HOME AND HELL: THE GREAT MIGRATION AND THE MAKING OF SUNDOWN TOWNS IN APPALACHIA

by

MATTHEW C. O'NEAL

(Under the Direction of Scott Reynolds Nelson)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines why the Great Migration to Appalachia held both promise and peril for African Americans. It argues that the racial violence of the Long Red Summer, and the formation of sundown towns in its aftermath, can be best understood by putting a consideration of labor back into labor history. At different locations within the kingdom of coal in Appalachia, the relationship between capital and labor produced distinct social relations and racial ideologies. In other words, the kinds of work people did, who they worked with, and how and where they lived, manufactured ways that they conceived of – and acted on – race. The industries of railroading and coal mining serve as a point of comparison, revealing how and why some white workers' desires to exclude Black labor from the job transformed into efforts to expel them from communities altogether.

INDEX WORDS: Labor, Race, Railroads, Coal, Racial Violence, Red Summer, Expulsion, Removal, Capitalism, Work, Community, African American, Company Towns, World War I, Land, Industry, Transportation, Extraction, Memory, Politics, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Georgia

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B.A., University of Kentucky, 2013

M.A., Auburn University, 2016

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2023

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May 2023

To Allie, for your abiding love and steady support.

And to J.S.O. I already love you more than you can ever know.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I saved this part for last, because I find it difficult to express my appreciation to all of the people that have helped me get to this point. Dead people, as historians know, are easier to write about.

First, there is my family. My parents Mike and Sarah have always supported me in all things and are no doubt glad to see that the early twenties knucklehead has given way to a slightly more mature, albeit overly educated, version of their son. I can't help but think that seeing all of my dad's books in his office at one of the many churches he pastored led me to want to pursue a life of education and scholarship. I love both of my siblings, Drew and Rachael, most dearly. My great-aunt Jan Rose, her recently deceased husband Kenneth, and my cousin Ellen have supported me in many ways and told me family stories that I am better for having heard. Without my grandparents, this dissertation would not exist. I first learned about Corbin from Papaw, and the trips to graveyards around southeastern Kentucky with him and Granny made me want to write about where our family was from. They will be pleased that I am done with my paperwork at last.

I am indebted to historians across three fine institutions, all in the Southeastern Conference. At Kentucky, Dr. Abigail Firey's senior capstone course offered me a chance to discover how much I enjoyed research and writing history. At Auburn, Ken Noe exhibited all of the traits that make him a great advisor and a first-rate historian. I hope I can emulate just a few of them. I caught the labor history bug from Jennifer Brooks, who told me to apply for a PhD at Georgia when I was finishing my Master's. I blame this all on her. She did so because Scott

Nelson and Cindy Hahamovitch had recently moved to Athens, and I am glad they did. They have both shaped my thinking and writing, each in their own way. Scott is all you could ask for in an advisor. He is always pushing me to think about the bigger picture. He had to wade through the morass of my early drafts, but his sharp eye for argument and narrative flow made this dissertation a much better product. I am honored to be his first PhD student to graduate from UGA. Cindy, from her emails, seems to never sleep, and has a knack for posing questions that get straight to the heart of the matter. I am in awe of both of them, and I'm grateful that I got to study and write under their tutelage. Will Jones and Tracey Johnson are invaluable members of my dissertation committee as well. Last, but certainly not least, I am thankful for John Inscoe. His fingerprints are on this dissertation, even if his signature is not.

I could not have gotten this far without the community that I was fortunate to form along the way. During graduate school at Georgia, Bryant Barnes, Terrell Orr, David Parker, and Shaw Bridges have been fellow travelers and friends, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. I think we spent most of it in my backyard. Marvin Chiles was always ready with an uplifting word or helpful advice. I am obliged to Bob Hutton, Scott Huffard, Stephanie Lang, and many other historians and scholars I interacted with at conferences and workshops. Their advice and ideas are in here, but I will claim all of the mistakes. I am especially indebted to William Isom of the Black in Appalachia project, who invited me to be a part of their documentary on the Corbin expulsion. I count him as a good friend, and I am glad we shared the stage together at a conference in Asheville. It was there that I also met William H. Turner, who has encouraged me and was gracious enough to talk with me for this project. I also want to thank the staffs of the archives I visited for their labor and their insights. This would not have been possible without funding from the history department at UGA, and also fellowships with the Hagley Museum and

Library and the Kentucky Historical Society. Thanks too to Jay Driskell, who consulted files for me at the National Archives. Lastly, the folks at UGA Press have given me much support over this past year as I worked as a graduate editorial assistant and finished the dissertation. To all of you, thank you.

And then there is Allie. We met in Auburn when I was about to graduate with an M.A., and we have been together ever since. She has been my rock throughout the ups and downs of graduate school. She models a curious mind and an intelligent sense of humor that I have always admired. She is probably tired of hearing my ramblings about my research and everything Kentucky. But she loves me, and I love her, and that is the best thing that has ever happened to me. We've often joked that this spring will see two babies born – my dissertation, and our son. This is for both of them. Whatever we do in this life, we will always have each other.

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BETWEEN HOME AND HELL

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram;
and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him.
Genesis 15:12 (NASB)

Travis wondered if the meadow would feel the same if he didn't know what happened there.
Leonard came up and stood beside him.
"You know a place is haunted when it feels more real than you are," Leonard said.
Ron Rash, *The World Made Straight*

Every Memorial Day weekend, Black Americans return home to Appalachia. They convene in the former company town of Lynch in Harlan County Kentucky, built at the foot of Black Mountain in 1917 by U.S. Steel. In 1940, 10,000 people lived in the "greatest coal camp in the world." Over a third of the mining workforce was African American, many of whom had arrived from the Deep South in what we call the Great Migration. When deindustrialization hit the coalfields in the 1960s, Black miners packed up and left the mountains behind. The Great Migration took them further north. Yet each Memorial Day weekend, families travel from Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Atlanta, and everywhere in between, gathering in relatives' homes or in the former Lynch Colored Public School. At the worn brick building, now the headquarters of the Eastern Kentucky Social Club, members and their families reconnect, fellowship, and tell stories. Sojourners to Lynch describe the Memorial Day homecoming as "sacred." "From all my life I can remember," Lexington, Ky. resident Brenda Clark Combs recalled, "that was the week that everybody that ever lived in Lynch came back home."[1]

[1] Karida L. Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 180-81.

Getting to Harlan County is no easy task. Just minutes from the Virginia border on U.S. Route 119, Lynch is hundreds of miles from any airport. From Detroit and Chicago, the best route is to link up with Interstate 75 and head south until you reach the town of Corbin on exit 29. From there, US-25E winds up, down, and around toward the Cumberland Gap for some eighty miles. Today, Corbin is mostly known as a convenient stop for cheap gasoline, and for giving the world Kentucky Fried Chicken. But for Black travelers heading to Harlan County, the name means something else altogether.

For much of the twentieth century, Corbin was well-known as a racist "sundown town" – a place that is "all-white on purpose."[2] Located at the confluence of three counties – Knox, Whitley, and Laurel – the once-bustling railroad hub funneled coal from Lynch and Harlan County to the Great Lakes region. In October 1919, a white mob ran nearly all of the Black residents out of town in boxcars, hundreds of whom had recently arrived from further South as construction laborers in the Louisville & Nashville (L&N) railroad yard. Over the following decades, rumors and stories cemented the town's all-white status. At its height, hundreds of coal cars passed through the town every day, but Black people weren't welcome. A century later, white residents still made up 98% out of a population of nearly 7,200.

Corbin's reputation as a sundown town has extended its influence far and wide. Just before Memorial Day weekend in 2022, I spoke with Lynch, Kentucky's very own, Dr. William H. Turner. Born in 1946 to Earl Turner, a Black coal miner for U.S. Steel, and his wife Naomi "Punkin" Turner, he is fifth of their ten children. With deeper roots in Virginia and Georgia, his family history is representative of the Great Migration. Turner grew up in Lynch and attended school there before graduating from the University of Kentucky and receiving a doctorate in

[2] James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New Press, 2005), 4.

sociology and anthropology from the University of Notre Dame. He is a something like a dean of Appalachian Studies, and without a doubt the foremost expert on Black life in the mountains.[3] He painted me a picture that day: "I'll bet you right now, as we speak the Thursday before Memorial Day, there are hundreds of people I know who are… going to Harlan County for the weekend, for Decoration Day." Yet according to him, these travelers paid close attention to where they were on Interstate 75: "A lot of them will not still stop in Corbin. They're my age and it's just, 'man, I don't even stop there." "The memories of Corbin, for good or for ill," he explained, "are still fresh in the minds of many people."

For Turner, his family, and other Black residents of the coalfields, the nearby sundown town was "a metaphor for the rest of America," a place that denied them full and equal rights as citizens. "Corbin itself," he continued, "was deeply embedded in in the consciousness of people like my father, because they all heard about that. They all knew about that. They didn't need any mass media to tell them, because the word of mouth was how things got around." His parents have passed on, but they relayed these valuable lessons to him throughout his childhood. The fact that the sundown town existed and persisted throughout his life was another reminder that African Americans were "framed and constricted by a legal system, and certain social mores and traditions." At the time, however, Turner didn't think of it in sociological terms, but only as, "'that's just the way it is.'"[4]

This dissertation explores how "just the way it is" came to be. In *Home and Hell in Appalachia,* I survey race, labor, and migration in Appalachia from its post-Civil War industrialization to the eve of the Great Depression, with a focus on the simultaneous creation of

[3] Before appearing on a conference panel with Dr. Turner in Asheville, NC in 2019, I told him my family had roots in Corbin, to which he replied, "Oh, God!"
[4] Interview with William D. Turner, May 26, 2022, in possession of author.

"all-white" communities alongside those built and sustained by Black migrants. When U.S. Steel built Lynch, the L&N Railroad marshalled money and men to upgrade the capacity of the Corbin railyard. In both cases, the Great Migration of African Americans supplied the labor. Yet while Lynch went on to play host to a generation of African American migrants, Corbin became a place well known for its all-white status. Thus the Appalachian coalfields, like the Upper South and indeed anywhere in America, could be both "Home… and… Hell" for African Americans.[5]

I treat this contradiction not as one to be resolved, but one to be understood as part of a connected historical process. My argument is that as the coal economy of Appalachia developed, a division of labor determined what kind of work that was necessary in certain places.[6] From this relationship between labor and capital then flowed the social relations of workers, including their ways of thinking about race. In other words, the kind of work people did, who they worked with, and where and how they lived, produced distinct racial ideologies. In this dissertation the industries of railroading and coal mining are compared, to show how over time, the organization of peoples' working and social lives channeled them along divergent paths. By World War I, a job in a coal mine or on the railroad presented starkly different experiences, especially for Black migrants moving up from the Deep South. To white railroaders, the arrival of unprecedented numbers of African Americans heralded the end of the racial order that had long governed their lives, and the beginning of a new one in which their place was uncertain. In a wave of reactionary backlash that responded to wartime changes in the industry, railroaders exhibited a

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[5] Luther Adams, "My Old Kentucky Home: Black History in the Bluegrass State," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society,* vol. 113, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2015): 387.

[6] According to Karl Marx's discussion of the division of labor, "Different communities find different means of production… Hence their modes of production and living, as well as their products, are different." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* vol. 1 (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 472. Here I also draw on Immanuel Wallerstein's conception of capitalism as a world-system. For Appalachia as a periphery, see David Walls, "Internal Colony or Internal Periphery: Three Models in Search of Appalachian Development," in *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins, ed., (Boone, N.C.: The Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978), 319-350.

commitment to racism that ran so deep as to produce communities based on the very principle of keeping certain people out. Lest we take the racism of southern white workers for granted, however, this analysis explains why these ideas developed over time, and how different ways of living and organizing were indeed possible. Further into the coalfields, miners proved that racial exclusion was not the only answer. This comparative approach, I think, can help us understand why the Great Migration brought Black and white workers together in one place, only to drive them apart in another.

Chapter Overview

My argument evolves over five chapters, followed by an epilogue. Chapter 1 traces how railroads, coal operators, lawyers, land agents, and even reformers transformed southeastern Kentucky into a New South coalfield by the eve of the war in Europe. I draw on the records of the Wentz Corporation, held at the Hagley Museum and Library, to show how the Pennsylvania family was a part of a movement southward in search of high-quality bituminous coking coal. The Wenztes and other northern industrialists partnered with lawyers and agents in Kentucky to buy and sell the land of Harlan County. Meanwhile, the L&N Railroad constructed its line southward and eastward to pierce the Cumberland Plateau and provide an outlet for the minerals in the hillsides. The state of Kentucky's most powerful corporation faced a populist opposition in the late 1890s, however, and a tumultuous political tug-of-war complicated capital's plans for the coalfield. Finally, from their base at the antislavery and interracial Berea College, liberal reformers advanced their own vision of social life in the mountains. Yet as capital tightened its grip on the coalfield, Kentucky's state legislature imposed a stricter Jim Crow regime and simultaneously removed impediments to the development of its land and resources. The state's

distinct style of racism set it apart from other Jim Crow regimes – Kentucky was (and is) not quite southern, but not quite anything else either. Nevertheless, the tactic proved effective at producing and reproducing justifications for inequality in an emerging system of capitalist class relations.[7] In the end, Berea College was no match for the onward march of capital and Jim Crow, but remnants of their particular brand of interracialism would persist into the World War I era and beyond.

If the first chapter is a story of capital's aspirations, the next is about the lives and labors of those who turned their plans into profits. I compare the industries of railroading and coal mining, with a focus on how the forces and relations of production shaped ideologies of race.[8] Even in the Jim Crowed kingdom of coal, the dynamics of these industries dictated how race functioned in practice. Key to my comparison of the two is an understanding of types of industrial communities: "transportation towns" of railroad employees stratified at points along an occupational hierarchy; and "extraction towns" of coal miners flattened into a mass by the powerful coal operators. Investigations conducted by academics and the federal government inform my analysis, as does the robust body of scholarship produced on both. While historians

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[7] According to Oliver Cromwell Cox, racial ideology emerged as a way for European capitalists to view laborers as less than human, which in turn provided a rationalization for their exploitation. See Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1948), 485-6, as well as 317-586 generally for his exegesis of race and capitalism as historical concomitants. For a helpful analysis of Cox's ideas, see Cedric J. Robinson, "Oliver Cromwell Cox and the Historiography of the West," *Cultural Critique* 17 (Winter 1990-1991): 5-19. For the origin of race within American class relations, specifically colonial Virginia, see Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in American History," *New Left Review* 181 (May-June 1990): 95-118. Her theory mirrors that of Stuart Hall, who explained that race is the "modality in which class is lived, the medium through which class relations are experienced." Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 341. See also Barbara J. Fields and Karen E. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

[8] Here I take my cue from Marx's explanation of historical materialism, in which "mental conceptions… flow" from the dialectical relationships between man and nature, the labor process, and social relations. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 493-4, note 4, and 175, note 35. Also, as Barbara J. Fields taught us decades ago, ideas about race derive meaning from their context, and to discuss the former without the latter grants "race" a "transhistorical, almost metaphysical status," rendering the historian an "unknowing – and therefore uncontesting" victim of its ideology. See Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 144.

have devoted considerable attention to life in Appalachian coal company towns, we know relatively little about the social dynamics of adjacent areas that served as transshipment points. Coal, and to a lesser extent, timber, did indeed dominate the economic and social worlds of the upland portions of these states, and played host to some of the most influential labor battles in American history. Although these stories are important, the singular focus on coal can elide as much as it reveals.[9] I argue that while railroaders and miners resisted the power of their employers, the organization of their working and social lives channeled their actions along separate paths.

With the outbreak of war in Europe, Appalachian coal became ever more important to the American industrial economy. Chapter 3 begins here, to show how the ensuing Great Migration led Black southerners to the extraction towns of Central Appalachia. In doing so, my work joins other recent efforts to dismantle the whitewashed image of Appalachia.[10] Like Chicago, East St.

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[9] Much of this work has focused on southern West Virginia. David A. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987); Joe W. Trotter, Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). James R. Green, *The Devil Is Here in these Hills: West Virginia's Coal Miners and their Battle for Freedom* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press. 2015). Alabama has also been the subject of several studies. See Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-1921* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Robert H. Woodrum, *Everybody Was Black Down There: Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfields* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007). One notable exception is Ron Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[10] For the foundational text, see *Blacks in Appalachia*, ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985); John C. Inscoe, "Race and Racism in Appalachia," in *Appalachia in the Making*, Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight Billings, and Altina L. Waller, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001). For the interrogation of whiteness and race in Appalachia, see the entire special issue of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1/2 (Spring/Fall 2004). More recent contributions have responded to J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: Harper, 2016). See Catte, *What You're Getting Wrong About Appalachia*; *Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy*, ed. Anthony Harkins and Meredith McCarroll (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2019); Brown, *Gone Home*; Fain, *Black Huntington*;

Louis, and Pittsburgh, the coal mines of Appalachia relied on Black southerners as a source of labor during the war. The Great Migration, a story often framed as a South-to-North journey, saw thousands of African American migrants move within the region as well.[11] In what historian Joe William Trotter labeled "rural to rural-industrial" migration, Black Americans began moving to the Central Appalachian coalfields in the 1890s to take jobs in the mines and on the railroads. This migration trend accelerated during the war years, continuing through the next decade.[12] Karida Brown's recent work on the migration into and out of Harlan County framed this movement as an "escape" from the repressive Jim Crow regime, as Black southerners took advantage of the Upper South's promise of more political and social equality. In West Virginia, and Kentucky to a lesser extent, African Americans faced fewer incidents of mob violence, retained the right to vote and hold office, and could attend institutions of (segregated) higher education. African Americans in Central Appalachia made the most of these opportunities, and in the words of historian Ron Lewis, came "closer to finding economic equality" there than anywhere else.[13] The southern mountains were still southern, though, and as any student of American history knows, racism was not confined to one side of the Mason-Dixon.[14]

Thus, the coalfields' distinct system of social relations presented a complicated context for Black migrants. I cite a Department of Justice investigation of labor agents in Alabama from 1916 to capture African Americans' hopes – and disappointments – in their own words. The

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[11] For examples of the first approach, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010).

[12] Joe W. Trotter, Jr., "Race, Class, and Industrial Change: Black Migration to Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, Joe W. Trotter, Jr., ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 46-51.

[13] Lewis, *Black Coal Miners*, 121. For an analysis of Huntington, West Virginia, see Cicero M. Fain III, *Black Huntington: An Appalachian Story* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

[14] For racial violence in Appalachia, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Racial Violence, Lynchings, and Modernization in the Mountain South," in *Appalachians and Race*, 302-316; Robert P. Stuckert, "Racial Violence in Southern Appalachia, 1880-1940," *Appalachian Heritage*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 35-41.

investigation also made clear the concerns that their movement elicited among white Americans across the nation. Although small in number compared to later waves of migration, the sociologist Guy B. Johnson observed that the wartime migration attracted attention "not because it is a migration, but because it is a *negro* migration."[15] Yet their movements elicited little in the way of racial violence or backlash at their destinations, even in predominantly white Appalachian counties of the coalfields. In the context of a company-owned extraction town, distinctions of race and ethnicity mattered less to miners than did their shared lack of political power and say over their working lives. Then, the U.S.'s entry into the war in April 1917 opened up new opportunities for both capital and labor in the coalfields. Giants like U.S. Steel entered Harlan County, making the lands acquired by the Wentz family altogether more valuable. The wartime state elevated the influence of organized labor, and the United Mine Workers made inroads in the Central Appalachian field. Elsewhere, a rising tide of racist reaction began with the East St. Louis riots in 1917 and threatened to engulf among workers throughout the nation. Parts of the Central Appalachian coalfields, on the other hand, appeared headed for a clash between capital and labor.

Wartime changes came to the railroad industry as well, but railroaders gave them a different reception. Chapter 4 begins with the Wilson administration's takeover of the roads, which resulted in higher wages for Black workers and many threats to the racialized labor hierarchy. What was once an effort to drive African Americans off the job became one to expel them from the industry entirely. Indeed, as labor historian Eric Arnesen observed, the war years saw white unionists write "a new chapter in the history of racial exclusion in railroad

[15] Guy B. Johnson, "The Negro Migration and Its Consequences," *Social Forces* 2 (March 1924): 404-408, in Thomas F. Pettigrew, ed., *The Sociology of Race Relations: Reflection and Reform* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 76.

employment."[16] In several transportation towns that experienced wartime migration, though, this impulse transformed into a campaign to remove Black people from their communities once and for all. While I use Corbin as a focal point, the violence there was not an isolated incident. The expulsion in Corbin mirrored two other incidents in Erwin, Tennessee and Ravenna, Kentucky. All three towns were regional hubs for coal-carrying railroads, and over the "Long Red Summer" of 1917 to 1921, all three forcibly removed Black residents.[17] Even the triggers for the removals are similar: in each, an alleged assault of white railroad employee, or employee's family, by a Black man triggered the mob action. I cite testimony from a grand jury trial of the Corbin expulsion, railroad union journals, and newspaper accounts of mob violence, that made it clear that the transportation towns belonged to white labor at the end of the Long Red Summer. I present this evidence in detail not out of a desire to dwell in the horrors of racism, but to tell with accuracy histories that have too often been the subject of uninformed speculation and myth.

In chapter 4, I make the historiographical case for understanding the events of the Long Red Summer as rooted in labor history. By and large, historians tend to focus on only the events of 1919, subsuming the specific circumstances and details of each incident of violence under a broad banner, leading to a relatively generic, and therefore unhelpful, portrait of race and racism.[18] But the (Long) Red Summer, as others have observed, manifested as "disparate *local*

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[16] Eric Arnesen, "Charting an Independent Course: African American Railroad Workers in the World War I Era," in *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working-Class Experience*, Eric Arnesen, Julie Greene, and Bruce Laure, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 295.

[17] Chad L. Williams describes the period from the end of World War I to the Tulsa Massacre of 1921 as the "long Red Summer." I propose that we can extend that distinction to 1917, beginning with the East St. Louis race riot. See Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 225.

[18] Most studies of the Red Summer attempt a synthesis of several, or all, of the major riots. See Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-in, 1919 and the 1960s* (Garden City and New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966); Lee Williams, *Anatomy of Four Race Riots: Racial Conflict in Knoxville, Elaine (Arkansas), Tulsa, and Chicago, 1919-1921* (Hattiesburg University and College Press of Mississippi, 1972); Jan Voogd, *Race Riots & Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2011); David Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Others ground

events that responded to immediate conditions."[19] To truly understand the causes of wartime repression, and the historical lessons it offers, we must ground local stories in the broader national narrative that includes the concurrent antiradicalism of the Red Scare. Scholars tend to silo these phenomena into the categories of "race" or "class," resulting in a tunnel-vision of sorts results in some satisfactory chronologies and a few confusing attempts at categorization.[20] For example, postwar unrest appeared to break down along the following lines: "For [white] labor, there were the 'Palmer raids'; for the Negro, lynchings and riots."[21] Yet at the time, Black socialists and the New Negro movement made the connection between anti-communism and racism, seeing 1919 as a moment when Marx's conception of class conflict was revealed to be the driving force of history.[22] Indeed, the emerging New Negro, born out of Black Americans' disillusionment with fighting for democracy abroad while being denied it at home, "was by and large… proletarian," as a prominent labor historian has pointed out.[23] Labor history, then, can explain why expulsion and riots happened alongside the rewriting of union rules, strikes, and gun battles with the hired private guards of capital. Beyond the fight for industrial democracy, the year of 1919 served as a troubling referendum on the civil and human rights of Black Americans.

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their analysis in one place, using a local story to reflect back on the national. See William Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Athenuem, 1970).

[19] Adam J. Hodges, "Understanding a National and Global Red Scare/Red Summer Through the Local Invention of Solidarities," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,* vol. 18, no. 1 (Jan. 2019): 81-98. Quote, with emphasis from text, is from p. 81.

[20] There are exceptions in the Red Summer/Red Scare literature that offer a glimpse of what can be learned through an approach that considers the "race" and "class" upheavals of the postwar period as intertwined. See William Tuttle, *Race Riot,* 14. Tuttle's connection has yet to be fully fleshed out, but other works that follow a similar line of thinking include: Theodore Kornweibel Jr., *"Seeing Red": Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998); Barbara Foley, *Specters of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). For a helpful overview of the literature, see Adam J. Hodges, "Understanding a National and Global Red Scare/Red Summer Through the Local Invention of Solidarities," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era,* vol. 18, no. 1 (Jan. 2019): 81-98.

[21] Horace R. Clayton and St. Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1945), 65.

[22] Foley, *Specters of 1919,* 16.

[23] Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color,* 57. Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power,* 11.

Chapter 5 and the epilogue detail the emergence of sundown towns in the aftermath of violent expulsions and the lasting effects of racial violence. While they may seem set in stone to someone looking back on them from the present, sundown towns were actually the result of a process akin to that of making race. In general, scholars often struggle to make sense of how "race massacres," "racial expulsions," and "racial cleanings" led to the development of sundown towns.[24] After the initial moment that birthed them, residents of nascent sundown towns engaged in the constant production and management of racial boundaries. This chapter outlines how Corbinites positioned their community as an all-white transportation town throughout a trial aimed at the leaders of mob, the 1922 railroad shopmen strike, and the cultural conflicts of the 1920s. Chastised by the state government and defeated by the L&N, white Corbinites fell back on labor conservatism, religious fundamentalism, and above all, their shared white identity. The epilogue extends this analysis into the post-World War II era to show how the tall tales and rumors about sundown towns became one of the main ways their boundaries were reinforced. Through word of mouth, both white and Black families passed on the stories, and whether true or not, they became part of the identity of the place itself. I close with recent attempts by grassroots efforts to grapple with the legacy of racist expulsions in the context of deindustrialization, as well as the wave of Black Lives Matter protests in Appalachia in 2020. Crowds even gathered in Corbin, a place that Black Kentuckians long regarded as "the World Capital of Sundown Towns."[25]

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[24] Sociologist James W. Loewen, for example, asserts that some places "went sundown simply because a neighboring town did so," citing Ravenna and Corbin as examples. I argue that a methodology that applies political economy and a materialist analysis of race can lead to a more satisfactory explanation. Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 181. I find "racial cleansing" to be a misnomer that can elide specific circumstances, in turn granting race a transhistorical power of its own. See Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters*. Studies of individual locales usually avoid generalizations and are on much more solid ground. See Patrick Phillips, *Blood at the Root: Racial Cleansing in America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016).

[25] William H. Turner, "Commentary: Black Lives Matter at the Mountaintops in My Old Kentucky Home," *Daily Yonder*, June 25, 2020, https://dailyyonder.com/commentary-black-lives-matter-at-the-mountaintops-in-my-old-

The intertwined histories of railroads and coal, of Corbin and Lynch, of exclusion amidst migration, cannot be told apart from each other. For Black southerners in the Great Migration, "home" and "hell" were destinations along parallel tracks. And just as the railroad yard of Corbin depended on the flow of coal from the mountains, so too did its residents fashion a sundown town in contrast to thriving Black communities nearby. Understanding the relationship between these places, and how people were – and are – molded by their specific contexts, are crucial starting points to dismantling the decades-long aftereffects of racism. I hope my dissertation can help further this work.

kentucky-home/2020/06/25/?fbclid=IwAR0IjNdh2rU7f1lwwHYFuDEjS9P0xuFn4AGAiVJAZEu62IZbUJJBa4TzskE

CHAPTER 1

CAPITAL: CREATING AN APPALACHIAN COALFIELD BEFORE WORLD WAR I

With each passing generation, Americans know less and less about the land,
its ownership and control. Even less are we aware of how
this yawning ignorance affects our lives and fortunes.
Introduction to *Who Owns Appalachia?: Landownership and Its Impact*

In the summer of 1908, Franklin Delano Roosevelt rode horseback through the hills of southeastern Kentucky. He accompanied his uncle, Warren Delano, Jr., and a party of surveyors through the would-be empire of a Massachusetts-based land company called "Kentenia" – so named for its position on the borders of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. On cool mornings Roosevelt donned a woolen sweater emblazoned with the Harvard "H," and when he stopped to write, he relayed detailed descriptions of the Cumberland Gap to his wife Eleanor: "If you can imagine a succession of ridges, each fifteen hundred or so feet above the valleys," he penned from Pennington Gap, Virginia, "running up at a very precipitous angle and covered with marvelous trees and an undergrowth of rhododendrons and holly you can get a general idea of the country." At the top of the Cumberland Mountains, Roosevelt experienced "one of the most magnificent views I have ever seen, looking to the South over the angle of Virginia… over the Harlan County, Kentucky section that Uncle Warren and Davis are interested in." Down at a fork of the Cumberland River, Roosevelt noted "great poplars, chestnuts and a dozen or two other deciduous trees and every mile or so a fertile bottom with fine crops and a stream of splendid water." Roosevelt also spent time "chewing the rag" with Harlan County politicians and

corporation officials before returning to New York. His uncle eventually helped acquire 100 square miles of coal and timber, some 64,000 acres, all in the name of Kentenia.[1]

The future president was just one of America's wealthy elite that saw the possibilities of a resource-rich empire in Appalachia. His uncle Warren Delano, Jr. helped counterparts buy and sell Kentucky land for decades, ensuring that the wealth contained in the land's trees and minerals flowed out of the mountains and into the boardrooms of the nation's industrialists. This chapter examines the stages of this process, first tracing the early history of land ownership in the state, then examining the boom period of the late 1880s as manufacturers sought the bituminous coking coal of Appalachia. It details the aspirations of boosters, railroad executives, lawyers, land agents, and reform-minded missionaries, all of whom looked to Appalachia to expand their influence. As they acquired the coal and timber, the state's political and business leaders created a coalfield with friendly land laws and the racial dynamics of the New South. By 1914, Jim Crow had appeared in Kentucky, the L&N had extended into the mountains, and its mineral resources were in the possession of large absentee landowners.

Land and Coal, Railroads and Steel

Absentee landownership plagued Kentucky even before its creation. Like a broad swath of America west of Old Point Comfort, it was once claimed by the colony of Virginia. The boundaries of the Virginia Company's revised charter in 1609 were generous, to say the least, with its authority applying from "Sea to Sea, West and Northwest," over most of the continent. The House of Burgesses granted thousands of acres to entities such as the Loyal Land Company, who dispatched expeditions over the Appalachian Mountains. In 1750, a group led by Dr.

[1] Eleanor Roosevelt, *This Is My Story* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), 154-56. Harry M. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 87-90.

Thomas Walker of Albemarle County, Virginia, crossed through the Cumberland Gap and followed the river into present-day Knox County, Kentucky. Among other observations, his report back to the company noted that the region "abounded in coal."[2] Other surveyors followed, but the end of the French and Indian War redrew the boundaries of the colony. The Proclamation Line of 1763 prohibited settlement beyond the crest of the mountains, reserving large portions of Native American land and angering Virginia colonists in the process.

Never intended to be a permanent demarcation, the Proclamation line moved ever westward. The 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix between the British and the Six Tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy established the Ohio River from Fort Pitt to the Tennessee River as the new boundary. The British took this to mean that the traditional hunting ground known as Kentucky – translated to "place of meadows" in several Iroquoian languages – was now open for settlement. This was news to the Iroquois and other tribes who had shared the land: the Cherokee from the southeast, the Shawnee in the north around the Ohio River, and the Chickasaw in the southwest along the Mississippi. Through the treaties of Hard Labor in 1768 and Lochaber in 1770, the boundary of Virginia marched further west and south. The colony rewarded military veterans with land in what was now deemed Fincastle County. By 1774, land companies and individuals claimed 100,000 acres, yet the county had no permanent residents.[3]

The Shawnee and Cherokee contested these settler incursions and prevented them from gaining a foothold for several years. In 1775, however, Colonel Richard Henderson, a land speculator from North Carolina, entered into a treaty with the Cherokee. Henderson, acting without the consent of Great Britain, secured the territory between the Kentucky and

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[2] E.J. Prescott, *The Story of the Virginia Coal and Iron Company, 1882-1945* (n.p., 1946), 4-5.
[3] Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 18, 8-9. Mary Beth Pudup, "Land Before Coal: Class and Regional Development in Southeast Kentucky," Ph.D. Diss, University of California, Berkeley, 1987 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1987), 83.

Cumberland rivers for a sum of ten thousand pounds. 17,000,000 acres in total, the holdings were vested in the new, not so-legal Colony of Transylvania.[4] Although the governors of Virginia and North Carolina publicly denounced the treaty, the company pressed on. Henderson hired Daniel Boone, who had already made several trips into Kentucky by then, to mark a road into the property in 1775. In December 1776, as the Revolution raged, Virginia nullified the Transylvania Company's treaty and incorporated its land into Kentucky County. Henderson protested to no avail. He and his partners won compensation in 1778: another 200,000 acres on the Green River in western Kentucky.[5]

White European settlers continued to follow Boone's route, eventually known as the Wilderness Trail. For the most part, they did not tarry long in the mountains. Many of them headed for the Bluegrass region surrounding what would become the city of Lexington. Known for its gently rolling hills and fertile loam derived from phosphatic limestone, the area promised much more agricultural productivity than the thin, rocky soil of the Cumberland Plateau.[6] As a result, westward migrants neglected southeastern Kentucky until the first decades of the nineteenth century. Yet as one student of the region observed, the land of hills did offer some advantages. Although the mountainsides were steep, the bottomlands were often close to water and most importantly, unoccupied. Farming may not have been an option, but wildlife abounded, including deer, bear, squirrel, and turkey. So did trees. Prized hardwoods – black walnut, oak,

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[4] Mary Verhoeff, *The Kentucky Mountains: Transportation and Commerce, 1750-1911: A Study in the Economic History of a Coal Field*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: John P. Morton & Co., 1911), 78. Henderson and his business partners met with chiefs Dragging Canoe and Oconostota and thousands of Cherokee to sign the treaty at Sycamore Shoals in what is now Elizabethton, Tennessee in March. The meeting gave birth to the misconception that Kentucky meant "dark and bloody ground." Harrison and Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky*, 6.
[5] Verhoeff, *The Kentucky Mountains*, 78-80. Wiley J. Williams, "Transylvania Company," NCPedia, https://www.ncpedia.org/transylvania-company, Accessed Feb. 15, 2022. See also John Anthony Caruso, T*he Appalachian Frontier: America's First Surge Westward* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).
[6] Verhoeff, *The Kentucky Mountains*, 4.

hickory, and ash – covered the hillsides. Well before the kingdom of coal, these assets did make mountain settlement viable.[7]

When Kentucky achieved statehood in 1792, the new government faced the ever-present problem of how to transfer ownership of land from the commonwealth to individuals. Much like Tennessee to the south, Kentucky had been claimed by its parent colony up to 1787 and not included in the national domain. Thus, no official statewide survey of land ever took place, either before or after statehood. Additionally, as part of the separation from Virginia, Kentucky agreed to honor original land grants made while it was still colonial territory. In many respects, Kentucky's land policy came to resemble that of the Old Dominion, with the state granting patents to anyone who completed a survey and paid the registration fee. The metes and bounds system of land division reigned supreme, with tress and ridgelines serving as natural markers of property lines. Descriptions of tracts of land in running prose laid out the boundaries:

> Beginning at a large chestnut oak on top of ridge, thence South fifty one degrees and twenty nine minutes west four hundred and thirty three feet to a large chestnut oak on the end of a spur; thence South forty six degrees and forty four minutes East three hundred and sixty three feet to a black gum and chestnut oak… corner to lands of J.F. Wampler and J.F. Hubbbard… South twenty eight degrees and forty one minutes East one hundred and fifty feet to the beginning…[8]

Chestnut oaks could be felled, though, and the exact "end" of a spur could be open to interpretation. No one checked to verify if the land was occupied, or to confirm if the claim overlapped with other properties. The state trusted that the claimed land was vacant and unencumbered. Predictably, conflicts over the definition of boundaries and between competing patents ensued. One observer of land speculation predicted Kentucky titles would be disputed

[7] Pudup, "Land Before Coal," 82-83.
[8] Penn Virginia Corporation Records, Accession 1764, Series III, Box 209, File #T-58: J.S. & M.D. Wentz to the Wentz Co., May 10, 1907.

"for a Centry [sic] to Come yet."[9] Through the initial "Kentucky Land Grants" and subsequent state government policies, the burden of settling these disputes fell increasingly on county courts. Indeed, adjudication of competing land claims became the "almost exclusive preoccupation of Kentucky courts during the early 1800s.[10]

Figure 1: The landscape of Harlan County, Kentucky. "Supplement to the Harlan Enterprise: Kentenia Corporation," *Harlan Enterprise*, April 10, 1908.

[9] Quoted in Wilma A. Dunaway, "Speculators and Settler Capitalists," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 61.
[10] Pudup, "Land Before Coal," 84. Stephanie M. Lang, "'Titles Must Be Perfect': The Broad Form Deed, Politics, and Landownership in Eastern Kentucky at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* vol. 113, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 27-57.

