red Summer of 1919*, New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1970.

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WILLIAM M. TUTTLE JR., "LABOR CONFLICT AND RACIAL
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UME TWO, 1865-THE PRESENT*, 250-268.

On a crowded South Side Chicago beach on the afternoon of Sunday, July 27, 1919, white and black swimmers clashed in savage combat. Sparked by this clash during which a Negro youth drowned, the interracial resentment that had been smoldering in Chicago for the past few years exploded in furious rioting. The violence raged uncontrolled for five days, as whites mauled Negroes and Negroes in turn assaulted white peddlers and merchants in the "black belt." Members of both races craved vengeance as stories of atrocities, both real and rumored, rapidly spread throughout the city. White gunmen in automobiles sped through the ghetto shooting indiscriminately as they passed, and black snipers fired back. Roaming mobs shot, beat, and stabbed their victims to death. The undermanned Chicago police force was an ineffectual deterrent to the waves of violence that soon overflowed the environs of the black belt and flooded the North and West Sides as well as the Loop, the city's downtown business district. Only six regiments of state militiamen and a cooling rain finally quenched the passions of the rioters, but by then thirty-eight lay dead, twenty-three Negroes and fifteen whites, and well over 500 others had sustained injuries.

There were several factors precipitating this riot. From July 1917 to the eruption of the disorders two years later, for example, no less than twenty-six bombs were hurled at isolated Negro residences in once all-white neighborhoods and at the offices of certain realtors who had sold to blacks. Well over half these bombings occurred during the six tense months leading up to the riot. Politics, too, were important. Chicago's notoriously corrupt Republican mayor, William H. ("Big Bill") Thompson, was anathema to reformers and Democrats alike. Many of these Democrats, moreover, were blue-collar workers who lived in neighborhoods contiguous to the black belt and who felt threatened, politically and economically, by the "invading" Negroes. Yet Thompson was a favorite of the predominantly Republican black electorate, some of whose leaders had been rewarded with posts in his administration. The mayor was reelected in April 1919, after a bitter campaign which had racial overtones, and the Democratic organ, the *Chicago Daily Journal*, boomed out at dusk on election day in bold front-page headlines: "NEGROES ELECT BIG BILL." As racial friction mounted with the heat in the spring and summer of 1919, whites and blacks battled on the city's streetcars and in parks and

schools. Several Negroes were murdered in mob assaults, and both blacks and whites armed themselves for the riot that numerous Chicagoans feared would erupt at any moment.

This riot was also the result of longstanding discord between white and black job competitors in the Chicago labor market. Several contemporaries claimed that job competition was not only a cause but perhaps the most significant one. Later students of the riot, however, while admitting that interracial labor friction might have precipitated some bloodshed, have listed it as merely a minor cause. The most exhaustive study, *The Negro in Chicago*, by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, for example, concluded that it was relatively unimportant since "race friction" was "not pronounced in Chicago industries." Recently Allan H. Spear in *Black Chicago* has similarly asserted that the riot "had little to do with labor conditions...."

Both the Chicago Commission and Spear support this contention by pointing out that during the riot there was an almost total absence of violence in the stockyards, which was by far the largest single area of employment for black Chicagoans. And, indeed, there was far less bloodshed there than knowledgeable observers had feared. But does this negative evidence prove anything other than that black workers did not dare return to the stockyards until after the militia had been ordered out of the armories to protect them? The absence of violence in the stockyards in the early days of the riot was, as Negro Alderman Louis B. Anderson explained, simply the result of fear of attack. "Colored men," Anderson said, "have refused to go to the stockyards to get paid even though their families were starving...." And what happened when Negroes returned to work? Even under military and police protection, on the first day back, one worker was savagely struck with a hammer wielded by a white man. A mob then chased the dazed Negro through the sheep pens and finally killed him with shovels and brooms. When police rescued a second black man after a severe beating, white workers retaliated, and a vicious battle against police and soldiers ensued. Several days later the packers notified non-union black workers that order had been restored to the yards, and that additional police and soldiers armed with rifles and machine guns would be there to insure their safe return to work. Organized labor disagreed, arguing that

the situation was still volatile. The packers "thought that if they would be able to jamb [*sic*] the colored laborers," charged President John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor, "that is, the great body of colored laborers, and the white union men in the stock yards ... that there would be murder there, and that they would destroy our organization. There was no other purpose in it, absolutely no other purpose in it...."

Herbert Gutman has recently made a plea to labor historians "to explore in detail the confrontation of the black worker and industrial America in particular settings." The history of the black worker in Chicago from the Pullman strike of 1894 to the race riot of 1919 provides such an opportunity—in large part because the race riot was in many ways the tragic culmination of this twenty-five years of conflict between blacks and whites in the labor market.

