Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980

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Ronald L. Lewis
Black Coal Miners in America
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To “Our Nell”
Ellen Fairclough Lewis
my English-American Mother
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Preface

Having been born and raised in a coal town, the heir to a family tradition in coal mining with roots in England and Wales, undoubtedly accounts for my willingness to expend so much time and effort on this project. The coal industry is chronically cyclical, and it was the bust end of one of those cycles, greatly aggravated by the technological dislocations produced by mine mechanization in the 1950s, which brought an end to the American branch of that family tradition.

These technical and market forces have permanently transformed coal mining and the culture which grew up around the production process. Hundreds of thousands of miners and their families have been forced to abandon the coalfields to seek a new life, usually in the industrial cities. How much greater the impact of this transformation was for Afro-Americans. So decimated was the black mining population, in fact, that few historians, and fewer laymen, are even aware that blacks ever represented an important element in the labor force of the coal industry. I hope with this book to partly fill this void.

The rural environment in which coal mining is typically conducted has produced something of a distortion in the sources relied upon by those who have written about mining. When the major magazines and newspapers reported events in the coalfields at all, they were the sensational affairs, such as violent confrontations between capital and labor or the pathos of hunger and destitution which so often accompanied these frequent and protracted struggles, and the reporters often were oblivious to subtler local nuances. Therefore, I have used the major publications where appropriate, but I have relied far more extensively on the small, obscure, and less accessible newspapers published in the coalfields to flesh out the contours of local life and labor that went unnoticed by the mass media.

Regrettably, neither the mining companies nor the United Mine Workers of America have demonstrated much interest in preserving the historical record of the industry itself, much less the social relations of the people who depended on it for their livelihood. The industry
itself is highly competitive, and the antagonism between coal companies and the miners' union is nearly unparalleled in American industrial history. This conflict has become institutionalized, and each side in the contest has come to view itself as locked in a deadly struggle for survival. Given the priorities which must be established under such conditions, preservation of the historical record hardly seems important. As a consequence, few good company collections exist in manuscript repositories, and the UMWA has followed an erratic policy regarding the scholarly use of its equally disorganized archives. In fact, at this writing, the union's records are closed and housed in remote storage.

Black miners did not share a monolithic experience. American coal miners have always been a culturally heterogeneous group living in widely dispersed, often isolated communities in a diversity of geographical and political environments. Moreover, Afro-Americans were not evenly distributed throughout the coal regions. In the older, established anthracite region of Pennsylvania, for example, long apprenticeships were legislated in the nineteenth century before southern blacks began their migration out of the South, and this practice effectively, if unintentionally, barred their entry into the field. Black miners were, therefore, employed almost exclusively in the bituminous coal fields. Even in those fields, however, there was neither a uniform black presence nor a common pattern of race relations but, rather, several unique regional histories. Delineating these distinctive regional patterns and the forces which shaped them defines the paths of enquiry and the organizational structure of this book.

Analysis of such widely divergent black experiences requires the use of a comparative regional approach. Such an approach permits a broader analysis of historical issues and trends by contrasting those experiences at the local and regional levels, and it allows chronological links to be drawn between earlier patterns of race in the coal industry and later developments. The patterns of race, class, and community conflict are examined because these lines of intersection most clearly reveal the matrix of social relations in the several coal regions.

Part I of this book deals with forced labor. The black mining tradition in America traces its origins back to slavery in eastern Virginia. As the southern coal industry slowly expanded into western Virginia and Alabama during the antebellum era, slaves were sent down into the mines just as they were deployed in other southern industries. Slavery in the southern coalfields, therefore, was a component of the peculiar institution itself and was governed by the ideologies of race control which went along with that system of labor. When slavery was abolished after the Civil War, some of the advantages of forced labor were preserved, for a select few with political
influence, in the form of convict leasing. During its existence, this system marshaled tens of thousands of convicts, most of them black, into the New South's coal mines. Since leasing evolved to its most mature form in Alabama, lasted longer there, and involved more blacks than elsewhere, I have focused on that state's leasing system.

The system which prevailed in the southern coalfields under the social, political, and economic dictates of segregation I have characterized in Part II. Its most elaborate development was reached in the mineral district around Birmingham, Alabama, the showcase of coal and steel in the New South. Discrimination against blacks was the key to successful competition for southern operators. Thus, the coal operators were tied into the oppressive system of racial segregation not only by agreement with its social objectives but, more significantly, by economic relationships guaranteeing their profits at the expense of the workers, particularly the racial minority they used as a lever to maintain this position.

Part III discusses the pattern of race relations in the northern coalfields. Wages were higher in the North because the miners' union was strong there. During conflicts between labor and management, operators frequently went South to recruit black replacements who would work for lower wages than the politically conscious, and overwhelmingly white, northern miners. In order to protect their jobs, and to keep their town lily white, the established miners used all means at their disposal, physical as well as political, to prevent blacks from entering their communities. In this section I have emphasized the virulent social relations involved in this exclusion movement among white miners, rather than geographic representation.

Part IV deals with central Appalachia. I do not contend that full equality reigned or that discrimination did not exist in this subregion. Compared with the exclusion and exploitation patterns of the North and South, however, the border states once again prove an exception to the traditional polarity. Central Appalachia attracted more blacks than any other coal region in the nation because they found ready employment at equal pay for equal work throughout these fields.

For several reasons, I focus here on southern West Virginia rather than attempting a uniform assessment of those portions of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee also comprised in this coal-producing subregion of Appalachia. More than 60,000 (69 percent) of the 88,000 blacks who lived in the central Appalachian coalfields in 1920 resided in southern West Virginia, with the remainder scattered in the other sections. Kentucky had the next largest number with about 15,000, but not until the World War I period did the black population expand to that number. No sooner were the eastern Kentucky coalfields integrated by railroad lines than the district was cast into the depths of the Great
Depression, and the out-migration began. Furthermore, all the states with sections comprised in Central Appalachia, except West Virginia, followed the southern example by instituting the complete range of jim crow laws, even though operators acknowledged the principles of equal pay for equal work and relatively open employment. As a result, race relations in eastern Kentucky were a mutation of the system which achieved its purest form in West Virginia. Because race relations can be examined in some detail over a long uninterrupted period of time and because blacks concentrated in far larger numbers there, I have described the system primarily as it evolved in southern West Virginia.

Part V outlines the forces which nearly eradicated blacks from the coal industry. Market and technological developments coincided to reduce the mine labor force in America from a high of over 650,000 workers in 1920 to fewer than 130,000 in 1970. When demand for labor began to decline, equality soon turned to discrimination, and blacks were disproportionately affected by the attempt to modernize the industry through mechanization. As operators replaced miners with machines and the UMWA cooperated to "save the industry," blacks were nearly eliminated from the mine force entirely.

For the most part, I have avoided extensive theoretical discussions. However, it seems appropriate to place my findings in a general theoretical context. At the outset it must be stated that this study is empirical, although not a test of hypotheses, and no single causal theory explains the patterns of race relations detailed here. Theory in social science can be useful in providing a framework for organizing complex social phenomena even if it does not predict precise outcomes. In that context, I have accepted the orthodox Marxist theory of class conflict as the best general explanation of those race, class, and community conflicts which occurred in the southern coalfields.

Simply put, this theory postulates that the employer desires to maximize profits and so will attempt wherever possible to weaken the power of the workers to increase their wages by creating division within the working class. This division will follow racial lines to the extent that capitalists succeed in isolating blacks in a lower paid, lower status category within the working class. To do that, a belief system of subjugation, such as segregation, is developed which will encourage discrimination in housing, education, politics, and other spheres of social life. The result is a black marginal class and a relatively privileged status for white workers who help to keep the blacks subjugated in order to preserve their own artificially derived status.

Thus, by forestalling solidarity in the working class, capitalists can exploit labor generally, the degree of exploitation being measured as the difference between the wages workers received and the value of the goods they produce. It is clear that exploitation is exactly what Alabama
operators had in mind, and I have used their own words, deeds, and calculations, rather than theory, to demonstrate that this was the case. Even if they did not follow a conscious policy of exploitation, their role and function within the social system produced the same ends. Therefore, both theoretically and empirically, the Marxist explanation of conflict is persuasive for this region.

The Marxist theory of race and class conflict is not applicable in the northern fields, however. Here the "split labor market" theory has far more explanatory power. According to this model, racial antagonism develops in a labor market which is split along racial lines, and the price of labor differs for at least two racial groups. The underlying premise is that businessmen support a laissez-faire system in which workers compete freely in an open market, and only under duress will they privilege one group over another. There are three competing interest groups in a split labor market: employers, higher-paid labor, and lower-paid labor. If the wages of indigenous workers are too high, employers may seek relief by importing cheaper labor or by relocating to an area where labor costs are lower, since it is in their interests to obtain labor as cheaply as possible. When cheaper labor is imported, conflict will result between the higher-paid established workers and the lower-paid imported workers.

This is precisely what occurred in the northern coalfields during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Coal operators refused to pay indigenous miners increased wages, and the miners retaliated by striking. The operators then locked out those who refused to accept the lower wage and imported workers from the South's black industrial reserve, as well as European immigrants. In both cases conflict occurred as established miners attempted to exclude the new and cheaper labor. The prevailing ideology in the North called for the exclusion of blacks and the gradual absorption of European immigrants. The primary conflict came along racial lines because the identity of blacks as cheap labor singled them out for a special hatred.

Operators in the northern coalfields would have employed any labor force that accepted the lower scale. In fact, there is little empirical evidence to support the contention that operators attempted to divide the working class by developing a privileged stratum of white miners. Instead, they sought to employ the cheapest labor available as free market conditions dictated, but established miners and the public intervened through physical resistance and political pressure. If operators were the chief agents of exploitation in southern mines, it was the established and higher-paid white miners who shaped the pattern of black exclusion in the northern coalfields.

In central Appalachia both theories have application. During the initial stages of development, a severe labor shortage necessitated the
employment of anybody willing to work at the wage offered. The population was so sparse in much of the region that prevailing racial norms were not a serious consideration, so resistance by established workers did not split the market. Operators did attempt to weaken the bargaining power of miners, however, by mixing diverse racial and ethnic elements. That policy inhibited unionism and enabled operators to pay miners lower wages than in the North but made for open employment opportunities for those who encountered a closed door in other coal regions. Operators did not use racial stratification or wage differentials to divide the workers but allowed diversity within the work force to do that for them. When conflicts occurred over pay or conditions, operators locked out those who would not work at the lower rates and imported strikebreakers. Since there was no established working class prior to the influx which accompanied industrialization, native whites, blacks, and immigrants were forced to unite against operators or all would lose. Once new miners became established miners, they fought strikebreakers with little regard to race or national origin. Thus evolved unity from diversity. When mixture failed to keep miners fragmented, the operators resorted to repression. Eventually, that tactic also failed, but by then blacks were migrating out of the region for work in northern cities.

I have accumulated innumerable debts of gratitude while researching and writing this book, and I regret that I cannot acknowledge all of them individually. I do wish to express my appreciation to Leah Atkins who graciously made my research in Birmingham so fruitful; Marvin Whiting of the Birmingham Public Library Archives and the late Mylo Howard of the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery for facilitating my research in their collections; and George Parkinson of the West Virginia and Regional History Collection at West Virginia University for making one of the best collections of Appalachian and coal-mining materials so accessible to me.

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I

EXPROPRIATION

Forced Labor
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Slavery represented the most fundamental cleavage separating the North and the South before the Civil War, and the social fissures it generated found their way into virtually every sphere of southern life in endlessly complex patterns. Certainly this was true in labor and industrial relations. A society based on slavery dictated that other institutions, and the ideologies which supported them, be compatible with the whole. Industrial and labor relations in the North evolved within the context of a free market and free labor ideology, but in the South the relations between capital and labor were planted and nurtured in a slave society whose very foundations were the economic and ideological imperatives of black bondage. Slavery provided the framework, therefore, within which labor relations evolved in the southern coalfields. Although these relations differed somewhat in the coal-producing districts of the antebellum South, among mine operators, as among planters and other industrialists, there was little question that the ideal labor force was one composed of slaves.¹

The antebellum coal industry expanded slowly at the beginning of the nineteenth century but accelerated rapidly in the two decades before the Civil War. Production increased from 2.5 million tons in 1840 to 8.4 million tons in 1850, and reached more than 20 million tons by 1860. Although bituminous coal was mined in more than twenty states, only Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Virginia, and Maryland produced more than 400,000 tons annually, and these five states provided approximately 90 percent of all the bituminous coal mined in 1860. Pennsylvania surpassed all other states, producing 45 percent of national production, not simply because of its rich resources but because it was bounded by the Atlantic coastal markets on the east and those of the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes on the west. Internal improvements undertaken by Pennsylvania, particularly canals and railroads, greatly facilitated the expansion of the industry by linking the state's bituminous fields with these major markets. Only Virginia enjoyed similar resources and geographical proximity, but because it was ser-
ously divided by geographical and sectional interests, the general assembly failed to undertake the internal improvements necessary for developing the coal resources in the western part of the state. Consequently, only operators in the eastern Virginia field near Richmond capitalized on the advantages of their location to become competitive in the marketplace.  

Discovered early in the eighteenth century, coal was being mined regularly in eastern Virginia before the American Revolution. In 1760, Andrew Burnaby, a Swedish minister from Delaware, noted that among the infant industries near Richmond were several coal mines opened along the James River. Six years later, Thomas Jefferson also recorded the existence of these mines. Extensively utilized locally even before the American Revolution, mines in the eastern Virginia field, known as the Richmond Basin, provided the first commercially developed source of domestic coal in the United States. As early as 1789, Virginia coastal vessels supplied coal to cities along the Atlantic from Charleston to Boston.  

The earliest evidence that slaves mined eastern Virginia coal fixes on the year 1760, when “Nathaniel Pope’s Davy” began working in the Deep Run Pits of Henrico County, twelve miles from Richmond. Mine operators in Goochland County also used slaves to dig coal, and the records indicate that considerable sums of money were expended for “Negro hire.” In one case a mine operator hired forty-one hands from their owners for his operations.  

Among the earliest and most important of the mines along the James River was Black Heath Pits, located in Chesterfield County near the town of Manchester. Founded in 1788, the mine was operated for the next three decades by Henry “Harry” Heth, a Revolutionary War army officer and enterprising farmer-businessman. Although he owned many slaves, in 1810 Heth leased from other owners thirty to forty bondsmen to toil in his coal mines. Slaves also constituted the vast majority of the 170 full- and part-time workers employed at Heth’s coal yards during the summer of 1813. The owner of considerable coal lands, Heth leased some of these properties to other mine operators for a percentage of the production, and he stipulated that the lessee must employ between twenty-five and fifty full-time miners per year.  

Heth not only employed slaves as miners, he also worked them in every occupation associated with the business, including the most highly skilled positions, such as engineers and “machine drivers.” In 1819, Heth, who had been ill for several years, drew up a “List of Negroes Which the Proprietor Will Sell All Together,” a document he appended to his will. The operator enumerated fifty-two men and
women, among whom were a number of skilled craftsmen. Apparently Heth followed the traditional pattern of early industrialists in the region, who owned highly skilled slaves to assure stability at key production posts. Unskilled workers were more easily hired from other owners. At the time of his death in 1821, Harry Heth owned forty-one slaves who had been hired to the company, and his partners paid hiring fees to the estate for thirty-four additional males, three females, and four children. The women and children probably cooked and cleaned for the pitmen.

Confederate General Harry Heth, a grandson of the mine promoter, recalled in his memoirs that among his earliest recollections were the family coal mines. The desire "to do what was forbidden" and his curiosity led the youthful Heth to save his allowance in order to bribe the foreman of the mine, "an old 'darkey,' to take me down to the mine seven hundred feet deep." After they had been underground for a few hours, the foreman led him back to the surface, and Heth never entered the mines again. Whether slave or free, this black foreman must have had considerable experience in coal mines to acquire the knowledge mandatory for underground supervision and was a living example of just how far the elder Heth carried his commitment to black labor.

Harry's son, John Heth, and Beverly Randolph reorganized Black Heath Pits into the Black Heath Company of Colliers in 1822. This company sank several new shafts, employing over one hundred blacks. Following an explosion in which forty-five blacks and two white overseers were killed in 1836, the company was sold to the English-owned Chesterfield Coal and Iron Mining Company. Unlike most companies in the region, Chesterfield employed 130 free blacks rather than slaves.

By the late 1830s, many coal companies were operating in the Richmond Basin. One of the largest of them was the famous Midlothian Mining Company, chartered in 1836. According to the president of the company, A.S. Wooldridge, two of the prospective four shafts were in production in 1841, and "the whole effective force at these mines, including the coal-yard hands, and top and bottom hands, is one hundred and fifty men and boys, with some twenty five mules." Two years later, the informed visitor Henry Howe confirmed that these were black workers when he observed that the Midlothian Mines employed in all of its operations, some 150 blacks. Most of these men undoubtedly were slaves, for a visitor at Midlothian in 1846, observed that these pits were of "incalculable benefit" to the nearby farmers, who hired to the company those excess slaves "who would otherwise be idle and a burthen on their hands." Free blacks also worked at
Midlothian, and in an 1846 advertisement for hired slaves the company assured squeamish owners that the free blacks were well behaved and should not be a source of concern.  

By 1860 the Midlothian Company had increased its labor force to two hundred workers, at least one hundred of whom were slaves belonging to the company. If traditional patterns prevailed, the remainder consisted largely of hired bondsmen and a sprinkling of free blacks and whites. Following the Civil War, the company employed as many newly freed blacks as possible rather than replacing them with whites. According to the superintending engineer, Oswald J. Heinrich, as late as 1871 most of the labor was black, “although we have a few good white miners amongst us.” 

Dover Pits, among the earliest mines in the eastern Virginia field, also depended primarily on slave labor. In 1796 the French nobleman the duc de La Rochefoucault-Liancourt left Richmond for Monticello to visit Thomas Jefferson. Along the way, he stopped to examine several coal mines at Dover, where he found about five hundred Negroes employed. Little is known about these mines during their formative years, but apparently the company utilized slaves in every capacity. Some forty years later, Edmund Ruffin, editor of the Farmers’ Journal, also visited Dover Pits and observed that the mines had been “superintended and directed entirely by a confidential slave” belonging to the owner, whom “he afterwards emancipated, and then paid $200 a year wages.” The laborers also were slaves, and only they “knew anything of the coal.”  

During the Civil War, the twenty-two leading coal companies of eastern Virginia either hired or owned 1,847 hands, mostly slaves. By then Dover mines consisted of some fifteen or twenty shafts sunk along the western outcrop of the field, about seventeen miles west of Richmond on the James River and Kanawha Canal. During the 1850s, Christopher Quarles Tompkins, a United States, and then Confederate, colonel and an experienced coal mine manager, organized several mines, including the original Dover works, into the Dover Coal Mining Company. After the Civil War began, the huge Tredegar Iron Works of Richmond bought Dover Coal, along with the Midlothian and Clover Hill companies, and consolidated them into one firm under Tompkins’s general supervision. In 1863 the new subsidiary employed over 291 black miners, most of whom were hired annually.

Eastern Virginia companies had the advantage of the intracoastal waterways, which allowed them to ship coal to the Atlantic cities or to nearby factories; yet the Richmond Basin deposits were insignificant compared to those in the western section of the state. Most of the Great Appalachian Coalfield lay buried beneath the western watershed of the Allegheny Mountains. The Kanawha Valley contained some of the best
coal to be found in Virginia, but neither canals nor railroads were built during the antebellum period to ship it to market. Consequently, mine operators were forced to flatboat their product down the Kanawha to the Ohio River and then to market. Unfortunately, the Kanawha River was navigable for only about six months of the year; the river was too low in the summer to permit shipments. Nevertheless, coal had to be stockpiled in the Ohio River cities in time for the fall demand. The James River and Kanawha Company was charged with maintaining the river, but it had not been able to improve the Kanawha beyond clearing it of rocks and snags.

Because of these obstacles to efficient river transportation, coal producers in the Kanawha Valley had made little effort to fully exploit the abundant resources at their disposal. Prior to the 1850s, local mine operators depended on the Kanawha salt furnaces to consume their coal. Production, therefore, was keyed to the needs of the Kanawha Valley salt manufacturers, and in 1850, the peak year for the local salt industry, all 250,000 tons of Kanawha coal produced that year was used to fire the salt furnaces.

The exact number of black bondsmen laboring in the Kanawha mines remains uncertain, but in 1836 William Barton Rogers, the renowned geologist of the University of Virginia, claimed that 995 miners were engaged underground, and certainly many of these were slaves. Because the region west of the Alleghenies was remote from the large black population in the east, slaves were hired annually and transported to the western district. The distance itself presented a serious impediment to hiring slaves, for owners did not want their property so far from home. Moreover, the trek across the mountains provided slaves with more than ample opportunity for running away. Harry Heth, for example, owned a salt company along the Kanawha in addition to his coal mines near Richmond, and the serious labor scarcity which always plagued the western industrialists forced him to transfer some of his Black Heath slaves to the saltworks. One of Heth's overseers, David Street, attempted to march a group of pit hands to western Virginia in 1819, but as the coffle progressed ever deeper into the dense forests of the Blue Ridge Mountains, "Billey and the 2 Johns" bolted for freedom. After two days the driver tracked the fugitives to a location near Lynchburg about sixty miles below where they had escaped. Two days later, Street informed his employer that after a struggle "Yellow John" had been captured, but the other two men had escaped once again into the mountain forests. What happened to the slaves remains a mystery; apparently they disappeared into the wilderness. Ironically, so did Street, and several months of searching failed to locate the driver.

Gradually, the Kanawha County slave population grew to 3,140 in
1850, with the salt firms owning or controlling approximately half of these. Males made up 75 percent of the bondsmen employed at the Kanawha saltworks, two-thirds of whom were between the ages of fifteen and thirty-nine. This disproportion of young men reflected the continuing need to hire a significant proportion of the slave force, averaging about 50 percent per year.35

The typical saltworks of the 1850s utilized approximately fifty-seven slaves and a few free workers, but the largest proportion of the work force was employed in the coal mine attached to the works. Typically, 40 percent of the slaves were in such mining jobs as digging, wheeling, and hauling. Slave mine workers were always hired because the inherent danger of these occupations posed too much of a threat to a salt company’s own slaves. Hired slaves usually were insured, however, and those who were killed or injured on the job were replaced by new men.36

Slave miners worked in very tight quarters, frequently picking and shoveling while lying on their sides. When the small tram cars were filled, the miners positioned themselves on hands and knees and used their heads to push the cars to and from the outside coal bank. Direct supervision was impossible under these circumstances, so slave diggers worked on a task basis, being required to load four or five tons of coal before the end of each day.37 It was in a Kanawha County saltworks mine at Malden that the recently freed Booker T. Washington had what he referred to as his “unpleasant coal mine experience.”38 Like Washington, slaves undoubtedly were terrified of the ever-present dangers, the darkness, and the inevitability of getting lost in the underground maze.39 Unlike Washington, however, slaves had no choice but to continue their labors and try to blot the fear out of their minds.

The Kanawha salt industry steadily declined after 1850, and coal mining in the valley appeared destined to follow the same fate. At just about that time, however, the discovery of cannel coal in the Charleston district coincided with major technical developments in the illumination industry which brought new hope to the Kanawha coal producers. In the late forties successful experiments proving the feasibility of producing lubricants and lamp oil from cannel coal resulted in a virtual boom in the Kanawha coalfield, with at least forty-six companies being chartered between 1847 and 1861.40

Although the great advantages of slave labor proclaimed by the promotional literature were seldom realized because of the labor scarcity endemic to the region, coal operators used slaves whenever possible. According to one estimate, a slave could be hired for seventy-five cents per day, whereas free white workers cost the operator from $1.00 to $2.50 per day.41 The Kanawha Cannel Coal Mining Company re-
duced its production costs by one-quarter, from two to one and a half cents per bushel, by using slave labor.  

Like the saltworks companies, cannel coal operators usually hired slave diggers whenever they could. Unlike the salt manufacturers, however, they could not mislead slave owners who did not want to hire their property for underground labor by promising to work the slaves only in outside jobs. There was little question about what coal companies wanted with hired hands, so the mine operators found it even more difficult to hire bondsmen than did the salt companies. Slaves who were hired worked with free miners but were maintained in slave quarters when they were not on the job. In Mason County, which faced the Ohio River and was within sight of free soil, coal operators were forced to take extreme measures to prevent their slave workers from escaping. Thus, R.C.M. Lovell confined his hired hands behind a stockade after work.

Slave miners at the Winifred Mining and Manufacturing Company, located just south of Charleston, practiced the primitive hand-mining techniques which had been used for centuries. Hand picks with four-inch steel bits set into the iron were used to pry coal from the vein. Each miner had an assigned number, and when he loaded a car he attached a tin car check bearing this number to the car so the foreman could determine each slave's daily production. The cars had wooden wheels which carried them over the wooden tracks to and from the coal bank outside. Slaves who completed their daily tasks were given supper; those who did not received a flogging instead.

The lack of capital represented another serious difficulty confronting the coal operators, and efforts to stimulate interest among investors in the eastern and English financial centers proved disappointing. Without adequate financial resources the cannel coal mania soon passed and most of the companies followed the decline charted by the salt industry. Even though they had a valuable product, the coal operators could not take full advantage of cheap river transportation to ship their coal to market because the Kanawha River was in need of improvements which were never carried out. As a result, many companies experienced disappointments similar to those of the Virginia Cannel Coal Company, which discovered that its shipping costs were double the actual cost for mining the coal and therefore suspended all shipments until the river was rendered more navigable for coal barges. Not until 1860 was there even a glimmer of hope that a stingy state legislature dominated by eastern Virginia planters would appropriate the funds necessary for improvements. This concession, designed to dampen sectional animosities in the state, came too late, however, for the Civil War brought an end to coal mining in the valley. Only after the war, when West Virginia had become an independent state, were locks
Expropriation

and dams constructed in the Kanawha River, and only then did the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad extend its tracks across the mountains to Charleston.45

The major regional industry in the Deep South was located in Alabama at the southernmost extension of the Appalachians. One of the first recorded attempts to develop the coal business in Alabama was made in 1840 when David Hanby loaded several flatboats full of coal and launched them down the Warrior River for sale in Mobile. Finding few buyers, Hanby attempted to stimulate interest in his coal by dispatching a black servant with each bucketful to demonstrate how it should be used. By the end of the decade he had shipped seventy-five boatloads of coal to Mobile, but apparently the townsfolk remained unimpressed, for Hanby sold most of his coal to the Mobile Gas Company rather than to homeowners. Coal was also produced in Tuscaloosa County during the early 1850s by William L. Goold, a Scottish miner who worked several pits with slave labor.46

Even though Alabama's coal reserves remained comparatively undeveloped during the antebellum period, black labor was relied upon from the very beginning. Just prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1861, an experienced mine engineer from Pennsylvania was appalled to see Alabama coal still being trenched out of the ground. Slaves were removing thirty feet of cover to obtain four feet of coal, even though it could have been mined with only one-tenth of the effort by the ordinary method of "drifting" with the seam. He concluded that Alabama colliers were hardly worthy of the title, for "neither skill nor science has aided brute force with any degree of intelligence."47 This particular trench mine seems to have been an isolated case, however, for according to Alabama's first state geologist, Michael Tuomey, by the 1850s most mines were laid out in drifts, with the coal being drawn up the slopes by horse power, the same process utilized in many professionally operated mines of the day.48 Nevertheless, Alabama produced no more than ten or eleven thousand tons of coal per year before the Civil War.49

To encourage coal production, the Confederate government enacted legislation in 1861 exempting from field service any operator who contracted to mine coal with at least twenty slaves.50 According to Tuomey, slaves were well suited for mining and left "little to be desired" when properly managed. The mineral district was still overwhelmingly agricultural, however. The 1860 census recorded only 47 slaves working in Shelby County's two coal mines, and only 226 slaves were employed in all nonagricultural pursuits.51 The important Shelby Iron Company employed slave labor, but the coal mine connected to the works does not appear to have been a significant operation. Shelby Company records indicate a total of thirty-two slaves were employed at
the works in 1863 and 1864, only six of whom were assigned to the "c. mines." In May 1864, fourteen slave men, one woman, and one boy were employed at the company’s mine, but the number fluctuated because slaves were hired temporarily or shifted back and forth between the mine and iron works according to needs of the moment.

Alabama gained a pioneer mine family when the Union forces set fire to Lewis Thompson’s Mississippi cotton plantation, forcing Thompson, his overseer, and a large number of “able-bodied negroes” to flee to Bibb County, Alabama, where they began to mine coal for the Confederacy. His brother, N.H. Thompson, joined them shortly thereafter and put his slaves to work digging coal in a mine adjacent to Lewis’s. The slaves used no explosives to free the coal, only picks and crowbars. The lack of drainage pumps meant that they constantly worked in water, and the makeshift huts thrown up around the Thompson mines provided totally inadequate and unsanitary shelter. Under such miserable conditions many of the black miners died from diseases incidental to maltreatment.

One of the most prominent early coal operators in Alabama was William Phineas Browne, who moved from Vermont to Alabama in 1831. Browne did not enter the coal business for another fifteen years, however, being involved in a variety of other businesses and serving in the statehouse. When Browne married a woman from Shelby County in 1846, they settled into an estate situated on sixteen hundred acres just west of Montevallo, and he began mining the coal buried beneath his new home.

Even though Browne’s mines were close to the black belt, he encountered stiff resistance from owners to hiring their slaves for mine labor. Throughout his career in the industry the pioneer operator was never able to obtain a sufficient slave work force. Nevertheless, Browne held firm convictions regarding the desirability of slave over free labor. In January 1857 he wrote his agent, “You know perhaps that for a time it was a sine qua non with me to do my mining with slave labor to be owned by myself or by an association to be formed on the basis of my coal property.” Browne’s experience had forced him to take his labor in “whatever state it may come,” but he was nevertheless convinced that a constant supply of cheap slave labor was necessary to operate a mine successfully. One of his competitors, the Alabama Coal and Mining Company, had experimented with white workers, but the cost in wages proved to be too high, and labor turnover excessive. The episode further confirmed Browne’s opinion that slaves were the satisfactory source of labor for southern mine operators, even though masters were reluctant to hire their Negroes for such employment.

This ideological commitment to slavery as an institution is an
important distinction between pioneer operators in Alabama and eastern Virginia and their counterparts in western Virginia’s Kanawha Valley. There, slavery was primarily an economic matter of “cheap” labor. Since the institution of slavery was not the foundation of western Virginia society, there was no overpowering need to demonstrate ideological allegiance to the institution. In Alabama, of course, quite the reverse was true. Therefore, Browne was convinced that slaves were more desirable workers than whites because they were more economical and more controllable but also because slavery as a system of labor was “more in harmony with our institutions.” Whatever his motive, Browne declared that it was “next to impossible to prosecute my mining interest successfully with free labor.” Therefore, he concluded, “I must have a negro force or give up my business.”

The Civil War increased the demand for coal, and hence the opportunities for profit, but it worsened Browne’s labor scarcity. In 1862 the Confederate authorities seized the flatboat Browne used to barge his coal to Selma, and the railroads refused to provide him with cars. Even though he had a contract to supply the Confederate government with coal, Browne could find no slaves to mine it, and officials refused to commandeer them for him. Browne’s health finally broke in 1863, and he sold his coal business and lands. Slavery plagued him to the bitter end, however, for he invested half of the proceeds in sixty Negro bondsmen, and with the other half purchased Confederate bonds. He lost on both counts, of course, and to earn a living after the war, Browne leased the mines he once owned. Ironically, the Freedmen’s Bureau supplied him with over eighty blacks, more workers than he ever successfully mustered during the slave era.
Emancipation terminated slave labor in the coal industry as it did throughout the South, but some of the economic benefits derived from forced labor were preserved, at least for a few mine operators, in the new bondage of convict leasing. Although leasing convicts to private contractors was common in the South, it became prevalent in the coalfields only of Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama. Other southern states with significant coal reserves did not use prison labor in mining. The manifold rewards derived from convict leasing prompted charges that the system was merely an attempt to reinstitute slavery in new form, but the motives underlying the development of convict leasing were far more complex. During the period of economic and political instability immediately after the war, neither capitalists nor political officials had a comprehensive awareness of the economic potential in convict leasing. Once instituted, however, the system rapidly developed into a hydra-headed monster which corrupted politics and business and undermined public morality in the New South.

Before the Civil War, most black lawbreakers were disciplined by their masters. Impoverished state governments were not eager to take on the responsibility and the expense of providing prisons for thousands of black criminals after the war. A few state prisons were damaged during the war, but most simply suffered the ravages of neglect. Convict leasing was initially seen as a way to shift one burden to private entrepreneurs. Provisional military governments began leasing convicts as a temporary expedient, and the practice was continued with the Radical Republicans and then institutionalized by the Redeemer Democrats.

Projecting themselves as the protectors of individual property owners, the Democrats regained political power by attacking the Republicans for extravagance, corruption, and excessive taxation. Consequently, "cheapness, even niggardliness, under this tutelage became widely accepted as the criterion of good government," as C. Vann Woodward has observed. The convict leasing system, of course, was
remarkably adaptable to the retrenchment policies of the Democrats. With the prisoners leased to the private sector, the necessity for additional taxes to expand and maintain prison facilities was eliminated. Moreover, the revenues generated from leasing could be substantial, and they helped to reduce financial pressures on the heavily indebted state treasuries. In 1880 Enoch Cobb Wines, the father of the prison reform movement, stated that about one-half of the expenses of operating prisons in non-convict-leasing states came from income derived from the labor of inmates. By comparison, the U.S. commissioner of labor reported in 1886 that where leasing was practiced the average revenues constituted 372 percent of the costs for operating those prisons.\(^2\)

The convict lease system also suited the new criminal codes of the Redeemer administrations, which were designed to protect property owners from those petty crimes which had also been controlled by local planters prior to the war. Stiff sentences for petty offenses were leveled primarily at freedmen at the same time that their protection in court was being weakened. With prisoners leased to the private sector, additional convictions meant additional revenues for the empty state treasuries.\(^3\) George Washington Cable, an archponent of the system and the leading convict lease reformer of the day, denounced the system for its banal economic motivations: “This system springs primarily from the idea that the possession of a convict’s person is an opportunity for the State to make money; that the amount to be made is whatever can be wrung from him; that for the officers of the State to waive this opportunity is to impose upon the clemency of a tax-paying public; and that, without regard to moral or mortal consequences, the penitentiary whose annual report shows the largest case balance paid into the State’s treasury is the best penitentiary.” In effect, there was no “human right that the State is bound to be at any expense to protect.” It was this characteristic which led governors to congratulate their legislatures for making convicts “into a shameful and disastrous source of revenue” from lessees whose only motive was to make money.\(^4\)

Cable’s critique of convict leasing was a modified version of the antislavery argument and demonstrates a continuity in the mentality which informed the opposition to forced labor in the Old South as well as in the New. Indeed, the continuities between slavery and convict leasing were also striking. Evolving out of the heritage of slavery as an adaptation to the needs of a nascent industrial capitalism in its aggressively exploitative stage, leasing may have sprung from habits of thought and attitudes rooted in agricultural slavery, but it took nourishment and flourished in the New South’s most dangerous labor-intensive industries, especially mining. Slaves had, after all, worked in the region’s coal mines, so it was an easy progression to send convicts
into them after the war. Just as slave owners desired a cheap and tractable labor force, so did industrialists. As Harold Woodman has observed: "The desire for a dependent, easily controlled, docile, and cheap labor force burns as fiercely in the heart of a thoroughly bourgeois factory owner as it does in the heart of a plantation owner." For decades, therefore, the most powerful coal operators of Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama exerted political influence, and their considerable financial resources, to secure convict labor.

The desire for the steady labor which convicts offered mine operators was intensified by an inadequate supply of free industrial labor. T.J. Hill, who worked convicts in Alabama and Tennessee mines, informed delegates at the 1897 convention of the National Prison Association that in the 1870s a strong effort was made to develop the iron and coal resources of the southern states, but it was "a practical impossibility to get our native free people, either white or black, their training having been principally of an agricultural tendency, to work in the mines, rendering it necessary to send abroad for miners, and even then the demand could not be supplied." The acquisition of convicts, however, made possible the rapid development of the coal reserves in Alabama and Tennessee and "gave an impetus to the manufacturing interests of the entire South which could not otherwise have been possible, for at least many years." 6

Convict leasing was, however, more than a means by which state governments alleviated financial pressures on their depleted treasuries or industrialists secured cheap, tractable labor. Leasing also was an important pillar of the South's racial hierarchy. Whites afraid that the hierarchy of the Old South was beginning to crumble took aggressive action to reinforce the edifice of white supremacy through the now familiar mechanisms of segregation. Although the black codes were disallowed by the federal government, the use of vaguely worded laws relating to vagrancy and loitering remained on the books for a century. These laws were utilized to arrest blacks for any behavior deemed inappropriate by white authorities, who then sentenced offenders to excessive jail terms. Consequently, the prison population became overwhelmingly black, and disproportionately blacks were leased to do the hard, dirty, and dangerous work of mining coal, work deemed uniquely appropriate for blacks. 8

Critics such as George Washington Cable did not charge judges and jurors with maliciously sending blacks who did not belong there to prison, as did W.E.B. DuBois of Atlanta University. Cable did insist that the racism which permeated southern society lay behind the disproportionate impact the system exerted on Afro-Americans. Where the lease system existed in states dominated by "caste-rule," blacks served longer sentences for lesser crimes against property at an
alarmingly disproportionate rate. In this context, the brutality which became characteristic of convict leasing may be understood as part of a more comprehensive system of racial intimidation and subjugation. The flagrant racial injustice of the lease system, one scholar observed recently, presents "incontrovertible evidence of the New South's moral failure." With the system generating revenues for the state treasury, taxpayers expressed their gratitude at the polls, and the coal companies extracted as much labor for as little expense as they could get away with. The cruelty which resulted from this unholy alliance between government and capital was a labor system with a mortality rate three times higher than the rate in northern prisons, and at certain mines ten times higher. As one lessee observed in 1883, "Before the war we owned the negroes. If a man had a good nigger, he could afford to take care of him." Convicts were better than slaves, however, because "we don't own 'em. One dies, get another."

Georgia was one of the first states to establish the convict lease system after the Civil War. Confronted with an empty treasury and an increasing number of convicts for a prison which had been destroyed during the war, the general assembly instituted leasing in 1866 as a practical expedient. Until 1876 the system was not administered according to a fixed long-term policy. In that year the legislature enacted a comprehensive convict lease plan which remained in force for the next three decades. Under this act, the state entered twenty-year contracts with three private companies for a total of $500,000. The vast majority of the convicts were leased to industrial establishments, such as brick factories, sawmills, railroads, and especially the coal mines. From its inception Georgia's convict lease system was deeply enmeshed in political corruption. Some of Georgia's most prominent political figures benefited financially from the system they were charged with overseeing. Between 1868 and 1908, when the system was abolished, dozens of well-connected public officials supped at the convict lease trough. Until an act in 1874 extended the leases to five years, the system was relatively honest; the state received $40,000 annually between 1868 and 1874 from leasing. A decade later, however, the number of convicts had doubled, but the state received less than $16,000 per year because public officials flagrantly ignored the law requiring that convicts be let to the highest bidder.

No politician was as adroit as Joseph E. Brown in manipulating the convict lease system to his own advantage. So adept was he, in fact, that Brown was known as Georgia's "convict king." After serving as a Democratic governor during the Civil War, he became a Republican and advocated acceptance of Radical Reconstruction. As a reward he was appointed chief justice of the state supreme court by Radical Governor Rufus Bullock. Following redemption he returned to the
Democratic party and, proving that principle was not a prerequisite for high office, served as United States senator from 1880 to 1890. Brown was the leading coal mine operator in the state of Georgia and the principal contractor of convict labor for his own Dade Coal Company and Walker Coal and Iron Company, both of which were located in the northwestern corner of the state. Even though coal never became a major industry in Georgia, Brown was financially successful because each convict leased to mine his coal cost him only seven cents a day.

The former governor used his political influence to insure cheap and ready access to all the convicts he needed. Sometimes such access meant sharing the spoils. When Governor Bullock demanded a share in Brown’s interests, for example, the lessee replied that he was perfectly willing that Bullock “be employed by our company in the capacity you mention at a reasonable compensation” and privately advised his partner that the arrangement was “not a matter that would do to write about.” It was this kind of political chicanery which enabled Brown to retain his lease in 1876 when other convict companies bid as high as 400 percent more than the former governor. Similarly, when a joint committee of the Georgia legislature inspected Brown’s convict mine in 1881, he held an elaborate banquet in their honor. Subsequently, the committee reported favorably on conditions at the senator’s prison even though a minority report charged that the prisoners worked in sixty-degree temperatures with cold water dripping on them and then slept in the same wet, dirty clothing. No feast could eradicate that fact, the minority report declared, but apparently it could quell any hunger for reform among the committee’s majority.

Rebecca A. Felton, the wife of a prominent Georgia congressman and a pioneer in the movement to abolish leasing, charged in 1887 that the system was allowed to continue despite serious abuses because of this kind of collusion between politicians and contractors. Felton claimed that most of the convict revenues went to “a gang of supernumerary officials, who are generally ‘go-betweens,’ involved in the business of selling the poor and powerless to the highest bidder. Himself a contractor, Governor James M. Smith lent credence to Felton’s charge by publicly declaring that “of the convicts in the penitentiary, five to one are colored persons, most, if not all of whom, by reason of their ignorance and former habits of life, can never be profitably employed in any of the mechanical arts.” It was this aspect of leasing, and not the inadequate food and cruel treatment, which reflected the most deplorable side of the system.

Felton’s criticisms, which were published in a widely circulated national magazine, sparked a major public controversy in Georgia. Just as the storm broke over the Felton article, a young prisoner still in his teens was beaten to death by Governor Brown’s whipping boss. The
Expropriation

public outcry precipitated by these two events forced the governor to call on Brown to show cause why his lease should not be annulled. On October 2, 1887, Brown personally defended his conduct as a lessee and presented an elaborate justification of the system. This position paper was printed as a pamphlet and widely circulated at Brown’s expense in an attempt to stem the rising tide of public sentiment against convict leasing.21

Brown’s defense relied on the notion that the labor of prisoners should be expropriated to generate funds for the treasury. Brown claimed that if the leased men were returned to the walls, approximately $500,000 would be required to construct a new prison, the old one having been burned during the war by General Sherman. Then a large sum of money would have to be raised in taxes from “honest laboring people” for the support of dishonest felons, who, under the current lease system, earned their own keep. The fifteen hundred convicts that would have to be housed in the penitentiary in 1887 would cost the taxpayers at least $4 million if the system were abolished, Brown argued. Under the lease system, on the other hand, the lessees paid into the treasury over a quarter of a million dollars between 1872 and 1886, and the state incurred no maintenance costs. In an argument reminiscent of the defense of slavery, Brown asserted that “the lessees would be fools” to maltreat their prisoners, for “every man of sense knows that the greatest aggregate of labor, during the year, may always be obtained from a man who is well fed and well clothed, and kindly treated, and his health carefully preserved.”22

Brown’s disclaimers about harsh treatment notwithstanding, conditions of life and work at Dade Coal mines earned the company its rank as one of the worst mine prisons in the southern coalfields. Part of the reason was that Brown, like other contractors, complied with regulations only when it was expedient, as is amply demonstrated by the prison inspectors’ reports. That for 1886, for example, called attention to the wretched sanitary conditions at Brown’s mines.23 That same year, the United States commissioner of labor released a special report on convict labor, denouncing the conditions in Georgia as “very bad.” All the convicts, including the miners, were “worked to the utmost and barbarously treated, from every point of view, moral, physical, and sanitary.” These conditions resulted in a death rate which the report described as “very high.”24 Similarly, a committee of the legislature reported in 1890 that at Dade mines the barracks, bedding, and clothing were filthy. Inside the mines the men worked “in such places as rendered it necessary for them to lie on their stomachs while at work, often in mud and water with bad ventilation, in order to get out the daily amount of coal that would save them from the punishment to be inflicted by the whipping boss.”25 On several subsequent occasions
these same conditions were reported by the Dade County grand jury committee on prisons. The committee noted that “the bed clothing was very filthy and infested with body lice. Window glass was broken, the barracks roof leaked, and the floor was too loose to keep an offensive odor from rising up through it.” Moreover, the prisoners complained bitterly that the physician in charge was incompetent to judge whether the convicts were able to work.

Physician incompetence was a potentially serious problem for convict miners. The act of 1876 stipulated that only able-bodied men were permitted to labor in the coal mines, and the state sent doctors to certify the health of workers. In 1883 the state-appointed physician, Dr. Thomas Raines, arrived at the Dade mines intoxicated. He remained in that condition for his entire stay and mistakenly certified twelve sick convicts as able-bodied men, even though they could only be moved on stretchers. Such dereliction of duty was not sufficient to have Dr. Raines dismissed, however, for acting Governor James S. Boynton reappointed him to another term the following year.

Certainly Dr. Raines did not protect the life of Lancaster LeConte. In his defense of the system in 1887 Governor Brown argued that the mortality rate was high at his prison because the jails sent “a class of aged and decrepit persons” to the mine who did not belong there, men “completely broken down in health, who linger in the hospital for months or possibly years, and die without ever doing a day’s work.”

Even as Brown spoke, however, seventy-five-year-old LeConte was sentenced to three years of hard labor at Dade mines for receiving stolen goods. Dr. Raines must have declared him an able-bodied man, for like the other three hundred convicts leased to the Dade Company, LeConte was forced to work ten to twelve hours a day crawling in mud and water to dig Brown’s coal. The freedman wrote to his former master, the eminent scientist Dr. Joseph LeConte, for money to hire a lawyer, but his plea apparently was ignored. It was not long before Lancaster LeConte entered the prison hospital, ailing with “chronic rheumatism,” and died there on February 13, 1889.

The dangers confronted by convicts in Georgia’s coal mines are clearly revealed in the hospital records of the Dade Coal Company. During the twelve months between October 1888 and September 1889, twenty-six convicts were killed or injured. Two were killed by slate fall, and another died under the wheels of a railroad car. Of the remaining twenty-three whose injuries were identified, rock falls disabled seven, railroad cars injured seven more, explosions injured two, and a mule kick fractured one man’s jaw. Twelve other men were injured at the hands of fellow convicts, their wounds variously described as “cut and carved all to pieces fighting,” “abdomen ripped open with coal pick,” and “eye knocked out fighting.” Such conditions undoubtedly re-
duced some men to a reliance on their most basic instincts for survival. Andrew Hargrove, for example, whose misbehavior verged on self-destructiveness, received eight vicious whippings between January 1885 and September 1886 for "rebelliousness." Hargrove's case was exceptional, but in 1886, twenty-two prisoners were flogged for "rebelliousness." In 1888-1889, twelve others received the same punishment for the same charge, and two men were shot while attempting to escape from Brown's coal mines.

Corruption and the cruel abuse of convicts did not go without public protest. A small but growing movement to abolish the system finally succeeded in swinging public opinion to its point of view by the turn of the century. During the summer of 1908, the Atlanta Georgian and News, along with such middle-class reformers as Rebecca Felton and the Atlanta clergyman John E. White, had exposed the many injustices of the system and had galvanized public opinion against leasing. The strategy of the Georgian was to concentrate on atrocity stories involving white convicts (although more than 90 percent of the prisoners were black) in the belief that the populace would be less incensed by news of brutality against blacks. Mass meetings were staged throughout the state that summer, and the legislature, inundated with memorials and protests, was forced to act. Against this background, the newly elected reform governor, Hoke Smith, seized the initiative and called a special session of the legislature to convene in late August 1908. Governor Smith recommended terminating the leasing system and assigning the prisoners to labor on the public highways. Confronted with an escalating spiral of popular indignation and a determined governor, the Georgia General Assembly abolished convict leasing in September 1908.

In Tennessee, public officials also found it expedient to expropriate the labor of convicts by leasing them to private contractors in order to generate revenues for a war-depleted state treasury. And as in Georgia, the number of blacks in the prison population grew dramatically during the post-Civil War period. In October 1865, blacks accounted for 66 of the 200 convicts in the penitentiary, or about 33 percent but by November 1867 that proportion had increased to 283 of 551, or about 64 percent. Thereafter, the figure remained around 60 percent until the system was abolished in 1896. The percentage of black convicts in the coal mines, as we shall see, was much higher.

A plan to lease the prisoners to coal mine operators received widespread public support on the grounds that such employment would reduce taxation, lower the cost of fuel, make the penitentiary self-sufficient, and alleviate convict competition with free labor. These were the chief arguments of the state's New South proponents as well, and they were in full accord with the plan. The war had unleashed
the advocates of industrial expansion, whose message had made them “prophets without honor” in the Old South. The foundations of new expansion in Tennessee were the basic industries of coal and iron, and many of the state’s Redeemer oligarchy had direct business ties with these industries. 38

Tennessee’s first Democratic governor was John C. Brown, former Whig and brother of the antebellum Whig governor Neill S. Brown. He became president of the Bon Air Coal Company and chief executive in the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company. Democrat James D. Porter, who succeeded Brown in the governorship, left that office and also became a TCI director. Albert S. Marks, who succeeded Porter, was a relative and former law partner of Colonel Arthur S. Colyar, another mine owner and the undisputed leader of the industrial wing of the Democratic party in Tennessee. 39

Colyar lost a campaign for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1870, but a major plank in his platform for industrial development was leasing convict labor to the coal mines in the eastern section of the state. 40 Even though Colyar subsequently derived considerable personal wealth from leasing, he genuinely regarded the convict lease system as wise public policy. “The greatest work of my life,” he told a convention of mechanics, “has been in turning convict labor from mechanical pursuits, and putting it where it helps the mechanic by furnishing him cheap coal.” 41 With the support of groups such as the Nashville Mechanics’ and Manufacturers’ Association, he was able to apply sufficient political leverage to win a contract in December 1870. For one dollar a day per man, with the state providing all other necessities except the prison facility, Colyar leased 102 black convicts for his Tennessee Coal Company mines at Tracy City. 42

Labor difficulties arose almost immediately. The free men promptly went out on strike demanding removal of the prisoners and unsuccessfully tried to attack the convicts themselves. The prisoners then refused to work, but a sound flogging persuaded them to return to their picks. After two weeks of unproductive demonstrations, the free miners also grudgingly returned to their work places. 43 These were portents of the serious labor problems in the future.