Available land and lax laws invited enterprising patent-seekers to southeastern Kentucky. By the late eighteenth century, one-quarter of the state's had been claimed by only twenty-one individuals, with three-quarters or more of eastern Kentucky land in the hands of absentee owners.[11] One of these was Boyd Dickenson of Lee County, Virginia. The origins of his land claims, so important later in the twentieth century, are shrouded in myth. According to later reminisces, Boyd and his brother John surveyed nearly all of Harlan County in the early 1800s. As legend has it, Boyd wandered into the county while following a wounded deer down the Poor Fork River. Around what is now known as Dione, he ran into another group of surveyors who also had sights set on a patent. Boyd and his brother filed theirs first, laying claim to 25,000 acres in the 1830s. Little did they know, the minerals beneath their feet would make it worth millions a century later.[12]

Long before Boyd Dickenson and other speculators wandered through Harlan County, it was hundreds of feet under water. Over thousands of years, rivers and streams from the mountain elevations drained the plateau and formed a lake. Eventually, the rock formations of the plateau shifted, tearing a rift that allowed the water of the lake to escape. The draining of the basin left carved the many creeks and hollows of the region, and created coal, the crown jewel of Appalachia. Vegetation flourished and then died, piling up in deep layers of peat. Pressure from above compacted peat to form the mineral, which would lay buried until the age of iron and steam. Classified as the Cumberland Gap Field, the coal is of the Pottsville Group of the Alleghany formation. It is bituminous coal low in ash, sulfur, and moisture, with a high volatile content. Early surveyors from the state government knew that deposits in places like Harlan County were twice as thick as anywhere else in the bluegrass state. Even casual observers noted

[11] Wilma A. Dunaway, "Speculators and Settler Capitalists," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 55.
[12] Mabel Green Condon, *A History of Harlan County* (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1962), 35.

the seams of coal "shining… in every mountain stream bed and outcropped on nearly every farm."[13] Although coal had been mined in the area before the Civil War, the lack of adequate transportation and profitable markets kept its extraction low. While coal surpassed all other energy sources in U.S. manufacturing in 1870 by percentage, it was not until 1885 that it became "the dominant energy source."[14]

Before the 1870s, anthracite coal mined in eastern Pennsylvania dominated the national market. Known as "hard coal," anthracite is almost pure carbon that "burns longer, hotter, and cleaner than any coal."[15] The city of Philadelphia's proximity to these mineral deposits enabled many industrial processes to thrive and incubated a number of budding capitalists. Much activity centered around the town of Mauch Chunk (renamed Jim Thorpe in 1954). Some eighty miles northwest of Philadelphia, Mauch Chunk had been built to be the headquarters of the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Company (LC&N) beginning in 1818. The LC&N started as a partnership between wire manufacturers Josiah White and Erskine Hazard and their investors in Philadelphia, with the goal of developing the region's anthracite deposits along the Lehigh River. The company proceeded to transform the area: it dug mines, built railroads, constructed the Lehigh Canal, and sold coal on the open market. Mauch Chunk attracted businessmen and investors from the area, especially after the company decided to open the town up to outside interests and lease mines to independent contractors in 1831. Clusters of interrelated families and their businesses coalesced in the town, many of whom shared a common German ancestry as well as the Presbyterian religion. One of these clusters, eventually known as the Leisenring Group, was made up of the Leisenring, Bertsch, and Price families. The Wentz family entered

[13] Mabel Brown Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coal Fields," *The American Child*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Feb. 1920): 296.
[14] Jonathan Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism: A History of the United States* (New York: Random House, 2022), 242.
[15] Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism*, 239-40.

the group through marriage. John Shriver Wentz, an army surgeon during the Civil War, followed his brother to the anthracite fields where they both practiced medicine for various coal companies. John then met and married Mary Douglas Leisenring of the Leisenring family, who by 1871 had ascended to control the LC&N. John became more involved with the family business, and his father-in-law set him up in the coal business with several collieries.[16]

When American industry transitioned from iron to steel, anthracite lost its grip on the market and came to be used almost exclusively for home heating.[17] In 1871, Henry Clay Frick pioneered the method of turning bituminous coal into coke, which proved far superior to anthracite in smelting iron and making steel. The bituminous coal in the Connellsville region of western Pennsylvania soon became known for its quality as a coking, or metallurgical, coal. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Frick populated western Pennsylvania with his beehive ovens, selling most of the refined fuel to Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie Steel eventually acquired a controlling interest in the H.C. Frick Company, and the coke-making operation became a part of U.S. Steel upon its creation. By 1892, American mills produced more steel than iron, and by 1900, the U.S. became the world's leading steel-making nation.[18] The shift sent anthracite producers scrambling for quality bituminous coal. The Leisenring Group expanded into bituminous mining in western Pennsylvania in 1880 with the Connellsville Coke & Iron Co. A

[16] This information is drawn from the finding aids of the Penn Virginia Corporation records, specifically the two volumes of Christopher T. Baer, "A Guide to the History of Penn Virginia Corporation and the Westmoreland Coal Company," Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.
[17] James P. Johnson, *The Politics of Soft Coal: The Bituminous Industry from World War I through the New Deal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 13. See also Scott Nelson, "'The Perfect Mill Is the Road to Wealth': Economic Crisis and Technical Innovation in the Pennsylvania Iron and Steel Industry, The Depression of 1873," Honors Thesis in History, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1987.
[18] Dan Rottenberg, *In the Kingdom of Coal: An American Family and the Rock That Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 111.

year later, on the word of ex-Confederate and booster Gen. John D. Imobden, the group acquired 80,000 acres of bituminous coal, iron, and timber land in Wise County in southwest Virginia.[19]

Meanwhile, promoters of the New South looked to the minerals of the region as an untapped resource. In a twisted amalgamation of progress and racial subordination, proponents of this new order sought to fuse industrialization with white supremacy. By retaining a semblance of the Old South racial division of labor, New South elites intended to recast the cotton kingdom in iron and steel. In 1881, Edward Atkinson, an entrepreneur from Boston and organizer of the first International Cotton Exposition in Atlanta, toured the mountain South as part of the lead-up to the fair. His route had taken him south from Kentucky over the Cumberland Plateau to Chattanooga and Atlanta, then up through the Piedmont to Richmond, Virginia. This area was more than three-fourths the size of France, and "nearly twice the size of England and Scotland combined." More important than its expanse, this part of the New South outpaced other nations in terms of its land and mineral resources. It far exceeded England and France in its stockpiles of coal, iron, and timber, and could nurture these assets more effectively than either country.[20] To plan the Atlanta exposition, he partnered with the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Henry Grady. Only the prospect of mutual gain could bring together Atkinson, a Yankee by any definition of the word, and Grady, perhaps the loudest of the New South champions. Grady spun a vision of coal and iron as the South's future post-cotton kingdom, with the Atlantic Ocean "whitened… with sails carrying American iron and coal to England." Just as

[19] This information is drawn from the finding aids of the Penn Virginia Corporation records, specifically the two volumes of Christopher T. Baer, "A Guide to the History of Penn Virginia Corporation and the Westmoreland Coal Company," Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.
[20] *Atlanta Constitution*, March 16, 1881.

the region enjoyed an Atlantic monopoly in cotton, so it would in iron and coal, for the basis of its wealth and power were "laid by the hand of the Almighty God."[21]

As northern operators and New South boosters began to target bituminous coal wherever they could find it, the Louisville & Nashville Railroad looked to extend its powerful reach into southeastern Kentucky and Virginia. Chartered in 1850, the railroad's main corridor was to the west, and by 1870, had reached as far south as Memphis, Tennessee. After the Civil War, the railroad became part of Louisville capitalist's efforts to access and then dominate southern markets. Indeed, the railroad enjoyed a monopoly on rail traffic in the South after the war, playing an important role in the development of Birmingham, Alabama as the "Pittsburgh of the South." The charter of the Cincinnati Southern in 1872 threatened this monopoly, but the L&N remained the state of Kentucky's largest company throughout the nineteenth century and was well-poised to extend this power over the coalfields in Kentucky. Its chief executive for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth was Milton Hannibal Smith. Described by some as a "charming bastion of rugged individualism," and others as "monomaniacal," he ascended to the vice-presidency of the company in 1883 and became president in 1891. Desiring to emulate the headway made by the Chesapeake & Ohio and the Norfolk & Western in the coalfields of West Virginia and Virginia, Smith needed to look no further than his own backyard.[22] As he aimed to create a new Birmingham in the Kentucky hills, Smith directed the company to build south from Livingston, just on the verge of the coalfields to the south and east. The L&N reached the

[21] Joel Chandler Harris, *Life of Henry W. Grady Including his Writings and Speeches* (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1890) vol.1, 104-5.
[22] Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 79-80. See also David Matthew Wilkins, "The Parents of Progressive Improvement: Railroads and Public Policy in Kentucky, 1829-1900," MA Thesis, University of Louisville, 2004.

swamps around the Laurel River in 1882 and the sprawling Jellico coalfield on the Kentucky-Tennessee border in 1883, where it met the East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad.[23]

The L&N faced a decision on how best to proceed eastward into the mountains. Two possible paths existed, one through the Cumberland Gap in Bell County, the other up the Cumberland River through Harlan County and a gap in Black Mountain. The company solicited a report on the mineral resources of the area, prepared by two mining engineers from Pennsylvania, to outline deposits of coal and iron ore along the two proposed routes. In Virginia, the engineers deemed the Big Stone Gap area "an ideal field for mining development," with coal low in sulphur and ash, making it prime for coking. To get there, they believed the Cumberland River route presented "by far the largest area of coal measures and numerous opportunities for development." The river and its tributaries provided natural, low-grade routes for rail lines to follow, which would in turn allow the railroad to "command tonnage from every one of the forty miles" of coal land in the vicinity. "To best develop the resources of the district," the engineers recommended that the L&N pursue the Cumberland River route.[24] Yet the L&N opted for the Cumberland Gap path to reach the holdings of the American Association, Inc. near Middleborough. The plan was to reach a connection with William Mahone's Norfolk & Western Railroad in Wise County, Virginia, which would give the L&N access to the tidewater market. Impressed with the chief engineer's findings, the board agreed in 1886 to begin construction on the Cumberland Valley branch from "Corbin's Station" in Whitley County. The railroad's leadership boasted of the large quantities of coal in Bell and Harlan counties, as well as the iron ore in Virginia's Poor and Powell's valleys. "It is believed," the board reported to stockholders

[23] Maury Klein, *History of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 223, 308.
[24] Andrew S. McCreath and E.V. D'Invilliers, *Mineral Resources of the Upper Cumberland Valley of South-eastern Kentucky and South-western Virginia: Tributary to the Proposed Cumberland Valley Extensions of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad* (Louisville, Ky.: Courier-Journal Job Printing Co., 1888), 146, 148, 152

in 1887, "that large iron and other manufacturing interests will be developed as soon as transportation facilities are supplied."[25]

With L&N company engineers in a supervisory role, their initial plans were for the line to reach the town of Pineville in Bell County by July 1, 1887.[26] The actual work of constructing the Cumberland Valley branch relied heavily on convict labor. Mason, Hoge, & Co., a firm out of Staunton, Virginia, leased a predominantly African American work force from the Kentucky State Penitentiary. In January 1886, the *Maysville Evening Bulletin* noted that forty to fifty Black laborers, along with "thirty-eight mules and as many carts" traveled over the Kentucky Central line.[27] Throughout the fall and winter, the crew pushed the track eastward toward the mountains. Their route traced, in reverse, the path of the old Wilderness Road along the banks of the Cumberland River. In places where the low-lying land proved to be a poor foundation for the road bed, the workers hewed a path out of the surrounding hills. Nine miles in, they faced the problem of Brafford's Ridge. After some deliberation, the L&N engineers decided that a tunnel was necessary, and work commenced in March.[28]

The heavy labor of tunnel construction was done by Black convicts in gangs of ten to fifteen under the supervision of a foreman, with guards also posted at the entrances. They went at the tunnel from all angles: east and west, above and beneath. To create the shape of the tunnel, the men drilled holes by hand on the top surface of the hillside. Once an opening had been created, they packed it with a small amount of dynamite to blast out an interior section without jeopardizing the structural integrity of the entire tunnel. After the excess rock had been removed,

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[25] *Annual Report of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company to the Stockholders, For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1887* (Louisville: Bradley & Gilbert Co., 1887), 22-23. Klein, *History of the Louisville & Nashville*, 279.
[26] *Railway Age* 11 (1886): 587.
[27] *Semi Weekly Interior-Journal*, Nov. 23, 1886; See also *Ibid.*, Feb. 4, 1887; *Maysville Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 28, 1887.
[28] Charles W. Staniford, "Brafford's Ridge Tunnel," *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, vol. 32 (1894): 53-64.

bracings made of white oak, sawed and cut at temporary mills set up along the line, were hauled in to support the roof. The convicts worked day and night, stopping only when rainwater threatened to engulf the tunnel. Charles Staniford, the Division Engineer for the L&N, recalled that "contrary to many newspaper and magazine articles," criticizing the convict-lease system, "he found the men (mostly colored) well treated, with comfortable quarters, plenty of plain but good food, and as a rule better contented" than those behind prison walls. There were only two or three attempts at escape during the work, which to Staniford, testified to the system's usefulness. Like the C&O in West Virginia and other railroads throughout the mountain south, Black convict laborers laid the rails and blasted the rock that made the New South possible.[29]

Capitalists and investors eagerly awaited the completion of the tunnel and the extension of the L&N line. In anticipation of a building boom, the *Interior-Journal* in Stanford reported that "foreign capitalists are bringing a great deal of money into Bell and Harlan counties," dumping money into the hands of mountain men who "never knew the value of money, on account of its scarcity." The Pineville Mountain Iron and Coal Company, organized by businessmen and attorneys in Louisville, purchased a large amount of land in Bell County in 1887. They partnered with the Commercial Club of Louisville, a group already actively engaged in promoting the region's coal, to publish a free booklet on Pineville's resources. Only the prolonged tunnel construction tempered their enthusiasm. In the summer, a group of investors toured the prospective railroad route with the president of the L&N. The caravan of "money kings" traveled on horseback, with a wagon full of whiskey to keep them occupied.[30]

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[29] Staniford, "Brafford's Ridge Tunnel," 53-64. Scott R. Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: The Untold Story of an American Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.
[30] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers,* 80. *Interior-Journal,* Jun. 10, 1887.

Race, Capital, and Politics in "Appalachia"

The very idea of a cohesive region known as "Appalachia" emerged alongside the development of industry in the mountains. In 1873, William Wallace Harney, a travel writer for *Lippincott's Magazine*, labeled the land of southeastern Kentucky and east Tennessee as "strange," and its people as "peculiar." His descriptions of the "quaint speech and patient poverty" of the people along with the "geological and botanical curiosities" of the mountains proved popular with readers, and soon other writers followed his lead.[31] Building on the ideas of Harney, James Lane Allen, and Mary Murfree, travel writers produced studies of the region that espoused essentialist, universalizing images of Appalachia. Throughout the Gilded Age, Americans imbibed a Manichaean portrayal of the region: the last bastion of white American stock on the one hand; ignorant, impoverished hillbillies on the other. Whether they were "mountaineers," "highlanders," or "mountain whites," residents of the mountains were always portrayed as racially homogenous.[32]

As the railroads sought out veins of coal, politicians and journalists touted their efforts as a crusade to bring "improvement" to the region.[33] From the L&N's home in Louisville, Henry Watterson's *Courier-Journal* heralded the construction of the new rail line. Throughout the 1880s and '90s, the editor used his newspaper to highlight the industrial potential of eastern Kentucky, and acted as a de facto spokesman of the New Departure Democrats.[34] For a template

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[31] *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science,* vol. 12 (1873): 430-31.
[32] John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921); Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachians and Study of Life among the Mountaineers* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1913). For analyses of Appalachia as an idea, see Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); and Allen W. Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).
[33] For the cultural implications of this, see David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).
[34] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, Mountaineers,* 45.

of what Kentucky coal would mean for the region, Watterson also looked south to the "Magic City." Deposits of iron ore and coal had been discovered in Red Mountain outside Birmingham, and manufacturers now flocked there in droves. Watterson proposed a similar trajectory for eastern Kentucky. He claimed that the corner of the state possessed, according to "scientists," the "richest mineral territory in the world." The planned branch offered Louisville business interests direct access to this well-spring of coal, and would lead to the improvement of the "underdeveloped" region. "It is a territory which Louisville money and Louisville energy should occupy," Watterson declared. Within a generation, he forecast that the city's population would grow to over half a million, cementing Louisville as an industrial center. As the L&N extended into the mountains, Watterson and other New South boosters watched with anticipation.[35]

On a plot of land between the Bluegrass and the mountains, liberal reformers from Berea College – the South's first interracial, coeducational college – argued for a different trajectory for Appalachia. Founded in 1855 by abolitionist John G. Fee, Berea College's ethos was "antislavery, anti-caste, anti-rum, anti-sin." The son of a Kentucky slaveowner, Fee had been educated and converted to abolitionism at Lane College in Ohio in the 1840s. His antislavery preaching caught the attention of Kentucky abolitionist Cassius Clay, who purchased a tract of land in Madison County and offered it to Fee as a base of operations from which to combat the evils of slavery. Fee accepted, naming the community "Berea" for the Biblical town whose people were open to the message of the gospel. From the beginning, Fee envisioned Berea as Kentucky's own Oberlin College, which admitted women and African Americans and instituted a manual labor program to defray the costs of attendance. Berea's operating principles were also influenced by the New England based, Congregationalist-dominated American Missionary

[35] *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 19, 1886.

Association (AMA); along with Fee, many other early teachers received training and support from both the AMA and Oberlin College. The fledgling college adopted a constitution in 1859 but was soon chased out of the state by a pro-slavery mob following Fee's comments endorsing John Brown's raid.[36]

Kentucky's position between the South, North, and Midwest made it a unique setting for Berea. Slavery flowered in the bluegrass state before emancipation, although it was primarily contained to the Bluegrass region, the Jackson Purchase land in the west, and the large cities of Lexington and Louisville. By 1860, just over 236,000 African Americans made up one-fifth of the state's population, a smaller percentage than most other slaveholding states. As a border state, Kentucky was split in two by the war. Although it did not secede from the Union, it did play host to both Union and Confederate governments and supplied men for both armies. Its border state status also dictated that slavery did not end until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, and it did not undergo the process of Reconstruction.[37] In 1866, Berea College opened its doors once again, with Fee determined to prove the interracial experiment could work. In its first year, Berea's student body consisted of 91 white and 96 African American students, a nearly equal ratio that would continue into the 1880s. Black veterans of the Civil War, recruited by Fee, moved to Berea and later purchased land alongside white residents. White backlash ensued but Fee's idea of the "practical recognition of the brotherhood of man" produced a social setting in Berea that was far more integrated than much of the greater South.[38]

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[36] Shannon H. Wilson, *Berea College: An Illustrated History* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 1, 9-23.
[37] Wright, *Life Behind the Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1985), 16. Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 2 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 1.
[38] Wilson, *Berea College*, 9-23.

In 1879, a young man freed by the Thirteenth Amendment arrived at its doorstep. James Bond – grandfather of Julian Bond – was born in 1863 in Lawrenceburg in Anderson County, Kentucky to Jane Arthur and her enslaver, Methodist minister Preston Bond. Jane Arthur was the product of such a relationship herself, being born in the hills of Knox County, Kentucky in 1828 to one of the county's largest slaveowners. She came to the Bond household as part of a marriage dowry in 1848 and gave birth to James and Henry Bond. Four years after the Thirteenth Amendment secured their emancipation, Arthur and the two boys moved back to Knox County to a house near her former owners, where her sister continued to reside. She worked as a nurse and housekeeper for the white Arthurs and raised her sons along the way, sending them to a one-room schoolhouse out in the county organized by local Black residents. James remembered her as an instructor at home as well, an "unlettered slave mother" that gave him and his brother a "classical education." It was her teachings that "fired" him along the seventy-five-mile walk to Berea when he turned sixteen, and his brother a few years later. She even gifted him the steer that he sold on his arrival for books and new clothes.[39] Bond, Carter G. Woodson – known as the "Father of Negro History" – and many other brilliant Black students attended Berea throughout the late nineteenth century.

In the 1880s, missionaries from the AMA and Berea College followed the railroads' path into the mountains, spreading the message of interracialism along the way. When he arrived in Berea from Michigan, the missionary Rev. Arthur A. Myers chose the sleepy county seat town of Williamsburg in Whitley County on the banks of the Cumberland River as a base of operations. He founded a Congregationalist church in the town and pushed AMA leadership to build a school nearby to train the state's teachers. The organization's Executive Committee agreed to do

[39] *The Crisis*, vol. 34, no. 2 (Apr. 1927): 41. Roger M. Williams, *The Bonds: An American Family* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 4-11.

so, but only if the community agreed to allow African Americans to attend as well. After discussing "the color question," more than thirty Williamsburg citizens signed a document "favoring the open door and open hand for the colored people of the mountains." The town's small Black population were already members of the church and the AMA hoped to recruit the few Black schoolteachers in the county to work at the school. Construction commenced and Williamsburg Academy opened in 1883, soon becoming a "symbol of anti-caste Christian fellowship" in Kentucky.[40]

More conservative churches in Whitley County, however, resisted these plans. Much of the pushback to the Academy came from Primitive Baptists, also labeled "hard-shell" or "iron-clad." The AMA tarred them as backwards, primitive, and ignorant; opposed to "book larnin'" and progress in any form. When the Academy began to admit Black students, a "stampede" of white students from the school lowered the enrollment to only 40, presumably mostly African American. The majority of the of the white students chose to return by the end of the term, however, so that the AMA leaders could report a total of 203 students, both white and Black, in 1885. The AMA declared – quite prematurely – that they would "have no more trouble with the color question in Whitley County," for it had been "settled right." While hard-shell Baptists acquiesced, they began to couch their opposition in denominational differences. The newly formed Mt. Zion Association of Baptists began to push for their own school, warning, "if you send your children to that school they will become Congregationalists," with all of the implications the term implied.[41] Four years later, the rival Williamsburg Institute opened its doors, thanks to a fundraising effort led by the Mt. Zion Association. Its founding charter made

[40] *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York: Published by the American Missionary Association, 1883), 51.
[41] *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York: Published by the American Missionary Association, 1885), 47-48.

clear that the school was to be controlled only by the association, and that "none but white pupils shall ever be admitted."[42] Bankrolled by local business leaders and prominent county seat politicians, the Baptist-affiliated Institute offered white Kentuckians a way to sidestep Berea's visions of an interracial society.

To the east of Whitley County near the Cumberland Gap, capitalists were at work on their own empire in the mountains. The advent of the L&N touched off a boom not seen in the state's history. Reports of the area's mineral deposits from Kentucky writers like James Lane Allen garnered the attention of the Gilded Age industrialists, including Scottish-born investor Alexander Alan Arthur. After reading Allen's account in 1886, Arthur traveled to the Cumberland Gap as an agent of the Richmond & Danville Railroad. Arthur collected specimens of coal and iron ore from the Kentucky hillsides and vowed to construct a city in the basin of the valley. Armed with a charismatic personality and samples of high-quality minerals, he marketed his plan to establish his own "Pittsburgh of the South" to the scions of wealthy families in Asheville, North Carolina as well as his connections across the Atlantic. Arthur and his co-investors formed the American Association, Inc. in 1887, funded by a generous line of credit from London's Baring Brothers Bank. Their city, named Middlesborough, grew from a small village to an impressive industrial town that stood poised to fulfill the "Magic City" prophecy. The Duke and Duchess of Marlboro came to see how $30 million had turned it into a "backwoods El Dorado," while just across the border in Tennessee, the Four Seasons Hotel catered to the social elite of the New York Four Hundred. The lobbying of the American Association, Inc. also persuaded the L&N to connect the line to their holdings and solidify the north-south corridor between Cincinnati, Knoxville, and Atlanta. The L&N reached

[42] *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Williamsburg Institute, First Session, 1889* (Jellico, Tenn.: Inter-state News, Job Print, 1889).

Middlesborough in 1889 and established a connection with the N&W at Norton, Virginia two years later.[43]

Eager to keep the outside capital flowing, Kentucky's boosters and the local elite of the mountains removed cumbersome barriers to investment. As mentioned previously, land-seekers found patenting process in Kentucky contentious and confusing, made all the more so by the continued legality of the older Virginia land grants. Capitalists feared competing claims from a previous century would undermine their holdings, with the admonition "titles must be perfect" governing the dealings of speculators in the mountains. Kentucky businessmen like John C.C. Mayo, Henry Clay McDowell, and R.C. Ballard Thruston, along with their friends in state government, recognized this as a hindrance to development and looked to pave the way for future investment. From 1890-1891, a state constitutional convention (ratified in 1892) resolved that all Virginia claims would be forfeited, except in cases where claimants and their descendants had continued to pay property taxes. Investors proceeded to buy mountain lands without trepidation, many of them through John C.C. Mayo's broad form deed. This bit of legal cleverness created two separate estates on a piece of land, surface and mineral. The owner of the mineral rights claimed the timber, coal, and the right to make improvements for extractive purposes, while the surface owner – often a small landholder – retained minerals for household use as well the ostensible ability to continue farming. Over time, these political and legal changes granted large firms the power to buy up valuable mineral rights, leaving small farmers with a tenuous claim to the surface land.[44]

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[43] Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 20-28. Kincaid A. Herr, *The Louisville & Nashville Railroad, 1850-1963* (Louisville, KY: L&N Public Relation Department, 1964), 99.

[44] Stephanie M. Lang, "'Titles Must Be Perfect': The Broad Form Deed, Politics, and Landownership in Eastern Kentucky at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* vol. 113, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 27-57. Pudup, "Land Before Coal," 185. Mayo used his salary as a schoolteacher to buy up mineral rights, eventually becoming "Kentucky's wealthiest man." Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 59.

In the 1890s, Kentucky found itself, in the words of one scholar of the era, caught between an "agrarian past and its industrial future."[45] This divide was revealed in the state constitutional convention, with the power of the L&N Railroad at its core. In their attempts to attract investors, boosters in Louisville and the local elite of the mountains clashed with interests in the more agrarian areas of the state who were vehemently opposed to corporate power.[46] As it grew, the company also came under the increasing control of outside capital, both from New York and London. The loss of Louisville power and New South influence proved too much for Henry Watterson, the editor of the Louisville *Courier- Journal* and New Departure Democrat, who had turned against the L&N by the 1890s.[47] At the convention, a growing populist opposition came from counties in the western part of the state that traditionally voted Democratic. In 1886, disgruntled farmers formed the Farmers' Alliance (Farmers and Labor Union, officially), and by 1891, claimed 125,000 members in eighty-eight counties. The Farmers' Alliance and their allies distrusted the Bourbon leadership of the Democratic Party, but they saved their most biting criticism for the L&N Railroad. Sometimes, these were one and the same: Basil Duke, the ex-Confederate general and leading Bourbon Democrat, also served as the L&N's chief lobbyist. The agrarians fumed over the subsidization of the railroad's debt to fund new construction, only to see agricultural prices fall and freight rates increase. Of the one hundred delegates in Frankfort, one-fifth represented the Farmer's Alliance. As Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark explained, the consensus of the agrarian-dominated body saw the

[45] T.R.C. Hutton, *Politics and Violence in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 154.
[46] Lang, "Titles Must Be Perfect," 39.
[47] John F. Stover, *The Railroads of the South: A Study in Finance and Control, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1955), 228-29. Gerold Zenick, "Henry Watterson, The Coincidental Redeemer," (M.A. Thesis, University of Louisville, 1971), 61.

L&N and other corporations as the "*bete noir* of the people."[48] Their anti-corporate sentiment manifested in major changes to the state's regulatory system, including the creation of a permanent state railroad commission and limits on local government's ability to issue bonds or securities to finance a corporation. At the end of the convention, Kentucky had a new constitution that reflected a skepticism of politicians and corporations yet looked to a regulatory state to check their power.[49]

In the face of a populist challenge that threatened to tear them apart, Kentucky Democrats turned to Jim Crow. In the first gubernatorial election under the new constitution, the party nominated John Y. Brown of Henderson as their candidate. While Brown did hail from western Kentucky, he was of the old guard of Democratic leadership that the agrarian insurgents despised. Free silver and a desire for agricultural reforms animated their crusade against the Bourbon faction of the party. In 1891, angry farmers crossed the Ohio River and founded the national People's Party as well as the Kentucky chapter, and designated the president of the Farmers' Alliance as their nominee. Yet the Alliance refused to endorse the third party in the election, and Brown won a narrow victory over his Republican opponent. Dissent lingered during Brown's tenure, as he clashed with his cabinet and lieutenant governor. The one thing Democrats could agree on, however, was the need for racial segregation. Spurred on by newspaper reports of conflicts between white and Black lower-class passengers on the railroads, whom the press deemed "roughs," Democrats introduced a bill in 1891 to segregate the state's railroad passenger cars. Led by Albert E. Meyzeek, a group of African Americans met with

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[48] Thomas D. Clark, "The People, William Goebel, and the Kentucky Railroads," *Journal of Southern History* vol. 5, no. 1 (Feb. 1939): 35. For the Farmers' Alliance and the convention, see Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 264-66.
[49] Wilkins, "The Parents of Progressive Improvement," 97-98.

Governor Brown, who assured them he was no fan of the law but did not commit to opposing it. Despite the opposition of African American organizers, along with Republicans and some Populists, the "separate coach law" took effect on Kentucky's railroads in 1892.[50]

As the legislature debated these changes, the international economy entered a serious downturn. The 1890 closure of Baring Brothers in London crippled American Association, Inc. and left Alexander Arthur scrambling to save the venture. He was discharged as president of the company in 1891, a year after the town barely survived a fire that threatened to consume it wholesale. To add insult to injury, geologists' reassessments of iron ore in the Gap found it to be inferior in comparison to that found down in Birmingham. Middlesborough's tannery, brewery, still mill, furnaces, and ice house shuttered one by one. The financial panic of 1893 spelled its ultimate doom. Banks failed, businesses closed, and land was auctioned off by the local sheriff. The spectacular boom and bust of Middlesborough was, in the words of Kentucky writer Harry Caudill, "capitalism… gone beserk" with investors "flinging their savings and hopes into a wild mountain backwoods, gambling that coal and steel would boom forever."[51] The magic of Birmingham would not be recreated in southeastern Kentucky, as the Panic ended the fever dream that was Middlesborough.

The Panic also enabled the rise of the Kentucky Republican Party, a development that stood poised to unravel the Democratic stranglehold, and by extension, Jim Crowism. Throughout the 1890s, Kentucky Republicans seized on the economic downtown and the intraparty squabbles among the opposition to make the state competitive. With Democrats still fighting over free silver in 1895 – and in the first statewide election to use the secret ballot – Republicans captured the governor's mansion with William O. Bradley. The state's first

[50] Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 266. Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 2, 69-70.
[51] Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 31-34.

Republican governor, Bradley's election "broke the Solid South."[52] The next year's presidential election seemed to confirm this as fact, as William McKinley defeated William Jennings Bryan in Kentucky by a mere 142 votes. During his tenure, Governor Bradley urged an end to the separate coach law – to no avail from the Democratic legislature – but his call for an anti-lynching bill was successful. Kentucky became one of five southern states to pass such a bill in the 1890s.[53] Kentucky Republicans did not welcome Black participation with open arms, however. In the 1895 contest, Bradley simply refused to acknowledge the existence of Black voters. His campaign committee did not work with Black Republicans and even withdrew from debates when racial tensions appeared to be dominating the discussion.[54] Opposition to the Democrats, it turned out, did not translate neatly into calls for racial equality.

The decline of interracialism at Berea College, however, hinted at things to come. By the mid-1890s, the AMA had abandoned its integrated school in Williamsburg, renamed it Highland College, and incorporated it as part of their "mountain work" among whites. Illustrative of this shift, William Goodell Frost, recently inaugurated president of Berea and product of Oberlin, described the people of Appalachia as "our contemporary ancestors" in 1895. Standing before a group of teachers in Cincinnati, Frost posed a question to his audience. Surely they were all aware of North and South America, but Frost wondered had they "ever heard of Appalachian America?" He went on to spin a vision of an undiscovered land in the mountains, where, the descendants of America's pioneer settlers lived as in the days of old.[55] Under Frost's leadership, Berea limited Black enrollment, discouraged social interaction between white and Black

[52] *Indianapolis Journal*, June 15, 1896, p. 2.
[53] Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 2, 81-82.
[54] Gordon B. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1978), 140.
[55] Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 119-20.

students, and in general took steps to make the school more appealing to mountain whites. Although diminished, Berea still remained the last integrated institution of higher education in the South.

Albeit in its early days, here was the marriage of racism and capitalism that could produce a coalfield. In the 1890s, the state began to coalesce around a New South system of social relations. To combat a populist insurgency within their ranks, Kentucky Democrats turned to Jim Crow, and the state legislature began the work of segmenting the population into racial categories. Ever the border state, Kentucky's path to join the New South was far more winding than its neighbors further from the Mason-Dixon. The advent of a competitive Republican Party complicated matters, but the shift among liberal reformers at Berea signaled their capitulation. The days of former slaves as an object of AMA uplift were gone; in their place stood the downtrodden, yet "deserving," white highlander. Historians have identified the turn-of-the-century impulse among reformers to make white mountaineers their cause célèbre, a shift that coincided with increased racism in the North and the rejection of the principles of Reconstruction. Conveniently, these reformers now twisted older evidence of barbarity as proof of mountaineer racial purity, thus deeming them more worthy of support than African Americans. After all, as Frost posed in the midst of rising numbers of immigrants from Europe, "what does America need so much as Americans?[56] Yet these changes did more than facilitate reconciliation, they also began to fashion a region more attractive to capitalist development. At the same time Jim Crow advanced through the legislature, the broad form deed and the elimination of the Virginia land grants issue made acquiring land more straightforward. Still, the

[56] James C. Klotter, "The Black South and White Appalachia," in *Blacks in Appalachia,* ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 51-67. Nina Silber, "What Does America Need So Much As Americans?" in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 245-258.

state's mercurial political situation, not to mention simmering opposition to the monopoly power of the L&N, stood in the way of capitalists' dominion over the coalfield.

Land Agents, Lawyers, and the Consolidation of Power in Appalachia

In the decade after the Panic of 1893, Appalachia and the rest of the South entered an "era of reorganization and consolidation," in the words of C. Vann Woodward. The period, which Woodward identified as beginning with J.P. Morgan's creation of the Southern Railway out of the ashes of the Richmond and West Point Terminal Company in 1894, saw the region come under the increasing control of Northeastern capital.[57] Morgan aside, capitalists who already had a presence in the region were primed to pick up the pieces from the Panic. The Leisenring Group of Pennsylvania was one such party. Chased out of the Connellsville region by the aggressive and well-funded Frick in 1889, the group sought out bituminous coal from their holdings in southwest Virginia. Disappointed, but three million dollars richer from the sale, they organized the territory under the Virginia Coal & Iron Company name and began evaluating the property. In 1890, company superintendent John K. Taggart expressed astonishment at the quality of coking coal on VC&I lands, even going so far as to deem it superior to Connellsville coal. A test conducted in Pittsburgh confirmed his thoughts and established it as "nearly the perfect coke yet made." Though priced out of Pennsylvania, the Leisenrings found themselves in the midst of rich coal lands in Virginia.[58]

In 1894, the Wentz family gained increased power within the group. When John S. Wentz's brother-in-law died in 1894, he inherited a mansion in Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania and

[57] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1951), 292.
[58] Drawn from Baer, "A Guide to the History of Penn Virginia Corporation and the Westmoreland Coal Company," Hagley Museum and Library. For the amount of the sale to Frick and Taggart's findings, see Rottenberg, *In the Kingdom of Coal*, 103, 106.

became president of several of the family companies, including VC&I. He and his wife Mary later acquired a Leisenring family home in west Philadelphia, with an office at the Land Title Building on Chestnut Street serving as the center of the company's operations. Wentz dispatched his son, Daniel Bertsch Wentz, to southwest Virginia in 1896 to take control of the group's coal and timber properties. Fresh out of Harvard, Daniel B. Wentz settled in Big Stone Gap in Wise County, one of the boom towns along the newly constructed L&N line. He moved into a sprawling residence in town built by superintendent Taggart, who had just been killed by an errant blast of dynamite and rock. While in Virginia, Wentz held the titles of land agent, general manager, and eventually vice president, establishing himself as a well-regarded operator. In his role as the company's land agent, Wentz took opportunities to explore land on the other side of Black Mountain in Harlan County, Kentucky.

Wentz and other industrialists eyed Kentucky's land, but the state's political battles over the power of the L&N threatened to derail their plans. Republican governor William O. Bradley had vetoed additional regulation of the company in 1898, much to the chagrin of the anti-corporation wing of the Democratic Party. In the 1899 gubernatorial election, populism reached its high-water mark. The contest pitted the Republican, Attorney General William S. Taylor, against the Democratic reformer and populist William Goebel of Covington. Goebel won the nomination at the raucous Music Hall Convention in Louisville over the protest of establishment Democrats, who soon branded themselves "Brown Democrats," after their candidate and former governor. A champion of railroad regulation, election reform, and with an endorsement from William Jennings Bryan in hand, Goebel urged Kentuckians to finally decide whether the L&N was to be "the servant or the master of the people."[59] He often neglected to mention his

[59] Quoted in Clark, "The People, William Goebel, and the Kentucky Railroads," 43-44.

Republican opponent by name in his stump speeches, instead referring to the railroad as his adversary. Confronted by the very real prospect of Governor Goebel, Basil Duke, the Bourbon Democrat and the L&N's lobbyist, wondered if it wouldn't be best to let the Republicans win this time.[60] The L&N, in search of a horse, backed Taylor.

The returns appeared to show that Goebel had lost the race, but allegations of fraud and voter intimidation on the part of the L&N and the Republican Party called the results into question. Under an election law passed while Goebel was a senator, the Democrat-controlled legislature met in Frankfort to decide the outcome. Meanwhile, the Republican Party summoned an "armed mountain mob" from Whitley, Laurel, and Knox counties who rode to the capital on the L&N free of charge. Brandishing "Winchesters and pistols, with 'moonshine' in every pocket," according the *Courier-Journal*, the mountain army of nearly a thousand milled about for a few days before returning home.[61] Their arrival in the capital signaled the importance of the southeastern counties to the resurgent Republican Party. With rocky terrain unconducive to plantation slavery, many southeastern counties supported Whig and pro-Union candidates before the Civil War. Opposition to secession did not translate neatly into calls for racial equality, but it did not engender goodwill towards the Democratic Party. In 1890, gerrymandering from the Democratic legislature placed Whitley, Knox, Laurel, and other southeastern counties into the new Eleventh Congressional District. The investment of the L&N in the area helped make it a rock-solid Republican stronghold as Kentucky became a true two-party state.[62]

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[60] Klein, *History of the Louisville & Nashville*, 383-84.
[61] *Courier-Journal*, Jan. 27, 1900.
[62] McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 168. With the exception of the 1912 presidential contest, Whitley, Knox, and Laurel counties went for the GOP in every election from 1868 to 1948. Harlan County followed this trend until 1936, when it joined Bell, Letcher, and Perry in voting for Franklin Roosevelt. Jasper B. Shannon and Ruth McQuwon, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948* (Lexington: Bureau of Government Research, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Kentucky, 1950).

On the cold morning of January 30, 1900, an unknown gunman shot Goebel as walked to the capitol. He took the oath of office on what proved to be his deathbed as he succumbed to his wounds on February 3, making him the first – and only – state governor to be assassinated. Democrats immediately levied blame at the opposition's incitement of the mountaineer mob, while Taylor and the Republicans convened their own General Assembly in the friendly confines of London in Laurel County, the Eleventh District.[63] For weeks, the state appeared to be on the brink of civil war. The Republican candidate Taylor eventually fled to Indiana amid charges of accessory to murder, and the courts declared Goebel's running mate J.C.W. Beckham governor. In opposition to his predecessor and possibly out of a wish to avoid his fate, Beckham – known as the "boy governor" became a "firm friend" of the L&N Railroad.[64] Three men were eventually convicted for Goebel's assassination, including Secretary of State and Eleventh Congressional District native Caleb Powers. The state's next Republican governor issued him a pardon in 1908, and Powers won a seat in Congress to represent the eleventh district just two years later. Many in Kentucky accused the L&N of engineering the assassination, a charge that the company denied but could never disprove.[65]

With the railroad victorious and the populist challenge dismissed, capitalists began examining southeastern Kentucky's rich coal lands. One of these, Daniel B. Wentz, proved to be a man of "energy" and "intensity" that was dogged in the pursuits of his family's interests.[66] In 1899, he began purchasing land in his parents' names. Much of the property Wentz sought was part of a land patent that dated back to 1846, granted initially to Boyd Dickenson. The old

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[63] *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1900.
[64] So named because he was only 30 at the time he took office. Hutton, *Bloody Breathitt*, 158-161. Harrison and Klotter, *New History of Kentucky*, 270-73. See also James Klotter, *William Goebel: The Politics of Wrath* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015).
[65] Powers published an autobiographical account of the events while still in prison. Caleb Powers, *My Own Story* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1905). Hutton, *Bloody Breathitt*, 158-161.
[66] *The Harvard Graduates Magazine*, vol. 34 (Harvard Graduates' Magazine Assoc: Boston, 1926), 646.