The seeds of discord between white and Negro job competitors in the Chicago labor market had been planted in the stockyards in 1894, when masses of packing and slaughterhouse workers had conducted a sympathetic strike with Eugene V. Debs' American Railway Union. Violence marked this strike; and, in the midst of it, Negro strikebreakers were hired for the first time in the history of the meat packing industry. Although the packers initially disclaimed any intention of adopting this practice, less than a week later Negro strikebreakers were working, eating, and sleeping in the stockyards, and their presence fired racial animosities. "Cases of attacks on colored men were numerous yesterday," the *Chicago Record* reported on July 19. "Swinging from the cross tree of a telegraph pole ... near the entrance to the yards, the effigy of a negro roustabout was suspended. A black false face of hideous expression had been fixed upon the head of straw, and a placard pinned upon the breast of the figure bore the skull and crossbones with the word 'nigger-scab' above and below in bold letters...."

The strike ended in August, and the Negro strikebreakers were intimately associated with the defeat. The workers had been thoroughly vanquished. They seemed "unmanly and without self-respect," recalled Mary McDowell of the settlement house "back-of-the-yards." "A community cowed is a sad sight to one who has been used to freemen."

Gradually, the workers built a new union—the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen (A.M.C.B.W.). Chicago was its target, for "if a start could be made in Chicago," the center of the industry, the A.M.C.B.W.'s president Michael Donnelly wrote Samuel Gompers, "our success nationally would be virtually established." Success was slow in coming, but by 1902 Donnelly could proudly announce that twenty-one locals had been chartered in Chicago and that the union rolls had burgeoned to 4,000. Accompanying organizing successes were concrete gains in wages and hours.

Yet these benefits went only to skilled workers, and at the turn of the century less and less skill was required in the meat packing industry because of the minute subdivision of labor. The "facts are these," Homer D. Call, the A.M.C.B.W.'s secretary treasurer, explained to Frank Morrison of the A.F.L., "twenty years ago the trade of the butchers was one of the best in the country." Then, after the consolidation of smaller packing houses into a handful of "large packing houses ... they began a system to crowd out the expert butchers and replace them by cheaper men in every way ..." The owners "divided the business up into gangs consisting of enough to dress the bullock, one man doing only one thing ..., which makes it possible for the proprietor to take a man in off from the street ... and to day [*sic*] the expert workers are, in many cases, crowded out and cheap Polackers and Hungarians put in their places...." The skilled worker realized that this specialization enabled unskilled workers with "muscle" to replace him; it appeared inevitable that unless a minimum wage were obtained for the unskilled, cut-throat job competition would drive all wages down. The unskilled were "the club held above our heads at all times," a skilled butcher complained. "If the packers refuse to agree to any minimum wage for the unskilled," asked Call, "how long will it be before they attempt to reduce the wages of the skilled men?" The skilled workers thus championed the demand for a minimum wage of 20 cents an hour.

This minimum was the union's objective, but it still faced an obstacle that had perpetually plagued unionization of the stockyards—the vast heterogeneity of races and nationalities that competed for jobs. No other divisive force more ominously threatened the union's goal of solidarity. Racial jealousies and antagonisms crumbled, however, as the unskilled enthusias-

tically joined the union because of dissatisfaction with the prevailing wage of 15 to 18 1/2 cents an hour, and Negroes joined as well as whites. Many of the 500 black workers in the Chicago yards had become members, U. S. Labor Commissioner Carroll D. Wright reported to President Theodore Roosevelt. The women's local reportedly greeted its black applicants with "a hearty welcome," and Mary McDowell noted that "black men sat with their white comrades" at union meetings. This fellowship extended beyond the confines of the meeting room. The A.M.C.B.W., for example, held a funeral for "Bro. Wm. Sims (colored) tail sawyer at Swift's east house," with sixty-eight whites and seven Negroes attending these last rites.

Negotiations with the packers over the minimum wage were fruitless, breaking down in late June 1904, and when the packers announced a wage reduction, 23,000 packing house workers struck. Seven thousand mechanical tradesmen later joined the strike, which dragged on for ten weeks before the workers sporadically drifted back to work. The A.M.C.B.W. had launched its strike in the face of a depression. Outside the stockyards each morning as many as 5,000 men stood lined up to replace the strikers. The strike was further doomed because the strikers' resources were so paltry compared to the combined assets of the packers. Moreover, the heterogeneous nationalities, races, and foreign languages, which had united confidently in 1903 and 1904, were in the final analysis divided and weak.

Despite the hopelessness of the strike, the arch villains to emerge from the defeat were the packers and their black strikebreakers. One observer estimated that upwards of 10,000 Negroes served as strikebreakers, with almost 1,400 arriving in one trainload. To white workers their disturbing presence seemed to be ubiquitous. Five white women strikebreakers described the prevalence of Negroes in the yards. These women, who had been hired by a black man representing Armour, worked in the canning room, ate their meals in a massive improvised dining hall one floor below, and at night slept in the canning room which "had 40 cots arranged as close together as possible." They reported seeing many Negro strikebreakers, including thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys.

Since the violence of the 1894 strike had alienated public opinion, in 1904 the union posted notices on trees and fences which admonished the

strikers "to molest no person or property, and abide strictly by the laws of this country." Non-violence was also the theme of union meetings. These exhortations notwithstanding, the strikers' animosities frequently boiled over. A mob of 500 mauled a black laborer and his 10-year-old son, and in another skirmish white strikers stabbed both eyes of a Negro strikebreaker. Other black people were hauled off streetcars. A full-scale riot threatened to erupt when 2,000 angry strikers hurled brickbats and other missiles at 200 Negro strikebreakers and their police escorts. Harry Rosenberg, a worker at Mary McDowell's settlement house, reported witnessing a mob of women and children chasing a Negro down the street, crying "kill the fink," and in late August union pickets fatally stabbed a Negro suspected of strikebreaking.