From the beginning, conditions of life and work were deplorable in Tennessee convict mines just as they were in Georgia. Even state officials found plenty to criticize. Dr. P.D. Sims, chairman of the state board of health’s Committee on Prisons, reported excessively high mortality rates of 95.2 convicts per thousand per year at Tracy City. Sims concluded that in the face of such figures “humanity stands aghast and our boasted civilization must hide her face in shame.” 44 The prison reformer, George Washington Cable, denounced the death rates in Tennessee as “startlingly large” when compared with those of
prison systems which did not lease convicts. The causes were not
difficult to comprehend, Cable asserted: overwork, overcrowding,
poor food, poor sanitation, and violent behavior on the part of both
prisoners and guards all shortened the life expectancy of convict
miners. Moreover, living quarters were so cramped that prisoners slept
in a space which approximated a “good sized grave,” and medical
facilities were “too revolting for popular reading.” No wonder escapes
from the mine camps were so high, he wrote. In northern state prisons
containing 18,400 convicts, there were only 63 escapes in 1881. That
same year, 49 Tennessee prisoners escaped from a leased population of
only 630.\textsuperscript{45}

Conditions did not improve over the next decade either. The U.S.
commissioner of labor reported in 1886 that conditions were “very
bad” in the Tennessee mine prison, with convicts living in “wretched”
facilities and suffering an “appalling” death rate. In fact, the system
was “in all ways atrocious,” but the state garnered “a large profit from
its convict labor,” so there was little hope for improvement in the short
term.\textsuperscript{46} One courageous prisoner testified five years later that condi­
tions still had not changed significantly: “There is lots of water and
sometimes I have to roll up my pants to wade through. The air is bad
and while at work it hurts me in the chest, to sleep in it. We are only
allowed one shirt, one pair of pants, and are not allowed any socks.”\textsuperscript{47}
Neither the state nor the company were sufficiently stirred by these
exposés to alter the lucrative arrangement, and TCI experienced no
difficulty in securing another six-year lease in 1889.\textsuperscript{48}

Convict-mined coal might have provided mechanics with an eco­
nomic advantage, as Colyar had suggested, but free miners certainly
were not included in his calculations. Tennessee Coal and Iron Com­
pany paid free miners daily wages of $2.50, but convicts cost the
company only $.24 a day. The company forthrightly admitted that its
purpose in leasing convicts was to counter the “high cost of regular
miners.”\textsuperscript{49} Just as importantly, TCI found that convict labor was ex­
tremely effective in defeating unionism because convicts could be
forced to act as strikebreakers. In fact, Colyar openly declared in 1883
that “one of the chief reasons which first induced the company to take
up the system was the great chance it seemed to present for overcom­
ing strikes.” Nearly twenty years later a TCI official echoed him: “For
some years after we began the convict labor system, we found that we
were right in calculating that free laborers would be loath to enter upon
strikes when they saw the company was amply provided with convict
labor.”\textsuperscript{50} TCI exploited another cost advantage when it worked con­
victs in the most productive sections of the mines, whereas free
miners, who worked on a tonnage basis, were assigned to sections
which required considerable “dead work” before they could begin
producing coal. In this way, the company maximized use of its cheapest labor to reduce per-unit production costs even further.51

Free miners were not ignorant of the effects of convict leasing, and they complained bitterly. The *United Mine Workers Journal* is filed with charges that the Tennessee legislature and TCI were in collusion to enrich a few oligarchs at the expense of the free miners. No wonder TCI put up such a fierce struggle to retain the system, the *UMWJ* charged, when each convict miner earned the corporation a net profit of $9.80 a day, and 1,029 convicts produced a profit of more than $10,000 a day. At this rate one work year of three hundred days yielded the company a bonus of $3 million. Meanwhile, the *UMWJ* noted, the 4,000 white miners in the district were "compelled to compete with the East Tennessee Company miners on equal terms."52 Although the *UMWJ*'s analysis was otherwise accurate, the editor incorrectly assumed that the free men were white. Actually, in 1891 there were a total of 4,595 free miners in Tennessee, and 840, or 18 percent, of them were black. The *UMWJ* was essentially correct when it presumed that the convicts were black, however, for 593 of the 858 prisoners working in the mines, or 69 percent of the total, were black.53

TCI's use of convicts to cut labor costs and to curtail unionization precipitated a conflict of legendary proportion with the free miners in the early nineties. Labor militancy escalated dramatically during the winter of 1890-1891 as remnants of the Knights of Labor and locals of the newly founded United Mine Workers of America began challenging the company's policies. On April 1, 1891, TCI closed down its Briceville operation, ostensibly for repairs, but when the mine reopened two months later the free miners were required to sign "ironclad" oaths repudiating the union to regain their jobs. Those who refused were evicted from company houses, and a convict stockade for 150 additional convicts was erected. In retrospect, the rebellious protest which erupted into the "convict wars" seems to have been inevitable, a natural consequence of the company's systematic suppression of lawful, moderate opposition. The rebellion signaled, as C. Vann Woodward has suggested, that not all southern labor would accept the "Old-South labor philosophy of the New-South leaders," which used forced labor to undermine the struggle of free workers for a better life.54

Over three hundred convicts the overwhelming majority of them blacks, were imported into Anderson County mines during the first two weeks of July 1891. Local public officials bitterly denounced the state and the company for shipping in "undesirables" to displace native citizens.55 On July 14 a mass meeting of miners and their supporters met to condemn the importation, and early the next morning three hundred armed miners captured the convicts at Briceville and herded them onto a train bound for Knoxville. When the miners
appealed to Governor John P. Buchanan to halt the influx, he re­sponded by ordering out three more companies of state militia. H.H. Schwartz, a representative of the Chattanooga Federation of Trades, reported from the scene that the miners were outraged, and “whites and Negroes are standing shoulder to shoulder.” He counted 840 rifles and a multitude of “pistol-toters” among one group of miners who marched through town that night. The following week approx­imately fifteen hundred armed miners once again commandeered the prisoners who had replaced the earlier convicts at Briceville and put them aboard a train for Knoxville. In a nearby camp another 125 convicts, “only five being white,” were captured and shipped to the same destination.

In an attempt to avoid further turmoil, Governor Buchanan dis­patched an emissary to negotiate a sixty-day truce while he called a special session of the state legislature to consider the future of the leasing system. Reluctantly, the miners accepted his proposal. Meanwhile, the state commissioner of labor, George W. Ford, and the entire Board of Penitentiary Inspectors held a surprise on-site investigation of conditions at the mines, which revealed multiple health and safety violations. The reports from this investigation became fuel for a heated debate over abolition of the system when the special session convened on August 31. Whatever hope the antileasing forces held for the outcome of the session faded, however, before TCI’s arguments that no adequate prison facility existed and that the state would lose considera­ble revenues if the system were abolished. Reluctant to raise taxes, the legislators saw the kind of wisdom they understood in TCI’s position and voted to retain the leasing system.

Upon hearing this news, the miners immediately resumed their attacks against the stockades, freeing the “zebras” and entraining them for Knoxville and Nashville. Fellow miners from Kentucky and Vir­ginia supported the uprising, and the entire countryside seemed to have fallen to the forces of anarchy, as armies of black and white miners challenged authorities and assaulted the convict stockades. Outraged public opinion in the rest of the state forced the governor to send in the National Guard armed with the latest weapons. Some five hundred miners were imprisoned by troops operating under orders to give no quarter to those who resisted. In one incident, soldiers riddled the body of Jake Witsen, a free black miner, with twelve bullets on the claim that he had resisted, but the several thousand miners who attended his funeral were convinced that Witsen was the victim of official murder because of his leadership role in the revolt. It was months before the state militia crushed the rebellion, and returned the convicts to the mines. The free miners were forced to sign the detested iron-clad oath before returning to their old jobs, and those who refused were sum-
marily fired and blacklisted as troublemakers. As for the convicts themselves, of the approximately 458 set free, two-thirds were recaptured, but 165 made good their escape.\textsuperscript{61}

Despite the magnitude of the miners' protest, the "convict wars" of 1891-1892 were only indirectly responsible for the abolition of convict leasing. The arrangement between the state and TCI had been founded on mutual economic advantage, but heavy financial burdens incurred during the disturbances altered that relationship. The August 1891 outbreak alone cost the state over $125,000, and to make matters worse, TCI refused to make its installment payments on convicts whose services had been lost to the company during the upheaval. Therefore, the state stood to lose an additional $102,000 in revenue. These expenses fell squarely upon the state from a system conceived as a means to generate revenue. With leasing costing more than it could raise and neither the government nor TCI willing to bear the financial burden for this failure, it became impossible for politicians to support continuation of convict leasing in Tennessee.\textsuperscript{62}

When the legislature met in January 1893, lame duck Governor Buchanan's farewell address recommended that the lease system be abolished and that the state purchase its own coal mine in which to employ the prisoners. Newly elected Governor Peter Turney espoused the same basic proposals in his inaugural speech before the legislature. Negative reports presented by the superintendent of prisons, the prison doctor, and the chief warden reinforced the growing sense that the system must be abandoned. But the legislators were cautious and formed still another committee to investigate the mines. The investigation found that little had changed over the years; unhealthy living conditions, unnecessarily dangerous working conditions, and inhumane punishments were still the order of the day. The committee finally concluded that all of this suffering had resulted from "petty meanness" and that the system itself was morally flawed for encouraging lessees "to make the last possible cent out of the flesh and blood bought with our money."\textsuperscript{63} These remarks carried strong lineaments of wrath, but many inspections over the years had inoculated legislators against any shock induced by such unsavory details. The real difference was that the system was now costing the state money rather than making it. The legislature passed a bill in April 1893, therefore, abolishing the system when the lease with TCI expired on January 1, 1896.\textsuperscript{64}

Some Tennessee convicts continued to mine coal after abolition 1896, but they worked at the state-owned Brushy Mountain mine. That Tennessee prison officials still considered coal mining particularly suited for blacks, is made clear by the fact that 85 percent of the Brushy Mountain convicts in 1898 were Afro-Americans, and twelve years
later they constituted 82 percent of the 747 convict miners in the state.  

Convict leasing achieved its fullest development in Alabama where economics, politics, and racist ideology converged in full support of the system. Alabama confronted financial exigencies similar to those of Georgia and Tennessee during the period following Radical Reconstruction. Saddled with a heavy bonded indebtedness, state legislators were unwilling to levy the additional taxes necessary for improving the prison at Wetumpka to accommodate the rapid increase of postwar convicts. Fiscal irresponsibility was one of the major charges the Democrats leveled against the Republicans during their successful 1874 campaign to regain control of state government. Once the Redeemers were in power, therefore, frugality became the hallmark of government in Alabama, and stringent austerity measures reduced a $25 million debt to approximately $9 million by 1882.

Although taxes were not reduced, neither were they increased, and so sources of revenue became more important than they otherwise might have been. One of these sources was convict leasing, which brought into the treasury a modest $14,000 in 1877, increased to $109,000 by 1890. This income placed Alabama first among all the states in revenue earned from convict labor, and next to the bottom for per capita taxation.

Convict labor came to play a more integral role in the political economy of Alabama than in Georgia or Tennessee. In Alabama profits from leasing state convicts in 1883–1884 totaled $100,000 in an annual budget which seldom exceeded $1 million. Between 1880 and 1904, Alabama's profits exceeded $2.3 million, an average of about $95,000 per year, or about 10 percent of the state's annual budget. Critics charged that these figures were far too low. For example, the Birmingham Labor Advocate, the official organ of the Alabama Federation of Labor, claimed that revenue from the convict department actually grossed over $759,000 for fiscal year 1905–1906, and netted the state $368,000.

The system was profitable for public officials also. Bulging jails and automatic convictions were to the financial advantage of nearly every public official in the criminal justice network. Paying sheriffs and the clerks of court out of fees, rather than a fixed salary, practically guaranteed a bountiful supply of convict labor. The Jefferson County sheriff, for example, received fees ranging from twenty-five cents to ninety dollars each for more than forty services. The sheriff's annual income in 1912, therefore, reportedly was between fifty thousand and eighty thousand dollars, and clerkships paid approximately twenty-five thousand dollars per year. With such lucrative incentives, it came as no surprise to State Representative Walker Percy of Birmingham to find that there were "more judges in Jefferson County, Ala., to the number
of people than in any other similarly populated area in the civilized world." Informed critics of the system claimed that the county sheriffs even dispatched shills to the mine camps on Sunday to engage black miners in games of chance so deputies could entrap the men and haul them off to court. The fine often was small, but when court charges, such as fees for solicitors, clerks, witnesses, and for the court itself, were added to the fine, the prisoner who was unable to pay was forced to serve two or three times his legal sentence.  

Alabama's convict lease system also functioned as an agency for racial control and supervision. Certain broadly drawn statutes gave employers a mechanism for keeping workers on the job. For example, the vagrancy law empowered the police to arrest "any person wandering or strolling about in idleness, who is able to work, and has no property to support him; or any person leading an idle, immoral, profligate life, having no property to support him." The public concern with idle blacks which lay behind such measures is evident in the press. A 1906 editorial in the *Birmingham News*, for example, remarked that "anyone visiting a Southern city or town must be impressed at witnessing the large number of loafing Negroes. . . . They can get work, but they don't want to work. The result is that they sooner or later get into mischief or commit crime."  

That racial control was an essential element in the lease system is amply demonstrated in the composition of the prison population itself. An Alabama prison official aptly observed that, judging from the prisoners, white men apparently "do not commit crime, or else they are safely insulated from the penitentiary by greenbacks or other penal non-conductors." Although few blacks were detained in the state prison until after the Civil War, throughout more than half a century of leasing in postwar Alabama the prison population remained overwhelmingly black. In 1871, 78 percent of the 182 state convicts were Afro-Americans. Between 1874 and 1877 the penitentiary population nearly trebled, to 655, of which blacks made up 88 percent in 1874 and 91 percent in 1877. That percentage leveled off at about 90 percent through the eighties and nineties, even as the total population doubled. Thereafter, the proportion of black convicts declined to 83 percent and remained at that level until the leasing system was abolished in 1927. County prisons, over which the state exercised little control, roughly paralleled the pattern of the state prison.  

From 1866 until 1874, when the Democrats were returned to power, most of the state convicts were consigned to railroad construction crews. When J.G. Bass was appointed warden in 1875, he quickly earned the praise of the Democratic administration by turning the penitentiary into a profitable institution. Nevertheless, dissatisfaction with the warden grew under Rufus Cobb's administration (1878–1882)
because the governor believed that Bass could have negotiated better terms for the state than he had. Bass was forced to renegotiate the 1881 leases from five to eight dollars a month minimum for first-class workers. The governor nevertheless remained dissatisfied with Bass, and he was replaced in 1881 by a new warden, John H. Bankhead. Immediately after his appointment, Bankhead renegotiated still another agreement, under which lessees paid twelve dollars per month for first-class hands sent to the mines.

As revenues escalated, convict conditions deteriorated. Conditions at Coketon (which became Pratt Mines) and New Castle were alarming when Bankhead took charge of the prison. Dr. John B. Gaston, president of the Alabama Medical Association, and Dr. Jerome Cochran, the state health officer, conducted an inspection of convicts working in the coal mines that year. Their report left little to the imagination, condemning the unsanitary conditions as “filthy and disgusting” and the treatment of prisoners as unnecessarily cruel.

Blacks and whites were segregated into cramped and filthy quarters. The cells for blacks were slightly smaller than those for whites. They contained the same 5'7"-by-3' bunks with straw mattresses, but three men were assigned to each, instead of the two in white cells, thus affording one foot of sleeping space for each occupant. The recommended space for prison cells without ventilation fans was four hundred to six hundred cubic feet per person, but whites had less than half that amount, and Negroes less than one-third. Moreover, the mattresses were infested with bedbugs, and the blankets were caked with a mixture of coal dust, human sweat, and grease. The prisoners all worked with shackles on their ankles and were marched to and from the mines chained together. After a full shift, they were marched directly to the dining hall to eat the evening meal without even washing their hands. The main meal, usually consisting of fat bacon, peas, cornbread, and coffee, was often served cold in tin containers without utensils, forcing the men to eat with their fingers.

The report sparked a bitter public controversy between Dr. Gaston and John T. Milner, owner of the mine at New Castle. Milner published a rebuttal vehemently denying the charges, but Dr. Gaston, the inspectors, and Warden Bankhead uniformly persisted in their denunciation of these conditions. This controversy prompted a major legislative reform of the system in 1883, which created a Board of Inspectors and concentrated two-thirds of the convicts with the companies of Comer and McCurdy, and Pratt Coal, both of which leased two hundred convicts and jointly operated the series of pits called Pratt Mines. The legislature initiated another major reorganization in 1885 when it abolished the office of warden and reassigned his duties to a new Board of Inspectors of Convicts. R.H. Dawson, who was appointed president
of the new board, favored a plan for concentrating all of the convicts at Pratt Mines, which had been taken over by the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company in 1886. When the previous contracts expired in 1888, therefore, a new ten-year lease was awarded to TCI, under which the company agreed to accept all able-bodied male convicts for between $9.00 and $18.50 per month, depending on their classification. The Pratt Mines division of TCI operated ten coal mines in 1895, with convicts concentrated at Shaft No. 1 and Slope No. 2, and free labor at the other eight. Together, Numbers 1 and 2 contained nine hundred convicts, over 80 percent of them blacks, who worked 313 days that year producing over 1.5 million tons of coal.80

TCI's bid had not been the highest, but the company had agreed to take responsibility for all the prisoners, as stipulated in the contract. TCI never accepted more than three-quarters of the state's more than one thousand convicts, however, because of the economics of convict classification. For example, in 1889 first-class men (the most able-bodied) cost contractors $18.50 per month; second-class men, $13.50; third-class men, $9.00; fourth-class men, the cost of their maintenance. First-class convicts were tasked to cut and load four tons of coal per day; second-class, three tons; third-class, two tons; fourth-class, one ton. At fifty cents per ton for a twenty-seven-day month, a first-class convict earned the contractor $54.00, and second-class miner $40.50. But the difference in the price paid per month between the two classes was $5.00, while the difference in earnings was $13.50 per month. Contractors, therefore, made $8.50 more per month on first-class men simply because of their classification.81 Consequently, it was in the economic interest of TCI to accept only men of the soundest physical ability and to leave the less able behind walls.

One reason the state permitted the contract to remain in force even though TCI had failed to comply with the lease was the company's promise to construct new prison facilities at Pratt Mines. TCI fulfilled this promise, and according to the Board of Inspectors, Pratt had the best facilities "ever erected by any convict contractor in the South." The facilities at Shaft No. 1 had accommodations for 420 inmates with six hundred cubic feet of space for each, and a similar prison was erected at Slope No. 2.82 A local newspaperman toured the mines in 1889 and reported that prison compartments were spacious, well-ventilated, and scrupulously clean. However, there was a "marked difference between the treatment of the convicts here and at Coalburg," the reporter observed. "While they are dying at the latter place like sheep with the rot," Pratt had only three of its five hundred inmates on the sick list.83

Conditions at nearby Coalburg were indeed different from those at Pratt Mines. Unable to obtain state convicts, independent producers
such as the company which operated Coalburg Mines pooled the available county prisoners. Since the county convicts were sentenced to short terms, they cost operators much less, about eight dollars per month, but they were less disciplined and seldom became skilled miners. State penitentiary inspectors had little control over county convicts, so they generally toiled under the severest of conditions.

Such was the case at Coalburg, which John Milner sold to the Sloss Iron and Steel Company in 1889. The state health officer, Dr. Jerome Cochran, that year charged Sloss officials with criminal negligence and cruelty. The doctor found the prison to be “dark, damp and loathsome” and so dirty as to be “offensive to the sight and smell.” Punishments were excessive as well. During the first two weeks of June, 137 whippings were administered for failure to complete the required tasks, even though most of the men had been seriously weakened by a six-month epidemic of dysentery which had afflicted most of the 536 Coalburg convicts and killed 22 of them. 84

Conditions did not improve at Coalburg over the next several years. Dr. Thomas D. Parke, the health officer for Jefferson County, filed another disturbing report in 1895 on the high rates of sickness and mortality at the prison mine. During the year ending February 1, 1895, the company had worked 570 men, with an average of 21 patients admitted to the hospital each day. During the previous two years, 105 men had died at the Sloss Company mine, the major causes being tuberculosis and the life-threatening infection erysipelas (“sore leg”). Parke concluded that the high incidence of tuberculosis was the natural result of too much time spent “underground, shut out from sunlight from nine to eleven hours daily.” Parke prescribed more sunlight as the cure, but six weeks later the Sloss Company still had not cut back the number of hours in the mine. Production concerned the company more than the health of their convicts; consequently the death rate at Coalburg for 1893 and 1894 was an alarming ninety per thousand. Such a death rate among young men who arrived in good condition, Dr. Parke concluded, was “simply frightful.” To underscore his point, he compared Coalburg prison’s annual death rate with the rate of nine per thousand for penitentiaries in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Even in other southern convict lease systems rates were lower. Mississippi’s deplorable death rate of forty per thousand was still dramatically better than Coalburg’s. 85 As late as 1908 the Sloss Company mines still had serious problems in the proper handling of prisoners, even by the standards of southern white prison officials. 86 The incredible inhumanity displayed by some mine operators gave new meaning to the old phrase “slave driving,” and a sentence in the mines quite properly instilled fear in even hardened criminals. In fact, 90 percent of all the crippling accidents and nearly all deaths among Alabama convicts occurred during
sentences in the coal mines. The injury and death rate was so high that Dr. Shirley Bragg, president of the Alabama Convict Bureau, voiced grave doubts in 1907 about consigning convicts to labor in the mines at all. If the state wished to exterminate its convicts, he contended, it should do so directly, not through a third party. Even a casual perusal of the local press discloses innumerable accidents involving convicts. The Pratt Mines were considered the best in Alabama, but accidents of every description left that company's convicts dead or disabled with alarming frequency. The most devastating accident to take the lives of Alabama convicts occurred on April 8, 1911, when an explosion at Pratt Consolidated’s Banner Mine, left 128 convicts dead, all but 5 of them black; 72 of the convicts were from Jefferson County jails, and 30 percent of them had been sentenced to twenty days or fewer for such misdemeanors as gambling, vagrancy, or illegal drinking. It was into the most hazardous occupation in America that these, and one-half of the Alabama state and county prisoners, were sentenced in 1911. The disaster dramatically focused public attention on the system of working convicts in the mines. Such a calamity involving miners who voluntarily entered the pits for pay was bad enough, but when a man committed a relatively minor offense and was sentenced to a few weeks or a few months in the mines because he could not pay the fine, one editor observed, it was “a disgrace to our civilization.” When that same convict was killed, it was “simply judicial murder.”

Unsurprisingly, many convicts reasoned that the disparity between the threat to life and limb from working and the physical dangers inherent in attempting to escape was greatly diminished by such conditions. The longer the sentence, the greater the probability that a prisoner would be maimed or killed. Yet those who became fugitives, however temporarily, were likely to receive the severest punishment when their pursuers caught them. For example, one of two black escapees from the Pratt Mines was overtaken by bloodhounds, and when his pursuers arrived the hounds were mauling him. “He begged pitifully to have the dogs taken off him,” but they were permitted to continue tearing the man’s flesh for a short time while the party chased the other escapee. Failing to overtake him, they returned to interrogate the captured man. Wetting a strap and applying it to the escapee’s naked back, one of the men whipped the fugitive until he begged for death. Afterward, it was reported, “they took the negro on the back of a mule and carried him about 3 or 4 miles. Finding he could go no further, they left him in a negro cabin, where . . . he died within a few hours.”

The practice of sending public prisoners into the privately owned mines of Alabama was more resistant to change than it was in Georgia and Tennessee only partly because the treasury had become so depen-
dent upon the system as a source of revenue. This was more or less the case in the other two states as well. In Alabama, however, despite the periodic outcries against the most barbarous aspects of the system, leasing endured because it constituted the quid pro quo of a compromise between the two major wings within the state Democratic party: the conservative planters of the black belt and “progressive” industrial promoters of the Birmingham mineral district. The party was dominated by the black belt planters, who succeeded in turning out the Republicans in 1874 by campaigning against their financial extravagance in promoting industrial growth through railroad construction. Once in power, therefore, the conservatives were obliged to avoid the appearance of fostering industrial growth and yet to accommodate the industrial wing of the party. This important schism within the party required vigilant management in order to prevent an outright rupture. In the interests of unity, the conservatives granted major concessions to the proponents of industry. Democratic policy towards convict leasing represented an important political concession with direct economic rewards for mine owners.  

In fact, mine owners believed that “they could not work at a profit without the lowering effect on wages of convict-labor competition,” reported the U.S. commissioner of labor in 1886. One of the largest of all southern mine operators, Henry DeBardeleben, explained to an Alabama legislative committee that “convict labor competing with free labor is advantageous to the mine owner. If all were free miners they could combine and strike, and thereby put up the price of coal, but where convict labor exists the mine owner can sell coal cheaper.” Convict-mined coal benefited all mine operators in the region, even those who did not lease convicts, by depressing the wages of free miners. Coal could not be loaded into cars for less than two dollars per ton with free miners, but that same coal cost only eighty cents with convicts. The average daily cost for the six hundred prisoners at Pratt Mines in 1888–1890, including maintenance, amounted to not more than 87.5 cents. On the other hand, free miners received 50 cents per ton, and at five tons per day cost the employer $2.50. At the lowest average wholesale price of $2.50 per ton, therefore, each convict earned the company an additional $1.625 per day.  

A variety of cost advantages beyond the direct reduction of labor costs emanated from the convict lease system. For example, all of the coal brought out of the Banner Mine was weighed on scales deliberately calibrated 22 percent underweight. In this manner free miners were underpaid for their work, but convicts also were cheated out of tonnage toward their required tasks by the same percentage. Nearly one-quarter of the coal production at Banner, therefore, was free of labor costs to the company.
Another important, although immeasurable, cost advantage derived from forced labor was its regularity and predictability. The mostly black farmers who were induced to enter coal mining lacked the proper socialization for the routines of industrial labor traditionally found among many northern or immigrant miners. J.S. Sloss, president of Sloss Iron and Steel, testified before a U.S. Senate committee that "as to the character of the labor employed by this company, . . . I will state that as a general thing they are mostly negroes, and in the main unreliable." Few of these workers were "disposed to settle down to regular, systematic work," and they labored an average of only fourteen days per month instead of the usual twenty-seven. Explaining the unreliability of free black labor, another employer claimed that "a colored boy growing up is apt to feel that if he is controlled by his employer he is a slave." In fact, he continued, "sometimes they feel that any kind of discipline or government, anything that is compulsory, is slavery." A Pratt Mines executive informed investigators that a great many black workers floated from job to job. "On our roll we have an average of one hundred and thirty-six that make only ten days' time a month." Against the background of a rapidly expanding industry, the predictability of convict labor took on added significance. A reporter summed up the industrialists' case when he testified before a U.S. House committee in 1912 that "convict labor is regular and can be relied upon from day to day." During his stay in the Birmingham district, the reporter was informed time and again by mine operators that the reason they preferred convict labor was its regularity. "Three hundred men go to work in the morning, for 310 days a year. There are no picnics, no general laying off to attend funerals of fellow workers, no excursions. Practically a constant number of men are certain to be on duty every day." The inevitable progression of this reasoning led some operators to conclude that a sentence in the mines was beneficial for blacks, an argument reminiscent of that made for slavery. Warden T.J. Hill believed that prison discipline helped the "ignorant negro" adapt to the status of free man. Indeed, "a term in the penitentiary was without question the best lesson he could obtain in citizenship, as it brought him to a realization of the fact that the blessing of citizenship also had its responsibilities." A survey conducted by the U.S. commissioner of labor confirmed that most southern mine managers held similar convictions.

Alabama mine operators argued, with greater merit, that the system functioned as a sort of vocational school for retraining redundant black farm laborers for a trade that was in high demand. As evidence they cited the fact that over 50 percent of the black coal miners in the Birmingham mineral district learned their trade as convicts. This
view of the convict lease system was found in all quarters of the Alabama mining community, although not everyone regarded this development favorably. J.R. Tankersly, a white miner at Pratt Mines, testified to a congressional committee that convicts generally remained in the mines after they were released. In the vicinity of Coketon, he observed, “there are about two hundred and fifty ex-convicts. They have got their families there and seem to be at home.” Upon completion of their sentences, the company provided each of the men with a good suit of clothing, eight to twenty dollars in cash, tools, and a month’s rations to get them started. The state warden confirmed Tankersly’s comments when he testified that the former convicts at Pratt Mines “who have been discharged from here with a good record for good conduct, nearly all have staid in the mine; hardly any of them have gone away.” After all, a man who knew nothing but farming could earn only eight or ten dollars a month on a plantation, the warden asserted, but after learning the miner’s trade that same man could earn two or three dollars a day by staying in the pits. More than twenty years later, the U.S. Immigration Commission confirmed that this process was still operative in Alabama: “There is a steadily increasing supply of efficient, steady, and trained negro miners. After the convict has worked in a coal mine several years he has learned a trade thoroughly.” Not only did the previously unskilled convict become a trained miner, “but owing to the system of rigid discipline and enforced regularity of work, he becomes through habit a steady workman, accustomed to regular hours.”

Forced labor also provided coal companies with a powerful weapon against labor unions, for convicts could be compelled to keep the mines open when free miners went on strike. This was a particularly obnoxious point for free miners who found it difficult to earn a living in the face of convict competition. An editorial in the *Birmingham Labor Advocate* by free miner Bo Jerkins expressed the frustration which emanated from bargaining with operators who used prison labor. If miners demanded a wage increase, he said, the companies “tell us they can work the convicts longer hours, and obtain all the coal they want.” On the other hand, if the companies demanded a reduction in miners’ wages, they would “sing the old song again” about removing the prisoners from the pits. Another free miner sarcastically editorialized that it meant “something to be an American citizen” after all: “If you don’t like common labor or farming you can go to the State warden of the prison and get a suit of striped clothes and be appointed a coal miner, provided the judge and grand jury are favorable.”

For their part, the operators could not have been more forthright in declaring their intention to use convicts to prevent unionization. As one operator declared in 1894, prison labor might appear detrimental
to free workers, but actually it was “beneficial to free labor, as it prevents strikes, keeps the free miners employed and insures the running of the industries of the State that use coal.”\footnote{106} James Bowron, a TCI official in Birmingham rejected the free workers’ demand that convicts be eliminated from the mines because he considered it “not right” that the coal industry of Alabama “be placed under the control of arbitrary and inconsiderate union leaders.”\footnote{107} TCI President G.G. Crawford himself informed a reporter that convict labor effectively blocked the development of unionism by furnishing the company with a “nucleus of labor and coal out-put.” After some reflection, however, Crawford added, “I really don’t think we ought to have this club over the unions.”\footnote{108} In this case at least, labor and capital were in complete agreement.

Nevertheless, the state continued to send its convicts into the coal mines, and operators such as Crawford continued to seek their labor because the system was so advantageous for both parties. Economic imperatives continued to triumph over considerations of social justice. It would take a dramatic turn of events, a public storm so furious that political survival would require politicians to correct their course before the system could be abolished. Just such a storm arose in 1926 with the death of James Knox, an Afro-American from Ravenswood, West Virginia, who was imprisoned in 1924 convicted of forging a thirty-dollar check. On August 14, 1924, less than a week after his transfer to Flat Top coal mine, Knox was dead, allegedly from swallowing bichloride of mercury. The true cause of his death did not come to light until a prominent professor of medicine and a score of witnesses testified to the actual cause of death more than a year afterward.

Knox was an unusually heavy man for his five-feet, five-inch frame, and his weight made it impossible for him to meet the ten-ton task required at Flat Top. Consequently, he was whipped every day. Weakened from the beatings, he collapsed on August 14. In this state, Knox was literally dragged out of the mine by his heels and dumped into a laundry vat, where hot and cold water were turned on him alternately until he died from shock. After this story became public a special grand jury indicted the warden and several of his assistants for murder, but they were summarily acquitted. Nevertheless, the scandal stirred the citizens of Alabama to such a pitch that in 1927 the legislature, bowing before their wrath, passed a bill abolishing the system on June 30, 1928. Several days before the deadline, all the white prisoners were removed from Flat Top. Then on July 1, 499 black convicts turned in their lamps and picks, singing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and “All My Troubles Are Over.” One convict remarked, “Boss, I’m no longer in slavery.”\footnote{109}
II

EXPLOITATION

The South
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The bituminous coal industry was one of the keystones in the New South edifice, but the natural tensions between modern industrial capitalism and the South's traditional social values and customs soon became the source of internal conflict. At the vortex of this conflict was the Afro-American worker. Ironically, at the very time that blacks were being disfranchised and segregated and slavery was being modified into the caste system of jim crow, blacks found increasing economic opportunities in the South's expanding industrial base. Whether blacks could best improve their economic position through competition or cooperation with white-dominated industrial unions, however, raised serious questions in the minds of both races about class and caste relations. Few southern workers labored under the burden of this racial question so directly as the coal miners.

Development of the Alabama coalfield was phenomenal. Many coal and steel communities sprang up during the 1880s and 1890s in Jefferson, Walker, and Bibb counties, but Birmingham was the largest, its population growing from zero in 1870 to 132,685 in 1910. Jefferson County contained 12,345 people in 1870 and grew to 226,000 by 1910, and for the first time large numbers of foreign-born and black workers came into the area. In 1880, 42 percent of the district's 389 miners were black, but by 1910 that percentage had increased to about 55 percent of 18,000 miners. Of the white miners, 73 percent were native-born and 27 percent were either foreign-born or had foreign-born parents.¹

This new mix of people created questions not only of industrial relations but of race relations as well. Mine operators employed so many blacks because they represented a known and plentiful supply of manpower in a labor-scarce, labor-intensive industry. Also the operators depended on traditional racial divisions to inhibit any movement among the workers to unionize. When the miners did begin to organize, therefore, the union had to enlist those workers found on the
job or fail. In Alabama the majority of that group was black. Even though there was formidable resistance among white miners against belonging to the same union as blacks for fear that it implied "social equality," most of them soon realized that the only question worthy of consideration was raised in a prominent Alabama labor paper: "Will organized labor admit the black man, not only thereby benefiting him, but adding strength to the organization?"\(^2\)

The roots of biracial unionism in the Alabama coalfields reached back into the 1870s when economic reform was sought through the National Greenback-Labor party. The party was founded in February 1878 with the merger of the National Greenback party, which had been created by farmers to promote monetary reform, and various workers' parties that had sprouted following the great railroad strike of 1877.\(^3\) Since the new party took a relatively progressive position on the race issue and the Republicans had all but abandoned them, many black workers could support the Greenback-Laborites.

Few industrial centers in the South boasted more Greenback clubs than the coal towns of Alabama, and blacks probably comprised the largest number of members in the district. The key black organizer of colored National clubs was a coal miner from Jefferson Mines, Willis J. Thomas, who was strongly supported by whites in the local movement. Thomas found his stride quickly as an organizer and soon had established an additional sixteen clubs in the county.\(^4\) The Jefferson County Nationals opposed both the straight-out Democratic racists and the paternalistic Bourbon racists as well, arguing for working-class solidarity over race consciousness. As a white miner who signed himself "Dawson" observed, "we who are compelled to work side by side with [the Negro] must drop our prejudice and bigotry. This is the lever that's keeping labor in bondage to capital."\(^5\) In fact, Dawson urged the county organization to put Thomas forward as a candidate for public office in the 1880 general elections. If Thomas was elected, Dawson declared, 1880 would be the year "when bigots and fanatics will have to fall to the rear and let men of brave hearts come to the front." He urged his fellow workers to cast aside their prejudices, for "God made all of us."\(^6\) The party dissolved before Thomas could make his bid for elective office, however, because the workers demanded more radical reforms, such as government ownership of the railroads and other public facilities, than the farmers were prepared to support.\(^7\) Unionism was still practically nonexistent in the coalfields of Alabama, but it was men like these who joined the first real union to enter the field.\(^8\)

Almost immediately after the collapse of the National Greenback-Labor party, the first local assemblies of the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor Trades Assembly No. 135 were established in the Birmingham
The Social Equality Wedge

district at Helena, Jefferson, Pratt, New Castle, and Warrior. Although the order was founded in 1869, the Knights made little headway in the Alabama fields during the first decade of its existence. Class-conscious miners supported the Knights, but the coal operators effectively exploited the order’s constitutional provision against racial discrimination by smearing it with a radical brush.

Another biracial union which emerged during a series of strikes in the late eighties and early nineties was the United Mine Workers of Alabama. This shadowy organization seems to have become visible with each strike of this period and receded again once the battle had been lost. In each effort, however, thousands of black and white miners struck the companies together, even though they uniformly failed to prevent the importation of black strikebreakers from the farms. All of these skirmishes were only rehearsals for the UMW of Alabama’s major battle in the spring of 1894 over a long list of grievances. When the UMW of Alabama failed in its attempts to negotiate with the operators, approximately six thousand black and white miners walked out of the pits.

Tennessee Coal and Iron was the largest producer in the district, so the union focused its energies on that company. TCI officials reportedly were dumb struck when the black miners at Johns joined the strike. According to one miner, the company had always assumed that because only blacks were employed at Johns, the company “could do anything they liked with them. They had found out their mistake and it has dawned upon their somewhat clouded vision that the colored men down here are just as wide awake to their own interests as the white men are.” Company officials quickly dispatched a railroad car of beer and whiskey to dampen the strike fever at Johns, but when this ploy failed, TCI vice president Henry F. DeBardeleben imported several hundred black strikebreakers to take the strikers’ places. DeBardeleben also enticed nonunion blacks to move to his Blue Creek mines by direct appeals to race consciousness and the desire for security: “This is a rare chance for all first-class colored miners to have a permanent home. . . . This can be a colored man’s colony. Colored miners, come along; let us see if you can have an Eden of your own or not. [Blacks have an opportunity to] manage their social and domestic affairs by themselves, in such a way as to command respect of the people at large. . . . As he, the negro, prospers, we can expect to grow rich, and we should go hand in hand.” Poor black farmers responded to DeBardeleben’s offer, and by May 6, the Blue Creek mines were in operation with an exclusively black force. Still convinced that black miners were more tractable workers than whites, the operator soon installed an all-black work force at the previously white stronghold at Pratt Mines as well.
The decision to fill the mines specifically with nonunion blacks was an obvious attempt to divide the strikers along racial lines. As the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, a procompany sheet, threatened: "Any serious and protracted struggle by white mine labor in the South will inevitably lead to its permanent displacement by Negroes from the plantations."\(^{16}\) This strategy did not work as well as expected, however, for their common grievances had bound the union men of both races together in a remarkable unity of purpose. Many whites were surprised that so few blacks abandoned the cause. Fear that they would be killed by whites, Pinkerton undercover agent Thomas N. Vallens reported, secured their union loyalty.\(^{17}\) Certainly coercion was a factor, but the black strikers were as determined a set of unionists as the whites. Many of them agreed with a black striker from Coalburg who was incensed by the constant references to the scabs as Negroes. He reported to the *Labor Tribune*, "all the blacklegs working [at Pratt Mines] were not 'niggers' from the color of their skins at least."\(^{18}\)

Most of the Afro-American scabs were new to mining, for established black miners left the pits with the whites. When approximately four thousand miners assembled at a Birmingham demonstration, at least half of them were blacks carrying signs, some of which declared: "We the Colored Miners of Alabama, Stand with Our White Brothers."\(^{19}\) In fact, the most arresting feature about this strike was the stubborn determination of the black miners. T. N. Vallens reported to the governor that "most of the men now at work are negroes, and the negro strikers are very bitter against them and threaten them at every opportunity and have done some acts of violence to intimidate them."\(^{20}\) Another agent reported that there were "a great many negro strikers living at Pratt City and the most of them stand by the white strikers."\(^{21}\)

Following a pattern common to strikes in the coal industry, the likelihood that miners would permanently lose their jobs to imported scabs soon produced violence. On the night of May 6, fifty men put Price's Mines at Horse Creek out of production by dynamiting the machinery.\(^{22}\) In addition to offering a reward of four hundred dollars for information leading to the conviction of the dynamiters, Governor Thomas Goode Jones secured the services of Lieutenant James B. Erwin, a U.S. Army officer on duty with the Alabama troops, and several Pinkerton detectives to work among the miners as undercover agents. The most prominent operatives in this clandestine enterprise were T.N. Vallens, J.H. Foley, and two men identified only as "E.W." and "J.M.P." Their reports to the governor make for interesting reading but produced little of the incriminating evidence desired.\(^{23}\)

Some of the violence and bloodshed resulted because TCI employed black labor agents for recruiting strikebreakers. For example, on
the morning of May 17 a gunshot was fired into the Pratt City home of Chat Holman. Pinkerton detective “J.H.F.” reported only one shot was fired through the window over the bed occupied by Holman. The buckshot was aimed upward, and evidently the gunman only intended to scare Holman. Three men were seen running away from the scene, and while the detective did not know whether the men were black or white, they did run toward the “negro settlement.” Holman himself was quickly spirited off to the TCI furnaces for safekeeping when a “mob of 600 gathered to vent their feelings in threatening language such as ‘shoot him,’ ‘hang him’ etc. and threw rocks and mud.”

On the morning of May 20, the first strike-related murder occurred when a black man, Walter Glover, was gunned down at his home in the same town. Before the strike, Glover worked at TCI’s coke ovens in Pratt City, but he had been “blacklegging” at the company’s No. 5 slope during the strike. At about 2:30 A.M. three men knocked on the door, claiming to be officers of the law and asking to Glover. Upon seeing that the men were not police, he tried to close the door but was struck by several shots fired through the door. As he lay on the floor, two more shots were fired point blank into his body. Two of those arrested for the murder, Jerry Hillery and Con Sullivan, were white, and the third, John Driver, was black. The trial of Sullivan and Driver (Hillery was released) occurred a few days later before a sympathetic justice of the peace, and both men were discharged even though the evidence against them was strong.

Citing Glover’s murder and roving bands of armed strikers, Governor Jones ordered state troops into the mine district on May 24 to protect the nonunion men. Once the troops were on duty, company officials were even less willing to negotiate with the strikers. Incidents generally were isolated, however, and could not be controlled by the militia. Therefore, Governor Jones relieved them from active duty on July 16. No sooner had they left for home when the superintendent at Pratt Mines sent an urgent telegram to the county sheriff: “Send deputies and troops. Strikers are killing my negroes at Slope No. 3.” As the black strikebreakers emerged from the mine entry, a rain of bullets greeted them from ambush, leaving three blacklegs and one company guard dead. Seventy-nine black and white strikers were arrested on charges of murder, and warrants were served for the arrest of twenty-five others, although only fourteen were ever tried.

The strike of 1894 was lost before it began. The operators, assisted by the power of the state, were simply too powerful for the union to overcome, and strikebreakers and convict labor provided sufficient manpower to keep the mines in production. The companies did not succeed in destroying biracial unionism, but the miners had not yet achieved the depth of class unity required to shut down an entire field,
which was necessary to win in Alabama. Whites too frequently engendered resentment among blacks by their failure to distinguish between black scabs and black loyalists. Moreover, the diversity of the new ethnic mix among the whites was also inhibitive. Pinkerton agent J.H. Foley was probably correct in his assessment that there were a large number of Negro strikers living at Pratt City and most of them stood by the white strikers. However, according to the black miners who talked with Foley, the white strikers at Pratt City were “too mixed up” and would not trust one another.\textsuperscript{31}

Following its final loss in the strike of 1894, the United Mine Workers of Alabama dissolved forever. Many of the strikers were able to regain their old jobs, but a large number of them, particularly the foreigners, migrated to other fields where they did not have to compete with that seemingly endless pool of destitute black farm laborers. Even though race relations steadily deteriorated in Alabama during this period, with blacks formally losing the franchise in 1901, it is important to remember that, despite its weaknesses, the UMW of Alabama followed a policy of organizing all miners, black and white, and represented a distinctive exception to the rest of institutional life in the state.

The same must be said of the United Mine Workers of America, the national union which would eventually succeed in organizing most of the nation’s coalfields, including Alabama’s. Although their names were similar, no official connection existed between the UMWA and the UMW of Alabama. The UMWA was founded in Columbus, Ohio, on January 25, 1890, but it made no real attempt to organize in the South until the latter part of the decade. Even more than their predecessors, UMWA officials recognized that racial and ethnic discrimination were the major obstacles which had to be conquered if the union were to succeed.\textsuperscript{32} This judgment applied throughout American coalfields, but nowhere would race loom so ominously as in Alabama. Even before the UMWA entered the state, the union’s official organ, the \textit{United Mine Workers Journal}, was denouncing racial prejudice in the South as utterly “preposterous in the face of present day civilization” and calling on Alabama miners to “act like rational beings whose common interest it is to get from their capitalistic masters a share of their labor.”\textsuperscript{33}

Alabama miners generally were aware that failure would be the inevitable result if the racial divisions in their ranks were not surmounted. Consequently, blacks became an integral part of the UMWA’s organization in Alabama (District 20). By 1902, 65 percent of the eighteen thousand miners in the state had been organized into the union, more than half of them Afro-Americans.\textsuperscript{34} The most racially sensitive issue confronting UMWA District 20 was not whether blacks
should be organized but rather how much power they should wield within the union. A compromise formula was developed which reserved the district vice-presidency and three of seven seats on the executive board for blacks. Two slates then were presented to the membership, one black and one white. This formula insured a racially mixed leadership but guaranteed that whites would retain control of the organization. More than a simple question of minority white dominance was involved in this arrangement, for members of both races recognized the political dangers inherent in a black-dominated union. L.B. Evans, a white delegate to the 1904 district convention, for example, argued against popular election of all officials on the same slate because it would produce "race troubles" and maintained that the election of a black president in Alabama would mean the "destruction of the organization in the South." Realizing that Evans was correct, most blacks present agreed with a black delegate who asserted that Negroes would vote against such a plan "even though with it negroes would probably capture all the offices in the district organization." More than a simple question of minority white dominance was involved in this arrangement, for members of both races recognized the political dangers inherent in a black-dominated union. L.B. Evans, a white delegate to the 1904 district convention, for example, argued against popular election of all officials on the same slate because it would produce "race troubles" and maintained that the election of a black president in Alabama would mean the "destruction of the organization in the South." Realizing that Evans was correct, most blacks present agreed with a black delegate who asserted that Negroes would vote against such a plan "even though with it negroes would probably capture all the offices in the district organization." 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transfer cards. "Greer reminded the delegates that “these questions are being discussed among the people of my race, and we should not do anything here that will keep them out of our organization." 39

The UMWA’s policy of incorporating blacks into the life of the organization naturally caused political difficulties in segregated Alabama, but the state organization resisted these pressures. At the 1901 district convention in Birmingham, for example, owners of the hall refused to permit access to the union when they discovered that it was to be an integrated affair. But the UMWA district president, William Kirkpatrick, declared that the Negro could not be eliminated; “he is a member of our organization and when we are told that we can not use the hall because of this fact then we are insulted as an organization.” The miners denounced the owners, voted to hold the meeting in Bessemer, and advised all locals to boycott the city merchants until they received an apology. Birmingham merchants quickly apologized for the “misunderstanding” rather than lose the business. 40

Even though national and district conventions were integrated affairs, enough local autonomy existed in the UMWA to make it difficult, if not impossible, for the national, or even the district organization, to control the racial composition or politics of union locals. Segregated locals were less common in the North, but in the South racial imperatives intruded much more forcefully into local union affairs. Afro-Americans may have been rankled by this fact, but they had come to expect it. In fact, most blacks had considerably more race consciousness than class consciousness, the former having received much more reinforcement than the latter. Actually, segregated locals allowed blacks to exercise more direct control over their own internal affairs, and many of them preferred this arrangement. In several cases, integrated locals voluntarily split so that each race could control its own local. At Warner Mines, for example, about five hundred miners were employed in 1901, half black, half white. Both races belonged to the same union local, but blacks withdrew and two separate locals grew out of the division. “I will say right now,” wrote one disapproving white miner, “that by separating the locals in that way in Alabama we will lose ground.” 41 A black correspondent from Warner Mines disagreed, claiming that since they had withdrawn from the white local, “the colored local U.M.W. of A. here is getting along ‘tip top’.” 42 Most locals were segregated from their inception. Integration would have courted political disaster by appearing to accept the social equality of the races. UMWA District 20 carefully balanced equal rights and full participation for its black members against the outward signs of white supremacy. Miners were organized “on business principles for the material advancement of labor,” editorialized the Birmingham Labor Advocate, the official organ of District 20. Consequently, the editorial
continued, no racial friction existed in the organization. The only circumstance which might produce that kind of animosity was “when social equality is expected or sought; and to the credit of the colored man can it be said that those worthy of having in the movement do not seek or expect this unobtainable boon.”

Miners recognized, therefore, that the social equality issue presented their primary antagonists with a powerful wedge which might be used to split the union’s membership or to cleave away public support in times of labor disputes. The coal companies had plenty of incentive to employ this weapon against the UMWA because segregation provided them with significant competitive advantages in the marketplace. Labor costs were substantially reduced by several direct forms of discrimination against black miners, the most blatant of which was the racially based wage scale, which paid blacks less than whites for the same work. Operators also used wider screens for coal mined by blacks than for that mined by whites. This method was slightly less direct but effectively reduced the tonnage blacks were credited for mining nonetheless. Moreover, operators paid whites but not blacks for “dead work,” such as cleaning up or preparing a section of the mine for production. A more complex differential resulted through the contract labor system, which categorized miners as either contractors or laborers. Contractors were paid more, and normally they were white; the laborers they employed in a working section were black. This was a southern variation of the traditional European system which had been transplanted to America. The UMWA had succeeded in demolishing the system in the northern fields by the turn of the century, but it was still in widespread use in the nonunion mines of the South well beyond that date. These pay differentials were so common in Alabama that operators gave little thought to them, but the UMWA committed itself to their destruction.

Occupational discrimination also reduced the earnings of blacks. The range of occupations in the coal industry was narrow, but the seasonal nature of mining rendered some occupations more lucrative than others over the course of the work year. Jobs such as maintenance and repair or operating machines provided steady employment and were less responsive to the aggravated cyclical patterns which plagued the industry. The job hierarchy actually reflected the stratification of social prestige ascribed to the ethnic/racial groups at work in the Alabama mines. Native whites and northern European immigrants (mainly from the British Isles) held the higher paying and higher status occupations, such as machine operator and other skilled positions. Below this select group were the southern European immigrants, and below them the multitude of blacks in the unskilled occupations, such as coal loading and pick mining. The net effect of this distribution was
to place the burden of seasonal employment disproportionately on the poorest and lowest-status groups. Recent white immigrants might hope to rise in the hierarchy, but blacks could not.\textsuperscript{45}

Average income figures, therefore, demonstrate the influences of discriminatory mechanisms as well as status stratification in the labor force, with native whites at the top, recent immigrants in the lower or middling range, and blacks at the very bottom. In 1909, for example, native-born white miners earned $2.15 per day, and whites with foreign-born fathers earned $2.03, but blacks earned only $1.85 per day, 14 percent less than native whites and 9 percent less than whites with foreign-born fathers.\textsuperscript{46} The black and white population of the rural South provided the coal operators with a differentiated labor reserve. The standard of living was so low that both groups were attracted to mining, but rural blacks were so poor, and their job opportunities so restricted, that significantly lower wages could recruit them into the pits. That situation did not remain static, however. Upon becoming assimilated into the mine force, blacks increasingly identified their economic interests with those of their brothers of the picks and sought to adjust the racial pay discrepancy to the standard in the trade.\textsuperscript{47}

The economic ties which bound the operators to the caste system is further illuminated by the South’s expanding share of the national coal markets as the costs of production declined in the South and increased in the North. Among southern states, Alabama led this trend, reducing its labor costs as a percentage of the whole from 82.3 percent in 1889, to 65.4 percent in 1909. In the northern fields, however, where the UMWA consolidated its strength, labor costs remained the same at from 81 to 82.3 percent during this period.\textsuperscript{48} The major factors enabling this downward trend in southern labor costs were the operators’ success in keeping out the union and their exploitation of Afro-American miners. The southern coal operators’ profits, therefore, became inseparable from black subordination, and the coal companies brutally suppressed all attempts to create a biracial unionism which promoted the economic, if not social, equality of blacks.

The tension produced by the companies’ determination to preserve the economic advantages it derived from the caste system, and the UMWA’s mission to transform its black and white members into a biracial organization unified by class principles, inevitably generated an all-out conflict over whose will would prevail. That battle came in the strike of 1908.

The steel companies operated 60 percent of the coal mines in Alabama. The largest, TCI, tolerated the union as long as it remained a quasi-fraternal order that posed no serious threat to the company’s control over its work force. When the UMWA began to demand recognition as the miners’ sole bargaining agent, however, TCI officials
decided that the union must be destroyed before it became a powerful challenger. Several tactical skirmishes quickly occurred, followed by a short strike of 1902 and an arbitration of grievances in 1903. The first real test between the UMWA and TCI came in 1904. According to a TCI spokesman, the company was losing authority over employees, and that control had to be restored "or all hope of permanent, successful competition with the products of other districts must be abandoned." Therefore, a majority of the largest operators in the district followed the lead of TCI in refusing to renegotiate their contracts with the UMWA.

The short strike of 1904 was over within a few months as the miners were overwhelmed by immigrants imported directly from Ellis Island, blacks from the farms, and convict labor. Nevertheless, five thousand of the nine thousand strikers were blacks, and the walkout again revealed that solidarity between black and white miners which seems so remarkable in the Deep South. Even though the company president predicted that 80 percent of the Negroes would return to work in less than one month, very few of the black unionists deserted the union. Those Afro-Americans who entered the pits came primarily from the plantations, not from the mines. The UMWA grimly accepted defeat, but District 20 leaders expressed no reservations about the steadfastness of the black strikers. As the district president observed to the delegates at the 1905 convention, blacks had proven "their loyalty in this strike, ha[d] suffered many things for the good of the order, and ha[d] deemed it not a disgrace to be put in jail for the sake of the union."