Dickenson patent contained 25,000 acres which had been divided among family heirs and subsequently sold. By the end of the Civil War, the bulk of the land was in the hands of New York investors. 10,000 acres, for example, had been sold to Emile Goulard of Brooklyn, NY in 1867. Goulard's mining firm went belly-up a few years later, and in 1887 the land passed to his heir Nils G. Kant, also of Brooklyn. Another large chunk of the Dickenson patent was in the possession of New York lawyer George Clinton Genet. Yet Wentz was no expert in land and title law, something he needed to acquire these properties to then sell to interested parties.[67]

Local lawyers well-versed in land and title statues proved invaluable to land-seeking industrialists. When Wentz arrived in Virginia, he met Joshua Fry Bullitt, Jr., a lawyer in Big Stone Gap who had successfully defended VC&I against a suit brought in 1891 by parties claiming a third of the company's lands.[68] Bullitt moved to Big Stone Gap during the town's boom in the late 1880s, where he established a practice with fellow Kentuckian Henry Clay McDowell, Jr. The two formed the Southern Appalachian Land Co. with their family's money and proceeded to buy up timber lands around southwest Virginia. A leading figure in the early years of the town, Bullitt helped organize the Police Guard in an attempt to impose some order in the rough-and-tumble mountain frontier town, an action that won him an appearance in John Fox, Jr's novel *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. Bald with a thick moustache, Bullitt wore oval-shaped glasses due to poor eyesight that kept him out of school as a child. A self-described "evolutionist" in belief, he regarded Herbert Spencer as "the greatest man who ever lived."[69]

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[67] Baer, "A Guide to the History of Penn Virginia Corporation," vol. 2, 62.

[68] His selection was no accident, as his uncle, John C. Bullitt, served on the board of directors for VC&I. While originally from the Bluegrass state, the Bullitt family made an impression in Philadelphia during a "wildcat bank" fraud trial typical of the Jacksonian era. Bullitt's uncle moved there in 1849 and became a leading lawyer for coal and railroad companies, which brought him into contact with the Wentzes and Leisenrings. The Bullitts of Louisville thus enjoyed close ties with Philadelphia.

[69] *Men of Mark in Virginia: A Collection of Biographies of the Leading Men in the State*, vol. III, ed. Lyon G. Tyler (Men of Mark Publishing Co.: Washington, D.C., 1907), 56-59.

Through hundreds of trials, Bullitt established himself as an expert in the complicated, even "arcane" subject of Appalachian land titles.[70] After 1891, he and his partners handled all of VC&I's legal business in Virginia. He also represented the family at the coroner's inquest of Edward L. Wentz, Daniel's brother, whose death in the hills of Wise County was shrouded in mystery.[71]

As they sought to capitalize on the fallout from the Panic of 1893, Wentz and Bullitt formed a close working relationship. Most of Bullitt's labor on behalf of the Wentzes involved him following the paper trail. Securing all of the documents required to purchase a piece of property required "herculean efforts." Lawyers like Bullitt worked to document the entire history of the parcel from its initial survey or patent to its current owner.[72] Many tracts of land had usually been deeded or sold by the original owner, and in the cases of absentee ownership, junior claimants who actually occupied the property could contest who possessed the right to the land. The property of George Clinton Genet in Harlan County, for example, had changed hands several times over the decades. In his will recorded in Lee County, Virginia, in December of 1861, Boyd Dickenson bequeathed the land to a James T. Lloyd. Five years later, the land passed to James Reamer, who in 1868 sold the eastern portion – about 15,000 acres – to Frederick S. Kirtland, a merchant from New York. Kirtland went bankrupt in 1870 in the Southern District of New York and the land went up for sale to pay his creditors. In 1892, George Clinton Genet bought nearly 4,000 acres, a slice of the original 15,000-acre plot.[73] Bullitt tracked all of this information down, consulting patents in state capitols and deeds in county courthouses to determine whether a title was "clear," with a direct chain of ownership and solid boundary lines,

[70] Baer, "A Guide to the History of Penn Virginia Corporation and the Westmoreland Coal Company," vol. 2, 21-23.
[71] *New York Times*, May 12, 1904.
[72] Pudup, "Land Before Coal," 183-84.
[73] Penn Virginia, Accession 1764, Series III, Box 209: Wentz v. J.W. Blair, et. al., 1902-1905.

or "cloudy," with overlapping patents, confusing boundaries, or conflicting claims of ownership. If no agreement could be reached between the parties, suits brought before the U.S. Circuit Court would ultimately decide rightful ownership.

While he navigated land titles and patent law, Bullitt also used his local connections to lean on local politicians. When the Harlan County Board of Supervisors increased taxes on their holdings, Bullitt warned a judge that the net result would be the ruination of the county. High taxes on absentee landowners like the Wentzes threatened to "kill the goose that laid the golden egg," made all the more worrisome since the "goose" had only "gotten… about one egg up to the present time." Harlan County farmers who owned the land would suffer too, Bullitt cautioned, as they would be forced to sell at lower prices. He urged the judge push the matter in court, warning that "capital will be frightened out of coming to Harlan."[74]

With Bullitt by his side, Wentz moved to acquire the property owned by Genet in 1902. He secured the option on the land through an agreement with Genet, and the full purchase took place two years later. On the eve of the deal, however, Genet started to waffle. In response, Bullitt urged Wentz to travel to Manhattan, and discuss the matter with the "old gentleman" in person. There was nothing that "a little good Bourbon" couldn't cure, Bullitt counseled. Wentz agreed with his lawyer, acknowledging, "we will have to humor him a little."[75] Kentucky's native spirit appeared to do the job, as Wentz completed the transaction in March of 1904. Genet died just two months later, prompting a bevy of obituaries in national newspapers. At the time, neither Wentz nor Bullitt knew that they were dealing with the son of General Edmond Charles

[74] J.F. Bullitt to Judge W.F. Hall, Jan. 24, 1903. Box 209, File #55: Wentz Kentucky Lands, 1902-1907, Penn Virginia.
[75] G.C. Genet to D.B. Wentz, Feb. 19, 1904; J.F. Bullitt to D.B. Wentz, Feb. 15, 1904; D.B. Wentz to J.F Bullitt, Feb. 20, 1904. Accession 1764, Series III, Box 209, File #54: J.S. & M.D. Wentz, Kant & Genet Lands, 1902-1904, Penn Virginia.

Genet, better known as "Citizen Genet," who had been granted asylum in the United States by President Washington during the French Revolution. "I did not know we were dealing with such a blue blood," Bullitt remarked to Wentz, but reminded him that they were fortunate to finish the business before Genet's death.[76]

Wentz's dealings brought him in direct competition with other investors who were also looking to expand into Harlan County. As the Genet transaction came to a close, local landowner John Wesley Blair claimed two "junior patents" that overlapped with the Wentz property. Blair traced his ownership back to a title bond bought by his ancestors in 1855 from the Boyd Dickenson patent, which he argued entitled him to some of the land recently purchased from Genet. Wentz and Bullitt soon learned that Blair had an outside backer: James Deering of International Harvester. Deering's company merged with McCormick Reaper in 1902, and the conglomerate looked to acquire captive coal and coke land for its expanded operations. After inspecting Blair's claim, however, Bullitt considered it "absolutely void." The original title bond contained no metes and bounds and was "so very vague" as to nullify the rest of Blair's case. Bullitt mapped out his own trail of ownership for the property, one that placed it in his client's hands. The Wentz interests eventually brought suit against Blair and Deering in U.S. Circuit Court, and the two parties settled on an exchange in 1905 that straightened out their boundary. When Deering's lawyers took too long to finish up the transaction, Wentz replied characteristically, "we have got to take the bull by the horns and insist on action which will enable me to carry out my plans."[77]

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[76] J.F. Bullitt to D.B. Wentz, May 20, 1904. Box 209, File #54: J.S. & M.D. Wentz, Kant & Genet Lands, 1902-1904, Penn Virginia.

[77] Penn Virginia, Accession 1764, Series III, Box 210, Folder # 252: Land Exchange with James Deering, 1904-1909.

Thousands of miles away from Kentucky in South Yarmouth, Mass., a converted boathouse served as the headquarters of another land-holding enterprise, the Kentenia Corporation. Named for its location in the Appalachian states of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, Kentenia was another project of wealthy Philadelphians. Edward M. Davis, a Philadelphia merchant, railroad official, and strident abolitionist, served as an advisor to John C. Fremont during the Civil War. Prominent members of the Quaker community in Philadelphia, he and his wife Maria Mott Davis (daughter of Lucretia Mott) advocated for women's suffrage and the rights of freed slaves. Davis also parlayed his political influence into large land holdings. In 1870, he purchased the rights to 86,000 acres of what he believed to be clear title to high quality coal and timber lands. Originally surveyed in the 1840s, the boundaries of the tract were predictably unclear: instead of just Harlan County, the claims actually stretched into nearby Bell County and parts of Tennessee and Virginia as well. Davis's lawyers acquired the mineral rights of the land for a dollar per acre and paid any outliers the same price just to settle their claims. As absentee owners, the Davis estate the taxes on the land but did little to enforce their property rights on the ground. Charles Henry Davis, Edward's grandson, inherited the property in 1901 and soon funded joint surveys of the region made by the Kentucky State Geological Survey and the U.S. Geological Survey. The findings showed the Davis holdings to contain coking coal of "great value" that was of "unlimited supply." Armed with this information, Charles Davis set out to consolidate his family's holdings and make them profitable.[78]

For a business partner, Davis looked to Warren Delano, Jr. The choice was a strategic one. Delano hailed from a group of monied families in New York, including the Astors and the

[78] "Supplement to the *Harlan Enterprise*: Kentenia Corporation," *Harlan Enterprise*, April 10, 1908, 2. John Egerton, *Generations: An American Family* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 75-76, 132. See also Thomas C. Cornell, *Adam and Anne Mott: Their Ancestors and Their Descendants* (A.V. Haight, Printer: Pughkeepsie, N.Y., 1890). Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 87.

Roosevelts. While his family initially made a fortune in the opium trade in China, Warren's interests lay in coal and railroads. He held directorships on the L&N Railroad, its parent company the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad – which came into the possession of J.P, Morgan in 1902 – and the Lackawanna Steel Company. Through these connections, Delano began to express interest in purchasing Harlan County lands. He competed against Davis for a time, but eventually agreed to bring his railroad influence to bear on the Kentenia claims. Capitalized at $10 million, Kentenia's shareholders included industrialists from the Northeast as well as elites in Kentucky (including the Wentz's lawyer Joshua Fry Bullitt). Through the newly formed venture, the men sought to develop Harlan County into their own personal fiefdom.[79]

While holding companies gobbled up titles, railroads jockeyed over access into the untapped territory. Yet rival railways in the early twentieth century South did not compete, as historian C. Vann Woodward explained, so much as they settled "administrative boundaries between two provinces of a single empire." Indeed, J.P. Morgan came to dominate the three largest systems in the region – the Southern, the Atlantic Coast Line, and the Seaboard Air Line.[80] When the L&N balked at building a branch line into Harlan County, the Southern Railway entered the fray. Acting on behalf of International Harvester, the Southern began surveying a route up the Cumberland River in 1904. The Southern shared trackage rights with the L&N into the town of Middlesboro and was the next-best option for the frustrated Chicago-based manufacturer. "We do not propose to let Southern get into that territory," an L&N official declared in response, but the railroad desired to let an independent operation first explore construction into the coalfield. Unburdened by the upfront costs, the L&N could then buy out the

[79] "Supplement to the *Harlan Enterprise*: Kentenia Corporation," *Harlan Enterprise,* April 10, 1908, 11. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 86-87.
[80] Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 295.

smaller company if the market made Harlan County coal a worthwhile investment. Morgan, for his part, stood to win either way.[81]

As capital tightened its grip, the Kentucky legislature imposed yet another element of the Jim Crow racial order. On January 12, 1904, Rep. Carl Day, a newly elected Democrat from Breathitt County in eastern Kentucky, introduced a bill aimed directly at Berea College. Day's proposed legislation outlawed racial integration in any institution of education, even a private one, and forbade schools from opening an integrated branch within a twenty-five mile radius of the main campus. In doing so, the Bluegrass state followed the lead of Tennessee, which forced Maryville College to segregate under order of state law in 1901. To prove the bill's necessity, Day produced a petition signed by 800 residents near Berea that alleged the college existed "in open defiance of the organic law of this Commonwealth." President Frost of Berea bemoaned the bill but did little to prevent its adoption, while African American leader James Bond defended him publicly. The Day Law, as it came to be known, passed the House and Senate and took effect in July 1904. Berea contested its legality all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled against the college 7-2 in 1908.[82]

For Black Kentuckians affiliated with Berea College, the passage of the law necessitated new organizing campaigns. After graduating from Berea and Oberlin, the Kentucky native James Bond agreed to return his alma mater in 1907 as its financial secretary to help lead a fundraising campaign for an all-Black college. He moved to Williamsburg, the county seat of Whitley County, where three generations of his family lived together in "a mountain home in eastern Kentucky." Like other county seat towns, local government and court functions ensured

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[81] Banks, "Class Formation in the Kentucky Coalfields," *Appalachia in the Making*, 336-7.
[82] Klotter, "Black South and White Appalachia," 61. Hutton, *Bloody Breathitt*, 187-88. Wilson, *Berea College*, 82-84.

Williamsburg sustained a minimum level of activity, which only increased as the area attracted outside capital. Lawyers, merchants, and other professionals occupied spaces near the square, with residential areas fanning out along the major roads.[83] Bond's brother Henry was the principal and often sole instructor of the Williamsburg Colored Academy, the former AMA school that operated under the Congregationalist banner and educated 300 Black students. A staunch Republican, Henry Bond was considered an "influential citizen" in Whitley County, especially on Election Day when he could motivate the voters in the county's population of around a thousand African Americans to show up to the polls. "He was the most important Negro in Williamsburg, perhaps in that whole part of the Kentucky mountains," a chronicler of his family observed.[84] James Bond preached at Black churches in the area, often shocking the conservative audience – and even his own brother – with his Congregationalist beliefs. His wife Jane Alice Brown Bond, herself a graduate of Oberlin, made sure their sons grew up in a home filled with "deep religious fervor, intellectual intensity and altruistic idealism," while James took them outdoors to swim, shoot, fish, and sleep out under the stars.[85]

Bond helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for the new Black school, much of it from the same class of capitalist that sought coal lands in the mountains. President Frost pitched it as a place to train Black teachers to educate "their race" in skills they formerly learned in the homes of their white enslavers, a message that no doubt appealed to wealthy industrialists. Andrew Carnegie, a Berea board member, promised a $200,000 donation if his funds could be matched. Money poured in from New England progressives, of course, as did that from a group

[83] Pudup, "Town and Country in Appalachian Kentucky," in *Appalachia in the Making*, 286, 291-92.
[84] *The Crisis*, vol. 34, no. 2 (Apr. 1927): 41. Williams, *The Bonds*, 26-27. For the school information, see *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1889-90*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 1087.
[85] *The Crisis*, vol. 34, no. 2 (Apr. 1927): 41, 60. Williams, *The Bonds*, 25-26, 49-51.

of business from the Louisville Board of Trade. Heralded as the "Tuskegee of Kentucky," the school raised over $400,000 by 1909. After some controversy about the location and the anger of Black leaders over the Day Law, it opened as the Lincoln Institute in Shelbyville, outside Louisville, in 1912.[86]

Although Jim Crow appeared in the Day Law of 1904 and other attempts to restrict Black access to public places, Kentucky did not impose as rigid a system of segregation as did states further South. African Americans throughout the state retained the right to vote, for example, perhaps because they represented a smaller percentage of the population and therefore less of a threat to political power. In 1890, African Americans composed 16.8 percent of the state's total population of 1,590,462. By 1900, every other southern state had a higher Black population, with Mississippi and South Carolina leading the way at nearly 60 percent African American.[87] As a result, Kentucky's system of race relations came to resemble a patchwork that illustrated the liminality of the state itself. In the city of Louisville, a form of "polite racism" reigned, while rural counties in western Kentucky played host to whitecapping and mob violence. The mountains were unique as well, as the coal industry shaped the land and its social relations. Racialized violence was far from absent, with one scholar estimating that there were more lynchings in Kentucky than any other Upper South state. Not quite "southern," but not quite anything else, Kentucky remained a border state long after the Civil War had come and gone.[88]

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[86] Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 2, 136-39.
[87] Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 2, 1. Bureau of the Census, Bulletin 8, *Negroes in the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1904), 20.
[88] Adams, *Way Up North in Louisville: African American Migration in the Urban South, 1930-1970* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010), 38-40. See also George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Christopher Waldrep, *Night Riders: Defending Community in the Black Patch, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

The old adage that "Kentucky seceded after Appomattox" bears some truth, however, as the state tilted southward in its attempts to entice development. As with the bill to segregate railroad travel in 1892, the move to target the integrated Berea College occurred in the context of Kentucky's deepening relationship with outside capital. While the Day Law received the lion's share of attention and outrage, and understandably so, another bill introduced by the same legislator went largely unnoticed. Quietly, Day's other piece of legislation granted owners of timber land more power to deny rights of way in order to secure outlets for their products. It was, as one historian of the period has observed, the "final nail in the coffin for the past century's free-ranging mountain economy." In true New South fashion, Day's twin bills evinced the simultaneous advance of capital and Jim Crow.[89]

"Machine Age in the Hills"[90]

By 1907, thanks to their son's efforts, Dr. John and Mary Wentz owned thousands of acres of coal and timber land in Kentucky and Virginia. To be exact, they laid claim to 14,578 acres in Harlan County, 2,468 acres in neighboring Letcher County, and 1,621 acres in Wise County, Virginia. All told, the land and mineral rights were valued at half a million dollars. To further develop and operate the coal mines of the Virginia Coal and Iron Co., in southwest Virginia, the Stonega Coke and Coal Company was incorporated under the laws of New Jersey in 1902 (and reincorporated in Delaware in 1910). Stonega remained a lessee company of VC&I yet the two were closely tied through their stockholders and leadership. Daniel Wentz returned to Philadelphia to succeed his father as president of its parent company, VC&I, in 1904. In 1907, the Wentzes incorporated a new company in New Jersey and deeded all of their holdings to it in

[89] Hutton, *Bloody Breathitt*, 189.
[90] Malcolm Ross, *Machine Age in the Hills* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

exchange for capital stock. The 14,000-acre block in Harlan County, bordering International Harvester to the west and the Virginia Coal & Iron Co. to the southeast, was the crown jewel of the portfolio. Wentz and Bulllitt worked for years to shore up this particular piece of property, clearing cloud from titles and jockeying with competing claimants. Now, the land lay waiting only for a railroad to penetrate up the Poor Fork of the Cumberland River and offer an outlet for the minerals in its hillsides.[91]

Despite the consolidation of Kentenia, the Wentzes, and other large land holders, however, the ever-present issues of competing patents and titles continued to stand in the way of massive capital investment in Harlan County. In April 1908, a forty-two-page supplement in the *Harlan Enterprise* filled with sycophantic biographies of the Kentenia Corporation's top players and picturesque mountain vistas attempted to bowl over the citizens of Harlan County. Tables displayed the high-quality coking coal held in the hills, while pictures of white oaks, poplars, chestnuts, and chestnut oaks, some over forty inches in diameter, portrayed the "timber wealth" of the region. Mixed in with these images were photographs of the so-called "people of Kentenia": barefoot schoolchildren and Harlan County families posed in front of their log cabins. Its director Charles Davis made sure to note their small plots of land, enclosed by the split-rail fence, as "indications of the limits of possession." "I believe that every foot of land that has been bought in our region will eventually be owned by 'Kentenia Corporation,'" Davis wrote, "because it is to the best and mutual interest of each and all of us that this should be so." If landowners did not join under the banner of the corporation, the development of quality coal lands "within sound of the railroad whistle" would be "entirely prevented or certainly delayed

[91] Penn Virginia, Accession 1764, Series III, Box 209, Folder #T-58: J.S. & M.D. Wentz to the Wentz Co., May 10, 1907.

and embarrassed."[92] To achieve this end, the corporation offered fifty dollars per acre, only redeemable in company stock. After one month, the promised amount dropped to forty dollars. "The future is in your hands," Davis admonished Harlan County landowners, "Will you grasp the opportunity now given you, or let it go by?" Kentenia eventually cleared the clouds from 100 square miles of coal and timber land, some 64,000 acres.[93]

Meanwhile, the L&N was still in search of a smaller enterprise willing to take on the risk of initial construction into Harlan County. The company got its wish with Thomas Jefferson Asher. A native of Clay County, Kentucky, Asher opened a sawmill near Pineville along the L&N's Cumberland Valley line in 1890 to tap the trees of Bell and Harlan counties. With a band saw churning out 50,000 feet of timber per day, Asher's yellow poplars sold on both coasts and as far away as South Africa. By 1905, he and his family owned 15,000 acres of coal and timber near the L&N and Southern railroads, including the aptly named town of Tejay.[94] To reach these holdings, Asher financed the construction of a railroad and officially organized it as the Wasioto & Black Mountain Railroad in 1908. The road branched off the L&N at Harbell and hugged the Cumberland River up through the hills, mirroring the route initially proposed to the L&N in 1888 by McCreath and D'Invilliers. Those in the know in Kentucky, like Louisville land developer R.C. Ballard Thruston, saw the Wasioto & Black Mountain as "a dummy for the Southern Railway or the L.&N."[95] Indeed, the L&N did advance Asher funds to cover construction costs, and in 1909, the company purchased the entire capital stock of his road. To continue Asher's line into Harlan County, the L&N awarded a contract to the Callahan Construction Company. Sixty

[92] "Supplement to the *Harlan Enterprise*: Kentenia Corporation," *Harlan Enterprise*, April 10, 1908.
[93] "Supplement to the *Harlan Enterprise*: Kentenia Corporation," *Harlan Enterprise*, April 10, 1908.
[94] J.C. Tipton, *The Cumberland Coal Field and Its Creators* (Pinnacle Printery, Inc., 1905).
[95] R.C. Ballard Thruston to J.F. Bullitt, Jan. 26, 1906. Penn Virginia, Accession 1764, Series V, Box 333: Interstate Investment Company; Black Mt. Ry. Right of way 1906-1908.

miles of track, from Tejay to the International Harvester property at Benham, took a little over a year to complete. The first L&N train pulled into the county seat in July of 1911, with service to Benham a few months later. By finally reaching the county, the L&N remedied what a former company president considered a "monumental and continuing blunder."[96]

International Harvester no doubt agreed. Their holdings at Benham, operated through the subsidiary Wisconsin Steel Co., contained over 20,000 acres of high-quality captive coking coal. With the railroad on the way, the manufacturing giant invested in housing, drift mines, and a plant of 300 beehive coke ovens. This coal combined with iron ore from Minnesota and timber from the Mississippi River delta to form the ingredients for tractors, wagons, reapers, and binders. H.F. Perkins, division manager of International Harvester's Raw Materials, described the company's reach in 1912:

> We are hewers of wood in the South; we are diggers of ore in Minnesota; we mine coal and draw coke in Kentucky; we are makers of steel in Chicago; out merchants in Manila and Yucatan seek strong fibres for the making of goodly twine; our buyers at home and at the outlying works scour the earth for wares of all sorts, which they must gather into store against the demand of the world for machines to garner its crops. Truly we are harvesters.[97]

International Harvester distributed their products to every continent, tying the coal of Harlan County to the fortunes of farmers all over the world.[98]

Henry Clay Frick's method of manufacturing coke in beehive ovens had sent industrialists scurrying all over Appalachia in the 1880s, but his approach began to fall out of favor around 1910. Though relatively inexpensive to build, beehive ovens sacrificed valuable gases as the bituminous coal carbonized. Ammonia, tar, benzol, toluol, ammonia, tar,

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[96] Asher continued as president of the Wasioto & Black Mountain Railroad until 1915, when the L&N finally incorporated the line into the company. Herr, *Louisville & Nashville*, 199-201.
[97] *The Harvester World*, vol. 3, no. 11 (Nov. 1912).
[98] *Annual Report of the International Harvester Company, Dec. 31, 1910,* 18, 28-30, 43-45.

naphthalene, and cyanogen were a few of the by-products were lost as they leaked out of ovens. By-product coke ovens, on the other hand, could recover these gases that coke manufacturers could then sell to the chemical industry. Prior to 1906, by-product coke ovens in the U.S. did not produce metallurgical coke as cheaply or efficiently as beehive ovens, and thus remained a small percentage of the market. In Germany, however, engineer Heinrich Koppers developed an oven that could recover the valuable gases and still make high-quality coke. U.S. Steel sent a team to investigate, and in 1908, the company built 280 Koppers Cross Regenerative ovens at Joliet, Illinois. After blast furnace managers conceded the superiority of by-product coke to beehive coke, other companies followed U.S. Steel's lead. By-product coal increased to 60% of total coal produced by the early 1920s and came to constitute "one of the fundamental factors of modern industry."[99]

Only the largest coal and steel companies could afford the massive investments in both bituminous coal and the by-product ovens themselves. With the advent of the by-product coke oven the American steel industry underwent yet another shift that had ramifications for Appalachian coal. In 1911, Maryland-based Consolidation Coal acquired thousands of acres of coal lands in Letcher County, which bordered Harlan County. The company built a model company town, Jenkins, along with McRoberts, along the banks of Elkhorn Creek. Consolidation spent over $40 million on its operations in Letcher County, making it the largest initial investment in the country's history.[100] Concurrently, the L&N moved up the North Fork of the Kentucky River, purchasing the stock of the Lexington & Eastern Railroad, a short line that had reached Jackson in Breathitt County. The move set in motion an extension to the holdings of

[99] *By-Product Coke and Gas Oven Plants* (The Koppers Co.: Pittsburgh, Pa., 1921), 7-11
[100] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, Mountaineers*, 144.

Consolidation Coal and other mineral companies in Perry and Letcher counties, and unleashed land agents all over the North Fork area.[101]

Figure 2: An L&N train pulls coal off the Cumberland Plateau near Artemus, Ky. Courtesy of Ran Flanary, L&N Historical Society

Men like R.D. Baker saw money in the hills. Based in eastern Kentucky as an agent of land speculators in New York, he had instructions to keep them informed of developments in the area that could affect their pocketbooks. When he got word of a railroad building a branch up the Kentucky River, Baker wrote to New York with a plan to "locate the best lands and timber" so

[101] Herr, *L&N*, 187-98. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 71.

he could "have all necessary time to survey, abstract and perfect titles." "I am right much excited over this information," he wrote his boss, "and want to make some money." Baker also contacted lumber companies in Cincinnati to advertise the "virgin timber" along the proposed rail line, some of which was "as good poplar as ever grew anywhere." Local farmers were likely to sell, as they were cash poor and "had no feed for a horse." With money scarce and the Iron Horse on the horizon, Baker thought "it is a good time buy trees."[102]

Conveniently, Northern elites remembered long forgotten claims to coal lands, some of which had expired. In late 1912, Adelbert Ames, Jr. of Boston, Massachusetts contacted the lawyer Joshua F. Bullitt about a title to 200,000 acres in Kentucky and Virginia. This land had been purchased by Ames's grandfather, the Union General Benjamin F. Butler, and Union naval officer Frederick Pearson in 1874. Ames reached out on behalf of the Pearson heirs in an attempt to convert their inheritance into coal and cash. The problem, as with so many disputes of titles and patents, came down to the paperwork. A misspelling of a single name in the original patent meant that there were divergent claims to the land. Years of absentee ownership, along with the unpaid land taxes that piled up, diluted the case of Ames and the Pearson heirs. Bullitt advised them to get out while they could and sell to whoever was interested. "If your people really want coal lands, and know anything about what they are doing," he wrote, "I would be willing to take the matter up with the different parties to see what could be done." Ultimately, Ames and his fellow heirs lacked the capital and the clean titles needed to turn Appalachian land into money.[103]

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[102] Penn Virginia, Accession 1764, Series V, Box 338, Robert C. Ream, Kentucky Lands, M. Decker & J.L. Kemmerer 1909-1912; Box 339: Robert C. Ream, Kentucky Lands: Lists of Timber & Lands, 1910-1912.

[103] J.F. Bullitt to Ames, June 30, 1913; J.F. Bullitt to W.A. Leneave, Oct. 2, 1913. Penn Virginia Accession 1764, Series V, Box 338: Pearson Heirs Lands: Correspondence, 1912-1915. Don't feel too bad for Aldebert Ames, Jr. He went on to research optics and perceptual psychology at Dartmouth and became known for his experiments in visual perception. His most famous demonstration is the Distorted Room, in which two people appear to be of vastly different sizes.

All of these developments in eastern Kentucky marked it as a "new producing field." "Records are being broken for rapid development," the *Black Diamond* reported in 1912. The industry journal heralded the quality of Harlan County coal, which would be marketed domestically for gas and steam as well as overseas through the port of Charleston, SC. The L&N's investment facilitated this movement, which the *Black Diamond* recognized was to the benefit of the large companies that dominated the coalfield. Wisconsin Steel had commenced shipping coal and coke "to its parent concern, the International Harvester Company, at South Chicago," while the Kentenia Corporation, "by far the largest," awaited direct rail access to its properties. All told, the opening of Harlan County "one of the most impressive features of contemporary coal activity."[104] Like much of coal country, the county was controlled by absentee landowners. On the eve of World War I, twenty-six taxpayers controlled 70% of Harlan's acerage, with the eight largest – including Kentenia and Wisconsin Steel – laying claim to nearly half of the county.[105]

Thirty years of cooperation between capital and government had paid dividends. To accommodate northern industrialists in search of bituminous coal, the state of Kentucky passed laws that removed old barriers to investment just as it constructed new ones that regulated society along the lines of race. John C.C. Mayo's broad form deed allowed land agents to seize the mountains' valuable minerals, while Jim Crow legislation attempted to segment the population along distinct racial lines. The joint effort produced a coalfield in the model of the New South that was tailored to the whims and wishes of northern industrialists. Along the way, the dream of Berea College succumbed to Jim Crow and big business, as even its leaders came to play the role of handmaiden to capital. The Day Law swept away the interracial college that

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[104] *The Black Diamond,* vol. 48, no. 25 (June 22, 1912): 84-85.
[105] Banks, "Class Formation in the Kentucky Coalfields," in *Appalachia in the Making,* 337.

could raise up young Black citizens like James Bond; in its stead rose the industrial model of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee. In 1912, Berea's president William G. Frost surveyed the recent developments, declaring "a new era" to be "knocking at the door of every mountain cabin." The mineral wealth of Appalachia, its lumber and coal, were bound to be possessed by the forces of "civilization." In the midst of change and conglomeration, however, Frost argued that the mountain whites of Appalachia were still "a glorious asset." The "strong traits of their race," among them patriotism and religiosity, marked them "as promising as were our own ancestors in the days of Elizabeth." Lest these traits disappear altogether, the white population of Appalachia needed a "friendly interpreter and a guiding hand." A far cry from Berea's original mission as an "anti-caste" institution, Frost's statements revealed that it was not he who drove the engines of change in the mountains.[106]

[106] *The Independent*, vol. 72 (1912): 714

CHAPTER 2

LABOR: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORK, COMMUNITY, AND RACE IN RAILROADING AND COAL MINING

My daddy is an engineer;
The best one on the road
He pulls his load of freight or coal
To any where he's told
L&N Employes' Magazine, Feb. 1929

Oh come all you young fellers so young and so fine
Seek not your fortune in a dark dreary mine
It'll form as a habit and seep in your soul
Till the stream of your blood runs as black as the coal
Merle Travis, "Dark as a Dungeon"

The developers of southeastern Kentucky may have envisioned a kingdom of coal, but railroaders and coal miners made it a reality. Following the snaking trail of the Cumberland River up into the plateau, Louisville & Nashville engineers piloted steam engines atop rails and ties laid by Black convict laborers in the 1880s. As the Massive Mikado-type locomotives belched black smoke over hills and through hollows, their howling whistles reminding anyone in earshot of their ties to the kingdom. Crews settled the engines under coal tipples hovering over along the tracks, filling their hopper cars to the brim with bituminous coal dug by miners out of the Kentucky hillsides. Lurching westward and down off the Cumberland Plateau, they hauled the coveted black diamonds first to an L&N classification yard, then on to the gateway cities of Cincinnati, Ohio or Louisville, Kentucky. Finally, the trains arrived at blast furnaces in the nation's steel-making belt on the Great Lakes.

Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, state government, business leaders, capitalists, and even liberal reformers helped to create a coalfield in southeastern Kentucky. In the process, they also began to fashion a racial order in the model of the New South. While Jim Crow legislation outlined the broad contours of race, however, the dynamics of industries within the kingdom of coal affected how they worked in practice. Railroads and coal were bound together. They were often close in proximity and linked in what a scholar of political economy has described as "narrow, purpose-built channels" along which flowed "great volumes of energy."[1] And in the Appalachian coalfields, both railroad companies and coal operators wielded racism as a tool to segment the labor pool, exert control over workers, and extract profits. Yet at various nodes within those channels, railroaders and coal miners developed particular social relations that marked them as distinct from one another.

This chapter undertakes a comparison of the two intertwined industries to explain this difference. Historians have long recognized that Central Appalachia supplied the raw materials that fueled industrial capitalism, yet a comparative approach shows that a pivotal link in this process has gone unexamined. Most studies of labor, class, and capitalism in Appalachia have focused on the points of extraction, with coal and timber camps as their setting.[2] Railroad hubs, however, and the workers that populated them, have been sidelined. I argue that workers' social worlds flowed from their material relationship to capital, with ideologies of race and gender, religion, politics, and attempts at unionization all revolving around workers' daily experiences on the job and in the community. Fundamental to this relationship was the concentration of power in the two industries: while railroads came to be dominated by monopolies, the coal industry

[1] Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso Books, 2011), 19.
[2] For an example, see David A. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

remained extremely competitive through World War I. As a result, the two adopted separate approaches to work discipline and company supervision, along with wage levels and systems of promotion. Coal miners and railroaders exhibited disparities in levels of community autonomy and possessed a varying degree of control over their working lives. Even the communities that emerged under these industries stood in stark contrast: "transportation towns" of railroad employees stratified at points along an occupational hierarchy; while "extraction towns" of coal miners were flattened into a mass by the powerful coal operators. Over time, they also came to profess disparate racial ideologies. Both railroaders and miners strained against the control exerted by their employers, but the organization of their working and social lives channeled their actions along divergent paths.

Working on the Railroad

To be a railroader on the L&N was to work under the watchful eye of a powerful company. In an industry characterized by monopoly power perhaps more so than any other, the L&N was one of the South's most extensive and influential railroads. By the turn of the twentieth century, it was one of five lines that controlled a majority of the trackage in the region. The L&N laid claim to 5,000 miles, and only the newly formed Southern Railway was bigger.[3] As railroad companies expanded their influence, they revolutionized the nation's business structure and attempted (sometimes unsuccessfully) to impose order and rationality on a rapidly evolving industrial economy.[4] Under the stated goal of efficiency, the L&N and other railroad companies imposed a strict "synchronization of labor" on their workers. Both road service,

[3] John F. Stover, *American Railroads* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 148.
[4] Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977). Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

where railroaders were paid by the mile or trip rate, and the shift-based work in rail yards depended on a regimented, organized, supervised workplace.[5]

From a conductor's timepiece to the precise schedule of trains' arrivals and departures, railroad work was highly structured. The operation of a single coal train, for example, required the cooperation of an entire crew of railroaders. In the cab at the head of the train, the engineer marshalled man and machine to ensure a successful run. From the moment he placed his hand on the throttle, an engineer managed a variety of variables: the company timetables, signals on the roadside, the track in front of the engine, the gauges measuring temperature, steam and water levels, and the sound of the engine itself. Over time, the state of constant vigilance demanded of engineers became second nature, but the weight of responsibility and the sense of "latent danger" never disappeared.[6] Engineers took immense pride in their work. To them, the locomotive was "a being of life and intelligence," and they enjoyed "great satisfaction… in learning to master its moods."[7] The job also came with its perks, including high wages and a good deal of prestige. According to a veteran railroader, engineers enjoyed a degree of celebrity comparable to a "crack air-mail pilot."[8]

An engineer may have received the lion's share of public admiration, but he was useless without the fireman by his side. "The hardest worked man in train service," the fireman's task was to build and maintain the fire that powered the steam engine. On an average freight train traveling a distance of 100 miles, the fireman scooped more than eleven tons of coal from the

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[5] Walter Licht, *Working for the Railroad: The Organization of Work in the Nineteenth Century.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 79. Licht draws on E.P. Thompson's classic "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," in *Past and Present* 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97.
[6] *Report of the Eight-Hour Commission, Commission on Standard Workday of Railroad Employees* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 385.
[7] Reed C. Richardson, *The Locomotive Engineer, 1863-1963: A Century of Railway Labor Relations and Work Rules* (Ann Arbor: Bureau of Industrial Relations, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Michigan, 1963), 104. Licht, *Working for the Railroad*, 161.
[8] Chauncey Del French, *Railroadman* (New York: MacMillan, 1938), 61.

tender connected to the cab. He then walked to the boiler and threw the pile of fuel through the small firebox opening at knee level, occasionally stooping down to spread the coals evenly inside the chamber. Other tasks included shaking the grates at the bottom of the chamber, breaking up clumps too large for the firebox, and cleaning out "clinkered" fires that suffered a buildup of ash or impurities in the coal. He did all this as the train hurtled down the track and the deck of the engine shifted beneath his feet. Fireboxes emitted intense heat, and many firemen donned leather aprons to keep their clothes from igniting. Between the high temperatures near the boiler, weather conditions in the open-air cab, and fumes from the firebox, firemen engaged in exceptionally dangerous and exhausting work.[9]

Rounding out the crew, the conductor, the flagman, and several brakemen occupied the caboose at the rear. One of the highest-paid employees in road service, the conductor was technically in charge of the train and carried out mostly clerical and preparatory tasks. He received orders from the company trainmaster or dispatcher and was responsible for the train's movements and its conformity with the rules of the road. Before departure, he and the flagman inspected the condition of all train cars and couplings. The conductor noted the markings on each car, comparing them against the bill of freight to ensure accuracy. In the days before the adoption of the airbrake, brakemen risked life and limb to scramble across the tops of cars, twisting brakes by hand to bring the train to a stop. As railroads adopted the new technology, they shifted to a support role, transmitting messages and throwing switches when necessary. Lastly, the flagman occupied the end of the train, using signals and lanterns to prevent collisions. The conductor

[9] *Report of the Eight-Hour Commission*, 386. Licht, *Working for the Railroad*, 82. Shelton Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Labor Conflict In Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 109-11.

officially completed the trip when he submitted his report to the operating department, which was used to determine railroaders' pay.[10]

In addition to the operating trades, both yard work and the mechanical repair shops relied on a hierarchical division of labor. Described as "railroading on foot," yard crews classified cargo and assembled cars along the outbound tracks. A typical crew numbered five railroaders: an engineer and firemen team, a pair of brakemen, and the conductor, more commonly known as the foreman. The foreman specified the specific cars for the crew to include, and the engineer pushed them into position through careful control of a locomotive's throttle. Brakemen rode on the cars as they drifted down the track, and then coupled them together. Under the authority of the yardmaster, whose office served as a communication hub for the entire yard, crews kept the operation running around the clock by working three 8-hour shifts, or "tricks."[11] Meanwhile, machinists, boilermakers, blacksmiths, carmen, electricians, and sheet-metal workers kept the company's rolling stock operational. In roundhouses strategically located at junction points, inspectors examined steam engines for defects, replaced steel tires, and double-checked the locomotive's myriad moving parts. All of this transpired under the watchful eyes of the roundhouse foreman and the master mechanic. Although shop workers were divided along craft lines, working as cogs in a larger machine served to fuse them together. Similar to the operating crafts, shopmen felt attached to their work. When repaired engines again belched steam and left the shops, the men who had labored together looked on with pride. A taste of this experience, an electrician later explained, and "it gets in your blood."[12]

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[10] *Report of the Eight-Hour Commission*, 384, 387. Licht, *Working for the Railroad*, 182-85.
[11] *Report of the Eight-Hour Commission*, 274.
[12] Colin J. Davis, *Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen's Strike* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 15-20. Quote from p. 20.