Their fortunes waning in late August, union leaders desperately wired Booker T. Washington. "Hundreds of Negroes are acting as strikebreakers," they informed Washington, as they begged him to come to Chicago to lecture on the subject, "Should Negroes Become Strike Breakers?" Washington, however, declined the offer.

The words "Negro" and "scab" were now synonymous in the minds of numerous white stockyards workers; and, lest they forget, anti-Negro labor officials and politicians were present to remind them. The strike, one union official wrote, was broken "by such horrid means that a revelation of them makes the soul sicken and the heart faint with an awful fear." It was broken by Negroes, most of them "huge strapping fellows, ignorant and vicious, whose predominating trait was animalism." South Carolina's Senator Ben Tillman traveled to Chicago a month after the end of the strike. "It was the niggers that whipped you in line," he told a group from the stockyards district. "They were the club with which your brains were beaten out."

It was not mere words, however, but another strike, the bloody teamsters' strike of 1905, that made the image of Negroes as a "scab race" even more indelible. Just days after the teamsters struck in April, trainloads of Negroes began streaming into Chicago. Shootings, knifings, and stonings soon paralyzed the city's commerce. Showers of bricks and stones greeted the black drivers as they attempted to deliver milk, coal, and other merchandise; and the injuries inflicted were recorded in the box scores of

"strike victims" that Chicago's newspapers printed as front-page news. Pummeled with brass knuckles, "right ear almost torn off"; "injured by bricks, severely bruised and cut, struck on head and left leg with clubs during riot at Rush and Michigan"; struck on the head by a brick "said to have been thrown from the tenth floor"; beaten into unconsciousness, "three shovels broken over his head"—these were but a few of the injuries.

Fearing that such acts of violence would erupt into full-scale rioting, the city council enacted an order requesting the corporation counsel to file an opinion "as to whether the importation of hundreds of Negro workers is not a menace to the community and should not be restricted." The employers' association responded by consenting not to import any more Negroes, though it refused to discharge any of its black drivers.

Not only was the employers' gesture futile, but its very futility indicated that new elements had entered into the relationship between labor conflict and racial violence in Chicago. In this dispute, unlike the stockyards strike of eight months before, the hostility of striking whites toward strikebreaking Negroes had been generalized into hatred for the black race as a whole; any Negro was a potential target. Now, no longer were mob assaults limited to just one district; presaging the 1919 riot, racial violence had spread throughout the city but it was especially prevalent in the blue-collar neighborhood to the west of the black belt. "You have the Negroes in here to fight us," the teamsters' president told the employers' association, "and we answer that we have the right to attack them wherever found." Moreover, as Graham Taylor of the Chicago Commons settlement house observed, the "great intensity of class consciousness" in the teamsters' strike forged a firm bond between strikers and their families, neighbors, other wage-earners, and even the little children who supported them by hurling rocks at the strikebreakers. The focus of their violence was facilitated by the distinguishing physical characteristic of the Negroes—the black skin that represented so many varieties of evil and danger to them. Finally, the besieged Negroes were determined to defend themselves, unlike 1904 when, unarmed, they had generally fled.

Some of the non-strikebreaking black victims were mistaken for non-union drivers. One of these was a dishwasher, who was kicked and beaten and his head smashed through a car window; when policemen came to his

aid, the crowd began to yell: "That's what they will all get." Another was a porter who was attacked by a crowd that ran after him screaming that he was a scab; beaten into unconsciousness, the porter died several days later of a fractured skull. The only offense committed by other Negroes, however, was that their color was "black and displeasing." A Negro medical student, for example, was pummeled to the ground. Even a black union member was pelted with rocks; when he called out to his attackers that his employer was not involved in the strike, one of them replied that being a "nigger" he deserved a beating anyhow.

Perhaps there was no better example of white solidarity during these turbulent weeks than the sympathy strike conducted by hundreds of grade-school students. Protesting the delivery of coal at school buildings by black strikebreakers employed by the Peabody Coal Company, the students not only hurled missiles at the drivers but organized a "skilled pupils'" union with a kindergarten local affiliated. "We are on strike. Hurrah for the unions," read the paper badges of the students who threw bricks, stones, and pieces of wood at those classmates refusing to join the picket line. Many parents supported the strike, some asserting that they would never permit their children to return so long as scabs continued to deliver coal. They also sanctioned violence. One father, for example, told a judge that his son was "amply justified" in flinging coal at Negro drivers because these men were "black" and "nonunion." Even teachers encouraged the strikers. "I will invite the pupils to strike," one principal allegedly said, "if the dirty 'niggers' deliver coal at this school."