The struggle was reopened in 1908 in what would be the last major confrontation between the operators and the union for more than a decade. Once again the black and white union miners of District 20 would demonstrate that same unity which gave the operators cause for anguish, and the outcome of the contest was shaped more by southern racism than by racial schisms within the UMWA. The UMWA organizational drive was a phenomenal success. During the peak of the strike in August, eighteen thousand men belonged to the union, and more than half of them were Afro-Americans. Many of the strikers had entered the Birmingham district as scabs in 1894 and 1904 but subsequently had joined the union. Even at Blue Creek, the all-black scab colony established by DeBardeleben during the 1894 strike organized a five-hundred-man local and carried their tools out of the mine. As in 1904, the UMWA poured money into the district to support the miners and their families, emptying its treasury of approximately $400,000 in two months by supplying an estimated fifteen thousand people with one meal a day. Most of the operators evicted the strikers from their company homes, and by the end of August, seventy thousand peo-
ple— strikers and their families— were living in UMWA tent camps.\(^{55}\) Even though the UMWA was successful in organizing the field, the strike, like its predecessors, was doomed even before it began. The coal industry was suffering from one of its periodic cyclical downturns, and the nation’s economy had not yet recovered from the severe recession of 1907. As a consequence, the demand for coal remained low, and unemployment was high. It was the large pool of unemployed workers outside of the district and that ever dependable supply of convicts that destroyed any real chance for the union’s success. The strikers’ only hope was to prevent the importation of strikebreakers.\(^{56}\) The companies understood this just as well as the strikers did, and in less than a week after the walkout, company agents were busy in Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Georgia, Missouri, and the cities of New Orleans and St. Louis, recruiting three to four thousand scabs for the Alabama field.\(^{57}\) Union men usually met each trainload of strikebreakers at the railroad depot and pleaded with them not to assist the operators in breaking the strike. Some, especially those who were not informed of the strike by their recruiters, heeded the call. At Pratt City, for example, 75 percent of the imported men either left or joined the union. Fifty-five scabs at Wylam left the pits, marched into town, and to the cheers of the unionists joined the UMWA.\(^{58}\)

Their inability to “talk out” most of the scabs and the companies’ determination to replace the established miners with new men radicalized many of the younger miners. Older, calmer heads lost control to the firebrands, who, out of desperation, resorted to violence. The most dramatic cases involved the ambush of scab trains. On July 17, for example, a coachload of black strikebreakers and thirty company guards bound for Adamsville mines were fired upon by strikers as it approached Jefferson tunnel. In what was described as the “most exciting battle since the Civil War,” a thousand shots were exchanged between strikers and company guards. The slope above the tunnel was “literally swarmed with armed men, constantly firing from behind rocks and trees” before the train could steam into the safety of the tunnel.\(^{59}\) Major G.B. Seals of the Alabama National Guard subsequently described how an advance guard discovered “negroes ambushed near an old mill” waiting for the train. The major believed that these were only a “sample” of the black strikers, who, he said, were “armed to the teeth and seem to be directed by white men, although the negroes are everywhere in predominance.”\(^{60}\)

In one of the “most cunning ambushes ever arranged,” strikers attacked another trainload of scabs near Blocton early on the morning of August 8. The engineer saw crossties piled on the track. Scarcely had he applied the brakes when “volley after volley of hot lead was poured into the side of the car” from the surrounding hillsides, killing three
men and wounding eleven more. Others would have died had the conductor not had the presence of mind to press the throttle forward ramming the train headlong through the barrier. Eventually, a total of thirty people were arrested during the ensuing roundup: thirteen black men, one black woman, and the remainder Slavs, who, incidentally, had been imported as scabs in 1904.\textsuperscript{61}

The almost daily incidents of violence that continued to occur even though Governor Comer ordered out units of the National Guard reveal the depth of hostility between the opposing parties. For example, at Johns a black striker was “shot to pieces,” and two deputies were wounded in one clash; at Sayreton a black scab died from poisoned whiskey; and at Blossburg a black labor agent was found dead, his body tied to a log and set afire. There were many house and shaft bombings, and in one case, a black striker was lynched by two deputies who had placed him under arrest.\textsuperscript{62}

Herbert Gutman, one of the pioneers of the new labor history, has argued that in post–Civil War America, the industrial way of life took root in the cities more easily than in the small single-industry towns because the “social environs of the large American city . . . was more often hostile toward workers than was that in smaller industrial towns.” The urban middle class extended little or no sympathy to the working class, but in small towns local conditions often hampered the employers’ decision-making power, and the “social structure of small towns and the ideology of the residents shaped the behavior of those employers who reached outside their local environment in order to win industrial disputes.”\textsuperscript{63} The urban aspect of Gutman’s assessment certainly holds true for Birmingham, where the coal and iron companies exercised their power with the solid support of the middle class.\textsuperscript{64} But the mineral district was larger than Birmingham proper, and corporate tentacles reached out into the city’s industrial satellite towns. Gutman’s analysis of the small-town middle class holds true for northern coal towns, as we shall see, but it needs some adjustment when applied to the Alabama coalfield. Prior to the rise of coal and steel in the Birmingham district, the small towns were farm centers. Since most of the coal towns were created and controlled by the companies, they lacked the political infrastructure for a clash of old agrarian values and new bourgeois industrial values which British historian E.P. Thompson found in England and Gutman observed in the cities and the independent coal towns of the North. Since these single-industry towns were creatures of the companies, industrial conflict occurred along the sharp line separating the interests of the miners and their employers. The non-employer middle class, both black and white, played a significant role in the outcome of this conflict because invariably they supported the companies against the unions.
The 1908 strike revealed the depth of middle-class antipathy toward the miners' struggle. The rejection of the union was just as strong among blacks as it was among whites, for middle-class Negroes feared any alteration in the caste system which they could not control. Booker T. Washington frequently spoke before Alabama industrialists, and his message was nearly always the same: the presence of blacks freed capital "from the tyranny and despotism that prevents you from employing whom you please."65 Men such as the Reverend P. Colfax Rameau, black editor of the Southern Industrial-FraternaL Review, praised TCI for its generosity toward blacks and applauded the failure of "unionism to dictate" labor policy to the coal companies.66 This conservative approach to capital-labor relations by the black middle class was succinctly articulated by Grand Master Henry Claxton Binford before the annual meeting of the Alabama Ancient Free and Accepted Colored Masons on August 18, 1908. Five hundred delegates, representing twelve thousand black Masons, listened with enthusiasm as Binford declared that he had warned black miners not to join the union. Miners who were dissatisfied with their working conditions had only one alternative: to quit. They had no right to prevent others from going to work, and he advised them against membership in the UMWA, which, he declared, was "not fit to live and should be put down by the strong arm of the law."67

Similarly the Reverend William McGill, editor of the black weekly, Hot Shots, opposed black affiliation with the UMWA and took the position that black miners' interests were best served by cooperation with those companies which hired them. Following the defeat of the miners in 1908, Hot Shots urged other blacks to apply for jobs vacated by the strikers and those with jobs to "hold fast to what they have." Mine management at such companies as TCI had treated black workers fairly, and blacks should demonstrate that this treatment was appreciated by remaining loyal to the company. Preaching solid middle-class values, McGill urged the black miner to "work hard, earn his wages and then spend them judiciously," for to do otherwise "disgraces the race."68

The desperation-spawned violence only further aggravated the anxieties of Birmingham's white middle class, which expressed its fears differently from middle-class blacks. White businessmen formed a committee of citizens to organize a mass indignation rally and to muster public support for Governor Comer's forceful tactics in dealing with the strikers.69 Meeting at the Bijou Theater in Birmingham on August 12, the group drew up a petition calling for mandatory arbitration which garnered approximately twenty thousand signatures.70 At the mass meeting, speaker after speaker simultaneously condemned violence, on the one hand, and advocated lynching those who broke
the law, on the other. Every speaker favored protecting the strikebreakers, company property, and the employers’ right to a free hand in dealing with their workers. When a local union president was arrested, community leaders held a meeting to consider the deportation of all UMWA officials.

Only the reform farmers of the district, those who had experience in cooperating with labor during the Populist insurgency against the Bourbons, and organized labor in Birmingham demonstrated any sympathy for the miners’ cause. Farmers provided food, and several allowed their land to be used for tent colonies. District 20 President John R. Kennemer received a resolution from the Farmers’ Union of St. Clair County, which declared that since capitalism was “trying to enslave the poor miners,” the farmers pledged their “hearty support and cooperation to them in any way that will assist them in their struggle.” A few days later the Farmers’ Union of Lewisburg sponsored a barbecue for the strikers’ benefit, and three thousand miners attended the feast to hear speeches condemning the companies and Sheriff Higdon’s “dirty deputies.” Blacks were not invited to the affair, but a group of them assembled on a hillside to hear the speeches.

The farmers’ support was hardly sufficient to swing the balance of power to the advantage of the miners, however. When the sentiments of the middle-class community became clear in early August, Governor Comer issued an official proclamation declaring that the “whole powers of the state will be exerted for the protection of everybody who desired to work.” With the governor and the middle class on their side, all the operators needed to crush the union by state force was a politically justifiable reason for doing so. That justification was readily available in the union’s biracialism. The banner of “nigger domination” was, therefore, unfurled and hoisted aloft to guide the faithful into righteous battle.

The white populace had become more and more concerned with the racial implications of the 1908 strike. The chief articulator of this concern was Frank V. Evans, an influential correspondent of the Birmingham Age-Herald. Evans had attended a union rally of about five hundred black and white strikers at Dora and became alarmed at what he perceived as a potential threat to the caste system. Indeed, Evans believed that conditions had reached a grave state when black leaders could “address assemblies of white women and children as social equals” on the “delicate matters of social status.” Such a sight brought back visions of Radical Reconstruction, and when a black strike leader embraced a white speaker in the presence of white women, Evans thought to himself, “Has it again come to this?” Evans claimed that the white UMWA leaders were as dangerous as the Radicals had been,
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for they were “daily instilling to the minds of the blacks ideas of social equality, which if they do take root soon will result in a worse condition than even now exists—a condition of bloodshed and absolute annihilation.” No reasonable man could doubt for a moment that the blacks were a vital asset to southern development, Evans asserted, but only so long as the “social line” between the races was strictly drawn. UMWA leaders were doing everything in their power to obliterate this line, however, by promoting “close social affiliation” and by encouraging black speakers to tell black miners that they were “as good as white men.”

Many whites agreed with Evans when he insisted that the race question was the most important issue in the 1908 strike. A county sheriff informed one crowd of miners that “this is a white man’s country and there will be no nigger domination here.” On the editorial page of the Age-Herald, J.V. Allen of Birmingham wrote that if the UMWA leaders and their black coconspirators had invaded southern Alabama instead of Jefferson County, “nothing further would be needed but the coroner.” In a thinly veiled call for lynchlaw, Allen argued that the time had passed for reasonableness toward those “who have brought shame and disgrace” upon the district. The UMWA’s worst sin was its “attempt to overturn our social status and break down barriers sacred to the whole south.” In another editorial, Dolly Dalrymple issued a public plea for a return to southern traditions and the day when blacks were like her mammy, who “knew where she belonged.” To her it was “absolutely inconceivable” that any organization would “deliberately set about to upset the primary social laws of our beloved South,” as did the UMWA. “When I hear of white miners eating side by side with black men; of womens’ auxiliaries where white and black women meet on a equal footing, my heart swells to the bursting point.” It was enough to prick the pride of any decent southerner, she complained, to see such infamies as “black men addressing white men as brother!” Another letter to the editor of the Age-Herald declared that “this social equality movement among United Mine Workers must be stopped at once.”

The Birmingham Labor Advocate editors understood the far-reaching implications of the strike far better than the UMWA national officers and attempted to defuse the social equality charges. Putting the best face on black and white unity, the Labor Advocate declared that white miners associated with blacks because the operators forced them to. Outside of the mines, however, whites associated with blacks on matters pertaining to their work and the union but nothing more. “There is not at present and never was and can never be social equality between the whites and blacks in this state.” The only equality miners
were after was "equal pay for equal work." Being southerners, and not especially progressive on the race issue, the editors realized that race-baiting provided the operators with a powerful weapon against the UMWA.

By the end of August, Governor Comer had decided that it was time to bring the strike to an end, and he issued orders to cut down the miners' tent camps. District President Kennemer consulted with the union's legal counsel regarding a restraining order but was advised that it would be impossible to obtain. "Who could you get to issue a restraining order in Birmingham? No judge would issue it," the attorney declared. Playing for time, Kennemer scheduled a conference with the governor before the order was implemented. Governor Comer informed Kennemer that he had already made up his mind on the matter and declared, "You know what it means to have eight or nine thousand niggers idle in the State of Alabama, and I am not going to stand for it." Meanwhile, UMWA President Tom Lewis, Vice-President White, Secretary William D. Ryan, and executive board member William R. Fairley arrived in Birmingham. In another conference with Comer, they received the same scolding, and the governor reiterated that he would "not allow eight or ten thousand niggers out of employment living in tents." If the strike was not brought to an end, Comer informed the union officials, he would have legislation passed which would permit the arrest of every striking miner on charges of vagrancy. The union officials realized that Comer was perfectly capable of gaining such a measure, for the state legislators were "outraged at the attempts to establish social equality between white and black miners." President Lewis proposed that the union would transport every Afro-American striker out of Alabama, making it a white man's strike, but the governor rejected the plan. Accordingly, the tent colonies were cut down by the militia, and the miners dispersed to fend for themselves as best they could.

That the union was dealing with a race problem, rather than an industrial dispute like those the national officials were accustomed to in the North, was driven home when UMWA Vice-President White was visited by a committee of Birmingham citizens, who plainly informed him that the strike should be called off because it violated the region's social customs regarding racial equality. "No matter how much merit there may be in the miners' cause," the committee argued, "you cannot change the opinion of the people in this country that you are violating one of the principles the South holds near and dear." Before southerners would accept social equality of the Negro, they would "make Springfield, Illinois look like six cents," referring to the race riot which had occurred in that northern city just a few days earlier. White claimed
that much of this white fear had been aroused by the *Birmingham Age-Herald*. “In all my experiences I never read such articles” as those in that paper, White later declared.\textsuperscript{83}

The UMWA found itself in an awkward position, wishing to conduct a strike over industrial questions but confronted with social issues with which it was unable to contend. As White reported at the 1909 UMWA convention, when the union completely tied up the companies, the operators “went to the old closet and brought out the ghastly spectre of racial hatred and held it before the people of Alabama.” In fact, White asserted, racial tensions were so high, “a small boy could have started a riot in the streets of Birmingham towards the close of that struggle that would have caused countless numbers of innocent people to lose their lives.” Under such intense pressure, the UMWA Executive Board decided it could no longer persist and ordered an end to the strike on August 31, 1908.\textsuperscript{84}

Manipulation of white racist attitudes by the press and the industrial elite rendered a UMWA victory impossible. Fearing a downturn in the economic life of the district, the public cried out for binding arbitration of the dispute. Since the operators had determined to crush the union, however, they unfurled the tattered banner of social equality to align public support behind them and against their union foes. “Nobody can deny that the late strike was won from an industrial standpoint,” District President Kennemer lamented in 1909, but it had been lost because of the race issue. The large number of blacks in the union was not a reason to terminate the struggle in Alabama, however. Indeed, Kennemer asserted, “there are no better strikers in the history of the United Mine Workers in any district than the colored men of Alabama. They struck, and struck hard, they fought for their rights and fought manfully.”\textsuperscript{85}

It is important to note that the race issue was not sparked by the importation of black scabs. In fact, the race of the strikebreakers received little mention in the local press. The attention of the entire white power structure, and the white populace generally, was focused on black strikers who were violating social norms by assuming a militant stance within a biracial working-class organization. When the companies attempted to bring in trainloads of scabs to run the mines, a confrontation resulted which would have been edifying to those northern miners who believed the terms *strikebreakers* and *blacks* to be synonymous. Trainload after trainload of black and white imports were fired upon by the predominantly black striking miners. The exact racial composition of the imports remains uncertain, but considering the racial climate in Alabama, the situation was potentially explosive no matter what the ratio; in either case black men were challenging the social order by resorting to arms against the white power structure.
Furthermore, that these black unionists were "conspiring" with white unionists presented the explosive possibility of a class uprising in a region organized by caste and controlled by a small elite. The new industrial and social relations which were finally hammered into place in the Birmingham mineral district grew out of a struggle between unionists and nonunionists, and the latter won. The racial aspects of this power struggle did not concern the exclusion of black strike-breakers so much as the continued control of blacks already within the established caste system. The white power structure won that one, too.86
Unionism in the Alabama coalfields languished following the destruction of the UMWA during the 1908 strike. Alabama UMWA membership plummeted from 4,089 dues-paying members in 1908 to 214 in 1913. The UMWA continued to monitor conditions in Alabama and established an investigating committee in 1913 to study the prospects for reviving the union there. The committee decided, however, that an organizing campaign was likely to fail at that time because of the unified opposition of operators and state and local public officials. It would be folly, the committee concluded, to call the men out in Alabama before the UMWA was financially capable of supporting a hundred thousand men, women, and children. By 1915, membership hit its lowest ebb with only 28 men paying dues to the organization.1

Prospects brightened for the union in 1917 when the international assumed control of District 20 and dispatched five organizers to the state. That year 123 new locals were established, although actual membership remained low. The European war raised concern among federal officials about war production, however, and the government intervened in the struggle for power in the Alabama fields.

In July 1917 District 20 officials invited the operators to the bargaining table, but the operators responded by firing and blacklisting known union men. The exact number of men affected is unknown, but TCI alone blacklisted 345 men in 1917, 129 blacks and 162 whites.2 When the operators refused to reinstate the men, a strike was called for August 18, 1917. At that point the federal fuel administrator, Harry Garfield, met with a committee of the Alabama Coal Operators’ Association and forced them to accept the miners’ right to organize, the reinstatement of dismissed union men, a grievance procedure, the eight-hour day, semimonthly paydays, and a guarantee of the miners’ right to a checkweighman. The recognition forced on the operators was only grudgingly accepted, however, and grievances persisted through-
out the war. Nevertheless, the federal government's wartime policy of ensuring labor peace by dictating labor's right to organize undoubtedly was responsible for the dramatic increase in dues-paying members in Alabama in 1918 and 1919, when UMWA membership rose to 6,614 and 7,747 respectively.

While the miners won temporary concessions in return for labor peace during the war, their wage increases fell far short of increases in the cost of living, despite the huge profits earned by the coal companies during this period. Therefore, when the UMWA national met in convention in September 1919, union officials were instructed to negotiate a wage increase or call a nationwide strike. When the operators association rejected the wage increase, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer obtained an injunction from Federal Judge Albert B. Anderson to prevent the strike. The nation's miners ignored the order, however, and on November 1, 1919, 394,000 of them carried their tools out of the pits.

UMWA officials finally agreed to a 14 percent wage increase and accepted the promise that the miners' grievances would be heard before a new Bituminous Coal Commission; the men were ordered back into the mines. District 20 miners had joined the walkout, but approximately a thousand of them had been replaced during the stoppage, and the companies refused to reemploy them. Moreover, in April 1920 the Bituminous Coal Commission recommended a continuation of the 1917 agreement, which granted miners the right to join the union and a 27 percent pay raise. The Alabama Coal Operators' Association refused to abide by the commission's recommendation on either point, refused to rehire the replaced strikers, and adamantly refused to recognize the union under any circumstances. Consequently, the strike continued during the last quarter of 1919 only in the Alabama fields, but with the complete support of the international organization.

From September 7, 1920, to March 12, 1921, therefore, approximately 11,000 miners were on strike in Alabama, and the UMWA provided food for 48,461 men, women, and children at a cost of $40,272.16. Because winter caught the Alabama strikers and their families unprepared, the union also supplied them with shoes and clothing at $135,782.36. The operators launched a massive eviction operation when winter came, and the miners soon found themselves in desperate straits. Van A. Bittner, the UMWA's chief organizer in charge of the Alabama strike, was besieged with requests for clothing, housing, and food. The UMWA found it necessary to purchase over two thousand tents costing $45,000. The wood flooring cost nearly as much as the tents, and about $200 per camp was spent for lots on which to erect the tents. The international ordered the district organization
to file suit against companies which evicted strikers without following the letter of the law. But the union lost these cases in the state supreme court and was ordered to pay the rents, attorneys' fees incurred by the companies, and all court costs, expenses totaling over $200,000.10

Three-quarters of the Alabama strikers were black, and as the operators replaced them in company houses with rural black recruits, a rash of house bombings ensued. At least thirteen houses occupied by Afro-American scabs were dynamited between September and December 1920, and judging from the available accounts, most of the perpetrators were black. Other property was also damaged, including a tipple and a mine machine shop, which were put to the arson's torch, and a Southern Railway train, which was dynamited from an overpass.11

A good deal of shooting also resulted from the importation of strikebreakers. On September 13 a trainload of nonunion men were ambushed enroute to the TCI mines. A “reign of terror” was reported to exist at Cordova in September, and bloodshed was considered a probability, for “striking miners, with pump guns, shotguns, pistols and other weapons” were patrolling the tracks. Nonunion men were fired on from ambush near Majestic the following day; one black scab was killed and another dangerously wounded. By September 18, 1920, the strike-related death toll reached eight. At one of the most serious trouble spots, the vicinity of Corona and Majestic, two Negro nonunion miners were killed. A local postmaster near Majestic Mines complained to authorities that a “mob of 38 men, six or seven white men, including the superintendent of the mines, and the rest negroes,” had perforated his post office with three hundred bullet holes. Eyewitnesses verified that “all of them who fired were nonunion men” taking retribution against the owner of the store because he was a union sympathizer.12

The most dramatic confrontation occurred in September at Patton Junction when Leon M. Adler, general manager of the Corona Coal Company, and Earl Edgill, a deputized company guard, were killed in a battle with strikers. According to company sources, Adler and several deputies were traveling toward the mines when they crossed the path of pickets posted along the road. When the party refused to stop, the strikers fired a volley of shots at them from two vacant houses along the road. The deputies, led by Adler, reportedly stopped the car and attacked the houses in an attempt to arrest the men inside. Instead, Adler was shot through the temple, and Edgill's body was riddled with bullets. Several shots were fired by the deputies, and it was believed that two black strikers were killed in the exchange, but their bodies were never found.13 As might be expected, the official union line on the Adler affair differed substantially from that of the company; the
union claimed that Adler and his guards had attempted to break up a strikers' meeting at the union hall and so precipitated the fight which resulted in their own deaths. This version of events probably comes closer to the truth, for Adler was widely known for his use of physical force against union men. In fact, he was awaiting trial on charges of assault with intent to murder in another case involving a union sympathizer. Moreover, even before the shoot-out, Adler had vowed that he and his deputies would disperse any attempt to hold a union meeting and would paint the union hall red “even if it had to be done with blood.”

As in the past, the Birmingham press and other opponents of the UMWA accepted the company's version of events and denounced the union men as Bolsheviks dispossessed of their reason by the “rabid speeches” of white and Negro organizers who had transformed the citizens of the mineral district into “skulking assassins.” Governor Thomas Kilby, a firm supporter of the coal companies, also accepted their version of the affair and took the occasion to order out the Alabama National Guard to end the strike. It is difficult to determine the exact number of casualties resulting from the 1920 strike, but at least sixteen people were killed, over half of them black.

As in earlier struggles, some influential black middle-class spokesmen proved sturdy supporters of the companies during the 1920 strike. Oscar W. Adams, publisher of the Birmingham Reporter, used his weekly to split black and white UMWA strikers by calling on Afro-American miners to put race first. Like other middle-class black leaders influenced by Booker T. Washington, Adams favored racial solidarity and cooperation with capitalists as the surest avenue to economic uplift. In September 1920, Adams published an editorial in the Birmingham News which explained his basic position. “In a situation like this,” he wrote, “the disadvantage in every respect of the case is with the negro.” Indeed, “what redress have we, what but humilitatingly to submit” to the will of those whites who employed black labor? As editor of a Negro newspaper it was his duty “to rectify as far as I may be able, the difficulties of the prevailing situation . . . for the good of all.”

While Adams viewed his role as that of mediator, he expressed no patience at all with the UMWA and its brand of biracial class-conscious unionism. In mid-September approximately six hundred blacks gathered at Metropolitan AME Zion Church in Birmingham to discuss the “unrest prevalent in the laboring fields.” Following several other black conservatives, Adams took the rostrum and vigorously attacked the union as a pack of “I.W.W. Bolsheviks” and “agitators” bent on violence. “We must align ourselves with righteous actions against the agitating element which attempts to hinder the producer,” Adams
declared.\textsuperscript{17} A month later, the editor assailed the UMWA for its biracialism, his most commonly articulated criticism against the union, in words which might easily pass for those of a company official using the race wedge:

Social intermingling and social contact as discussed by those who claim there is no color line in the union is but to breed everlasting trouble for the black man, not only in Alabama, but wherever decent members of both races reside. It comes to us that organizers of the United Mine Workers of America, whose homes are not in Alabama nor the South, are insinuating that Negro miners and white miners are social and industrial brothers. They are neither. Both are impossible, never have and never will be possible. Certainly no Negro will accept membership or continue membership in an organization of this kind. A white man from Indiana and a Negro from other Northern states are arguing that there is no color line. There is a color line.

Adams considered such ideas dangerous to blacks, for no “worthy” person would urge others to “seek other than its own race members for social contact and social relations.”\textsuperscript{18} When Governor Kilby ordered out the National Guard, the editor proclaimed him a statesman and “protector of an honest, humble working group of men, seventy-five per cent of whom are Negro men.” Adams certainly was no visionary, but he recognized who held power in Alabama.\textsuperscript{19}

Colfax Rameau was an equally outspoken critic of the class-conscious approach to labor organization. Rameau’s ardent championing of the jim crow system undoubtedly was motivated in part by self-interest. As president of the Southern Federation of Afro-American Industrial Brotherhood and editor of its official organ, the \textit{Workmen’s Chronicle}, Rameau procured black nonunion miners for the Alabama operators.\textsuperscript{20} Rameau had worked his way through college in the 1890s as a trapper boy in Henry DeBardeleben’s Blue Creek mine. As early as 1894 Rameau had “set out to advise my people not to take any part in the Northern white man’s organization, and from the day until this very moment I have been against the un-American organization.” He was convinced that economic progress for black miners would come not through joining white miners in class struggle but through loyalty to the companies whose enlightened policies of providing schools, churches, housing, and other social services had dramatically improved the lives of black miners and their families.\textsuperscript{21} In his opinion, black membership in the UMWA would place about the necks of black miners “a yoke of industrial slavery more galling than that of physical slavery of our parents.” He considered the UMWA a “band of labor agitators” who extracted their livelihood from the “blood and sweat of my people because of their ignorance.” All the violence in the Alabama district, in fact, was traceable to the “socialistic and anarchistic propa-
ganda preached by these labor Barons” who were determined to “rule or ruin.”

Such vitriolic opposition from middle-class blacks drove militant union leaders to distraction. Convinced that miners of both races would achieve better conditions only through class, rather than racial, solidarity, union men considered conservative black spokesmen to be either “in the hip pocket” of the operators or simply ignorant. In either case they represented a sinister threat to the labor movement. District President J.R. Kennemer created a storm of denunciation in September 1920 for a speech before an audience of mostly black miners at Sayreton. Referring to black opponents like Adams and Rameau, Kennemer declared, “If you have any such leaders among you at Sayreton, you should take them and hang them by the neck.” Such language was uncharacteristic of Kennemer, but it illustrated how much the opposition from the black middle class stung the UMWA leadership.

The response to the district president’s outburst was swift. The Birmingham News reported that the “best citizens of the community” expressed indignation at such incendiary remarks directed toward blacks, particularly “their conservative leaders and their preachers who, in this vicinity, are strongly and openly opposing the union.” Not surprisingly, Oscar Adams immediately denounced Kennemer for affirming what the black editor had been saying about the UMWA “agitators” all along. It was a “bold and daring” threat against the Negro race when a leader of the white race urged blacks to “lynch and kill men who oppose his idea or advise against it,” and it was a sure sign that blacks would be “destroyed” if they followed the UMWA leadership. Kennemer was more reflective when he gave advice to black miners thereafter, for he had committed a serious tactical blunder which gave the union opponents higher moral ground.

Middle-class blacks may have urged Afro-American miners to remain loyal to the principle of racial solidarity and to the white operators who provided them with jobs, but there were few miners who did not respond to the class position of the UMWA instead. The reason was simple. From the national office down to the locals, the UMWA encouraged, although it did not dictate, the inclusion of blacks in every level of organizational life. District 20 leaders recognized that black involvement was essential to success in Alabama. Consequently, when an NAACP fieldworker visited the UMWA offices in Birmingham, he could report that “Negro organizers sit at desks in the same room with the white man and on terms of apparent equality. They are paid the same salaries. At the miners meetings, no discrimination is made.” Moreover, repeated attempts had been made by the newspapers and employers “to drive a wedge between the black and white workers in the miner’s organization, but without success.”
Most locals in the district had a black vice-president or president, many of whom were among the militant leadership. Local 2131 at Sayreton was run by a black president, J.C. Walls. At one meeting, Walls urged the black membership to cooperate closely with white miners, for “in all things united we stand, divided we fall.” This sentiment produced a rousing cheer from the forty or so blacks and three to five whites who were present. The National Guard prevented J.F. Sorsby, the black vice president of District 20, from speaking at Searles, and within four days nine hundred black and white miners had walked out of the pits together over the incident. The international also sent black organizers into the Alabama district during the strike. L.E. Irvin and O.F. Johnson signed on as fieldworkers in the district and William Prentice, a black Illinois miner with international organizer status, was also ordered into Alabama. The chief black international organizer was George H. Edmunds of Iowa who worked out of strike headquarters in Birmingham with his longtime friend strike leader Van Bittner. These black organizers endured the same indignities inflicted upon UMWA organizers elsewhere in the American coalfields prior to the New Deal, along with those customarily heaped upon black men who had the effrontery to act like men. William Prentice and George Edmunds, for example, complained of constant harassment because of their race and their union affiliation.

Whatever local discrimination blacks encountered in their dealings with white miners, in the context of southern society the UMWA was the most progressive force in their lives. Blacks recognized that Van Bittner was assaulting the caste system which entrapped them when, for example, he declared at the 1920 district convention: “I don’t care what a man’s color is . . . so long as he is a good union man. If we are going to fight this issue on the question of race . . . we are going to get the same wages and the same conditions, industrially, and the same living conditions for these men in these mining camps here in Alabama as we do for the white men.” This statement was greeted with thunderous applause from the racially mixed delegates. The chief organizer roundly criticized the black middle class and challenged Oscar Adams to a public debate over the issue before the black miners. “This is the coal miner’s fight,” Van Bittner boomed, “and we do not care an eternal damn what his color is, so long as he fights.”

Such opinions, publicly expressed and enthusiastically received by miners of both races, in conjunction with the obvious class solidarity demonstrated by UMWA members, generated seismic ripples of concern among Alabamians and officials charged with preserving the status quo. Fearful of loosing control over the black population in the mining district, G.C. Hartsfield, sheriff of Jefferson County, wrote Governor Kilby in September 1919 that in his twenty years in law
enforcement he had "never known the situation to be just as it is today." He advised the governor that race feelings were running high because at camps "where the entire population consists chiefly of negroes the situation has become almost intolerable. These negroes are heavily armed and well equipped with pistols, guns and ammunition." The sheriff requested two machine guns to help preserve order because of the "dangerous situation that my men would be in against negro mobs of 600 or 800 men." 30

The specter of armed blacks clearly alarmed the white citizenry, and their fear played into the hands of the coal companies who grasped the opportunity to vanquish the UMWA once again with the trusty race wedge. With whites already traumatized over armed and militant blacks, the operators focused public attention on the corollary taboo of social equality, also under assault from the UMWA strikers. During the second month of the strike, a committee of the Alabama Coal Operators' Association widely publicized the charge that the UMWA was responsible for importing "a large number of foreign negro and white agitators" who had excited the miners to such a point that state troopers were called upon to preserve the peace. "This organization has a history of associating the black man on terms of equality with the white man," they charged, calling attention to the clause in the UMWA constitution which prohibited racial discrimination as evidence that the union fostered social equality of the races. The operators' association quoted a speech in which Van Bittner stated that, "as far as the mine workers are concerned, our union recognizes no race, and this fact is emphasized at their meetings where whites and blacks, men and women, assemble together; white and black jointly officer them and jointly address them." 31 The UMWA had no appreciation for southern customs, the committee cried, "Over seventy per cent of our labor is negro, and this northern union teaches them race equality." 32

Few coal operators were more direct in articulating the racial basis of the companies' labor policy than Milton H. Fies, vice-president of the DeBardeleben Coal Company. Testifying before the Governor's Special Strike Commission in March 1921, Fies stated, "I believe, and I think you gentlemen believe, that the salvation of the South depends upon its industrial welfare." The chief factor in that industrial welfare was the Negro, he continued, "and I think it would be a fatal mistake to deliver our negroes into the hands of these men who came down here from the North." Asked if these northerners instilled "into our negroes union ideas, would these negroes spread that through the balance of the state," Fies responded that there was no question of it. Such unionism would, of course, unify poor black and white workers and therefore poised a dagger at the heart of the South's caste system but also threatened the operators' policy of divide and conquer. Fies sum-
med up the case succinctly: "There is the eternal question which we have down here. . . . That is the reason why we can’t take the standards used for settling disputes over labor in Illinois, and West Virginia and Indiana. But where 70% of the miners are negroes, we have got to settle it not according to some standard they have established, but we ought to be brave, rough and courageous enough to settle it according to the standards of Southern white people." 33

The UMWA found itself impaled once again on the horns of a dilemma: It had to represent the interests of black miners in Alabama, but to do so threatened the southern caste system thereby enabling the operators to employ the social equality wedge to split away public support from the miners’ cause. UMWA spokesmen understood the danger inherent in this issue, and although they did not want to offend the public’s racial sensibilities, their response was much less ambivalent than it had been during the 1908 strike. Van Bittner denounced the operators in the press, emphatically denying as a deliberate lie the operators’ charge that the UMWA advocated social equality of the races. “The Negro miners are a fine set of men for the coal operators as long as they are willing to work for starvation wages without complaining,” Van Bittner declared, but when they join the UMWA “to raise the standard of living for the white miner and his family as well as themselves, then the coal operators attempt to prejudice the case of the miners by taking up the race question.” 34 At the District 20 convention held on September 22, 1920, Van Bittner threw down the gauntlet, declaring, “As far as I am concerned, . . . our constitution says that we recognize no creed, color or nationality.” The operators hired black men and put them to work in the mine with whites, and “I don’t care what a man’s color is . . . so long as he is a good union man.” 35

The potential for a prolonged conflict, and the implications which a racially united working class in the mining district presented for a segregated society, prompted grave concern among white civic leaders. One of them was the publisher of the Birmingham News, Victor Hanson, who persuaded Van Bittner and the operators to submit the case to Governor Kilby for binding arbitration. With all parties in agreement, the UMWA officially ended the strike on February 18. Van Bittner announced that the UMWA was “conceding a great deal in thus resting our case entirely upon the fairness of the Governor.” 36 The strike leader’s misgivings were well founded. Within a month Kilby confirmed his suspicion and rejected all of the miners’ demands. 37

No sooner had the arbitration decision been rendered when operators began slashing wages. UMWA headquarters in Indianapolis sent an investigative team to the field immediately, but it soon concluded that the UMWA had no alternative but to comply with the decision. Therefore, the union assumed the full obligation for debts incurred by
District 20 during the strike and agreed to provide relief in the form of food, clothing, and shelter to the jobless miners until April 9, 1921. In doing so, the union suffered staggering financial losses. In addition to the $448,469 spent for organizing between March 12, 1917, and September 6, 1920, the UMWA spent another $1.5 million between September 7, 1920, and March 10, 1921, to wage the strike itself. Thus, after several years of strenuous effort and nearly two million dollars, Alabama still was not enlisted under the UMWA banner.

The UMWA's second major failure served to reinforce the perception among Alabama miners that the union was not sufficiently powerful to prevail against the southern operators, supported as they were by the power of the state. Loss of the strike, therefore, made miners reticent about challenging that power and retarded the development of class consciousness in the coalfields. The preindustrial culture of the landless black peasants recruited as strikebreakers also retarded the union movement. Indeed, from the coal operators' point of view, black peasants offered many advantages as workers. The subservient dependency which formed the foundation of landlord-tenant relations was readily transferred to the company town and provided the companies with a tractable work force willing to accept the operators' complete authority. Operators considered blacks from the farms to be unequalled in "mule-like endurance," as well as "obedient, pliable, easily satisfied, loyal and faithful," antiunion and willing to work for little pay. A Welsh mining expert visiting the Alabama field was informed that blacks made good miners because they are "good-humored, docile and accept orders without question or criticism, unlike coal-diggers who have worked in European mines."

To entice such workers, coal companies provided them with transportation advances against future pay, and if they had families, the entire group was moved to the mine camp. Others sent their families before they departed their jobs on the plantations. Will Armstead came to Mulga in the fall of 1916 to get out of the never-ending cycle of debt which ensnared sharecroppers, but he had to sneak away to avoid the legal restrictions which tied him to the plantation until his debt was cleared. Although uneducated, Armstead could count well enough to know that the white landlord was cheating him, so he placed his wife and children on a train to Birmingham where relatives helped to spirit the family to Mulga. Three weeks later Armstead made his way to Mulga also, where he landed a job in the mine and was able to rent a company house. For Armstead this was a significant step up in the world. It would take time for him to fully comprehend the new relationship of dependency he had assumed, and only then would he be ready to join a class-conscious biracial union. In the meantime company paternalism meant that he had exchanged a malevolent master
for a benevolent one, and it would be an act of gross ingratitude to turn on such an employer.\textsuperscript{42}

Desperate family men were not the only blacks lured to the coal camps. Young and venturesome farm laborers were also attracted by higher wages and the wild life frequently found in the camps. Usually restless drifters, they did not think of themselves as permanent residents of a community or craft. Drifting from place to place in search of adventure, such men were not the stuff of which a strong labor movement is made. Moreover, a large percentage of the black coal miners in the Alabama fields were ex-convicts who had been released to labor in the mines where they had worked as prisoners. Assisted by the operator in gaining a new start in society earning a decent wage, they were hesitant to work against the company’s interests by joining the union.\textsuperscript{43}

The generally low level of education among blacks constituted another formidable barrier to union organization in Alabama and, hence, an additional advantage to the companies. George H. Edmunds, the black UMWA organizer, lamented that it was “no uncommon thing to organize a local union with 50 or 60 men and then you discover there are not enough lettered men to fill the few offices of the local union.”\textsuperscript{44} Schools for black children were usually poor by any standard. White teachers received double the salary of black teachers, and the school term lasted from six to nine months for whites, while that for blacks was but three to five months.\textsuperscript{45} Established black miners frequently complained about such discriminatory treatment. A white miner from Searles corroborated their complaints, charging that, while whites could send their children to school for a full nine-month term, blacks were granted sufficient funds for only a few months of school per year, and many of the teachers in the mining camps were “a disgrace to any school room . . . for Negroes or any other race.”\textsuperscript{46} Observing classes in the Negro school at the company town of Edge-water, Alabama, a Welsh mining engineer concluded that poor education among black miners was “one reason why the organization of southern miners is so weak.”\textsuperscript{47}

Separate and unequal education was only one aspect of life in the Alabama coal towns which reflected the broader racial norms of the region and deterred the formation of a unified front among coal miners. Actually, considerable planning was required by the companies in organizing their coal towns in order to accommodate the large percentage of black miners while adhering to the segregationist blueprint of the broader community. Physical and social separation of the races made it easier for the operators to exploit racial divisions among the miners, and made the UMWA’s task extremely difficult. For example, the Woodward Coal and Iron Company divided Mulga into
two distinct sections connected only by a two-mile road. The post office and the commissary were located in the white section, the schools and churches were segregated, and when the men entered the slope, blacks rode in the rear of the man-trip car. Even the company police force was segregated, with several black deputies assigned to assist the white sheriff in maintaining the peace, and keeping out union organizers, in the black section of Mulga. The company, rather than the proper civil authorities, granted the black deputies the power to make arrests and even to kill blacks in self-defense. If a black deputy did kill an unruly Negro, he simply reported it to the sheriff, and according to one old resident, "that was the end of that." 

Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, which became a subsidiary of U.S. Steel in 1907, employed twenty-five thousand workers in 1929, a majority of whom were blacks. The company owned and operated at least ten towns containing a total of five thousand houses. A strict policy of housing segregation was imposed, and to elevate the white miners above them, the blacks received houses which were smaller, in less desirable locations, and in the worst state of repair. "In all company villages housing for white workers—including Italians who had no higher skilled jobs than Negro workers—was better than that provided for colored," one investigator reported. White workers paid more rent, but they also received higher wages and performed the skilled labor, while "Negroes were permitted to do only rougher labor, such as loading." 

TCI's town of Docena, for example, was completely segregated throughout its existence. The company maintained 437 houses at Docena for five hundred whites and a little over twenty-seven hundred blacks. A church, a school, and a general store occupied the center of the town square. Whites lived on the streets immediately surrounding the square, and blacks resided on the streets beyond; "Nigger quarters they called it," an aging resident recalled. All public facilities were dual and segregated: churches, schools, bath houses, baseball teams, picnics, boy scouts, and social clubs. Angelo Herndon, the black Communist organizer, worked at Docena in 1929 and 1930. In the segregated coal camp environment, he wrote, blacks grew "brutish" and "quarreled with each other incessantly." Moreover, "hard work, maltreatment, ignorance and a bestial atmosphere contrived to keep them blind as bats to their degradation." To Herndon's comment to a fellow black miner that "this was no life for a man and a Christian," the other man responded: "There are no men—there are no Christians, nowhere. Only pigs." 

The hated "shack roaster" was another reason established black miners shunned the company town if they had the option. A "Negro Miner" complained in the United Mine Workers Journal that there existed
at Acton "the most damnable evil that lives and has its being in every
camp in the district, that is, the white brute in human form called the
'shack rouster.' " The rouster rode about the camp "with his billy and
revolver hanging to his saddle" going from house to house "beating up
on Negro men and using their women to suit his fancy." If black men
protested "they were either beaten almost to death or shot down like a
dog and there is absolutely nothing said or done about it save the
compliment paid him by the bosses for killing an insolent negro."52
There was a shack rouster in most Alabama coal camps where there
were a large number of blacks, but they were never used to police
whites.53

The exaggerated form of social control in company towns, the
*Birmingham Post* editor concluded, filled the miner with psychological
tensions that frequently spilled over in violence. The operator "is his
boss while he is at work. The operator is his landlord, his grocer, his
butcher, his clothing salesman and his shoe salesman. Always miner
and operator are on opposing side in daily transactions. Consequently,
it is inevitable that honest difference of opinion, strained relations and
conflicts will arise."54 If this was true for miners generally, it was
doubly so for black miners. Few companies exercised such complete
social control as the Alabama Fuel and Coal Company, owned by
Charles F. DeBardeleben, and the DeBardeleben Coal Company,
owned by Charles's brother Henry. Both were sons of Henry DeBardeleben, a pioneer coal operator in the Birmingham district. Each of the
DeBardeleben company towns had dual welfare associations, one for
blacks and another for whites, which organized social affairs such as
picnics and musical programs. At the Fourth of July celebration in 1920,
for example, the company provided food and watermelons for one
thousand miners at Searles, Brookwood, and Lewisburg. Such affairs
were designed to further the DeBardeleben labor policy, however,
especially regarding black workers. On this occasion, Oscar Adams,
the black publisher of the *Birmingham Reporter*, spoke to blacks on "Race
and Community Devotion," underscoring the need "for race members
to cooperate and show appreciation for the things being done for them
in such a manner as can be perfected through a welfare association."
Several other black middle-class spokesmen followed Adams on the
platform, including W.B. Driver, chairman of the Republican Club of
Jefferson County, who spoke on "The Dignity of Labor."55

DeBardeleben welfare associations met monthly as well, and their
format and function were specifically designed to cement a unification
of interests between blacks and the company and to create an abhor-
rence of the union. Charles DeBardeleben himself frequently spoke at
the monthly meetings explaining on one occasion that the company's
rule against union membership was a "necessary precaution" for the
“protection of the men and their families” against the “alien-foreign influences” of organized labor. Milton Fies, vice-president and general manager of Charles DeBardeleben’s Alabama Fuel Company, went so far as to pronounce himself in favor of franchising “worthy Negroes” and disfranchising lower-class whites. “As I see it,” he told his black audience, “the Negro is the one element in this country whose loyalty is unquestioned; and loyalty is the one thing needful today to beat back the sinister forces which threaten the very foundation of our civilization.”

Based on white supremacy and the corollary need to control the large black minority in its midst, the civilization Fies referred to lent its full support to the elaborate web of restraints which the coal companies placed on their black miners. Consequently, the UMWA had not played a significant role in the Alabama coalfield for more than a decade when the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed in 1933. Almost immediately thereafter the UMWA rejoined the struggle in District 20 because Section 7-A of that act gave workers the legal right to organize unions without interference from their employers. Moreover, the National Labor Relations Board was founded to insure compliance with the new law, and a new federal coal code was also instituted on September 16, 1933. The Alabama Operators’ Association bitterly resisted Section 7-A and the new coal code on the grounds that both would result in higher wages which would destroy their competitive position. Even though District 20 President William Mitch claimed that over six thousand miners in Alabama had already joined the UMWA by June 1933, the operators put up a bitter resistance.

None of Alabama’s operators fought the union with such determination and such an extensive arsenal of weapons as the DeBardeleben interests. By the late thirties, they were the last major stronghold of antiunionism in the Alabama coalfields. In fact, the history of labor relations in the DeBardeleben empire was, as one NLRB report phrased it, “a story of all-out opposition” with “every weapon known to the anti-union employer,” including hired thugs, labor spies, machine-gun-armed mine guards, dynamite, physical intimidation, and “prostitution of the ballot.” For example, when the miners at Markeeta struck for union recognition, a committee of them presented itself at Alabama Fuel’s headquarters to speak with the superintendent. Upon arrival at the company office, the miners were immediately surrounded by a group of gunmen, one of whom stated that the union men had been “trying to cause confusion by organizing the niggers in the camp” and that the company would not permit their miners to be organized. One of the three committee members, Carl Peavy, a black man, requested permission to see the superintendent and was admitted to Superintendent Sansing’s office. U.S. Commissioner of
Conciliation E.H. Dunnigan related what transpired in his official report of the incident.

Mr. Sansing asked the nigger what did he want. The nigger told him he was representing the men working at the mine. Mr. Sansing said, "what G-d D--n body of men are you representing?" The nigger told him he was representing the United Mine Workers. Mr. Sansing said, "You G-d D--n black s-n-of-a-b--h you get out of this office, all of you get out!"

As he turned to leave three or four of the gunmen began hitting and kicking the nigger. They beat him until he went down to his knees. He got up and started for home. Before the nigger reached home he was overtaken by the gunmen. They attacked him again beating him up and shooting him in the shoulder and leg. He is now in a serious condition.\textsuperscript{61}

In a similar fashion, when Willie Newman, a black miner, joined the union in August 1933, he was summarily fired from his job. In a deposition to the Jasper City judge, his wife charged that the superintendent had paid another woman to beat her up. She sought protection from a justice of the peace, an employee of the company, but as she sat in his office the superintendent arrived and shouted: "I told her to beat hell out of you . . . You are a damn black bitch. You are lower than a yellow dog . . . He also told me that he was a good mind to come out to where I was and stomp my god damn guts into hell."\textsuperscript{62}

The DeBardelebens' paternalism obviously had two sides. Their intention to shape a tractable nonunion labor force indebted to the company apparently went for naught, at least over the long term. During the twenties the blacks in DeBardeleben camps were farm laborers who saw in labor strife an opportunity to secure comparatively well paying jobs. By the thirties, however, many of these same men had undergone a fundamental realignment in their loyalties. Although race remained the most salient fact of life for them in nearly all spheres of life, as they became established in the trade they increasingly perceived that their interests lay with other miners in the struggling biracial UMWA. The lopsided power relationship between landlord and tenant had been replaced by the paternalism of the company town. In the process of becoming industrial laborers, separated from the land and from control of their own time and labor, black miners gradually came to understand the nuances of their new dependency. The union promised to realign the power relations between miners and employers, and blacks at DeBardeleben mines flocked to the UMWA. Henry DeBardeleben was compelled to abandon his faith in the "natural" loyalty of blacks to their employer when they turned out to be a majority of the union miners who struck his operations in 1933, and imported nonunion whites made up the majority of his scabs.\textsuperscript{63}

In March 1934, UMWA miners tried to force DeBardeleben to
Resurgence of the UMWA

recognize their rights by invading the mines at Townley and Coal Valley en masse. A group of fifty or sixty armed strikers attacked the scabs at Hull as they emerged from the pit. More than half of the strikers were blacks, while over 80 percent of the men working at Hull were white. Hammering on the old race wedge, Henry DeBardeleben charged that the union encouraged Negroes to arm and terrorize his coal camps. The following day, 510 armed strikers marched into Coal Valley. "This mob consisted of both whites and blacks, and many of both races were armed," he claimed. "One of the members of the mob in the front file was a negro with a shotgun," who had an ammunition belt strapped around his chest. The man, Will Love, had been discharged by the company for "intimidating" other workers into joining the union.64

Lieutenant Colonel James Webb of the Alabama National Guard was called to Townley and Coal Valley on March 29, 1934, to insure against any possibility of violence. The officer was informed that the company "had quite a bit of trouble with the negro strikers" at Townley, and the night before "60 or 70 armed with rifles and shotguns" had returned from a nearby union meeting in Hull. At nearby Coal Valley, Webb, accompanied by Henry DeBardeleben and Milton Fies, attended a large open-air miners' meeting. Of the 250 men in attendance, "about 60 or 75% were colored and about 150 of them armed with rifles, shotguns, and butcher knives." The local union president informed Webb that the men were armed for their own protection, since "one of their number was shot from ambush last night." DeBardeleben told the army officer that since the trouble began, the highways had not been "free of negroes armed with rifles and shotguns."65

The DeBardelebens were not bound by convention when it came to antiunion activities, and occasionally they surpassed themselves in the bizarre. Between 1933 and 1935, for example, a so-called "mystery man" appeared at the Acmar, Margaret, and Overton mines. This character was draped in a black robe outlined with white markings resembling a skeleton, and wore white gloves to which were attached long claws. His hood was adorned with horns to which flashing electric lights were attached. Presumably the superstitious black miners were supposed to be frightened by this masquerade. The mystery man would sneak up behind them while they were working and listen to them talk. He also searched employees' homes for union literature.66

Although the "mystery man" caper can only be described as absurd, Charles and Henry were deadly serious in their determination to remain nonunion. Charles constructed an "organizer trap" along the road leading to Overton. It consisted of twenty sticks of dynamite to be detonated by a guard in a house overlooking the road when union marchers passed by. The trap was never sprung, but in October 1935
company men ambushed union marchers at Acmar, killing one and wounding six others. Following this incident, union activities at DeBardeleben mines practically ceased, but violence against union miners continued unabated.67

In September 1941, Charles F. DeBardeleben died. Ironically, he was buried on Labor Day. The presidency of the Alabama Coal and Iron Company, then fell to his son Prince, who immediately informed his employees that his father had fought the union all his life, and "the same blood runs in my veins." Although "I cannot stop you from joining the union," he told them, "I can stop you from working here." True to his word, Prince continued into the third generation the labor policies of his father and grandfather before him. As late as January and February 1942, Prince discharged miners who joined the UMWA and used violence against the more assertive unionists. In April 1942 union miner Otis Johnson was distributing union literature at Margaret and Acmar when company guards enticed him to accompany them to a house for free liquor and gambling. Once there, a company thug told Johnson: "You don't know what you are in. The CIO is a negro organization. John L. Lewis is about three-quarters negro himself." When such persuasion had no effect, the company guard began "educating" Johnson over the head with a blackjack. Fortunately, Johnson was able to grasp a steel poker with which to fight his way out of the cabin.68

The large billboards at the entrance to the DeBardeleben camps remained in place too, proclaiming the family's defiant message. The sign at Acmar declared:

NOTICE
We Are Americans
And Believe in American Principles
If You Are Here to Interfere
With Our Rights, This is
The Place to Turn Around
—Acmar Welfare Society

Another sign read: "We Are 100% Non-Union And Proud Of It." To underscore the point, armored blockhouses with portholes for machine guns and rifles also remained in the ready. The UMWA's editor raised the obvious question: "What is this Americanism that shrinks so cowardly before visiting investigators? What are these principles that are so closely guarded from American democracy" that visitors to DeBardeleben camps are warned that they enter "at their own risk?" The UMWA then listed the conditions as they existed according to state and federal investigators, including fourteen-hour workdays; quotas
which had to be met before leaving work; no lunch break; a system known as "share-cropping," whereby every third car a miner loaded was credited to the contractor; armed guards who also served as labor contractors; the three-thousand-pound ton, and the miners bore the loss from washing; no checkweighman; an elaborate system of fines for dirty coal; no pay for dead work; deductions from meager paychecks for such things as rent for preachers, company stores which kept men in debt, churches which preached nonunionism along with religion, a strict rule requiring every housewife to raise a garden and can no less than a hundred quarts per year; the requirement of special permission for visitors entering the barbed-wire camps and special permits for miners who wanted to leave; segregated, company-run unions; and an elaborate system of espionage. 69

These were common problems for miners throughout the country during the early years of the UMWA's existence, but by 1940 most of them had been resolved in the northern fields, and even in the southern fields. Even the "captive mines," such as those operated by TCI to supply coal for the company's steel mills, which were not bound by the provisions of Section 7-A or the federal regulatory codes, recognized the union in 1934. Prince DeBardeleben refused to the end, however, and when the UMWA won a court battle to bring his operations into compliance, he sold the company rather than capitulate. 70
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III

EXCLUSION

The North
"You northern people don't know what you have done," an unnamed southern general was reported to have declared after the Civil War. "You will yet see these blacks you have freed go North and come into competition with free white labor."\(^1\) The general's prediction soon became a reality in the coalfields above the Ohio River, where imported southern blacks began breaking the strikes of white miners as early as the 1870s. The exceptional racial violence which accompanied the importation of black strikebreakers was at least partially explained by two early scholars of black labor, Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, who observed that the "bitterness of American race prejudice" has always made the Afro-American workers' presence "an especially sore point and not infrequently a signal for exceptional disorder."\(^2\) Although racial prejudice was as prevalent in the northern coalfields as elsewhere in America, prejudice alone cannot account for the complexity of race relations in the region's coal industry. A functional explanation must take into account not only the white miners' attitudes toward blacks but also their attitudes toward strikebreakers. Secondly, it must account for the dramatic variation in race relations in the northern coalfields from the pattern prevailing in the southern fields. This variation was shaped by the broader class struggle between operators and miners for control over the terms of labor, or job control; the miners' efforts to retain social dominance in their communities; and the efforts of new black arrivals to gain an occupational and social foothold.