Figure 3: A coal train enters the west yard in Corbin. Courtesy of Ron Flanary, L&N Historical Society.

An extensive set of company rules kept the synchronization of labor in place. For John Garrett, an L&N engineer, a day of work meant "you had a superior over you all the time, to see that you lived up to the rules." Before each run, the company's book of rules mandated he receive a call an hour and a half before the train was to depart. The first hour was his to spend as he saw fit. Once he arrived at the roundhouse to take charge of the engine, the clock took command and thirty minutes of paid "preparatory time" began. He and the fireman used this time to ensure they had the proper tools and enough coal and water to make the run. The engine left the roundhouse at the exact time on the call sheet, a brake tester gave him the go-ahead, and they pulled out of the yard. When they returned several hours later, Garrett detached the engine and

turned it back over to the roundhouse. Before he went home, he stopped by the register room to fill out his trip card, make out an engine report, and enter the details of his trip in the logbook: he and his fireman's names, their engine number, departure time and arrival time, and the total hours they were on duty. Once off the railroad's time, the crew was "at liberty to do whatever we wanted to do until we was called again."[13]

Railroad management enforced discipline and the hierarchical division of labor through the use of seniority lists. By progressing upwards throughout the course of their careers, railroad workers in entry level positions expected to be promoted to the better paying, more prestigious jobs. At the top of the ladder stood the engineers and conductors, "labor aristocrats" who earned higher wages and enjoyed more prestige than the rest of the crew.[14] Firemen, considered to be the "engineer in embryo," aimed to one day pilot the engines themselves, while brakemen aimed for the rank of conductor.[15] Unlike the mileage system that governed the lives of engineers and firemen, work in the yards was regulated more intensely by time. A favorable position on the shift schedule, instead of a preferred route, was the aim of men in the yards. At the bottom of the ladder, a new switchman worked off the "extra board," filling in for regular men in the event of no-shows or other vacancies. Eventually he started a regular shift, often the "third trick" through the night. After several years in this position, he could apply for a promotion to the head of the crew as a yard conductor, also called a foreman. The most well-regarded foremen could then ascend to assistant yardmaster and eventually the top job of yardmaster, with authority over all switching crews. Yard and switching service implemented a promotion system wholly separate

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[13] John Garrett Oral History Interview, Knox County Oral History Project, Kentucky Historical Society (hereafter KHS).
[14] Paul Michael Taillon *Good, Reliable, White Men: Railroad Brotherhoods, 1877–1917* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 6. Stromquist, *Generation of Boomers*, 106-7.
[15] Quoted in Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 28.

from the operating trades. Although sometimes labeled "junior employment" by the operating trades, a career in the yards rewarded steady employment and the jobs at the top granted men social prestige.[16]

Railroaders' work for the company depended on the labor of their wives at home, who conducted the unpaid and often unsung domestic work essential to a functioning household. A railroader rarely left home without his lunch, prepared for him by his wife. Sandwiches, coffee, and extra cigarettes could be found in the lunchboxes of nearly every man headed for the railyard. From preparing these meals to shouldering the burden of their husbands' sometimes long and odd hours, women's labor allowed railroad men to be the sole breadwinners. In the home, cooking, cleaning, washing, and caretaking occupied most of their time and effort. With a father on the road most days out of the year, children of railroaders grew up almost exclusively at the feet of their mothers. Wives and children also supplemented a railroad man's wages by taking in boarders, sewing, growing vegetables, and raising hogs and chickens. The need for these kinds of additional labor tended to decrease as railroad men gained security through the seniority system. In general, railroaders married and formed nuclear families at higher rates near the top of the ladder. Engineers and conductors, for example, were more likely to be married and have more children than were brakemen and firemen, occupations frequently held by young, single men.[17]

Whether in the yards or on an engine, railroaders labored according to their places in the hierarchy. All were subject to the discipline of the company, but the promise of promotion motivated those at the bottom to climb their way up the occupational ladder. Engineers and conductors – the "labor aristocrats" – supervised multiple workers, possessed a good deal of

[16] *Report of the Eight-Hour Commission*, 274.
[17] Tallion, *Good, Reliable, White Men*, 22-24.

technical knowledge, and earned higher wages than other industrial workers. Railroading, however, was still dirty, dangerous work, highly circumscribed by the management structure of railroad companies. The men who worked on the railroads championed this a badge of masculinity, and viewed a job in the shops, yards, or on an engine as a privilege. Many a railroader continued to work after losing an arm to the crushing weight of a boxcar, the "Empty Sleeve" a symbol of his dedication to the job.[18] As firemen, brakemen, and switchmen looked up to the positions of engineer, conductor, and yardmaster, they saw paths to a more prestigious working life.

Race and Railroad Unions

To exert control over these work rules and seniority lists, railroaders formed labor unions within their particular crafts. In 1863, disgruntled engineers in Michigan founded the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), the first permanent trade union representing railway workers. The BLE established guidelines for conduct and discipline, while its mutual aid initiatives provided railroaders with accident insurance, death benefits, and burial funds.[19] Based on hierarchies of skill and seniority, railroad unions mirrored the organizational structure of the companies. Local brotherhood lodges elected members of adjustment committees to represent them in the offices of their railroad division. If these negotiations failed, a system-wide committee presented grievances to the general manager of the railroad, with the involvement of railroad executives and national brotherhood figures – called Grand Masters.[20] The Order of Railway Conductors (1869) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (1873) also emerged in

[18] Taillon *Good, Reliable, White Men*, 34-35.
[19] Licht, *Working for the Railroad*, 241-42. Richardson, *Locomotive Engineer*, 196-97.
[20] Pier Luigi Gregory DePaola, "Management and Organized Labor Relations of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad During the Depression Year 1893," (M.A. Thesis, University of Louisville, 1971), 11.

this period as benevolent organizations, with both eventually taking on the role of trade unions. Finally, railroaders in New York organized the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (1883) to represent brakemen, switchmen, and other yard workers.[21] Competitors vied for prominence with the brotherhoods, like the Switchmen's Mutual Aid Association and the Brotherhood of Railway Conductors, but the "Big Four" persisted as the most powerful and influential unions.

While they emerged as protection agencies, the brotherhoods also served as fraternal organizations that buttressed the identities of white working men.[22] Quasi-Masonic and steeped in rituals such as initiation rites and secret oaths, all brotherhoods also restricted their membership to men, "white born, of good moral character, sober and industrious, sound in body and limb, not less than eighteen nor more than forty-five years of age, and able to read and write the English language."[23] Other railroad unions that imposed racial barriers to full equality included the largest shopcraft unions, the International Association of Machinists and the boilermakers and blacksmith brotherhoods, as well as the unions representing the clerks, telegraphers, and maintenance-of-way employees.[24]

The railroad brotherhoods were predictably conservative in their dealings with railroad management. In the labor conflicts of the late nineteenth century, the brotherhoods rejected the principles of federation, and the producerism of the Knights of Labor in favor of a craft-based approach. In several moments, industrial unionism did appear to be a possibility only to be derailed by the actions of the brotherhoods. This debate drove Eugene V. Debs, once the secretary-treasurer of the BLF, to embrace federation in the American Railway Union (ARU) in

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[21] Licht, *Working for the Railroad*, 242-43, 267.
[22] The most important work on this subject is Tallion, *Good, Reliable, White Men*.
[23] Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of* Color, 28. Licht, *Working for the Railroad*, 241.
[24] Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris. *The Black Worker* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 284-85. Davis, *Power at Odds*, 27-30.

1893.[25] In the midst of the rubble of the failed Pullman strike that was broken by the federal government, the railroad brotherhoods stood ready to pick up the pieces. Indeed, while they did not affiliate with the American Federation of Labor, the brotherhood unions likewise adopted a course that sought a friendlier relationship with capital.[26]

Throughout these struggles, white railroaders opted to not make common cause with their Black coworkers. Both the engineers and conductors brotherhoods barred Black membership from their inception, and were successful in keeping the occupations lily white. The firemen and trainmen brotherhoods banned African Americans later on but struggled to expel them from the crafts entirely. Considered in context, the brotherhoods' exclusion of African Americans mirrored similar conservative labor organizations in the nineteenth century. One racist rationale for this approach was the intelligence required to operate a steam engine, which in the opinion of one member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, "no Negro had, or could ever acquire."[27] Most of the craft unions in repair shops, in addition to the telegraphers, clerks, and maintenance of way employees, either prohibited Black workers or refused them full membership status. Even the federated ARU denied Black railroaders membership, over the strenuous objections of Eugene V. Debs. Outside of rare moments of interracial unionism, the railroad unions ensured that many crafts remained a "Nordic closed shop."[28]

As white railroad unionists crafted racialized and gendered identities, they excluded workers across the color line. African American railroad workers thus found themselves

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[25] Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers*, 76-99.
[26] Tallion, *Good, Reliable, White Men*, 97-98.
[27] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 439.
[28] Quote from Eric Arnesen, "Like Banquo's Ghost, It Will Not Down: The Race Question and the American Railroads, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (Dec. 1994): 1602. Theresa Ann Case details the biracial unionism of the Knights of Labor strikes against the Gould system in her *The Great Southwest Railroad Strike and Free Labor* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010). Many of the railroad workers who joined the Knights were those in the non-operating trades.

"unorganized in the midst of a highly organized industry," and at the bottom of the occupational ladder.[29] Locked out of the top jobs, Black railroaders did not operate under the same seniority system as their white coworkers. Many Black railroaders worked as Pullman porters, firemen, and brakemen, as well as section hands and helpers in repair shops. Yet their exclusion belied their essential roles in the creation and maintenance of the nation's railway system. Before the Civil War, enslaved Black men had built railroads and worked as firemen and brakemen in the South and continued to do so after emancipation. When the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad pierced the Appalachian Mountains in the 1870s, Black convict laborers laid track and bored holes for explosives. Many, like John Henry, paid with their lives.[30] Aside from working as laborers, African Americans found work primarily in the more dangerous positions of firemen and brakemen in the South. Shoveling coal into the firebox, or scrambling across the roof of a boxcar to twist the brakes, seemed like fitting occupations for those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, while the coveted positions of engineer and conductor remained off-limits for African Americans well into the twentieth century. White railroaders gave firemen the nickname "blackie," and branded labor-intensive freight trains using racial slurs.[31]

Railroad companies, especially in the South, exploited racial divisions to control labor costs. "Negroes do work white men won't do," a superintendent in Kentucky explained flatly, and employers preferred black workers "because they are cheaper."[32] While a select few lines paid out an equal wage regardless of race, earnings for a Black fireman usually ranged around a quarter less than that of a white fireman.[33] In this context, the relationship between a white

[29] Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 286.
[30] Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man.*
[31] Ramon F. Adams, *The Language of the Railroader* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 14, 105.
[32] Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 169.
[33] *Report of the Eight-Hour Commission*, 414-16.

engineer and a Black fireman took on more of a "master-servant" dynamic. In fleeting moments, however, as the train surged across miles of rail, the rhythm of shovel, fire, and steam could fuse both white and Black railroaders into a single unit. Isaac Zachary, a character in Lloyd Brown's 1951 proletarian novel *Iron City,* told of how a white engineer "might see in the flashing light of the opened firedoor a fellow man," and forget for a moment "that he was black." Once the train slowed to a stop, the trance of the road broke, and the Black firemen returned to their "proper" place. When asked when a Black man could become an engineer, a white railroader told Zachary, "Company wouldn't allow it, and the Brotherhood neither. Never."[34]

Racial tensions between workers enabled railroad companies like the L&N to pit them against each other, usually to devastating effects for unions. In 1891, Black brakemen started working on a previously all-white division of the L&N in Alabama, prompting a violent response from white railroaders. Black brakemen had to dodge bullets, and a sympathetic white brakeman caught a beating for working alongside them. The L&N did not back down, however. Like the Southern Railway and the Illinois Central, the L&N continued employing Black firemen and brakemen in large numbers. Throughout the first century of railroading, Black workers often entered the industry as strikebreakers, which elicited disdain and violence from the white brotherhoods.[35]

In addition to the L&N's "ample supply of negroes for firemen" that allowed it to ward off many a strike by white railroaders, its president Milton H. Smith carried out a personal vendetta against unions.[36] Smith, who ascended to the presidency of the L&N Railroad in 1891, viewed all unions as "threats to the prerogatives of management" full of dishonest, lazy "rabble-

[34] Lloyd L. Brown, *Iron City*, 2nd edition (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 159-60.
[35] Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 25, 35-38.
[36] *Report of the Eight Hour Commission,* 272.

rousers." When L&N workers threatened to strike to oppose wage cuts with the backing of the brotherhoods in 1893, Smith laid plans to import strikebreakers and enlisted the services of the Pinkerton Detective Agency. After meeting with Smith, the brotherhoods accepted a wage decrease with the promise that they would be restored at the end of the year. While the company was pleased, the compromise severely damaged the standing of the union with the rank-and-file, especially when the railroad failed to hold up their end of the bargain. Wages did not return to 1893 levels for another six years. Shopmen in Louisville went on strike, which the L&N broke by importing European immigrant workers under the protection of armed guards. Not soon afterwards, Smith purchased a railroad car for his own personal use. Management-labor relations, to say the least, remained "tenuous and often uncomfortable."[37]

Even after a landmark piece of legislation, L&N railroaders near the bottom of the ladder faced an intransigent management that was hell-bent on denying them recognition. The Erdman Act of 1898 prevented companies from firing workers on interstate railroads for joining a union and promoted a voluntary – yet binding – arbitration system to settle disputes, with the company, the union, and an agreed-upon third party as the three parties. Now with a permanent seat at the table, the act granted an "unpreceded level of security" for the brotherhoods, especially the engineers and conductors.[38] Milton H. Smith came to tolerate dealing with the engineers and conductors, whose measured and conservative tactics he viewed as beneficial to managing the labor force. He did not, however, view the "junior brotherhoods" of trainmen and firemen as worthy of a seat at the table. When L&N firemen attempted to organize a lodge after the Erdman Act, railroad management resorted to bribery, coercion, and intimidation to keep the union out. A

[37] Klein, *L&N*, 260-62. See also Pier Luigi Gregory DePaola, "Management and Organized Labor Relations of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad During the Depression Year 1893," (M.A. Thesis, University of Louisville, 1971).
[38] Stromquist, *Generation of Boomers*, 265.

company official promised one of the aspiring unionists a promotion if he withdrew his support, which he declined. When president Smith declined to meet with the grand masters of the BLF and BRT, the leaders deduced the L&N "are determined to destroy the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen on their system."[39] Smith stood as a "striking illustration" of the power of a railroad president, particularly one with a "resolute antibrotherhood attitude" that hindered the progress of collective bargaining on the line. Along with other major roads, the L&N recognized the BLE and ORC after the Erdman Act of 1898, but it refused to deal with the trainmen and firemen until World War I.[40]

Seemingly wedged between powerful railroad executives and the Black workers that they saw as driving down their wages, white unionists in the firemen and trainmen brotherhoods perceived enemies everywhere. Rather than organize with African Americans, however, white railroaders sought to eliminate the competition. As early as 1897, Frank P. Sargent, Grand Master of the BLF, advocated equal wages as a means to achieve this end. If Black workers were no longer cheaper to employ, he reasoned, railroad companies would hire white men instead due to their "superior intelligence." Sargent stressed the need to obtain the support of engineers in the matter, who were "to some extent responsible for the employment of the negro firemen." "It will only be a matter of time," he warned, "until the white engineer will also be displaced by the negro."[41] When it came to the question of whether or not to admit Black railroaders into their ranks, however, letters of protest poured into the firemen and trainmen brotherhood journals. An engineer from Birmingham stated plainly, "I don't want to be affiliated with any organization

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[39] "Grand Master's Report," *Grand Lodge Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Convention* (Peioria, Ill.: Edward Hine & Co., 1898) 58, 68.
[40] *Report of the Eight-Hour Commission*, 272, 339.
[41] "Third Vice Grand Master's Report," *Grand Lodge Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Convention* (Peioria, Ill.: Edward Hine & Co., 1898), 17.

when I have to be on an equality with the negro."[42] In response to northern railroaders calling for the admission of Black railroaders, a fireman from Louisiana argued that southerners had done "far more to advance and uplift the negro" than Yankees had, but they would "draw the line when it comes to taking him into our worthy order."[43]

To allow African Americans into the union would be to grant them social equality, a conundrum that undermined railroad labor solidarity throughout the Gilded Age. White railroaders made this clear in the pages of the *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*. One writer asserted that "the Negro… cannot be fitted either by birth, education or otherwise to fill any position of trust," not just those on the railroad. He proceeded to spew forth stereotypes, including that Black Americans were "of an exceedingly low order of intelligence… naturally vicious, slothful, filthy, and indolent." These qualities allegedly disqualified Black men for the jobs of trainmen and switchmen, endangered their fellow workers, and put the company at risk. A fellow union member agreed, stating that "where there is life at stake the negro should not be tolerated." When a writer rose up in opposition to point out that African Americans were "born in a free country" and should be judged equally to white men, he was derided as a "champion of the monkey tribe." Embittered by racially discriminatory wages, some white railroaders blamed company policies that gave them little choice other than to hire Black workers. The remedy that many advocated was to organize white men together and "eliminate at once and forever this degraded element" from all jobs on the railroad.[44]

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[42] Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis, ed., *The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present, Vol. IV: The Black Worker During the Era of the American Federation of Labor and the Railroad Brotherhoods* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1979; Reissued 2019), 87.
[43] Foner and Lewis, *Black Worker*, 97-98.
[44] Foner and Lewis, *Black Worker*, 103-107.

On several occasions, white railroaders hit the picket lines in attempts to expel Black workers from the industry entirely. In 1909, white firemen on the Georgia Railroad struck over the presence of Black firemen on preferred passenger train runs. The policy of seniority, they contended, entitled them to the cushy positions, since Black firemen were barred from becoming engineers. They also viewed the lower wages paid to Black railroaders as an employer bulwark against walk outs. Under the Erdman Act, however, a panel decided against the white firemen, and called for an elimination of the wage gap. Two years later, white firemen struck the Queen & Crescent line for a similar reason. Passenger service ceased, and freight trains fired by Black men faced considerable violence from mostly white communities along the Q&C. In the end, the white firemen were again stymied, as the company agreed to not employ Black firemen on specific sections and limited their numbers via quotas, but kept them on the company payroll. White railroaders in Tennessee were, to say the least, frustrated at the outcome. As an editorial in a Tennessee newspaper proclaimed, "Americans have determined that neither the negro, the Chinaman nor the Japanese will 'run' either this country or its railroads." For the time being, however, white railroaders remained unable to exclude Black workers from the industry.[45]

In their attempts to force powerful railroad companies to recognize their right to bargain, railroaders in the brotherhood unions embraced a "whites-only" view of labor organization. The highly skilled, "labor aristocrat" positions of engineer and conductor pioneered this approach and used it to keep their occupations lily white. For railroaders in lower-paying, less skilled positions, however, the rejection of interracial unionism weakened their bargaining power. Railroad companies exploited these divisions by employing Black firemen and brakemen at lower wages and refused to back down when pressured by the unions. Over the course of these

[45] Arnesen. *Brotherhoods of Color*, 36-38; p. 38 for quote.

struggles, white railroaders came to view Black workers as "natural strike breakers," with no place in the labor movement. Even when they were not their direct competitors, white railroaders thought Black laborers were determined to "undermine white living standards."[46] As workers in an industry that incentivized climbing the ladder, and represented by unions that discouraged cross-craft and interracial organization, white railroaders came to resent the very presence of Black labor.

Transportation Town

Within the sprawling networks of rail, many railroaders made their homes in regional hubs situated at crucial junction points. Nestled in the foothills of the Appalachians between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Knoxville, Tennessee, the town of Corbin, Kentucky was one such hub on the L&N. Laborers carved it out of an area near the Laurel River called the "Big Swamp" in 1880s as part of the L&N expansion, and according to legend, the L&N postal agent named the fledgling settlement after a local minister.[47] Traffic from four divisions of the L&N converged daily in the town. Out of the mountains came trains on the Cumberland Valley line, filled with coal mined out of southeastern Kentucky and southwestern Virginia. Freight from Virginia and West Virginia, in addition to Tennessee and points further south, passed through the station on the way to Cincinnati and Louisville. Likewise, southbound traffic to Knoxville and Atlanta, Georgia routed through Corbin. By the mid-1910s, the L&N shops operated a roundhouse that could service up to twenty-five locomotives, which, combined with the yard's large amount of track, fashioned it as one of the most important terminals in the region. Its role as a conduit of

[46] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 445.
[47] "A History of Corbin, by John D. Feather," *Corbin Daily Tribune 75th Anniversary and Progress Edition*, Feb. 23, 1967. John Leland Crawford, *A Tale of One City: Some Highlights in the History of Corbin* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1981), 9.

industrial activity led one observer to describe it as "the gateway to the coal fields." In the constant movement of coal trains through Corbin, the writer observed "the pulsations of the development of Southeastern Kentucky."[48]

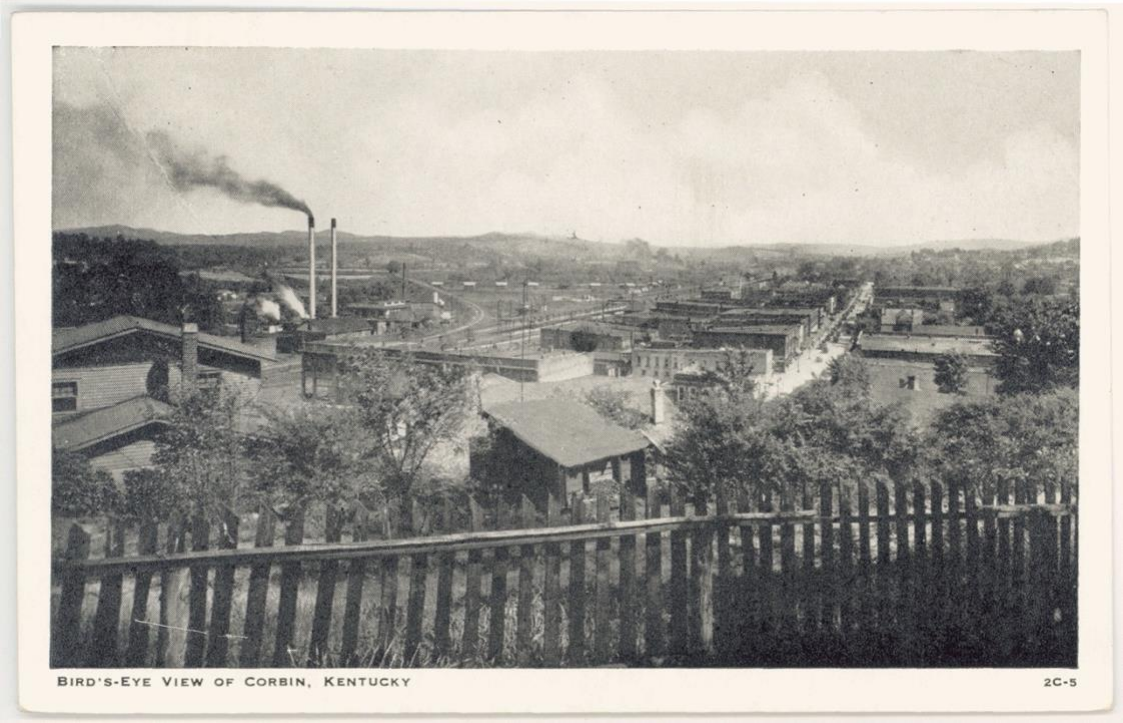

Figure 4: Postcard of Corbin, Ky., likely between 1910-1930. ExploreUK Online Database.

Corbin was not alone in its position as a railroad junction. Some seventy miles north, the L&N established another railroad hub to receive coal from new ventures in 1910. That year, the giant Maryland-based Consolidation Coal began to acquire lands in the Elkhorn Coalfield of

[48] *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 28, 1920. Herr, *Louisville and Nashville,* 199-206.

eastern Kentucky.[49] Concurrent with this investment, L&N acquired rights to the Lexington and Eastern Railroad, which ran from Lexington to Jackson, KY. The L&N set about extending its line to reach Perry and Letcher counties, and also built a new coal route from Winchester. For the switching yard and repair shops, the L&N selected land in Estill County near the Kentucky River. To avoid the high tax rates imposed by the county, the L&N built a new town and deemed it Ravenna. Construction crews built the shops and roundhouse between 1910 and 1915. Meanwhile, the Ravenna Realty Company, organized by the L&N, sold lots to railroad employees and business owners. The influx of northern capital saw the "railroad gem" expand from an outpost to bustling town of about 1,000. Although younger than Corbin, Ravenna followed a similar developmental trajectory.[50]

Their reliance on the railroad, as well as the railroad's role as a conduit of industrial activity, qualify these communities as "transportation towns." Historians have previously identified similar places as "railroad towns," or places whose "very existence was predicated on the location of railroad shop and service facilities." Dependent on the railroad for their livelihoods, residents of these towns exhibited ironclad loyalty towards railroad workers.[51] A third of Corbin's population worked for the L&N in its heyday, as freight handlers, conductors, engineers, firemen, and repairmen. Most of these men lived within sight of the smoke of the steam engines, either in modest family homes on the east end of town, or in boarding rooms at the Railroad Y.M.C.A. Those who weren't employed by the L&N were tied to the railroad in

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[49] *History of the Consolidation Coal Company, 1864-1934,* (New York: The Consolidation Coal Co. Inc., 1934), 57.
[50] W.T. Williams, *History of Ravenna, Kentucky* (Irvine, Ky.: W.T. Williams, 1956), 1-8. *L&N Employes' Magazine* vol. 3, no. 4 (June 1927): 10.
[51] Stromquist, *Generation of Boomers*, 142-87. Herbert Gutman first identified this phenomenon among small railroad towns in the 1870s, and attributed it to the strength of community in the face of interpersonal corporate forces. "Trouble on the Railroads in 1873-1874: Prelude to the 1877 Crisis?" in Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society: In Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 295-320.

some way, either in the service industry or as merchants. Clustered together in neighborhoods, the families of railroaders formed close-knit communities. Children of second-shift workers in Corbin played together as they watched their fathers walk to the yards clad in their overalls. The shared experiences of work, and the home life needed to support it, gave many the impression that the railroad was a family of its own. "There were so many lives that [the L&N] touched," one Corbin resident remembered years later, "it was just a railroad town."[52]

The makeup of railroad communities mirrored the racialized occupational hierarchies of the workplace. From its inception, the workforce in Corbin consisted of mostly native-born white men from Kentucky and adjacent states. Many of these men and their families arrived in Corbin with the coming of the railroad. Whitley County native W.A. Hood started working for the L&N as a section hand in the 1880s, and saw Corbin become as a rail center over his decades-long career.[53] In the 1890s, Joe Doody of Marion County, Kentucky worked as one of the first conductors on the Cumberland Valley line to Cumberland Gap. Known as "Captain," Doody was active in the ORC and became known as one of the town's founders. An Irish Catholic, he also helped establish the Sacred Heart parish in Corbin in 1899.[54] Doody and other members of the brotherhood unions in Corbin served in elected positions, owned homes, and invested in local real estate. Described as "good-souled, clever fellows," in the words of one union member, railroad men thought of themselves as the backbone of the town. One Corbin conductor estimated that "ninety percent of railroad men" owned their own "humble home in the mountains of southeastern Kentucky."[55]

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[52] Willard McBurney Oral History, Corbin Railroad Museum Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.
[53] *L&N Employes's Magazine*, vol. 5, no. 9 (Nov. 1929): 21.
[54] Paul E. Ryan, *History of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, On Occasion of the Centenary of the Diocese, 1853-1953* (Covington: The Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, 1953), 578-81.
[55] *The Railway Conductor*, vol. 22 (1905): 923, 132.

The social hierarchy of a transportation town emerged in the roiling context of late nineteenth industrial life. Indeed, a place dependent on the constant movement of goods and people could be a rough and tumble place. Corbin's location in three different counties – Laurel, Whitley, and Knox – created confusion with regard to legal jurisdiction, which invited lawlessness. Like other working-class men in the nineteenth century, railroad men drank more than their share of alcohol. "I drank because all railroad men drank. I drank because I liked it," the veteran railroader Harry French recalled in his memoirs. While the quality of the liquor was "terrible," French bragged that "the quantity would suffice to float a good-sized boat."[56] In Corbin, railroaders gathered with miners, timber workers and farmers at businesses across the street from the depot. Eventually known as "Saloon Row," the block contained, at one point, ten barrooms, and was notorious as a den of drinking, gambling, and prostitution. When their deeds were too illicit for public view, they moved to the woods near the railroad bridge just to the north of the saloons. A "pest hole for crime of all sorts" outside the Corbin city jurisdiction, locals gave the place a name, "Hell's Half-Acre." Killings of men and women were common, the circumstances often murky. It was not uncommon for a bullet-riddled body to be placed on the railroad tracks. Passing L&N trains mutilated many a corpse, providing authorities with a believable, if inaccurate, cause of death.[57]

In the aftermath of the vicious 1899 gubernatorial race and the assassination of the populist Governor Goebel, Corbin's Saloon Row served as an arena for the state's battle over monopoly power. Kentucky Republicans "preached a regular holy war throughout the mountains" after Goebel's death, as one resident remembered, especially in the heavily-Republican "Bloody Eleventh" Congressional District of which Corbin was a part. "Bitterness

[56] French, *Railroadman*, 12.
[57] *Corbin Times Anniversary Edition*, p. 6. See also *The Citizen (Berea, Ky.)*, Sept. 27, 1906.

prevailed" among white community members in tense political debates at the Masonic Hall, and when a young Corbinite cheered in favor of the William Jennigns Bryan and the Democrats, the front porch of his family home received a hail of gunfire.[58] In 1901, a conflict between the Shotwell and White families erupted, with political differences fueling the violence. The Shotwells were well-known Corbin residents and members of the Republican Party, with their family's original home just south of town. The White family, on the other hand, hailed from Virginia and had moved to Corbin in hopes of the men getting work on the railroad. They also voted Democratic. A dispute between the two families arose from a rebuffed courtship between Rolla White and Belle Shotwell, in which White murdered her father Uncle Jim Shotwell. In retribution, the Shotwells planted the dynamite under the White's restaurant on Saloon Row. The explosion destroyed the store, sending patrons "through the ceiling" but leaving them miraculously unscathed. The Shotwells waited for the Whites to emerge and the resulting volley of 300 shots peppered Saloon Row, killing two bystanders. Only the arrival of the state militia, complete with a Gatling gun mounted on a railcar, staved off further violence. In a transportation town, party politics and support for the railroad provoked strong feelings.[59]

The violence and debauchery of Saloon Row drew the ire of the L&N and reformers, who sought to create a reliable class of white laboring men. All too aware that a drunk, mostly transient workforce was difficult to manage, the L&N partnered with the Young Men's Christian Association to construct a boarding house across from the freight depot in 1902. When a train needed to be loaded, or unloaded, railroad callboys could now find most of the hands in one place, rather than scattered in boarding houses and saloons across town.[60] George E. Evans,

[58] Crawford, *A Tale of One City*, 39-40.
[59] John D. "Peter" Feather Oral History, KHS. *Courier-Journal*, Jan. 18, 1901.
[60] As other historians have observed, Y.M.C.A. lodges were built in company towns with the intention of improving relations between ownership and workers, and Corbin was no exception. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion,* 125.

general manager of the L&N, touted his belief that the Y.M.C.A. would result in "employees being more comfortable and enabled to give good service," which would in turn make them easier to manage. The building provided meals and sleeping quarters for the railroaders, and sponsored activities to promote Christian ideals over those of the saloon.[61] Carrie Nation brought her signature hatchet to town in 1906, offering her brand of temperance and Christianity as salves for Corbin's violent streak.[62] In November 1907, an overturned coal oil lamp in an upstairs room of a saloon sparked a blaze that engulfed the entire street, destroyed the depot, and put an end to Saloon Row.[63] Legislation outlawing the sale of alcohol passed a popular referendum in the following months, and the Y.M.C.A. declared victory. Corbin's chapter conducted Bible class weekly, and held five religious meetings every week.[64] In the transition from outpost to transportation hub, Corbin's residents embraced the values of white respectability touted by the Y.M.C.A and the railroad brotherhoods.

Whiteness in a transportation town came to encompass more than just Protestantism, however. For the first half of the twentieth century, Corbin boasted the largest Catholic church in southeastern Kentucky, and after the opening of St. Camilus Academy in 1914, the area's only Catholic academy. St. Camilus provided the best education in town, bringing Catholic and Protestant children of various ethnic backgrounds under the same roof.[65] Father Ambrose Reger noted that among the boarders at the academy, "Germans, Hungarians, Italians, and Syrians find room beside their native Kentuckian or Virginian sisters."[66] Corbin also supported a small population of immigrants from Europe. In 1910, Russian-born Jewish merchant Michael

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[61] *Courier-Journal*, Jan. 11, 1902.
[62] *Courier-Journal*, Dec. 4, 1906.
[63] Crawford, *A Tale of One City*, 17; *Kentucky Advocate*, Nov. 8, 1907.
[64] *Railroad Men: A Monthly Publication Devoted to the Railroad Service*, vol. 21 (1907): 58-59.
[65] *Catholic Educational Review*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1916): 210-12.
[66] T. Leo Keaveny, *The Rural Problem and the Catholic School* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1922), 81.

Sherman ran a dry goods store downtown, which Louis Merenbloom and Ben Feinstein operated a decade later. Merenbloom eventually opened his own department store, remaining in Corbin until his retirement. The influence of the Catholic and Jewish adherents in Corbin testified to the religious and ethnic diversity that began to characterize Appalachia around the turn of the twentieth century.[67]

On the other hand, only a small number of African Americans called Corbin home. By 1910, the town was still almost 95 percent white of native birth.[68] Long-time resident Thomas W. Gallagher recalled that there had only been "a few local negroes" in Corbin for many decades, possibly "because they could not find work in a railroad town." Meanwhile, the surrounding county seat towns of London, Williamsburg, and Barbourville all boasted modest Black populations.[69] The 1900 census for Corbin listed forty-three Black residents, most of whom hailed from the bluegrass state. Women worked in domestic service as laundresses and cooks, while the men worked as porters, bell boys, or laborers for the L&N. By 1910, sixty-four "black" or "mulatto" people resided in Corbin out of a population of around 2,500, all but seven of whom hailed from the bluegrass state. Corbin did not have a formal system of segregation. Black families were scattered across the town's different wards. Clustered on either side of its downtown center and railroad depot, Black women worked as laundresses and cooks, while the men worked as porters, bell boys, or laborers for the L&N. Minnie Parks, known to white Corbin residents as "Aunt Mitt," ran a laundry on Railroad Street, near the L&N yards. Years after her death, she was remembered for tending to sick and ailing railroaders. Both of Parks's grandsons

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[67] Individual 1910 and 1920 Census information accessed via ancestry.com. Background information gleaned from: H.E. Everman. "Corbin, Kentucky, A Socio-Economic Anomaly: Portrait of a Diverse Railroad Boom Town, 1895-1930," Unpublished Typescript in possession of author. Louis Merenbloom was interviewed about his Corbin experiences in the *Courier-Journal*, Feb. 20, 1973. See also Deborah Weiner, *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).
[68] 1910 Federal Census, vol. II, 754.
[69] Thomas W. Gallagher, *My Memoirs* (Corbin, Ky., n.d.), 100.

lived with her and worked as laborers for the L&N. Another laundress, Emma Woods, lived with her daughters and one granddaughter on nearby Poplar Street. Orville McKee and his family lived on Center Street, close to the depot. He worked as a porter, his brother as a laborer, both for the railroad. All of these families lived in rented houses, with one exception. George Smith, a "mulatto" cook for the L&N, owned a home on Kentucky Avenue with his wife, mother, five children, and a boarder.[70] In the transportation town, the overall social and economic standing of African Americans did not pose a threat to white residents.

As it emerged as a town built by and for railroad workers, white railroaders ascended to the top of the occupational ladder and served in positions of prominence in town. Much like their working lives, railroaders' social circles reflected the influence of the labor hierarchy.[71] Engineers attended the Masonic Lodge and dined at one of Corbin's hotels, while firemen and brakemen played pool and ate at one of the many boarding houses in town. The union men gathered at weekly meetings: Corbin's ORC lodge met at the Odd Fellows Hall on Sundays, and the BLE gathered at the Masonic Hall on Monday mornings.[72] By the World War I era, Walter H. Worsham, a passenger train conductor on the Cumberland Valley line, also occupied the position of vice president of the town bank. He was a charter member of the ORC in Corbin and had served as its chief conductor, in addition to being a "earnest member of the Baptist Church" a Democrat (less of a mark against a Corbinite by this time), and an affiliate of several local Masonic lodges.[73] Harry Feather, the master mechanic in charge of the Cumberland Valley

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[70] Ancestry.com. *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006. *L&N Employes' Magazine,* vol. 3, no. 5 (July 1927), 75.
[71] While the master-apprentice relationship between engineers and firemen could lead to some after-work fraternization, railroaders mostly stuck with their own kind. Licht, *Working for the Railroad*, 232-33.
[72] *The Conductor and Brakemen,* vol. 29 (1912); *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal,* vol. 48 (1914), x. Everman, "A Socioeconomic Anomaly."
[73] William E. Connelley and E.M. Coulter, *History of Kentucky*, vol. 4 (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1922), 419-20

division in Corbin, supervised 2,500 employees in the repair department. He ascended the ranks from the age of fifteen in 1884, when he started as a machinist apprentice in the Louisville shops. In 1913, almost thirty years after he entered the service, the L&N appointed him master mechanic. In many ways, Feather exemplified the ideal railroad man: a "stalwart" Republican in politics, a "zealous" deacon of the Christian Church, and a member of the Odd Fellows, Elks, and Modern Woodmen of American to boot. He, his wife, and their five children lived in a handsome house away from the railroad yards and also owned a farm west of town. A "well known and popular citizen of Corbin," Feather was a leader on the job and in the community.[74]

Younger railroaders looked up to these men and aspired to ascend to their positions. By following the rules and biding their time, it was possible for them to do so. Engineer John Garrett, for example, started with the L&N as a fireman, shoveling coal on trips between Corbin and Norton, Virginia. He ascended to the rank of engineer five years later, and credited seniority lists with ensuring that he "started on a Model T and finished up on a Cadillac."[75] Charles E. Elliott hired on as a switchman for the L&N and never considered a change to road service, for fear that he would lose his accumulated seniority. After four years, he attained the position of foreman and assembled trains in the yards for the rest of his career.[76] Gilbert G. Root also started out as a switchman, climbing the ladder to foreman and eventually becoming assistant yardmaster in 1918.[77] He owned his own home, played a role in the founding of Corbin's first lodge of the BRT, and served on the City Council. When he ran for mayor, he did so as "a union man, a railroad man" who stood poised to "serve his class, the workers."[78]

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[74] William E. Connelley and E.M. Coulter, *History of Kentucky*, vol. 5 (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1922), 292-93.
[75] John Garrett Oral History Interview, Knox County Oral History Project, KHS.
[76] Charles E. Elliott Oral History, Knox County Oral History Project, KHS.
[77] *L&N Employes' Magazine*, vol. 28, no. 9 (Sept. 1952): 51.
[78] *Corbin Times*, Oct. 31, 1919.