Negroes appeared resolved to defend themselves. When a white man made a crude remark about a black strikebreaker who was standing at the rear of a custom house, the Negro leaped down from the platform and leveled a revolver at the white. "Why, I was only joking," the white man quickly said. "You're just white trash and I ought to shoot you anyhow," replied the Negro.

It was this resolve that helped to precipitate unrestrained violence in mid-May. An 11-year-old boy died on May 16, after two Negro strikebreakers, leaving work at the Peabody Coal Company, had fired into a group of jeering children. Hysteria swept the neighborhood as enraged mobs hunted for Negroes. White anger swelled menacingly, so that black

people feared to appear in the streets. Then, on the evening of May 20, rioting surged out of control. Parading down the streets and proclaiming their intention of "driving the blacks off the face of the earth," whites met armed resistance. Surrounded by attackers, another strikebreaker from Peabody fired and fatally wounded a white man. The next day, as the rioting spread to other districts, police were unable to prevent the outbreaks and disturbances that grew bloodier as night approached. That evening a Negro was murdered by a white bartender in a saloon brawl, and other black men were dragged off streetcars. In the black belt, where Negroes marched the streets crying for "justice" and "down with the white trash," white men were chased and beaten. When the violence subsided on May 22, two people were dead and a dozen severely injured. It had been, as Allan Spear has written, "the bloodiest racial conflict in the city before the riot of 1919." Labor conflict, it was readily apparent, could easily escalate into racial violence.

The image of black people as a scab race no doubt continued to fester in the minds of white workers, even though Negroes did not reinforce it again until 1916. Pullman car porters and other black men and women replaced striking railroad car cleaners in the spring of that year. Fed in dining cars and sleeping in the Pullmans, the Negroes, according to the employer, were hired "not as strikebreakers, but with the understanding that their positions would be permanent," and they were "proving themselves much more efficient in every way than the cleaners who left...." Most of these workers stayed on the job after breaking the strike.

In 1916, too, as a result of increased meat production to feed Europe's armies and a sharp decline in immigration, the lines of men waiting outside the stockyards each morning evaporated. "In the past years," Mary McDowell wrote a friend, "we have seen three to five thousand men and women waiting every morning for work and have been told that while there was such a surplus of labor a raise in wages could not be given to the unskilled workers." Surely, this must change.

Union leaders realized not only that the moment was propitious to organize all the stockyards workers, but that in this mass-production and minutely specialized industry some sort of industrial unionism would be required to do it. Under the leadership of John Fitzpatrick, president of the

Chicago Federation of Labor (C.F.L.), and William Z. Foster, an organizer for the railway carmen's union, all the trade unions in the yards, with the exception of the A.M.C.B.W., united in July 1917 to form the Stockyards Labor Council (S.L.C.).

Next to persuading the nationals to lay aside jurisdictional jealousies for the benefit of central organization, the S.L.C.'s most formidable problem was that of unionizing Negro workers, of whom there were between 10,000 and 12,000 in the yards, or about one-quarter of the total laboring force. The C.F.L. asked Samuel Gompers to provide a method by which the S.L.C. could grant membership to Negroes without violating the constitutions, rituals, and other color bars of the nationals. Gompers' solution was that the A.F.L. would award federal charters to all-Negro locals, if no serious objections were raised by the nationals. Despite the established unworkability of federal locals, and the cries of "Jim Crow" that they would arouse, the S.L.C. confidently embarked on its campaign to organize Negroes. To assist in the drive, the Illinois coal miners donated two black organizers, and others later joined the team.

The yards, rather than the steel mills or other mass-production industries, were the focus of the unions' efforts to solicit Negro membership. Not only were the packers by far the major employers of Negro labor but, nearly as significant, success in organizing Negroes in the yards was generally considered a gauge of the unions' ability to organize them in any of Chicago's industries. Moreover, the slaughtering and meat-packing industry was the city's largest, employing over one-eighth of Chicago's wage-earners and ranking first in value added by manufacture and total value of its products.

A mass organization drive began in September 1917, with parades, smokers, hall and street meetings, and the distribution of 50,000 pieces of literature in various languages. "Brother's [sic] in all the Packing Houses.... BE MEN—JOIN THE UNION" read the handbills summoning black workers to a union meeting. The strike failures of 1894 and 1904 haunted union members, and it was rumored that the packers wanted a strike and had imported an enormous labor reserve of Negroes to break it and crush unionization. And, indeed, it seemed to be a fact, though a much disputed one, that employers were importing black laborers from the rural South.

On March 30, 1918, however, through the intervention of the federal government, Judge Samuel Alschuler, who had been appointed U. S. Administrator for Adjustment of Labor Differences in Certain Packing House Industries, awarded the eight-hour day and other benefits to workers in the yards. Such gains, the workers felt, were a tremendous union victory. Fitzpatrick jubilantly proclaimed to an excited crowd of thousands assembled in a Chicago public park: "It's a new day, and out in God's sunshine, you men and you women, black and white, have not only an eight-hour day but you are on an equality." Union membership soared in the weeks following these awards.