Coal mining was an established black occupation in the Deep South, but in the northern fields miners were traditionally white. The major reason for this division, of course, was that the overwhelming majority of blacks resided in the South during slavery. That demographic pattern was only beginning to break down when Central Competitive Field (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, western Pennsylvania) op-
Exclusion: The North

operators began to tap the southern black "industrial reserve." Even though new mining towns developed in the region, the miners tended to be predominantly native whites or immigrants from the British Isles. As the end of the century drew nearer, however, the number of southern European immigrants increased every year. Each group in its turn strove to carve out a niche for itself in a community and work environment which preceding groups claimed as their own.

As early as the 1870s a spirit of militant unionism spread through the northern fields, encouraging class unity among the miners to counter the rapidly expanding concentration of power in the hands of ever fewer, ever larger coal companies. Coal miners were affected by this increasing corporate power more dramatically than most other workers because they usually lived in relatively small, isolated, single-industry towns, where company influence was forceful and direct. Moreover, the seasonal nature of coal mining, its inherent dangers, and the seemingly endless cycles of destructive competition and wage reductions all produced an occupation fraught with insecurity and anxiety. The general economic depression which engulfed the nation during the 1870s and 1890s can only have worsened conditions that were already bad, and the insecurity of the coal miners must have been particularly acute at the very time that black strikebreakers were imported. The response of the white miners in the Central Competitive Field to the importation of black scabs must be understood against this background of insecurity, which one prominent scholar of the American labor called "scarcity consciousness."

In his *Theory of the Labor Movement*, Selig Perlman distinguished between the economic perspective of the businessman, who views the world as a place of "abundant opportunities," and the manual laborer, who believes that he lives in a world of "restricted opportunities." The worker's "scarcity consciousness" stems from two basic sources: the awareness that he does not have the capacity to avail himself of economic opportunities and the conviction that society is structured to the advantage of the capitalists. It is this economic pessimism, according to Perlman, which explains the worker's attitude toward social and economic control and shapes the worker's belief that "outsiders," who may lay claim to limited opportunities, represent a threat to his economic security. Therefore, the function of the union must be to "prevent the individual from appropriating more than his rightful share" of those opportunities. The union must have the power to dispose of jobs for the collective welfare of the group and to exclude "undesirables." From this point of view, free competition becomes a form of antisocial behavior, "a sin against one's fellows." According to Perlman, "'Scarcity groups' regularly endeavor to 'own' the limited
opportunities at their disposal. Thus no issue relating to the conditions upon which they will permit an individual member to connect with an opportunity can escape becoming strongly tinged by this fundamental aspiration to 'own' all the opportunities extant." As one operator observed in 1874, older resident miners felt "an actual property right to their place" in the pits. The miners' struggle against black strikebreakers, therefore, was one of job control.

Although the northern white miners responded to the importation of black strikebreakers according to the scarcity-consciousness model, their behavior was acted out along racial lines. Not only were the imports scabs, they were black scabs, and the white miners displayed at least as much hostility to their color as to their status as strikebreakers. Since so few blacks were present in the region when the coal communities were established, a definition of the legitimate social sphere for the race was unnecessary. The system of social relations evolved without a black component, so the prevailing consensus of the ideal community did not include a significant number of Afro-Americans.

This sense of community was threatened by black imports in the Hocking Valley strike of 1874, which centered around Nelsonville. In 1870 Nelsonville, Ohio, was composed almost entirely of native-born whites and immigrants born in the British Isles, 58 percent of whom owned real property. Nelsonville was an independent, homogeneous town. When the depression of 1873 undermined the demand for coal, the Hocking operators cut wages sharply, and the newly formed Miners' National Association retaliated by calling out the miners on April 1, 1874. The operators then imported between four and five hundred nonunion southern blacks.

One of the recurrent complaints from the white miners was that the presence of blacks threatened their homes. A coal operator involved in the Hocking strike informed a reporter that, because they had worked in the mines since childhood, when they were locked out, the older men experienced "about the same emotions that an ordinary person would if robbed of his home." After the strike was lost, the rabidly racist Hocking Sentinel editorialized that the miners were defeated by a "gang of Africans." The Sentinel proclaimed that blacks were unwelcome intruders, for "our hills were not formed to echo the crack of the negro driver's whip." A nonminer defended the displaced strikers, noting that "if men who have purchased little homes and partially paid for them would not complain and get excited over such a state of affairs, we would indeed be surprised." The most virulent denunciation of the black imports appeared in the National Labor Tribune, official organ of the Miners' National Association:
This crowd, composed mostly of ignorant, dissolute villains...were hurried from their miserable, filthy dens, into the beautiful Hocking Valley of Ohio, where a few hundred honest, hardworking miners have for years past been struggling to build themselves and their children little homes. 

This Valley is their home; some of them have homes paid for out of the labor of their strong arms...; others have lots and houses on them partly paid for; others are trying to save enough out of their hard earnings to buy themselves homes. They have helped to build the churches and school-houses, which they look upon with pride. These men are citizens.

Several years later, blacks imported into the central Illinois coalfield received an even more hostile reception from established white miners. Early in May 1877 the white miners at Braidwood, Illinois, struck the Chicago, Wilmington, and Vermillion Coal Company for higher pay. After the pits lay idle for a few weeks, the company determined to break the strike with imported black men. By July 20 between three and four hundred blacks had already arrived, and several hundred more were expected from Richmond, Virginia, and other points south. Upon their arrival, the company armed them for self-protection, but the peace remained undisturbed until July 23 when over fifteen hundred white strikers overpowered the scabs and drove them out of the mines. The blacks appealed to the sheriff for aid, but the miners took complete control of the town, rendering the local official powerless. In dire need of food and shelter, the imports then appealed to the county. The strikers prevented the county authorities from delivering food to the scabs, however, and drove them "out into the country, where they, with their wives and children, [were] compelled to subsist upon private charity." The outraged whites found sympathy among local town officials. A Chicago newspaper reported that the presence of the blacks was odious to the white miners, and the "feeling of the whole town, authorities and all, has been against them." In fact, Mayor Daniel McLaughlin was also a prominent official in the Miners' National Association, which had called the strike. "Old Dan," as miners affectionately called him, met the county sheriff and a posse of twenty-one peace officers at the Braidwood train depot and advised them that the miners posed no clear and present danger. He persuaded the sheriff to remove his men to a nearby town for the night. The blacks returned to the mines on July 29 under the protection of seven hundred militia, and the strikers made no attempt to stop them. About four hundred men, women, and children returned, "perfectly overjoyed" to be going back to work. According to a Chicago correspondent, "They sang all the way down [from Wilmington], and with their few worldly goods in
their hands, consisting mostly of frying pans and live chickens, presented a curious spectacle as they disembarked from the train."\textsuperscript{12} Although the established whites, and the new blacks, all returned to work, peace was short-lived. The white miners refused to accommodate themselves to an Afro-American presence, and blacks continued to resent the white hostility. In fact, racial friction was so intense that a race riot was considered inevitable.\textsuperscript{13} It was common knowledge in town that the white men had accumulated five hundred weapons and had formed a military league which practiced maneuvers on the open prairie "when the nights were dark enough to cover their actions."\textsuperscript{14} As precarious as life seemed for blacks in Braidwood since their importation in 1877, they could expect little protection from local authorities, who "largely represented the miners' interests," a newsman reported, and "pooh-pooh the matter and affect not to believe it."\textsuperscript{15}

Race relations in Illinois coal towns continued to be strained after this initial importation of black scabs, and violence periodically erupted between the races. The most vicious racial conflict of the northern fields, however, occurred at Pana and Virden, Illinois. Miners there went on strike in the summer of 1898 when the operators refused to meet a previously agreed upon increase in the pay scale, locked out the protesting miners, and imported blacks from Alabama. Two of the largest operators were the Pana Mining Company, and the Chicago-Virden Company, whose mine at Virden was the largest coal producer in the state. Chicago-Virden attempted to unload a train of strikebreakers on September 28, 1898, but the town was teeming with armed miners, and the engineer refused to stop. By October 12, 1898, the company was ready to try again. As the train bearing the strikebreakers and armed guards stopped at the mine, heavy gunfire erupted between the miners and the company guards, killing eleven men and wounding at least thirty-five others. Shortly afterward, Governor John R. Tanner sent in the national guard to keep the peace. Meanwhile at Pana, black imports were working the mines behind a protective stockade. The governor had sent in the militia in late September with direct orders not to permit any further importation of scabs at either place. By November 1898 Chicago-Virden accepted defeat, released the blacks, and returned the workplaces to their old miners.\textsuperscript{16}

The disposition of the six hundred blacks crowded into filthy and cramped quarters amidst a sea of white hostility at Pana remained unsettled, however. The tension, which rose higher every day inside the black enclave, was equaled among the white blockaders. A traveler passing through Pana observed that "the men have the Afro-phobia so
badly that the colored porters on the trains crawl under the seats” when the train goes through the town. An aged miner who had been among the white pickets told an interviewer that the terms scab, strikebreaker, and Negro were used synonymously by the established miners. On April 10, 1899, the sheriff of Pana arrested a black strikebreaker and ignited a full-scale race riot between some five hundred whites and a similar number of blacks. In this bloody confrontation seven persons were killed and fourteen were wounded. With virtually no public support from the Illinois populace or the state government, the Pana Company buckled under heavy political pressure, accepted defeat, and entrained the remaining blacks for points south and west.

Testifying before the U.S. Industrial Commission, UMWA President John Mitchell justified the actions of the miners by saying that the black strikebreakers had “taken the places of white miners” and had “driven them from the towns they developed, where they have been living all their lives.” After the Virden riot a small hotel nearby was turned into a temporary morgue. Mitchell, who was raised in the mining camp of Braidwood, Illinois, and had witnessed the turbulent Braidwood strike of 1877, arrived shortly after the battle. Some time later he commented that he would never forget the scene at that hotel: “There were six dead union miners laid out on the floor. All of them had left their homes in other mining towns to come to Virden to assist the miners of Virden to protect their homes from the imported ‘criminals’ and ‘ex-convicts’ from Alabama.” Letters in the United Mine Workers Journal from miners in the district reflect the same sentiments. One correspondent denounced the Pana-Virden imports as a “horde” of “Darkies,” and warned that if blacks continued to come north, “it would be bad for them, bad for the community, bad for all labor.”

Historians have amply demonstrated that racism was a powerful force above the Ohio River even before the importation of strikebreakers. During the antebellum period, for example, the Illinois constitution of 1848 barred free blacks from entering the state, and a harsh black code made life difficult for those who already lived in the state. Although Illinois was the first state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment and repealed its black code, racial attitudes did not change dramatically after the Civil War. Nevertheless, antebellum attitudes do not fully explain the many local ordinances which prohibited blacks from crossing the city limits or remaining in town after dark. Many of these towns were postwar settlements of European immigrants whose racism did not spring from the same cultural reservoir as that of older-stock Americans. One scholar, who has studied black strikebreaking in Illinois during this period, found that at least fifty-two towns had unwritten ordinances to the same effect. He concludes that these local restrictions and the racial antagonism which
convulsed the state of Illinois between 1865 and 1900 "stemmed to a large extent, from the use of black strikebreakers."24

Some of Illinois's most important coal-mining towns followed the practice of racial exclusion. When rumors circulated through the northern Illinois coal district in 1889 that trainloads of blacks were coming, the Chicago Tribune predicted that rioting would be the result, for "the miners of LaSalle, Peru, and Spring Valley do not allow a Negro in their city limits."25 Similarly, several coal towns in the southern part of the state prohibited blacks from living inside the city limits or remaining there after dark. Herrin, for example, had such an ordinance until the 1950s. Carterville, another southern Illinois coal town, also prohibited blacks within its limits. Consequently, when the union miners struck the St. Louis and Muddy River mines at Carterville in 1898 and 1899, the union erected Union City, a hamlet for the handful of resident black strikers evicted from company houses. Near the shaft of the same mine was a small cluster of shacks called Dewmaine, where black strikebreakers were housed during the strike. This hamlet never numbered more than a few hundred people, but long afterwards blacks continued to live in this nearly all-black enclave.26 Although Braidwood was composed of immigrants from a number of European countries, 75 percent of them were British. The first blacks were imported during the bitter strike of 1877, and those who remained lived in a segregated black quarter called Bucktown.27

This exclusionary pattern often was extended to the workplace as well. For example, in 1878 about 50 percent of the Vermillion Coal Company's miners were black, and they worked almost exclusively in a mine by themselves. That year Braidwood's white miners decided to strike over the question of black employment and once again contemplated driving blacks from the town.28 One Braidwood man defended the black miners in an 1881 letter published by the National Labor Tribune. He noted frequent articles which complained that "wherever the laboring class struck for their rights the negro would go and break the strike." Such was the case in Braidwood, he observed but only because blacks "could no more get work here until the year 1877 than they could fly." Capitalists were not responsible for their exclusion; it was the miners themselves. Even as he wrote, blacks were permitted to work at only two of the twelve shafts in the vicinity, and if Negroes were discharged for union activity, they had to leave the area to find other employment. Union membership, he continued, offered Braidwood blacks meager protection, and in "nine cases out of ten the miners are to blame for it." The working class had enough of a battle to gain its rights from capital, the Braidwood man observed, "without fighting against six million of people that have got to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow."29
In Ohio’s Hocking Valley black strikebreakers remained segregated in the original colonies created for them by the coal companies. For example, the town of Rendville was established by operator William Rend for his black imports, and well into the twentieth century the town was still nearly half black. This was the case with other black colonies in the Hocking Valley also, such as those at Buchtel and Congo. Where blacks were settled in established towns, such as Corn­ning, they were restricted to peripheral Negro sections. Exclusion also applied to the workplace, just as it did in Braidwood and other towns of the Central Competitive Field. Thus, Rend mine number 3 was the “Negro mine” along the Sunday Creek, and blacks found themselves almost entirely excluded from work in the other mines.\(^{30}\)

Blacks were excluded not only because they had been scabs but because they had been black scabs. The *Hocking Sentinel* was still hurling abuse at the onetime strikebreakers in 1886, when it reminded its readers that “the negro colony at Corning was established for the purpose of breaking down, driving out, or degrading the white workers in the mines.”\(^{31}\) Similarly, an 1895 editorial in the *New Lexington Tribune* denounced the black miners at Rendville as a “horde of barbarian niggers,” who had been colonized in the town as strikebreakers and “drove the white men out of their houses and compelled white women and children to settle in dugouts.” Ever since, the editor concluded, Rendville had been a “pest place of industrial leprosy that has infested our valley.”\(^{32}\)

In contrast, ten years earlier, during the Hocking strike of 1884-1885, when only fifty of the fifteen hundred imported strikebreakers were black, the valley press had been surprisingly restrained. George Cotkin, a close student of the strike, concludes that the white miners in that case “viewed the strikebreakers as misguided and uninformed, but morally innocent.” The white strikers perceived the white scabs as “pitiable men robbed of their basic human dignity” and refused to attack the strikebreakers because “they saw them as fellow victims of a harsh economic system.” Significantly, when frustration finally pushed some of the strikers to destructiveness, it was directed primarily against company houses. Many of the strikers had been evicted from these dwellings, and as one reporter observed, the strikers were “goaded to madness” after being evicted from their homes.\(^{33}\)

The introduction of black strikebreakers into the coal camps of the Central Competitive Field often sparked the fires of racial antagonism which destroyed all hope for a peaceful resolution of conflict. This reaction was particularly likely where the established white miners refused to waver in their determination to retain complete control over jobs or to alter their conception of community. When that occurred the defenses of both groups were so heightened that assimilation became
virtually impossible. Where white miners successfully altered this pattern and adjusted to the new racial composition of their communities, however, the welfare of both groups was served. At Coal Creek, Indiana, for example, black imports were brought in to break a strike of the Miners' National Association in 1878. It was not long before violence erupted between local residents and some of the new arrivals. On April 18 a company of militia retired to a local saloon after drilling all day. When an altercation occurred between them and several of the scabs, the militiamen grabbed their firearms, shot four blacks to death, and wounded a white blackleg named "Buffalo Bill." The incident quickly polarized the contending factions in the dispute, and the passions of local white citizens were fanned to a white heat. As a precaution, the operators placed seventy-five rifles in the hands of the black scabs with directions to defend themselves if threatened. From the white unionists' point of view, importing blacks was a loathsome act, and arming them was dangerous, but when the company began to pay the scabs in the all-white town of Knightsville, they added insult to injury by bringing the pariahs into unavoidable contact with the white miners' families.34

Tensions were heightened to the point of explosion the following month during the trial, when Frank Kelly, the leading witness for the defense of the white militiamen, passed several black miners and, without a word drew a revolver, shot one of them dead, and wounded two others. Pursued by armed blacks, Kelly then ran up a ravine where he took refuge in a friend's house. The irate blacks surrounded the building and peppered it with bullets, wounding Kelly and another of the occupants. A major race riot appeared imminent as forty-five blacks from Joliet set out for Coal Creek to help the outnumbered blacks defend themselves, but a large number of deputized citizens intervened and arrested the principals in the affray.35

By the following year, however, circumstances in the Coal Creek district had improved dramatically. A union official wrote in the National Labor Tribune that he and a fellow organizer had stopped at Coal Creek; he was proud to report that organization is progressing there even beyond our most sanguine expectations among both white and colored, for now the two colors meet on the most fraternal terms, and all express their firm determination to pull together and work in harmony for the future, without any distinction as to color. This is as it should be, for our interests are identical. We must meet the colored men on fraternal terms, for we must not elevate ourselves by trying to keep them down. We must try to bring them up to our level, and it will not take so great an effort as many might imagine, for to our shame be it said, the colored men (according to their chances) are ahead of many of our white men on the principles of organization, and they do not seem to be so much afraid of it.36
A similar sequence evolved at the mine camps along Grape Creek, in Vermilion County, Illinois, where members of the National Federation of Miners and Mine Laborers went on strike in May 1886. Some of the men belonging to the Knights of Labor refused to go out, however, and a battle over jurisdiction ensued. Apparently few, if any, blacks worked at these mines, for a local black minister declared: "It is not our fight. It is the white man's fight, and when Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of war. Let the fur fly." 37 It did not remain a white man's fight for long, however, for the operators soon imported black strike-breakers from the South to break the impasse. By July more than a hundred blacks were working in the pits vacated by the eight hundred to a thousand white miners. Outraged by their presence, the white strikers attacked the black scabs, driving them out of the mines. Within a week, however, the scabs had returned under armed protection, and by August frequent additions had increased their number to three hundred. The whites were evicted from company houses and forced to live in makeshift huts and to subsist on donations from the union and local charity. 38

Sporadic confrontations between the white strikers and black scabs punctuated the cold war which ensued. Whites refused to leave the district and jobs they saw as rightfully theirs, while blacks insisted on their right to work for whomever saw fit to employ them. Because of the ever-present danger of attack and probably to further undermine the white miners' position, the operators armed the black imports, leading one miner to complain that the blacks came there penniless but in a weeks's time acquired "a new suit of clothes, new shoes and pistol in their pockets." Apparently they did not keep the weapons in their pockets either, for several confrontations occurred where mines claimed that some of the blacks had imbibed too much liquor and waved pistols under the noses of offending whites. Nothing outraged the white men more, and one of them warned that "the colored men are going to force the white men to extreme measures." 39

Out of sheer destitution, however, the white strikes were forced to capitulate by the following year. Many of the blacks left for other fields, but others stayed. Eventually, the two groups recognized each other's position, and a new era of cooperation emerged. A decade later, UMWA official William Scaife visited the Grape Creek local and found the miners thoroughly organized. More significantly, he was "pleased to see so many colored men acting as officials on the local." These were the same Afro-Americans who had been imported as scabs during the 1886-1887 strike, but subsequently the white men recognized that they were there to stay, and if labor was to advance, miners of both races had to cooperate. Apparently the black miners responded positively, for Scaife observed that they had "joined hands with the whites to make
the union a success." One of those black miners, S.C. Armstrong, urged other blacks to join the union and rejected the common misapprehension among blacks that the union would discriminate against them. Armstrong himself claimed to hold "more offices than I know what to do with" and at the time was serving on the tipple in the elective position of checkweighman.

The exclusionary pattern was not confined to the Central Competitive Field but prevailed wherever the struggle for job control by established white miners worked itself out along racial lines. In these cases, black strikebreaking initiated a course of social conflict in which white strikers erected protective barriers, blacks demanded the right to work, and the white community rushed to the support of the strikers in order to keep the particular coal town lily white. This scenario developed even in the far Northwest when blacks were imported to replace striking whites at the Oregon Improvement Company mines in Franklin County, Washington, in 1891. Union troubles had erupted in 1886 when the Knights of Labor organized a walkout against OIC, and the company suppressed the union's drive by force. Out of this experience and the tumultuous period of labor-management relations which followed grew OIC's determination to eliminate unionists from its work force by replacing them with blacks.

The company manager, H.W. McNeill, had acquired experience with black strikebreakers during the early eighties when he imported them to break strikes at his mines in southeastern Iowa. It was McNeill who recommended that the company hire T.B. Corey as OIC superintendent when new rumblings of discontent were heard from the miners in 1890. As mine superintendent at Braidwood, Illinois, since the seventies, Corey had had considerable experience in managing black strikebreakers. His first move after accepting the OIC position was to make an extended recruiting tour of Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Illinois, where large numbers of southern blacks had also been imported. The largest single contingent of the five hundred blacks assembled by Corey came from Braidwood, Illinois, where he persuaded one hundred men to accompany him to the state of Washington. Before the first trainload of strikebreakers arrived, the white miners learned their black replacements were on the way and walked out of the pits en masse. On May 17, 1891, the white strikers assembled at the depot to meet the imports, but the company detrained them at a secret location and marched them to the safety of the heavily guarded mine encampment.

By July approximately a thousand men were on strike in the field, and miners from several other local companies had joined the walkout. The scabs worked under heavy protection, and production was soon back to prestrike levels. When OIC moved several hundred additional
blacks into its Newcastle mine on June 27, the strikers, who had organized themselves into quasi-military units of Home Guards, attacked twice but were driven back by the superior fire power of the private guards. Over a thousand shots were exchanged in this battle, leaving two men dead and seven more wounded.\textsuperscript{44}

The suppression of the Home Guard by the state militia and Pinkerton detectives finally broke the strike, and a few white miners returned to work along side the blacks. With the strike crushed, and the blacks firmly in control of the strikers' jobs, an exodus of whites from Franklin County began to other fields, particularly British Columbia. Those who remained shared the available work with blacks.\textsuperscript{45}

For many of the white miners the experience must have been more than vaguely reminiscent of earlier encounters with black imports, for a significant number of the white miners had come from northern Illinois, particularly Braidwood and Streator, which had endured considerable unrest and violence over the importation of Afro-American blacklegs. When the pits were opened in Washington, the companies recruited these experienced white miners from Illinois, some of whom almost certainly had been displaced by blacks during the troubles of the seventies. Some Illinois whites also accompanied Corey when he was first hired by OIC in 1890; others had accompanied another operator, who moved from Streator and opened a mine in Roslyn, Washington, in the eighties.\textsuperscript{46} No doubt these northern Illinois miners carried with them their notions of community and job control, for the black importation prompted one striker to ponder whether miners "who worked long years in a place, built their homes there, humble though they may be," were simply "base chattels, that they should be cast away without cause?" Through the importation of hundreds of Afro-Americans, protested another white striker, the miners have "built houses which are now (to them) absolutely worthless." The injuries sustained by the white strikers consolidated the support of other segments of the mining communities if not the state authorities, behind them. Public indignation meetings, concerts, and other social affairs, were sponsored in towns throughout the field "for the benefit of the wronged men."\textsuperscript{47}

The racial nature of the conflict was apparent to the newspaper reporters who covered the story. For example, the \textit{Cincinnati Enquirer} headlined articles about the troubles in Washington as "The Race War." The entire white community of Franklin, Washington, turned out to mourn the death of two strikers slain in a battle between the Home Guards and the company gunmen. "Every white miner in the camp marched in the procession, an escort of military being furnished to protect them while passing through the black camp," the Cincinnati newsman reported. Four hundred black miners watched from behind
the lines of soldiers, but neither side spoke to the other. That hatred of scabs and hatred of blacks were inextricably entwined in this episode is obvious in the comments of a white miner who swallowed his pride and went back to work in the integrated pits:

Now the condition of the white man at Franklin and Newcastle is to work with the negro, and mingle with him, and be very careful not to insult him, and the worst of all the white man's children have to go to the same school, same room and same class as the negroes. I am not at all prejudiced against the negro race, but in this case, were even the same class of whites, if picked up as the dregs of their own people as those people are of theirs, it does not look right. Even decent and respectable colored people I believe would object to have their children mingle with bad influences.

Job control was the root of this labor conflict, however, just as it was in the Central Competitive Field. Similarly, the hostilities thus generated took on a racial quality because the scabs were black. The two hatreds mutually reinforced one another. As one of the white strikers declared: "not a great while ago, the miners could tell the pit boss who to employ and who not to employ, and when he could employ a man. In fact, the pit boss had not the authority to hire or discharge a man without consulting the miners." This was too much worker job control for the OIC, however, and the company demanded the right to employ and discharge whomever it pleased. "Here the miners objected and next the negroes were brought to the mines."

In western districts where coal mining was not firmly established as a white occupation, a racial definition of job control could not take firm root. As a consequence, the pattern of strikebreaking more closely resembled the southern model of racial inclusion, rather than the Central Competitive Field model of exclusion. This pattern usually was reflected in the union's inability to present a solid phalanx in its resistance to the importation of blacks and in its inability to apply a racial definition to the friends and foes of organized labor. Such was the case in Kansas where the original white miners themselves were ideologically divided over the benefits of unionization. Here the various segments of the mining community, like the miners themselves, responded to black importation according to the perceived interests of each faction.

The coal industry in Kansas was concentrated in the two southeastern counties of Crawford and Cherokee, which produced 85 percent of the state's coal. The ethnically diverse Kansas miners had only begun to organize in 1893 when the infant UMWA attempted to force the companies to recognize it as the miners' bargaining agent. The operators quickly scuttled the movement, however, by importing 375 nonunion blacks to run the mines at Weir City and Yale. The imports
stayed on after the strike was broken and became a permanent component of the population. The UMWA regrouped after its initial defeat, and on May 13, 1899, another strike for union recognition was launched against the “Big Four,” as the largest producers were called. Once again the coal companies sought to maintain production by importing black miners from outside the state, particularly Alabama. Social conditions were sufficiently demoralizing in Alabama that blacks were prepared to leave the state for a more hospitable climate, and the operators sent two labor agents, one black and one white, to provide them with the transportation. In June 1899 the agents posted broadsides in the Birmingham district announcing: “Wanted! Colored Coal Miners for Weir City, Kansas . . . the paradise [sic] for colored people.” Another announcement urged black miners to “get ready and join your friends in the land of plenty” at Weir City, Kansas where several hundred miners were at work already. The companies used another common vehicle for recruiting miners, the “colored orator,” a preacher who extolled the virtues of Kansas as a less restricted social environment.51

Between June 13 and September 14, 1899, trains bearing 1,300 blacks rolled out of Alabama and into the Kansas strike district. Many blacks were recruited from areas other than Alabama as well. About 175 came from Tennessee, and 300 of the 450 black strikebreakers from Pana, Illinois, also went to Kansas. Approximately 300 of the Afro-American imports hailed from West Virginia.52

Blacks did not meet the same resistance in Kansas as they did in the Central Competitive Field because the miners themselves were too fragmented to erect a solid barrier to the importation. For one thing, the UMWA had failed to organize a sizable percentage of the white miners, and the nonunion whites refused to strike. Worried about the potential for conflict between the unionists and nonunionists in the white community of Weir City, the mayor warned the governor that “terrible feeling exists between the men and it is going to be a war to the death.” Since imported blacks could not be viewed as the only source of the unionists’ problem, a fixation on their blackness was also more difficult than in the Central Competitive Field. Moreover, like the whites, some blacks joined the UMWA, and others refused. Therefore, white miners tended to respond to the new blacks according to whether they were allies or enemies on the union issue, rather than judging them on the basis of race. Instead of insisting on exclusion, the union men actively recruited the black imports and happily accepted as union brothers those who joined the UMWA cause.53

Similarly, the coal district electorate was politically split between “Popocrats” (Populist-Democrats) and Republicans. Even though the Republican mayor of Weir City “hated to see the niggers come,” it
pleased him that the imports were all Republicans. On the other hand, the Cherokee County sheriff, chief of the Democratic machine, was the most vocal public opponent of the blacks. He reportedly deputized sixteen Popocrats in one coal town to prevent the Negroes from voting. Unlike the community and state politicians in Illinois, who exploited the importation of a despised race for partisan advantage, neither political faction in Cherokee County could prevail, and the response of each group was held in check by the other. 54

Nor was militant unionism restricted to whites. Milton Reed became a UMWA convert and argued in a compelling voice for the union cause. Born in Selma, Alabama, Reed was seventeen when he migrated to Kansas in 1893 as a strikebreaker. He soon became convinced that the UMWA cause was just, however, and began organizing other blacks in the field. When the 1899 strike brought an additional influx of fifteen hundred black scabs into the Kansas coalfield, UMWA District 14 officials chose Reed to shepherd them into the fold. He was so successful that the UMWA appointed him to the post of organizer in 1901. Reed was not blind to racial prejudice among the white strikers, but he drew a sharp distinction between class conflict and race conflict. He cautioned white union men not to confuse their distaste for scabs with racial prejudice and warned them that “if the object was to drive out the colored man he would have to object.” 55

Although blacks suffered a degree of social discrimination in the Kansas coal towns, there was relative equality in the pits. As one old black miner recalled, “the damps and rock falls didn’t care what color you were.” Locals were integrated, also, and when the 1899 strike was over, four of the union representatives who signed the contract between the UMWA and the companies were blacks who had originally migrated from Alabama as scabs. In 1901 Isaac Starr, a black miner of Fleming, was elected local president. Blacks who came to Kansas found a small but viable black community, complete with established social institutions to help new arrivals cope, and put down roots. Black churches and fraternal lodges were established in mining towns throughout Kansas, and two black newspapers, the Weir City Eagle and the Cherokee, Kansas, Homestead, were founded shortly after the 1899 strike. 56 The very existence of these social institutions indicates an atmosphere very different from that blacks encountered in the coalfields of Ohio or Illinois. The more than one thousand blacks who remained in the coal district of Kansas were accepted by whites as having a legitimate place in the community. 57

Two views have dominated the historical treatment of the Afro-American role in strikebreaking. One is the “willing tools” interpretation. Three decades ago historian Ray Ginger observed that scholars of American labor “generally accepted the twin theses that Negroes as a
group were anti-union, and that Negroes in many instances served voluntarily as strikebreakers." He argued that Wisconsin school economists Selig Perlman and Philip Taft had presented a superficial and distorted view of the dynamics of black strikebreaking when they contended that the violent conflict at Pana and Virden was between two distinct groups, "armed [white] miners versus negro strikebreakers armed with rifles and shotguns." The second prominent interpretation cast black strikebreakers in the mold of "ignorant serfs" and was best articulated by Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, who contended that the "Negro's availability as a strikebreaker has been due to his complete ignorance not only as to what a strike or union was, but even what a factory was. Most of the colored labor used to break strikes came straight from the farms without any previous industrial contacts."

In addition, from selective factual evidence, both interpretations assume that black strikebreakers were an undifferentiated group. Yet a close examination of Afro-American strikebreakers in the American coalfields reveals a considerable diversity of backgrounds and motivations among them. Most were neither "willing tools" nor "ignorant serfs" but poor, ambitious men recruited by coal company agents under false pretenses. Many white strikers believed that blacks so deceived by the companies were "more to be pitied than blamed for their acts." Upon discovering the actual reason for their presence in a strike zone, most blacks made their departure as soon as possible. The labor press is replete with stories of company deception and black withdrawal. A wide variety of sources demonstrate that blacks recruited to Kansas in 1889 were unaware that a strike was in progress until they arrived, and one newspaper editor called for the prosecution of the recruiting agent for issuing "misleading statements to the innocent colored miners." Afro-Americans went to Kansas seeking a better life, and a social climate where, as one old miner recalled, "you can be free!" They were an assortment of young and old, married and single—all looking for a brighter future. Nevertheless, a large percentage of them left to look for work in other states when they found that a strike was in progress, not wishing to "make anybody's condition bad or worse than their own." The United Mine Workers Journal reported that of the 175 blacks shipped to Weir City from Tennessee, only 13 stayed on to work in the mines. Of the 162 who refused to work, 100 joined the Weir City local, and 62 presumably left for other fields or returned home. A Weir City correspondent reported that several hundred had been imported, "but somehow or other they leave almost as fast as the companies ship them in."

The Pana-Virden troubles represented the most complex strike-breaking events in the northern coalfields during this era and also
displayed a diversity among the Negro imports reflective of black imports elsewhere in the region. It is clear that the first trainloads of blacks recruited from the Birmingham, Alabama, district were the victims of deception. An advertisement placed in a Birmingham newspaper announced the desire to employ one hundred black miners but implied that Kansas would be their destination when in fact they were bound for Pana, Illinois. So many blacks were eager for good jobs elsewhere that agents immediately secured two hundred recruits who agreed to make the trip. These initial imports included union and nonunion miners, farmers, and other workers simply looking for a better life. When the Illinois state mine inspector examined one group of the Alabama blacks he found that some of the men were competent miners but others were not.

Skilled or not, nearly all of the first two hundred imports left the Pana-Virden district upon learning of the strike. According to one report, "sixty-five negroes who left the Springside mine camps yesterday have notified their friends at Birmingham, Woodard, and Bessemer, Ala., of the conditions existing here, advising them to have nothing to do within the propositions to come to Pana." The union transported thirty-seven of these men to Chicago, and twenty back to Alabama. Others simply "walked out of town in different directions on the railroads [tracks] during the night." UMWA International President Michael Ratchford notified Alabama district president, Michael Fairley, that the importation must be stopped at its source, although so far "those who arrived here refused to work, and have joined the union or left the state."

Within a few weeks another train bearing one hundred Alabama blacks arrived at Virden, but the engineer pressed the throttle forward when he saw crowds of angry miners lining the tracks. No sooner had the train finally stopped in Springfield, when UMWA district president John Hunter climbed aboard and induced the weary and shaken passengers to accompany him to union headquarters. The men had been on the train for two days, and Hunter arranged to have them fed before pleading with them not to take the place of the white strikers. He assured them that the union would provide transportation back to their homes if they would refuse to work. They voted to follow this course with "not a vote being cast against the proposition." The black company agent had accompanied the group, and when he attempted to stem the shift of opinion among his recruits, they turned on him. The angry and disillusioned imports denounced him for telling them that the strike had been over for six months, and that the white miners had gone to fight in the Spanish-American War. Hunter called on the group to vote whether they would support the union by standing, and instantly one hundred men jumped to their feet. "This is pretty
tough," one downcast man lamented, "I wanted to come here and work right off as I only got 90 cents a day for driving mules. Now I have lost my job at home and don't know what to do. I guess all I can do is stick with the rest of the crowd." Within a few days they were back home in Birmingham, unemployed.

Operators who assumed that they were importing a race of miners who would meekly accept any treatment meted out to them frequently were dismayed to find otherwise. Upon learning that a strike was underway, blacks imported in 1899 to break a strike at Ardmore, Missouri, refused to have anything to do with the company. One correspondent reported that "some of those colored folks are ex-presidents of U.M.W. of A. locals and Master Workmen, and some are members of the K. of L. Assembly." Moreover, they absolutely refused to live in the stockade ostensibly erected for their protection from the strikers. "No, sah! We is free people, we uns need no guards; we's able to take care of ourselves," one black miner declared. The guards failed to convince the men that the white strikers were "going to murder them."

Some black imports resisted the will of their white bosses even more forcefully. At Cleveland, Iowa, one mine boss was hit in the head and knocked insensible during an argument with a strikebreaker. Similarly, at Lehigh, Indian Territory, a black import punched the foreman and then struck him with a shovel. Another scab in Indian Territory "chased a foreman up the ladder at No. 6 shaft, and it is said no straw-boss ever flew heavenward faster than did that one." When a company official visited the Negro boardinghouse at Six, he found a black scab packing his belongings to leave. The official informed the man that he was not permitted to leave, "whereupon the colored gentleman unlimbered a rapid-fire razor and went after this high mightiness, who ran like a Filipino."

Yet even though a large proportion of black imports were victims of deception, by no means was this universally true. Oregon Improvement Company superintendent, T.B. Corey, claimed that among the blacks he recruited there were "300 to 350 practical miners, besides a number of mechanics and men necessary about the mines." Many had worked under Corey at Braidwood, Illinois, and he could have secured an additional three hundred experienced men if he had needed them. One of Corey's black strikebreakers confirmed this claim when he stated that there were "about 300 miners along and all are old hands. I have been mining in Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Iowa." Although many of the first blacks imported to Washington had been deceived and subsequently left the district, those who came afterward can only be described as seasoned scabs.

A similar pattern prevailed in the Pana-Virden strike. The initial
three or four hundred black imports left the district upon learning that a work stoppage was underway, but the scabs who followed were made in a different mold. They were tough men determined to gain employment at any cost, and if that meant conflict with men on strike, they were prepared to fight. Undoubtedly, most were simply nonunionists who saw their bread coming from the employers rather than the union. Yet, it is certain that many of the imports of the second wave were seasoned scabs, self-acknowledged strikebreakers who earned a living by moving from one strike to another, serving the interests of the companies in times of trouble. After the strike at Pana was settled in the spring of 1899, most of the black imports were shipped to Texas, Kansas, Missouri, and Indian Territory to break other strikes. Certainly these men were far different from the first wave of blacks imported into the Pana-Virden district. And neither group was representative of the much smaller number of established black miners who adhered to class interests during the dispute.

Black strikebreaking in the Central Competitive Field followed a fundamentally different pattern than in the Deep South, therefore. The major reason for this difference lay in the nature of job control, which meant inclusion of blacks in UMWA struggles in Alabama but exclusion in the northern fields. An excess of racial prejudice existed in the coalfields of both regions, but blacks held neither an established nor numerical position in the fields above the Ohio River as they did in Alabama. In the northern fields the negative view of black imports as unwelcome outsiders and scabs was compounded by their race. Racial violence was, therefore, more easily rationalized in the northern fields, where racism found apparent justification in material economic conditions. There, the race issue was used by white strikers to undermine the operators’ public position and to reinforce white solidarity. In Alabama, however, the race issue was employed by the operators to destroy unity among the black and white strikers and to alienate any public sympathy for the unionists. In the northern fields the union’s struggle for job control worked in tandem with racial prejudice; in Alabama prejudice worked against the union’s goals.

The same basic pattern operated in the western coalfields, where similar circumstances prevailed. The Washington coalfield resembled the Central Competitive model, with few established blacks in the industry and a strong class consciousness expressed in the union’s struggle for job control. On the other hand, these conditions did not prevail in Kansas, where the union was fragmented, and black imports, like whites, were found inside as well as outside the union. There, exclusion was impossible. Consequently, although Kansas was more open socially, black occupational participation more closely resembled the inclusionary model of the Deep South, and blacks were
more easily absorbed because whites did not possess a firmly established racial position. The experience of blacks in the Central Competitive Field reveals the truth behind the sage observation of black scholars Horace Cayton and George Mitchell that it was difficult for Afro-American workers to “find a secure place in an older order” where they held no established position in either the mining occupation or the coal community.
Social relations in the northern coal communities were severely strained by the importation of black strikebreakers from the South, and these tensions carried over into the fledgling UMWA’s local and district organizations. Racial and ethnic prejudices confronted the union at every turn, but so too did the awareness that a broader ideological unity was essential to the survival of the organization. With its highly diverse ethnic and racial composition, a membership scattered in independent rural or semirural communities where local prejudices could easily prevail over union principles, and an industrial basis of organization, the UMWA was compelled to forge a class-conscious identity among its members or fail. William H. Crawford, a white miner of New Straitsville, Ohio, articulated the problem very clearly in 1893:

An Irishman has no confidence in an Englishman, an Englishman no confidence in a Welshman, a Welshman no confidence in a Dutchman, a Negro no confidence in a Yankee and a Yankee no confidence in the Negro, and *vice versa*, all around. Then the Methodist don’t like the Catholic, nor the Catholic the Methodist, and so on throughout the various religious sects. . . . We all know that is the logical result of such a course and can see the blighting effects of it upon every hand. All of us believe in the principle that in union there is strength. Then let us lay aside all of our wicked prejudice and come together in fact as well as in form.¹

At Long Run, Dillonvale, and Laurelton, Ohio, the black UMWA organizer, Richard L. Davis, found in 1892, that at least two-thirds of the one thousand miners were Hungarians, Poles, Slavs, Bohemians, and Belgians, who spoke little or no English and nearly all of whom were unorganized. Davis was successful in establishing UMWA locals in three of the towns, but the ethnic mix complicated organizing the men as well as conducting business after the union local was established. When officers were chosen at Long Run, for example, among
them were "one Hungarian, one negro, one Polander, one Slav, and one white [native born]." 2

Clearly, the union needed to find a common bond to unify such a disparate mixture of people if it was to survive, and progressive miners of every stripe consciously sought to create a brotherhood based on craft. The union's official organ was remarkably open to commentary and complaints from all of its members and the editor readily used the paper to educate. As John Kane, the editor of the United Mine Workers Journal, proclaimed in 1892: "This paper was established by the miners and for the miners, not by the white miners nor for the white miners, no more than by the colored nor for the colored miners." In essence, the Journal was founded upon "the liberality which recognizes man . . . as nature and God made him." 3 Most prominent UMWA officials recognized the validity of this position. 4

Even though the UMWA made remarkable progress in forging class unity among the various nationality groups in the northern fields, however, the union encountered innumerable barriers at all levels to inspiring class consciousness among blacks. One of the greatest obstacles was the unity among blacks themselves, which centuries of racism had served to engender. The collective black experience had taught them that their survival depended on racial solidarity. Episodes of racial discrimination, of course, reinforced this group wisdom and posed the constant threat that blacks would recoil from class unity into racial solidarity.

The experiences of Richard L. Davis, one of the most militant unionists of the 1890s, are illustrative. Davis was sent to mediate a racial dispute at a mine near his hometown of Rendville, Ohio. A black miner had been elevated to foreman and some of the whites refused to work under him, thus angering the black miners who threatened to withdraw from the union if such behavior was permitted. Some of the blacks, Davis observed, were convinced that they would "never do any good until they organize to themselves." Davis was able to convince the black miners that such an action was unwise, but he prayed the day would soon arrive when workers ceased fighting among themselves over such matters. Davis's class consciousness apparently was a constant irritant to that segment of Afro-American miners at Rendville whose militancy was grounded in race. On several occasions Davis came into serious conflict with his race-conscious opponents, as in 1896 when the race men went so far as to threaten to remove Davis as checkweighman for being a traitor to the race. Davis was the most prominent black miner of his day to speak for class over racial solidarity, but others echoed his position over the decades that followed, and the problem continued for decades. 5

The antiunion attitudes of middle-class black spokesmen pre-
presented another serious obstacle to the development of class consciousness among black miners in the North during the union’s early decades. Booker T. Washington, the most prominent black spokesman of that era, was vocal in his conviction that the interests of black workers were best served by an alliance with capitalists rather than the labor movement. Some of Washington’s closest white friends were, in fact, the same captains of industry whom the class-conscious union leaders considered their enemies. According to historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, the Accommodator’s attitude toward labor is attributable “chiefly to his general petit-bourgeois outlook and mentality, and his close relationships with white capitalist-philanthropists” who financed his educational efforts at Tuskegee Institute. 

Washington’s insistence that unions stood between black workers and their employers and sought “to make a monopoly of the opportunities of labor” drew heavy fire from the editor and readers of the United Mine Workers Journal for stirring up “a bitter antagonism” against blacks “where none should exist.” Class-conscious black miners also criticized Washington’s antiunionism. W.E. Clark, of Ohio, informed readers of the Journal that Washington was to black workers what J.P. Morgan was to white workers: they both belonged to “the 400.” At least one black UMWA organizer, George H. Edmunds, wrote to the race leader directly, requesting that he clarify his stance on whether blacks should join unions. The Accommodator offered a weak and perfunctory response and did nothing to counter the impression that he was antiunion.

Unlike most unions, which excluded blacks, the UMWA openly accepted them as full members. Still, their near invisibility in local, district, and national elective offices in the northern fields served as a reminder to black miners of just how successful whites had been in blocking their entry into the coalfields above the Ohio River. To be sure, some blacks had achieved positions of leadership by sheer power of personality, and others because some white miners were progressive enough to recognize the legitimacy of their need for representation in policy-level positions. As a rule, however, only by appointment to such offices as international organizer could blacks obtain office in the union’s administrative hierarchy.

Concern over the lack of black representation on the national executive board, for example, was manifest at the very first UMWA convention and continued to be a recurrent issue for the next thirty years. Blacks demanded racial representation, but whites were reluctant to make that concession on the grounds that the constitution did not permit distinctions on the basis of race, religion, or nationality. As might be expected, R.L. Davis was at the center of the storm during the nineties. One of the earliest Davis letters printed in the United Mine
Workers Journal, in fact, dealt with this very issue. In reading over the names sent for national officers, he wrote, he could not find the name of a single Negro: "Now I wish to say that these things should not be left for the colored men to mention, but you white men should see that one colored man is elected. . . . So I say, by all means, let us have one of them and put him to work, give the poor negro a chance, it's high time this was being done." At a meeting in Rendville, presided over by national UMWA Secretary-Treasurer Patrick McBryde and local officers, black miners sharply questioned the union officers on the matter of representation. One of them declared that he was unwilling to remain in the organization because there were no black salaried officers. In his opinion, this proved that the UMWA was an organization "entirely of the white man, and he (the negro) is simply paying his money to build up the white men of the country, while the poor negro must be satisfied with being a member of the organization just to keep it going." Davis pointed to similar incidents throughout the 1890s and urged UMWA officials to insure black representation in the union's hierarchy, but his insistence aroused the ire of several white miners who vigorously reacted against this demand. Davis responded to each of them in equally heated fashion, and a debate over guaranteeing membership to blacks on the international executive board grew into a major controversy which raged for months until the editor brought it to an inconclusive end in 1893.

Little had changed in this regard over twenty years later. By then the demand for black representation at the international level became bound up with broader issues of power within the UMWA. Disputes over administrative jurisdiction of the locals, the districts, and the national organization became endemic in the UMWA by the twenties because locals and districts traditionally enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. District officials, in particular, rebelled when international officials attempted to usurp their power, as occurred when the UMWA president appointed international organizers. District presidents also had that power, and disputes inevitably arose in cases when international organizers were sent into a district. Even though they were supposed to work under the direction of the district president, the latter could exercise little control over organizers whose loyalties were to the international office. Those whose interests were served by district autonomy naturally advocated the election of international organizers, which would give the districts effective leverage over the organizers, while those who favored a strong central administration favored appointment of the organizers by the international president. Because they believed they were discriminated against by local and district officials who were subject to direct pressures from racist constituents and because as a minority they could not ensure the election of black
organizers, blacks sided with centralists on this very important question. This struggle shaped the main course of UMWA politics during the twenties, as John L. Lewis struggled to become the dominant figure in a centrally controlled union. Blacks strongly supported Lewis in that fight.13

A resolution to amend the UMWA constitution to restrict the presidential appointive power came to the floor as early as the 1919 convention and initiated a floor fight which brought forth one of the most eloquent of the black delegates, William M. Prentice, to argue for the appointive power of the international president. Little is known of Prentice’s Alabama years or of his status at birth. He was born at Montevallo, Alabama, in 1848 and graduated from Tuskegee Institute before moving to Illinois in 1898. Whether he came as a strikebreaker also remains unknown, but Prentice did join the UMWA in 1906, served as secretary-treasurer of his local for several years, and held the office of international organizer from 1916 to 1926. In 1919 he was one of the grand old men of the UMWA, still active at age seventy-one.14 Prentice was utterly opposed to changing the constitution to provide for the election of international organizers because the change would mean “closing forever the door of opportunity in the face of the colored men in the miners’ union.” As evidence that blacks could only lose by such a change in the constitution, Prentice charged that “today 80 percent of the coal mines in Indiana deny colored men the right to work in them. In Illinois more than 60 percent of the mines deny colored men the right to work.” Illinois delegates jumped to their feet to dispute Prentice’s claim, but the aging black organizer countered that his statements were easily verified.15

Afro-Americans were rightly suspicious of local and district leaders, who were much closer to those same miners who discriminated against blacks socially and on the job. Their assessment that Lewis would provide them with more protection was reasonable, for by 1921 several black miners played highly visible and important roles in the national organization. Lewis was tyrannical in his rule over the UMWA, but under his administration four blacks were employed as international organizers: George H. Edmunds of Iowa, Walter W. Jones of Alabama, William M. Prentice of Illinois, and Bozo Damish of Pennsylvania. Others played prominent roles in the conventions; A.J. Jackson of Illinois, for example, served on the crucial Grievance Committee.