Key to white railroaders' ascent, however, was their embrace of racism and exclusion. Everything in a transportation town revolved around the steam engines and steel rails that employed men and gave the town its purpose. A job on the railroad gave men a sense that they were providing not only for their families, but for the town as a whole. "That black smoke from them steam engines looked good," as a veteran switchman remembered, "and that's what Corbin lived on, was the L&N Railroad."[79] Railroaders' social lives, politics, and religion came to reflect the ideologies of the workplace, as they and members of the community equated well-paying jobs and full citizenship with white skin. The result was a town that was run by, and for, white railroad workers.

Race and Labor in Coal

Railroaders in Corbin knew how important the coal of southeastern Kentucky was to their livelihoods. The town's role as the conduit of the Cumberland Valley division meant that it depended, in the words of a veteran railroader, on the "many tons of that black diamond hauled out of these coalfields down here by the railroad."[80] The L&N could lay down rails and build transportation towns wherever they were profitable, but coal – and from the 1870s onward it was bituminous coal – had to be extracted wherever it lay in the ground. This geographical and material reality laid the foundation for a peculiar industry. In contrast to the railroads, which tended towards consolidation and monopoly, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century American coal industry was intensely competitive. Thousands of operations dotted the coalfields across thirty-three states, some centered in highly capitalized company-operated towns and others simply small "doghole" mines near the railroad tracks. The major coalfields east of the

[79] Charles E. Elliott Oral History Interview, Knox County Oral History Project, KHS.
[80] Cecil Hayes Oral History Interview, Knox Co. Oral History Project, KHS.

Mississippi River were the Central Competitive Field (Indiana, Illinois, western Pennsylvania) the Central Appalachian (West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, east Tennessee, and southwest Virginia), and the Southern Appalachian (Georgia, southern Tennessee, and Alabama). No one company came to dominate the entire industry, and even the largest firms that operated in several states – like Consolidation Coal and Peabody –confined their operations to one coalfield region. On the eve of World War I, bituminous coal had no national trade association and no semblance of monopoly power. It remained, in the estimation of one scholar, "disorganized, highly competitive, inefficient, and wasteful."[81]

The geography of the bituminous coal industry also led to a unique working environment. As we have seen, railroading subjected workers to a high degree of company-imposed discipline and synchronization. Likewise, in the early twentieth century, other forms of industrial work began to adopt the methods of scientific management. Yet coal mining remained an outlier seemingly stuck in a previous age. In the estimation of a contemporary study of the industry, bituminous coal mining was marked by an "*indiscipline*… far out of line with the *new discipline* of the modern factories." According to the editor of the industry journal *Coal Age*, it was still "a cottage industry… only the cottage is a room in the mines." While coal companies did possess some degree of power over their workers, mining presented a "real and important contrast" to other industries.[82]

In the dark, damp, cramped environment of a coal mine, miners did work mostly on their own terms. Before each shift, miners made the short trek from their company-owned home to a portal in the side of the mountain. Due to the geography of the underground workplace, the

[81] James P. Johnson, *The Politics of Soft Coal: The Bituminous Industry from World War I through the New Deal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 13, 19.
[82] Carter Goodrich, *The Miner's Freedom: A Study of Working Life in a Changing Industry* (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1925), 13-15.

miner became, by and large, "his own boss." In the room-and-pillar system common in the drift mines of Appalachia, one or two miners, classified as "pick miners" or "loaders," worked at their own section of the rock face. Measuring around twenty-four feet wide, and no taller than the seam of coal itself, rooms were cramped and stuffy. Cross-cuts and break-through tunnels provided some ventilation, but rooms could easily fill up with coal dust. A narrow-gauge track led away from the face and out to the main track for loaded cars, some of which had to be pulled by mules up steep grades. Miners made their own decisions about where to position pillars, cut the face, plant dynamite, and the pace of work in general. Paid by the ton (or by the car in some cases) and generally left to their own devices once at work in their rooms, miners could claim to "own and inhabit" their workplace in ways that other industrial workers could not. Mine foremen made only occasional visits to the face, and usually made little effort to regulate the actual activity underground. As some scholars have described, they enjoyed a "miners freedom" that seemed intrinsic to the industry. Far from a Taylorized factory, the coal mine was not governed by the hands of a clock or the watchful eye of the company.[83]

With coke dominating the market for steelmaking fuel, coal companies began to employ workers to produce the material at plants next to the mines. In brick beehive ovens, pioneered by Henry Clay Frick and named for their dome-shaped structure, a lack of oxygen combined with high temperatures -- 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit or more – liquefied bituminous coal. Over 48 to 72 hours, the heating process eliminated impurities and yielded a hard, porous material of pure carbon desirable in the blast furnaces of steelmakers. Coal companies that produced coke often located batteries of ovens near the face of the mine. To "charge" the ovens, electric larry cars carried coal from a bin house near the mine down tracks over top of the batteries. A workman

[83] Goodrich, *The Miner's Freedom*, 15-16, 20-21; James T. Laing, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1933), 203.

called a "charger" released the contents into the opening of each oven and the coal piled up in a cone until it reached the walls of the twelve foot and six-inch diameter oven. A leveler then used a scraper to spread the coal out evenly within the oven. Before the oven could be fired, daubers sealed the door with brick and mud to keep out oxygen. Two days later, coke pullers removed the bricks and ran a water pipe into the oven to quench the fire. Coke pulling was the most labor-intensive part of the process, with pullers first using the scraper to split the material "as an ax does a block of wood" before using it to drag the large chunks towards the door. When the puller gathered a pile of coke, he wielded a rake to toss the chunks into the yard, where it was then loaded into cars for extraction.[84]

Along with coke production, other positions inside and outside the mine were supervised more closely than digging itself. Throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century, companies began to employ machine men in increasing numbers. Working at night in crews of two, these men operated an electric machine that "undercut" the coal to make it easier for miners to blast and load the rock the next day. Other jobs on the inside included motormen, brakemen, and mule drivers that hauled coal cars into and out of the mines along tracks laid by crews of trackmen. Slate pickers, often young men or boys, separated the unwanted mineral from the valuable coal, while pumpmen flushed water from flooded rooms and timbermen propped up the roof of the mine to prevent cave-ins. Jobs outside the mine included tipplemen and general laborers, in addition to skilled jobs such as masons, carpenters, engineers, and electricians. Yet these jobs were usually less than half of the mining workforce in any given operation and were subject to more surveillance and company discipline.[85]

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[84] Section 69: "Construction and Operation of Beehive Ovens," in International Library of Technology, *Surface Arrangements at Bituminous Mines* (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Co., 1907), 50-63.
[85] Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern*

To man the mines and the ovens, operators adopted regionally-specific approaches in terms of race and labor. Unlike the railroad industry, coal operators in Appalachia did not differentiate wages on the basis of race. This choice stemmed, again, from the geographic realities of coal. To populate their newly constructed camps in the isolated mountain region, operators could not afford to pick and choose their laborers. Thus, in their attempts to attract labor and keep the coal flowing, companies paid the same by-the-ton wage regardless of racial or ethnic classifications. Other coalfield regions did not follow suit, which allowed operators in Appalachia to appeal to laborers from outside the region.[86]

Coal operators in Central Appalachia also deployed a distinct method of recruiting labor. With supervisory positions almost always occupied by men appointed from headquarters, coal companies only needed to worry about recruiting and managing mine labor. Since wages could not be used to segment the mining workforce, however, operators turned to the "judicious mixture" approach pioneered by Justus Collins in West Virginia. Designed to dilute worker power and ward off unionization, the mixture proscribed for operators to maintain a balance of native-born white, Black, and European immigrant miners. Under the policy of *divide et impera*, specific ratios varied from company to company, and often followed larger shifts in the labor market.[87]

When prompted, coal operators were often explicit about their use of judicious mixture to manipulate race in order to control their workers. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, West

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Appalachia (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 92-93. Price V. Fishback, *Soft Coal, Hard Choices: The Economic Welfare of Bituminous Coal Miners, 1890-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 179. Laing, "Negro Miner," 205.

[86] Fishback, *Soft Coal, Hard Choices*, 176. Laing, "Negro Miner," 209.

[87] Kenneth R. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture: Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880-1917," in *Blacks in Appalachia*, 117-132; Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 121-142. Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, 220.

Virginia native James T. Laing conducted research on the coal industry in his home state for his dissertation in sociology at Ohio State University. The finished product, "The Negro Miner in West Virginia," outlined the thinking of coal operators with respect to race and labor. Three-fourths of the operators Laing interviewed preferred "about equal numbers of whites and Negroes," by which they meant "an equal proportion of native whites, foreigners, and Negroes." Almost all of them pointed to their efforts to control miners as a reason for cultivating this mixture. "I prefer a mixture of Negroes and native whites – more easily handled," one operator explained. From "division in case of labor trouble" to "too independent if all Negroes – same if all whites," coal bosses were explicit about their manipulation of race. "We find that we get the best results where one class is looked upon by the others," another operator stated, while yet another claimed, "split 3 ways they will never agree on course of action in a strike."[88] While railroad executives used wage differentials – justified through racism – to undermine worker power, the equal wages of Appalachia pushed coal operators to adopt the judicious mixture method.

Although they claimed to pay all loaders an equal wage, operators' racial and ethnic views did have an effect on miners' earnings. Among the three categories of labor, employers thought of the European immigrant miner as the "champion coal loader." This "rating" was not necessarily related to the amount of coal mined, but involved how obedient he was, how well he spoke and understood English, and how willing he was to work in bad places in the mine. Operators rated Black miners second but tended to place them in less than desirable mining locations. They believed that African Americans were "better able to stand" rough conditions like wet rooms and low seams, for as one operator put it, "the Negro is the best human machine

[88] Laing, "Negro Miner," 266-67.

in the world." As a result, the average wages of Black loaders lagged behind those of immigrant miners, and to a lesser degree, those of native white miners.[89]

The competitive nature of the coal industry also led operators to tailor their use of "judicious mixture" according to each state. While Virginia enacted an array of Jim Crow laws as a member of the Old Confederacy, West Virginia offered a less-southerly racial climate.[90] An employer with mines in the two states told Laing that in Virginia, he preferred "Negro labor over foreign labor" due this difference. Black miners in Virginia encouraged their children to become miners as well, allowing operators to "get four or five good loaders from one family," he explained. Yet in West Virginia, Black miners "were so different," as their children tended to leave the coalfields rather than follow their fathers into the mines. Where Black miners possessed more freedom and equality, the operator preferred to employ foreign laborers instead.[91]

These attempts at judicious mixture made Central Appalachian coal mining attractive to African Americans. In his *Black Coal Miners in America*, historian Ronald Lewis argued that approaches to race relations emerged according to the dynamics of each particular coalfield region: Black miners encountered fierce resistance from white miners in the North and West, and were hamstrung by Jim Crow in the South, but found the Central Appalachian coalfield states relatively welcoming.[92] From the mid-nineteenth century experiences of Booker T. Washington and Carter G. Woodson to the migrations of the twentieth century, African Americans took advantage of this approach to make the Appalachian Mountains their home. In the coalfields of

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[89] Laing, "Negro Miner," 225-26.
[90] Ronald L. Lewis, "From Peasant to Proletarian: The Migration of Southern Blacks to the Central Appalachian Coalfields." *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Feb. 1989): 96. See also Michael H. Burchett, "Promise and Prejudice: Wise County, Virginia and the Great Migration, 1910-1920," *Journal of Negro History*, vol. 82, no. 3 (1997): 312-327.
[91] Laing, "Negro Miner," 117-18.
[92] Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America.*

"The Mountain State" of West Virginia, Black miners built strong institutions and vibrant communities. 25,800 African Americans lived in West Virginia in 1880, a number that increased to around 115,000 by 1930. Over twenty percent of West Virginia miners were African American for much of the early twentieth century, concentrated primarily in the southern counties. McDowell County, with a population that was thirty percent Black in 1910, became known as the "Free State of McDowell" while nearby Bluefield became a bulwark of Black mountain life. Fewer lynchings, more opportunities for education, and a ballot not restricted by race facilitated these developments.[93] Racial troubles remained "conspicuously absent" in southern West Virginia, as company-imposed segregation failed to deter what Lewis called a "remarkable degree of class unity."[94]

Key to this was the shared experience of working underground. In Central Appalachia, African Americans, too, enjoyed the "miner's freedom." Most African Americans employed in the region's mines worked as loaders, as they embraced the work rhythms of coal as an alternative to farming and sharecropping. While loading was the most hazardous position in the mine, it provided considerable independence, and most importantly, it paid well. By increasing his tonnage, a Black coal loader could earn more in comparison to the fixed wage of day laborers. Some men saved up enough money to move their families elsewhere, while others worked in the mines in between growing seasons to supplement their income from farming. In many cases, Black miners had the ability to load enough to cover their bills to the company, then work at their own discretion. Other positive aspects included the temperature inside the mine, which was cool in the summer and relatively warm in winter. Yet time and again, Black miners

[93] The phrase was coined by black newspaper editor M.T. Whittico. Larry Scott Deaner, "Home in the McDowell County Coalfields: The African-American Population of Keystone, West Virginia," (M.A Thesis, Ohio University, 2004), 12.
[94] Corbin, *Life, Work, Rebellion*, 62. Second quote – Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*, 156.

cited the lack of supervision underground as an attractive feature of coal loading.[95] Returning to West Virginia after trying out factory work, one Black miner liked that in the mines, "they don't *bother* you none."[96]

African Americans also worked in the area's coke ovens, although they found it less desirable than a job inside the mines. As in coal mining, companies paid coke oven work on a piece-rate basis, with each worker receiving a set rate per each oven. Unlike mining, however, African Americans occupied the lower-paid and laborious positions of dauber, puller, and laborer almost exclusively. In 1908, Stonega Coke and Coal employed 500 Black workers at its Imobden operation, all of them at the coke ovens.[97] At a nearby coking operation in Kentucky, African Americans consistently made up nearly ninety percent of the coke oven workforce. In June 1916, the company recorded its coke yard laborers as follows: seven "Americans," three "Polish," and 134 "Negro."[98] Most African Americans in the coalfields, however, preferred the less supervised work inside the mines.

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[95] Joe W. Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 85. Laing, *Negro Miner*, 204-6. Fishback, *Soft Coal, Hard Choices*, 179-84. See also Trotter, "The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in the US Coal Industry," *International Review of Social History* 60, special issue 1 (Dec. 2015): 145-164.
[96] Goodrich, *Miner's Freedom*, 15-16 (emphasis from text).
[97] Shifflett, *Coal Towns*, 73-74.
[98] "Labor Report of Wisconsin Steel Co., 1916." Benham Coal Company Records, 1911-1973, University of Kentucky Special Collections.

Figure 5: Coal miner in Lynch, Ky., ca. 1930. Southeast Appalachian Archives, Appalachian Archive Online Exhibit, U.S. Coal and Coke Company Collection.

Indeed, while African Americans did find employment in various jobs inside and outside the mines, the majority worked as coal loaders. As James Laing explained, Black miners' goal was "to make money as rapidly as possible," whether they chose to stay or move on elsewhere. The position of loader offered them the best chance to do so.[99] In 1921, over 90 percent of Black workers in the West Virginia coal industry were loaders and general laborers. Black miners rarely entered the managerial positions of foreman and fire boss, as racial discrimination and unequal access to education kept managerial positions white.[100] "A Negro is a very good boss

[99] Laing, "Negro Miner," 202.
[100] Joe W. Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks in Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 85. Laing, *Negro Miner*, 204, 206. Fishback, *Soft Coal, Hard Choices*, 179-84. See also

among his own color," one operator told James Laing, "sometimes it works among the whites but very seldom." Another operator in West Virginia cited his proximity to "the Virginia and Kentucky state line" for not placing Black miners in positions of authority. "You know just about how a white employee here would feel towards a negro mine foreman," he explained to Laing.[101]

As miners toiled together away from the eyes of the operator, however, they developed a strong sense of mutualism.[102] At work in the mines, cooperation and trust were essential in the midst of the ever-present threat of disaster. Described by one historian as a "workscape," a coal mine posed a particularly hazardous laboring environment.[103] Electrocutions, explosions, fires, and roof collapses were the leading dangers. In the late 1910s, over two hundred Kentucky miners died on the job in a given year.[104] Given the risks, the act of daily survival imbued miners and their families with a sense of camaraderie. "Well, the mines were the Great Equalizer," the child of an eastern Kentucky miner explained to an interviewer, "Everybody was buddies you know?" All miners faced the same daily dangers for the same rate of pay, leading many to realize they had more in common than the operators would have had them believe. Even the physical effects of mining masked outward differences. "You can't tell a white man from a black man when you come out," Jeff Turner, son of a miner in Kentucky, recalled his father telling him.[105] According to a union organizer, when miners were underground, "all covered with coal dust, we

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Trotter, "The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in the US Coal Industry," *International Review of Social History* 60, special issue 1 (Dec. 2015): 145-164.

[101] Laing, "Negro Miner," 213, 216-17.

[102] Herbert G. Gutman, "Labor in the Land of Lincoln: Coal Miners on the Prairie," in *Power & Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, Ira Berlin, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 117-212.

[103] Andrews, *Killing for Coal*, 125-56.

[104] *Annual Report of the State Department of Mines of Kentucky for the Year Ending December 1920* (Frankfort, Ky.: State Journal Co., 1921), 3.

[105] Brown, *Gone Home*, 93-94. See also Robert W. Woodrum, *"Everybody Was Black Down There: Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfield* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

is *all* black!"[106] Far from a utopia, the experience of emerging alive alongside men of different racial and ethnic backgrounds could foster a sense of solidarity.

Coal miners drew on their working experience to organize an industrial union across the lines of race and ethnicity. The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), formed in 1890 out of the ashes of the National Progressive Union and the National Trades Assembly, pledged to unite all those who worked in and around the mines "regardless of creed, color, or nationality."[107] Notably, the UMWA organized white, European immigrant, and African American miners into the same locals, instead of the segregated approach of more conservative craft unions. Black miners, including Richard L. Davis in Ohio, George Durden in Illinois, and William R. Riley in Tennessee held leadership positions at both the local and national levels.[108] In 1900, "about 20,000 Negroes belonged to the UMWA," the largest of the AFL unions, and miners like Davis and Durden played an important role in its formative years. It was this distinguishing piece of evidence that prompted labor historian Herbert Gutman to praise the UMWA for its attempts to organize across racial lines. He did temper his enthusiasm, noting that any history of the union would reveal "racial and ethnic" quarrels. He himself detailed of violence between white miners and Black strikebreakers in Virden and Pana, Illinois.[109]

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[106] Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 174.
[107] Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 355.
[108] For William R. Riley, see Ronald L. Lewis, "Race and the United Mine Workers' Union in Tennessee: Selected Letters of William R. Riley, 1892-1895," in *Blacks in Appalachia*, 173-182.
[109] "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning: 1890-1900," in Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society: In Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 121-208. See p. 186-7 for Gutman's figures. For comparisons with other industries, see Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*; Herbert R. Northup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944); Phillip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619 – 1973* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974).

Interracial unionism proved to be difficult, and the alliances tenuous, but the UMWA stood out for its "official attitude" that did not pose an "obstacle in the organization of Negro miners."[110]

The UMWA confronted a powerful anti-union sentiment in Central Appalachia, however. Throughout the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the struggle between union organizers and the coal companies yielded remarkable displays of labor militancy, evinced in the Paint Creek-Cabin Strike of 1912-1913 and the West Virginia Mine Wars of the early 1920s.[111] For historian David Corbin, the UMWA was "more than an economic institution; it was a crusade promising human dignity and religious purposefulness." Central to Corbin's argument is the idea that coal company towns fostered a sense of class consciousness, diluting racial tensions in the process. Both Black and white families lived in company housing, often segregated, a controlled social context that led to less competition among miners and thus less interracial conflict.[112]

Where they could, mine owners turned to Black laborers to break the power of unions. In the Central Competitive Field in the Midwest, the use of a racial wage gap made employing Black strikebreakers an effective operator tactic. In response, white miners attempted to exclude Black miners from the region entirely, much like brotherhood unions on the railroads. Operators in Central Appalachia liked to employ Black miners because they considered them less prone to "radicalism" than their native white and immigrant coworkers. "In the minds of the employers the Negro is a safety measure against the threat of unionism," James Laing deduced.[113] Yet as Ronald Lewis, David Corbin, and other historians have explained, class concerns could subsume

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[110] Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 355. Another contemporary work in this vein is Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., 1930). The inclusiveness of the UMWA sparked decades of debate among labor historians. See Herbert Hill's response to Gutman, "Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2 (1988): 132-200.
[111] Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, xiv. See also James R. Green, *The Devil Is Here in these Hills: West Virginia's Coal Miners and their Battle for Freedom* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2015).
[112] Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 146-75.
[113] Laing, "Negro Miner," 268.

racial ones in Central Appalachia. In the many conflicts between striking workers and nonunion strikebreakers in West Virginia, a miner's position relative to the picket line mattered more than his race or ethnicity. In the Paint and Cabin Creek strike of 1912-1913, according to Lewis, Black strikebreakers who arrived in Central Appalachia were often confronted by Black union men determined to "prevent scabs of any race from taking their jobs." Union men – native whites, African Americans, and Italian immigrants – attacked "scabs," while company-employed Baldwin-Felts guards "attacked black strikers because they were strikers, not because they were black." When Mother Jones rallied groups of miners to march, the assemblies often reflected the "unity across racial and ethnic lines that the striking miners had formed." In the coalfield context, Black, white, and European immigrants could recognize their common lot and join together to oppose the operators.[114]

Extraction Town

Operators could not control miners' every interaction in the bowels of the mountain, but they could dictate what happened outside the mine. The coalfields' relatively small population, along with the lack of sufficient housing and utilities, led operators to construct their own company towns, or what I call "extraction towns." According to historian Crandall Shifflett, these settlements first appeared in the "pioneer or frontier phase," as the industry first entered the mountains in the late 1880s. Early settlements were more "camps" or "outposts" than towns, with temporary housing and a transient labor force of single men. As operators searched for ways to maintain a more predictable mining output, they began to provide a safer working environment as well as modern infrastructure to house miners and their families. A

[114] Lewis, *Black Coal Miners*, 140.

"paternalistic" social welfare-conscious phase of extraction towns lasted from around 1910 to the onset of the Great Depression. In places centered on extraction, operators owned everything – above and below ground – and exercised tremendous influence on the lives of their employees.[115]

Once within the bounds of company property, miners and their families of all racial and ethnic distinctions entered the fiefdom of the company. Living conditions in Appalachian extraction towns depended solely on the resources dedicated by the company. The worst camps, sometimes holdovers from the pioneer period, could be no more than ramshackle wooden structures clustered at the bottom of a mountain hollow. Miners and their families lived in A-frame, "Jenny Lind" style houses, their board and batten structures on stilts braced against the hillside. Communities lacked adequate roads, sanitation, and even running water. Operators did make improvements over time, but a region-wide assessment by the U.S. Coal Commission in 1925 found the living conditions in the mining camps of the southern Appalachians to be among the worst in the United States.[116] Many operators paid miners in scrip, and even those that paid in cash first took their cut for housing, utilities, or debts at the company store.[117]

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[115] Shifflett, *Coal Towns*, 48-49. Some company towns do not fit neatly into this chronology and the phases themselves overlap, as with any such attempt at description, but for the most part Shifflett's model describes the overall pattern.
[116] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, Mountaineers*, 182-83.
[117] Mabel Brown Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coal Fields," *The American Child,* vol. 1, no. 4 (Feb. 1920): 319-20.

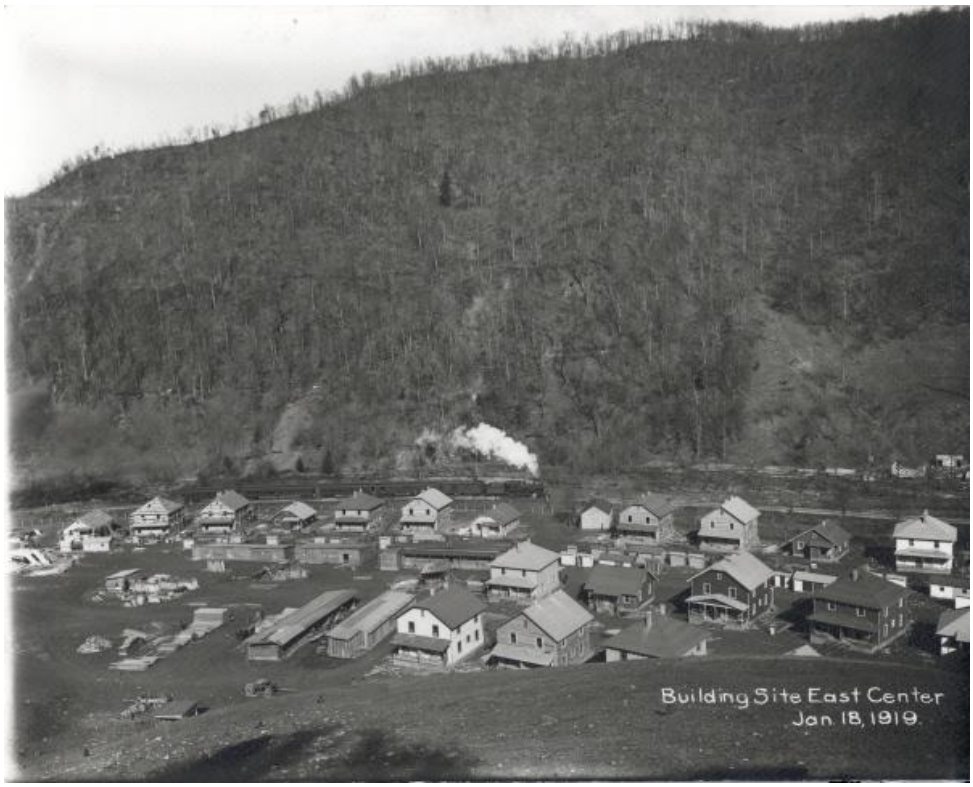

Figure 6: An extraction town layout. Benham, Ky., 1919. Courtesy of SKCTC Appalachian Archive.

Women in extraction towns, to an even greater extent than those in transportation towns, labored in the home. The dominance of the company created a true single-industry town, one that barred women from working in the mines by company policy. Extraction towns offered women no opportunities to work in factories, stores, or other jobs found in industrial towns and cities. Even domestic service was scarce, as "few families in a mining camp can afford to pay a maid." All told, women and young girls in extraction towns seldom worked outside the home, except for the rare instances when they ran boarding houses or worked as laundresses.[118] As in railroading families, women performed the domestic labor that made the idea of a "breadwinner" possible.

[118] Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coal Fields," 315-16.

They raised children, tended vegetable gardens, and kept the family house as free from ash and coal dust as possible. Where the company and the physical environment of the town allowed, women also kept chickens, hogs, and cows. Miners' houses had very little storage space for canned fruits and vegetables, and usually lacked smokehouses for cured meats. With little opportunity to store fresh food at home, women supplemented homegrown items by shopping at the commissary or company store. Many women began their day by purchasing provisions at the store, which carried a variety of goods from canned meats and vegetables to corn meal, flour, milk, and coffee. Until late in the evening, wives and mothers worked to keep their husbands and children well-fed, in clean clothes, and out of danger.[119]

While coal miners labored together under the same conditions regardless of race, the same could not be said for their – or their families' – social lives. In extraction towns, operators wielded segregation in housing and company facilities as a tool to segment the mining workforce. Not unlike the use of judicious mixture, operators tailored their housing policies to fit the prevailing racial dynamics of a particular state. Outside of southern West Virginia, where the situation was closer to "separate but equal" separate housing usually resulted in unequal housing for African Americans. Across the mountain from Kentucky in southwest Virginia, miners for the Wentz's Stonega Coke and Coal Company lived in sections according to both race and ethnicity, with African Americans at the bottom. Established in 1902 to distinguish the Wentz family's mining operation from the parent land-holding venture, the company operated coal mines and coke ovens at nine company-owned towns over 25,000 acres in Wise County, Virginia. From the beginning, the Wentzes cultivated a paternalistic relationship with their workforce and laid out their towns according to a social hierarchy. In Stonega, neighborhoods

[119] Shifflett, *Coal Towns*, 82-83. Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coal Fields," 385.

called “Hunk Hollow,” “Little Italy,” and “Nigger Town” offered clear boundaries for miners and their families.[120]

Stonega company officials adhered to their own racialized logic of judicious mixture, and thus preferred to employ immigrants from eastern Europe. In 1915, when the company attempted to attract and retain these miners, they upgraded the quality of some of their company-owned housing. One of their mining camps contained a neighborhood called “Slabtown” that had mostly been occupied by a “low-class of labor.” The company remodeled the houses and furnished them with fences and garden plots, which made them “particularly attractive to the foreigners.” Stonega designated the new neighborhood as housing for “foreign” miners only.[121] By the fall of 1915, however, the company’s problems “locating and holding mine labor” was hindering its output. To keep up with demand, the company dispatched labor agents to the South, bringing workers in “on transportation.” In this practice, companies lured workers from other areas with the promise of good wages and by advancing the cost of their train tickets, with that cost coming out of the miners’ pay. In the last three months of the year, 900 men arrived from Alabama, many if not all of the African American, to work underground and in the coke ovens. Most of these men were “ignorant of underground practice in the methods of coal mining,” but management found them to be satisfactory miners once they received instruction.[122]

In the firmly Jim Crow state of Virginia, the arrival of Black workers on transportation tested the company’s commitment to racial segregation. Stonega’s Interstate Railroad ran daily “labor trains” that transported company employees to the mines from the various company-

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[120] Shifflett, *Coal Towns*, 37. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners*, 148.
[121] *Annual Report of Stonega Coal and Coke Co., Inc., Operating Department, 1915*, 7-8. Penn Virginia, Accession 1765, Series II, Box 211: Annual Reports of Operating Dept.
[122] *Annual Report of Stonega Coal and Coke Co., Inc., Operating Department, 1915*, 7-8. Penn Virginia, Accession 1765, Series II, Box 211: Annual Reports of Operating Dept.

owned settlements. Using Jim Crow statutes as their guide, a group of white miners in the extraction town of Osaka petitioned the company to provide separate transportation for "the colored" employees, requesting that an additional passenger car be added to ensure that there would be no racial mingling on the way to work. In addition to the petition, a supply clerk also protested to the labor train conductor "about riding with the negroes." The complaint got sent up the ladder to the company's General Superintendent, R.E. Taggart. Taggart considered the white miners' request, but ultimately rejected it because it would prove too expensive. The company already bore the cost of running the labor trains, which Taggart reminded them was "very expensive," and it did not plan on devoting any more money to the operation. If the choice was between racial segregation and the bottom line, the company's priorities were clear.[123]

Stonega's operations exemplified the transition between two different stages of Appalachian extraction town development. Stonega coal was sold on the open market, but as bituminous coking coal became more and more important to the production of steel, operators established "captive" mines that produced coal only for the parent company. In turn, they invested more heavily in the infrastructure of extraction towns. From around 1910 through the 1920s, the philosophy of "welfare capitalism" yielded a new approach, as operators tried to keep miners content, the coal flowing, and unions at bay. A few companies began to offer quality homes, modern amenities, and a planned, almost suburban, community setting. Known as "model towns," they were few in number – less than two percent of all company-owned extraction towns in Appalachia according to one estimate. Only the most powerful and lucrative coal companies established model towns: Benham, Kentucky (International Harvester); Lynch, Kentucky (U.S. Steel); Jenkins, Kentucky (Consolidation Coal); Holden, West Virginia (Island

[123] Penn Virginia, Accession 1765, Series II, Box 424: Virginia File #99: Transportation to Work, 1915-1957.

Creek Coal). These attempts to create "an ideal industrial community" with "perfect harmony between employer and employee" stand as a marked difference from the haphazard management of less capitalized extraction towns.[124]

Through its subsidiary company Wisconsin Steel, International Harvester began construction on the model extraction town of Benham in Harlan County in 1911. Located next to the land owned by the Wentz Corporation, Benham's primary role was to take the high-quality coal of Black Mountain and turn it into coke. The company planned to sell some coal on the market, but most of it would be used to "feed the coke ovens" that fueled the furnaces of Wisconsin Steel in South Chicago. To attract miners to the hollow, the company constructed 200 houses "of a higher class" than most extraction towns, with two to four room houses built on stone foundations, complete with paint and plaster, running water, and electricity, and surrounded by large fenced-in lots. The company built "a dozen or so" different floor plans and painted the houses in a variety of colors so that no similar homes would be located near each other. At the center of the planned community stood the railroad depot, company buildings, and officers' houses. Miners' houses stretched along regular blocks and in the surrounding hollows, which allowed for a "naturally advantageous method of separating the races into colonies of their own." The company also provided separate schools, Y.M.C.A. buildings, and churches – Catholic, white Protestant, and Black Protestant – for a diverse workforce. Sanitation, along with a medical staff, kept miners healthy and on the job. In every facet of life, the population of around 1,000 lived in the "little town that International Harvester built."[125]

International Harvester built Benham with judicious mixture in mind. Out of 302 miners in the "nationality report" for the first quarter of 1916, the company listed 134 "American"

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[124] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, Mountaineers*, 190. See his footnote 105 for the source of the quote.
[125] *The Harvester World,* vol. 3, no. 7 (July 1912), 15. *The Black Diamond*, vol. 53, no. 15 (Oct. 10, 1914), 282.

miners, 112 "Negroes," and about fifty immigrants primarily from southern and eastern Europe. The percentage of African American miners increased to sixty-five in the second quarter, before settling back to the original ratio.[126] Mabel Brown Ellis, an observer of Benham's social scene, remarked that the town was "unique in the approximate equality of recreation facilities afforded the negroes and the whites." The Black YMCA served as a hub of the Black community, hosting film screenings, choral clubs, cooking classes, and garden festivals for the children of miners. On the weekends, Black miners and their families put on private parties where they ate and danced to the tune of Victrola record players, and on Sunday mornings, white and Black miners attended separate churches.[127] While company-imposed segregation relegated them to segregated neighborhoods and facilities, model extraction towns did provide Black miners and their families with a decent standard of living.

Black miners in Benham, however, lived in planned communities crafted to keep them under the heel of the company. Within the boundary of mine and town, the authority of the operator was absolute. "The company owns the houses, the store, the land on which church and schoolhouse stand," one critic noted, and it was also the "largest contributor to the pay of teacher and minister." On the whole, good wages, quality housing, and a stocked company store came at the expense of a miner's "whole life and that of his family was dominated by the company."[128] Whether they lived in a model town or a ramshackle mountainside operation, all residents of extraction towns shared a similar experience. As unincorporated communities, extraction towns did not have a municipal government. Although they did adhere to county, state, and federal

[126] "Labor Report of Wisconsin Steel Co., 1916." Benham Coal Company Records, 1911-1973, University of Kentucky Special Collections.
[127] Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coalfields," 370-4.
[128] For first quote, see Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coalfields," 317. For the second, see Thomas A. Kelemen, "A History of Lynch Kentucky, 1917-1930," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, vol. 46 (1974): 176.

laws, extraction towns were in many ways the fiefdoms of the companies. Miners could not vote for a mayor or city council. Instead, coal company officials made the decisions that affected their daily lives.[129] Miners and their families could not even claim their own houses. Built and owned by the operator and rented out contingent on employment, a miners' home was no refuge from the power of the company. As Black miners and their families laid the foundations of communities in Appalachia, they did so as subjects in the Kingdom of Coal.

In these state-of-the-art model extraction towns that were also corporate fiefdoms, companies used violence and intimidation to keep out union organizers. While the UMWA had a presence at most of the smaller mines in Harlan County in the late 1910s, the biggest and most capitalized mines at Benham, and later Lynch, operated as open shops. Miners in Benham could bring complaints before monthly meetings of the International Harvester Industrial Council, composed both of management officials and elected employee representatives. Each member had an equal vote, but the council usually decided according to the company line. A testament to the repressive power of the company, Benham remained firmly anti-union until the county earned the moniker of "Bloody Harlan" in the 1930s.[130]

The pursuit of coal began to reshape the social relations of the mountains. A few years into the boom, a correspondent for W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Crisis* surveyed the impact of the southeast Kentucky coal boom. Contrary to the common belief that "there are not, and never were, any representative of the black race in that region," southeastern Kentucky offered African Americans a home. Older communities of Black mountaineers lived in the hollows and even worshipped alongside their white neighbors, presenting "a standing challenge to the statement

[129] Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 10.
[130] Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coalfields," 316. John W. Hevener, *Which Side Are You On? The Harlan County Miners*, 1931-1939 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 165.

that whites and blacks cannot live together on terms of mutual respect and absolute amity." The mountains were changing, though, and the racial ideology espoused by Berea College had given way to that of the coal industry. Coal companies had imported "great quantities of outside labor, including many Southern blacks," whose upbringing in the Deep South marked them, in the *Crisis*'s estimation, "by no means as desirable citizens… as their mountain brothers." Hazard, the seat of Perry County, was "full of Negroes," the author explained, "but they are no longer of the native race." While imbued with the *Crisis*'s obsession with respectability, it did capture the power of King Coal to influence racial ideology.[131]

Yet it was these very power dynamics that had the potential to dilute dissension among miners. Notably, all of these changes in Kentucky had resulted in relatively little conflict among the miners themselves. Indeed, as Laing noted in his study of West Virginia, the coal industry saw "diverse racial and national elements" that were "able to work together more peacefully" in comparison to other industries.[132] Although the coal industry in southeastern Kentucky developed later than West Virginia, and imposed Jim Crow to a greater degree, it still bore many of the characteristics that made Central Appalachian coal mining attractive. Kentucky's Black Appalachian population increased as a result, from 10,222 in 1910 to 15,692 in 1920, which mirrored a much larger increase in the Black population of Central Appalachian counties from 14,360 in 1870 to 88,076 in 1920. This was a concentrated phenomenon: 96 percent of the region's African Americans resided in the region's top sixteen coal-producing counties.[133]

In Kentucky, Black miners lived and worked in the segmented kingdom created by Jim Crow and capital. Yet when racial segregation did occur in the controlled environment of an

[131] W.K. Bradley, "The Negro in the Kentucky Mountains," *The Crisis*, vol. 22, no. 2 (June 1921): 69-71.
[132] Laing, "Negro Miner," 465.
[133] Lewis, "Peasant to Proletarian," 81.

extraction town, miners placed the blame on the company rather than fellow miners.[134] From "judicious mixture," the absence of a racial wage gap, and the levelling influence of company-owned housing, to the lack of discipline underground and the influence of the UMWA, the circumstances of working in coal lead many miners to recognize what they had in common. Operators in Central Appalachia embraced many of these initiatives in search of ways to attract and keep miners in the coalfields, which miners could then use as a means to organize and counteract employer power. While southern West Virginia offers the most prominent example, Kentucky and Virginia would see battles for interracial unionization only resolved by the New Deal. This is not to say that miners never harbored dislike towards those of a different racial or ethnic distinction or acted on those ideas – the policies of the operators did much to cultivate racial animosities. But the facts of their labor, social, and political lives channeled these impulses away from fellow workers.