"I suppose you have heard from official sources that the Stockyards will soon be a hundred percent organized," Ida Glatt, an officer of the Women's Trade Union League, happily recounted to Agnes Nestor, former president of the League. "From intimate connection with the white and colored English-speaking women workers I can tell you firsthand that the women are just rolling into the organization." The unions' secretaries "do nothing but take in applications from morning to midnight." Negro men and women were also participating in the meetings of the S.L.C.

Not everybody shared Miss Glatt's optimism. Irene Goins, a Negro who was actively organizing in the yards, expressed her disappointment: "My people ... know so little about organized labor that they have had a great fear of it, and for that reason the work of organizing has proceeded more slowly than I anticipated." Another black organizer, John Riley, echoed her disappointment.

The urgent need to organize black workers increased in the fall of 1918. The war was drawing to a close, and accompanying demobilization would be the termination not only of government contracts but of the federal wartime agencies which had supported union recognition, collective bargaining, and non-discrimination against union members. It was imperative for labor to meet with greater solidarity the employers' efforts to re-establish the pre-war pattern of industrial relations. Unorganized Negroes, union leaders feared, would be pawns of the employers in the future struggle. Southern Negroes continued to pour into the city; in recent years the Negro population in Chicago had more than doubled, increasing from 50,000 to over 100,000, while the Negro industrial force

had risen from 27,000 to almost 70,000. In 1910, black men comprised just 6 percent of the laboring force in the yards; ten years later, they comprised 32 percent. The black laboring force of every packing house, reported Dr. George E. Haynes of the Labor Department's Division of Negro Economics, had increased rapidly from three to five times over the level of January 1916.

In addition, the image of Negro strikebreakers had not dimmed during the war. Hotel keepers, for example, locked out waiters in April 1918, hiring Negroes in their place. "This is a deliberate attempt to start a race war," Fitzpatrick wrote Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson. Wilson's conciliator in Chicago agreed that the dispute was "full of danger because of the Race problem." Negroes also broke strikes of egg candlers and garment workers.

With the Armistice, as the forces of demobilization touched all levels of the economy, the battle lines between employers and workers hardened. But the peace was also portentous to black Chicagoans whose employment security was in large measure attributable to the government's demands for war products. That spring, the prospect of a peacetime labor market disturbed people who were usually the first to feel the effects of the immediate postwar unemployment. Negro women were the first to be discharged; Negro men and white women soon followed. At the stockyards' National Box Company, where half of the workers and almost all the unskilled workers were black, Negro women were discharged after a pay raise for women workers. "After they gave that," a black woman complained, "there came a whole lot of white ladies." This woman, who wanted to remain at National Box, was told she could stay if she were willing to do the grueling work of loading trucks formerly done by men. "If you don't want to do that," her foremen told her, "you will have to go home, because they are going to have all whites."

Upwards of 10,000 Negroes were unemployed in early May 1919. Employment in the stockyards had fallen from over 65,000 in January to 50,000. Returning soldiers aggravated this situation, and thousands of black troops were mustered out in or near Chicago, many of them southerners who had little desire to return home. A. L. Jackson of the Wabash Avenue YMCA pleaded with the Chicago industrialists to hire these veter-

ans; and in boosting their qualifications he even invoked the nativism so prevalent in 1919: "These boys are all good Americans. There are no slackers, no hyphens among them." To alleviate this distress, the Chicago Urban League distributed portions of the labor surplus to Battle Creek, Flint, and Detroit, and to areas of Wisconsin and Illinois, but it could place only a few hundred compared to the many thousands of placements it had made during the war. Even during the prosperous summer months of 1919, black Chicagoans doubtless realized that during a labor depression they were the most expendable, and many did not want to jeopardize their tenuous positions by unionizing.

In early June the stockyards unions kicked off their most spirited organization drive since 1917. Following a parade and the distribution of campaign buttons on June 8, John Kikulski, an organizer of butchers and meat cutters, outlined the goals of "this great campaign," in which "Polish, Irish, Lithuanian, and in fact every race, color, creed, and nationality is to be included...." "While there will be varied differences in our physical makeup and thoughts," he continued, "there is one thing which we all hold in common, and that is our right to a living wage, and our rights in the pursuit of happiness as American citizens...." In other attempts to organize black workers, and to convince them that labor's cause was also theirs, the C.F.L. devoted portions of its newspaper, *The New Majority*, to the Negro. The organ of the A.M.C.B.W., the *Butcher Workman*, likewise published pointed appeals to black workers. An article authored by a Negro woman appeared in the May issue. Entitled "The Negro's Greatest Opportunity as I See It," it was both a slashing attack on race prejudice and an announcement that the A.M.C.B.W. had "broken down the bars and ... invited us in." "Therefore, the black man should take advantage of this great opportunity [membership in the A.M.C.B.W.], so that he may be the instrument through which discrimination may be driven out of this country—the home of the free and the home of the brave."

White and Negro workers paraded through the black belt on Sunday, July 6, and congregated in a playground near the yards. Brass bands led the way, and the marchers waved miniature American flags and carried placards, on one of which was printed: "The bosses think because we are of different colors and different nationalities that we should fight each other.