Charges that Lewis was using the appointive power to ursurp the power of district presidents while building a centralized political machine with himself at the controls surfaced repeatedly at the conventions until Lewis was firmly in power. At the 1924 convention the issue of the international president’s appointive power arose once again, and
again William Prentice rose to represent the position of blacks. Who were the men sponsoring this proposal? Prentice asked rhetorically, and when several called out, "the rank and file," he sneeringly retorted, "Yes, and I will tell you what the rank and file does. It is the rank and file that is always wanting to disregard every fundamental principle of our organization." Prentice then gave the standard view of blacks on the subject, pointing out that there were many blacks digging coal in such places as Alabama, West Virginia, and portions of Kentucky who were unorganized, and these men were a menace unless they were brought into the organization. "I want to say to you that white men can't organize them," Prentice declared, and when it comes to electing organizers, an Afro-American has about as much of a chance "as a bat flying through the infernal regions." Once again a majority of the convention delegates agreed and voted to preserve the appointive power.

The presence of antiblack hate groups in the northern fields confirmed the worst suspicions of Afro-American miners that racial prejudice among their white counterparts precluded fair treatment, much less the possibility of achieving important staff positions through the electoral process. Even well-meaning union officers seemed powerless to prevent the influence of these groups. In Ohio, for example, district president Lee Hall received queries from several locals requesting guidance on the question of Ku Klux Klan activities among union members. A local official from Bellaire informed Hall that at the funeral of a deceased brother, a number of men appeared at graveside clad in KKK regalia. The UMWA men had refused to participate in the ceremony because the union specifically barred membership in the Klan. The local officer sought guidance on the appropriateness of this action since the deceased miner was also a member of the KKK. Taking a strict constructionist position, Hall responded that the constitution did not grant district presidents the authority to interpret it, and so the case should be handled by the local.

Lee Hall received similar communications regarding KKK affairs in other Ohio mining towns. H.J. McAbier of Amsterdam informed him that the "KKK had a meeting at the ball park and they denounced the Catholics, Jews, and Negroes." McAbier urged Hall to take up the matter as soon as possible for "this thing would break up the miners organization" in Amsterdam. Leonard McAbier, a relative, also wrote to Hall in 1923 to report that the KKK had held another meeting in Amsterdam and "some of our members joined this un-American organization and are openly boasting of the fact" in total disregard of the UMWA constitution, Article 14, Section 2, prohibiting any member from belonging to the Klan. Once again the district official informed a concerned member that the district president had no authority to
interpret the constitution, but on this occasion he directed McAbier to present the matter to the international office. Hall expressed his surprise at the large number of members of the UMWA who were joining the KKK:

While in Indiana last week I was reliably informed that fifty percent of the members in District No. 11 belong to the Klan, and in some local unions 75% of our members belong to the Klan. I find the same condition prevailing in Ohio, in some localities; also in Illinois and other districts. This is only hearsay as I do not know of an individual member of our organization holding membership in the Klan, however, local unions have a right to insist on their members complying with the laws of our organization and I really believe it is a local matter, or a question that should be decided by the local union.

In some Ohio locals Klansmen were in the majority and refused to comply with the UMWA constitution. "This makes a very bad situation and really one that should be handled by the national organization," Hall wrote. In Indiana there was a strike "where the Klan was in the majority and took action to refuse to work with the anti-Klan" UMWA men. In this case, the union was forced to appeal to the governor of Indiana to use his good offices to adjust the matter in a satisfactory fashion. District 11 officers, in fact, traveled to Columbus, Ohio, for a conference with high officials of the Klan who promised to direct their members "to take no action in the labor movement, for or against anyone who was not affiliated with their organization," because the KKK was opposed to stirring up conflict with non-Klansmen in local unions.19

These letters can be interpreted in two ways: either the UMWA district officials simply abdicated their leadership on the issue or they were concerned but powerless. Both answers are probably correct. The authority of district officers was increasingly circumscribed under John L. Lewis, who came to the UMWA presidency in 1920. The turmoil within the organization resulting from Lewis's struggle for control produced an environment which rendered a principled stand difficult. Also, the strength of the Klan in the northern coalfields, the union's only real power base, raised a serious tactical problem: push too hard and lose the membership, or do nothing and lose to the Klan. Union officials, therefore, took a pragmatic approach to the issue hoping that it would resolve itself.

If the UMWA found it difficult to keep miners who were members of both the UMWA and the KKK without losing control in the northern fields, the union sometimes was unable to organize in southern fields because the constitution specifically barred membership in the Klan. The 1924 convention received so many resolutions dealing with this subject that the Committee on the Constitution wrote a single sub-
stitute for them. In place of the prohibition against the Klan in the constitution, Van Bittner, secretary of the committee and a prominent organizer in the southern fields, proposed a more general ban providing that members of "any other organization whose principles are detrimental to the United States government, or the United Mine Workers of America, shall be expelled from the United Mine Workers of America and no member of any such organization shall be permitted to have membership in our union."\textsuperscript{20}

When the proposal was being drawn up in committee, delegations from Ohio and Indiana, where the Klan was strong among the miners, pressured the committee to fashion some kind of compromise. These delegates informed the committee that "they knew these [Klans]men and they hated to expel them from the organization, as they were pioneers." Clearly some of the UMWA officials were willing to compromise on the issue rather than risk a confrontation with the KKK or their own membership. Van Bittner defended the proposal in a transparent attempt to appease UMWA members who violated the constitution by belonging to the KKK. Bittner disclaimed any intention of soft-pedaling the KKK issue. He contended that the substitute resolution still gave the union authority to expel those who belonged to any organization whose principles were detrimental to the United Mine Workers of America. This assertion was true, of course, but the new clause left open for interpretation just when an organization was "detrimental" to the union. Bittner was given a fair hearing because he was responsible for inserting the original anti-Klan clause into the constitution. Having served in Alabama, Bittner told the delegates, he knew "how the colored members feel on this proposition," but blacks should rest assured that the substitution would "conserve the best interests of all concerned without taking the right away from any member of our organization."\textsuperscript{21}

The convention delegates would have none of this truckling to the Klan, however. There were simply too many Catholic, black, and foreign-born men in the UMWA to abide a mellowing of the union's position toward the KKK, and white delegates immediately jumped to their feet to reject the committee's report in sharp language. "The object of the United Mine Workers of America is to organize all Mine Workers on the American continent, regardless of race, creed, color or nationality," one delegate declared, "and it is my opinion that the object of the Ku Klux Klan is not in harmony with those policies." Another white delegate from Iowa avowed that the "Ku Klux Klan was organized for the purpose of intimidating the negro race, to deny them their franchise. It should have died when Ben Tillman died." As might be expected, blacks were quick to support such sentiments, and James J. Hart, a black delegate from West Virginia, no doubt voiced the
consensus of the black delegates when he warned: "If you are going to put the negro and the alien or foreigner in separate classes and on the outside, then you might as well, gentlemen, get ready to fight a greater dissension in the ranks than you will find today." Other black delegates argued that the ban against Klan membership was one of the most vital clauses in the constitution and that the UMWA would be destroyed if it were withdrawn. Most of the convention delegates concurred, for when the committee's report was put to a vote, it was defeated by an overwhelming majority.\textsuperscript{22}

Black miners were relieved that their union had not abandoned them or its own democratic principles to pacify those racist elements represented by the KKK. Nevertheless, they could not have been reassured by the apparent willingness of some international and district officials to cave in under the pressure of racist demands. Once again they found themselves in the unenviable position of having to depend on the good intentions of racially ambivalent whites or of being condemned as scabs if they struck out on their own. The anxiety generated by this dilemma further confounded the efforts of black and white progressives to convince Afro-American coal miners that the root of their problems was class rather than race.

Racial tensions in the northern coal communities directly influenced race relations within the UMWA and also provided operators with a class division they could exploit during labor disputes in order to divide and conquer. Few cases so clearly demonstrated the operator's ability to take advantage of this racial cleavage as a series of strikes and lockouts generally referred to as the Panhandle War, which began in 1924 in West Virginia, and similar events across the state line in western Pennsylvania. These strikes were protracted struggles for survival characterized by violence and destruction.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1920 John L. Lewis became president of the largest and most powerful union in America, with more than a half million members. In that year, bituminous coal production reached a record high of 568 million tons, and the UMWA's basic daily rate set another record of $7.50. By the end of the decade, however, the UMWA lay in shambles. High wartime prices induced overdevelopment of new mines, particularly in the border and southern states, and the return of "normalcy" precipitated a downward spiral of savage competition. Moreover, the increase in productivity which resulted from more efficient mining technology and the increased market share captured by other fuels, such as oil, gas, and hydroelectricity, further reduced the power of the once mighty coal industry. The resultant cycle of cost cutting drove down the price of coal from record highs to record lows within the decade. The price of railway coal, for example, plunged from $4.20 per ton in 1920 to $2.40 per ton in 1929. Since labor costs represented about
two-thirds of total production costs, miners' wages bore the brunt of the cost reductions, even as the hours miners worked for those lower wages increased from an average of eight to twelve hours per day.\(^{24}\)

In this environment southern operators used to fullest advantage their lower wage structure and favorable freight differentials to make inroads into the industrial markets traditionally controlled by the northern operators. By 1929, therefore, nearly half the coal sold in the United States was produced in the nonunion mines of southern and central Appalachia. As the cost of labor in the Appalachian fields declined by 50 percent or more, northern operators began clamoring for wage reductions in order to compete. After tortuous negotiations between the UMWA and the northern operators in 1924, at Jacksonville, Florida, John L. Lewis finally persuaded the northern operators to preserve the $7.50 basic daily wage rate until 1927, when a new contract would be negotiated. Before the year ended, however, the operators were once again demanding wage cuts. Lewis's response was a trenchantly enforced policy of "No Backward Step." Northern operators then responded with a systematic effort to destroy the union's power in the Central Competitive Field.\(^{25}\) The Panhandle War officially began on October 10, 1924, when operators in the district reneged on the 1924 agreement, and the UMWA ordered the men out of the pits. For their part, the operators quickly shifted to a nonunion black and white work force.\(^{26}\)

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had developed the Clarksburg, Fairmont, and Morgantown fields of northern West Virginia because the area was geographically accessible and close to north-central urban markets. Situated so near the Ohio and Pennsylvania coalfields, the demographic and marketing conditions of the panhandle district closely resembled those of its adjacent neighbors in the Central Competitive Field. Very few blacks lived in this section of the state, following the northern exclusionary pattern, and most companies restricted the employment of blacks, both on their own and because white miners refused to work with them. This was an established white man's district, where companies traditionally turned to immigrants for strikebreakers so as not to completely alienate community support. Immigrant scabs were, after all, white people coming to a region where many residents themselves were either foreign-born or descendants of recent immigrants; strikebreakers tended to be gradually assimilated into the local communities. By 1910 native-born whites represented 52.5 percent of the mine workers, Italians 18.6 percent, and the percentage of other immigrants stood at 25.5 percent. On the other hand, blacks numbered only 3.4 percent of the miners by 1910. With their heavy importation in 1925, however, their numbers increased until by
1926 there were 3,356 black miners employed, 12 percent of the total in the district.27

The first significant influx of blacks had arrived from Alabama following the loss of the 1919-1920 national strike. These were blacklist-listed union militants who came seeking employment in the recently unionized mines near Fairmont and freedom from the southern caste system. Possessing a relatively high level of political consciousness, these black unionists would play an important role in the 1925 panhandle strike. It was during the first year of this strike, however, that the largest influx of blacks occurred. Unlike the migrants who preceded them, these were nonunion strikebreakers imported by labor agents. A significant percentage of them were “floaters,” nonminers who had migrated to northern cities during World War I and had become unemployed after the war.28 These blacks entered communities that already contained a bewildering variety of ethnic groups. A 1925 study of the Fairmont field, for example, revealed that 1,579 of the miners were native whites, 548 were native blacks, and the remaining 2,843 miners were divided among twenty-five white ethnic groups.29 This great cultural diversity produced a complex interplay of race, class, and ethnicity in the social life of the communities, in the pits, and in the local union halls.

It was, however, the infusion of blacks which caused the greatest social conflict. It is clear that most of the blacks employed during the strike would not have been hired otherwise. According to Abram Harris, a contemporary black economist who studied the strike firsthand, blacks normally represented less than 7 percent of the work force in the mines but 33 percent during the strike.30 The mine at Grant Town, for example, never employed more than fifty blacks before the walkout, but in 1925 half its nonunion work force was composed of Afro-Americans.31 The reasons for this exclusionary pattern were the same here as elsewhere in the northern fields: whites refused to work with blacks, and operators refused to hire them in the first place. It is clear that the pattern was initiated and maintained by the white miners themselves, who did not want blacks in their communities or in jobs they perceived as reserved for white men. Labor and management blamed each other, but both were equally culpable once the pattern was initiated. Thus the superintendent at one mine claimed that he had nothing “agin’ the niggers”; they simply had not asked for employment. The UMWA district president refuted this claim, however, charging that the company had never employed Afro-Americans. According to UMWA international organizer C.F. Davis, the Osage mines near Morgantown also adamantly refused to employ blacks before the strike, despite the union’s efforts to break the racial barrier.
On the other hand, the superintendent of a nearby mine claimed that his white miners had always opposed the hiring of blacks. On one occasion when he attempted to hire seven Negroes the white workers threatened to strike, even though the blacks belonged to the same union. This same operator claimed that the "foreign element would drive the Negro out of his own country," and he thought the black man would be "a fool to turn 'red' with hunkies and Russians whose first words in English are usually 'I won't work with a _____ black _____ of a ______.'"32

Not all foreigners held that attitude, for according to a "hoary old Negro" striker at Grant Town, blacks and foreigners got along well because the "100 percent Americanism" of the native whites had forced them to become allies. The old veteran did not blame the UMWA but rather local native whites, and he denounced the community as a jim crow town. In fact, he said, blacks and foreigners were the "mainstay of the union at this mine," and working together, they elected mostly blacks to the local union offices.33

Although whites blamed them for breaking the strike, blacks never made up more than one-third of the imported scabs. The other two-thirds were whites. They too were roundly denounced, but blacks were the identifiable group which could be singled out for a special brand of vituperation. The general racial hostility among native whites became exaggerated when the percentage of blacks seemed to tilt away from complete native-white control. As a U.S. Department of Labor report explained in 1924:

The relative strength of the colored group appears to create difficulties in the mines. . . . In many instances, native whites refuse to serve on committees with colored men and, what is worse, many native white miners refuse to follow orders issued by a colored committeeman. This racial animosity is sometimes encouraged by the operators on the old theory of divide et empera.

The appearance of colored committee men may be traced directly to the union scale of agreement which specifies that only the citizens or men who have actually declared their intention of becoming citizens and who speak the English language may serve on committees. From the point of view of many of the miners who are of foreign birth, the Negro has still the necessary qualifications for a committeeman—he is a citizen and he speaks the English language.34

Nativist spirit found expression in a strong local Ku Klux Klan in the panhandle district during the twenties. That brand of native-white chauvinism helped forge an alliance between foreigners and black unionists, but it also undermined the class solidarity necessary to win the strike. The Rosemont mine near Morgantown was characterized by blacks as a "Ku Kluxer's Mine" because the operator and the white
Race, Class, Community, and the UMWA

miners reportedly had a tacit agreement that neither blacks nor foreigners would be hired. The casual use of Ku Klux Klan symbolism by native whites during confrontations with scabs reinforced the association between local whites and the hated Klan among blacks on both sides of the dispute. At Brady, near Morgantown, a battle between strikers and guards began when an organization known as "the Regulators" burned a large cross on a hillside as a signal for the strikers to commence firing. For blacks, fighting the union cause under the light of a burning cross called for more selfless dedication than seemed justified. Moreover, if the strikers hoped to win over black or foreign imports, cross burning obviously was not the way to do so.

Local UMWA officials argued that even if some ignorant whites refused to work with blacks, the UMWA had declared the Ku Klux Klan an outlaw organization, and blacks should help the organization to eliminate the KKK from the coalfields. If the union was destroyed, according to the official line, then white men would be free to join the KKK and to eliminate blacks from the miners' craft entirely. Therefore, black miners should use, and thereby enforce, the UMWA constitution to defend their rights.

This line of reasoning had the power of logic, but it was based on the premise that blacks could gain employment or, if they could not because of racism, that they could win justice through union grievance procedures. In the northern counties of West Virginia, however, blacks often could not get a job in the first place because white union men would not work with them. If the black union miner brought charges of discrimination, he rested his case for justice with those same racists who were hostile to his presence. Even if he gained employment after having won a grievance, he had to work among his enemies, and a coal mine is a very dangerous place when one cannot trust his co-workers.

Abram Harris estimated that at least two thousand blacks, most of them established union men who resided in the district before the walkout, joined the strike of 1925. These black residents, according to Harris, were intensely loyal to the union, and the number who deserted the cause was, he said, "infinitesimal." In fact, the introduction of black strikebreakers elicited even stronger denunciations from the black strikers than from the native and immigrant whites. Harris reported that "even the wives and children of the Negro strikers show conspicuous evidence of intensive drilling in trade union principles." They exhibited, he said, a "crude martyr-like zeal for the cause." One black striker declared that "the wealthy white class had enslaved his fore-parents, but that he was determined not to be subjected to industrial slavery." Moreover, "he had no desire to indent the white miners' organization simply because a few ignorant Ku Klux Klan members"
refused to work with blacks. "Martyr-like zeal" landed many black strikers in jail. On May 14, 1925, for example, 138 men, women, and children were arrested for illegal picketing at Grant Town when they gathered to shout obscenities at the strikebreakers. Among the group were 31 black men and 11 black women. The women were released, but the men refused bail, shouting: "We don't want bail. We want industrial freedom."41

The UMWA was mistaken in not assigning a black international organizer to the district, for racial divisiveness played an important role in the union's defeat. Several black union stalwarts did actively organize in the district, however, Fred Stubbs, a miner from Monongah, West Virginia, being the most prominent among them. Stubbs served as a delegate to the West Virginia Federation of Labor throughout the twenties and was honored by election to the office of vice-president for several terms.42 The UMWA also received strong support from black organizations in the state, such as the Charleston chapter of the National Association for the Improvement of Negro Workers, which empaneled a committee to investigate the conditions of black coal miners in the northern counties. The committee's report denounced the operators for "seducing negro miners to enter their employment at starvation wages" and urged the black strikebreakers to join their brothers who were "so valiantly fighting under the banner of the United Mine Workers of America."43

Such meager efforts were insufficient to persuade black imports to honor the strike, however, and the spirit of "Ku Kluxism" played a large role in that failure. The union walk-out became a company lockout and officially dragged on until 1929, but its impact rapidly diminished as the operators readily imported sufficient labor to replace the strikers. By the end of 1925 the strike's effect was negligible. For their part, the strikers hung on in UMWA-built barracks until life became untenable and many moved on to other fields. With the stock market crash of 1929, the strike, the union, the coal industry, and the American economy all collapsed in one devastating blow. Those panhandle operators who survived did so with non-union labor, and strikers who could find jobs at all "slunk back to the pits."44

Across the state line in neighboring southwestern Pennsylvania a similar course of events transpired when the two leading coal companies abrogated the Jacksonville agreement. One of these, the Pittsburgh Coal Company, the largest coal producer in the nation, had recognized the UMWA since 1895. Just after the company signed a new agreement with the union, however, it passed under the control of financiers Andrew and Richard Mellon. Implacable union foes, they were determined to operate the company without the meddlesome UMWA. In late 1924, therefore, Pittsburgh Coal shut down its opera-
Inside the slave-operated Midlothian mine in eastern Virginia, 1860. *Harper's Monthly Magazine*

An exslave miner in southern West Virginia, at age 90 (ca. 1932). James T. Laing photo
Lighting the fuse, 1923. Northern West Virginia Coal Operators' Association

Interior of the New England Mine, Marion County, West Virginia, late 1920s. West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University
Banner Mine Prison buildings, in Alabama, primarily housed black convicts; below, free miners at an unidentified coal mine near Birmingham, ca. 1915. Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama
Company store at Harmco, West Virginia, 1946. Russell Lee Photo, National Archives
Children of miners in southern West Virginia, 1932. James T. Laing photo

Picket line at the Purseglove mine, Monongalia County, West Virginia, ca. 1933. West Virginia and Regional History Collection
A segregated West Virginia Department of Mines extension class in the 1950s; below, D.T. Phillips, mine foreman, "fourth Negro to become certified in West Virginia" (1933). West Virginia and Regional History Collection
An underground casualty from Wyoming County, West Virginia, 1932. James T. Laing photo

Men of the night force, Wyco, West Virginia, 1947. Rufus "Red" Ribble photo, West Virginia and Regional History Collection
Men of the day force, Lillybrook, West Virginia, 1951. Rufus “Red” Ribble photo. Below, a motorman, 1950s. West Virginia and Regional History Collection
tions, and when the mines were reopened on August 10, 1925, it was on a non-union basis. The company's actions were soon followed by the second largest producer in the field, Pittsburgh Terminal Coal Company. The UMWA responded by ordering a massive walkout, which the operators trumped by evicting the strikers from company houses, importing strikebreakers, and hiring a large contingent of the hated coal and iron police. 45

As in northern West Virginia, relatively few blacks were employed in the Pittsburgh district prior to the strike. Before 1925 Pittsburgh Coal employed eleven thousand workers, approximately 7 percent of whom were blacks. As importation gathered momentum and peaked in 1928, about nine thousand men were at work in the company's operations, but blacks now made up 40 percent of the total. Similarly, Pittsburgh Terminal employed three thousand workers before 1925, only 2 percent of them blacks. By 1928, however, Negroes made up 36 percent of the company's 2,645 miners. 46

Again, as in the West Virginia panhandle, some mines employed blacks, and others did not, and although both miners and operators were culpable once the cycle of discrimination was put into motion, it was the desire among white workers to maintain control over their communities and jobs that perpetuated the pattern of racial exclusion. 47 Matters were worsened by the fact that most of the imported strikebreakers were nonminers from the steel cities in the Pittsburgh region. Work was hard to find in the region for black laborers, and a majority of the thirty thousand or so Negro scabs who passed through the mine towns during the strike worked in the pits as a temporary expedient. 48 Militant miners viewed this violation of the picket line by other laboring men as an act of class treason which fully justified any action taken against them.

The population was stable in these overwhelmingly white communities, and the residents considered the towns their permanent homes, not just another coal camp. Therefore, so large an influx of black strikebreakers into these coal towns was bound to be recorded in destruction and bloodshed. To insulate the scabs from intimidation by the strikers and persuasion by union organizers and to deter those who might try to slip away, the companies erected high fences around their installations. Pittsburgh Coal's Gallation mine was "lighted up like Broadway," and a coal and iron policeman was posted at every corner. Machine guns were emplaced as well because, as Richard B. Mellon testified, "you could not run without them." Bethlehem Steel also mounted machine guns on top of two-hundred-foot slate piles at its Ellsworth mine, and searchlights swept the property all night. Strikebreakers were sometimes virtual prisoners. To leave these camps miners needed special passes from the company police, but requests
often "brought a punch in the jaw" instead of a pass. Frequently, those who did leave camp were followed by the guards, beaten up, and hauled before an operator-controlled magistrate who then jailed them on trumped-up charges.49

Members of a U.S. Senate investigating committee visiting the strike zone in 1928 were shocked by the living and working conditions they found there. At Pittsburgh Terminal's Coverdale camp eight or nine men lived in nine-by-eighteen-foot lice-infested rooms without ventilation. According to Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, "The air was so bad inside we could not stay there more than three seconds." Wheeler informed the president of Pittsburgh Terminal, Horace F. Baker, that he had lived in a mining camp for twenty-five years but had "never visited anything in my life where they had 8 and 9 men sleeping in a bunk room like that, under the conditions that you have out there at the mines." The committee also found the facilities thoroughly segregated. The dining rooms were separated by the kitchen, with a dining room for 72 black men on one side and on the other a dining room for 196 whites. The bunkhouses were segregated as well.50 Will Green, a black import from Johnstown, testified that work was slow in the steel mill where he was normally employed so he came to work at Terminal No. 6. Green took one look at how the men lived, however, and was so disgusted by the filthy conditions that he immediately left camp. "I don't think when they come out of the pit that the boys ever wash," he said. "I don't think that they ever take a bath. They just come out . . . and never seem to go to bed, and those that do go to bed . . . sleep just like a hog that might run out and get into a mudhole, and lay down at any place he comes to."51 Coverdale barracks must have been particularly revolting, for H.T. Brundidge, an investigative reporter who wrote a series of exposes on these conditions for the St. Louis Star, testified that it was "the filthiest place I ever saw in my life. You could almost see the vermin on the blankets and on the beds," and the men were "as dirty as it is possible to get."52

The operators attempted to cater to the more prurient interests of the strikebreakers to dampen their desire to leave camp. Frick Coal and Coke Company encouraged prostitution and the sale of liquor and drugs at its mines in Uniontown. Similarly, the Pittsburgh Coal and Pittsburgh Terminal companies were notorious for abetting such practices. Brundidge testified that at Pittsburgh Coal's Moon Run mine he found three houses of prostitution next to the coal and iron police barracks. At Pittsburgh Terminal's Horning camp he found four houses of prostitution, one gambling den, and two bootleg joints. Most shocking, he thought, was the revelation that the races "intermingled indiscriminately" in these houses of prostitution. Some houses were all-black and others all-white, but in most of them the races mingled
indiscriminately. The senators were stunned into disbelief with the information that one of the houses at Horning offered a young white girl of about fourteen for the pleasure of black miners. Also, white women were found drinking and dancing with black men “who looked like they had not bathed for years, and who had dirt and filth and coal dust all over them.”

Because of these conditions, local citizens and union officials charged that only “scum” would remain in such camps. Labor turnover was indeed extremely high. At Bethlehem Steel’s Ellsworth mine twenty-two thousand men of both races had passed through the town during the strike. Some strikebreakers left because they had been deceived by company agents. James Smith, an unemployed black steelworker from Homestead, was recruited by promises of big money. Upon arrival, however, he found a strike underway, filthy and rowdy houses, poor food, and dirty coal, and he refused to work. On occasion a few hundred men marched out together, seeking safety in numbers. On December 5, 1927, for example, more than 350 strikebreakers, most of whom were black, walked out of Pittsburgh Coal’s Montour Mine No. 1 in an attempt to force the company to raise wages and recognize the UMWA. What they received instead was repressive force from the coal and iron police. A reporter came to the mine near Cecil that night and found the police shack “full of colored boys, and they were a pretty badly frightened lot. Some of them had fresh bruises on their faces.”

At least eighty-five murders were committed in the non-union camps between April 1927 and February 1928. In some of these cases the coal and iron police demonstrated the reason for the hatred they aroused among coal miners. For example, when a black strikebreaker entering Pittsburgh Coal’s Montour No. 4 mine refused to give his name to the company guard, he was shot in the back. In 1927 fifteen murders were committed in Allegheny County. Eight of the ten victims who were miners were killed in camps belonging to the Pittsburgh Coal Company; seven of the ten were blacks.

Not all these murders can be charged against the coal and iron police. Many resulted from conflict among the strikebreakers themselves, whose violent ways reinforced the conviction among local residents that their towns were being invaded by “scum.” In Washington County one man was killed and four wounded in separate knifing or shooting affrays on Christmas Eve 1929. “Negro miners were involved in all of the brawls out of which the shootings later developed,” the Washington Daily Observer reported. Most of the men were drinking and gambling when arguments erupted among the players. Thus ended the life of a black miner, Thomas Croom, age thirty-eight, when he refused to give another black man a cigarette.

Established residents of the southwestern Pennsylvania mining
towns were horrified at the upsurge in crime, vice, and violence which accompanied the influx of strikebreakers. Their cries of outrage were so shrill because they were convinced that their communities were being overrun by outsiders of the “worst type,” as Victor Marlier, a UMWA local official in McDonald, phrased it. It is clear that residents considered blacks the “worst type” of all. Marlier charged that Pittsburgh Coal intended to destroy the stability of the miners’ home communities and thus force the unionists to leave by importing “the most ignorant, brutal, beastly, so-called men in all creation.” The company had “dumped them in these peaceful valleys” among “God-fearing and God-loving” people, and most, Marlier avowed “would rather starve than have our men work with such brutes.”

One of the God-fearing, Father John Skrak, a Catholic priest at Ellsworth, testified that there had been only three black families in his parish before the strike. Then, almost overnight, the mines were 30 to 50 percent black. What made this influx of blacks so objectionable in his opinion, was that they were a floating population which had changed the district into a “Sodom and Gomorrah.” The streets were no longer safe for women to walk in, and of those black strikebreakers who lived with women in the camps, “you will not find three out of ten that even have a marriage certificate.” Similarly, C.F. Fehrenbach, a Catholic priest in Broughton, testified that the strikers disliked the imported blacks because they were floaters, whereas the strikers were longtime residents and were “a very good class of people,” who had been “around here for many years and are citizens [my emphasis].” The cleric emphasized this observation by pointing to the strong support for the strikers among the local merchants, who, according to Father Fehrenbach, were carrying the strikers for about eighty thousand dollars in credit.

The solid wall of hostility to the black scabs erected by the store-keepers, priests, and school officials, as well as the miners of Broughton, was reinforced by actions of the strikebreakers themselves. The citizens of Broughton were especially outraged when black strikebreakers from Pittsburgh Terminal No. 6 positioned themselves on an adjacent railroad trestle and peppered the school with rifle fire while the children were in classes. A number of armed residents sped to the scene, but as they approached the school, the strikebreakers ran behind protective barriers on company property. This incident followed on the heels of another in which a black strikebreaker admitted to shooting into the strikers’ barracks and into some of the town’s stores. The man testified before the local squire that the company had paid him and another man twenty-five dollars each to do the shooting. Many such incidents were provoked, however, by hazing from the
strikers' wives and children, who called the black strikebreakers "yellow dogs" and even more scurrilous names.  

Resentment toward the imported strikebreakers apparently extended beyond the town limits. A resolution was signed by the farmers, businessmen, and professionals of Bethel Township in Allegheny County, charging that the operators were destroying the character of community life in the township by bringing in men "of a desperate character, armed with deadly weapons" who were a "serious menace to the peace and safety of the citizens of this community." The signers presented the petition to the county sheriff and requested that he drive out the imports in the interest of public health. Of course, the sheriff had no such power and the scabs remained.

The UMWA tried to turn this fear of endangered community to propaganda advantage. The United Mine Workers Journal editorialized, for example, that the "boll-weevil scabs" imported by Pittsburgh Coal had been killing one another ever since they were brought into the "otherwise respectable and decent mining communities." The crime and vice which accompanied the arrival of the black imports had debased the communities of "decent, hard-working and honest miners" who were "good citizens of their communities." Ellis Searles, editor of the United Mine Workers Journal, charged that if Pittsburgh Coal had not abrogated the Jacksonville Agreement, "these liquor-drinking, dope-eating toughs" would not have been imported in the first place. With their arrival, "contentment has disappeared and fear has taken its place in the hearts of good men and women." UMWA vice president Philip Murray repeatedly denounced the companies for "dumping" dope peddlers and prostitutes from the slums and cotton fields into the "peaceful mining communities" of southwestern Pennsylvania. These evils were sufficient to undermine community life in the district, Murray declared, but destruction was certain now that "white men and women and Negro men and women mix and mingle together."

Even the black middle class in the region probably sided against the black imports to some degree. The Pittsburgh Courier, the most influential black newspaper in the district, followed an editorial position which expressed those same concerns about community. Robert L. Vann, the owner-editor of the paper, had vacillated on the labor issue until 1926, when the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was organized, and then he came out in favor of unionism for blacks. He supported the UMWA as an open-door union, and he encouraged black miners to join it. So vocal on behalf of the UMWA did the paper become, in fact, that it was banned from many coal camps in the district. The Courier echoed the union line regarding the destruction of community but with an interesting twist: "What would happen in
Western Pennsylvania if ten thousand jobless Negroes were to be let loose on the community. Broke, jobless and without home and food for any length of time, they would become a charge upon the very Negro communities which are now asking these green men to join the union. . . . Who will have to care for the homeless and jobless men? Why the Negro communities. Then our jails and work-houses will fill up.”

Western Pennsylvania was the eastern pillar of the UMWA in the Central Competitive Field. Because the union was weakened by internal schisms which rendered it powerless against the onslaught of the operators, it was imperative that the UMWA leadership articulate the concerns about community endangerment which preoccupied some of its most stalwart constituents. Unfortunately, to race-conscious blacks the UMWA’s emphasis on vice and crime among the black imports, whatever the merits of these claims, seemed to be an attack against the race. The public position of the UMWA leadership undoubtedly had a negative influence on Afro-Americans, for all too often it sounded more like racial demogoguery than the language of class struggle. The suspicion was not wholly without foundation. Desperate to hold its membership in the Pittsburgh district, the UMWA made some serious strategic and tactical errors. The union failed to undertake a serious recruiting drive among the black imports, even though some of them showed interest. None of the black international representatives, such as George Edmunds or William Prentice, were sent to the district; no educational campaign was conducted; nor did the union offer relief on a scale sufficient to attract strikebreakers out of the pits.

And for these failures the UMWA paid dearly. By the end of the decade, Pittsburgh Coal had cut wages to a $4.50 basic rate, and some of the smaller companies who followed its lead were down to $1.75. Even John L. Lewis could not maintain the fiction of his “No Backward Step” policy, and in 1928 the UMWA instructed each district to make its own best contract. The UMWA lay prostrate, bargaining by then for only 20 percent of the nation’s bituminous miners.
IV

EQUALITY
Central Appalachia
Judicious Mixture in Central Appalachia 1880-1920

The prevailing patterns of race relations in the American coalfields resulted in the exclusion of blacks in the North and nearly complete dependence upon them in the South. Correspondingly, the struggle for control of the labor process set the course of race, class, and community conflict along diametrically opposite paths in North and South. In vast portions of industrializing central Appalachia, however, no racial group held an established position in the mines or the company towns. Here, operators maintained control over their workers through a policy of "judicious mixture," which enabled them to divide and conquer by offering the carrot of equal opportunity to all miners without regard to race or nationality and the stick of company police repression against those who did not accept complete subservience. In central Appalachia, particularly in southern West Virginia, blacks came closer to finding economic equality than in any other coalfield, and perhaps anywhere else, in America. But the price of equality was freedom, and because this was the price operators exacted from all miners in the region, they inadvertently fostered a class consciousness which overcame racial and cultural differences to bring an end to the operators' complete control over life and work in these fields.

King Coal's rise to industrial supremacy between 1880 and World War I was swift, and its power to transform the shape of society awesome. Nowhere was that power felt more profoundly than in the Central Appalachian Plateau, comprising counties in northeastern Tennessee, eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, and southern West Virginia. Prior to the 1880s vast areas of the region were still covered by uninhabited virgin forests, and coal mining was insignificant. The nation's demand for coal was readily supplied by the established northern fields, and Appalachia lacked transportation facilities for moving coal to market. The rugged topography in what was still essentially a wilderness meant that massive infusions of capital invest-
ment would be required to exploit the region’s rich coal reserves. That infusion came slowly in the 1870s and then accelerated rapidly in subsequent decades until the Great Depression. Industrialization transformed the life and landscape of central Appalachia, and mountain farms were replaced by coal mines, coke ovens, and railroads as the base of the mountain economy. Independent mountaineers sold their lands and moved into company towns, where they mingled with European immigrants and Afro-Americans from the South—all of whom came together to dig coal for far off markets.¹

Certainly there was plenty of coal to mine, for Appalachia contained more than fifty million acres of the fossil fuel, the nation’s largest source of supply. Even after the railroads opened the fields for exploitation, there were some restraining influences to overcome. The Panic of 1893 drove coal prices down to a twenty-year low in 1894, for example, but the national business recovery, and the war with Spain, stimulated demand once again by the late nineties. That decade witnessed unprecedented growth in the Appalachian fields. Coal production in the region tripled by 1900 and multiplied fivefold by 1930, to account by then for nearly 80 percent of total national production.² The most important single explanation for this growth was the success of Appalachian operators in penetrating the Great Lakes markets beginning in the late nineties. Thus, southern West Virginia shipped only forty thousand tons, or 1 percent of the Lakes market in 1900, but six million tons, or 23 percent in 1913. Appalachian operators enjoyed lower production costs, especially for labor, than the unionized northern operators, and they took fullest advantage of that cost advantage.³

Industrial society advanced into the mountains behind armies of laborers who laid the tracks of three major railroad systems. The first to cut its way through the plateau was the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, fulfilling a dream dating back to the eighteenth century, when planners of the C&O Canal hoped to connect Virginia tidewater ports with the Ohio River. Under the direction of Collis P. Huntington thousands of laborers invaded the formerly inaccessible New River Gorge between 1868 and 1873 to lay the iron rails of commerce. Many of these men were blacks, and some of them stayed on to work in the mines that sprang up along the right of way. It was while digging a C&O tunnel through Big Bend Mountain that the steel driver John Henry died and became a legend.⁴

The Pocahontas and Flat Top fields of West Virginia, to the southwest of the C&O line, were connected to the national markets by the Norfolk and Western Railroad. It was organized in 1881 specifically to serve as a coal carrier linking the southern West Virginia and southwestern Virginia coal country with the port of Norfolk and eventually the Great Lakes. The N&W offered financial assistance to investors for
the construction of mines and towns along its right of way, and in 1883 when the railroad reached Pocahontas, Virginia, on the West Virginia line, the town was already in full operation, with large stockpiles of coal ready for immediate shipment. Eventually, the N&W built a major branch line to Big Stone Gap in Wise County, Virginia, and forged ahead with the main line along the Guyandot River Valley to the Ohio River, and on to the Great Lakes. Hundreds of mines sprang up along the N&W's tracks, and by the first decade of the twentieth century innumerable feeder lines formed an intricate web of tracks through the coalfields of southwestern Virginia and southern West Virginia.5

While the C&O and the N&W were developing central Appalachia from the east, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad began constructing lines into the Kentucky fields from the west. The main line passed along the edge of the plateau running from Louisville to Knoxville. Determined to dominate the eastern Kentucky fields, the L&N constructed a branch line from Corbin, Kentucky, to the Cumberland Gap in the 1880s, but the Kentucky River highlands were not reached by rail until the eve of World War I, when the L&N branch line was completed into Harlan, Letcher, and Perry counties.6 Eventually, the entire region was integrated into an elaborate network of main lines, branch lines, and feeder lines for transporting Appalachian coal to the nation's industrial centers.

The population grew dramatically between 1880 and 1920 in the wake of industrialization, though growth did not proceed uniformly, nor was it evenly distributed. The West Virginia plateau grew rapidly throughout the era, with the population of the southern counties nearly quintupling from 93,174 to 446,051. Kentucky's plateau counties, which already contained a sizable population on the eve of industrialization, grew sporadically from 216,883 to 538,350 during the same period. On the other hand, Virginia's central Appalachian counties grew moderately but steadily from 55,349 to 155,405. The several plateau counties of northern Tennessee contained the smallest population, and over the course of this forty-year period they doubled their population from 45,375 to 96,063.7

A large percentage of the migrants into the central Appalachian coalfields were blacks, and by far the majority of them came to live in southern West Virginia. Blacks came to West Virginia in larger numbers in part because the scope of industrialization was greatest there, and labor in greater demand. But jobs with good wages were available in other districts of the region, and many blacks were attracted to them also, as is demonstrated in Table 1. By 1920, therefore, 88,076 blacks lived in central Appalachia, but 69 percent of them resided in southern West Virginia, and the remainder were distributed throughout the other districts of the plateau.8
Table 1. The Black Population of the Central Appalachian Plateau

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>5,814</td>
<td>6,734</td>
<td>7,602</td>
<td>15,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>2,175</td>
<td>2,570</td>
<td>3,609</td>
<td>2,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>3,405</td>
<td>4,242</td>
<td>7,056</td>
<td>8,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>3,769</td>
<td>5,781</td>
<td>21,584</td>
<td>60,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15,163</td>
<td>19,327</td>
<td>39,851</td>
<td>88,076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


To attract southern black labor to the new fields, companies dispatched labor agents to the southern states with "pockets full of money" and offers of free transportation, steady work at high wages, and company houses to lure those who had little money with which to purchase their own. Agents usually were accompanied by black recruiters, or subagents. According to West Virginia attorney general Howard Lee, recruiters were "skillfully selected for their persuasive eloquence and conscienceless disregard of the truth." Upon arrival in the South, the black recruiters went to work speaking in churches or buttonholing individuals in bars and near work sites, spreading the word that big money could be made in the central Appalachian mines. The black recruiter "Bowlegged" Jones pitched a tent in the woods near the Alabama mine camps and handed out a train ticket and twenty-five dollars to every man who signed on. According to one informant, Jones said "he gon' ship 'em 'til his leg get straight."9

From the spring of 1916 through 1917, the U.S. Department of Labor's Division of Negro Economics estimated, seventy-five thousand blacks, or about 8.3 percent of Alabama's black population, migrated to points north. Most departed from the black belt, but Jefferson County was the major non-black-belt county to contribute to this exodus. Two-thirds of the twenty-five thousand coal miners in Alabama resided in Jefferson County, and about two-thirds of these were black. The Division of Negro Economics reported that labor agents were more effective in Jefferson County than anywhere else in the state. So many blacks were leaving that state officials ordered the strict enforcement of the recently passed labor agent licensing act. A member of the state licensing board claimed that he and several other inspectors had worked in Jefferson County for several weeks and had arrested thirty labor agents for miscellaneous breaches of the law. The black subagents were also required to hold a license, but most did not. When arrested and convicted, recruiters were fined up to five hundred
dollars and sentenced to one year's hard labor. Columbus Avery, a black miner of McDowell County, West Virginia, who worked briefly as a labor recruiter for a coal company in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, recalled that the general manager "gave me a bunch of train tickets and I would go South and pick up a bunch of colored men and put them on a train." According to Avery: "If the law caught you with a bunch of tickets, you were gone. A couple of my friends were arrested. It was too dangerous for me, so I quit after a couple of months. The last transportation I pulled, I brought about 1,000 people to West Virginia and Kentucky." 11

The labor agent received as much as ten dollars per recruit, and all able-bodied men were accepted. In fact, agents were instructed to "pick workers with strong backs and weak minds, as they give the least trouble." Nor was there any effort to screen out criminals or other undesirable elements. Indeed, many agents made arrangements with local jailers to empty the cells of those prisoners who agreed to migrate. 12 The imported men were charged for their transportation, the money being deducted from their first few months' pay. When they arrived, therefore, the "transportation men" frequently attempted to escape paying their railway fare by slipping away to work at other mines where no questions were asked. At Stonega, Virginia, 18.8 percent of the men brought in between 1905 and 1915 left without working. 13 George Swain, a supervisor at an Omar, West Virginia, mine during World War I, recounted in an interview that the Island Creek Coal Company ran many trainloads of men into Omar. One night, 130 imports arrived after dark, and 40 of them attempted to escape into the woods, but were captured and marched back to camp at gunpoint. Swain recalled that "we got alcoholics, and tramps, and everything else undesirable, but a number of fine coal loaders as well." 14

Many black and white miners came to central Appalachia in this fashion. Others migrated on their own. 15 Hilton Garrett came alone by train from Birmingham, Alabama, to Wheelwright, Kentucky. After saving enough money from his wages, Garrett sent for his wife, who was accompanied on the trip by his brother and another man. 16 Most recruits were attracted by the comparatively high wages. McCullom Cook of Alabama was so poor that his aunt sent him the money to get to Jenkins, Kentucky. His first pay envelope contained "more money than I had ever seen or money than I ever made." His pay of sixty dollars came in two bills and it "messed me up," he recalled; "I couldn't count that stuff." To prove that he had not been cheated, his aunt exchanged the large bills for coins because he couldn't count that little $50 dollar bill. 17

Better wages were not the only reason blacks left the South for Appalachian coal mines, however. The prominent black UMWA
organizer George Edmunds probably summarized the deeper foundations of the exodus when he observed that black migrants were seeking a "man's chance in the world; a chance to educate their children; to live in decent homes, under decent conditions, to exercise the right of the ballot, and in short, they are looking for true American citizenship."¹⁸

Democratic politicians in Kentucky and West Virginia were more suspicious of the motives behind the influx of southern blacks into their state, and they conveyed their concern to the Wilson administration that blacks were being brought in by Republicans to swing the 1916 elections. Upon orders from his superior in Washington, the U.S. attorney in Atlanta, Robert N. Bell, launched an investigation into the operations of two Birmingham labor agents, J.R. Estes and Dave Ryan (black), and E.H. Williams an agent in Bessemer, who were retained to procure labor for the Consolidation Coal Company's operations in southeastern Kentucky. E.T. McCarty, an agent for the New River Company and the New River Pocahontas Company in southern West Virginia, also was investigated. Bell filed his report with the attorney general on October 25, 1916, concluding that the Alabama Great Southern Railroad Company had issued 6,359 tickets for men (and some wives) going north "on transportation" during the period from April through October 1916. Nearly all these tickets were to destinations in the coalfields of Kentucky and West Virginia. The towns receiving the largest percentages of Alabama migrants were Jenkins, 1,379; McRoberts, 728, and Fleming, 354. All three were Consolidation Coal Company towns, in the same vicinity of southeastern Kentucky. Clarksburg, West Virginia, also received a large but uncounted influx of southern blacks. Although not a company town, it served as a commercial center for the many coal camps in the district, and a considerable number of the citizens in that growing city worked in the mines at its periphery. Bell's reference to "these negroes" indicates that most of the migrants were black. Another list of émigrés leaving for the West Virginia and Kentucky mining towns, compiled for the period between October 13 through October 28, 1916, demonstrates that most of these migrants were traveling in families. The number of migrants increased each succeeding month from 97 in April to 1,446 in September and then slipped to 909 in October. Thus, the total number of migrants shipped by a single labor agent in this period came to 5,195.¹⁹

The U.S. Division of Negro Economics calculated that between November 1, 1916, and May 1, 1917, 5,161 tickets were issued at Bessemer to blacks bound primarily for the coalfields of Kentucky and West Virginia. Another 2,619 tickets were issued at Birmingham during that period. Departing the coal and iron district of Alabama for Appalachia, therefore, were 7,780 blacks—all of whom left in a six-month period over only one of the five railroads serving these two points. This
The figure does not include the even larger number heading for the major northern urban centers. The verifiable number of blacks leaving the mineral district between April 1, 1916, and May 1, 1917, totaled 12,975. The figures would be much higher if the data from other labor agents, the number of those who left of their own accord, and ticket sales for other railroad companies were available.

So large a body of black people leaving Jefferson County during a short span of time did not go unnoticed in Alabama either, and local officials hastened to determine the causes for the exodus. Many opinions were bandied about in Alabama, but U.S. Attorney Bell's assessment of the situation seems to be most accurate. In the late spring or early summer, middle Alabama crops were destroyed by a terrible storm, and the farmers were unable to furnish sustenance to their black workers. Forced off the land, these farm laborers floated to the cities, especially Birmingham. In desperation many agreed to enter mining "very cheaply" and thus "put some good miners out of employment." The displaced miners then sought employment elsewhere, thus opening up a prime field for the labor recruiters. Moreover, the companies permitted contractors to employ men as helpers to work sections of the mines and to take a liberal allowance for themselves out of the helpers' pay. Many of the men who left the Alabama field for points North were union men opposed to such conditions.

Bell also reported that an investigation was underway into rumors of fraudulent recruitment and mistreatment of migrants to Jenkins, Kentucky. However, descriptions of Jenkins by black migrants do not support such rumors. Life was difficult in most new coal camps, but Consolidation Coal Company was a large corporation with sufficient capital to finance its operations without the gross abuse of employees found at so many camps operated by smaller companies.

Those rumors apparently did apply to certain operations of the Stonega Coal and Coke Company, however. Stonega, a Virginia concern with several mines in the western part of the state near the Kentucky and West Virginia borders, retained Frank Jones as its labor agent in Birmingham. A number of depositions were sworn against him before a justice of the peace in Jefferson County by returning migrants who had gone to Stonega mines. They charged that the agent had fraudulently enticed black miners to relocate in Virginia. Almost universally they claimed to have been promised sixty to seventy-five cents per ton but were actually allowed only sixty cents per car. Moreover, each car was supposed to be of two-ton capacity but turned out to be closer to four tons. Few experienced miners could load more than two cars per day, and out of this $1.20 they had to pay the usual miners' expenses, plus transportation charges of $12.50. Most claimed to have drawn no pay whatsoever while working for the company, and many
actually left in debt. There were other reasons for leaving as well. Universally, the complainants considered the mines dangerous, and the houses had no windows, stoves, or water. Moreover, company guards far exceeded their authority, as Nathan Burton soon discovered. He shipped to Stonega's Imboden, Virginia, mine from Bessemer on October 15, 1915. His brother had preceded him to the company's Keokee, Virginia, mine, a few miles from Imboden. Burton decided to visit his brother, and some of the men warned him to get rid of his gun, for company guards had killed a black miner at Keokee the night before. When Burton reached the town, several acquaintances from "down home" informed him that it was his brother who had been murdered for attempting to leave camp and return to Alabama. The guards had attempted to stop him, and the brother had resisted and was shot to death. This case may have been unusual, but the heavy-handed manner of forcing men to continue to work against their will under dangerous and debilitating conditions was not unique to Stonega.

Democratic U.S. Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory ordered investigations into charges of political corruption in the mountain states, but there was little evidence that the coal companies were conspiring to swing elections by importing black Republicans. U.S. Attorney William Barnhart of Charleston, West Virginia, did report, however, that 951 blacks imported into the state had voted illegally at the statewide primary held on June 6, 1916, in McDowell County. In fact, several indictments for voting fraud in McDowell County were pending already. Barnhart considered it likely that similar irregularities would occur during the November elections in Mercer and Mingo counties. Both counties had experienced a dramatic influx of blacks, but such practices were not necessarily related to black migrants. McDowell and Mingo counties had deservedly poor reputations for electoral fraud. The Williamson Daily News, for example, published an article on October 17, 1916, which contained the names of three hundred people who were allegedly registered illegally. The state assistant attorney general informed Barnhart that special agents had been dispatched to McDowell, Mingo, and Kanawha counties to monitor the November elections.