Railroaders and the transportation towns they inhabited, on the other hand, were riven by differences of status at work and in the community. Unlike mining, railroading was highly structured and supervised. Whereas coal miners toiled together underground *en masse* and had little prospect of ascending to a position of authority, railroaders worked according to a strict, racialized hierarchy in which men at the bottom aspired to the jobs at the top. Railroaders' unions drew on this work experience, with the craft-based model of the brotherhoods reigning supreme. The railroad unions excluded Black workers and strove to achieve industrial democracy for white men only. As a result, railroaders' family life, politics, and religion reflected the ideologies of the workplace, with racism and exclusion as key organizing components. Yet the powerful railroad companies, ever in search of ways to dilute union power

[134] Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*, 156.

and control workers, continued to employ Black workers at the lower rungs of the occupational ladder. Squeezed between the company and their competition in the labor force, white members of the brotherhood unions – especially the firemen and trainmen – perceived Black workers as the reason they were unable to ascend to positions of prominence. White railroaders could exclude African Americans from their unions, but they failed to extend this ban to the workplace. As residents of transportation towns, however, they would come to embrace their power to expel undesired competition not through organized labor, but coordinated violence.

CHAPTER 3

MIGRATION: WORLD WAR AND BLACK WORKERS IN THE APPALACHIAN COALFIELD

Not to go means lingering here to live out this slow death; to go means facing the unknown. But, strangely, life has already prepared us for moving and drifting. Have we not already roamed the South? Yes, we will go and see.

Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*

When Europe went to war, according to W.E.B. Du Bois, "the world changed." Armies prepared to engage in "willful murder," and American industry retooled to provide the necessary material. "Hands that made food made powder," Du Bois explained, while "iron for railways was iron for guns."[1] DuPont supplied Russia with TNT and France with powder and gun cotton for explosives, increasing the company's profits 100 percent from 1914 to 1915. Britain contracted with Bethlehem Steel for $50 million initially, then $100 million worth of shells and shrapnel. The price of steel rose, as did that of wheat and pork. Meanwhile, Europe's need for cash drove it into the open arms of American finance. J.P. Morgan orchestrated hundreds of millions of dollars in loans to France and Britain, which kept flowing even when credit became overextended.[2] Coal, the source of "nearly three-fourths of the nation's energy requirements," according to one scholar, was "revolutionized" by the war as a result. From 1914 to April 1917, U.S. coal output increased by 30 percent, with price increases and labor shortages coming to characterize the already hyper-competitive industry.[3] The Appalachian coalfields, in particular, experienced "phenomenal" growth beginning in 1915, touching off a "wild chase for enormous

[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (London: Verso Books, 2016), 50.
[2] Eliot Asinof, *1919: America's Loss of Innocence* (New York: D.I. Fine, 1990), 24-25.
[3] Johnson, *Politics of Soft Coal*, 31.

profits."[4] Troubled by the contribution of war to the nation's booming economy, Progressive journalist William Allen White declared America "rich with blood money." "Our prosperity is cursed and tainted," White wrote, "Some day we shall have our own fiddler to remunerate." For the time being, however, war was good for business.[5]

As war tied the American periphery and core more closely together, it produced a profound moment of social change. Faced with the closing off of immigration from Europe, industrial employers turned to the South for a new source of labor. From 1916 to 1918, half a million Black southerners left the southern states for points further north in the first phase of what came to be called the Great Migration. Du Bois outlined their many journeys: African American migrants went to the industries of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, "because war needs ships and iron;" to the "automobiles of Detroit and the load-carrying of Chicago;" and to the mines of Appalachia, "because war needs coal."[6] Outside the Deep South, they found new kinds of work, commanded higher wages, and even exercised their right to vote. Wartime capitalism opened a path away from the Old Confederacy, and Black southerners began to make good on the promises of the Civil War and Reconstruction for the first time in the young century.

This chapter examines the war's effects on the coal industry, both for miners and operators. It argues that the conflict stimulated demand for coal, creating an opportunity for long-laid plans to come to fruition and spurring the Great Migration of African Americans to Appalachia. For capitalists like Daniel B. Wentz, property amassed in their kingdom of coal became valuable in an instant when the nation's industrial giants came calling. To "help turn the wheels of industry," Black migrants left the South on the word of labor agents who promised

[4] Quoted in Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 154.
[5] William Allen White, *The Editor and His People* (New York: MacMillan, 1924), 130-31.
[6] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 51.

free transportation, higher wages, and better living conditions.[7] From 1915 to 1918, Black migrants took advantage of this demand as well as the Upper South's distinct system of social relations, much to the concern of white Americans across the nation. Migration journeys did not always work out as planned, especially under the heavy hand of King Coal. Yet coal mining incubated a sense of mutualism among miners. This chapter builds on the last, demonstrating that racial and ethnic differences among miners faded as all confronted a lack of political power, precarious housing, and dangerous working conditions in extraction towns. Wartime demand also elevated the influence of workers and organized labor, which miners sought to capitalize on by establishing UMWA districts in the notoriously nonunion field. Finally, as the racial violence of the Long Red Summer began to burn through American towns and cities, such conflict remained "conspicuously absent" in the extraction towns of the coalfields.[8]

"I Heard Some Fellows Talking about Work in Kentucky"

In 1915, Jim Thompson came to Birmingham, Alabama "from down below Montgomery" in search of a job. Twenty-one years old, he mined coal for Tennessee Coal and Iron at its Muscoda camp for $2.25 a day and lodged at the Black boarding house. While he was in Bessemer on a Friday, a white labor agent gave him a card advertising for miners to work on transportation in Virginia. Thompson was intrigued, later saying, "I thought I would go and see how things were up there." He hopped a train with twelve men and one woman, one of whom

[7] Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002), 86.
[8] Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 62. The coalfields of Appalachia weren't completely exempt from the violence, however. In Dec. 1919, a lynch mob in southern West Virginia killed Ed Whitfield and Earl Whitney as retaliation for allegedly murdering a white construction foreman in Logan County. Trotter, *Coal, Class, and Color*, 125-6.

had tickets for the entire group. They left Alabama in the dead of night, arriving in Appalachian Virginia in the early afternoon.[9]

Thompson's journey from the rural South to an industrial setting was a common migration story. Nearly nine million African Americans (90 percent of the nation's Black population) called the South home in 1910, with many living in the rural areas of the Deep South. Although industrialized cities such as Birmingham, Atlanta, and Savannah began to attract Black labor in the early twentieth century, an overwhelming number of Black southerners worked as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In the cities and out in the countryside, southern capitalists depended on a racialized workforce. Indeed, southern elites' desire to control Black labor remained constant throughout chattel slavery and its eventual recreation through Jim Crow segregation. From around 1890 through the early twentieth century, Jim Crow laws segregated public place places, outlawed interracial marriage, and denied African Americans the ballot. Those who resisted were met with the sheriff's badge, the lyncher's rope, or the torches of an angry mob. Under these circumstances, some African Americans chose to move to the North. Often referred to as the "Promised Land," or the "House of Refuge," states north of the Ohio River did offer clear social, economic, and political advantages for Black Americans. Yet in 1910, almost fifty years after Emancipation, little more than one-tenth lived outside the Old Confederacy. According to Emmett J. Scott, special adviser for Negro Affairs to the Secretary of War, the lack of migration out of the South was a systemic, nationwide problem rooted in labor. The "very hard fact" was that while the North "afforded larger privileges, in the end it "would not support Negroes." Unable to gain a foothold in the industries of the North, African Americans remained in the predominantly agricultural states of the South. "It was the operation

[9] Testimony of Jim Thompson, DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.

of an inexorable economic law," Scott explained, "that pushed them back to the soil of the South despite their manifest desire to leave it."[10]

A series of disasters in southern agriculture created the conditions for these things to change. First, the coming of the boll weevil in the summers of 1915 and 1916 decimated the cotton crop in the Deep South. The "interloper from Mexico" appeared in Texas in 1892, but soon spread to every cotton-producing state save Virginia and the Carolinas. First appearing yellowish, then grayish brown and eventually donning a shade of black, the pest fed solely on the boll of the cotton plant. Variations in rainfall and harsh winters affected its numbers but its spread continued apace. One observer estimated the loss of fifty percent of the South's chief crop by 1918, 400,000 bales annually, valued at some quarter of a billion dollars.[11] The devastation was particularly acute in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Unexpected flooding in these same states in 1915 made matters worse. The combined effect was to unsettle farming conditions, a nightmare considering growers' practice of mortgaging the crop before it was harvested. Faced with two years of lower profits and possible debt to creditors, landlords shuttered commissaries and sent tenants packing.[12] The losses of plantation owners fell squarely on Black tenants and sharecroppers. Black families lost mules and other property to repay their employers for the previous year's provisions, rent, and charges at the local store. Many plantations could not offer their farmers any nourishment whatsoever, particularly those owned by absentee landlords and operated by their agents. The situation reached such a critical point that the Department of Agriculture and the Red Cross distributed food in several Black Belt counties.[13] Some farmers attempted to diversify with crops like corn and velvet beans, which

[10] Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 16.
[11] Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1918), 171.
[12] Emmett J. Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 14-16.
[13] U.S. Department of Labor, *Negro Migration in 1916-1917* (Washington, D.C.: Government

required fewer laborers for less of the year. “Nothing is ahead of them for the winter but starvation or charity,” one observer wrote. In this dire situation, the prospect of a train ticket to a job somewhere else could be “irresistible.”[14]

As a result, the rural, agricultural areas of the South experienced the most dramatic effects of the migration. In Alabama, the movement appeared most drastic in the south-central part of the state known as the Black Belt. Stretching in a crescent-shape from Sumter County on the border with Mississippi to Russell County on the Georgia line in the east, the area first became known for the dark, rich soil that enabled the growth of cotton plantations. Eventually a definition connoting the heavy concentration of African Americans in the area came to include 21 counties centered around the original core band on either side of the capital of Montgomery. In 1910, Black Belt counties possessed a total Black population of almost 490,000 in 1910, compared to 418,000 in the remaining counties throughout the state. Black residents composed three-fourths or more of the population in 11 of the 21 counties: Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Marengo, Perry, Sumter, and Wilcox to the west of Montgomery; and Macon, Bullock, and Russell to the east.[15] It was in these counties that Black migrants left “literally by the thousands,” with some losing a quarter or more of their Black residents. In Uniontown, Alabama, the boll weevil eliminated the “sole crop” of Perry and surrounding nearby counties. Thousands of Perry County’s Black residents left along the Southern Railway beginning in April 1916.[16] Afterwards, one 2,000 acre plantation was left with “only or three Negro families.”[17]

Printing Office, 1919), 61.
[14] District Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia to the Attorney General, Oct. 28, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical Files #182363.
[15] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 52-53.
[16] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 56.
[17] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 99.

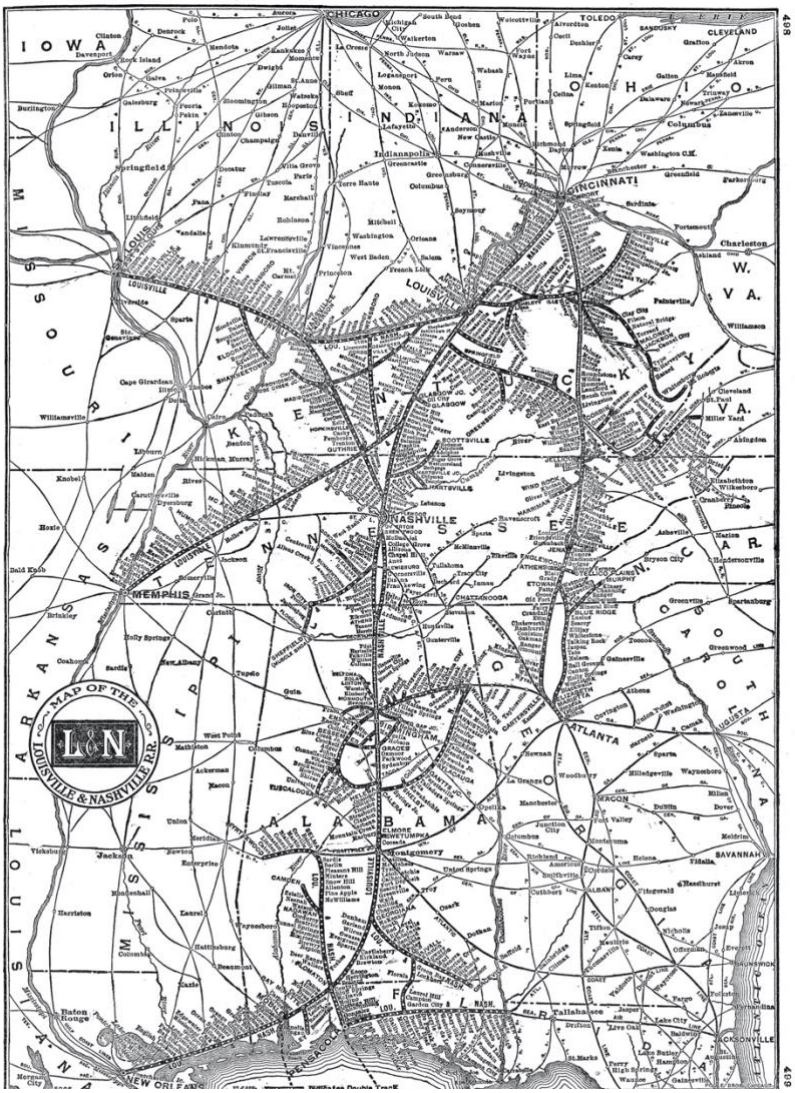

Figure 7: Map of the L&N, showing its connections between Alabama and Appalachia.

The city of Birmingham attracted thousands of out-of-work farm laborers, exacerbating a process that had been underway for several decades. The city and its surrounding towns boasted industrial work for African Americans in coal, iron, steel, and on the railroads. Two-thirds of Alabama's coal miners worked in Jefferson County. By the early twentieth century, Black miners made up the majority of the district's mining workforce and were well-represented in the

other industries. Out of the city's approximately 132,000 total residents in 1910, 90,617 were Black. The city's five major railroads – the Southern, L&N, St. Louis & San Francisco, and Illinois Central – made it an easy destination for those cast off the land. The town of Selma, for example, the seat of Dallas County in the "heart of the black belt," boasted a population of 13,649 in 1910. Several branch lines ran into the town from outlying counties and connected it to Birmingham. From August to December 1916, nearly 6,000 African Americans purchased tickets from Selma to the Magic City. Birmingham also attracted African Americans from other near-by parts of the South, including Meridian, Mississippi, southwestern Georgia, and western Florida.[18]

The arrival of new potential workers in the city had a domino effect, increasing the labor pool that employers seized to decrease wages. Coal companies such as Tennessee Coal and Iron paid less for new miners, putting their current employees out of work and causing them to look elsewhere. Operators also used this technique to undermine the organizing efforts of the United Mine Workers in the district, whom they had long opposed. The coal companies "all joined hands in this effort" to break the union, "the purpose being to control the prices, dictate terms and hours, etc." The cumulative result as a "fine field for labor agents."[19]

Companies in search of Black workers dispatched agents to Birmingham and other large cities that could be reached by several different lines. Railroad companies in the South had long used the transportation system to obtain labor. The practice of the Illinois Central, which resembled other railroads', was to authorize section foremen to recruit and transport Black

[18] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 53, 55.
[19] District Attorney for the Northern District of Alabama to the Attorney General, Oct. 25, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical Files #182363. For more on Alabama and Black workers, see Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power*; and Henry McKiven, *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1995).

workers as they saw fit. These foremen, nicknamed "straw bosses," carried passes from the company and often did not record the names of their employees with a passenger agent. Straw bosses for the Illinois Central, which stretched from Chicago to New Orleans through Mississippi, transported Black workers into and of many Deep South states. They usually did not move them to the North, however, where the company relied on immigrant laborers from overseas.[20]

Several of these labor agents represented coal companies in Appalachia. The Consolidated Coal Corporation, New River, and New River Pocahontas companies, for example, recruited Black workers to mine coal in Kentucky and West Virginia out of offices in the Chamber of Commerce Building and the Jefferson County Bank Building.[21] An agent for the Pond Creek Coal Company in Pike County, Kentucky passed out his card that advertised biweekly pay and "no labor trouble." Anyone interested could apply in-person at the corner of Alabama Avenue and 19th Street in Bessemer, just across the street from the depot that would send them north.[22] When agents found it necessary to branch out into other parts of the state, they still routed their recruits through the Magic City. In 1916, a labor agent for the Pennsylvania Railroad transported hundreds of men from Mobile to Birmingham, wiring the passenger agent there a "block ticket." He then purchased new tickets for the L&N train to Louisville, Kentucky. There they met the southern terminus of the Pennsylvania system and headed to various points along the line. Often, Black migrants did not know their ultimate destination. "All that they know is that they are going to Birmingham," the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama

[20] District Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, Oct. 16, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical Files #182363.
[21] District Attorney for the Northern District of Alabama to the Attorney General, Oct. 25, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical Files #182363.
[22] "Coal Miners Wanted!" DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.

explained.[23] Some migrants chose to bypass Birmingham altogether and head straight for their destinations. From one railroad in Selma, Black travelers bought tickets to Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Memphis, and Appalachia, Virginia. One railroad in Montgomery reported selling 1,705 tickets that sent Black migrants to Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania from September 1916 to May 1917.[24]

Many of the migrants were young, single, and Black. Some of them were simply after something new, an adventure somewhere else. Sociologist James T. Laing interviewed "no less than twenty" Black miners who cited various forms of "venturing out" as a reason they left home for the West Virginia coalfields. "I wanted to see the world," one responded, while another told him "I just wandered here."[25] Henry L. Badham, President of the Bessemer Coal, Iron, and Land Company understood why they would want to leave Birmingham. Part of the city's fee system involved a "street tax" of $2.50, which had to be paid promptly upon being stopped by a policeman. All violators faced arrest, but in reality, Black residents were far more likely to be stopped and apprehended. Badham admitted to the *Montgomery Advertiser* that "there are thousands of men walking the streets who have not paid a similar sum into the treasury of the city," and thought "the negroes ought to get a square deal." Harassment from city police, he explained, "is enough to make them desire to depart."[26]

Black workers in Birmingham talked to labor agents who advertised good wages in "either Kentucky or West Virginia," while others received word secondhand and decided to go on their own volition. One Black miner in Birmingham "was approached by some colored men

[23] District Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama to the Asst. Attorney General, Oct. 30, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.
[24] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 56.
[25] Laing, "Negro Miner," 150-51.
[26] Scott, *Negro Migration During the War*, 20.

with reference to going to West Virginia." They told him he could make up to ten dollars a day "pretty easy," and he agreed to ship on transportation the next day.[27] Walter Eyre "heard some fellows talking about work in Kentucky" while in the mines and "decided to go up and see what kind of work it was." He paid for his train ticket to Fleming, Kentucky and went to work for the Elk Horn Coal Company.[28] Cornelius Brown was on his way to a baseball game when his friend convinced him to "go and sign up" with a labor agent from the Consolidated Coal Company. He promised them they could make four to five dollars a day in the mines, so they boarded a train with 25 other men for Jenkins, Kentucky. Likewise, Tom Jones left for Jenkins after talking to a labor agent. In Kentucky, he found out that the Consolidated Coal Company did not pay by the ton, but by the car, and a "full car" had to be overloaded by six inches to count. After two weeks in Kentucky, he left for another extraction town in Cranberry, West Virginia. One month later, he "hoboed" his way to Detroit, Michigan to work at the Ford automobile factory for a much higher wage – three dollars per twelve-hour shift. For Jones and other Black southerners, coal country was only the first step.[29]

From the perspectives of many African Americans, a move to the Appalachian border South was an improvement. As a young Black man growing up in Columbia, Tennessee, Lyman T. Johnson thought, "If I could only get to Kentucky, it would be heaven." Johnson "didn't know much about Kentucky," but he knew it was "north of Tennessee and that was a good direction."[30] Black migrants took advantage of the social and political dynamics of the Upper South, particularly in West Virginia. As a case in point, W.L. McMillan departed Bullock County,

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[27] Statement of Charlie Teague, DOJ Straight Numerical File 182363.
[28] Statement of Walter Eyre. DOJ Files.
[29] Cornelis Brown Statement, DOJ Files #182363. Statement of Tom Jones, DOJ Files #182363.
[30] Wade Hall, *The Rest of the Dream: The Black Odyssey of Lyman T. Johnson* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 58. Johnson would go on to successfully challenge Kentucky's Day Law in 1949, becoming the first African American graduate student at the University of Kentucky.

Alabama for Logan County, West Virginia in October 1916. He lived and worked in Omar, an extraction town operated by the Main Island Creek Coal Company. In a letter a month later, he attempted to convince his friend back in Alabama to join him. He described his surroundings as "mountains higher than any that you ever seen… one on the top of another." The weather was pleasant and there was "plenty of good waiter [sic]." There were also "so many good peoples" in Omar who were prepared to "take good care of new comers, just as many you can bring." The coal camp offered steady work, or as he put it, "you can make 1dollar heaire [sic] quicker than can 20 ct. theaire [sic]." All of this meant that his friend should "get to B-ham" and catch a train to West Virginia. If he didn't like it, McMillan promised to return to Alabama with him. He closed by telling his friend that he would be voting in the upcoming presidential election, for the "collered [sic] man… stands just as good as white man heare [sic]." From decent wages to the right to vote, McMillan found much to appreciate about his Appalachian home.[31]

Black migrants to West Virginia were doubtless inspired by the direct appeals made to them by the Republican Party. Through the local county committees, the party hosted Black orators on the eve of the 1916 election. Party literature addressed to "Mr. Colored Man" announced they were "Sovereign Rulers of the Land," that their vote "counts the same as any other man's," and they could "help to shape the destinies of your country." For Black southerners who had never voted before, and had certainly not been courted by a political party with such intention, the ballot was a chance to make good on their rights as American citizens.[32] A Black preacher in West Virginia explained to sociologist James T. Laing that African Americans had migrated "because they were denied the franchise; because they were denied opportunities for education; because the labor market was such that they wanted to come where

[31] W.L. McMillan to R. L. Thornton, Nov. 2, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.
[32] "Republican Speaking." DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.

the competition was less keen. They wanted an opportunity for their children that they never had."[33]

Letters written by migrants like McMillan who had moved out of the Deep South proved extremely influential. Mail "containing the story of good wages and good conditions generally" streamed into "every community" in the Black Belt of Alabama in 1916. Single men who had migrated alone now sent money back to transport their families, and those who had departed urged their friends and family to "come on in, the water's fine."[34] "Every Negro that makes good in the North and writes back to his friends starts off a new group," one observer explained, a "quiet work… more effective in carrying off labor than agents could possibly have been." After the initial group movement induced by agents, Black migrants "kept going by twos and threes… drawn by letters, and by actual advances of money, from Negroes who had already settled in the North." The practice was so effective that a student of the migration argued for "the railroads and the United States mails" as "the principal 'labor agents.'"[35] A "well-known Negro educator" pointed to another kind of labor agent, "the colored man who comes back proclaiming he has come to stay, don't like the North, and is back to die in the Sunny South." "Nine times out of ten," he guessed, "he is back after a crew and pretty soon disappears and a hundred more with him."[36] Indeed, some Black workers went back South "under plea of distress" and regained their jobs in Birmingham, only to leave again after recruiting "20 or 25 other employees."[37]

Demand for coal and coke continued to soar in 1916, and the labor market tightened accordingly. Many factors, including the war itself and higher wages in more urban industrial

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[33] Laing, "Negro Miner," 147.
[34] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 66, 28.
[35] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 12.
[36] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 28.
[37] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 65.

areas, made European immigrant labor harder to procure. As a result, Appalachian coal companies committed to recruiting ever increasing numbers Black workers from the South. The management of Stonega Coke and Coal in Virginia, however, felt this situation was less than ideal. The arrival of "Southern darkies" served to "decrease the labor standards in this section," a company report explained, before describing Black workers as "illiterate, and having little interest or pride in their employment." While the company tried all other avenues to entice workers, they "always had to resort to Southern Colord [sic] labor." The situation remained fluid. Many Black southerners chose to head elsewhere once they arrived on company property, with some returning soon after. Management held out hope that the company could "reap some benefit" from the money spent to transport thousands of Black workers up from the South.[38]

Stonega's labor agents zeroed in on railroad depots in the industrial towns clustered around Birmingham, catching Black workers coming and going. Henry Young encountered Frank Jones, a labor agent for Stonega, "standing on the railroad track near Sloss depot." Jones asked if Young "wanted to go to Virginia… working in the coal fields" for three to four dollars a day. Young expressed interest, and Jones told him to meet him at a livery stable in Bessemer that afternoon. When he got there, "twenty-seven men and one woman" waited for a special coach on the Alabama Great Southern Railroad. Young and his fellow travelers arrived in Imboden, Virginia late that night. He and seven other miners were assigned to a three-room, company owned house.[39] Willie Parker headed out of Bessemer on a Monday afternoon when he met a labor agent who went by the alias "Nose." He told Parker he was "getting up labor to go… on transportation to work in the coal fields," and asked him to not mention his name for fear he

[38] Penn Virginia Records, *Annual Report of Stonega Coal and Coke Co., Inc., Operating Department, 1916,* 13.
[39] Testimony of Henry Young, DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.

could be arrested for operating without a license. According to "Nose," coal diggers could make up to seven dollars a day, which was enough to convince Parker and his brother to agree to go.[40]

Will Henry traveled north to Virginia as well. He had worked for Tennessee Coal & Iron in Bessemer for two years until he left for Virginia in 1915. As he walked down 20th Street one Saturday afternoon, he saw a group of men gathered around a "men wanted" sign. Frank Jones approached him and asked if he wanted to mine coal in Virginia. "I told him I would go," Henry recalled, "but I would not work inside the mine." Henry preferred outside labor or blacksmithing, both of which promised to net him around two dollars a day. The labor agent told him to be ready to leave on the following Monday and that his ticket fare of $9.85 would come out of his paycheck. Henry's trip was delayed until Tuesday, when two special coaches transported 200 Black men out of Bessemer. In Birmingham, they picked up ten more men and another passenger coach to relieve the cramped conditions.[41]

The arrival of African American migrants could generate anxiety among coalfield residents, both white and Black. In the late 1930s, James T. Laing observed that in West Virginia, a Black person's place of origin could also brand them with a stigma. African Americans born in West Virginia or Virginia tended to look warily on those from further south. Migrants from Alabama received the most animosity, although Laing noted that native-born Black people were by no means "over-cordial" to migrants from Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina. Laing deduced that the differentiation was due to "Alabama Negroes and others of the south" taking pride in "being 'bad.'" African Americans born in Virginia or West Virginia described southerners as "bullies," "too loud," and excluded them from their social circles. "We don't like Alabama people any better than they like us," one woman in Fayette County related,

[40] Testimony of Willie Parker. DOJ Straight Files #182363.
[41] Accession 1765, Series II, Box 540: Stonega Coke & Coal Company: Historical Files. Penn Virginia.

causing another woman nearby to remark, "I don't mess with these Alabama people. They'll kill you in a minute."[42] Considered rough, rude, and dangerous, Black migrants from the Deep South were cause for concern.

Yet as the previous chapter explained, Black miners saved their most biting criticisms for the coal companies that employed them. Several Black workers recruited by Frank Jones, the labor agent employed by Stonega in Birmingham, later testified they had been lured by false promises. Henry Young's first day at work revealed that the company only paid sixty cents for one car of coal, not the three or four dollars per day Jones had promised him. Another Black miner who was six feet tall described the cars as "up to his chin" and over nine feet long. The company claimed that the cars held two tons, but the miners all thought the actual amount was twice that number. "Four cars was the best I could do in day, in fact nobody could load over four cars a day," Young recalled. He and the other miners had to buy powder, oil, and other supplies from the company, which meant he earned quite a bit less than the "four dollars a day" promised by the labor agent. Additionally, the mine itself was in a dangerous state, with water leaking into the rooms and slate falling from the roof. One of these pieces hit Young on his third day and he could no longer work. On a foggy Wednesday morning, he slipped out of town and hoboed to Louisville. He got a job as a "roust-about" on a steamboat between there and Cincinnati. But he found it "so cold up there I could not stand it," and caught a freight train back to Birmingham. He harbored no fond memories of his time up in Virginia. "I left Bessemer with $5.75," he explained, "and when I got back I didn't have anything bit a suit of greasy, dirty over-alls, which I had on." To him, Virginia "didn't have any use for 'Shines.'"[43]

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[42] James T. Laing, "Social Status among Migrant Negroes," *Social Forces,* vol. 16, no. 4 (May 1938): 564-65.
[43] Testimony of Henry Young, DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363. Testimony of Percy Jemsion, DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.

Nathan Burton had a far more tragic experience with migration to the mountains. He left Bessemer on a Friday courtesy of Frank Jones. His brother had done the same a few weeks before, but Burton had not heard from him since. Burton arrived in Imboden, Virginia and was greeted with a dinner of canned goods at the company commissary. "I looked around the camp," he explained later, "and found that were only about fifty negroes there and they had been shipped in recently from Alabama on transportation." Bad living conditions and rumors of stingy checkweighmen convinced Burton to go find his brother at a nearby camp. He ran into a group of white men on the way, who told him that sheriff's deputies shot and killed a Black man there recently. When he got into town, he learned that the dead man was his brother. Burton wanted to take his brother's body home, as he had not yet been buried. The company refused. He made plans to leave but encountered the company superintendent of mines and a deputy sheriff – armed with a pistol on each hip – at the depot. They demanded he return his ticket and proceeded to take most of the money in his pockets. "If they had known I had any more money I guess they would have gotten it," he recalled. Burton walked to the next nearest station and bought a ticket home. Other men from Alabama told him to send them money so they could do the same. When he returned to Bessemer, Burton took a job as a mucker in the iron ore mines of the Woodward Iron Company.[44]

Likewise, Ed Hardaway had little good to say about Stonega. After talking with Frank Jones, he agreed to leave Bessemer to go work in Virginia. His wife was reluctant to leave Alabama, but when he told her he thought he could "do better" up there, she agreed to follow him. However, Hardaway soon learned that "Every negro they get out of Alabama they put in the worse places." He filled up cars of coal in spite of the dangerous conditions inside the mines but

[44] Box 540: Stonega Coke & Coal Company: Historical Files. Penn Virginia.

struggled to pocket any money due to his debts to the company. On top of his tools, rent, and their transportation, Hardaway and his wife arranged to have their furniture shipped up to them. Contrary to the labor agent's promise, the company charged him for this. When Hardaway protested, the company bookkeeper lashed out against "Alabama niggers" who had "come up there with the idea of beating his company." To make matters worse, he discovered that Frank Jones was also the sheriff of Imboden. He and his wife slipped out of town at night and walked across the mountains into Kentucky. Back in Birmingham, he expressed, "I sure did get enough of that transportation business."[45]

The Black workers recruited by Stonega revealed what miners either knew or would soon find out. In explaining how their journeys went awry, they pointed to the company as their ultimate adversary. Notably, they did not mention the racism of white miners as the source of their mistreatment, only the heavy-handed policies of the operator and its officials. In Fleming, the Elk Horn Coal Corporation owned the mines, but Walter Eyre deduced that "the police and police courts belong to them too." The Black migrant from Alabama pointed to "a system of finding a man in order to keep him debt" as one way the company exerted its control. "It is almost impossible for a man to get away from this place unless he is fortunate enough to slip off in the night and catch a freight train," he explained.[46] Coal-bearing states fostered varying degrees of segregation and freedom, but the power of the companies to shape the social relations of the coalfields meant that they all looked different from the rest of the South. As chapter two explained, efforts to affect a "judicious mixture" meant that Black migrants could find work in Appalachia at higher wages, and in some cases, a measure of social equality. Extraction towns in Virginia, Kentucky, and West Virginia were far from the promised land, as Black migrants from

[45] Testimony of Ed Haraway, DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.
[46] Statement of Walter Eyre, DOJ Straight Numerical File 182363.

Birmingham soon discovered. In the kingdom of coal, however, miners directed their anger at the operators, not their fellow workers.

Democracy on the Move: Black Migrants and the 1916 Election

The coalfields continued to lure Black migrants out of the Black Belt of Alabama throughout 1916. The records of a passenger agent revealed that 12,731 passengers, "practically the whole… Negro labor" left the city on one major railroad. The great majority of these emigrants headed for the coalfields of Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.[47] One partnership firm in Bessemer "sent away more Negroes than any other single agency in the Birmingham district." The labor agent worked on behalf of a coal company in Kentucky, which paid for the agent's license, his salary, and personal expenses in addition to the transportation costs of the workers. The coal company operated a "Negro restaurant" in Birmingham for the Black migrants and also allowed two dollars per man for food on the trip. While most of the Black men recruited went to the coal mines, the agency also routed them to other destinations for a fee.[48] To combat this mass exodus, the city council of Montgomery, Alabama passed an ordinance levying a $100 fine and 60 days of imprisonment for apprehended labor agents.[49] Nevertheless, Black southerners continued to head to the coalfields. From 1916 to 1917, the U.S. Department of Labor's Division of Negro Economics estimated that seventy-five thousand African Americans, eight percent of Alabama's Black population, emigrated out of the state.[50]

In Washington, D.C., the administration of President Woodrow Wilson perceived the migration as clear evidence of a Republican scheme to "colonize" a few choice states and sway

[47] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917,* 54-55. Lewis, "Peasant to Proletarian," 83.
[48] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917,* 64.
[49] *McDowell Times,* Sept. 29, 1916.
[50] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917,* 51.

the 1916 election for their candidate, Charles Evans Hughes. With just weeks to spare, Attorney General Thomas W. Gregory launched an inquiry into the migration of southern African Americans. The investigation soon revealed that 60,000 Black migrants had moved to West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana since the summer. Letters to district attorneys in several states requested "definite information of the shipment of negroes to other points," with the end goal of disqualifying "Big Republicans" from running for office.[51] Gregory wrote to the U.S. attorney in Birmingham with instructions to "proceed immediately and without publicity" to gather this information. He wanted names, dates, points of departure and destination, the inducements promised by labor agents, and information on the agents themselves. "Cover your district thoroughly," Gregory advised, ending his missive with instructions for replies to be sent in code.[52]

Reports to the attorney general detailed the many movements of Black migrants to Appalachia and points further north. From Louisville, Kentucky, came reports of "three carloads of negro men and women scheduled to leave Birmingham," with destinations in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio.[53] Correspondence from the U.S. Attorney in Montgomery, Alabama traced the activities of Black migrants down to the individual level. Postmasters in his district, which the attorney had mailed with instructions, informed him on what they thought were noticeable migrations. From Newton, "seven laborers" had left for New Eagle, Pennsylvania, all of them African American. The town postmaster included the names of all seven and even identified a particular couple for drawing the others to New Eagle. The postmaster for Gordon had seen

[51] "Negro Colonization May Involve Big Republicans."; Asst. Attorney General to Stuart W. Walker, Oct. 26, 1916. DOJ Files #182363.
[52] Attorney General Gregory to U.S. Attorney in Birmingham, AL, Oct. 11, 1916. DOJ Files #182363. For more on this investigation, see Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*, 126-28.
[53] To the Attorney General from the Clerk to the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Kentucky, Nov. 2, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical File 182363.

letters from "quite a number of laborers" who had departed told of better wages, and other from husbands who wrote back home to tell their families to join them. In Auburn, information from two Black men revealed that "negroes have left here for Montgomery to catch trains. Their final destination being Pennsylvania." The correspondent also noted that a brick layer named "Smith" possessed a letter from Chicago offering passes for himself and five other individuals.[54]

Analyses of the causes of Black migration streamed in from across the South. A white lawyer from Savannah complained to the attorney general of "large numbers of negroes… carried to West Virginia and Indiana by agents of the north." Labor agents recruited Black Georgians "ostensibly for the purposes of working," but he had heard "that the prime objective… was to vote them in the presidential election in an effort to throw these states into the Republican column." He claimed he was "not aware of what the qualifications of voters of West Virginia and Indiana are," but desired to "see fairness prevail in elections." As a prosecuting attorney, he also alleged that the "train loads of negroes" leaving Savannah included many who did so to escape law enforcement. "The people of the South" desired to see "action taken against such methods wherever the law has been violated," including the return of these migrants to Savannah. Taking a stance against Black southerners who dared leave home and take advantage of the ballot could not affect the 1916 election, but would be "for the purpose of safeguarding future ones."[55]

Wild, unsubstantiated rumors in the South also drove the migration process. One bizarre example pertained to the threat of foreign invasion. In Hattiesburg, Mississippi, African Americans were told that "Germans and Mexican[s] would soon overrun the south and that they

[54] To the Attorney General from the U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama, Nov. 2, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical File 182363.
[55] Clarence T. Guyton to the Attorney General, Nov. 9, 1916. DOJ Separate Files #182363.

had better hurry away." The message came from two labor agents, one white and one Black. Not only the promise of higher wages, but the idea that "the south was a bad place to stay" with conflict looming lead "about three hundred able bodied negroes" to leave Hattiesburg for St. Louis and Chicago. According to a Black resident of Metcalfe in southwestern Georgia, a similar rumor persisted. "White and collored [sic] speakers that claim to be sent by the Government" told Black Georgians that they were required by law to move to Pennsylvania and other Northern states. A Black man from Macon claimed he had heard "negroes had been given three years" to get out of Georgia, and he "decided he had better go now while the going is good." The same story had apparently spread to Florida and Alabama as well. As the European conflict encroached on American life, labor agents exploited anxieties and spread falsehoods just to secure workers.[56]

Sober-minded white observers, however, saw the migration as rooted fundamentally in the region's labor dynamics. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* lamented Northern industries' "luring negro labor from the South Atlantic states to the great injury of employers in that section." The shortage of cheap immigrant workers affected, "like everything else, due to the European war," meant that "Northern employers have turned to the South to supply the deficiency with the negroes." This left planters and manufacturers without "enough men to supply their needs or take off their crops," and threatened the region's social order. The paper pointed out that similar migrations have "always been harmful" for society and faulted the "wholly irresponsible labor agents" who gave "no thought to the men they are bringing North." Presumably, the employers of the South had the best interest of Black workers in mind, or at least more so than did the labor agents. "It is well for employers here, however, to be warned in

[56] To the Department of Justice from Hattiesburg, MS, Oct. 26, 1916. To U.S. Attorney from Metcalfe, GA, Oct. 31, 1916. DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.

time and to be watchful," the *Times-Picayune* advised. With high demand for "rough labor," the paper predicted "similar raids on negro workers in all parts of the South."[57]

State and local officials set their sights on the so-called "colonization agents" seducing Black labor northward. Labor agents seemed "adept at the art of keeping their identity concealed," as were Black counterparts who "are paid so much per head for every laborer secured."[58] A common refrain from investigators described African Americans as cagey and unwilling to cooperate. "If you knew the negroes as I do," the attorney for south Alabama wrote to Washington, "you would know that they are secretive." His counterpart in Mississippi agreed, lamenting, "we have a great deal of trouble in getting any information from them at all."[59] Yet some managed to amass an astounding level of detail. In some reports, the list of migrants' names and their destinations stretched for several pages. The district attorney in Birmingham found it "a very hard matter to get anything definite," but he did manage to calculate that nearly 5,000 African Americans had left the city from April to October. Many of these migrants now worked in Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia.[60] The U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky noted "a large number of were brought from Alabama… for the purpose of breaking a strike of section hands on the L.&N. Railroad between Louisville and Cincinnati." After the end of the strike, the company shipped the Black workers somewhere further north.[61]

The very prospect of Black migration prompted southern authorities to take action. The chief of police in Macon, Georgia recommended that "forty magazine rifles be purchased" in 1916 to maintain order in the city in the midst of "general unrest among the negroes." Macon

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[57] *New Orleans Times-Picayune,* Aug. 22, 1916. Arnesen, *Black Protest*, 59-60.
[58] "Labor Agents Succeed In Inducing Negroes To Leave Southern Farms." DOJ Files #182363.
[59] U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama to the Asst. Attorney General, Oct. 25, 1916. U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi to the Attorney General, Oct. 21, 1916. DOJ Files #182363.
[60] U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Alabama to the Attorney General, Oct. 25, 1916. DOJ Files #182363.
[61] U.S. Attorney for Eastern District of Kentucky to the Attorney General, Oct. 20, 1916. DOJ Files #182363.

policemen had dispersed a large crowd of Black migrants trying to board a train to Michigan, but not without some difficulty. "It is said that surliness now exists among a certain class of negroes," the *Atlanta Constitution* warned.[62] From West Virginia, the *McDowell Times* described the scene at a depot in Savannah as "a black paradise." Over a thousand African Americans, ranging from 21 to 45 years old, gathered at the platform with their families. They had been recruited by agents of the Pennsylvania Railroad to work as laborers at various points along the line. "There was nothing of the sorrow of parting in the crowd," the newspaper alleged, with those left behind looking forward to the good wages that would be sent home. The labor agents of the Pennsylvania who had engineered the migration had been arrested twice for violating state law, each time posting bail. As the engine readied to head north, the two men were there to help the Black migrants board.[63]

On the eve of the election, the perceived threat of African American voters became more pronounced. The chairman of Ohio's Democratic Party saw "large numbers of negroes… brought into the state and put to work on railroads and highway construction" as reason enough to be concerned. A coded telegram to the Justice Department confirmed these numbers, stating that a construction company employed "two to three hundred southern negroes" on a contract for Goodyear near Akron. Ohio remained "free from election fraud" for the time being, however.[64] From Kansas City, Kansas came word of 3,000 new Black registrants in the city, with "circumstances… to indicate colonization of Negroes here to carry coming election."[65] In Letcher County, Kentucky, "something like a thousand" Black migrants from Alabama were

[62] "General Unrest Among Negroes Feared in Macon." DOJ Straight Numerical File #182363.
[63] *McDowell Times,* Aug. 11, 1916. Arnesen, *Black Protest*, 58.
[64] "Finley Says He Made Charges." "To the Attorney General from Columbus, Ohio, Oct. 28, 1916." DOJ Files #182363.
[65] Western Union Telegram to Samuel J. Graham, Oct. 27, 1916, DOJ Files #182363.

rumored to be political pawns.[66] Over in West Virginia, the U.S. attorney acknowledged that "quite a number of laborers from the South, principally negroes," had been brought to the state by coal companies. He had assurances from the coal industry, however, "that it was not with the intention of voting these people."[67] After Wilson's victory, a Newark, New Jersey man remembered seeing "300 Negroes who looked like strangers in the North" at a train terminal, "some with suit cases others with just plain bundles." He joked to a railroad employee, "I suppose those negroes came North to vote for Hughes and are now going back."[68]

The majority of migrants had no such plans. Between 150,000 and 350,000 African Americans left the Deep South over eighteen months, with seventy to ninety percent choosing to leave their homes for good.[69] Newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* continued to tout the advantages of moving north and saw their demand increase. The *Defender* saw a large uptick in demand, with some estimating it increased from 80,000 to 93,000 nation-wide over a year period. A paperboy in Mississippi who once struggled to sell ten copies a week and was often late to Sunday School as a result now had no trouble at all. [70] The *Defender* encouraged migration through its promotion of "The Great Northern Migration Day," and by publishing poems that spread migration fever. One piece, "Bound for the Promised Land," appeared in print in January 1917. Its author, a "Mr. Ward," encouraged Black southerners to "duck the 'Jim Crow' laws" and "bid the South 'Goodby'." In closing the author declared, "I'm leaving today, No longer can I want. If the recruiters fail to take me 'way, I'm bound to catch a freight."[71] Several months later, copies of the poem caused a consternation. Five Black men in Savannah,

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[66] U.S. Attorney for Eastern District of Kentucky to the Attorney General, Oct. 27, 1916, DOJ Files #182363.
[67] U.S. Attorney for Northern District of West Virginia to the Attorney General, Oct. 23, 1916. DOJ Files #182363.
[68] To Attorney-General Gregory, Nov. 15, 1916, DOJ Files #182363.
[69] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 11.
[70] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 30.
[71] *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 13, 1916; Steven Reich, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Great Migration*, vol. 3 (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2006), 18-20.