We're going to fool them and fight for a common cause—a square deal for all." Union leaders delivered speeches at the playground. The seven speakers, of whom three were Negroes, did not betray the advertised purpose of the meeting—to organize Negro workers. "It does me good ... to see such a checkerboard crowd," said J. W. Johnstone of the S.L.C. in welcoming the workers. "You are standing shoulder to shoulder as men, regardless of whether your face is black or white." John Kikulski then addressed the Polish in their native language to explain the need for "cooperation between blacks and whites."

Yet events just two days later belied the union leaders' rhetorical optimism. For on July 8, as a hot spell settled on the city, the most violent strike of the summer occurred. Two thousand employees of the Corn Products Refinery at Argo struck that morning, after the company's president had reneged on an agreement to hold a referendum on the closed shop. Anticipating trouble, the company had requisitioned a shipment of rifles and reinforced its special police force. The next day, during a fracas at the plant's entrance, armed guards shot and killed two strikers and seriously wounded eighteen others, one of whom soon died. A howling, stone-throwing mob of strikers' wives and daughters added to the turbulence by chasing the mayor of Argo, who was also superintendent of the company's machine shops, two miles to Chicago's city limits for threatening local grocers and druggists with discontinuance of the refinery's accounts if they extended credit to the strikers. The day after the shootings, the strikers and several thousand other Russian, Lithuanian, and Polish workers, mainly from the stockyards district, marched in a guard of honor at the funeral of the murdered men. During the funeral the rumor was rife that the company had asked numerous Negroes to "come back Monday and bring all of your friends." Argo's citizens feared that the introduction of Negroes would ignite another round of bloodshed; and on Monday refinery officials deputized a number of black men whom they strung out in a line in front of the plant. Their presence particularly incensed the strikers, and disorder erupted during which three strikers were wounded. A mother of four was shot in the leg and then beaten down from a trolley wire, but not before she had disengaged it in order to allow strikers to hurl bottles and bricks at a stalled streetcar filled with strikebreakers. Altogether 600 Negroes were brought in as strikebreakers in this

bloody dispute; doubtless, the immigrant strikers in Argo and around the stockyards did not forget the Negroes' role.

A confrontation between labor and management in the yards was not long in coming. The first week of July witnessed the introduction of 300 mounted policemen to patrol the stockyards district, apparently to reverse the union's organizing successes. As workers gathered around a union speaker, the police would ride into the crowd and disperse it. After protesting to the packers, 10,000 workers walked out on Friday, July 18. Although they returned to the stockyards Monday, it was evident that one of the most serious strikes in Chicago's history was imminent. That evening, union members voted to demand wage increases and other benefits, to submit these demands Saturday, July 26—just the day before the outbreak of the race riot—and to allow the packers forty-eight hours either to accept them or prepare for a strike. Ninety percent of the whites were unionized by that fateful weekend, while three-fourths of the Negroes, or 9,000 workers, were still outside the labor movement. What had retarded unionization among black workers?

Negroes in labor histories too often appear as faceless figures either to be praised, pitied, or damned. It is evident that black workers had very real reasons for resisting unionization. Many unions, of course, barred black craftsmen in order to control their portions of the labor market. These Negroes thus had to seek out unskilled positions, and it would be unreasonable for them then to unionize with common laborers, especially if they accrued employment benefits as non-union men. Unfortunately for the stockyards organization drive, neither all the A.F.L. national unions nor their members followed the lead of the C.F.L. Negroes were induced to join the federal locals recommended by Gompers, although some overzealous organizers enlisted black workers with the false promise that they would be transferred later to the locals of their respective crafts. A steamfitter expressed the dilemma of many of the Negro tradesmen in the yards: "I have worked as a steamfitter at the stockyards for fifteen years and tried to get into [all-white] Local 563 as have others of my race, but we have always been put off with some excuse until we gave up the attempt to get in." Other Negroes had become union members during labor disputes, only to be discharged after the strike was over. They felt betrayed, certain

that unions were motivated not by a spirit of brotherhood but solely by self-interest. The exclusionist policies of southern unions had likewise alienated Negroes from the labor movement, and some of the migrants to Chicago during the war had traveled there to escape the job control exercised by the unions. Other migrants had peculiarly individual motives for not unionizing; some Negroes' life insurance policies were even voided if they did. Still others hesitated to join with whites who, during earlier labor depressions, had replaced them in domestic services, in the operation of barbershops, bootblack parlors, and contractual janitorial services, and in cooking, waiting tables, and dishwashing.

Negroes who traveled from the South to work in Chicago's industries brought with them not only a rural psychology but, in many cases, a total ignorance of strikes and unions. Fully 90 percent of the northern-born black workers in the yards, for example, wore the union button, but few of the migrants did. Other Negroes, however, were fully aware of how Negroes broke strikes, undermined wages, and reduced the white workers' bargaining power. Strikebreaking presented an opportunity to enter industries which formerly had been closed. Even if a Negro strikebreaker were employed at less than the union scale, he was generally paid more than he was accustomed to earning; and by refusing to go out on strike with whites, Negroes received promotions into more highly skilled fields which had not been previously open to them.