Most U.S. attorneys in the coalfields did not express much concern that the newly arrived blacks would vote illegally. In fact, W.H. Mays of Consolidation's legal department actually warned U.S. Attorney Charles Fennell of Covington that something like a thousand Alabama blacks might be herded to the polls by local politicos if precautions were not taken. Fennell conceded the possibility of fraud in Letcher County, for citizens there followed the practice common in many mountain counties of selling their votes on election day.
Even though the figures would be impossible to estimate with accuracy, it is clear that thousands of blacks who came to the mining camps of central Appalachia between 1890 and 1920 did not consider themselves permanent residents or even career miners. In fact, many blacks clung tenaciously to their identity as farmers long after they arrived in the coal camps. The individual histories of these miners suggest that while they may have been, in a general way, part of the Great Migration of black southerners to northern industrial life, they often followed a much more complex pattern of movement than the simple one-way trek north. Eighty-five percent of the southern rural black population in 1890 were tenant farmers or sharecroppers. This system bound blacks on all sides; it immersed them in an endless cycle of dependency and debt and destroyed any hope that they might become independent yeomen. To help offset anticipated farm losses, many took temporary employment as lumberers, longshoremen, domestics, or in a variety of other nonagricultural jobs to sustain their families during a bad year. Increasingly the radius of this movement widened to include the northern labor markets. The net effect was to undermine the migrants' ties with the tenant system as they became more aware of the broader labor markets. 28

By World War I, therefore, the resistance to migration had been worn down, but the break was not so sharp for coalfield blacks as is suggested by Florette Henri's observation that many of the migrants "must have been homesick for the South, but few went back." 29 Actually, many who became miners seem to have been weaned away from their southern agricultural roots gradually. Black miners could return home for visits quite easily, and they frequently did so. The migration routes were usually along the railroad lines, which were increasingly making their way into even the more isolated areas of the Appalachian coalfields. Blacks in Mercer and McDowell counties, for example, were less than a day's travel from the piedmont and tidewater sections of Virginia by way of the N&W, and a branch of the railroad connected Virginia to Durham, North Carolina. Similarly, the L&N connected the coalfields of Kentucky and Tennessee with Birmingham, Alabama. Black migrants frequently remained in close contact with friends and relatives back home in other ways as well. The McDowell Times, published in Keystone, West Virginia, by and for blacks, regularly printed social news from eastern Virginia or North Carolina, covering such events as weddings, funerals, sermons, illnesses, and festivals. 30

Probably because West Virginia received such a disproportionate number of the black migrants into central Appalachia, it was the only state to systematically chart the demographics of this movement, creating the West Virginia Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics in 1921. The following year the bureau reported that more than 75 percent of
the black male wage-earners of West Virginia were employed as coal
miners, and more than 60 percent of the black population had been
born in other states, primarily in the South. The largest percentage of
West Virginia blacks born outside the state came from Virginia.31

The migration from adjacent Virginia counties into West Virginia
had been continuous since Reconstruction. By 1920, 33,347 blacks
living in West Virginia were born in the state, but their numbers were
more than matched by the 29,315 Afro-Americans who were born in
Virginia and the 6,512 born in North Carolina. An unknown but
significant percentage of them either owned farms in Virginia and
North Carolina or had relatives who did. Blacks had little opportunity
to purchase farm land in southern West Virginia, where most of the
land was owned by the coal and lumber companies, but it was easy for
them to return to farms in neighboring states to work when mine work
became irregular, wages declined substantially, or the mines shut
down for lack of business.32 That the mines were only a day’s train ride
away from the farms accounted for much of this movement, but not all.
Equally significant was the strong tradition of yeomanry among black
Virginia farmer-miners. The Virginia migrants attempted to use coal
mining as a cash crop, and viewed the mines as a way to maintain farms
back home. A black minister in the Pocahontas field described this
annual ritual:

It used to be the common thing for men of my people to own farms in
Virginia or North Carolina. They would go home and get the crop started and
perhaps, having a son who would carry it on, the father would go back to the
mining fields, and work. On this account many of their children were born in
Virginia and North Carolina when their fathers were really in West Virginia.
Finally the son would not be content to stay on the farm but would insist on
going to the mining fields with the father. So, the whole family would come at
last.33

The number of blacks migrating into central Appalachia was im-
pressive, but they were never sufficient to supply the enormous de-
mand for labor in the coalfields during this era. As early as 1907, at the
behest of the coal operators’ association, the West Virginia legislature
approved the creation of a state commissioner of immigration charged
with the responsibility of recruiting Europeans into the state. John H.
Nugent, a former UMWA official, was the first commissioner. The
extraordinary influence exerted by the coal mine operators in West
Virginia’s internal political affairs is indicated by the fact that Nugent’s
salary was paid directly by the coal companies, rather than by the State
of West Virginia. The United States commissioner general of immigra-
tion considered the state’s mines too unsafe to recommend them to
prospective immigrant workers, so Nugent himself went to Europe to
recruit miners for Mountain State operators. Most of the immigrants did not come to West Virginia directly from Europe, but from the teeming eastern port cities, particularly New York. Whatever their point of origin, established miners, black and white, resented the foreigners because they considered them sojourners who would drive down the earnings of native workers by accepting substandard wages. Of course, this was precisely the reason that the coal companies were willing to support a commissioner of immigration and to bear the burden of importing foreigners in the first place. The ethnic and racial composition of the southern West Virginia fields which resulted from this recruiting policy is revealed in Table 2.

With the outbreak of World War I, thousands of foreign nationals returned to their homelands. More than thirty-two hundred Greek and Italian miners departed from Charleston alone during the summer and fall of 1915. Nevertheless, probably 50 percent of the foreign-born remained in the state, and gradually they were assimilated into coalfield society. The massive recruitment of labor into central Appalachia during the decades of frenzied, uncontrolled expansion of the coal industry resulted in a bewildering variety of races, nationalities, and cultures. The influx of so many different peoples into the isolated coal towns and camps during such a short time created considerable cultural conflict and social instability. Southern blacks settled in camps with native whites, who were frequently hostile to the intrusion of "outsiders" generally; with traditionally antagonistic poor whites from other southern states; and with foreigners who were generally viewed unfavorably by most American miners. With such a heterogeneous mingling of peoples in camps where law enforcement was either non-existent or the domain of company guards, cultural conflict and the struggle for a secure social place was bound to boil over into violence. Between 1890 and World War I, when the influx of blacks corresponded with the industry's phenomenal growth, intergroup violence was commonplace. For example, in 1887 when black miners were the majority in the New River district, a black man killed a grade foreman near Quinnimont, West Virginia, and was lynched by a white mob. In reprisal a mob of three thousand black miners began a march on Fayetteville, seeking revenge. Even though the mob was dispersed, whites were terrified by the report that the blacks intended to "clean out" every white person along the river. Three other incidents occurred the following year when blacks attempted to drive out foreign immigrants in another variation of the struggle for job control and social dominance.

One of these episodes occurred on primary election day in June 1916 at Winding Gulf Colliery in southern West Virginia. Following an altercation between a black and a white, two blacks were jailed. That
Table 2. Ethnic Origins of West Virginia Mine Workers by County
(Year Ending June 30, 1909)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Origin</th>
<th>Fayette</th>
<th>Raleigh</th>
<th>Mercer</th>
<th>McDowell</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native/White</td>
<td>5,724</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>3,217</td>
<td>10,910*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2,949</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>4,419</td>
<td>8,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>1,648</td>
<td>3,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>392</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>1,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>176</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austrian</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>540</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
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<td>155</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>129</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown or other</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>2,894</td>
<td>5,814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12,859*</td>
<td>2,819</td>
<td>2,933</td>
<td>14,595*</td>
<td>33,202*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The number of blacks and Hungarians would be considerably larger if figures for the Virginia portion of the Pocahontas field were available, for one of the largest employers of black miners in the field was located just across the state line. The ethnic composition of the figure changed during and after the national coal strike of 1902 when large numbers of immigrants were imported.

*Incorrect totals in source have been corrected.

Night an armed mob of blacks attacked the jail and set the two prisoners free, killing Sheriff Frank Wyatt and seriously wounding two deputies in the process. The general manager George Wolfe informed owner Justus Collins that it would never do to let the matter rest. "It shows the sentiment of the negrows [sic] and that is that if you arrest some of their race, that it is proper for them to gather in a mob and kill the white officers." Wolfe believed that the race for the nomination had "seriously affected some of the colored people. You cannot send for a nigger
Judicious Mixture in Appalachia

and sit him down in the executive mansion and plot with him to overthrow the white people without evil results." 38 A dragnet was cast immediately by the Raleigh County sheriff, who intended to make an example of the culprits by demonstrating to Afro-Americans that "they cannot bunch together and shoot up a bunch of deputies to liberate a couple of three-by-four coons." Within a few days the two escapees, along with thirty or forty other black suspects, were behind bars. They received a speedy trial in Beckley, and several were given stiff prison terms for their involvement in the affair. The outcome pleased Collins, but the operator regretted that a few of them had not been hanged. 39

A good deal of the mayhem in the central Appalachian coal camps was intraracial. Milton Smith, a black miner of Wheelwright, Kentucky, claimed that when he arrived from Alabama in the 1920s, blacks and whites got along better "than the colored got along with one another. Yeh, they were getting pistols and killing one another." 40 A retired white miner remembered when blacks first came to Wheelwright during World War I. He thought that the southern blacks were not "half as bad" as the northern blacks. When the company brought those "colored people in here from the north, oh my god, they was tough and when the southern [blacks] came, they just feuded out. . . . they just killed one another." 41

The West Virginia Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics reported in 1927 that in McDowell County, which had the largest number of blacks, Afro-Americans totaled 21,728, or 21.7 percent of the population. Of the forty causes of death listed in the bureau's report, murder ranked third, with twenty killed, behind mine accidents (thirty-eight) and myocarditis (twenty-one). No other cause even came close. Among whites, murder ranked eleventh, with eleven killed. 42 Violence was so endemic in McDowell County, that in October 1925 Justice James Strother of the criminal court sarcastically declared to a reporter that it was a new record established in McDowell County when the grand jury returned only one murder indictment that month whereas eight to ten true bills for murder usually were returned. As further evidence of the "falling tide of criminality" in McDowell County, it was reported that "only 20 felony and 17 misdemeanor indictments were returned." Grand juries in this county normally returned from forty to fifty felony indictments, and the same number of misdemeanors. 43

Racial and cultural conflict and the potential for serious social instability were intolerable to operators when the recruitment or retention of a stable work force was threatened. Clearly, this is what worried the manager of Winding Gulf Colliery regarding the 1916 election day riot. He cautioned the mine owner that the incident had to be settled "as quietly as we can so that we will suffer as little as possible in the way of loss of men. Heaven knows, it is going to cost us a lot anyway." The
vast majority of the blacks who worked in the field were, of course, hard working and law abiding, and it was fear of losing these people which caused managers like Wolfe to fret. As Wolfe observed during the election day affair, "What people that remain with us are scared to death, and I imagine that a good many of the good reliable colored people will get out of the country and go elsewhere." 44

Faced with enormous labor problems of their own creation, operators attempted to bring them under control by following a policy of "judicious mixture." This policy was founded on the notion that an ideal labor force was composed of a particular mixture of native whites, Afro-Americans, and foreign workers. Each operator applied his own variation of the formula but always to the end of achieving maximum control over labor and, hence, the costs associated with production.

Sociologist James T. Laing conducted extensive research into the operators' perception of the ideal mixture of native whites, foreigners, and blacks during the early thirties. Himself a descendant of pioneer coal barons in the area, Laing lived in the field while he gathered his data, and doors were opened for him as for no other scholar of the subject before or since. He interviewed six hundred black miners in thirty-eight different coal towns and also forty-four operators. Moreover, Laing gained access to the records of coal companies which together employed more than twelve thousand native whites, nine thousand Afro-Americans, and five thousand foreigners. Of the forty-two operators who responded to Laing's questions regarding their judgment of the ideal mixture, 78 percent preferred an equal mixture of blacks and whites. Control over the work force was the universal criteria on which all operators based their preferences. Spero and Harris observed that the operators inaugurated the practice of race mixing to divide and conquer, and Laing's evidence supports the basic outline of their conclusion. Operators believed that native whites, blacks, and foreigners all became too difficult to control when the percentage of any one of these groups became too great. One operator declared that he preferred "a number" of whites, native and foreign, because "we get the best results where one class is looked [down] upon by the others and try to get advantage of the other class in the way of good places and responsible positions which pay more money." 45

In southern West Virginia no single group of miners could control the jobs in the coal industry, and the policy of judicious mixture was calculated to insure that result. That policy also produced a distinctive pattern of labor relations because, along with native whites and foreigners, American blacks were among the founders of industrial society in the district. While blacks constituted 53.8 percent of mine workers in Alabama in 1920 and only 1.8 percent in the northern fields, they represented 20.3 percent of the mine workers in West Virginia,
and that percentage was closer to one-third in the southern counties. Foreign-born whites represented only 3.6 percent of the miners in Alabama, and the people of British stock comprised the vast majority of foreign and American-born miners in the Central Competitive Field in 1920. In West Virginia, however, 20 percent (18,500) of the miners were southern Europeans, even though their representation had diminished during World War I.46

Operators hoped to reap another benefit from judicious mixture as well. In such a culturally heterogeneous work force widely divergent attitudes toward work were inevitable. Blacks tended to work only long enough to fulfill their basic needs, about three days a week, and then they laid off to enjoy themselves. Foreigners, on the other hand, worked as long and as often as they could but insisted on celebrating numberless religious and national holidays by getting roaring drunk. Native white mountaineers, for their part, were unaccustomed to rigid work routines, and mine managers considered them lazy and shiftless.47 Therefore, operators attempted to get the proper percentage of each group to offset the unproductive habits of the others. Unfortunately, they reckoned without the workers.

In 1911 a superintendent at Winding Gulf Colliery complained that “a protracted meeting at Lynwin of the colored people” had almost shut down the night shift of Number 2 shaft because all of the men at Number 2 were black. To solve such problems, the superintendent reported, he was “getting them mixed up now and we will increase the tonnage very rapidly.” Apparently the supervisor failed to mix his workers quickly enough to avoid another decline in production, however, for he soon reported that “our reason for falling down in our loading Saturday at Number 2 was on account of the colord [sic] men having a ball game at Tams and we were short of men.” A month later, mixing still had not occurred, for on August 12 the supervisor reported that Number 2 was not producing as expected, explaining that “they are practically all niggers over there and work one day and lye [sic] out the next.” The supervisor had hired six Hungarians whom he expected to place at Number 2 shift in a few days, and he apologized for yet another decline in production at Number 2 the day before “on account of a nigger wedding and they all came out to attend it.” Some additional Hungarians and “Slavish” miners were hired in June, but their work was so unsatisfactory that the superintendent fired them and in September brought in replacements. Nevertheless, the following month brought still another decline in production at Number 2, “it being a Hungarian holliday [sic] and all the Hungarians are out.”48 Even though the work force was mixed, production continued to decline because of holidays, weddings, and other such festive breaks. Obviously, operators hoped to balance out cultural characteristics in a way
that would enable them to maintain production, but it is equally clear that the policy of judicious mixture did not guarantee that result.

Coal companies recruited blacks because of their urgent need for labor but also because conventional wisdom of the period held that they were docile, antiunion workers whose vulnerability in the labor markets made them grateful to whoever employed them. Whatever the case elsewhere in industrial America, central Appalachian coal operators quickly found this was not necessarily so. Most of the mine workers in the field during the early years were blacks from Virginia and North Carolina, supplemented by recent immigrants from eastern Europe and native whites. Labor agents actively procured blacks from Richmond and Lynchburg and other eastern Virginia cities, and the background of these men is important for explaining the labor militancy they demonstrated in the coalfields. The consensus among contemporaries and subsequent scholars is that blacks were an impediment to union organization in the southern field because they had little conception of organized labor unity. Actually, the labor union stalwarts were found primarily among the early black miners of the Flat Top–Pocahontas field. Blacks recruited from eastern Virginia were at least familiar with political and labor activism prior to their arrival in Appalachia. The Knights of Labor had been actively organizing in eastern Virginia, especially in the Richmond and Petersburg area, and had organized the largest black membership found in any state. By 1886, when the Knights of Labor national convention met in Richmond, blacks made up one-half of the state's total 12,000 membership, 3,125 of them belonging to Richmond locals alone.

Unquestionably many of these men were miners in the Richmond coalfield who carried the principles of labor organization with them to the western corner of the state. As early as 1886 Pocahontas, Virginia, had four local assemblies, two for blacks and two for whites. Although the locals were segregated, blacks served on integrated mine committees in recognition of the need for racial cooperation.

Labor consciousness certainly was prevalent among Pocahontas blacks during the eighties. In 1886 miners who belonged to the Knights of Labor were displaced by imported Hungarians for "labor agitation." At a mass rally in September black and white Knights passed resolutions expressing their discontent, and an integrated committee delivered them to the superintendent. The Knights failed to dislodge the imported men, however, and on November 12, 1887, a "riot" ensued between the established blacks and the newly arrived Hungarians. Even though they lost the struggle to control their jobs, the black miners in the Flat Top–Pocahontas field took the lead in labor agitation. In April 1889, Michael F. Moran, a white union organizer in the Flat Top field, reported that "the colored men here are not as cowardly as the
white men are, and if the white miners were possessed of half as much manhood there would be very little trouble to help these men out of their present condition. They have attempted two strikes in the last year and were defeated." Moran's weekly reports in the National Labor Tribune reiterated his optimistic view about the future of unionism among the blacks of this field.54

When the National Federation of Miners and Mine Laborers and Knights of Labor National Assembly 135 merged in 1890 to form the UMWA, Moran became president of District 17 (West Virginia).55 William B. Wilson, a UMWA executive board member, who subsequently became the first U.S. secretary of labor, accompanied Moran on one organizing trip to the Flat Top field in 1891. Giving credit where it was due, Wilson reaffirmed Moran's judgement that blacks were "the ones doing what they can to help us in our work, while the English-speaking white men, boasting of the achievements of their great grandfathers, lie back upon their oars stubbornly refusing to pull a single stroke in the ship of unionism, giving as a reason that the 'nigger' is no good as a striker." Wilson rejected this assertion as pure rationalization. "The truth is," he wrote, "the persistent unionists here are blacks."56

The peak of this early organizational work in southern West Virginia came with the strike of 1895. Early that year, the Norfolk & Western lowered the minimum price guarantee on coal shipped to tidewater ports. In a power play designed to force the N&W to reinstitute the previous minimum, the operators reduced wages by 20 percent and encouraged the miners to go on strike.57 They complied, and by the end of April the mines on the West Virginia side of the Pocahontas field were completely shut down, but a large mine across the state line in Virginia continued to operate. On May 1, about fifteen thousand West Virginia miners assembled at Keystone to launch a march across the state line to force the Virginia miners to join the strike. Upon receipt of this news, the Virginia miners began arming themselves to resist the invaders who were "swarming into Virginia on every train." Thus loomed the possibility of armed conflict between two armies, one of predominantly black strikers and the other of predominantly black nonstrikers.58 As a precaution, Virginia Governor Charles O'Ferrall ordered an artillery company and six infantry companies to the area, but West Virginia Governor William MacCorkle refused requests from O'Ferrall to reciprocate.59

The operators finally capitulated to the N&W's terms by the end of May, but the miners refused to work under the 20 percent reduction. The UMWA immediately ordered organizers into the field and soon enlisted 70 percent of the miners in McDowell County and 40 percent of those in Fayette County; a majority of the new members were
Alarmed, the operators urged the governor to send in the militia, one of them noting that the “black men are running the whole thing, and think we are afraid of them.” Demanding that MacCorkle act at once, a spokesman for the operators lamented that they no longer had control over their businesses. “Strikers are heavily armed with Winchesters and overawe and drive the imported labor from our works by threats of killing,” he complained. “Negro strikers in large bodies meet trains nightly armed with Winchesters and clubs and say no men shall work.” MacCorkle again refused, however, countering that it had become too common a practice in West Virginia to break strikes with the state militia.

The militancy of the black strikers prompted one white unionist to write that “the negroes know more about business, and right and wrong, than do the poor whites in the South.” Blacks were the best members in the union, he claimed, for “they stick together closer, keep their views to themselves, and don’t let the ‘cat out the bag’ in times like these, and are the most eloquent speakers in this country.”

Despite great sacrifices, the strike collapsed by the end of August, as most of the mines resumed operation with imported strikebreakers. Rumors circulating among the black unionists that UMWA officials had accepted bribes from the operators to leave the field left the strikers disillusioned and demoralized, and it would be several years before the UMWA could stimulate much enthusiasm in this part of West Virginia again. The truth of the matter is that the UMWA was too weak to control the district, its treasury being entirely insufficient to finance the kind of drive required in such a remote and hostile area. The UMWA was, after all, little more than a paper organization until after the 1897 national strike, and then it exerted real influence only in Illinois and Ohio.

Because a large number of blacks held an established position in southern West Virginia and adjacent Virginia, unionists were aware that the UMWA could succeed in the area only if blacks were organized. Afro-Americans were, therefore, readily accepted into leading positions in local and district offices from the beginning. The first vice-president of District 17, was Horace Smith, a black activist who defeated a white man for the position. Smith, who was described as a man of considerable education and talent, immediately launched a successful organizing drive among black miners in the nearby New River field.

The following year John L. Edmonds, a black unionist from a New River local, was elected to the district vice-presidency after an impressive organizing effort brought him public acclaim from Moran and R.L. Davis. Edmonds vacated the post after one year and was succeeded in April 1892 by J.J. Wren, another black miner, from a large,
mostly black local at Bewry. Wren became the first full-time, paid black organizer in West Virginia and was active throughout the southern part of the state. When Moran became ill and died in 1893, Wren achieved another first by completing the unfinished term of the fallen president.68 Fred A. Bannister succeeded Wren in the district vice-presidency. In April 1898 five thousand miners rallied at Montgomery in support of the eight-hour day and to hear Terence V. Powderly, grand master workman of the Knights of Labor. Bannister also addressed the throng and, in keeping with "his previous good record as a public speaker," pleaded with the white miners "to stand (like his race) for their just demands." Henry Stephenson, the recently elected district president, seconded this appeal, declaring that "all credit is due our colored miners for being true" to the UMWA.69

The tentative groping toward unionization by central Appalachian miners during the first two decades of the UMWA's existence failed because they had not achieved the cohesion required for success. Therefore, strikes resembled sporadic violent outbursts more than an authentic labor movement. The union spirit which had been growing in fits and starts since the early 1890s, however, finally erupted in one of the most explosive labor and management struggles in American history. During that upheaval, native-white, foreign-born, and Afro-American miners of southern West Virginia finally coalesced into a powerful collective force in the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek district when they "could not stand the oppression of the coal barons any longer" and walked out of the pits.70

Paint and Cabin creeks flow into the Great Kanawha River near Montgomery, about ten miles upriver from Charleston. The two valleys are separated by a nearly perpendicular ridge about five miles wide. Fifty-five mines on Cabin Creek and forty-one mines on Paint Creek employed about seventy-five hundred miners who in turn supported a total population of approximately thirty-five thousand people.71 How many blacks were living in this district is impossible to determine from the available data because the district is in two different counties, and the census data for Kanawha County includes the city of Charleston. Certainly hundreds of blacks were involved as strikers, however.

When the UMWA contract expired in the Kanawha field in April 1912, the operators decided not to renew the agreement. Following a two-month strike, most of the operators recanted and signed the new union contract. But the operators on Paint Creek and Cabin Creek refused to recognize the union under any circumstances, and they hired a private army for the struggle that was bound to come.72 The Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency guards, appropriately decrying by the miners as "gun thugs," heightened the level of hostility when they
began to evict families from company houses in April 1912. Personal belongings were dumped beside the railroad tracks or in the creek bed, the only property not owned by the coal companies, and the miners were forced to move their families into tent camps provided by the UMWA.\footnote{73}

Historians have described in considerable detail the events which transpired during the Paint and Cabin creeks strike of 1912-13. The significant point for this study is that the strike did not polarize around race, because blacks had been accepted as legitimate members of society, and their economic interests had been absorbed into the broader aspects of class warfare against the operators and their supporters. Black strikebreakers confronted a significant number of hostile black union men every bit as determined to prevent scabs of any race from taking their jobs as were the white strikers. In the innumerable individual fights between strikers and nonstriking miners, race simply was not a consideration. A white miner, testified before a U.S. Senate investigating committee that while he was waiting for a train at Cabin Creek Junction, three union men (one black, one native white, and one Italian) began fighting “fists and skulls” with three scabs and were promptly arrested. Baldwin-Felts guards attacked black strikers because they were strikers, not because they were black. On one occasion a black union man who joined a group of strikers at the Eskdale depot to “hoot” at the imported strikebreakers was shot dead by a company guard. The guard claimed that the black striker had thrown an object which hit him in the head, and that he had shot in self-defense. But as one witness testified, he doubted that anyone could “throw a rock at a man and get killed and fall with both hands in his pockets.”\footnote{74}

Blacks also joined the marches and demonstrations which trooped from camp to camp to whip up enthusiasm for the union cause. According to a Baldwin-Felts gunman, Mother Jones, the “Miners’ Angel,” was leading a group of marchers up Cabin Creek when a posse of company men intercepted them. As a group the marchers reflected the unity across racial and ethnic lines that the strikers had formed. One of the posse testified that he saw coming toward them “a mob consisting of 42 negroes, Italians and Americans carrying army rifles with bayonets attached and followed by about 125 or 140 unarmed strikers.” The guards assembled their machine guns in the road ahead of the marchers and waited. On discovering the guards’ presence, “the armed strikers dropped down in a position to fire and with their rifles in a shooting position.” At this point Mother Jones came forward to parley, and when she was advised that the men should disband if they wished to avoid bloodshed, they complied.\footnote{75}

In addition to national officers, such as President John P. White and
Vice-President Frank Hayes, and unofficial organizers, such as Mother Jones, the UMWA dispatched its leading black field representative, George H. Edmunds, to assist in the struggle. Edmunds, who was just beginning his thirty-year career as a UMWA international organizer, performed yeoman's service during the strike, serving as an international representative on the District 17 scale committee and maintaining a characteristically frenetic speaking schedule at mass meetings and political rallies against local antiunion candidates. He also spoke to strikebreakers whenever the union could intercept trains carrying them into the area.\(^7^6\)

More important than all the assistance received from organizers sent into the strike zone was the influence of local union militants. The actions of prominent organizers are difficult enough to reconstruct in detail; it is usually impossible to discern the influence of local activists in such struggles. Occasionally, however, a local hero emerges briefly from the faceless crowd just long enough for people to take note of his presence before he disappears once again into historical obscurity. Such a man was Dan Chain, alias "Few Clothes" or "Few Clothes Johnson," a black miner who assumed heroic proportions among local unionists. Fred Mooney, secretary-treasurer \& UMWA District 17, recounted Chain's story in his autobiography. Company gunmen frequently fired into the miners' tent camps, and so a few of the men decided that they should give the guards "a dose of their own medicine." Only eleven men were chosen for this select group of commandos, and Chain was one of the "dirty eleven" as the miners affectionately dubbed them. Mooney described him as a big man, weighing 252 pounds but "encumbered with little superfluous flesh," who knew how to use his fists and a gun.\(^7^7\)

Dan Chain's size, nerve, and fighting ability made him a favorite among strikers when it was time to confront the transportation men at the railroad depots. Attempts to stop the influx of these strikebreakers frequently resulted in a brawl, and Chain obviously was an important asset in such affrays. Mooney recounted how Few Clothes almost single-handedly fought off fifty imported strikebreakers, successfully convincing them that their interests would be better served by reboarding the train and departing.\(^7^8\) It was a similar attempt to prevent transportation men from taking the place of the strikers which sent Dan Chain to prison. The military commission which convened under martial law on November 19, 1912, tried Chain and found him guilty of obstructing a C&O train attempting to deliver strikebreakers. He pleaded not guilty, but the commission found otherwise and sentenced him to Moundsville prison for five years.\(^7^9\) Governor William E. Glasscock pardoned Chain on January 3, 1913, on the condition that, thenceforth, he would not use "threats or force, menace or otherwise
intimidate or attempt to intimidate, any miner or other person who desires work." Upon his release from prison, Chain created a stir by appearing at union headquarters in Charleston still attired in his large gray-checked prison uniform. A Senate investigating committee questioned prison warden Martin L. Brown about the matter, but he insisted that Chain left Moundsville in civilian clothing. The question of how he left with a set of prison issue remains unanswered, but the incident may account for Chain's nickname of "Few Clothes." The black hero of Cabin Creek violated the conditions of his pardon almost immediately by joining the strikers on the picket lines, and Governor Glasscock ordered him remanded to Moundsville to serve the remainder of his sentence. In the interim, Henry D. Hatfield was elected governor, and as part of the settlement he imposed on the contestants, all of the miners jailed by the military commission were released, including "Few Clothes." The only condition attached to his pardon was that Chain "conduct himself as a peaceable and law-abiding citizen." Thereafter, Few Clothes eluded public notice, passing into the folklore of southern West Virginia miners. It would not be long before the miners would again need men with the assets of a Dan Chain.
Southern blacks chose the unknown dangers of life and labor in central Appalachian coal mines for sound economic reasons. The southern caste system dictated that blacks receive the worst jobs and lower pay than whites for the same work, whereas in the northern fields blacks all too frequently found themselves excluded entirely. Although racist attitudes were prevalent among white employers and white workers in central Appalachia too, the severe labor shortage in an expanding industrial labor market eliminated the most blatant forms of racial discrimination.

Blacks not only were welcomed in the mountain coalfields, they were given equal wages for equal work and as good an opportunity in the occupational hierarchy as they were likely to find anywhere in industrial America. Two important analyses provide an exhaustive array of data on the occupational and wage equality of blacks in southern West Virginia, by far the most important field in the region. The aforementioned survey by Laing was the earlier, completed in 1933. The second was completed in 1983 by economic historian Price V. Fishback. Incorporating Laing's data into his own, Fishback used sophisticated statistical techniques to reconstruct an accurate wage and occupational profile of black miners for the period from 1900 to 1930.1

Both studies demonstrate that racial discrimination was operative in a few job categories. As might be expected, management was all but closed to blacks. Fishback found only 9 blacks in his sample of 248 supervisors employed between 1906 and 1925. In 1922 the West Virginia Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics similarly reported only 7 bosses among 6,483 black miners and only 1 fire boss among over 7,000 Afro-Americans surveyed in 1927.2 Laing confirms this pattern in his 1932 survey, which showed that of forty-four operators three permitted blacks to be supervisors, and two of those employed them to supervise only other blacks. In fact, only eleven blacks held jobs which might be
considered positions of authority. To claim, therefore, that black foremen were becoming common in West Virginia mines, as Lorenzo Greene and Carter Woodson did in *The Negro Wage Earner*, is highly misleading.

The responsibility for this occupational pattern lay with the employers, most of whom agreed with a fellow operator's assertion that "we don't use Negroes because with our mixed organization white leadership tends towards greater harmony," meaning that blacks were "easier to handle under white men." The typical attitude was expressed by an employer who stated that he would "Never!" employ a black boss, because "Negroes are followers, not leaders." Employers also claimed that blacks would not work for other blacks, but black supervisors were burdened by greater performance standards than those expected of white supervisors. In one case, for example, black trackmen complained of a newly appointed black foreman that he worked them too hard. The supervisor, however, was under pressure to demonstrate that he could "push" his men as hard as a white supervisor and would show them no favoritism. Interviews with black miners verified their preference for working under white foremen, who were free of such pressures. One black claimed that he was removed from his position as foreman because the blacks under him complained when he did not favor them more than other groups. They constantly ran to the superintendent with so many complaints that he was removed, and his position was given to a white man. The complaints tended to confirm the employers' prior opinion regarding the presumed lack of leadership abilities among blacks.

Some segregation also existed in transportation. Throughout this period motormen were almost exclusively whites; mule drivers were black. Both performed similar functions in the industrial process, but mule driving was harder work. Electric motors were used to haul coal cars in newer, larger, and more mechanized mines, whereas the mules were most often found in smaller and older operations. When blacks did find employment as motormen, they usually operated the smaller gathering motors which brought loaded cars to the entry, where the main haulage motor towed them outside. Blacks encountered little discrimination barring them from jobs as brakemen, who worked with but subordinate to the motormen. The brakeman's work was much harder and more dangerous than the motorman's, and it paid less. Segregation in these two classifications undoubtedly was related to notions about which race should be subordinate. A mining engineer from Logan County, West Virginia, thus, advised operators in a 1916 issue of *Coal Age* that "where ever one finds a colored motorman having a white brakeman or a machineman a white helper, he may be sure that there is more or less friction between the two." In some coalfields, the
author continued, "trustworthy men to handle machinery can hardly be secured except among the colored class." Where this situation prevailed, however, the operators should be "careful in not mixing the white and black." There is no denying, the engineer concluded, that "a white man doesn't care to have a colored man for his buddy." 9

Supervisory and motor jobs accounted for so few actual positions in the industry, however, that only an insignificant number of blacks were directly affected by discrimination in these categories. In the vast majority of jobs, including other highly sought-after machine jobs, blacks encountered little or no segregation. No measurable degree of segregation was found in the position of cutting machine operator, for example. The machine runner, as he was generally known, was responsible for undercutting the coal for the miners. As a company job, the work was steady, and the pay was relatively good. Even though the machine runner's job was highly coveted by miners, it was open to blacks throughout the first third of the twentieth century. The desire to discriminate against blacks may have existed, but tight labor conditions modified the tendency, and experience rather than race prevailed as the key criterion in hiring for this position until the thirties, when the demand for labor declined dramatically. 10

Afro-Americans certainly found ready acceptance in the more general labor classifications. Like their native-white and foreign counterparts, the overwhelming majority of blacks worked inside the mines as coal loaders, pick miners, and laborers. Between 1907 and 1932, years for which data are available, the percentage of native whites found in the harder, dirtier, and more dangerous inside jobs ranged between 53 and 80 percent of the total. A greater percentage of the black work force held inside jobs, between 77 and 92 percent, and southern European immigrants holding these jobs between 88 and 92 percent or higher. Wages, rather than employer discrimination, explain the higher proportion of blacks and foreign laborers working inside. These occupations paid on a tonnage basis at the same rates regardless of race or nationality, and an expert loader could earn as much or more money as any of the skilled men, with the possible exception of the machine runner. 11

After hundreds of interviews, Laing was convinced that black miners actually preferred the tonnage jobs because they suited their immediate needs. With families to be maintained abroad, foreign workers simply were not interested in the stability offered by company positions but rather in earning as much money as quickly as possible to send back home. Afro-Americans whose families still lived in the South surely were governed by similar motives. Many of them preferred coal loading because they came from farms where work and leisure routines were established by nature and necessity, and the
miner's traditional independence on the job resembled this familiar work pattern. Like farming, traditional methods of coal mining called for alternate periods of intensive labor and rest and permitted miners to simply walk out of the mine when they had loaded enough. Coal loading also offered less direct white supervision, and miners might not see a foreman more than once during an entire shift. This was an important consideration for southern blacks who came to the mines to escape the constant scrutiny of whites in the Jim Crow South.\(^{12}\)

On the job, operators integrated the races more or less indiscriminately and, through equal opportunity and pay, attempted to mute irrational racial animosities which might hinder production and profits. But controlling the miners' work life was only part of the operators' management problems. In these remote mountains coal companies also had to plan and construct entire towns, and towns involved social life. The policy of judicious mixture, therefore, also required a ritual of controlled human interaction which insured an acceptably harmonious social order. The social sphere of coal town life was not so directly connected with production, and most operators followed the customary social norms by segregating the racial and ethnic elements of the mining population. Even though segregation prevailed, however, in southern West Virginia the separate-but-equal doctrine usually applied, and most miners were offered the same type of housing, rental rates, and conditions of tenancy.\(^{13}\)

Company towns varied greatly, depending on when they were constructed and by whom. Pioneer operators in the central Appalachian fields frequently were long on determination but short on capital. Consequently, most of their capital went into production facilities rather than accommodations for the workers. The earliest houses were of board-and-batten construction without even the meagerest amenities. Conditions improved during the next several decades but not substantially. The typical mining camp was built on the lower slopes and valley bottoms, where it competed with other man-made structures for the limited space available. Therefore, houses often backed on the railroad tracks and fronted on a creek or were stilted against the mountainsides. Each day brought a new layer of coal dust from the tipple, giving the camp and its surroundings a uniform bleakness.\(^{14}\)

The U.S. Coal Commission reported in 1925 that living conditions in central Appalachian coal towns were among the worst to be found anywhere in the nation. More than 50 percent of all company towns in the nation were located in West Virginia, and nearly 80 percent of the state's miners lived in such towns. After examining 713 company towns in 1922 and 1923, the commission found that only 14 percent of the company houses in the Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky coalfields had indoor running water, compared with 90 percent in the
coal towns across the river in Ohio. Only 2 percent of the company towns in these states had sewage systems, and in consequence there were serious pollution and health problems in most of them. Some model towns constructed by large companies—such as Holden and Widen in West Virginia and Jenkins, Lynch, and Wheelwright in Kentucky—offered recreational opportunities and a well-rounded social environment for their black and white residents. However, these towns represented fewer than 2 percent of all company towns in central Appalachia.15

Many operators tried to provide against the scarcity and instability of the labor supply by securing entire families for their towns. To make themselves more attractive to prospective families, companies constructed schools, clubs, theaters, churches, and other public facilities. Operators assumed the burden of law enforcement as well, hired private guards, and supported county sheriffs and their deputies. As these communities became more complex, the operators’ power became increasingly pervasive. They controlled access into the towns as well as movement within them, and any activity considered detrimental to company interests was quashed forcefully. Coal companies became the dominant political force in the region, and to protect their investments they saw to it that state law defined their relationship with the miners who occupied their houses as one of master-servant, rather than landlord-tenant. This arrangement permitted the employers to unceremoniously evict any miner they deemed undesirable. In fact, the company-owned coal town was not a community at all in the usual sense, for residents had little control over their own lives, much less over the political life of the town itself.16 Operators built company houses out of necessity, and managed their properties in a way that gave them control over the labor supply. As one operator proclaimed, it had always been his intention “to have men concentrated so as to have proper supervision over them, to better control them in times of labor agitation and threatened strikes.”17

The powerlessness of the miners who lived under these circumstances heightened their insecurity, however, and actually aggravated, rather than eased, the labor instability operators sought to prevent. Miners drifted from mine to mine in a constant, and usually vain, search for higher pay and better conditions. More than 90 percent of the families in the independent coal towns of the Central Competitive Field had been in the same area for five years or more in 1923, but in southern West Virginia only 26 percent of the mining families had been in the same company-owned communities for that long.18

Social and political segregation was written into the state constitutions of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, and these legal dictates dovetailed with the companies’ own housing policies in establishing
segregated coal towns. The separate facilities in central Appalachia were decidedly not equal. Thus, Stonega, Virginia, was divided into sections designated "Hunk Hollow," "Little Italy," and "Nigger Town." Jenkins, Kentucky, was segregated in similar fashion, with blacks living in their own hollow and usually in the worst housing. The same pattern prevailed in nearby Dunham and McRoberts. Both towns also had two recreation halls, one in town for whites and one on the hill for blacks. In Wheelwright, another eastern Kentucky coal town, the miners were integrated inside the mine but segregated outside in the community. Even the town's police force was segregated, with a black deputy assigned to control the black section of Hall Hollow. "He didn't interfere with the white men," one resident recalled; "he just kept the law with the colored." When Hilton Garrett, a black miner from Alabama, came to Wheelwright in 1923, strict rules of segregation had been imposed, and they remained in force until the 1960s. Whites had elementary and high schools, but blacks had only a grade school which met in a church. During the late-1930s Wheelwright finally constructed Dunbar High for blacks and staffed it with several Afro-American teachers. Even the boardinghouses were segregated; there was one for foreigners, one for blacks, and one for native whites. Only whites were permitted to use the soda fountain. In fact, according to Garrett, "none of the public places, you weren't supposed to go in." Marvin Gullett, a native-white mountaineer who lived in Wheelwright, remembered when the black laborers first entered the area to work on the railroad and remained to mine coal. "There were many colored people worked there at their separate camp. They lived in what they called the nigger camp." Most of the time blacks were "kept down," Gullett recollected; they "couldn't mingle too much" and "couldn't go to a white man's home at all." For black miners the racial lines were firm: friendly on the job but segregated outside in daily life.

Most black miners in central Appalachia lived in southern West Virginia where public facilities were separate but, unlike those in much of the region, also equal. Race relations in the Mountain State have generally been misinterpreted, and it is not difficult to understand why. In the first place, the full range of jim crow laws were never enacted by West Virginia as they were in the Deep South and in neighboring Appalachian states. In fact, many observers question whether West Virginia was "southern" at all. During the 1920s, it was common to refer to West Virginia as "the most northern of the southern states; the most southern of the northern states; the most eastern of the western states; and the most western of the eastern states." Editors of black periodicals, such as M.T. Whittico of the McDowell Times, further obscured reality by espousing the upbeat company line on racial policy and by claiming that West Virginia was "a veritable Eldorado for the
industrious Negro.” Similarly, black preachers and teachers in company towns either followed the best interests of the employers, or they soon found themselves in the market for another position. Even the reports published by the Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics, which was always directed by an Afro-American, uniformly painted a bright picture of black life in the state.

Perhaps the most curious misreading of the condition of blacks in the coal towns of West Virginia appeared in a 1924 issue of the Messenger, edited by Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph, two self-proclaimed black radicals who seldom lost an opportunity to castigate capitalist exploitation. The Messenger printed an article on West Virginia that year by T. Gillis Nutter, a prominent black attorney from Charleston who served as a state legislator and was president of the Charleston branch of the NAACP. In his description of life in the state’s coal towns, Nutter claimed that black miners who had once lived in crude shacks now dwelled in “comfortable houses of four, five, and eight rooms, that have modern conveniences, such as electricity, water, gas, fenced yards, and gardens.” Nutter claimed that social, educational, religious, and sanitation facilities were superior to those usually found in the nation’s rural towns. Moreover, he declared, the “average miner” dressed well, “set a splendid table,” and commonly spent his leisure time riding about in an automobile.

If such a view had been published in the New York Times, E. Franklin Frazier, then a young black sociologist at Morehouse College, responded in an acerbic letter to the Messenger, he might have overlooked it as the “usual propaganda.” But for this article to “adorn the pages of the spokesman of labor is unthinkable.” Frazier pointed out that four-fifths of the state’s miners lived in company-owned houses, only 7 percent of which had running water; that more than two-thirds of the roofs were of tar paper; that fewer than 3 percent of the houses had bathtubs; and that only 3 percent had inside toilets. From all this comfort the miners could be ejected at company will. Moreover, whatever their daily wage, miners had worked an average of only 214 days during the period between 1890 and 1924. In other words, the average miner earned only $500 for a year of work in 1921, when $1,603 was considered necessary for a minimum subsistence for a family of five. These conditions applied to all miners in the state, black and white, Frazier declaimed, and any author who focused on “a few successful men” while ignoring the thousands of “industrial serfs” was grossly distorting the truth.

Even though blacks received equal pay, nearly equal access to the skilled occupations, and essentially equal housing, they were segregated nonetheless. One authority on the southern West Virginia coal industry, David Corbin, has asserted that “most of the company towns
were integrated, although some of them, depending on company policy, were segregated." He cites an article which describes Minden, West Virginia, sometime prior to 1938, although the article nowhere says that Minden was integrated; in fact, it specifically states that the black team was "emblematic of the baseball standard of 'nigger town,' " unquestionably referring to the segregated district where blacks lived. Actually the vast bulk of evidence supports the opposite of Corbin's conclusion. 28 A Washington reporter investigating life in a southern West Virginia coal camp in 1900 found that even under almost indescribably squalid conditions, Italians lived in their own quarter and "would not associate with negroes, hardly spoke to them," in fact. 29 Major William Tams, who owned Tams, West Virginia, divided his coal camp into "immigrant town," "colored town," and "American town." The coal baron imposed his notions of social organization upon the camp and enforced the barriers between the three sections. 30 Winding Gulf, West Virginia, was segregated as well. In 1918 Winding Gulf celebrated the Fourth of July with a big community celebration in the park with a picnic and amusements. Whites attended a program of their own in the morning, which was followed in the afternoon by the "colored people's program." 31

When James Elwood Jones, who managed the Pocahontas Fuel Company, became a Republican candidate in 1930 for the United States Senate from West Virginia, Obie McCollum of the New York Urban League informed the NAACP's Walter White that Jones should be opposed. McCollum, who had lived in the Pocahontas coalfield for fourteen years, claimed that Jones was responsible for the housing segregation which existed in the twenty-one towns his company owned in West Virginia. 32

Managers frequently instituted segregated housing patterns in West Virginia's company towns as part of their larger conception of appropriate social interaction. In one Fayette County coal camp the superintendent located the black section at the center of town near the company store, "so the whites will have to pass the Negro section and the Negroes the white. I think they learn to get along that way. That's my idea but it seemed to work." Even in the least segregated town surveyed by Laing, the company would not permit integrated double houses, refusing to place black and white families together under the same roof. 33 Another example may be found in the case of Slab Hollow, which was predominantly black in the 1920s. A manager moved Charles Bradshaw, a black man, and his family from a four-room house into a larger one that had been occupied by a white miner because Bradshaw had more children than the white man. The mine manager purposely arranged housing into a checkerboard pattern, the only unbroken rule being that a white family never lived between two black
families. In 1930, however, a new superintendent reversed the former policy, resegregated the housing, hired more whites than blacks to alter the labor ratio to favor whites, and replaced the only Afro-American foreman with a white man. 34

These examples demonstrate that the lines of segregation were drawn, but not so tightly as to lose all flexibility. Some blacks occasionally lived in white sections, and some whites in the black sections of town. One Kanawha County superintendent, who favored segregated housing, claimed that he had tried to separate the white and black miners, but they would not let him. A Logan County operator informed Laing that the native whites did not mind living with Afro-Americans, and some whites deviated from the norm and asked to be transferred to the black section. 35

Recreational and other public facilities were nearly always separate, even where blacks and whites used the same buildings. Bathhouses were invariably segregated and so were the clubhouses. As a rule, blacks sat on one side of the theaters and whites on the other. Poolrooms were usually built to accommodate both races, but blacks and whites entered the buildings through separate entrances and played pool on their own respective sides of a partition, usually a counter over which drinks were served to the players of either group. The two races frequently conversed across the counter, but they did not usually play together. Although informal recreation, such as cards and checkers or baseball, frequently found blacks and whites intermingling, company-sponsored baseball teams were always segregated, even though they sometimes competed against one another. 36

There were some dramatic exceptions to these general patterns of social segregation. Howard B. Lee, a Bluefield lawyer and attorney general of West Virginia (1925-1933), accompanied a client to Keystone one June day in 1911 to see the town's infamous "Cinder Bottom" section. The population of Keystone was twenty-five hundred, and black and foreign-born miners made up 75 percent of the total. At the upper end of the town on a bottom covered with two feet of cinders from nearby coke ovens stood twenty-five dilapidated houses used as brothels, "the toughest of the country's tough spots." Guiding Lee and his companion on their tour was none other than the town's police chief. In addition to black and native-white women, prostitutes representing many nationalities plied their trade in these houses, along with saloonkeepers, gamblers, bouncers, thieves, pimps, and panhandlers. The chief informed the two men that "in these dives all barriers are down, and there is complete racial, social, and sexual integration." In one of the eight houses he entered, Lee saw "a white girl on the lap of a Negro man, both drinking beer from the same bottle." In another house "a Negro girl and a white man were swigging beer from a
common bottle.” When the chief opened a few bedroom doors, “we saw a white man with a Negro girl.” In another house were “a Negro man and a white girl in the same bed.” When asked why the companies permitted Cinder Bottom to exist, the chief responded that he had heard the operator’s explanation many times: “The entire economy of the country, and the value and permanency of their huge investments are wholly dependent upon the brawn of the thousands of colored and foreign-born miners employed in the country; and that these workers would not remain in the country without the ‘gaiety, entertainment, and accommodations’ that go with the ready presence of ‘wine, women, and song.’ Therefore, they demand a wide-open country, and the local authorities cooperate fully.”

Such cases were obvious exceptions to the norm, however, and where they existed it was because the coal operators perceived the deviation to be in the interests of their companies.

Even though racial lines were not so stringently enforced in West Virginia as they were in the Deep South, or even in neighboring central Appalachia, social life in the Mountain State was segregated by custom and management design. Nevertheless, race relations were unique. Perhaps the key to understanding the distinctive qualities of race relations in southern West Virginia was the freedom of expression enjoyed by blacks. Only in education and intermarriage was integration specifically barred by statute. Unlike its Appalachian neighbors, West Virginia did not disfranchise blacks, and they continued to enjoy full political equality. In fact, one of the major reasons blacks moved into the state’s mining towns in such large numbers was the near absence of jim crow laws. They preferred West Virginia to Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee because they wanted to vote, to educate their children, and to live in a black community which was not suppressed by racist politics or hedged in at every turn by the constraints of caste etiquette. That only 14 percent of the blacks who resided in West Virginia during the 1920s were born in the state testifies to the powerful allure of the relative equality they found there.

Afro-Americans took full advantage of this political freedom. Their enthusiasm for politics led the prominent black politician and Charleston attorney T.G. Nutter to conclude in 1924 that “the Negro is the balance of power in the State and this fact is recognized by the two great parties.” Consequently, Nutter wrote, “in no other section of the country does the Negro wield the power and enjoy the political prestige” he had in West Virginia. Although Nutter exaggerated, it is true that blacks were a political force to be reckoned with in the southern part of the state. Since they were staunchly Republican until the New Deal era, blacks exerted considerable influence in the party’s local machinery.
Social status did not necessarily translate into political leadership in the coal communities, however. Preachers, teachers, machine men, or night watchmen who held positions denoting company trust usually held high social status in the mining communities, but that did not propel them into political leadership as spokesmen for Afro-American miners. Laing found that among the sixty-six black leaders in the coal towns he surveyed, only one held a supervisory position (stable boss), none were professionals, and thirty-nine (about 50 percent) were coal loaders. The remainder were ordinary mine workers of one description or another. Preachers and supervisors served at the pleasure of the company; so independent leadership among black miners came from within their own ranks.

The deep political involvement of blacks in a state that lacked a vigorous caste tradition and needed blacks to develop its industrial base, was instrumental in their appointment to "more state offices than in any other state in the Union," according to Nutter. Afro-Americans held such offices as state librarian, state supervisor of rural schools, and director of the Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics. Three blacks sat in the House of Delegates in 1912, two in 1921, and one in 1923. They were neither the first (the first was Christopher Payne who was elected in 1896 from Fayette County) nor the last. At least one Afro-American held a prominent position in every department of the state government. At the local level, blacks served as city councilmen, justices, deputy sheriffs, postmasters, and clerks.

McDowell County was frequently referred to as the "black county of West Virginia." There, Afro-Americans made up 34.1 percent of the 17,200 total male population of voting age in 1910, and they were the best organized bloc in the state. Of this total, native whites represented 7,172; foreign-born whites, 4,196; and blacks, 5,883. Of the foreign white population, not more than 250 were naturalized citizens, and few of them actually voted. Moreover, a smaller percentage of native whites exercised the franchise than did blacks. Blacks were politically very active through the McDowell County Colored Republican Organization, which had organized clubs in nearly every town in the county. The organization itself was run by a black deputy sheriff. With approximately seven thousand whites splitting their votes between Democrats and Republicans and with blacks solidly Republican, the six thousand black voters were the decisive element in the county electoral process. For example, when the white incumbent mayor of Keystone ran for reelection in 1914, he was supported by the local black Republican organization. When the votes were counted, he had defeated his opponent 351 to 284. Inasmuch as blacks cast at least 225 of the votes, the mayor clearly owed them his election.

In Mercer County, the black residents of Princeton were organized
into the Colored Politico-Civic League, "having for its object the development of closer cooperation with the whites in the matter of public welfare movements, such as for improving roads and better schools, for their race, as well as for the betterment of their social conditions." Purportedly, the league was nonpartisan, but clearly it concerned itself primarily with local political issues and worked "solely for the welfare of the colored race in governmental affairs."45

Educational equality was the other significant area in which West Virginia race relations were most distinctive. Actually, equal opportunity in politics reinforced equality in education. In 1872 West Virginia adopted a provision in its constitution which provided that "white and colored persons should not be taught in the same school."46 Until the 1890s, the state's public schools were not only separate but conspicuously unequal. In that decade, however, the coal companies became involved in public education in the belief that basic education would increase productivity, improve safety, and stabilize the work force. Primarily as a result of company efforts, coalfield education improved dramatically. The companies supplemented teachers' salaries, standardized hiring and salaries on the basis of qualifications rather than race, and frequently provided school districts with buildings, land, equipment, and other supplies. In 1885 public educational facilities in McDowell County consisted of nine log-cabin schools, valued at less than a hundred dollars each, and the school term was three months. By 1904 the county had seventy-eight schools, valued between three and six hundred dollars each, and the school year was eight months long.47 Blacks were the direct beneficiaries of company support for education. For example, in 114 West Virginia mine towns examined by the U.S. Coal Commission in 1922, coal companies owned the black school buildings and land in 51 cases, and in 15 others they had donated the land. For white schools the figures were significantly lower, with companies owning the buildings in only 11 cases, and providing the land in 34 others.48

To make sure that West Virginia University, which was reserved for whites, would continue to receive annual appropriations under the provisions of the Second Morrill Act, the state established West Virginia Colored Institute near Charleston in 1891 to provide blacks with an opportunity to acquire a college education. The Republicans gained control of the state legislature in 1895 for the first time since Reconstruction and, to reward their black constituents, obtained a second collegiate institute for blacks, constructing it in the southern coalfields at Bluefield. Both institutes originated as normal schools to train teachers for the state's parallel black school system, but eventually both became colleges. West Virginia State College emerged out of the colored collegiate institute near Charleston, and Bluefield State Teachers
College grew out of the normal school in Bluefield. The state board of regents issued a report in 1912 explaining its policy regarding the black institutes: "The State of West Virginia has always shown a disposition to give its colored population a square deal in educational advantages. . . . We must base our efforts to give the negroes higher education upon our plain duty and privilege to serve our fellow citizens, yet this education could be urged on the ground of economy alone, as the saving of the expense of crime and pauperism and the increased earning power of this large number means more to the state financially than the cost of these institutions."  