Georgia appeared before a judge for reading poetry in public, which police deemed tantamount to inciting a riot. One man was arrested for simply possessing "Bound for the Promised Land." Two received a thirty-day sentence at Brown Farm, a notorious penal institution just outside the city. Nevertheless, thousands of Black southerners read or heard these poems, including "Northward Bound," "The Land of Hope," and "Farewell! We're Good and Gone."[72]

For many Black southerners, moving out was "an expression of their faith." The belief that God opened a way "out of the restrictions and oppressions that beset them" convinced many of their proper course.[73] Emmett J. Scott described a "wave of enthusiasm" that Black migrants found irresistible. "They left as though they were fleeing some curse; they were willing to make almost any sacrifice to obtain a railroad ticket and they left with the intention of staying." Whether they were "bound for the promised land," "Beulah Land," or "crossing the Jordan," Black migrants likened their journey to the Israelites of the Old Testament. Scott relayed a striking anecdote of a group of Mississippians who, upon crossing the Ohio River, stopped to give thanks to the Lord for their deliverance. They knelt, prayed, and sang songs of praise. "The men stopped their watches," according to Scott, and shed "tears of joy." One woman in the group even attested that the "atmosphere" felt different, somehow "lighter." For whatever reason, she could breathe easier outside the bounds of Dixie.[74]

The scale of the movement, combined with the emotions and attitudes of the migrants themselves, marked it as a true exodus. Lyman T. Johnson and his friends would watch northbound L&N trains roll into Columbia, Tennessee on Saturday afternoons. While the train paused at the station, they talked with the Black passengers in the Jim Crow cars "hanging out

[72] Scott, *Negro Migration*, 37.
[73] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 101.
[74] Scott, *Negro Migration*, 45-46.

the windows, yelling and waving at us, and talking about where they were going." To Johnson, "the Negroes sounded like they were being delivered from bondage."[75] A year into the migration, W.E.B. Du Bois analyzed what he called "social change among American Negroes… of great moment." Waves of "economic distress and social unrest," he observed, had produced "a mass movement and not a movement of leaders." Black southerners no longer followed "the conservative advice of the Negro preacher, teacher and professional man," but set out from their homes "determined to find a way for themselves." War, as Du Bois predicted, would only exacerbate their exit from the Deep South.[76]

Coal Miners and Capitalists in Wartime

On April 6, 1917, the United States Congress officially entered the country into the war in Europe, and the architects of the kingdom of coal in Appalachia stood ready to benefit. Nowhere was the uptick in demand seen more prominently than the coalfields of eastern Kentucky. The state's coal production in 1918 more than doubled the figures from 1910. In 1918, operators extracted 31 million tons from the hillsides, with the majority of the new coal emanating from the eastern Kentucky coalfield.[77] In the words of Thomas D. Clark, dean of Kentucky historians, the period was a deceptive "age of jubilee." As demand for carbon fuel soared, "ravenous" coal trains crisscrossed the hillsides. Clark described the trail of smoke "above a zigzagging Allied convoy" as "akin to the smoky haze which settled over the

[75] Hall, *The Rest of the Dream*, 38-39.
[76] *Crisis*, vol. 14, no. 2 (June 1917): 66.
[77] David Bettez, *Kentucky and the Great War: Kentucky and the Great War: World War I on the Home Front* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 209.

Cumberland Plateau." Both symbols of "war fever" emanated from the same source – Appalachian coal.[78]

Four days before Congress declared war, U.S. Steel moved to purchased millions of dollars of coal lands in Harlan County, Kentucky. On April 2, the Wentz Corporation reached an agreement with the H.C. Frick Coke Company, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel, which allowed the latter to prospect the nearly 14,000 acre tract of land amassed by Daniel B. Wentz and Joshua F. Bullitt throughout the early 1900s.[79] The company dispatched L.A. Billups, one of its "ablest metallurgical engineers," to scour the southeastern corner of Kentucky for black diamonds.[80] He was in the right place. Billups spent the summer surveying, and at the foot of Black Mountain in the far eastern end of Harlan County, he found exactly what he was looking for. In the hillsides along the bed of Looney Creek, he discovered bituminous coal from the "C" seam, considered to be one of the best fuels available. At over sixty percent carbon and thirty percent volatile matter, coal of this variety could stand up to the by-product ovens used by U.S. Steel along the shores of Lake Michigan. In addition to high quality fuel, the by-product ovens process also yielded benzol and toluol, gases that were used in the manufacturing of high explosives. Enticed by Billups's report, U.S. government officials pushed the company to move quickly.[81] Wentz wanted news of the possible transaction kept quiet, but word of the development soon leaked to the press.[82] The *Appalachian Trade Journal*, mouthpiece of the area coal operators, reported that U.S. Coal and Coke had a large force active in the Wentz tract, with mules and cars transporting supplies

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[78] Thomas D. Clark, *Kentucky: Land of Contrast* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 272-73.
[79] Agreement #T-42: Wentz Corp. & H.C. Frick Coke Co., April 2, 1917, Box 213, Penn Virginia Corporation Records. Hagley Library.
[80] Thomas A. Kelemen, "A History of Lynch, Kentucky, 1917-1930," *Filson Club History Quarterly*, vol. 46 (1974): 156. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 93-4.
[81] *American Gas Engineering Journal*, vol. 106 (1917): 629. Kelemen, "A History of Lynch, Kentucky, 1917-1930," 156. Howard N. Eavenson, "Lynch Plant of United States Coal and Coke," *Transactions of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers*, vol. 66 (1922): 653.
[82] D.B. Wentz to C.F. Blanton, July 26, 1917. Box 216, File #125. Penn Virginia Records.

through Harlan. A "large, model mining town" courtesy of U.S. Steel would soon ensure that a substantial increase in the county's coal tonnage.[83]

Local entrepreneurs wrote to Wentz in 1917 seeking to lease a few thousand acres of his land "while prices are soaring." Wentz turned them down, for he had bigger deals in mind.[84] Congressman C. Bascom Slemp of southwest Virginia met with Wentz and valued the property at $150 an acre. Slemp, who had bought and sold land in the vicinity, recognized that the quality of the minerals, in addition to the Wentzs' clear title and its proximity to the L&N Railroad, made it an extremely desirable tract of coal. In 1917, nothing had changed his mind save for, in his opinion, "the lands are more valuable even than I thought."[85] On October 5th, the attorney for U.S. Steel phoned Philadelphia with news that the company intended to purchase the tract. The interested parties met at the Empire Building on Broadway to complete the transaction. After ironing out details on a few remaining titles, Wentz received a check for $2.5 million, an amount that one attendee described as "larger than any I had heretofore seen." War was indeed good for business.[86]

The war proved consequential for Wentz personally as well. Like other executives in industry, he offered his services to the government as a "dollar-a-year man." He served as the assistant to Francis S. Peabody, Chairman of the Coal Committee under the Committee of National Defense. In January 1918, Maj. Gen. Goethals selected him as director of the Fuel & Forage division of the American Expeditionary Force's Quartermaster's Department. Wentz headed to France as a lieutenant colonel where his management of the A.E.F.'s fuel supply

[83] "U.S. Steel in Harlan?" *Appalachian Trade Journal* vol. 10, no. 34 (Aug. 25, 1917). Box 321, Penn Virginia.
[84] J.G. Muncy to D.B. Wentz, May 3, 1917. Box 216, File #125. Penn Virginia, Hagley.
[85] C.B. Slemp to D.B. Wentz, Oct. 18, 1917. Box 213, Folder # T-38. Penn Virginia Corporation Records. Hagley Library.
[86] Oct. 5, 1917 & Oct. 19, 1917, Bullitt File # 1494: Wentz Corporation, 1917-1927.

earned him a promotion to colonel and the distinction of chevalier in the Legion of Honor. Military life seemed to suit him. When he returned stateside, Wentz continued to use this title, and brought several associates into the corporation.[87]

In addition to the increased demand of industry, companies in the Appalachian coalfields of eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia benefited from the actions of wartime government. Coal operators' main concern during the war boom was the shortage of railroad cars. Stonega Coke and Coal, for example, lost out on "fully twenty-five per cent," of its production in 1916 due to the lack of empty cars at its mines. No cars meant unsteady work schedules and the subsequent loss of miners to other operations with more stable employment.[88] The entry of the U.S. into the conflict only exacerbated these problems, and in 1917, the passage of the Lever Act granted the Wilson administration the power to create the United States Fuel Administration (USFA). The USFA not only looked to stabilize prices and shore up fuel supply issues, it also decided to allocate cars based on productive capacity and proximity to destinations. This granted an increased market share to coal operators in the Central Appalachian field, which, combined with the more favorable tonnage rates of Southern railroads, allowed them to expand in the Midwest and Great Lakes markets. Additionally, the Central Appalachian operations were non-union and continued to produce coal during UMWA strikes. In the midst of war and labor unrest, Appalachian coal became ever more essential to nation's industrial manufacturing core.[89]

While the conflict in Europe enriched the nation's industrial barons, it also granted miners increased political power. Government and industry leaders recognized the need for a steady supply of coal and looked to convince miners of their duty to the nation. President Wilson

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[87] *Coal Trade Journal*, vol. 51, no. 24 (June 16, 1920): 665; Baer, "A Guide to the History of Penn Virginia Corporation and the Westmoreland Coal Company," vol. 2.
[88] D.B. Wentz to C.E. Lesher, Dec. 8, 1916. Accession 1765, Series II, Box 434, Virginia File #384.
[89] Baer, "A Guide," vol. 2, 120.

stressed the importance of miners to the war effort, and from overseas, General John J. Pershing expressed confidence that coal would help them achieve victory.[90] A circular from the Department of the Interior in May impressed upon operators their "patriotic duty" to institute plans for workers and their families to grow gardens in their yards and on vacant company property. "War today," the circular argued, "is as much a matter of food supplies as actual fighting in the trenches." Not only would growing vegetables help soldiers "fighting for a world democracy," it would also provide "healthful outdoor exercise to the people" and fresh vegetables for their consumption. Lastly, the Department requested that companies who agreed to this plan provide American flags for their workers, "as a reminder that he who serves his country in this capacity serves the flag."[91] The manager of Stonega Coke and Coal thought the company would be "able to do better work this year if we appeal to our men from the patriotic standpoint." Wentz agreed, and the company introduced the initiative at its collieries. In the midst of a crusade to "make the world safe for democracy," coal mining became imbued with a sense of patriotism.[92]

Union organizers harnessed this newfound political power to alter the relationship between miners and their employers. During the war, the UMWA increased its membership rolls to the highest levels in its history. At 400,000 members, it could claim to be the largest union in the nation.[93] District 19 of the United Mine Workers established a presence in southeastern Kentucky and east Tennessee during the first months of the war. The union sought recognition by the operators and an agreement that included a wage increase, the eight-hour day, and better

[90] Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 178.
[91] Department of the Interior Circular, May 31, 1917. Penn Virginia Records, Accession 1765, Series II, Box 434, Virginia File #384: U.S. Bureau of Mines, U.S.G.S. 1915-1919.
[92] R.E. Taggart to Otis Mouser, June 9, 1917. Penn Virginia Records, Accession 1765, Series II, Box 434, Virginia File #384: U.S. Bureau of Mines, U.S.G.S. 1915-1919.
[93] Johnson, *Politics of Soft Coal*, 81.

working conditions. A wage scale convention held in Pineville, Kentucky in July attracted 160 delegates "from every mine in the entire field," including several Black miners, making it "the largest in the history of that district."[94] Negotiations failed, and in August, over 20,000 miners went on strike. In Kentucky, miners in Whitley, Knox, Bell, and Harlan walked off the job. All operations in Harlan County ground to a halt, save for those of International Harvester at Benham. There, 200 Black workers arrived to take the place of the striking miners.[95] The cover of the *United Mine Workers' Journal* proclaimed labor to be "ready to serve; ready to sacrifice," for the country, but only if its voice was recognized and its demands met. "Service and sacrifice exacted by force, is slavery, not democracy," the *UMWJ* declared, "We must maintain our democracy at home also!"[96]

Over the course of the fall, the chairman of the Fuel Administration Garfield met with the miners and operators to iron out an agreement. The strike came to an end on October 1, as miners won a wage increase and some concessions on working conditions. The settlement did not result in formal recognition of the union, but it did provide an arbitration board to decide future matters. Nationally, the negotiation of the Washington Agreement on October 6 nixed further wage hikes and mandated no strikes for the duration of the war.[97] For some operators, like Stonega in nearby southwest Virginia, the agreements "practically amounted to the same thing" as full recognition. District 19 of the UMWA had made more progress at mines in Kentucky, and a mine in Virginia had been organized under District 29 of West Virginia. "Conditions in that

[94] *UMWJ*, vol. 28, no. 13, July 26, 1917, 8.
[95] *Courier-Journal*, Aug. 14, 1917, p. 3.
[96] *UMWJ*, vol. 28, no. 14, Aug. 2, 1917.
[97] Bettez, *Kentucky and the Great War*, 211. McCartin, *Labor's Great War*, 125.

territory are going to be intolerable until this question is definitely decided," the company warned, "and intolerable if recognition is granted."[98]

Throughout the first year of the war, "all classes of mine labor" from loaders to construction workers found steady employment, with wages that seemed to keep rising. Stonega Coke and Coal issued three wage hikes in 1917 alone, to account for the increased cost of living and maintain competitive with its neighbors. As single men either enlisted or were drafted into the armed forces, operators sought out other sources of labor. Stonega increased the number of married men on its payroll but found it difficult to provide adequate housing for the men and their families. As a result, they turned once again to the transportation of Black workers. While the "men secured in this way are not the most desirable," operators kept their eyes and ears open to "labor conditions in practically every locality which could be reached by transportation without very excessive expense." For Stonega, the bulk of the 3,496 workers imported on transportation in 1917 came from industrial cities in the South: Bessemer, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Louisville, Kentucky. African American miners at Stonega were "familiar with labor agencies maintained in Cincinnati and Louisville," and could travel to Alabama free of charge thanks to this relationship. On the other hand, laws against transporting labor in certain parts of Georgia and the Carolinas were "so rigid and the penalties so severe" that companies tended to look elsewhere first. Indeed, fear of running afoul of the law caused many a railroad passenger agent to refuse prepayment from a labor agent.[99]

The arrival of U.S. Steel into the coalfield complicated the labor situation. With demand soaring, engineers planned Lynch – named after the president of the subsidiary U.S. Coal and

[98] *Annual Report of Stonega Coal and Coke Co., Inc., Operating Department, 1917,* 5-6. Penn Virginia Records, Accession 1765, Series II, Box 211: Annual Reports of Operating Dept. 1915-1920.
[99] *Ibid.,* 4-8.

Coke – to produce over two million tons of coal per year, up to 8,000 tons per working day. All of the coal was captive, destined for U.S. Steel mills south of Chicago.[100] To distribute the mine output into railcars, the company designed what promised to be the "largest coal tipple in the world."[101] As construction crews assembled the mining infrastructure, U.S. Steel set about "bending every resource of large capital and the trained intelligence which money could buy, to the making of a modern town." Where a log cabin once stood, the company built a hotel; paved streets snaked through what was once a wooded hillside.[102] The multi-million-dollar project to construct Lynch produced a state-of-the-art extraction town that represented the cutting edge of corporate paternalism. Harlan County's relatively small population, along with the lack of sufficient housing and utilities, led to the need for such an undertaking. Additionally, because there was enough coal "to last more than a century," the company wanted to cultivate a stable relationship with labor. To keep miners content, and out of unions, U.S. Steel spared no expense to build adequate houses, churches, and schools. Identical duplex-styles homes put the shanties of other extraction towns in the county to shame. Plastered walls and running water made Lynch's homes "palatial extravagances by Appalachian standards." The company store promised to be the largest and most well-stocked commissary ever built, while the mines themselves were well-ventilated, and electrically powered. Teachers and preachers brought in by the company espoused the holy trinity – "Patriotism, Americanism, and Capitalism." Proposed as an "idyllic

[100] The majority of Harlan County coal fueled manufacturing in the Midwest. Kentucky State Department of Mines, *Kentucky Coal Mines: Output for Calendar Year 1929* (Lexington: Department of Mines, 1929). "Coal – Part B, Distribution and Consumption, By C.E. Lesher," in *Mineral Resources of the United States, 1917, Part II: Nonmetals* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1920), 1203 – 1260. For 1929, see W.H. Young, "Distribution of Coal Produced in the Middle and Southern Appalachian High Volatile Districts in 1929." *Monthly Coal Distribution Report - M.C.D. 3, Supplement*, October 20, 1931.
[101] *Courier-Journal*, Dec. 16, 1917, p. 3.
[102] Ellis, "Children of the Kentucky Coal Fields," 290. *Manufacturers Record* vol. 73, no. 21 (May 23, 1918): 60.

place" for workers and bosses, the philosophy behind the "Kingdom of Lynch" aspired to subsume all individuality under the pursuit of coal.[103]

Stonega looked to form a working relationship with their new neighbors over Black Mountain, especially in matters of labor and wages. Daniel B. Wentz came into close contact with U.S. Steel executives in Pittsburgh as they concluded the land deal and urged his vice president on the ground in Virginia to cultivate "the most friendly working basis possible." U.S. Coal and Coke's plan to recruit miners, however, strained this partnership from the beginning. Superintendents from the two companies met to discuss matters in October. Miners in Lynch, according to USCC's superintendent Edward O'Toole, would be paid by the hour, not the day. The company also planned to pay "enough to get labor" regardless of wage levels at nearby mines. When word of this reached Wentz in Philadelphia, he dashed off a letter to USCC Pres. William H. Clingerman. If miners could get more digging coal in Lynch, other operations would have to raise wages to keep up. "I am afraid, if Mr. O'Toole pursues his policy," Wentz wrote, "it is going to result in a very marked increase in the wages paid labor in our immediate section." Wentz found the situation "disturbing" and presumed the Wisconsin Steel Company – USCC's next-door neighbor in Harlan County would also be concerned. In closing, he urged Clingerman to consider how their actions could affect the "equitable and level condition" operators enjoyed in the region.[104]

Undeterred, U.S. Steel proceeded with their plans and recruited Black southerners to live and work in Lynch. A May 1918 advertisement in the *Middlesboro Pinnacle News* touted the advantages of working for U.S. Coal and Coke. Miners in Lynch worked six days a week, were

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[103] Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power*, 95-96.
[104] D.B. Wentz to Otis Mouser, Aug. 31, 1917; Otis Mouser to D.B. Wentz, Oct. 19, 1917; D.B. Wentz to C. H. Clingerman, Oct. 22, 1917. Accession 1765, Series II, Box 434, File #157: U.S. Coal & Coke Co., 1905-1923. Penn Virginia.

not beholden to railroad car shortages, and lived "in the best houses" in eastern Kentucky. The company needed miners, laborers, and carpenters, urging all interested to "Come up and see what we have."[105] Early migrants to Harlan County recalled being recruited by a white labor agent named "Limehouse," a "funny looking hillbilly" that transported truckloads of Black families from Alabama to mine coal for U.S. Steel.[106] According to Karida L. Brown's recent work on migration to Harlan County, Black southerners did indeed think of a move to the border South as an "escape" from the repressive Jim Crow regime down south and an occasional springboard to places further north. As chapter two explained, Black Appalachians made the most of the dynamics of race and labor in the Central Appalachian coalfields.

Harlan County Total Population
1910 – 10,566
1920 – 31, 545 (199% change)
Harlan County Black Population
1910 – 564
1920 – 2,901 (414% change)[107]

Fueled by southern migration, Benham and other model extraction towns in Kentucky attracted a disproportionate number of African Americans. Out of the total Black population of Harlan County in 1920, nearly 2,000 made their homes in either Benham or Lynch.[108] While company-imposed segregation relegated them to separate neighborhoods and facilities, model extraction towns did provide Black miners and their families with a more attractive setting than the Deep South they chose to leave.

The federal government, on the other hand, came to view Black migration as one more variable to control. Just as the USFA fixed the price per ton for coal and coke and dictated which

[105] *Middlesboro Pinnacle News*, May 9, 1918, p. 2
[106] Brown, *Gone Home*, 40.
[107] 1920 Census, vol. 3, 373.
[108] Author estimates on extraction town figures from ancestry.com database.

particular territories companies could operate in, the U.S. Employment Service regulated the labor market and attempted to mitigate the influence of labor agents. Companies were barred from advertising for unskilled labor and could only recruit workers by going through their assigned states' Employment Service offices. For Appalachian companies allowed to recruit in the states of North Carolina and Virginia, however, the high wages offered by the shipbuilding industry along the coast presented stiff competition. Some companies found success soliciting labor from within, but larger industrial areas in other states offered far more potential workers. This situation drove Stonega to consider workers of vastly different backgrounds than it had previously. When some workers from Mexico recruited to the zinc industry in nearby Knoxville had found their way to the coal mines, operators found them to be "very efficient laborers." Stonega reached out to the director of the Texas Employment Service to inquire further but they were rebuffed. The company also checked into Puerto Rican laborers at military camps in South Carolina but found them "entirely too light for service on the coke yards… unfit for any class of work we had to offer." Until the armistice, the draft and general instability in the workforce produced a labor market that companies struggled to control.[109]

Whether on the back of a truck or in a passenger car, migrants to Appalachia joined the half-million African Americans who left the Deep South during the war. By leaving the land of the Deep South, Black men and women attempted to claim their rights as Americans citizens. As one influential Black woman in Florida explained, "Negroes are not so greatly disturbed about wages. They are tired of being treated as children; they want to be men."[110] Their movements transformed the working class at the very moment that organized labor reached new heights of power. The newfound partnership between unions and the wartime regulatory state yielded

[109] *Annual Report of Stonega Coal and Coke Co., Inc., Operating Department, 1918*, 6.
[110] *Negro Migration in 1916-1917*, 107.

advances for workers, which in turn raised the stakes and the attendant possibility of racial violence. Some saw these changes and issued words of caution. Carter G. Woodson, graduate of Berea College and founder of the *Journal of Negro History*, predicted an "increase in race prejudice leading in some communities to actual outbreaks." like the one that occurred in East St. Louis in 1917. Woodson acknowledged that white northerners considered Black workers "not only strike breakers" but "inferior individuals unworthy of the consideration which white men deserve." Instead of a facilitating a welcome to the Promised Land, migration would ensure that "maltreatment of the Negroes will be nationalized." Woodson argued that only by realizing their labor power would Black migrants enjoy "that sort of freedom which carries with it industrial opportunity and social justice."[111]

[111] Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, 179, 180, 190.

CHAPTER 4

REACTION: THE LONG RED SUMMER ON THE RAILROADS

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity
William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"

The Great Migration brought Black southerners to the extraction towns of Benham and Lynch, but also to transportation towns like Corbin. With U.S. Steel promising to extract millions of tons of coal in Harlan County, the L&N strengthened its corridor into and out of the coalfields. Just over the county line from the railyard in Corbin, construction crews laid thirty miles of new track in 1918 to handle the output of Lynch's new mines. Military draft registration records for neighboring Knox County show that 152 Black men registered for the wartime draft in 1918, and twenty-nine listed the L&N as their employer.[1] Nearly all of them were engaged in "trackwork" or as section hands for the L&N in Place, a small flag station a few miles from Corbin. Twenty of the men hailed from points further south, including Birmingham, Alabama; Macon, Mississippi; and Cotton Plant, Arkansas.[2] Nearly all of them were under twenty years old and unmarried, with next of kin hundreds of miles away. Colie Reese, age twenty, listed his closest relative as Hattie Reese in Macon County, Alabama.[3] How Reese and the rest of the crew got to southeastern Kentucky is unknown, but their job was clear-cut. The yards in Corbin would need to be expanded and upgraded, and Black laborers from the South would again do the hard

[1] With the Selective Service Act of 1917, Congress mandated that all American men from ages twenty-one to thirty-one register for the draft. After some initial Southern consternation, lawmakers discarded racial limitations on conscription. Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 52-53.
[2] Ralph King, draft registration card, ancestry.com; Will Smith, draft registration card, ancestry.com; Charlie Waffer, draft registration card, ancestry.com.
[3] Colie Reese, draft registration card, ancestry.com.

work. White railroad workers would see their arrival, however, as a threat to the racial order. By the New Year, all but three of the town's Black residents would be gone.

This chapter shows how white railroaders, observing the changes in wartime industry, took action to secure their postwar futures. In the last chapter, we saw that war increased demand for coal opened up opportunities for migration and imbued workers with a great deal of power. Through strikes and coordinated action, workers – especially miners – could and did disrupt the flow of coal, which in turn granted them increased political influence. Federal intervention accelerated the conflict between this new power and the old order, resulting in the recognition of unions, a wave of strike activity in 1919, and what some scholars describe as the rise of mass democracy.[4] By the early 1920s, the unions for both railroaders and coal miners became part of the labor movement's "progressive bloc."[5] Yet any analysis of the spread of labor activism is incomplete without also considering violent repression. Racism and exclusion presented tantalizing alternatives to class solidarity in the U.S., especially for railroaders. At specific points within the coal economy, Corbin and other transportation towns among them, white railroaders were all too willing to wield the power for themselves. I argue that the mob violence of the Long Red Summer should be seen through the lens of labor history, as railroaders moved to finally accomplish their goal of excluding Black workers from the industry and their communities altogether. Expulsions and anti-Black riots, then, were as much a part of the postwar working-class experience as were general strikes and gun battles with the henchmen of capital. The war had broken the racialized hierarchy of labor on the railroads, but white workers were willing to hammer it back together.

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[4] Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil,* 19-21.
[5] David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1987), 399.

Race and Labor on the Railroads during the War

In the war to make the world "safe for democracy," workplaces around the country proved to be important battlefields in their own right.[6] Under the strain of a national economy geared towards world war, shippers, government officials, and union leaders battled over issues ranging from labor and freight car shortages to the implementation of the recently won eight-hour day.[7] In December 1917, President Woodrow Wilson established the U.S. Railroad Administration (USRA) to alleviate the "transportation crisis," placing his son-in-law William McAdoo in charge.[8] On Feb. 21, 1918, McAdoo issued General Order number 8, which barred railroad companies from discriminating against employees based on union membership. The ranks of the brotherhoods swelled almost immediately as the federal government endorsed unionization. Furthermore, McAdoo established three separate boards to settle workplace grievances in the operating trades, shops, and for maintenance of way crews. All three boards included union representation.[9] That same month, the U.S. Employment Service offered its services to secure "workers of all classes for the railroads." C.H. Markham, the regional director of the USRA's southern district, informed railroad executives that they should not engage in labor practices that would compete with the U.S. Employment Service.[10] Railroad workers should not be solicited by competing companies, or indeed competing industries, without the approval of the director. McAdoo explained that difficulties in securing labor necessitated this

[6] McCartin, *Labor's Great War*, 2.
[7] The Adamson Act, adopted in 1916, guaranteed an eight-hour day for the running-trades – engineers, firemen, conductors, and brakemen. Tallion, *Good Reliable White Men*, 198-202.
[8] K. Austin Kerr, *American Railroad Politics, 1914-1920: Rates, Wages, and Efficiency* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), 39, 65.
[9] Davis, *Power at Odds*, 37. McCartin, *Labor's Great War*, 75.
[10] Circular Letter No. 50, Feb. 28, 1918. L&N Papers, Box 12, Folder 8a.

stance, as railroads were "essential to the successful conduct of the war." The railroads, as McAdoo declared, "are now a government institution."[11]

Wartime government control also brought changes to the racialized hierarchy of railroad labor. As explained in the last chapter, higher wages in industries across the nation attracted Black labor out of the South and away from traditional occupations. Black brakemen and firemen could now find employment in a shipyard, for example, with higher pay and more appealing working conditions than their posts at the bottom of the railroad hierarchy. In an attempt to keep the railroads competitive in the increasingly tight labor market, McAdoo and the USRA released General Order no. 27 in May of 1918. The order commanded that "colored men employed as firemen, trainmen, and switchmen shall be paid the same rates as are paid white men in the same capacities." In effect, order 27 and its supplements mandated wage increases across the board, equal pay for equal work regardless of the employee's race or sex, and time-and-a-half for overtime. For railroaders at the bottom of the occupational ladder, the order was a substantial boon. Firemen received a thirty-five percent raise, while flagmen's earnings rose by half. Only the lily white "labor aristocrats" at the top saw little benefit from the order. It also staved off the impending labor crunch, as Black railroaders found the jobs attractive once again. McAdoo, a southerner and ardent segregationist, certainly seemed an unlikely vehicle for racial equality. Yet he described the order as "an act of simple justice," and Black railroaders and labor leaders hailed his actions as a step towards democracy. As the wartime boom continued, the USRA helped to usher in the "first black industrial working class." [12]

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[11] Director General of Railroads, Washington, March 14, 1918. L&N Papers, Box 12, Folder 8a.
[12] Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 48-56. Douglas B. Craig, "'Don't You Hear All the Railroad Men Squeak?': William G. McAdoo, the United States Railroad Administration, and the Democratic Presidential Nomination of 1924," *Journal of American Studies* vol. 48, no. 3 (2014): 783. Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 295. Philp S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 131.

The white unionists in the trainmen and firemen brotherhoods, on the other hand, gave the orders a mixed reception. Thanks to General Order 8, railroaders for the stubbornly anti-union L&N, which had only bargained with the engineers and conductors since the Pullman Strike, joined the brotherhoods by the thousands. Railroaders around the country recognized McAdoo as a hero, with the vice president of the Pullman Conductors declaring him "the emancipator of the white race."[13] By April 1918, the *Courier-Journal* could report that for the first time in a quarter century, "practically all of the employes in the operating departments of the Louisville & Nashville are members of a union."[14] Many decisions of the USRA's adjustment committees favored railroad workers over management, with the board assigned to oversee the repair shops siding with labor over sixty percent of the time.[15] As far as the equal wage order was concerned, some white unionists – in reasoning reminiscent of the turn-of-the-century debates – had hoped eliminating the discrepancy would disincentivize companies from hiring Black railroaders. Yet when Black workers began to reap the benefits of the wartime economy and government intervention, "unease about the present and uncertainty about the future" started to seep into the halls of the brotherhood unions, according to one historian of railroad labor.[16] In protest of order 27, the journal of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT) resurrected old rhetoric to describe African Americans as "illiterate" and "incompetent." Allegedly, a Black railroad employee occupied a "privileged class" and "could do pretty much as he pleases without any apprehension." White railroaders, on the other hand, had to be "perfect in every particular,

[13] *The Railroad Trainman,* vol. 36, no. 10 (Oct. 1919): 730, 492.
[14] *Courier-Journal,* April 28, 1918. Kerr, *American Railroad Politics*, 92. Russell T. Wigginton, "Both Sides of the Tracks: Louisville and Nashville Railroad's African-American Workers in Louisville, Kentucky, 1915-1945," (PhD. Dissertation: University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign, 2001), 119.
[15] McCartin, *Labor's Great War*, 98.
[16] Eric Arnesen, "Charting an Independent Course: African American Railroad Workers in the World War I Era," in *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working-Class Experience,* Eric Arnesen, Julie Greene, and Bruce Laure, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 294.

and be ever ready to respond to the call of duty, even to the extent of protecting the negroes' position or be summarily discharged."[17] The BRT, newly emboldened by the USRA, became a vehicle used by frustrated white brakemen and switchmen in the midst of a rising tide of unionism.

Employers across the country also seemed reluctant to embrace the idea of equal wages and equal treatment for African American workers. In the pages of *Industrial Management*, Dwight Thompson Farnham, a supervising engineer for the Emerson Company, offered his fellow managers some advice. He believed "the mistake most foremen make is that they use the same method with the negro that they use with white labor." Farnham's approach assumed that Black workers were lazy, childish, required more supervision, and in general were "different physically, temperamentally and psychologically from any of the white races." Foremen and managers needed "firmness" and "constructive supervision" to get the most out of Black workers. He also believed in using segregation to separate the workforce: "In places where different races necessarily come into close contact and in places where inherited characteristics are especially accentuated," he counseled, "it is better to keep their respective folkways from clashing wherever possible." With proper management, Farnham considered it possible to "use negroes successfully" in many types of industrial work.[18]

Black workers still faced a myriad of obstacles, but the war years did afford opportunities in new locations, in different occupations, and at higher wages. The expansion of the wartime regulatory state, seen in the USRA, seemed to buttress African American progress with the authority of the federal government. According to the historian Eric Arnesen, the USRA

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[17] *The Railroad Trainman,* vol. 36 (1919): 804.
[18] Dwight Thomson Farnham, "Negroes a Source of Industrial Labor," *Industrial Management* vol. 56, no. 2 (Aug. 1918): 123-39.

represented a source of "dramatic change" for Black railroaders. "Not since the Freedman's Bureau during the turbulent Reconstruction era," Arnesen argued, did African Americans have the authority of a government "with the capacity to intervene and order improvements in their working lives."[19] Letters from Black railroaders streamed into the USRA office thanking McAdoo for issuing decisions that granted them better pay and a sense of job security. Labor also won concessions from capital through the National War Labor Board, implemented in April 1918, which brought the nation a step closer to achieving industrial democracy.[20] After seeing the its acceptance by the wartime state, civil rights organizations began to embrace labor organization as a means to an end. The NAACP concluded that "the Labor Union is no panacea, but it has proved and is proving a force that in the end diminishes race prejudice." The organization urged workers to join unions whenever possible, for the struggle "to live like men" would ultimately unite white and Black labor under the same banner.[21]

Railroaders across the South bristled at other attempts to unsettle the hierarchy. After General Order 27, railroad companies circumvented the equal wage provision by twisting job titles and duties that had long been defined by race. At a hearing before the Board of Railroad Wages and Working Conditions, BRT President William Granville Lee brought the issue before Congress. Some railroads in the South, he explained, employed Black men as porters but required them to do the tasks of a passenger brakemen. On top of their usual duties, these Black "porter-brakemen" were often tasked with cleaning, sweeping, and even shining the shoes of the white conductor. By classifying the workers in this manner, and in some cases even placing the brakeman badge on their caps, railroads could avoid paying the higher wage afforded to actual

[19] Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 52.
[20] McCartin, *Labor's Great War,* 116, 96.
[21] *The Crisis*, vol. 18, no. 5 (Sept. 1919): 241

brakemen, including white brakemen. Porters, almost always Black, did not command as high of pay as white brakemen and were not part of the railroad labor hierarchy. BRT President Lee argued that if the railroads continued to use Black railroaders in this position "in preference to white men," they should also enjoy "every right that should be theirs as brakemen, including promotion to a conductorship." Lee claimed to want "a square deal" for Black railroaders but the mere mention of seniority for Black employees proved to be a deal-breaker for the brotherhood.[22]

The same month that McAdoo issued the consequential order number 27, railroaders in east Tennessee used violence to create an all-white transportation town. Erwin, the county seat of Unicoi along the banks of the Nolichucky River near the North Carolina border, had served as the headquarters of the Clinchfield Railroad since its arrival in 1909. The railroad's financier, George L. Carter, owner of thousands of acres of coal lands in southwest Virginia, reorganized the failing road in 1908 and extended its lines from Pike County, Kentucky to Spartanburg, South Carolina. Throughout the teens, Erwin became a vital conduit for Appalachian coal bound for the Atlantic coast.[23] Home to the Clinchfield's yard and repair shops, Erwin's attracted railroad workers from other lines and saw its population increase steadily throughout the 1910s. One of these men was L.H. Phetteplace, a former trainmaster on the Norfolk and Western, who became the general manager of the Clinchfield. In Erwin, as in Corbin and other transportation towns, railroading was "a way of life," with white workers and their families taking immense pride in a job on the Clinchfield.[24]

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[22] *The Railroad Trainman*, vol. 35, no. 12 (Dec. 1918): 865.
[23] James A. Goforth, *Erwin, Tennessee: A Pictorial History, 1891-1929* (Johnson City, TN: The Overmountain Press, 2004), 36-40.
[24] Goforth, *Erwin*, 55.