The readjustment from life on the farm to that of industrial wage-earner was so immense that Negro migrants often followed the advice of black leaders. Their advice was understandably more influential than that of white union members. A frequent source of counsel was the Urban League, the main employment agency in the black belt. The Urban League took a pragmatic view of unions, although the officers of the local branch were clearly cognizant of the danger of post-war labor conflict along racial lines. Robert E. Park, a white sociologist and president of the Chicago Urban League, feared that all the Negroes' perplexities after the Armistice would be "intimately bound up with the labor scene"; and, as early as November 1917, the League announced that it "would welcome any effort tending to an amicable settlement of this vital problem." It met with officers of the Chicago and Illinois Federations of Labor, and it advised the

Women's Trade Union League during its campaign to organize Negro women in the yards, but these efforts accomplished little toward persuading unions to lower their color bars. The dilemma of the League, as of many Negro leaders, was that though it recognized the exigency of unionizing Negroes, it left little doubt that the first move had to be the unions' obliteration of all discriminatory membership policies. The League sought to plot a course between management and organized labor. For two reasons, however, it was more often on management's side: the unions did not lower their color bars, and Chicago's large industries could provide immediate opportunities for the migrants.

The attitude of Chicago's most widely circulated Negro newspaper, the *Defender*, paralleled that of the Urban League. "We have arrayed ourselves on the side of capital to a great extent," the *Defender* proclaimed in an editorial in late April 1919, "yet capital has not played square with us; it has used us as strikebreakers, then when the calm came turned us adrift." If it were to the race's "economic, social and political interest to join with organized labor now, it should not make the least bit of difference what was their attitude toward us in the past, even if that past was as recent as yesterday. If they extend the olive branch in good faith accept it today." In July, however, after the A.F.L. convention had done nothing to remove the exclusion clauses of some A.F.L. unions or the segregation clauses of others, the *Defender* complained: "Unwillingly we assume the role of strikebreakers. The unions drive us to it."

To most leaders in the black belt, exclusion and segregation were the roots of the problem. There was also a widespread attitude that employers were the Negroes' natural allies and that they, rather than unions, provided security and industrial opportunity. Negroes have found, Booker T. Washington wrote in 1913, that "the friendship and confidence of a good white man, who stands well in the community, are a valuable asset in time of trouble." For this reason, the Negro worker "does not always understand, and does not like, an organization [that is, a union] which seems to be founded on a sort of impersonal enmity to the man by whom he is employed...." Mary McDowell recalled an example of the personal relationship which Negroes often believed existed between employer and employee. During the campaign to organize the stockyards, an organizer

approached a newly-arrived Negro and explained to him the advantages of union membership. "It all sounds pretty good to me," the Negro replied, "but what does Mr. Armour think about it?"

Union leaders accused the packers of subsidizing black clergymen and other professional people, YMCAs, and welfare clubs to spread anti-union propaganda. Certain clergymen, among them unprincipled labor recruiters, did urge their parishioners to spurn union advances. Others, however, endorsed the endeavors of unions that were organizing without regard to race, arguing that union membership would help to minimize racial conflict; and among these were two of the city's most eminent ministers, L. K. Williams of the Olivet Baptist Church and John F. Thomas of Ebenezer Baptist. In addition, black clerical associations, such as the Colored Baptist Ministers' Alliance and the AME Sunday School Convention, invited union organizers to use their groups as forums for outlining labor's views.

The YMCA, where at least two packers, Wilson and Armour, financed "efficiency clubs," was anti-union. Armour also gave an annual membership to the YMCA to each black worker after his first year of employment. Negroes at the club meetings, J. W. Johnstone charged, were "lectured and taught that the thing they have to do is to keep out of organized labor."

But were ministers and the YMCA witting instruments of the packers? Dr. George E. Haynes thought not. It was obvious, he reported after investigating the origins of the race riot, that certain black leaders were adamantly opposed to workers unionizing, "but there was no evidence that could be obtained that they were influenced to these opinions or used as tools of the employers."

It is not so difficult to determine the motives of Richard E. Parker, a notorious anti-union propagandist. Parker admitted that in 1916 he had distributed 20,000 handbills to "All Colored Working Men in the Stockyards," warning them not to "Join Any White Man's Union." He claimed that he had paid for these himself because of his "personal interest" in his race; but he also acknowledged that he had gone to the South in 1916 while working for several packing and steel companies, and had "imported more Negroes than any man in Chicago." Parker edited a newspaper in which he advised black workers not to join the established unions but to

join the American Unity Labor Union, which he had founded and of which he was business agent. A card from his union, he boasted, would secure employment for Negroes in the building trades, steel mills, and stockyards. Parker was a demagogue and he was doubtless on the payroll of employers, but he might also have been working in the race's interest, as he perceived it. Because "the Negro happened to be born black," he wrote, "the Unions have labelled him inferior." As a result, they barred him not only from membership but also from apprenticeships and the chance to secure work in skilled jobs. "For this reason we formed the American Unity Labor Union," for we could expect "fairness from no local."