Recognizing that little could be done to establish an integrated school system, black leaders applied political leverage to ensure that black administrators and staff would be appointed to operate the state's segregated institutions. They demanded and won black administration not just for the black school system but also for the other segregated institutions funded by the state, such as homes for orphans and the aged, industrial (reform) schools, an insane asylum, and a school for the deaf and blind. If public institutions were to be segregated in West Virginia, then blacks demanded that they be in charge of their own, and they had the political muscle to win those demands. As one black leader stated it, black West Virginians "have fought for equal facilities under the law," and their success was evident in the "fine educational and eleemosynary institutions in the state."  

Dual school systems were expensive to operate, but blacks did not suffer from underfunding in West Virginia as they did in southern and border states. Because all teachers were paid on the basis of qualifications rather than race and because teaching was one of the few professions open to a significant number of Afro-Americans, a higher percentage of talented youths were channeled into that career. Consequently, black teachers tended to possess higher qualifications as a group and, therefore, to receive higher average salaries than whites. West Virginia also spent more per pupil for black students ($111.47) than for white students ($100.63). In 1913-1914 the two black colleges were being operated for only 5.3 percent of the state's population, but they received 18 percent of total state appropriations for higher education.  

The children of black miners took advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. In 1910 nearly 80 percent of the black children between ages six and fourteen in McDowell County attended school, as compared with 75 percent of native-white children in the same age bracket. By 1930 a larger percentage of black youths attended high school than in any other southern or border state. Similarly, in 1933-1934 ninety-four of every thousand blacks between ages eighteen and twenty-one were enrolled in public colleges, where-
as the ratio for whites was only fifty-three per thousand. In the seventeen southern and border states which maintained dual systems of education, the enrollment for blacks in public colleges was twelve per thousand. The children of miners were highly represented in West Virginia's black college population. For example, over 50 percent of the 1932-33 freshman class at West Virginia State were the sons and daughters of coal miners or other unskilled workers. At Bluefield State 93.9 percent of the 232 students were the children of coal miners.\(^{56}\)

Equally funded education in the coalfields was significant not merely as a magnet for attracting black workers or as a mechanism for upward social mobility but also as preparation for equal citizenship. David Corbin is correct in his assessment that these "schools provided blacks with the sense of dignity and pride that comes with the knowledge of one's past and helped to make it possible for the blacks to live, work, and cooperate with whites on an equal basis." As long as black (or white) teachers did not discuss labor-related issues they controlled their own classroom instruction, and black administrators controlled the schools. Students, therefore, were fortified with a sense of self-respect and taught the rigid discipline necessary for self-uplift.\(^{57}\)

Segregation in company towns was not by itself sufficient to deter the rise of a remarkable degree of class unity among the miners of southern West Virginia. As the heterogeneous racial and ethnic groups became accustomed to the new order imposed by the coal companies, a camaraderie among the workers sprouted out of the soil of common grievances against company rule and the common dangers which confront all who go down into the pits. As workers lived close together in small isolated towns, discrimination generated by fear and ignorance soon dissipated, and racial-cultural animosities declined. When racial discrimination occurred in company-owned towns, the onus fell on the companies rather than other miners.\(^{58}\)

Black miners may have achieved an approximate equality with their white counterparts in southern West Virginia, but the coal companies extended their feudal power over blacks and whites alike. The UMWA offered the only alternative source of institutional power in a political order so thoroughly dominated by the coal interests. Prior to the permanent entry of the UMWA into the coalfields of central Appalachia, the operators were the only real force behind racial discrimination. For this reason, the union remained untainted by racial grievances among Afro-American miners. This harmony enabled the UMWA to capitalize on the antagonism toward the companies among all miners and to forge a class movement characterized by racial and ethnic cooperation. Institutional loyalty among blacks, which hitherto had gone to operators, was transferred to the union as the only other agency which could serve their economic interests. If the operators
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were the agents of an autocratic despotism, the UMWA became the vehicle for democratic reform, and in attempting to crush the union, the coal interests backhanded the UMWA into a position of moral authority among the miners. Thus, as blacks became established citizens of southern West Virginia along with whites and foreign-born immigrants, they acquired a stake in transforming a feudal system into one which more closely approximated American democratic ideals. The agent of transformation for all three groups was the UMWA.\(^{59}\)

Violence became a permanent feature of the miners' movement to organize a union in central Appalachia, and in a long history of labor management conflict, few regions can surpass it in the bitterness of that struggle. By the end of World War I southern West Virginia operators would lock horns with a people unified by a class consciousness which at least temporarily rendered race and nationality insignificant to the larger cause. Details regarding the role of black miners in the mine wars of Mingo and Logan counties between 1919 and 1921 are as elusive to document as in the Paint and Cabin creeks war of 1912-1913. Whatever their precise numbers, however, blacks certainly played a major role in both conflicts. The Mingo and Logan round in the seemingly endless cycle of violence in the West Virginia coalfields began in September 1919, when the UMWA called for a national shutdown of the mines in an effort to regain wages lost during World War I. West Virginia miners refused to comply with a federal injunction prohibiting the strike, and before long the dispute degenerated into guerrilla warfare between miners and company gunmen. Nowhere in the state or, for that matter, in the entire region did the conflict equal the scale it assumed in the nonunion bastions of Mingo and Logan counties where thirteen thousand miners dug coal under the rule of company gunmen. UMWA organizers saw the area as crucial, believing that they must establish a solid organization in Mingo and Logan before a drive to enlist the miners in southernmost West Virginia or across the Tug River in eastern Kentucky could possibly succeed.

By May 1920, two thousand of the four thousand miners in Mingo County had joined the UMWA, but they were summarily discharged and forced to move into UMWA tent colonies.\(^{60}\) Then, on May 19, 1920, eleven Baldwin-Felts guards arrived at the independent town of Matewan on their way to evict union strikers from company houses. When the gunmen attempted to board a train, however, they were intercepted by the Matewan mayor and Chief of Police Sid Hatfield. Hatfield had been a coal miner and UMWA member, and both men sympathized with the miners. The exact sequence of events remains unclear, but when the shooting ended, the mayor, two strikers, and seven guards lay dead. Among the dead gunmen were Albert and Lee
Felts, brothers of Tom Felts, coowner of the hated agency that bore his name. "Two-gun" Sid Hatfield, who was credited with their deaths, became a folk hero among the miners, but Baldwin-Felts men marked him for revenge. Hatfield was indicted, but he would never see the courtroom, for on August 1, 1921, he and another defendant were assassinated by two Baldwin-Felts gunmen on the courthouse steps in broad daylight. Even though the two Matewan officials were murdered before a crowd of witnesses, the gunmen were acquitted on the grounds of self-defense with customary swiftness. 61

The assassination of Sid Hatfield galvanized the miners' resolve to end the system of "gun-thug rule." By July over 90 percent of the Mingo miners had signed union pledge cards, and they were spoiling for a fight. Gun battles became routine, and anyone who hindered the organizing effort—including the state police, Baldwin-Felts guards, and nonunionist miners—became a target for retribution. When the governor sent in federal troops to protect strikebreakers, the miners killed several of the soldiers as well. 62

The number of black miners in the county was comparatively small in 1920, standing at 513, but that figure represented approximately 12 percent of the 4,000 miners in Mingo. The UMWA had at least one local black organizer on the payroll in Mingo County, Frank Ingham, of Chattaroy. The company discharged and evicted him when the lockout began, and subsequent difficulties reveal just how far the operator's arm could reach in the political economy of the central Appalachian coalfields. Ingham moved to McVeigh, Kentucky, where he was employed for only two weeks before being discharged for his union membership. From there he moved to Alfex, Kentucky, but after working only five days he was dismissed once again for the same reason. On his return to West Virginia, the company which had blacklisted him in the first place rehired Ingham. The reason for this change of mind subsequently became apparent when the superintendent informed Ingham that the company planned to fire all of the whites and replace them with blacks, and Ingham would become the "head nigger." But Ingham was not a race leader of that stripe, and instead he urged blacks not to take the white men's jobs. Because the blacks admired him, and followed his advice, Ingham soon found himself unemployed once more. 63

Ingham would not play the race game. Remaining a union stalwart, he received the special treatment reserved for principled union organizers in central Appalachia. Deputy sheriffs and other law enforcement officials harassed him constantly. Once he was arrested by a prohibition officer and placed in the Williamson jail. The officer cursed him, called him abusive names, and told others present that "what we
ought to do with him is . . . riddle his body with bullets on the street.” When Ingham asked why he was detained, the officer said, “Shut up. Don’t open your mouth. I will blow your brains out.” The black organizer was also jailed in Welch and was refused his right to see a lawyer. In response to his request for permission to send a message to his wife, the sheriff responded that “the only message you can get out will be to God, and unless you hurry you will fail in that.” That was more than idle rhetoric, for at midnight the sheriff escorted Ingham from his cell to a waiting car in front of the police station and sped out of town with a carload of deputies following closely behind. The procession stopped along the road between Welch and Hemphill, and the deputies proceeded to beat Ingham with clubs until they believed he was dead. One of the deputies gave Ingham a final kick in the face and robbed his pockets before leaving him alone in the dark. Ingham was not dead, however, and after the thugs drove away he gathered enough strength to stumble down the road to a railroad coaling station where he received assistance.

Other black strikers were the recipients of Mingo gunman justice as well. U.S. Senators William S. Kenyon and Samuel M. Shortridge, members of the Senate committee investigating conditions in West Virginia, spent the afternoon of September 8, 1921, at a tent colony near Williamson where about 150 of the striking miners were black. Among the miners interviewed was George Echols, an Afro-American who was serving as local vice-president when he was discharged. He claimed to have been born a slave in eastern Virginia, and “when I was a slave . . . I felt just like we feel now.” Echols related to the horrified senators a hair-raising incident which had occurred on June 14, 1921. After a police car was fired upon from the hills near the colony, an armed force of company guards and state policemen sped to the scene and immediately mustered all the residents of the colony for a head count. All were present, but the officers arrested forty men and marched them to Williamson nonetheless. Before they herded their captives off to jail, however, the policemen sliced the tents and wrecked the furniture of the already desperate inhabitants. Alex Breedlove was one of the first men to join the union in Mingo County, and so the state police singled him out to serve as their example. “Hold up your hands, God damn you, and if you have got anything to say, say it fast,” a state trooper ordered Breedlove. All he had time to mutter was, “Lord, have mercy,” before the policeman shot him in cold blood. Now the West Virginia State Police had joined the Baldwin-Felts thugs in murdering miners for the operators. This was not the end of that ghoulsh incident, however. The body of Alex Breedlove was tossed into the bed of a pickup truck and paraded through the streets of
Williamson. According to Fred Mooney, “several of the crowd sat on the last remains of their victim holding his body in such position that his feet dragged the pavement.”

Such brutality infuriated and further radicalized coal miners throughout southern West Virginia. In the unionized fields plans were soon afoot to march on Mingo and neighboring Logan County to liberate their brothers of the picks from such loathsome tyrants. If anything, Logan was worse than Mingo. There, Sheriff Don Chafin manipulated all local elections to insure that only those whom he controlled were elected to office. In turn, Chafin was on the payroll of the coal operators to the tune of $32,700 per year to guarantee that the county and its residents were subservient to the interests of the companies. The coal companies owned or controlled all social institutions, and professionals or independent shopkeepers dared not run afoul of the coal establishment on penalty of being run out of the county or beaten by Chafin’s gunmen. In fact, a company-maintained private guard system constituted the only police force in Logan County, and that force was designed to do one thing alone: keep Logan County nonunion. A single railroad served Logan, the only incorporated town in the county, and Chafin’s gunmen patrolled the depot around-the-clock for strangers who might be union organizers.

Blacks represented a large proportion of the 9,000 miners in Logan County, numbering 1,752 in 1920 and 2,068 in 1921. That number increased to 3,022 in 1922, reflecting the importation of nonunion Afro-Americans during the strike. In 1923 their numbers fell to 2,415, about one-quarter of the work force. “Chafin justice” was not discriminatory, and these black miners were as oppressed as their white counterparts. For example, black miner Luther Mills related a story to a reporter in 1920:

Don Chafin says, “I want you to go up and get around among them men and find out who is tryin’ to organize and report back to me.”
Then he told the others, “Luther is goin’ to come clean,”
And Squire White says, “If you don’t come clean, by God, we will kill you.”
Don Chafin says, “Dead nigger if you don’t.”
I says, “I come clean, you let me go.”

Black professionals who served the Afro-American community dared not counter the system either, or they too would receive “Chafin justice.” A black minister, the Reverend Alfred Eubanks, who was friendly to the UMWA cause, delivered a prounion speech to his flock one Saturday night, and a spy quickly informed the “high sheriff” of Logan County. The next morning on his way to church the minister was attacked and pistol-whipped by a deputy sheriff and two strang-
ers. Eubanks was then charged with resisting arrest and received the usual fine and jail sentence. Such treatment was not reserved for professionals, however. On one occasion, Logan company guards reportedly "stood two negro citizens against a box car and riddled them with bullets." During the organizing drive the operators' hired thugs also beat hundreds of workers into insensibility, and "slugged negro women in the public highways, evidence of which has been presented to the governor by sworn affidavits." Such treatment was not reserved for professionals, however.

As early as November 1919 Kanawha County miners, black and white, were ready to arm themselves to put an end to this mockery of democratic government. A rumor circulated that month that Logan gunmen were beating and killing the organizers sent into the county by UMWA district president Frank Keeney, and almost overnight approximately four thousand armed miners gathered near Marmet to prepare for a march against Logan County. Governor John Cornwell hastened to the encampment to plead with the men to disband and avoid bloodshed. From a platform, Governor Cornwell stated that the gunman system had been implemented before his time, and he promised to do everything in his power to eradicate it. The men had grown weary of such promises, however, for experience had taught them otherwise. When the governor finished his speech, according to one participant in the event, a "burly Negro said to him, 'Mr. Governor, you made a nice speech, we likes yo' talk, but it don' mean nothin', and I'se erfraid you done lose.' " His remark apparently expressed the sentiments of the entire gathering for it was greeted with much applause. Keeney finally persuaded the men to return to their homes, and thus ending the first march on Logan. It is probable that many other black miners were at this gathering, for the labor force in the Marmet area was 50 percent native white, 30 percent black, and 20 percent foreign-born.

The second march on Logan was precipitated by the assassination of Sid Hatfield on August 1, 1921, and it would lead to far more dramatic consequences than the first. For the miners, his murder at the hands of company gunmen, and their unseemly quick release, constituted irrefutable evidence that the companies had destroyed the last vestige of legitimate authority. The miners had long since abandoned the political system as a means of protecting their rights because of its complete domination by the coal interests. There was little left for them to do but fight.

Between August 20 and 23, 1921, thousands of armed miners once again converged near Marmet. Estimates of how many blacks joined the second march to "free Logan" vary considerably. The director of the West Virginia Bureau of Negro Welfare claimed that "less than 200 Negroes took part in the march, while on the other hand more than 500..."
Negroes in Mercer, McDowell, Mingo and Logan Counties volunteered their service to go to the battle line and repel the invaders.” But it is likely that the bureau was attempting to defuse the issue to prevent a wedge from entering between the employers and black miners, or the bureau itself, which faithfully followed the Booker T. Washington line on industrial relations. 75 Reporter Heber Blankenhorn probably was more accurate when he estimated that one-quarter of the eight thousand men who gathered at Marmet were blacks. 76

After several days the miners slowly began to move toward Logan, their ranks swelling with each mile until they numbered between fifteen and twenty thousand. Many joined the marchers temporarily to “get in a lick” against the “gun-thug system” before retiring to the safety of their homes. The march was better organized than might be expected from the diversity of its makeup. There were doctors, nurses, and hospital facilities for the miners’ army, and about two thousand of the marchers were World War I veterans who set patrols, drilled, and used passwords as a precaution against infiltration by company spies. Trenches were dug at Blair Mountain, the high ridge which formed the western border of Logan County, and the last physical barrier obstructing the marchers’ approach. Here too Chafin deployed hundreds of his gunmen, as well as others whom he either bribed or pressed into service at the point of a revolver. “Pinhead” Jones, a black miner living at Logan, remembered that Chafin offered to pay him to fight, but Jones was frightened and “just hid out all that week.” The battle raged for more than a week. The miners were more numerous by at least ten to one, but the Logan gunmen were better equipped, better trained, and had a more centralized command structure. The guards also had machine gun nests on high ground, operator money, a limitless supply of ammunition, and small aircraft for dropping hand bombs. More importantly, the federal government was on their side. By September 1, 1921, the marchers controlled half of the long ridge, but they would never liberate Logan, for President Warren G. Harding dispatched twenty-five hundred federal troops to the scene to interdict the marchers. Disappointed, the men slowly dispersed and returned to their homes. They could fight the operators’ gunmen, but the miners were patriots, and they refused to bear arms against the federal government.77

The number of people who died in the battle for Blair Mountain has never been authenticated. Neither side in the conflict ever revealed the number of deaths or casualties, and of course, no one was charged with tabulating battlefield statistics. A reporter for the Baltimore Evening Sun estimated that one hundred Chafin men and ten miners lost their lives. His estimate was based on the word of eyewitnesses, one of them a black miner who claimed that he had observed truckloads of dead
"constabularies" returning from the battle zone. At least two black marchers were either killed or seriously wounded. Early Ball of Lake, Logan County, "saw a Negro shot through, but if he died they never brought him into the barracks," a converted schoolhouse. Another participant testified that he was on patrol when three Logan gunmen were encountered, and "a negro standing alongside of me . . . was hit by a high power ball, and he fell." The wounded black miner was rushed to a doctor by his white compatriots, but his life could not be saved. Apparently blacks were conspicuous among the marchers; one operator claimed that "at any turn you were liable to butt into a colored man with a high-powered rifle." Hundreds of miners were arrested and charged with crimes ranging across the legal spectrum, including murder and treason. UMWA district official Fred Mooney was placed in the Kanawha County Jail along with about two hundred white miners and four hundred blacks. Conditions were deplorable, especially among the black prisoners. According to Mooney:

About 400 of the inmates were Negroes, and they were confined in the bull pen on the ground floor. "Kangaroo court" was in full blast among the "shines" and men were beaten unmercifully for trivial offenses against the assumed peace and dignity of the inmates.

The "whipping jack" among the Negroes was an old Negro preacher, nicknamed "St. Albans." It was he who applied the "cat o' nine tails" for from 10 to 150 lashes according to the "kangaroo" judge's decision or the findings of a jury when an offender was found guilty. At one time we saw him whip another Negro until his shoes were full of blood.

"Why don't you stop them?" I asked the jailor.

"Can't afford to do it, for if I do they will become unmanageable," he answered.

"Bull," I replied, "you mean to tell me that when such brutal treatment is accorded men under confinement that they are made better by it?"

"Don't know about that," he said, "but we reason that it is better to let them handle one another than to be constantly called upon to settle some internal dispute or infraction of the rules."

He would sit back and laugh while one of these whippings was in progress, and judging from his actions he enjoyed it.

The so-called treason trials had to be moved to Charles Town in the far eastern tip of the state to obtain a jury sufficiently uninfluenced by the event. The miners were tried in the same courthouse in which John Brown was convicted for his 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry; fortunately, the results were not the same. In the end, most of the charges were dropped, or the defendants were acquitted. John L. Lewis bitterly denounced District 17 officers for trying "to shoot the union into West Virginia," even though the UMWA had spent eight million dollars between 1920 and 1922 in its efforts to enlist southern West Virginia
miners. The officers were replaced, and the starving miners were forced to return to the pits. 83

One scholar of southern West Virginia miners, David Corbin, treats the march on Logan as class warfare, "an uprising of the southern West Virginia miners against the coal establishment." But many participants on the miners' side were not mine workers at all. 84 Actually, this was a much broader struggle for democratic ideals, a conflict between freedom and tyranny, an effort to break the all-pervasive power of the coal companies, which owned two-thirds of all privately owned property in the state. At this level of consciousness nearly every West Virginian, black or white, miner or not, could identify with the cause, and nearly everybody who understood it did. All along the way marchers received assistance from nonminer citizens. Early Ball, a white school teacher who lived on a Logan County farm near Lake, claimed that although they were called miners, "men come up there from every walk of life—doctors, lawyers, people that ran drugstores, and got out there and took to the hills with high-powered guns with the expression, 'I want to get a crack at those S.O.B.'s'." 85

The battle for Blair Mountain was the largest single armed conflict between labor and capital in American history. In this confrontation blacks and whites fought side by side for a common cause. Out of necessity the southern West Virginia coal companies had established a new industrial society based on equal opportunity, and the state reinforced economic opportunity by maintaining equality at the ballot box and in the schoolhouse. The ironic fruit of this policy was that within a generation black and white miners had not only accepted equality as a democratic ideal, at least in rough outline, but had come to identify along class lines on economic questions. This was, of course, the foundation of the interracial unity which united the southern West Virginia miners against the operators. Thus did the seeds of judicious mixture grow to entangle the companies that planted them in the remoteness of central Appalachia.
ELIMINATION
An Epilogue
Demise of the Black Miner

Before the Great Depression, coal mining was a labor-intensive industry organized around the relatively independent skilled miner who exercised considerable control over his own job. As the use of mechanical loaders spread throughout the industry during the 1930s and 1940s, the integrated factory system moved underground, transforming not only the production process but the nature of work itself. With more machinery, coal mining became less labor-intensive, and the number of machine operators, maintenance men, and service personnel increased, while the percentage of independent practical miners declined. Blacks were disproportionately affected by these changes, their numbers in the industry falling from 55,142 to 30,042 between 1930 and 1950. In southern Appalachia, where blacks were most heavily concentrated, the decline was even more drastic, dropping from a total of 42,266 in 1930 to 26,136 in 1950 and 3,673 in 1970. These changes are charted in Figures 1 and 2 on the following page and tabulated by state in the appendix.¹

Coal miners first encountered the issue of mechanization during the 1890s when cutting machines began to make a serious impact on coal production. The UMWA did not oppose the change but did try to limit the cost spread between machine- and hand-mined coal in order to retain the competitive position of the latter and to control the rate of mechanization. The first coal-cutting machine was introduced in the early 1880s and gradually accounted for an increasing percentage of coal mined in the bituminous fields, from about 6 percent in 1891 to 35 percent in 1906.² The cutting machine did not displace the miner but rather converted him from a generalist to a specialized worker. As long as the mechanization process did not proceed too rapidly, the impact on the pick miner was minimal because displacement could be offset by natural attrition when men left coal mining for other occupations, retired, died, or were disabled. These conditions underlay the union's traditional policy of gradual and controlled acceptance of mechanization. As early as 1892, District 6 (Ohio) President John P. Jones recog-
Figure 1. Employment in the Bituminous Coal Industry

![Employment in the Bituminous Coal Industry](image1)

Figure 2. Percentage of Blacks Employed in the Bituminous Coal Industry

![Percentage of Blacks Employed in the Bituminous Coal Industry](image2)
nized that "the tendency of the age is to substitute machinery for hand labor." This process had only begun, but Jones believed that it was irreversible. "It is matterless if we approve or disapprove," he told the UMWA district convention. "My judgment is that mining machinery is but in its infancy, and hence we should prepare ourselves to yield with as much grace as possible to the inevitable, and turn our attention to securing the best terms possible."3 The same opinion prevailed at the national level. UMWA President John Mitchell declared in 1900 that the union did not accept the "untenable position that the introduction of labor-saving machinery in coal mines should be discontinued," but he did demand an equal opportunity for pick men to compete with machine-mined coal.4

The union pursued this policy in the northern fields by establishing a wage differential for machine- and hand-mined coal, thereby representing the interests of both types of miners. In effect, the UMWA accepted a lower wage scale for machine men, but not so low as to provide a powerful incentive for the operators to mechanize as rapidly as possible. Considering the weakness of the UMWA during these years, the attempt to cushion the impact of mechanization rather than resist it probably was an intelligent policy. Between 1900 and 1919, machine mining increased from 25 percent to 60 percent of the coal mined nationwide. By the 1920s, pick mining remained most heavily concentrated in the nonunion fields of central Appalachia and the South, where lower wages rendered mechanization less attractive.5

Even though the Joy Manufacturing Company marketed a mechanical loading device as early as 1921, the pace of investment in the new technology slowed markedly between 1921 and 1935 as the coalfields suffered first a postwar recession and then the Great Depression. Correspondingly, labor demand in the industry declined to new lows. As the Depression reached bottom in 1935, however, demand for coal began to rise, and the use of mechanical loaders in Appalachia expanded dramatically. Between 1935 and 1947, coal loaded by machine in West Virginia grew from 2.1 million tons per year to 99.8 million tons, an increase of 4,900 percent. Similarly, machine-loaded coal in Kentucky expanded from 500,000 tons in 1935 to 30.8 million tons per year in 1947, an increase of 3,000 percent.6

Rising demand and improved earnings played an important role in the mechanization of Appalachian mines, but companies shifted to mechanical loading primarily to prevent a rise in labor costs, according to the industry's leading journal.7 Several industry leaders adopted machinery to improve their competitive positions in the market, and smaller competitors were forced to follow. Increasing wage demands by the union and the vicious competitiveness which characterized the industry were exacerbated by increasing competition from other fuels.
The only way companies could significantly reduce costs was to mechanize the mines, and contracts with the UMWA were revised to decrease the wage differentials for machine- and hand-loaded coal in the Appalachian fields.\(^8\)

The impact of the mechanical loader fell disproportionately on black miners because they were concentrated in the unskilled classification of hand loading and beginning with the Great Depression had fewer and fewer opportunities to learn the skills necessary to become machine operators or maintenance men. Until the late forties, moreover, miners were laid off according to classification seniority, rather than minewide seniority. Men in jobs eliminated by mechanization often had more seniority than those in jobs unaffected by the introduction of the new machines, but their greater seniority did them no good. Since blacks were overwhelmingly concentrated in the former categories and seriously underrepresented in the latter, they suffered a much larger degree of displacement.\(^9\)

Hiring, firing, upgrading, and training are the prerogatives of the employer, and it is clear that many, perhaps most, believed that blacks were either intellectually incapable of operating the new equipment or too unreliable to be depended upon. Such inherently racist notions were more easily acted upon as the demand for labor in the industry declined. Black miner William Major Veasly, who moved to West Virginia from Alabama in 1926, claimed that the first machine that entered his mine at Grant Town went into a black man’s entry. Blacks could not “kick” against a machine, but the mine management “always put them where blacks were working first,” which meant that Afro-American miners were the first to be laid off. Veasly claimed that not all blacks were affected, however, only those who “wanted white men’s jobs.” In the 1940s, when mechanical loaders came to Grant Town, for example, Veasly was put into a section where he could not make any money. Because he had gone to classes and received his foreman’s papers, his white supervisor exclaimed: “You black son-of-a-bitch you’ll want a white man’s job.” Another supervisor explained that his black miners were laid off because “they would envy the machine and not work well.”\(^10\) A black delegate from a Coal River local in West Virginia rose before the 1938 UMWA convention to complain of a similar scheme to discriminate against blacks. When this miner began work at his job four years earlier, Afro-Americans constituted a majority of the men operating motors and other equipment at the mine. When the company changed superintendents, however, the new supervisor removed all blacks from the machine jobs and replaced them with whites. The black man hoped that the international would “talk to those fellows, because they certainly are trying to bring division among us, and cause a fight.”\(^11\)
Black miner Oliver Gholston, who worked in the mines at Cambria, West Virginia, from 1935 to 1957, informed an interviewer that "automation and the race thing" were responsible for the demise of the black miner. When the company brought in the loading and cutting machines, "blacks began to disappear," Gholston asserted. "All those machines were run by whites." In fact, during his entire career in northern West Virginia mines, he had never seen a black man running a loading machine. Gholston remembered a black loading-machine operator from Illinois who came to Cambria looking for work. Even though he was an experienced operator, "the company wouldn't let him help on the loading machine, much less run one."asked whether the UMWA found discrimination against blacks during mechanization, Gholston responded, "Sometimes yes, and sometimes no." On one occasion the company broke the usual line of progression by placing a white trackman on the motor ahead of Gholston, who was a brakeman. He complained to district officials, but "they didn't do a damn thing for my case," Gholston commented.12

Even though management was responsible for these concerns, they did fall within the grievance system established by the UMWA contract. The union had been remarkably open to blacks, but its policy of gradualism on issues involving racial discrimination meant that the UMWA was less vigilant in providing equal protection against layoffs from mechanization than Afro-American members had a right to expect. Very few grievances were ever filed on behalf of black miners who lost their jobs to machines or were passed over for upgrading. As economist Herbert Northrup has observed, the UMWA's failure to protect the interests of black members represented "discrimination by omission."13 In some cases, however, discrimination against blacks was by overt commission. For example, white miners occasionally forced a company to discriminate by refusing to work when blacks were upgraded to machine jobs. Normally such practices occurred in the Alabama fields or in mines where blacks had been barred or restricted to unskilled work by long-standing policy or custom. At one such mine whites refused to work if blacks were permitted to take jobs previously restricted to whites, and in 1951 the company employed them only in what white miners considered "Negro jobs."14

The most serious difficulty confronting black miners in this environment of contracting labor demand, aside from racism itself, was the group's relative inexperience with mine machinery and the segregated institutions by which miners learned skills for occupational upgrading. West Virginia was once again unique as the only mining state in which a formal effort was launched to train blacks in technical mining to prepare them for the mechanical revolution. The effort was initiated in the thirties by the prominent black miner-schoolteacher,
Ulysses G. Carter. At thirteen Carter entered the mines at Kimball, in McDowell County, as a trapper boy; he paid his own way through high school and West Virginia State College by working as a miner. With a degree in chemistry and mathematics, Carter taught at Kimball High School but continued to work in the mines during the summer months. In 1937 the state approved his plan to offer extension courses for black miners under the auspices of West Virginia State College. West Virginia University had started a similar program for white miners in 1913, but blacks were not admitted. Carter became director of the new program, and ten Afro-American instructors were hired to assist him. "It was difficult selling the program to black miners though," Carter recalled, "because they would look around and say, 'I don't see any black bosses so what's the use of studying.' " He countered this resistance with the argument that the time was coming when the opportunity would be available, and blacks should prepare themselves for that eventuality. Carter directed the program until 1957 when the schools in West Virginia were desegregated, and West Virginia University invited the black extension instructors to join its own faculty. During the program's twenty-year existence approximately ten thousand black miners took one or more courses offered by the extension service, and three hundred blacks became certified.

By 1951 U.G. Carter would report that there was "little if anything for the unskilled miner to do" because machines had rendered most of the old manual skills obsolete. In fact, "every procedure used in the process of mining marketable coal is being replaced by a mechanical process," and Carter made this observation before the onslaught of the continuous miner. He had foreseen that training to meet the demand for skilled personnel would be offered "mainly to white miners who eventually would receive fabulous salaries paid to attract young men to the industry." Consequently, Carter aimed to make blacks more skilled miners, but he also sought to convince superintendents that "an intelligent miner, whether white or black, is the kind of miner who should be given an opportunity to learn how to use today's intricate mine machinery."16

Before the Mining Extension Service was established in 1938, there were only 5 certified black miners in West Virginia. Ten years later, 115 black men in the state had received state certification, a process which required them to take courses and pass examinations on mine gases, mine instruments, ventilation, mine records, mine arithmetic, the use and care of safety lamps, fires and explosions, mine rescue, and first aid. According to Carter, the advantages of certification were several: it represented personal development; the miner was eligible for employment in responsible positions at better pay; the miner could help fellow miners improve themselves in their work; and certification com-
manded greater respect from miners and superiors alike. Despite these advantages and a decade of service, of the 115 Afro-American miners who were certified in 1948, only 7 percent held jobs on machines, and 49 percent were still common miners. Apparently the companies were more willing to place blacks in supervisory positions than they had been in the late twenties and early thirties, and 28 percent of the certified men were in supervisory positions, 9 as foremen, and 23 as fire bosses. This was an advance over the total in 1942, when only 8 blacks were supervisors. Nevertheless, the impact of this improvement on the labor force as a whole was insignificant, and the number of black miners continued to follow a precipitous downward spiral.

In 1944 Herbert Northrup observed that “if Negroes continue to bear the brunt of technological unemployment, the UMWA will no longer be able to claim that it adhered to a policy of racial equality as steadfastly as any other American labor union.” Northrup anticipated that continued mechanization during the post–World War II era would put the equalitarian policies of the UMWA to their severest test. Judged by its open membership policy, the UMWA continued to live up to its equalitarian tradition, but if protection of black miners’ interests in the face of mechanization is the criterion for judgment, the UMWA failed its “severest test” miserably. Ironically, one of the major reasons the UMWA leadership was so little criticized by blacks, even as their numbers plummeted, was the union’s progressive image on the race issue. During the late thirties and early forties this image glittered brightest because of the prominent role played by UMWA leaders in the racially progressive Congress of Industrial Organizations, founded by the union’s powerful president John L. Lewis.

UMWA policy toward racial discrimination continued to have as its foundation the assumption that elimination of racism required a slow educational process, even though the rise of mechanization had fundamentally altered the nature of discrimination. The issue no longer centered upon equal admission and office holding in the union, class versus racial solidarity in the face of hostile operator associations, or UMWA relations with racist unions. Nevertheless, Lewis continued to focus on a class-conscious strategy which yielded fine public relations for the UMWA as a union in the vanguard against racism. The CIO did indeed organize masses of black workers hitherto ignored, but this camouflaged the actual plight of the Afro-American coal miner. It is not necessary to assign malevolent motives to the UMWA president to account for this course of events. Lewis had always taken the position that class should transcend race within the labor movement. As early as the 1916 UMWA convention he had made such an argument. When a black delegate to that convention raised the question whether it was equitable for the UMWA to support other unions which practiced racial
discrimination, Lewis had responded that the UMWA should not con­
done such policies or the resultant suffering, but unions had a right to
frame their own policies without interference from other unions. As
president of the UMWA from 1920 to 1960, he consistently stood by
this basic position.

Although Lewis was generally guided by pragmatism on racial
issues, when the cause of black rights intersected with what he
perceived to be the broader interests of the union, the UMWA presi­
dent did not shy away from battle. At public hearings to amend the
bituminous coal code in 1934, Lewis presented an array of data for
uniform wage rates in the South. In a detailed statistical analysis, he
destroyed the argument of the Alabama operators that the cost of living
was lower in the South. In fact, he pointed out, black miners, who
made up more than half the work force in Alabama, endured a lower
standard of living than white miners because racism depressed black
wages while compelling them to pay more for identical housing.

Such forthright public denunciations persuaded civil rights organi­
zations to support Lewis as David against the Goliath coal companies.
The UMWA president was also the chief architect of the Congress of
Industrial Organizations, which received a strong endorsement from
the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The
Crisis editorialized that if the CIO followed the racial policies of the
UMWA, then “Negro workers ought to flock to the C.I.O. un­
hesitatingly, for the U.M.W. is known far and wide for their absolute
equality, regardless of color.” Similarly, the National Urban League
urged black workers to rally in support of John L. Lewis and the CIO in
their dispute with the craft-oriented American Federation of Labor,
pointing out that many AFL unions were “notorious for their hostile
attitude to Negro labor.”

Lewis dispatched UMWA and CIO emissaries to speak before
Afro-American meetings and conventions. In a speech to the second
National Negro Congress, which convened in Philadelphia in October
1937, Thomas J. Kennedy, secretary-treasurer of the UMWA, roundly
denounced discrimination in the labor movement. Referring to the
UMWA’s open door policy, he urged Congress to pass legislation that
would force all unions to admit workers without regard to race. Ex­
pounding the standard UMWA policy, Kennedy made a direct appeal
for class unity between black and white workers, arguing that if blacks
joined whites in the CIO unions the resultant economic progress
would open the doors for cooperation in the social and political
realm. Lewis sent “warm greetings” to the same group and commen­
ded black men and women for the part they were “playing in the
CIO’s march to bring a better life to American workers.” In his letter to
NNC secretary John P. Davis, Lewis declared that he was “convinced
that the share of the American Negro in our labor movement will be even greater in the future.”

The following year John Brophy, a past president of UMWA District 5 (Pennsylvania), was sent to address a national conference against lynching called by the National Negro Congress in March 1938. As the Lewis-installed director of the CIO, Brophy articulated the UMWA-CIO line on race and denounced the American Federation of Labor’s acceptance of racial discrimination by its union affiliates. Brophy emphasized that the CIO was for all workers, regardless of race, and was responsible for organizing thousands of blacks, some of whom were officers in their unions and in the CIO itself. Brophy announced that the CIO supported passage of federal antilynching legislation because “behind every lynching is the figure of the labor exploiter” attempting to divide black and white workers along racial lines.

At the UMWA’s Golden Jubilee Convention in February 1940, Lewis himself informed a reporter for the Pittsburgh Courier, an Afro-American weekly, that the UMWA held to its “uncompromising attitude toward racial discrimination because we know that it is the only way to deal with the problem.” He advised blacks to “pay more attention to social and economic questions, rather than devote all their time and energy to politics alone,” because effective political action was possible only after the fundamental economic organization of the people had been achieved. “After all, a man, whether he is Negro or white must first of all earn a living,” Lewis avowed, and the need for bread “swept aside all other considerations.” He further claimed that the UMWA was the only labor organization which had always attempted “to do the right thing by the Negro,” and the same would be true for the CIO. This policy was not grounded on the quicksand of altruism, nor was it “a special privilege to be given to the Negro.” According to Lewis it was an affirmation of the belief that class transcended race and that “we should treat everyone in the same way because we all have the same problems. No group of workers can succeed if it leaves its fellow workers behind.”

A few days later, Lewis addressed the American Youth Congress, assembled in Washington, D.C., and again took up the then unpopular cause of black civil rights. “Every citizen born under this flag, regardless of his color” must be accorded his civil rights, he asserted. The UMWA president also demanded that the Department of Justice enforce the rights of blacks in the South and that it “strike down those damnable provisions inflicted upon the citizenship of those Southern States in the iniquitous poll taxes.” Appreciative of such criticism of federal inaction, the Chicago Defender, a prominent black newspaper, thought that Lewis had “taken the lead in a direction with which Negro America can certainly find no fault.” In the South the “Ku Klux Klan
rides again,” and “peonage stinks to high heaven,” but the federal government ignored these atrocities, the Defender editorialized.29

On April 26, 1940, the union president addressed three thousand delegates to the third National Negro Congress, which assembled in the U.S. Department of Labor auditorium in Washington, D.C. The speech was broadcast over the NBC radio network, and Americans across the nation heard the labor leader address the problems of unemployment, war, lynching, and the poll tax as unconscionable denials of traditional American civil liberties. Quoting Frederick Douglass, Lewis reminded the delegates that it would be a “great mistake for any class of laborers to isolate itself and thus weaken the bond of brotherhood between those on whom the burden and hardships of labor fall.” If it is the mission of the United States “to save western civilization” from the ravages of fascists, Lewis intoned, “then let us begin by saving it right here in our own country” by guaranteeing blacks the right to vote and the right to life by passage of antilynching legislation. Following his address, two black miner-delegates presented Lewis with a bronze plaque bearing an inscription which read in part, “To John L. Lewis, for distinguished service to the Negro people.” In accepting the award, Lewis told the assemblage that he was one American who believed in “equality of opportunity for the Negro people. I do not try to conceal the fact. I am rather anxious that a great many people find out about our views.” In closing, Lewis brought the audience to its feet with a stirring call for class solidarity: “Organize—Organize—Organize,” he urged the delegates; “exert your strength collectively and join with the labor movement in demanding that participation and that degree of protection which you know as Americans is your right.”30

A few months later, Lewis articulated the same theme before the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People convention in Philadelphia. Three thousand cheering delegates heard him avow that “fundamentally, labor’s fight is the same as yours—to obtain for American citizens those rights which are their heritage. The problems of the Negro people are the problems of all American wage earners.” Lewis admitted that these problems were more pronounced among blacks. Equal economic opportunity, he said, would come to black workers only when they were “organized industrially, side by side with all other industrial workers.”31

Although John L. Lewis did little in public to support the civil rights cause after he stepped down as president of the CIO in 1942, he did employ the United Mine Workers Journal as a propaganda vehicle to keep his image as a progressive on that issue alive. For example, the UMWA donated five thousand dollars to the Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial campaign to build an industrial training school at
Washington's birthplace in Franklin County, Virginia, and Lewis served on the campaign's executive committee. Well publicized in the black community, such occasional indirect involvement in black causes periodically replenished the reservoir of black support for Lewis. It was this powerful image of a progressive labor leader taking up the cause of black rights and economic uplift which prompted men such as "Uncle" Joe Glass, a black miner from Arista, West Virginia, to opine in 1945 that John L. Lewis was "one of the smartest men in the world today and all miners should never forget that John Lewis is the best friend any laboring man can have." To the editors of Color, an Afro-American magazine published in Charleston, West Virginia, Lewis was "labor's implacable warrior," the "champion of democracy," who would not tolerate racial discrimination in a UMWA which barred from membership anyone who belonged to the Ku Klux Klan.

Although the external facade of Lewis's UMWA was that of a strong progressive organization, by the late forties all was not well in this house of labor, especially regarding the future of black "brothers of the picks." The racial issues had deteriorated from such questions as the role of blacks in the union to whether or not Afro-American miners would survive the next phase of mechanization or be eliminated from the industry entirely. On this score, Lewis demonstrated both the depth of his own personal commitment to racial justice and the bankruptcy of complete reliance on class consciousness in interracial organizations.

The severe interregional competition and corresponding cost cutting which swept the coal industry of the 1920s and 1930s convinced the UMWA president that the problems confronting the industry were not caused by a decline in the demand for coal so much as by an excessive capacity for producing it. In other words, there were too many mines and too many miners. Lewis concluded, therefore, that the marginal companies should be driven out of business, and the "excess" miners culled from the work force. The first step in the union leader's plan to achieve a more acceptable balance of supply and demand in the coal industry was the establishment of uniformly high wage rates in all the nation's coalfields. Since labor represented over 60 percent of the total costs of production, less productive mines would be at a competitive disadvantage if their labor costs were higher than those at the most efficient mines. Eliminating wage differentials would encourage companies with a lower nonunion scale to mechanize in order to retain their competitiveness, and those without the capital would be forced to shut down operations. Those surviving the "shake out" would then be in a better position to maintain a more stable work schedule for their own workers.

The UMWA's approach to reducing the industry's work force
followed several paths. Among them were active lobbying for legislation prohibiting children under eighteen from entering the mines and enforcement of the seniority provisions in the union contract requiring that experienced miners be hired before new men were given jobs. By far the most significant influence on the level of employment in the industry, however, was the UMWA's unambiguous policy toward mechanization. Lewis himself informed the House Committee on Education and Labor in 1947 that the standard of living for coal miners could be raised only "by increasing the productivity and lowering the unit costs and utilizing the genius of science and the automatic machine." In effect, Lewis acquiesced to the elimination of working miners by machines, but only if the profits yielded by the increased labor productivity were shared with the remaining miners in the form of higher wages and shorter hours. The new mining technology was so prominent in Lewis's strategy for stabilizing the "sick industry," that in 1950 Fortune magazine called the union's bristly president the best salesman Joy Manufacturing Company ever had and quoted Consolidation Coal Company President George Love, who said that "Lewis' union has one great advantage over many others. It has never fought mechanization." Indeed it had not, for Lewis had advocated mechanization as early as 1925 when he published The Miner's Fight for American Standards. In this book he argued that maintaining high union wages benefited the large coal operators because high wages would force a "reorganization of the basic industry of the country upon scientific and efficient lines." Any concession to wage reductions would serve only "to delay this process of reorganization, by enabling the unfit to hold out a little longer." Lewis took the operators to task for "inefficiency and incompetence" and reproached those who resisted the siren call of improved technology for lacking vision. Since only the companies with sufficient capital would "undertake the improvements that the times demand," Lewis advocated an increased concentration of ownership. "The little corporations will have to go," he declared.

With the passage in 1935 of the Wagner Act, granting workers the right to organize, Lewis's focus shifted to organizing the nonunion fields of central and southern Appalachia which had eluded earlier UMWA drives. Once organization was accomplished, the UMWA president turned his attention to saving the industry through rationalization. Then, between 1950 and 1965, the industry was "saved" by the introduction of the continuous miner, the greatest invention since the mechanical loader was developed in the 1920s, but nearly 300,000 miners lost their jobs before its onslaught. The rationale behind the union's position was the same as it had always been, and the UMWA was wealthy enough by the fifties to spend fifteen million dollars from
Demise of the Black Miner

Table 3. Producing 600 Tons of Coal per Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hand Loading</th>
<th>Machine Loading</th>
<th>Continuous Mining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Tons per Man</td>
<td>10 Tons per Man</td>
<td>16 Tons per Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cutting machines</td>
<td>2 cutting machines</td>
<td>2 loading machines</td>
<td>2 continuous miners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miners at face</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in service jobs</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total labor force</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor costs per ton</td>
<td>$3.28</td>
<td>$1.64</td>
<td>$1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other costs per ton</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
<td>$2.15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cost per ton</td>
<td>$5.28</td>
<td>$3.79</td>
<td>$3.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from "Continuous Coal Mining," *Fortune* 41 (June 1950): 114.

its own treasury to assist large coal companies in negotiating the transition to a new era of continuous coal production. As Lewis's biographers, Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tyne, have observed, Lewis did not grasp the actual fate of those individual miners who were displaced by technological unemployment. He believed that they would simply be absorbed into other industries. Characteristically, Lewis concerned himself more with the problems of the coal barons than he did with the black and white coal miners of Appalachia, who were thrust into a hopeless poverty by UMWA policy.

Even though the mechanization process had begun earlier in the century, the introduction of the continuous mining machine had a profound impact on coal production. In southern Appalachia, for example, adoption of the mechanical loader had resulted in a 20 percent rise in productivity between 1930 and 1950, from 5.1 to 6.2 tons per man-day. Between 1950 and 1960, however, the continuous miner boosted productivity in the same region by nearly 100 percent, from 6.2 to over 12 tons per man-day. Just as significantly, productivity was doubled with only half of the manpower required during the earlier period. The new technology not only eliminated most unskilled labor, it outmoded many machine jobs as well and created greater demand for machine maintenance men such as mechanics and electricians. The term miner no longer referred to a craftsman possessing the knowledge and skills traditionally associated with that occupation. With automation a miner became one who simply worked in underground coal seams.

The comparative economic advantage offered by the continuous miner is illustrated on a human scale by the case of Primus Prude, a black miner from West Virginia. In 1948 Prude broke the national record for total tons of coal loaded in a lifetime. In over fifty years of uninterrupted toil, Prude had loaded ninety thousand tons of coal, an
amount sufficient to fill a seventeen-mile-long train of 1,750 coal cars containing fifty tons each. His was a staggering human achievement, and yet it appears paltry alongside the capacity of one continuous miner, which, cutting and loading three hundred tons per day, would break Prude's record in only three hundred days. Men like Primus Prude, of course, could not compete with such machinery, and as the major companies adopted the continuous miner, masses of coal miners were placed on indefinite layoff or let go entirely. Between 1950 and 1970, the white work force fell from 483,818 to 128,375 men, a decline of 73.5 percent. The effect on blacks was even more devastating as their total plunged from 30,042 to 3,673, a reduction of 87.8 percent in twenty years.

Many black miners charged the companies with discriminating against them in favor of training whites for the new machine jobs, rather than the UMWA for not protecting the principle of equal opportunity. An article in Our World, a black periodical published in West Virginia, reported in 1953 that the “biggest problem facing Negro miners is machinery” and charged that a few companies were “attempting to maneuver unskilled whites into skilled positions, so they won’t be fired when machinery is added.” Hilton Garrett, an Afro-American who had operated a boardinghouse for black miners in Wheelwright, Kentucky, observed that his house was full “until they put this machine in the coal mines” during the late fifties. By the end of the decade his last boarder had left town.

Bill Worthington, a black miner from Eastern Kentucky, claimed that there had always been discrimination in mining, but the exodus of blacks which began in the early fifties had resulted from automation. “They don’t bother to train black men to operate the modern equipment,” he informed an interviewer in 1971. The operators “make the criteria so high that blacks can not qualify to operate it.” The way to learn, of course, was to get experience working with the equipment, but the companies permitted only whites to “tamper around with it, they don’t reach back and get the black man and say, ‘I want you to learn to run it,’ they just don’t do it.” He considered this “discrimination of the worst kind.”

Lavelle Finley of Westland, Pennsylvania, agreed with this assessment, claiming that blacks were considered “qualified” to operate machines only if the company could not find white men. “The bosses get every white apprentice boy they think can become a mechanic,” Finley charged, “but they’ll never come to a black man and ask him would he like to be trained for a mechanic.” Willie Epps of Fireco, West Virginia, who concurred with this assessment, observed in 1972 that before mechanization black and white miners had been equal in the pits, but now “you go up to a mine, you see a hundred white faces, you
won't see any black faces, maybe one." The companies simply would not hire them, Epps charged. "They wouldn't give my boys nothing to do," and he could foresee no improvement in the future.48

William Finley, Lavelle's brother, also from Westland, Pennsylvania, went one step further and implicated the UMWA. He was convinced that blacks were barred from learning to operate the new machinery because the union and the companies were in collusion. Within his memory the UMWA had never actively fought for the equal rights of blacks in the mines, except in isolated cases when they where forced to do so. In a similar vein, Charles Bradshaw, of Slab Fork, West Virginia, claimed that the mines in his district had been integrated until the companies decided to mechanize. At that time, all the Afro-Americans were transferred into separate sections and then laid off en masse. Bradshaw charged that this was a deliberate maneuver because management knew that the union would not fight very hard for aggrieved blacks.49

The displacement of so many miners, black and white, produced an exodus from the coalfields, particularly from central Appalachia where mines usually were located in small isolated towns with few alternatives for other employment. Black and white patterns of migration differed substantially, however. In central Appalachia the influx of blacks which began in the late 1880s continued through the 1920s, but after 1930 the number of Afro-Americans began to decline steadily, accelerating after 1950 into an outright exodus. This pattern was part of a general demographic pattern whereby one generation moved out of the Deep South to central Appalachia, and their children or grandchildren completed the trek north.50

The general outline of this process was revealed in a 1950 study of Raleigh, West Virginia, which examined three generations of black families. It found that nearly all of the parents of black coal miners and 58 percent of the black miners themselves were born in southern states other than West Virginia. Over 90 percent of the children of black miners were born in the state and these children were migrating in large numbers to northern cities. One of the main reasons for the outmigration among younger blacks was the conviction that they were improving the quality of their lives by leaving the coalfields to enter other occupations. In Raleigh, 80 percent of the young adults believed that "they would make more and have a better chance in life doing work other than mining," and a majority of black miners agreed with this assessment. Most Raleigh blacks considered coal mining an undesirable way to earn a living; one of their primary grievances was that they were barred from the better jobs. Since mining was the only opportunity available to them in West Virginia, they determined to leave the state.51 Joseph Haygood, of Welch, West Virginia, was expres-
ning the view of most blacks when he informed a reporter that he did not want his sons to become miners, being convinced that they would make more “progress” in other occupations.52

Whites, on the other hand, were reluctant to leave their “established homes” and hung on as long as possible.53 Those who moved away to find work often returned on the weekends and migrated back to the homeplace at the first employment opportunity. Blacks moved away permanently, however; most had no strong sense of home to tie them to the area, and fewer and fewer kinsmen remained in the region.54

Those blacks who migrated out of the coalfields undoubtedly welcomed the opportunity to get away from coal camps dominated by white operators with racial attitudes similar to those of a Joseph G. Bradley, president of several West Virginia coal companies. In correspondence with friends in Massachusetts and California, Bradley characterized himself as the “last feather in the tip of the right-wing,” though he had trained himself, he said, to talk about racial liberals “without frothing at the mouth.” He was convinced that “you can’t boost a Negro. You can only lead him, and without white leadership he’s done for. All the so-called negroes who have amounted to anything in this country have had white blood.”55 Moreover, no question existed in Bradley’s mind that “if I am a human the Negro is not; if the Negro is human, I am not.”56 Bradley employed many blacks in his mines and even claimed to like many of them, but what Afro-American would willingly consign his fate to such an employer, no matter how benevolent he might have been? And Bradley was not unique.

Victor R. Daly, minority groups representative on the Region IV War Manpower Commission, reported in 1945 that black miners were “steadily drifting away from the industry in numbers far out of proportion to the total number of miners who have left the coal fields.” Daly believed that numerous “deep-seated” factors were involved. In the first place, these coalfields were located conveniently near such industrial centers as Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Akron, where manpower was in short supply and all willing laborers found ready employment. Moreover, wage levels were high in these cities, and employment hazards were comparatively negligible. For the first time in his experience, therefore, the black miner found an opportunity to earn a high wage with reduced risk in a place where his wife and children might also find employment. A family’s disposable income might greatly exceed what a miner could earn single-handedly in a coal town where females could find no employment outside the home. Moreover, living conditions might be crowded in the cities, but they seemed a worthwhile trade for the isolation of a remote hollow. Finally, black miners realized that experience would not win them advancement in the
Demise of the Black Miner

mines and, becoming frustrated with working at deadend jobs, they succumbed to the lure of city life. Even though the UMWA was aware of these problems, the union claimed to be powerless to provide a remedy. Consequently, Daly observed, it would be “well-nigh impossible to dam the flow of Negro miners out of the coal regions.” This was an accurate summation of the plight of the black miner immediately after the war, but Daly probably did not fully perceive how great the flood would become. 57

Under John L. Lewis’s policy of encouraging rapid mechanization, and his more than cozy cooperation with corporate leaders, over 300,000 miners were displaced. Nevertheless, while he was president of the union, Lewis commanded so much loyalty from the UMWA membership that his policies went virtually unchallenged. His retirement in 1960, however, brought to power Lewis’s less influential and much less competent successors. Gross abuses of the union’s pension fund and other major problems, such as the neglect of mine health and safety, soon emerged to challenge the union’s new leaders. What was left of the Lewis machine began to unravel when the Consolidation Coal Company’s Mountaineer No. 9 mine at Farmington and Mannington, West Virginia (the mine had portals at both towns), exploded in November 1968, killing seventy-eight men. The disaster brought a parade of VIPs to the scene to answer the questions of reporters. After quipping to television cameramen and newspapermen, “Are all the bodies here,” Consol’s public relations man described the mine explosion as “something that we have to live with.” Conversely, of course, it was something less fortunate men had died with. W.A. “Tony” Boyle, a former Lewis aide who assumed the UMWA presidency in 1963, arrived to declare that Consol was “one of the better companies as far as cooperation and safety are concerned.” While such disasters were sad affairs, Boyle informed the national press corps, “as long as we mine coal, there is always this inherent danger of explosion.” Assistant Secretary of the Interior Cordell Moore also arrived to exonerate the company as one that had “done all in its power to make a safe mine.” West Virginia Governor Hulett C. Smith chimed in before a nation of television viewers, “We must recognize that this is a hazardous business and what has occurred here is one of the hazards of being a miner.” 58

To people reading about the disaster or watching reports on the evening news, these ritualistic official utterances had the ring of truth. To coal miners, however, they meant something quite different. The ghoulsh humor of the company spokesman and the official shoulder-shrugging by public servants, long experience had taught coal miners to expect. In an industry with an average of a hundred mine fatalities per month over the last three-quarters of a century, however, men did
not expect their union officials to accept lax safety attitudes on the part of the coal companies.\(^9\) It was common knowledge that Consol No. 9 had been cited for twenty-five safety violations since 1966. Under the circumstances, the UMWA president's casual dismissal of the disaster as one of the hazards of the occupation came as a shock. It started a ball of fire rolling through the rank and file that would not stop until it had consumed Tony Boyle.

Out of this discontent arose the figure of Joseph "Jock" Yablonski, a loyal UMWA chieftain whose conscience would no longer permit him to remain silent about the corruption and deterioration in UMWA leadership. In 1969 he began a campaign to unseat Boyle from the presidency and confirmed the miners' suspicions by telling them that "Boyle is in bed with the operators." The rest is a well-known story culminating with the brutal murder of Yablonski, his wife, and daughter as they slept in their beds on December 31, 1969, at the hands of assassins hired by Tony Boyle.\(^60\)

Reformers in the UMWA were convinced that the time had come to save the miner rather than the industry, and miscellaneous rank-and-file organizations forged closer working relationships following the Yablonski murders. Black miners were few by this time, but several played a prominent role in the rank-and-file movement to regain control of the UMWA, especially in central Appalachia. The first president of the Black Lung Association was Charles Brooks from Kanawha City, West Virginia, and Bill Worthington from Harlan County, Kentucky, served as the organization's fourth president, between 1973 and 1977. The most militant of the rank-and-file organizations was the Disabled Miners and Widows of Southern West Virginia, which, from its inception, had been under the direction of Robert Payne, a disabled black miner from Itmann. Both grass-roots associations sought to pressure government and the UMWA to do more for disabled miners. At times they acted directly against the insensitive Boyle machine. Payne, for example, led a five-week strike during the summer of 1970. Approximately twenty-five thousand miners honored the DMW picket lines, while Boyle's henchmen physically abused the disabled pickets and their wives. To even the most imperceptive observer it was obvious that the once mighty UMWA had fallen on hard times.\(^61\)

The climax of the rank-and-file insurgency was reached on the weekend of May 27, 1972, when five hundred delegates convened at Wheeling, West Virginia, to nominate a slate of candidates to challenge the Boyle machine under the auspices of a new coalition of union reformers calling themselves the Miners for Democracy.\(^62\) For many blacks, however, the MFD got off to an inauspicious beginning. According to one black reformer, James Millner, the meeting was tainted with a philosophy of "No Hunkies, No Blacks" on the slate.
Millner's reaction typified that of other black miners: "I am a Black man first, before I am anything else. I want to know how any slate is going to help my people. I worried about what happened at Wheeling. They nominated an all-white slate. If you start out with discriminatory practices and an all-white slate, then I'm worried about what's going to happen in the future."63

Millner was not being overly sensitive about his race; the reform leadership was indeed following such a policy. Ignorant of their own history of interracial and interethnic cooperation, the reformers held assumptions about the rank and file which proved erroneous. The rebel leaders devised a pragmatic ethnic and geographical strategy in the belief that it was needed to defeat Boyle candidates in the most important districts of central Appalachia and those in northern Appalachia. Since most voters were concentrated in the central region, the rebels were convinced that an Anglo-Saxon should be nominated for president to allay the ethnic prejudices assumed to be important there. As vice-president the rebels wanted a man of southern or eastern European ethnic extraction to win northern Appalachia. Thus, Arnold Miller of southern West Virginia and Mike Trbovich of eastern Ohio were chosen to head the reform slate, under the assumption that miners would vote along the lines of ethnic prejudice. Just how wrong the rebels were can be seen in the fact that over 40 percent of the convention delegates at Wheeling voted for Trbovich over Miller for the presidential nomination. Moreover, Miller could not have received the nomination without the strong support of the northern delegates. The union elections that fall provided additional sobering data for rebel leaders. Miller failed to carry District 29, southeastern West Virginia, his own backyard, and yet he piled up impressive victories in the northern districts.64

Even though the strategy was ill founded, it was used to formulate slates at the district level as well. Prospective black candidates were most adversely affected because whites strongly believed that blacks could not win against the Boyle-machine men. Therefore, they believed it advisable to run only whites on the district ballots. White MFD candidates promised Afro-Americans running for nomination that if they withdrew and the white reformers won, the victors would appoint those blacks to union offices as a reward. William Finley, the black miner from Westland, Pennsylvania, who lost his bid for a seat on the District 5 Executive Board in 1970, understood the meaning of these promises and refused. He charged that the MFD could never win the support of blacks with promises of appointment to union positions because appointed people served at the behest of the elected authorities and had to be "yes men" in order to keep their posts. "But when you are elected, you are elected by miners. You are responsible
to them, and not the one individual. That is what black people want.” The MFD had to “put out the effort to elect Black people” to positions of authority in order to win the trust of Afro-Americans.65

Finley ran for the District 5 Executive Board again in May 1973. As the campaign gained momentum, several MFD leaders urged Finley not to place his picture on MFD literature so that miners would not know that he was black, but he refused to comply. The results of the elections represented a rejection of MFD racial thought, for even though Finley was from a subdistrict which was 95 percent white, he defeated his white opponent, outpolling him two to one to win the highest office ever held by a black man in District 5. Finley recognized that some of the reform whites opposed him out of self-interest, however, and he remained a staunch MFD adherent. He did so, at least partly because of the racial discrimination allowed by past UMWA administrations and because he had determined to fight for a position of power within the movement in order to rectify these conditions. Finley enjoyed significant official support too, for numerous white MFD leaders, particularly District 5 President Louis Antal, stood behind him. A testimonial dinner for Finley in May 1975 at the Pittsburgh Hilton, for example, was attended by 550 people, who heard speeches from Arnold Miller, Louis Antal, and other prominent spokesmen from the labor movement.66

Two other union elections in 1972 demonstrated that, although few blacks remained in the coal industry, individual blacks could still draw support from white fellow miners. At Barking Local No. 6566 in western Pennsylvania, a three-way contest for the local presidency pitted two whites and a black candidate, Henry Garner, against each other in a heated campaign. One of the white candidates offered Garner an appointive position if he would withdraw, but Garner refused. He received more votes than either of his two opponents in a local which was well over 90 percent white.67

The third significant election for black miners occurred in District 29, southern West Virginia. Arnold Miller had appointed Levi Daniel, a black miner, to the district presidency, and in 1973 Daniel headed the district slate for the MFD. Daniel lost the election, but the pro-Boyle slate also included a well-known black miner, Francis Martin of Gary, who became the first Afro-American in the twentieth century to win election to the UMWA’s International Executive Board. Ironically, Martin was assisted in his efforts by Arnold Miller, who had won the UMWA presidency in 1972 and actually instituted the democratic reforms in the election procedures under which Martin won his seat.

In both cases, principles rather than race were the key factors. Many Boyle supporters favored the central-power model of union organization not only because they held power but because they be-
lieved that only the union’s leaders were sufficiently knowledgeable to recognize what was realistic at the bargaining table. The reformers disagreed, of course, and argued that only rank-and-file involvement could keep the union responsive to its membership. Francis Martin’s brother, Napoleon Martin, also lived in Gary and was an active member of his UMWA local. As a member of the local grievance committee since 1963 and then as local president, Napoleon Martin supported Boyle. Even though he experienced discrimination during the Boyle administration, Napoleon supported Boyle against the insurgent Jock Yablonski in 1969 because Boyle, not Yablonski, was in control of the union, and Martin needed the support of the international office against the company in order to settle local grievances. “Sometimes you might have to go along with somebody when they need you, even if you don’t agree with everything they’re doing, because then when you need them they’re going to help you,” Martin explained.68

Thus, for blacks as for whites, the struggle between the UMWA administration and the rank-and-file reformers came down to divergent conceptions of the nature and proper use of power in organized labor. Finley and the Martins differed because union politics, like state and national politics, involved established patronage and influence. Those, like the Martins, who had worked long and hard to become effective within the established structure were threatened by reformers who might suddenly rearrange that system. Men like Finley, who felt aggrieved because his talents had gone ignored, could favor replacement of the leadership without fear of losing influence he did not have. But the MFD’s struggle meant more than just an attempt to replace the old with a new guard. It was the culminating confrontation in an intraunion conflict which had begun with the rise of John L. Lewis in the twenties. The loss of local and district autonomy to international headquarters had never been fully accepted by miners whose traditions and work life made them jealous of their independence. Blacks had argued for the central-power model during the twenties against those who advocated district and local autonomy because they feared the rank and file would ignore their interests. By the 1970s few black miners remained to fight over policy, and those who did were, like the white union men, of a divided mind.

Although blacks believed the the MFD had gotten off to a poor start in 1972, once the reformers had ousted the Boyle leadership, it quickly became clear that the new position on racial issues was refreshingly different from that of the previous administration. Arnold Miller, for example, spoke on May 26, 1973, in Washington, D.C., before more than one thousand delegates to the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists convention. A lifelong miner who emerged from the rank and file to become UMWA president, Miller was just the man to appeal to the
reform-minded black labor activists. The CBTU delegates gave Miller standing ovations when he declared that "your cause is labor's cause, ... what is done to one is done to all." Racism had "crippled the labor movement in the past," Miller concluded, and if blacks received their rights, organized labor would benefit, because "victories for black workers are victories for all."\(^69\) Blacks had waited a long time to hear a UMWA president speak such words.

The racial posture of the new UMWA leadership was also demonstrated in the change of editorial policy of the *United Mine Workers Journal*. A class-conscious organ before John L. Lewis transformed it into his personal propaganda sheet, the paper once again began to chart a working-class course. For example, a number of articles appeared criticizing South Africa's policy of apartheid and American companies that did business with South African firms using "slave labor."\(^70\) In October 1974 the *Journal* published a seven-page spread on racist practices of the coal companies and argued that an anti-discrimination clause was needed in the contract "so that a miner and his local union would have the clearest grounds on which to protest unequal treatment." Arnold Miller was also quoted as saying that "discrimination by coal companies appears to be a problem we are going to have to deal with ourselves, through the contract." Racial discrimination was "still the job of the state governments and federal governments," Miller stated; it was their job "to enforce the law, and we insist that they do so."\(^71\) The UMWA negotiated such a clause into the 1974 bituminous wage agreement; it prohibited racial discrimination by either the employer or the union in the hiring and classification of labor. The 1974 contract also revised promotion guidelines to read "ability" instead of "qualification" because the latter term was believed to contain more potential for discrimination against blacks. The "ability" criterion made it more difficult for companies to pass over blacks who had not been given the opportunity to acquire the skills to qualify them for better positions.\(^72\)

The Miller administration supported still another fundamental shift in union policy by opposing the discrimination against women which barred them from underground employment. As a result, women miners began to enter the pits for the first time during the mid-seventies. One of them, Olivia Rowe, a black single parent of eight, went to work for the Bethlehem Mine Corporation at Ellsworth, Pennsylvania, on August 1, 1974. She was a solitary figure, one of the very first black women to enter the mines and the first in Pennsylvania history. Yet she was one of the last of her race in an industry which had provided employment to countless thousands of Afro-Americans over the last two centuries.\(^73\)

Throughout the history of the American coal industry blacks were
tolerated only so long as their labor was in demand. Their role varied from region to region but was always dependent upon the economic needs of others, rather than their own, or simply upon the dictates of the free market. The contours of race relations which emerged in the coal regions demonstrated this essential powerlessness and dependency.

When blacks were slaves and convicts, southern mine operators simply expropriated the value of their labor. Free black miners in the region served double duty in the operators' drive for profits, for not only did they receive lower pay based on their race but that lower pay itself depressed the wages received by white miners as well. When black and white miners attempted to ally in common cause to increase their bargaining power, southern operators used race as a wedge to split away community support.

Blacks were exploited by operators in the South, but they were entirely excluded by white miners in the North. When operators did attempt to employ blacks, the established white miners physically resisted, sparking some of the bloodiest conflicts in the industry's history. Public opinion in the northern fields generally supported the miners' efforts to bar blacks from the mines because their entry into the work place also meant an unwanted black presence in the white communities.

Even in central Appalachia, where a severe labor shortage during the years of development dictated that coal operators grant them relative economic equality, blacks were used as one important element in a diverse racial-ethnic population mix which operators hoped would keep the workers too divided to unionize. When that method failed, operators called in hired gunmen and implemented an entire range of social control mechanisms. That method also failed with the passage of New Deal legislation guaranteeing workers the right to organize unions. By the 1930s, machines increasingly took the place of miners as operators were confronted with the prospect of higher wages, lower profits, less social control, and a complicated variety of hostile market forces. Mechanization of coal mining virtually transformed the industry, with astonishing increases in productivity even as the number of miners declined to a shadow of its former size. Under these conditions, equality became elimination as blacks were disproportionately displaced, often by discriminatory means.

The reform movement which gained control of the UMWA in 1972 was more sensitive to the plight of black miners and took steps to end their demise. These efforts, along with an increased demand for coal during the energy crisis of the late seventies, have arrested the black decline according to the 1980 census. The statistics probably represent only a temporary aberration in a long-term decline in employment in
this industry, however. If the downward trend established between 1930 and 1970 is shown to have resumed in 1990, then, with the assistance of the revolutionary long-wall technology, which can produce ten times the coal with half the current manpower, black miners will almost certainly be statistically extinct by the end of this century. Machines, those mechanical slaves, will have taken their places.
# Appendix

Employment of Blacks in the Bituminous Coal Industry, 1900-1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>7,369</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>20,797</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>66,253</td>
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<td><strong>NORTHERN STATES</strong></td>
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<td>1,368</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Indiana</td>
<td>12,575</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>11,078</td>
<td>1,065</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>33,209</td>
<td>780</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>180,474</td>
<td>1,616</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>275,520</td>
<td>5,228</td>
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Note: The data for 1910-1930 include only mine operatives; operators and managerial personnel are not counted. Two-thirds of all black miners worked in coal mines in 1910. U.S. Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915*, p. 527.
Employment of Blacks in the Bituminous Coal Industry, Continued

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Black (%)</td>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN STATES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>23,956</td>
<td>12,742 (53.2)</td>
<td>23,022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>54,307</td>
<td>7,346 (13.5)</td>
<td>54,676</td>
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<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>8,765</td>
<td>578 (6.6)</td>
<td>9,534</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>12,629</td>
<td>1,511 (12.0)</td>
<td>20,086</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>97,505</td>
<td>22,089 (22.6)</td>
<td>105,915</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>197,162</td>
<td>44,266 (22.5)</td>
<td>213,233</td>
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NORTHERN STATES

<table>
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<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Black (%)</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>54,135</td>
<td>1,242 (2.3)</td>
<td>34,496</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>15,404</td>
<td>314 (2.0)</td>
<td>9,909</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>7,081</td>
<td>485 (6.8)</td>
<td>5,184</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>27,616</td>
<td>1,261 (4.6)</td>
<td>23,300</td>
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<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>267,654</td>
<td>7,574 (2.8)</td>
<td>204,378</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>371,890</td>
<td>10,876 (2.9)</td>
<td>277,267</td>
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<td>1960</td>
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<td>1980</td>
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<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN STATES</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>11,902</td>
<td>3,026</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>37,519</td>
<td>1,135</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>8,434</td>
<td>40*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>19,277</td>
<td>687</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>59,098</td>
<td>3,919</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>136,230</td>
<td>8,807</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<td><strong>NORTHERN STATES</strong></td>
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<td>Iowa</td>
<td>2,382</td>
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<td>Ohio</td>
<td>19,278</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>65,528</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>117,569</td>
<td>1,505</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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</table>

*The U.S. Census schedule reports 400, but this is probably a typographical error, and clearly out of pattern. This error rendered the total incorrect and that too has been changed by the estimated difference of the error.*
Notes

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADAH</td>
<td>Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AHS</td>
<td>Atlanta Historical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPLA</td>
<td>Birmingham Public Library Archives, Birmingham, Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDAH</td>
<td>Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Archives, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA</td>
<td>University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>University of Kentucky, Lexington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMWJ</td>
<td>United Mine Workers Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNC</td>
<td>Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UVA</td>
<td>University of Virginia, Charlottesville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHS</td>
<td>Virginia Historical Society, Richmond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSL</td>
<td>Virginia State Library, Richmond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WVU</td>
<td>West Virginia and Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Slavery


Notes to Pages 4-6

10-20; Frederick Moore Binder, Coal Age Empire: Pennsylvania Coal and Its Utilization to 1860 (Harrisburg, 1974), pp. 27-28; Niles' Weekly Register 6 (May 2, 1814): 198-99.
11. Agreement, C. & R. Railey and Heth, 1819, and Heth to David Street, Jan. 12, 1819, both ibid.
12. Agreement, Heth and Daniel French, Nov. 30, 1811, Oliver Evans to Heth, June 15, 1813, Heth to Evans, July 8, 1813, Evans to Heth, July 14, 1813, Heth to A.S. Wooldridge, Dec. 28, 1817, Pennock to Heth, July 10, 1813, Agreement, Wiley Jackson, Heth, S. Adams, and Beverly Randolph, Dec. 21, 1814, [?] to Heth, July 20, 1815, Benjamin Sheppard to Heth, Dec. 15, 1815, all ibid.
24. Ibid., 123; Edmund Ruffin, “Visit to Graham's Coal Pits,” Farmers' Register 5 (August 1, 1837): 315. Traditionally, Dover has been regarded as the oldest commercial coal mine in the South. Kathleen Bruce, Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era (New York, 1960), p. 88. However, the New York Mercury, July 22, 1765, carried an advertisement by Garrard Ellyson for the sale of coal for his “bank of Coal in Chesterfield county.” Clipping in the Archibald Cary Papers, VHS.


28. "List of White Persons at Dover Pits—1864," and "List of White Hands at Trent's Pits—1865," both in Tompkins *Commonplace Book*. Both black and white miners are listed.


32. Street to Heth, April 16, 1819, Heth Papers.

33. Street to Heth, April 19, 1819, ibid.

34. C.L. Stevenson to Heth, Nov. 5, 1819, ibid.


42. Rice, "Coal Mining in the Kanawha Valley," 415.


45. Rice, "Coal Mining in the Kanawha Valley," 404, 408, 413, 516.


47. Daddow and Bannon, *Coal, Iron, and Oil*, p. 41.
48. Armes, Coal and Iron in Alabama, p. 49.
49. Ibid., p. 68.
50. Ibid.
57. Browne to A. Saltmarsh, Sept. 21, 1859, Saltmarsh to Browne, Oct. 10, 1859, both ibid.
59. Browne to Saltmarsh, Sept. 24, 1859, ibid.
60. Virginia Knapp, “William Phineas Browne, Business Man and Pioneer Mine Operator of Alabama,” Part 2, Alabama Review 3 (July 1950): 193-97; “Time Role of Persons Employed at the Works of the Mobile and Selma Coal Mining Company,” Browne Papers. Browne and other pioneer coal mine operators in Alabama were also convinced that proper management required the employment of local white supervisors because northern whites did not know how to work blacks efficiently. (See John T. Milner to William Gilmer, March 17, 1864, in the files of the Raw Materials Division, United States Steel Corporation, Wenonah, Ala.). My thanks to Justin Fuller and Robert Cvonryek for this information.

2. Convict Labor


10. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, p. 222.


22. Ibid.


26. Dade County Superior Court Minutes, Grand Jury Presentments, 1893, 1894, GDAH.


30. Weekly Register of Convicts in Hospitals.

31. Whipping Reports for Dade Coal Company, 1885-1886, GDAH.


33. Weekly Register of Convicts in Hospitals; Whipping Reports for Dade Coal Company; Whipping Reports for Durham Coal and Coke Company, 1908-1909, GDAH.


37. *Nashville Republican Banner*, June 10, 1870.


49. Ibid., pp. 288-89.


52. *UMWJ*, Nov. 12, 1891.


67. Ibid., pp. 79, 86-87, 120.
69. Birmingham Labor Advocate, Jan. 11, 1907.
70. Shelby M. Harrison, “A Cash-Nexus for Crime,” Survey 27 (Jan. 6, 1912): 1553-54; UMWJ, March 28, 1912; National Prison Association Proceedings (1897), p. 314; Message of the Governor, Alabama Senate Journal, 1886-87, pp. 25-26; Carter, “Prisons, Politics, and Business,” pp. 94-95. Official abuse of the fee system was common in Georgia as well. U.S. District Court Judge Emery Speer examined county court records for one month and found that the judge had sentenced 149 persons to a total of nineteen years for minor indiscretions such as walking on park grass or spitting on the sidewalk. Clarissa Olds Keeler, The Crime of Crimes; or, The Convict System Unmasked (Washington, D.C., 1907), pp. 8-12.


74. The demographics of the state prison population can be obtained from the biennial *Convict Inspectors Reports*, ADAH. For a less detailed summary, see Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama*, pp. 176, 180. See also Census Bureau, *Prisoners and Juvenile Delinquents in the United States*, p. 204; *Birmingham Post*, March 27, 1926; David Alan Harris, "Racists and Reformers," pp. 285-87.


83. *Pratt Mines Advertiser*, July 26, 1889. The reporter noted that "the same system observed here is carried out at prison No. 2."


85. "Report on Coalburg Prison, 1895," in Parke Papers. For Dr. Parke's response to the denunciation of his report by the lessees, see Thomas D. Parke to the Board of Convict Inspectors, n.d., and Parke Diary, unpublished manuscript, both in Parke Papers.

86. W.A. Burns, M.D., to B.B. Comer, Aug. 29, 1908, Braxton Bragg Comer Papers, ADAH.


91. *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, April 14, 1911. See also *UMWJ*, April 13, 20, 1911; *New York Times*, April 9, 10, 1911; *New York Herald Tribune*, April 9, 10, 1911.


93. *Birmingham Chronicle*, Oct. 4, 1885; Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama*, pp. 67,


95. Alabama House Journal, 1888-89, p. 463; Jesse Stallings to Emmett O'Neal, Nov. 15, 1911, Jesse Stallings Papers, UNC.


102. U.S. Senate, Immigrants in Industries, Pt. 1, 2:218.

103. David Alan Harris, "Racists and Reformers," p. 379.

104. Birmingham Labor Advocate, July 24, 1897. For similar arguments, see also issues of Dec. 25, 1897, March 26, May 28, 1898, July 23, 1915; Pratt Mines Advertiser, June 7, 21, 1889.


109. Korson, Coal Dust on the Fiddle, pp. 172-74. Nicholas B. Stack claimed to be the "proud father of the Anti-Convict League in Alabama," the sole purpose of which was to remove the convicts from the mines to work on the roads. Clipping, "Black Warrior" (a reference to Stack's dog), dated April 1916, in the Nicholas B. Stack Papers, UA. Stack had been a leading figure in the Knights of Labor, the Alabama Federation of Labor, and was relatively progressive on the race issue. ("Nicholas B. Stack's Own Story," typescript autobiography, ibid.). UMWJ, Nov. 7, 1912; R.N. McDonough to W.E. Fort, June 14, 1923, American League of Women Voters Papers, Manuscript Division, ADAH; Florence Herald, June 15, 1923. For the Knox case, see New York World, Jan. 28, May 2, 1926; Birmingham Post, March 22-24, 27-28, 1926; UMWJ, April 1, Nov. 13, 1926, April 30, 1927, and July 15, 1928.

3. The Social Equality Wedge in Alabama, 1880-1908

1897-1904,” Labor History 10 (Summer 1969): 377-79; Carl V. Harris, Political Power in
Birmingham, 1871-1921 (Knoxville, 1977), p. 32.
2. Birmingham Labor Advocate, June 30, 1900.
3. Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis, eds., The Black Worker: A Documentary History
from Colonial Times to the Present, vol. 2, The Era of the National Labor Union (Philadelphia,
5. Ibid., April 26, 1878.
6. Ibid., Aug. 16, 1879.
8. Some individuals, such as W.J. Thomas, were members of the Miners’ National
10. Foner and Lewis, The Black Worker, vol. 3, The Era of the Knights of Labor (Philadelphia,
Movement in Alabama,” p. 56.
11. Birmingham Labor Advocate, May 10, July 4, Nov. 8, Dec. 6, 13, 20, 28, 1890, Jan. 10, 21,
24, Feb. 21, 1891; Ward and Rogers, Labor Revolt in Alabama, pp. 31-34; Head, “Labor
Movement in Alabama,” pp. 91-95; Engineering and Mining Journal 50 (Dec. 13, 1890): 696;
Birmingham Labor Advocate, Oct. 21, 1893.
12. Birmingham Labor Advocate, April 14, 1894; Ward and Rogers, Labor Revolt in
Alabama, p. 61.
15. UMWF, June 7, 1894; Ward and Rogers, Labor Revolt in Alabama, pp. 73-74; Richard
A. Straw, “‘This Is Not a Strike, It Is Simply a Revolution’: Birmingham Miners Struggle
for Power, 1894-1908” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Missouri, 1980), pp. 16-17.
16. Birmingham Age-Herald, June 12, 1894.
17. Thomas Vallens to Thomas G. Jones, June 9, 1894, Thomas G. Jones Papers,
ADAH.
Undercover agent “T.N.V.” reported that the “larger portion” were black. Vallens to
Jones, April 23, 1894, Jones Papers.
20. Vallens to Jones, May 8, 1894, Jones Papers.
23. See various Pinkerton reports in the file, and James B. Erwin to Jones, May 17,
1894, Jones Papers; Ward and Rogers, Labor Revolt in Alabama, p. 78.
25. Erwin to Jones, May 17, 1894, ibid.
29. Birmingham Age-Herald, July 17, 1894; Birmingham Labor Advocate, July 21, 1894;
Warrior Index, July 20, 1894; “Proceedings of a Conference between Members of the
Executive Board of the Mine Workers of Alabama and Gov. Thomas G. Jones, July 19,
1894,” copy in Philip Taft Research Notes, BPLA. TCI official James Bowron claimed that
six were killed. See his unpublished “Autobiography,” Vol. 1, p. 354, Bowron Papers.
32. UMWJ, Dec. 9, 1897.
33. Ibid., Oct. 5, 1893.
36. Straw, “ ‘This Is Not a Strike,’ ” p. 239.
37. Birmingham Labor Advocate, Feb. 12, 1898, June 23, 30, 1900; Birmingham News, June 22, 25, 1900; Worthman, “Black Workers and Labor Unions in Birmingham,” p. 391. Shortly after this convention the Birmingham Trades Council began to accept black delegates from the UMWA and several black unions. From 1900 to 1903 the council accepted black representatives. In 1903 Birmingham black trade unions merged with the Bessemer Negro Central Labor Council to form the Colored Central Labor Council with twenty member unions (Worthman, p. 391).
41. UMWJ, Sept. 5, 1901.
42. Birmingham Labor Advocate, Dec. 14, 1901, Feb. 11, 1899; UMWJ, April 6, 1899.
43. Birmingham Labor Advocate, April 27, 1901, and see March 12, 1898, Nov. 20, 1908; UMWJ, Dec. 12, 1901.
53. UMWA, Proceedings of the 8th Annual Convention, District 20, 1905, p. 29.
55. Birmingham News, July 31, 1908; Birmingham Daily Ledger, August 24, 1908.
57. Straw, “ ‘This Is Not a Strike,’ ” p. 120; Engineering and Mining Journal 86 (Aug.


59. *Birmingham Age-Herald,* July 18, 29, 1908. See also *National Labor Tribune,* July 23, 1908; *Bessemer Journal,* July 27, 1908; *New York Times,* July 18, 1908. The press reports are confused on the details. I have used the *Age-Herald* account.


62. *Birmingham Labor Advocate,* July 21, Aug. 7, 1908; *Birmingham Age-Herald,* July 29, Aug. 4, 5, 18, 1908, and for examples of house bombings, see July 23, Aug. 1, 2, 4, 5, 1908.


64. For a different point of view, see Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South,* particularly Part 3.


66. Spero and Harris, *Black Worker,* pp. 363-64.


70. Ibid., Aug. 13, 1908.


72. UMWJ, Aug. 20, 1908.

73. *Birmingham Age-Herald,* Aug. 23, 1908.

74. Ibid., Aug. 11, 1908.

75. UMWJ, Sept. 10, Oct. 1, 22, 1908.

76. *Birmingham Age-Herald,* Aug. 8, 1908.

77. Ibid., Aug. 22, 25, 1908.

78. Ibid., Aug. 27, 8, 25, 30, 24, 1908; UMWJ, Aug. 13, 1908.


83. Ibid., pp. 873, 871. See also UMWJ, Sept. 3, 1908; *National Labor Tribune,* Sept. 10, 1908.

84. UMWA, *Proceedings of the 20th Annual Convention,* 1909, pp. 872, 868-69. This order caused some grumbling among delegates at the 1909 convention, and was labeled a “sell-out” by President Lewis's enemies in the organization. It was also perceived that way by militant miners who wanted to continue the struggle against any odds. See *Proceedings,* pp. 864, 874-76; *National Labor Tribune,* Nov. 5, 1908. For further explanation of the reasoning behind the order, see *Birmingham Labor Advocate,* Sept. 4, 25, 1908.


86. Many documents relating to the 1908 strike have been reproduced in Foner and Lewis, *The Black Worker,* vol. 5, *The Black Worker from 1900 to 1919* (Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 156-98.
4. Resurgence of the UMWA in Alabama, 1920-1940


17. Ibid., Sept. 20, 1920.


27. Ibid., Oct. 21, 24, 1920.
32. Position of the Alabama Coal Operators to Governor Kilby, Feb. 28, 1921, Kilby Papers.
33. Testimony at Meeting Held at Room 236, Tutwiler Hotel, Birmingham, Alabama, Friday, March 4, 1921, between the Governor's Special Strike Commission and the Alabama Coal Operators' Association Representatives, Kilby Papers.
36. Taft, Organizing Dixie, p. 57; Report of William T. Sheehan, Chairman, Committee of Investigation, to Thomas Kilby, Feb. 1921, Kilby Papers; Birmingham Reporter, Feb. 26, 1921. The committee established to gather evidence upon which the governor would render his decision was composed of William T. Sheehan, John W. Durr, and Richard M. Hobbie—all prominent citizens from Montgomery.
42. Lewis Rodgers, "Black Coal, Dark Days," pp. 44, 53-54, typescript, Oral History Collection, Samford University.
44. UMWJ, March 15, 1923.
52. UMWJ, June 1, 1916.
56. Ibid., Oct. 9, 1920.
62. Deposition of Lucy Newman before Judge Alex A. Wall, Aug. 11, 1933, ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Report of Paul Styles to NLRB.
68. Report of Paul Styles to NLRB.
70. Taft, *Organizing Dixie*, p. 92.

5. Job Control and Racial Conflict in the North and West, 1870-1903

2. Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, p. 131.
3. Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York, 1928), pp. 242-43. This concept has been revived in modified form by David Montgomery. See, for example, his *Workers’ Control in America* (New York, 1979).
10. *Chicago Tribune*, July 21, 1877; *Chicago Times*, June 13, 1877.
12. Ibid., July 29, 25, 26, 30, 1877.
22. See for example, N. Dwight Harris, The History of Negro Servitude in Illinois and of the Slavery Agitation in the State, 1719-1864 (Chicago, 1904); David A. Gerber, Black Ohio and the Color Line, 1860-1916 (Urbana, 1976).
31. Hocking Sentinel, Sept. 16, 1886.
35. Chicago Times, June 16, 1878.
37. Local Record (Shawneetown), May 15, 1866, quoted in Keiser, “Black Strikebreakers and Racism,” p. 318.
40. Ibid., Jan. 6, 1898.
41. UMWJ, Nov. 11, 1898.


45. Stern, "Black Strikebreakers in the Coal Fields," p. 67; UMWJ, Nov. 12, 1891, Feb. 25, 1892.

46. UMWJ, Nov. 12, 1891, May 12, 1892, May 19, 1892, reprinted from the Streator Tribune.

47. Seattle Press Times, May 18, 1891; UMWJ, June 4, 1891.

48. Cincinnati Enquirer, July 2, 1891.

49. UMWJ, Feb. 25, 1892.

50. Ibid.; Pratt Mines Advertiser, May 22, 1891. The black strikebreaking of 1891 made a lasting impression on organized labor leaders in Washington. In 1918 (twenty-seven years later), long after the blacks had left the King County mines, the Central Labor Council of Tacoma, Washington, recommended to the American Federation of Labor Convention, meeting in Buffalo, New York, that black railroad workers be organized into a separate colored railway department (railway brotherhoods barred them). They justified the resolution as a "plain square deal for the colored American laborers," but the possibilities of strikebreaking from unorganized blacks was clearly on their minds. "Race prejudice and its foul by-products, riot and mob rule, as during the mine trouble in the Pacific Northwest in the early nineties," they said, worked against interest of both black and white workers. Report of Proceedings of the Thirty-eighth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor (Washington, D.C., 1918), pp. 263-64. See also, Foner and Lewis, eds., The Black Worker, 5:422-24.


52. Robb, Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas, p. 5; UMWJ, June 22, Aug. 3, 1899; Birmingham Labor Advocate, July 15, 1899; Recorder, June 24, 1899; Bluefield Daily Telegraph, June 29, July 1, 1899.

53. UMWJ, July 25, 1901.

54. Robb, Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas, p. 7.

55. UMWJ, July 25, 1901; Robb, Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas, p. 7.

56. Robb, Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas, pp. 8, 9, 13. The other black newspapers of Kansas, the Colored Citizen (Topeka), and the American Citizen (Kansas City), failed to comment on the racial conflict at Pana and Virden. Only the American Citizen noted even the Carterville incidents. When the strike was finally settled in July 1901, the Big Four contract was not reported in the black-operated Wichita Searchlight, even though one of the miners’ representatives at the signing was a black president of a union local.

57. UMWJ, Jan. 15, 1903; Robb, Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas, p. 14.


59. Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, p. 129.


63. Robb, Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas, pp. 5, 7.

64. UMWJ, June 22, 1899.

65. Ibid., Aug. 3, 1899.
66. Ibid., Sept. 1, 8, 29, 1898; Hicken, "Virden and Pana Mine Wars," p. 267; American, Aug. 27, 1898.
67. Ibid., Sept. 1, 8, 29, 1898; Hicken, "Virden and Pana Mine Wars," p. 267; American, Aug. 27, 1898.
68. Ibid., Sept. 1, 8, 29, 1898; Hicken, "Virden and Pana Mine Wars," p. 267; American, Aug. 27, 1898.
69. Ibid., Sept. 1, 8, 29, 1898; Hicken, "Virden and Pana Mine Wars," p. 267; American, Aug. 27, 1898.
70. Ibid., Aug. 3, 1899.
71. Ibid., June 20, 1898.
residents of Amsterdam witnessed KKK meetings being held in the light of a fiery cross on a hill near their homes. The Klan focused its hostility on foreign-born Catholics living in Amsterdam and the vicinity during the twenties. (Interviews with Isabel and Ellen Lewis, July 13, 1982, Amsterdam, Ohio).

21. Ibid., pp. 808, 797, 798.


27. Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, pp. 217-18, 225-26; UMWJ, Nov. 4, 1897.


32. Harris, "Strike of 1925," pp. 25-29. See also, Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, p. 227; interviews of Jerry Davis by John Stealey, June 6, 1967, and Veasly by Dix, Oral History Project, WVU.


34. Department of Labor, Fairmont Coal Field, p. 4.

35. Harris, "Strike of 1925," p. 36.


38. Harris, "Strike of 1925," p. 40. One of the black informants declared that the UMWA had never expelled a white man belonging to the KKK. This may have been the case in the Fairmont district, but some white miners were expelled by the UMWA for membership in the KKK. A miner in Denning, Arkansas, sued the union for expelling him on these grounds and then securing his discharge from the mine. The man, J. Humphreys, sued for damages, but in 1925 the courts ruled that he had no case, thereby upholding the UMWA's constitutional bar against membership in the Ku Klux Klan. UMWJ, May 15, 1925. See also interview of Frederick Walker by John Stealey, May 31, 1967, Oral History Project, WVU.


40. Quoted in Harris, "Strike of 1925," p. 30. See also interview of Frank Dale by John Stealey, June 6, 1967, Oral History Project, WVU.

41. Fairmont Times, May 14, 1925, and for other examples of strike-related violence and arrests, see May 5, 8, 15, 19, 1925.

42. West Virginia Federation of Labor, Proceedings of the Convention of the West Virginia
Federation of Labor, 1928, p. 32. See also Proceedings for 1925, p. 65, and 1926, p. 25; Wheeling Intelligencer, Oct. 7, 1925.

43. UMWJ, Sep. 15, 1925.


47. Those blacks who favored class solidarity and were sympathetic to the UMWA usually blamed the discrimination on employers, and there was little protest aroused in the UMWA to the small part played by blacks in these fields before the great importation beginning around 1925. See, for example, McDowell, “Negro Labor and the Miners’ Revolt,” p. 274; and Pittsburgh Press, March 24, 1972, which claimed that fifty thousand men were imported, “most of them Negroes.” The UMWJ, July 1, 1927, claimed seventy-four thousand scabs were imported, fifty-five thousand of them blacks. The Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce stated, however, that most of the scabs were white (Conditions in the Coal Fields, 1:568-69).


50. Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce, Conditions in the Coal Fields, 1:202, 866, 58.

51. Ibid., p. 86.

52. Ibid., p. 866.

53. Ibid., pp. 861-63, 872.

54. Ibid., pp. 81, 1013-14; UMWJ, June 1, 1927; Nyden, “Black Miners,” p. 82.

55. Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce, Conditions in the Coal Fields, 1:84-86, 960; Report of Committee Appointed by Employees of the Pittsburgh Coal Company, Submitted by Colored Committee of Non-union Miners, Montour No. 1, UMWA Archives, courtesy of Peter Gottlieb.

56. Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce, Conditions in the Coal Fields, 1:21, 1033-34, 1040-62.


58. UMWJ, Aug. 1, 1926.

59. Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce, Conditions in the Coal Fields, 1:1012-13, 78-79. At least some black preachers were utilized by the operators to encourage the support of black miners, while other black ministers took the side of organized labor and denounced industrial conditions fostered by such companies as Pittsburgh Coal. See Dennis C. Dickerson, “The Black Church in Industrializing Western Pennsylvania, 1870-1950,” Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 64 (Oct. 1981): 340-41.

60. Senate Committee on Interstate Commerce, Conditions in the Coal Fields, 1:70-71, 76-78, 87-88, 90, 2:2585, 2591, 2831).

62. Ibid., Jan. 1, 1930, April 1, 1927. See also, "Crusaders Seeking Vice to Eliminate Can Find Plenty If They Spotlight Non-union Coal Camps," *Coal Facts*, Aug. 21, 1926.

63. Ibid., Feb. 1, 1928; Philip Murray to Council of Churches of Christ in Pittsburgh, March 23, 1927, reproduced in Allen, "The Negro Coal Miner," App. III, pp. 78-79. Murray wrote to the Council of Churches of Christ in Pittsburgh urging the organization to investigate, but the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, the parent body, published its own report instead. Unfortunately for Murray and the UMWA, the council's study did not report the vice and crime, only the more generalized history and nature of the industrial dispute. The *UMWJ* branded the report a whitewash, and Oliver K. Eaton, UMWA attorney, charged before the U.S. Senate investigating committee that the council was in collusion with the coal operators. *UMWJ*, March 15, 1928; F. Ernest Johnson, "The Case of Bituminous Coal," *Survey* 60 (May 15, 1928): 213-15.


7. Judicious Mixture in Central Appalachia, 1880-1920


8. Lawrence, “Appalachian Metamorphosis,” p. 94.


15. See, for example, ibid., pp. 91, 117, 119; Archie Reeves, June 28, 1967, and Jerry Davis, June 6, 1967, interviewed by John Stealey, Oral History Project, WVU. Coal Age, an industry publication for mine managers, reported that “about 1100 new coal mines have been opened in the United States” between May 1916 and August 1917, stimulated by the increased war demand for coal. Coal Age 12 (Aug. 18, 1917): 291.


20. Department of Labor, Negro Migration, pp. 54-55.

21. Bell to Attorney General, Oct. 25, 1916, RG 60, file 182363, NA. A TCI official claimed that 75 percent of the thirty-six hundred employees in that company’s ore mines had come from the farms within the past twelve months. (Department of Labor, Negro Migration, p. 63) A similar turnover was occurring in the coal mines.


24. Deposition of Edward Hardaway, Oct. 25, 1916, before a Notary Public, Jefferson County, Ala., ibid. For the depositions on which these paragraphs are based, see vertical file 182363, ibid.


30. Lawrence, “Appalachian Metamorphosis,” pp. 133-34; McDowell Times, Nov. 21, 1918.


43. Wheeling Intelligencer, Oct. 7, 1925.
44. Wolfe to Collins, June 7, 8, 1916, both in Collins Papers.
46. Based on data from Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population (1920); Herbert Northrup, Organized Labor and the Negro (New York, 1944), pp. 156-57; Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, p. 218; West Virginia, Bureau of Negro Welfare, Report (1925-26), p. 22; Edward Eyre Hunt et al., eds., What the Coal Commission Found: An Authoritative Summary by the Staff (Baltimore, 1925), pp. 136-37. In West Virginia nearly 75 percent of the foreign-born were still alien in 1920. That year, 60 percent of the nation's miners were native white, 8 percent native black, and 32 percent foreign-born. Census data on the coal-mining population are not entirely reliable because so few miners lived in incorporated towns of twenty-five hundred or more. In West Virginia, for example, the figure was only 6 percent (ibid).
48. Superintendent to Collins, June 1, 5, Aug. 12, June 10, Sept. 12, Oct. 24, 1911, all in Winding Gulf Colliery Company Business Letters, WVU.
50. Steven Brier has made this argument in, "Interracial Organizing in the West Virginia Coal Industry: The Participation of Black Mine Workers in the Knights of Labor and the United Mine Workers, 1880-1894," Essays in Southern Labor History: Selected Papers, Southern Labor History Conference, 1976, ed. Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed (Westport, Conn., 1976), pp. 18-43. Strong supporting evidence for this argument can be found in Peter J. Rachleff, Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890 (Philadelphia, 1984), chaps. 8 and 9; and in Foner and Lewis, eds., The Black Worker, vol. 3, pt. 4.
55. Ibid., May 24, 1890.
56. UMWJ, Nov. 26, 1891.
60. UMWJ, June 20, July 18, 1895.
62. UMWJ, June 20, 1895.
64. West Virginia, Department of Labor, "Strike of Bituminous Coal Miners of 1897," Biennial Report, 1897-1898 (Charleston, 1898), pp. 92-106.
66. UMWJ, April 30, 1891.
68. UMWJ, April 21, 28, Nov. 27, 1892.
69. Ibid., April 7, 1898.


74. Senate, Conditions in the Paint Creek District, Pt. 1, pp. 188-89, 451-53.

75. Petition of Habeas Corpus, Dan Chain, March 18, 1913, pp. 44-45. Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, copy in Proceedings of the Military Commission, 1912-13, WVU.

76. UMWJ, April 25, May 2, 16, July 4, Nov. 12, 1912.
78. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

79. Trial Proceedings, Sept. 6, 1912-Dec. 31, 1912, West Virginia Secretary of State Papers, West Virginia State Archives; Senate, Conditions in Paint Creek District, Pt. 1, pp. 160-61. Mug shots of fourteen of those convicted, including Dan Chain, were reproduced in this volume on p. 165. Chain was the only black among this group.

80. Petition of Habeas Corpus, Dan Chain, p. 79; Conditional Pardon of Dan Chain, alias "Few Clothes," Jan. 3, 1913, West Virginia Secretary of State, Pardons and Paroles Records, microfilm copy at WVU.


82. Conditional Pardon of Dan Chain alias "Few Clothes," May 17, 1913, West Virginia Secretary of State Records, Pardons and Paroles. Andy Willis of the Miners Art Group, West Virginia Chapter, Workers Education Local 189 recently created an illustration of "Few Clothes" as a large muscular man delivering a forceful speech to a group of miners; a banner reading "Join the United Mine Workers of America" waves in the background. The caption reads "Fewclothes Johnson addresses the Strikers; An often forgotten figure, well-known in the southern West Virginia coal fields, speaks to fellow workers." The illustration was made into a greeting card and sold by Workers Education Local 189 (a copy was given me by Janet Gamble, Labor Studies Department, West Virginia Institute of Technology, Montgomery, West Virginia).

8. The Fruits of Judicious Mixture, 1910-1932

1. Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia"; Price Van Meter Fishback, "Employment Conditions of Blacks in the Coal Industry, 1900-1930" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Washington, 1983). Laing's data are representative of the labor market in southern West Virginia where almost 90 percent of the state's black miners resided in 1932. Price's
figures are for the West Virginia counties that contained 97 percent of the black, 85 percent of the native-white, and 83 percent of the southern European miners in the state. If anything his figures are understated because discriminatory patterns were harsher in northern West Virginia.


23. Marvin Gullett interviewed by Ron Daley, Wheelwright, Ky., Nov. 2, 1975, tape no. 1128, ibid. Wheelwright was integrated in 1965, but by then nearly all of the blacks had moved away. See Louisville Courier, Nov. 17, 1980; Lewis M. Williams, The Transformation of a Coal Mining Town (Chicago, [1948?]), an Inland Steel Company pamphlet in the Wheelwright Coal Camp Collection, UK. This collection is best for the 1940s and 1950s, but few blacks remained in Wheelwright by then, and there are only a few casual references to blacks. See, for example, folders C-9, C-11, C-14, S-28. See also Stephen Clark King, Wheelwright, Kentucky: Community in Transition (Lexington, Ky., 1982).


29. UMWJ, Dec. 20, 1900.


34. Charles Bradshaw interviewed by Bill Taft, June 21, 1973, Oral History Project, WVU.


36. Ibid., pp. 484-86.

37. Lee, Bloodletting in Appalachia, pp. 203-6. Fifty years later, in 1961, Lee returned to Keystone to find the “miners, the money, and the Cinder Bottom floozies” gone; Keystone had become another “ghost town” of the coalfields. The young mayor informed him that there were still a few prostitutes working in Cinder Bottom, but life was “dismal.” In the summer of 1968 Lee once again had occasion to visit Keystone, and there had been little change, “except for the worse.” (Ibid., pp. 207, 208n).


42. Nutter, “These Colored United States,” pp. 46-47; Douglass C. Smith, “Race

44. Ibid., Feb. 3, 1914.
46. *Constitution of the State of West Virginia* (1872), Article 12, Section 8.
51. Nutter, “These Colored United States,” p. 46. See also West Virginia, Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics, *Reports*, which summarize the status of black public institutions in the state during these years.
53. Ibid., pp. 28-29; UMWJ, Oct. 1, Nov. 1, 1921.


70. *UMWJ*, Jan. 1, 1925.

71. Ibid., June 15, 1921.


73. Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*, pp. 65, 170 n5.


9. Demise of the Black Miner


the Origin of Coal Miners' Unions in the United States (New York, 1940), p. 48; UMWA, Proceedings of the 19th Annual Convention, 1908, p. 36.


10. William Major Veasly interviewed by Keith Dix, Oct. 27, 1976, Oral History Project, WVU. Veasly noted parenthetically that the supervisor who denounced him later tearfully apologized for his behavior (ibid.).


18. Ibid. (1941-42), pp. 30-31. John Paterson was the first black mine official in West Virginia. He went to work in the mines of Keystone at an early age, took extension courses by mail from Pennsylvania State University, and passed the state certification examination in 1926. He became a foreman of five hundred men and rose to the position of fire boss, or safety director, at Koppers Coal and Coke Company in Keystone. Later he served as West Virginia Department of Mines safety director. Paterson holds the distinction of being the second black mine official in the United States, according to U.G. Carter (undated typescript in the Carter Papers).


23. Daily Worker, June 4, 1936.


25. Ibid., p. 149.
27. Pittsburgh Courier, Feb. 10, 1940.
29. Chicago Defender, April 13, 1940.
30. John L. Lewis, "Equal Opportunity," speech before the National Negro Congress, April 1940, Washington, D.C., reprint in the UMWA District 6 Collection, Box 9, Ohio University. The NNC overwhelmingly accepted Lewis's invitation to join efforts with the CIO. See Daily Worker, April 28, 1940.
31. UMWJ, July 1, 1940; CIO News, June 24, 1940; Crisis 47 (June 1940): 181-82.
32. UMWJ, May 15, 1948.
33. Ibid., June 15, 1945.
35. Baratz, Union and the Coal Industry, pp. 70-71; Curtis Seltzer, Fire in the Hole: Miners and Managers in the American Coal Industry (Lexington, Ky., 1985), chap. 3.
36. Ibid.
44. See Table 3. These figures do not include the western fields, which are primarily strip mines and statistically lily white. See also Southern Appalachian Labor School, Montgomery, West Virginia, Road Report 2 (March 1981): 9; "Black Appalachian History: A Forgotten Story," Mountain Life and Work 55 (June 1979): 36.
47. Bill Worthington interviewed by Paul Nyden, Oct. 20, 1971. My thanks to Paul Nyden for providing me a transcript of this and other interviews.
51. William S. Walker, "Occupational Aspirations of Negro Family Members in a Coal Mining Community" (M.A. thesis, New York Univ., 1950), pp. 47-60, 133, 170, 202-3, as cited in Barnum, Negro in the Coal Industry, pp. 50-51. All M.A. theses have been removed from the archives of NYU and returned to their authors.


70. See, for example, UMWJ, June 1-15, 1974, Jan. 16-31, 1975.


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