Above all, it was conflict between the white rank and file and their black counterparts that retarded unionization. Labor historians have wasted much energy debating the A.F.L.'s attitudes toward black workers, when the truly bitter, and functional, racial animosities were not at the national but at the shop level. Unions have too often directed their recriminations at anti-union Negroes, rather than conceding their own inability to control the racial hatreds of white members. Evidence of racial conflict at the shop level is scarce and difficult to find, but it is extant; and in few places was such conflict more pervasive than in the stockyards in 1919, where just a month before the race riot there was a series of spontaneous walkouts, all racially inspired.

"Well, are you going to join or not," the smokehouse floor steward impatiently asked the black worker. "No, I would rather quit than join the union." "If you don't join tomorrow, these men won't work with you." "Fuck you." "God Damn you." Then the black man drew a knife from the pocket of his overalls. "He was big enough to eat me ... " the floor steward recalled, so "I called for help." The union men, "practically all of them are in the union except ... these three colored fellows," came to his assistance. It was after this encounter that the white men in the smokehouse walked out, declaring that they could no longer work with non-union blacks. Similar confrontations were occurring simultaneously in various shops at the yards. Leaving dead hogs hanging on the conveyor belt or after only partially dressing the beef, hundreds of workers informed their foremen that black men on the floor were non-union, and that they would not return until these men were discharged or made to join the union.

"We are paying the union and wearing the buttons," one member complained, "and they are getting just as much." Other members echoed this resentment. "Fuck the Union," a black worker had reportedly told one of them, "I am making as much money as you are. What is the use of joining the Union?" Another grievance was that Negroes allegedly received preferential treatment, such as not being docked for reporting late or punished for stealing meat.

Negro as well as white members accused certain black men who used abusive language and incited violence of being anti-union agitators. The only task of "Heavy" Williams, they said, was to bring new workers from the company employment office to the cattle-killing floor, and "he brings up all non-union men and keeps the non-union men from joining the union." " 'Let me tell you,'" he would instruct the new men, "when they get after you about this union, don't you join it.... You stay out. If you don't you won't be here long.'" Williams also fought with whites, among them "Tubs," whom he threatened to "split open" with a meat cleaver. Williams had been a union member; so had Joseph Hodge, until a black friend of his had been hit over the head with a blunt instrument. Hodge continually cast such vicious and obscene slurs at the union that whites warned that he would "agitate a race riot or perhaps ... get killed." Another anti-union Negro stabbed a white man on the killing floor after damning the union and branding black union men "a lot of bastards," "a lot of white folks' niggers."

Negroes frequently replaced striking whites in the stockyards that summer. In the hair house, for example, the all-white union of spinners struck, and Negroes from various other departments were recruited to fill their jobs. Few whites in the yards could have been unaware of the strike; for, as one man reported, "at the noon hour these colored men are looking out of windows and doors, and these [white] men come out for lunch, and ... it creates a disharmony and hard feelings among the races...." It was also a fact, however, that sometimes Negroes who joined unions were also discharged.

Organizers and black workers had difficulty communicating with each other, and this was a major cause not only of friction but also of the unwillingness of Negroes to unionize. Numerous floor stewards and union

committeemen spoke English poorly, if at all. How, a non-English-speaking Polish steward was asked by an interpreter, did he expect to explain the benefits of unions to black workers? He did not even try, he said, but there was a Negro committeeman who "talks the best way he can." Well, then, did he instruct the Negro committeeman? "I don't tell him nothing," he replied. "They have got to get it for themselves."

A Negro who did not "get it," however, would have "it made hot for him," with his "face pushed in" or bricks hurled at him. Frustration as well as racial bitterness provoked these acts of violence. "When I was coming in [to work]," recounted a Negro, "6 or 7 or 8 Polocks grabbed a colored fellow out there, and carried him on the [union] wagon, and said 'you son-of-a-bitch, you will join the union,' and made him go up, and one had him by this arm, and the other by this arm, and one fellow had him by the neck...."

Black resistance—and, with it, interracial abuse and violence—only mounted in the weeks before the riot. "Fuck the union, fuck you in the [union] button," raged a black worker. Knives and revolvers proliferated on both sides. "If I catch you outside I will shoot you," a Negro warned an insulting committeeman. Yet the unions became even more aggressive. "Where is your button?" demanded an organizer. "I ain't got none on," was the angry reply, "but [if I did] I would put it on the end of my prick."

Union leaders claimed that there was no racism involved in this bitterness—that it was simply a labor matter. But it was obviously much more than that by late July 1919; the two were inseparably fused. The Irish, Polish, Lithuanian, and other workers who clashed with Negroes in other spheres of human relations had their racial antagonisms reinforced if not initiated at the stockyards and in other industries. Labor in Chicago, moreover, was possessed of an intense class consciousness; anyone who was not with it was against it—and the black workers were notoriously not with it. The hostility was so intense that, as in 1905, hatred of Negro "scabs" could be generalized into hatred of an entire race. The factors retarding unionization—Negro distrust of unions and white workers, the economic advantages to be accrued as non-union workers, the manipulation of black workers by management, and, above all, the hatred of black workers by whites arising from racial antipathy and conditioned by strike-

breaking and by other anti-union acts—left a legacy of twenty-five years of violence and helped produce a bloody race riot in 1919.