The growth of the railroad tested the community's commitment to a racialized hierarchy. In 1915, the Erwin lodge of the BLE protested to the Clinchfield Railroad that an engineer did not meet the racial requirements to work on a preferred run. The union alleged that I.S. Cousins was "not a full-blooded white man" and demanded that the railroad move him from his usual train. The railroad obliged and Cousins sued the union lodge for libel and damages. The case, which the *Johnson City Staff* described as "one of unusual interest," made it to federal court, where the jury deemed Cousins to be white and awarded him $3,000 in remuneration.[25] Race would only grow more salient in Erwin, as its Black population increased from 1910 to 1918. In the midst of the Great Migration, around a hundred African Americans took jobs as laborers in the railroad's repair shops. Most of these new workers hailed from South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, and lived in houses below the railyard near the river.[26]

Although relatively small, this migration to a largely white transportation town produced the conditions for anti-Black violence. One of these men was Tom DeVert, a Black man born in North Carolina, who worked as a construction laborer for L.H. Phetteplace. On the afternoon of Sunday May 20, 1918, DeVert won some money gambling with white men near the railyard. An argument ensued over his right to the winnings, and DeVert fled through the woods near the river. In the midst of the chaos, DeVert ran headlong into Georgia Collins and her brother, the children of a blacksmith for the Clinchfield Railroad. DeVert grabbed the young woman in an apparent attempt to use her as a shield, plunging into the river with her in tow. One of the men in pursuit shot and killed DeVert, while Collins drowned.[27] Collins's brother ran for help, and word

[25] *Johnson City Staff*, Oct. 11, 1915, p. 1.
[26] William W. Helton, *Around Home in Unicoi County* (Johnson City, TN: The Overmountain Press, 1987), 427.
[27] This interpretation of events is based on Elliot Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 158-61; *Johnson City Staff*, May 20, 1918; *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 20, 1918.

of her death spread quickly. A group of white men pulled the bodies from the river and proceeded to drag DeVert's body over a mile and a half back to town. By then, the small group swelled to an angry mob whose members sought revenge for what they thought was interracial murder. They summoned the town's entire Black population to the railyard and burned DeVert's body on a makeshift funeral pyre of railroad ties. Some members of the mob then moved to burn down the entire Black section of town, but they were stopped by L.H. Phettplace, DeVert's employer and the manager of the Clinchfield. After he convinced the mob against further violence, they settled on a forced exodus. If any of Erwin's Black residents were still in town in the morning, the mob warned, they would meet Devert's fate. Over the next few days, the African Americans who lived and worked in Erwin left their homes, never to return.[28]

The fallout from the lynching and expulsion exposed a debate over the role of Black labor that was at its core. Some days after the lynching, the *Johnson City Staff* newspaper pointed out that "at a time when labor conditions are growing more and more critical," Erwin lost "nearly a hundred skilled laborers," some which were "high priced machinists." African Americans of "the best of reputation, sober, industrious, and owners of property" had been forced out. Many had moved to Dante, Virginia further into the coalfields, or had returned to the Carolinas. The paper predicted that the town would be hard-pressed to recover from the blot it now had on its reputation.[29] Equating well-paying jobs and full citizenship with white skin, some white railroaders in Erwin took offense at the newspaper's characterization of the former residents as "skilled machinists." Clinchfield Railroad officials notified the newspaper that "no negroes have

[28] *Knoxville Journal and Tribune,* May 22, 1918. *Knoxville Sentinel,* May 22, 1918.
[29] *Johnson City Staff,* May 22, 1918.

ever been employed in the Erwin shops or elsewhere as machinists, but simply as day laborers and helpers." The newspaper soon corrected their mistake.[30]

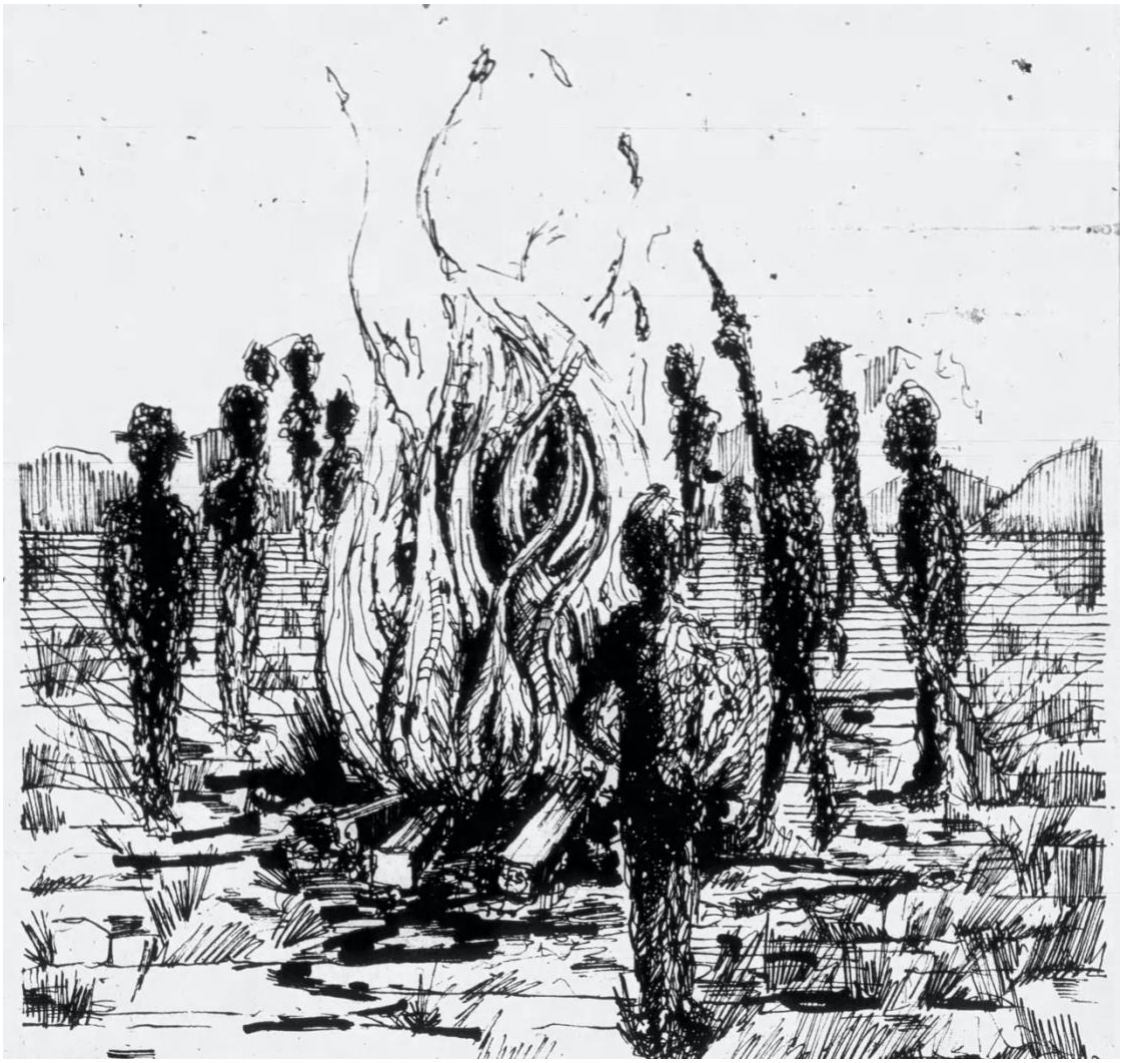

Figure 8: Depiction of Tom DeVert's murder. *Johnson City Press Chronicle*, June 17, 1979.

[30] *Johnson City Staff*, May 23, 1918.

By the end of the war, African American labor had seen remarkable, yet tenuous advances. In addition to the progress made at workplaces across the country, over 367,000 African Americans served in the military, with 200,000 overseas in Europe. Most of these men worked as laborers and stevedores, but some units, like the Harlem Hellfighters, distinguished themselves in battle.[31] To Emmett J. Scott – President Wilson's Special Assistant for Negro Affairs – the war allowed Black Americans to gain a "keener and more sharply defined consciousness, not only of his duties… but of his rights and privileges as a citizen of the United States." Black soldiers "performed to their utmost of their ability the duties which the war imposed upon all citizens," and distinguished themselves as a result. If conditions on the home front did not improve accordingly, the country's Black citizens would question if "the war have been fought in vain."[32] Soon, however, the impetus for industrial expansion and the requisite demand for labor and government regulation would evaporate. If the Erwin expulsion and the opposition to General Order 27 were any indication, Black workers would face a determined effort to turn back the clock.

Railroaders and Reaction

The armistice of November 11, 1918 signaled the end of the wartime economy and the arrival of much uncertainty for both capital and labor. As industries pulled back from wartime production, the labor market that spurred the Great Migration tightened. Jobs became increasingly scarce. White veterans reentered the work force fully expecting to resume their occupations, while the return of Black soldiers, according to W.E.B. Du Bois, heralded an effort

[31] Mark R. Schneider, *We Return Fighting*: *The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 9.
[32] Emmett J. Scott, *The American Negro in the World War* (Chicago: Homewood Press, 1919), 459.

to “Make way for Democracy.” African Americans had helped save it in France, Du Bois declared, and would “save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.”[33] Well aware that it was the great overseas conflict that had incited these social and economic changes, NAACP secretary James Weldon Johnson wondered, “can the Negro hold what he has gained when the war is over?”[34]

Almost immediately after the armistice, rank-and-file white railroaders moved to expel African Americans from the job by any means necessary. In January 1919, disgruntled white workers in Memphis formed a committee to demand the Illinois Central and one of its subsidiaries remove all Black yardmen from the service. Labeling them “inefficient, disorderly, and boisterous,” the switchmen objected to Black workers being paid at an equal rate. When the company refused, all of the white switchmen walked out and were soon joined by workers on other systems in the city, some six hundred in total. One of the organizers stated that theirs was not an organized labor movement, “though all are union men.” President Lee of the BRT disapproved of the walkout, as did the other leaders of the brotherhood unions. The so-called “Memphis Hate Strike” failed, but not before some white workers grew increasingly violent. Targeted beatings, and in some cases, blatant killings, of Black trainmen in the area forced many out of the railroad industry.[35]

Taking a lesson from their employers, railroaders then twisted the language of their contract and appealed to the regulatory state to finish the job. The BRT took the matter to the USRA, and in September 1919, six major railroads in the South agreed to the following rule changes:

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[33] *The Crisis*, XVIII (May, 1919), p. 13
[34] Arnesen, *Black Protest*, 148.
[35] Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 295-98.

1. All men entering the service on and after September 1, 1919, to fill positions of brakemen, flagmen, baggagemen and switchmen will be subjected to and required to pass uniform examinations and comply with the regulations as to standard watches and to know how to read and write.
2. Discipline will be applied uniformly, commensurate with the facts in the case, without distinction as to color.
3. When train or yard forces are reduced, the men involved will be displaced in the order of their seniority, regardless of color. When a vacancy occurs, or new runs are created, the senior man will have a preference in choice of run or vacancy, either as flagman, baggageman, brakeman or switchman; except that negroes are not to be used as conductors, flagmen, baggagemen or yard conductors.
   Negroes are not to be used as flagmen except that those now in that service may be retained therein with their seniority rights. White men are not to be used as porters; no porter to have any trainman's rights except where he may have established same by three months continuously in freight service.
4. Any rules, regulations or agreements in conflict with the foregoing are null and void.[36]

The rule changes ensured that seniority, the bedrock of railroad employment was now for whites only. Decades of custom had established that Black railroaders occupied the position of brakeman, with the position of flagman at the rear of the train reserved for white men. While rule 3 was ostensibly color-blind, it allowed white railroaders with seniority to claim the jobs of Black brakemen, who were in turn barred from filling the position of flagman. Officials of the USRA acknowledged they had assuaged the trainmen, citing their preference to "inconvenience" a few railroad workers rather than risk a strike.[37] The BRT celebrated the developments in the pages of its journal, pointing out that "a large number of white trainmen" were able to choose new positions due to the new rules.[38] The newly-formed Colored Association of Railway Employees resisted these changes to no avail, and the new contracts spelled disaster for Black railroaders.[39]

[36] *The Railroad Trainman,* vol. 36 (1919): 804.
[37] Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 300-1.
[38] *The Railroad Trainman,* vol. 36 (1919): 798.
[39] Arnesen, "Charting an Independent Course," in *Labor Histories,* 296-7.

In some cases, unionists used whites-only membership clauses as reasons to fire Black workers. Charles Malone, a Black man from Florida, hired on with the Pennsylvania Railroad in Morrisville, PA on July 5, 1917. He soon impressed the roundhouse foreman, who made Malone a hostler, where he helped position railroad engines within the train yard. Faced with a labor shortage due to the war, the foreman tasked Malone with recruiting "some more good colored men." Malone took on the task, working for the PRR during the day and recruiting new men at night. When "work got scarce" after the armistice and departed workers – in this case, Italian immigrants – returned to their jobs at the roundhouse, the Black workers received their walking papers. Then, in May of 1919, a member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (BLF&E) came to the roundhouse and demanded dues from all of the hostlers. The next day, he returned Malone's money and told him that since he was "a colored man," he could not join the union and would lose his job as a result. Malone's boss lamented the whole situation but explained that "the war was over, and they could get plenty of men now." The racist exclusion of the union had tied his hands, since "men of any Nationality could belong to the Brotherhood," except Americans with black skin.

Malone left the PRR and planned to return home to Pensacola, Florida to run his farm. Yet by July, he had not received his back pay. When he asked why, a railroad official informed him that the company did not intend to pay him. To this, Malone responded with righteous indignation. "Now, we are American citizens the same as anyone else," he wrote to the Railroad Administration. "We are taxpayers, we do our bit and protect the American flag. We are good on the battlefield and we want to know why we cannot be good here." The PRR eventually awarded Malone his back pay, but Malone then brought suit against the union lodge in Trenton, NJ. Ultimately, attorneys for the union decided Malone had only been a "temporary" hostler and

could not claim discrimination. Malone, like many other Black railroaders in 1919, faced blatant opposition from the unions and relative indifference from the company.[40]

Through a multi-pronged attack, white railroaders' decades-long campaign to eliminate Black workers from their occupations began to come to fruition. Where violence failed, as it did in Memphis, USRA-backed contracts proved to be effective. What a difference a year made for Black railroaders and McAdoo's organization. The regulatory agency that had once been seen as emancipatory now helped drive Black workers out of the industry. Across the country, unions invoked their whites-only clauses to demote and fire Black railroaders who had made advances during the war. Yet the railroad companies' manipulation of job titles, seen in the porter-brakemen dispute of 1918 and the case of Charles Malone in Pennsylvania, blurred the lines of race, occupation, and seniority. These tactics had thrown into conflict groups railroaders that, prior to the war and the USRA orders, had little reason to be in opposition to each other. In this context, white railroaders came to view all workers across the color line – not just those with whom they were in direct competition – with distrust and disdain.

The efforts of railroad unionists to expel African Americans from the workplace occurred in the midst of a nationwide epidemic of anti-Black mob violence. From April to November 1919, at least twenty-five major riots or mob actions occurred across America, resulting in hundreds of deaths and at least fifty-two lynchings. The violence prompted James Weldon Johnson, field secretary of the NAACP, to dub the period "Red Summer." In Elaine, Arkansas, the shooting of a lawman at a meeting of a sharecroppers' union sparked days of violence, resulting in 100 to 300 African American deaths. In Omaha, Nebraska, news of the alleged rape

[40] Charles Malone to Railroad Administrator, July 29, 1919, Pennsylvania Railroad Company Records (hereafter PRR), Personnel Department, Eastern Region, Superintendent of Labor & Wage Bureau, General Files, Box 932, Folder 11.

of a white woman incited a mob that surrounded the courthouse, lynched Will Brown, and nearly did the same to the city's mayor. In Knoxville, Tennessee, similar reports of interracial rape spurred a mob to demand custody of Maurice Mays. Unsuccessful, the white mob then exchanged gunfire with Black residents, and the Tennessee National Guard fired indiscriminately into the crowd in an attempt to quell the violence. Riots in Elaine, Omaha, and Knoxville (just to name three) all occurred in the context of the changes wrought by world war and mass migration.

The events of the Red Summer led W.E.B. Du Bois to describe the circumstances of 1919 as akin to being "on the Great Deep," in the midst of a "vast voyage which will lead to Freedom or Death." The war had illuminated a fight for justice to labor, in which Du Bois saw Black people across the globe as crucial actors. "But of all laborers cheated of their just wage from the world's dawn to today," Du Bois explained, "[the Negro] is the poorest and bloodiest." In the United States, the Black worker had "taken his fastest forward step" from slavery to wage labor, from "scab to half-recognized union man." Yet the opposition exemplified in the Red Summer threatened to roll back this progress. Du Bois cast the struggle as part of the "battle of Industrial Democracy" across the world. In that struggle, white workers had to decide whether to consider Black labor their ally. Although Black workers had been "reluctantly" invited into some unions, Du Bois wondered if they would now be considered "a man – a fellow-voter, a brother?" Finally, he remarked on the rise of communist Russia, which represented the "one new Idea of the World War." "*It is the vision of great dreamers that only those who work shall vote and rule*," Du Bois explained, an idea that Americans often misunderstood thanks to the "maledictions hurled at Bolshevism." In his mind, communism had the chance to become "the one thing that made the slaughter worth while."[41]

[41] *The Crisis*, vol. 18, no. 5 (Sept. 1919): 231-35.

As Du Bois identified in his remarks, the Red Summer coincided with anti-Bolshevist reaction of the first Red Scare. Many believed that the rampant social unrest was the result of an organized, coordinated program under the direction of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Although exaggerated, this theory did stem from the Bolsheviks' stated goal that the October Revolution of 1917 would bring about a worldwide proletarian revolt. For Lenin, victory in Russia was, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm explained, "primarily a battle in the campaign to win the victory of Bolshevism on a wider global scale, and barely justifiable except as such."[42] By 1919, American workers did possess increased power and organizational wherewithal, as seen in the strikes that spread from the steel industry to the general strike in Seattle. Four million workers went on strike in a single year, just over twenty percent of the nation's laboring class.[43] As labor historian Joseph McCartin has explained, along with these "glimmers of modern industrial unionism" came crests of "mass-based radical movements." The IWW, the Socialist Party, worker cooperatives, trade union banks, and other challenges to the capitalist system flourished during and in the aftermath of the war.[44]

To conservative contemporaries, however, the events of the year appeared to mark the coming of a "radical readjustment" that threatened the "social fabric with shocks of doom."[45] Citizens and workers who appeared to resist the homogenizing forces of the war bore the brunt of aggressive pro-American, anti-radical, and often anti-German sentiments. In Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Railroad denied a night foreman his wish for a daytime position because his coworkers believed "that he is not a true American." He did not buy Liberty Bonds until he was badgered by his fellow railroaders, who considered him "more or less Pro-German." The railroad

[42] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 56.
[43] Davis, *Power at Odds*, 48.
[44] McCartin, *Labor's Great War*, 3.
[45] Kelly H. Miller, *The Everlasting Stain* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1924), 5.

eventually ruled that he would be eligible for a daytime position, but only if he took a demotion from his position.[46] Later, politicians seized on the sense of social anxiety to repress those they deemed dangerous to the American government. Senator Miles Poindexter, for example, fashioned himself a prominent critic of Wilson and a leader of the Red Scare anti-communist hysteria of the postwar years. In 1919, the Republican from Washington made political hay by alleging that President Wilson and the Department of Justice had not done enough to combat Bolshevism within the government. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court upheld the convictions of two Socialist Party members under the Espionage Act in the *Schenck v. United States* decision. This hysteria permeated workplaces around the country. In a letter to the Supervisor of the USRA Wage Bureau in February, a general manager for the Pennsylvania Railroad deemed a confiscated pamphlet on "The Bolsheviks and Soviets" to be "a dangerous piece of work." The piece painted the Bolsheviks and their revolution "in the colors of humanity, altruism and martyrdom," which the manager considered "entirely contrary to their real character and intentions." He argued that it ought to be suppressed for its protentional to sway "good, loyal, right minded Americans who permit themselves sometimes to be carried away by booklets of this kind." With nationalism on the rise, any persons who stood athwart were marked as traitorous.[47]

In addition to German Americans and other immigrants from Europe, proponents of wartime hysteria targeted Black labor activists and organizers for their radicalism, perceived or otherwise. The *Knoxville Sentinel*, for example, reprinted an article that placed the blame for racial violence on "a sinister propaganda" that was "at work among negroes in these days of

[46] To Mr. R.L. O'Donnel, Dec. 13, 1918 & Oct. 30, 1918. PRR Papers, Box 935: Complaints, 1918-1919.
[47] To Mr. H.A. Enoch, Feb. 1, 1919. PRR Papers, Box 940: General Manager's Chronological File, 1919.

world upheaval and industrial disturbance."[48] Then, a report from the Department of Justice in November of 1919 identified "a well-concerted movement among a certain class of negro leaders" to "constitute themselves a determined and persistent source of a radical opposition to the Government, and to the established rule of law and order." The report classified five major points of concern: the "ill-governed reaction toward race rioting" and the threat of "retaliatory measures in connection with lynching"; the "more openly expressed" calls for social equality, in which "the sex problem is not infrequently included"; the influence of radical organizations such as the I.W.W. and "an outspoken advocacy of the Bolsheviki or Soviet doctrines"; and lastly, political stance that opposed the Wilson administration, the League of Nations, and "the South in general." Underlying all of these, the department warned, was a burgeoning sense of race consciousness that antagonized white Americans.[49]

Thus in 1919, African Americans became the targets of the twin reactionary currents in postwar America. Stanley B. Norvell, a Black war veteran living in Chicago, articulated much of the sentiment in a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Daily News* in 1919. The war, Norvell wrote, "jolted" African Americans into "a sort of realization of how our government was made and is conducted." The "average Negro of some education" now knew "that he counts as a part of his government, that he is a unit in it," and with that realization came a set of demands:

> We ask not charity but justice. We no longer want perquisites but wages, salary and commissions…. Put us in your counting rooms, your factories and in your banks… People soon become accustomed to new things and things that seem at first preposterous soon become commonplace. We have surely proven by years of unrequited toil and by constant and unfaltering loyalty and fealty that we are worthy of the justice that we ask. For God's sake give it to us!

[48] *Knoxville Sentinel*, Nov. 7, 1919.
[49] *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 1919, p.1.

The violence of Red Summer, in Norvell's analysis, was due to a social structure that had "been long soaked in the inflammable gasoline [sic] of smouldering resentment." The individual incident that incited riots, in Chicago's case – the murder of a Black child who crossed an imaginary line in the waters of Lake Michigan – only provided the spark that "ignited and exploded such vials of wrath" that had long simmered in the American social system.[50]

From Bisbee, Arizona to the nation's capital, the violence of the Red Summer announced the arrival of a terrible backlash. The war had dismantled hierarchies in labor and in American society writ large, and in 1919, white workers on the railroads and other industries aimed for their reconstruction. To settle matters of workplace conflict, they fell back on the tried and true tactic of racism. It was, as Du Bois called it, "the logic of the broken plate, which, seared of old across its pattern, cracks never again, save along the old destruction." For railroaders, the old pattern was a way to put the hierarchy back together.[51]

"Plenty of White Men to Do the Work"

In the summer of 1919, the transportation town of Corbin was still experiencing the wartime boom. The Louisville *Courier-Journal* described it as a "live town" that was "bustling." "If the L. & N. continues to build and add to Corbin," it noted, "that little city will be a metropolis yet."[52] A year after federal control of the railroads, the USRA's action to ban employer discrimination of union workers had allowed the Corbin chapter of the BRT to build a membership of several hundred with "five to ten candidates" joining at each meeting.[53] One

[50] Stanley B. Norvell and William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Views of a Negro During 'The Red Summer' of 1919," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 51., no. 3 (July 1966): 209-218.
[51] Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 54.
[52] *Interior Journal* (Stanford, Ky.,), Oct. 11, 1918, p. 1.
[53] *The Railroad Trainman,* vol. 36 (1919): 437.

brother in the BRT lodge at Corbin remembered with little fondness "how unjustly" they were treated before they organized. "Like an old crippled dog," the railroaders found themselves with little recourse to oppose the power of the company. Thanks to McAdoo and the USRA, he acknowledged, "it is not that way now."[54] Corbin's shop employees also organized a lodge of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen in May of 1918. One year later, the lodge reported "one hundred percent membership." It was clear that these new brotherhood members thought highly of the USRA. "We realize that the government gave us freedom when it took over the railroads and M. McAdoo said that we had a right to organize," a member of the Corbin lodge wrote to the national journal. "Now is the time to quit politics on account of party affiliation," he urged his fellow workers, "and uphold the men that stand for the laboring men regardless of their politics." He commended the journal for taking up the issue of continued government control, which the Corbin lodge supported.[55]

Meanwhile, the USRA wage hikes were a boon to the few African American railroaders who now made their homes in town. Among them were Alex Tye, a thirty-four year-old porter in the L&N master mechanic's office, and his twenty year-old step-son Cearney Parks, who worked as a machinist helper in the L&N shops.[56] The only other Black employee of the shops was Albert Stone, who painted the head end of steam engines.[57] Other occupations for Black Corbin residents included railroad and hotel porters, and janitors. Roscoe Lyttle, born in nearby Clay County, worked as a porter at the Wilbur Hotel. In July of 1918, Lyttle shipped off to France as part of the 317th Supply Train unit. When he returned in April 1919, he and his wife moved to

[54] *The Railroad Trainman,* vol. 36, no. 10 (Oct. 1919): 730, 492.
[55] *Railway Carmen's Journal,* vol. 24, no. 4 (April 1919): 1019.
[56] Alex Tye, draft registration card, ancestry.com; Cearney Parks, draft registration card, ancestry.com.
[57] Albert Stone, draft registration card, ancestry.com

Corbin.[58] After the war, the Lyttle, Tye, and Turner families all lived close to one another on the Whitley County side of town. For those at the bottom of the railroad hierarchy – brakemen, trainmen, flagmen – the rising stature of the Black working class posed a perceived threat.

The matter of wages took on increased importance as postwar inflation soared. In the summer, McAdoo's successor at the USRA, Walker D. Hines, wrote to President Wilson to recommend that Congress create a board to adjust railroaders' pay. The cost of living was "rapidly rising," Hines explained, which threatened the purchasing power of railroad workers. Wilson concurred and sent a letter to the chairman of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce that stressed the need for "real relief" for railroad employees. In the end, however, no wage increases took effect. Hines eventually argued that the higher cost of postwar life should be viewed as only transitory and not in need of serious action to mitigate its effects.[59]

Lastly, the specter of Black labor as competition grew more serious in the midst of a tightening labor market. In February of 1919, when U.S. Steel was well along in the construction of its model extraction town of Lynch, the L&N committed over a million dollars to expand the capacity of the Corbin yards.[60] The John T. McKinney Construction Co. of Lynchburg, Virginia went to work with steam shovels and drag lines, moving earth to make way for crews of tracklayers.[61] For the next step, the L&N imported several "extra gangs" of African American laborers from further south, around 200 in total. While in town, they lived in rail cars on L&N property, pulling track and driving spikes around the clock.[62] An all-Black road paving crew

[58] Roscoe Lyttle, draft registration card, ancestry.com; U.S. Army Transport Service, Passenger Lists, 1910-1939, ancestry.com.
[59] United States Railroad Administration, Washington, Aug. 2, 1919 & Aug. 26, 1919. PRR Papers, Box 940: General Manager's Chronological File, 1919.
[60] *Courier-Journal*, Feb. 12, 1919.
[61] *Steam Shovel and Dredge*, vol. 25 (1919): 299.
[62] Kristy Owens Griggs, "The Removal of Blacks from Corbin in 1919: Memory, Perspective, and

from the George M. Eady Construction Company in Louisville also set up a tent camp, and the Black population of the town more than tripled, seemingly overnight.[63] As the *Courier-Journal* noted in August, "the surplus labor which a few months ago seemed imminent is more than taken up by the mines, the mills and road-construction projects."[64] These changes marked the transportation town as far more than a destination for coal and freight, or in the words of a correspondent for the *Courier-Journal*, a "yard for human beings."[65]

Figure 9: A Black construction crew, with two white foremen, on the L&N in Breathitt Co., Ky. Courtesy of the Breathitt County Museum.

the Legacy of Racism," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, vol. 100, no. 3 (2002): 295-6. Theodore Kornweibel, Jr. notes that extra gang laborers had a reputation for drunkenness and violence. *Railroads in the African American Experience: A Photographic Journey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 50.

[63] Griggs, "Removal of Blacks," 295-6.

[64] *Courier-Journal*, Aug. 11, 1919, p. 5.

[65] *Courier-Journal*, Oct. 20, 1920, pages 1, 5.

It took until the fall, but the Red Summer finally reached southeastern Kentucky. Like other such incidents, the Corbin expulsion began with rumor and falsehood. On the night of October 29, 1919, Ambrose F. Thompson, a 34-year-old switchman for the L&N, walked home from attending a carnival near the railyards. The story, as told in the newspapers, was that two Black men from the work crew ambushed him in the woods. After he crossed the Cumberland Valley division bridge, they stabbed him, robbed him of his four dollars, and left him for dead. Thompson made his way to a nearby house, where a physician deemed his condition to be critical.[66] Later, it was discovered that it was actually white men, possibly donning blackface, who were to blame for the assault on Thompson.[67] Yet the rumor spread that it was "two negroes" to blame. Although a distinctly southern creation, sociologist Charles S. Johnson argued that by Red Summer, "no section of the country" disagreed with the stereotype that characterized African Americans as "instinctively criminal." Other charges against the behavior of Black people included boisterousness in public places, sensitivity to insults, and a lack of civic consciousness. Black men were thought to be degenerate gamblers, lovers of flashy dress, and always in possession of a razor blade. These stereotypes, "crystallized by years of unchallenged assumption," would inform the actions of the white mob in Corbin and beyond in 1919.[68]

With Thompson's assault as a pretext, the events of the next day and night revealed the expulsion to be a premeditated attack on Corbin's Black working class. On the morning of October 30, 1919, Steve Rogers and a group of railroaders approached L&N construction foreman William Fugate and the crew of Black workers. Rogers, born in 1895 to a miner in

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[66] *Corbin Times*, Oct. 31, 1919.
[67] *Corbin Daily Tribune, 75th Anniversary Edition*, February 23, 1967, p. 8; Many sources corroborate this claim. See the report of James M. Bond, Director of Kentucky Commission on Interracial Cooperation, in "Minutes of Inter-Racial Commission, Held November 17, 1920, Atlanta, Georgia," Commission on Interracial Cooperation Papers, Reel 20; See also *The Crisis*, vol. 21, no. 6 (April 1921): 250; John Leland Crawford, *A Tale of One City: Some Highlights in the History of Corbin* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1981), 59-60.
[68] *The Negro in Chicago*, 438, 444-45.

Rockholds just south of Corbin, had bounced between jobs during the war. In 1917, he worked for the J.B. Blue Gem Coal Company in nearby Bell County. He claimed exemption from the draft due to a "weak heart," and by 1919, was on the payroll of the L&N as a brakeman.[69] Rogers and his cadre demanded information on which of the men had waylaid switchman A.F. Thompson the night before. The chief of police waded into the crowd and mentioned that some trunks had gone missing from the carnival as well. Much to the railroaders' chagrin, however, the foreman and the crew denied any knowledge of the incident. Fugate had been in Corbin for one week in charge of an extra gang of construction workers and later recalled that "had heard rumors prior to this time that an attempt would be made to run the negroes out of Corbin as soon as the construction work was completed." Word of Thompson's assault appeared to be the event that jumpstarted the process. Later that day, another foreman told him he overheard men employed on the shop tracks "arranging for the action that followed that night" while he was measuring up some rail.[70] Near the depot, Pete Frakes, a Black employee in the baggage room, saw Steve Rogers walking around "with two large revolvers in his pockets." Whenever Rogers saw a Black person, he stopped and snarled. Elsewhere, John Turner, a married cleaner and presser who had lived in Corbin for three years, attended the carnival with John Berry and Albert Stone. Multiple white men approached the three to tell them that would have to get out of town that night. Two of the white men got abusive, swore at them, and declared, "By God we are going to run all negroes out of this town tonight." Turner also heard "that a notice had been posted at the round house, to the affect that all negroes would be run out of Corbin that day."[71]

[69] Stephen Rogers, draft registration card, ancestry.com; 1920 Census for Bell County, Kentucky, ancestry.com.
[70] Testimony of William Fugate, Gov. Morrow Rejected Petitions, File 177 (Hereafter GMRP), Kentucky Department of Library and Archives.
[71] Testimony of Pete Frakes, Testimony of John Turner, GMRP File 177.

As the sun set, Fugate noticed that the Black workers became "uneasy." They had heard the rumors throughout the day as well, but he had reassured them with promises from the police chief and other officers that no harm would come to the Black work crew. While Fugate worked on some paperwork in his camp car, a worker from another extra gang entered to tell him that the trouble had started. "White folks were shooting all the negroes down there," he told Fugate, and asked for his protection. After Fugate relayed the information to Corbin's chief of police, the officer replied, "I can't do anything for you. We are helpless." Beset by Steve Rogers – who earned the nickname of "Pistol Pete" – and the mob, the construction foremen sent the workers to the passenger depot and purchased them train tickets in all directions.[72]

Chaos ensued as the town's Black residents fled or sought shelter. At one point, a Black man knocked on O.A. Miles's door and pleaded for protection. Miles, owner of an automobile garage, took him to the city jail instead. Later, the police allowed a man recognized as "working in the L&N RR yards" to take him to the depot. On his way back through town, Miles saw another Black man being escorted to the depot with a suitcase in hand. At the depot, he saw a large number of Black people huddled in the colored waiting room, guarded by armed white men. He also saw Tom Good, the Black janitor of the Railroad YMCA, begging the mob to let his sick wife remain in bed for the night. Steve Rogers acquiesced with the understanding the two would be gone by noon the following day.[73]

The passenger depot soon became the central point around which the expulsion swirled. H.H. Wilburn, the night baggage agent for the L&N, arrived at the depot at 8:30 PM to find "quite a crowd of negroes herded in the colored waiting room." It soon became clear to him that "an attempt was under way to drive all of the negroes out of Corbin that night." He located

[72] Testimony of William Fugate, GMRP File 177.
[73] Testimony of O.A. Miles, Testimony of Will Jones, Testimony of Tom Good. GMRP 177.

several Black employees and started to shelter them behind the locked door of the baggage room. Wilburn then went to the chief of police Boggs in an attempt to broker a conversation with the leaders of the mob, only to be told that "it had been decided to run all of the negroes off and that it would probably be best to let them go." Wilburn returned to the baggage room, where some members of the mob had discovered the presence of the Black employees and someone had fired a shot in the air. The chief of police then asked Wilburn if he could help identify who pulled the trigger. The chief "did not mind the negroes being run off," Wilburn explained later, "but that the shooting would be dangerous and some white person might be hurt." Over thirty members of the mob then stormed in and ordered all of those inside to head for the colored waiting room. When Wilburn protested and cited the lack of employees as hindering the mail and baggage service, a member of the mob told him "there were plenty of white men to do the work." Dejected, he walked out of the depot. Once outside, he saw a crowd following Steve Rogers who yelled, "Come on now boys, follow Pistol Pete, there are some more we didn't get."[74]

At about that time, the Union Band of Corbin marched back from the public school building, where it had furnished music for a Republican Party campaign event. T.D. Thomas, a merchant tailor in town and member of the band, "soon observed that a crowd was falling in behind the band and was making a great deal of noise and firing guns and pistols." When the band attempted to follow its usual path, Steve Rogers commanded them to change course and follow him to the Wilbur Hotel. Some of the band members protested, but men in the crowd kept firing "weapons of large caliber" to keep them in line. "Fearing personal violence," Thomas and the band "complied with the orders of Pistol Pete." Just eight years old in 1919, Lillian Butner heard the drums of the band as the mob marched around town and rounded up Black residents.

[74] Testimony of H.H. Wilburn, GMRP File 177.

Her mother had attended the Colored Academy in Williamsburg and her stepfather, Tip Mays, worked as one of the Black mail handlers at the passenger depot. "The news got out that they were gonna have this race riot," Butner remembered, which she recalled as a conflict over "the jobs at the railroad." Once they got word, Butner's family did not stay at home, choosing to spend the night at a white neighbor's home across the street. The white family they sheltered with went out on their front porch to watch the proceedings, as did the Woods family, who Butner identified as the sole Black family spared by the mob.[75]

Inside the Wilbur Hotel, the foreman of the George M. Eady Construction woke to the night clerk's news that the mob had captured two of the Black men in his work crew. The foreman advanced them railroad fares to Pineville with instructions for them to return the next day to receive their pay. He then walked out to their camp to discover that the mob had destroyed the tents and stole or scattered all of the men's personal belongings.[76] Rogers then directed the band towards the depot, and when they hesitated, he instructed them to "line up in twos… and he placed himself at the head, shouting follow Pistol Pete." A bystander watching the proceedings counted twenty-five or thirty members of the mob, including a number of "young boys in knee pants and others who were "drunk and were looking for more whisky." When the assemblage reached the passenger station, they saw that around 250 Black people had been "herded to the passenger station and compelled to take trains in all directions out of Corbin." It was then that members of the band "fully realized what this mob was trying to accomplish" and refused to participate any further.[77] Dr. B.J. Edwards, a physician in town, walked up to the passenger depot at about the same time and observed "a large crowd about the depot and noticed a great

[75] Testimony of T.D. Thomas, GMRP File 177. Lillian Butner Oral History Interview by George C. Wright, Jan. 30, 1987, Blacks in Kentucky Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.
[76] Testimony of J.A. Walker, GMRP File 177.
[77] Testimony of T.D. Thomas, Testimony of W.H. Candler, GMRP File 177.

deal of excitement." He recognized quite a few of the Black people corralled there and protested against their removal "as vigorously as circumstances permitted." One of the men in the mob then approached him and suggested, "that I ought to be sent down to Richmond Ky where there were plenty of negroes to live with." Edwards returned home, where later that night, a group of men arrived carrying a companion shot through the throat and chest. The young man told Edwards he had "been mistaken for a negro," and a "soldier in the RR yards" had shot him. The men also told the doctor they had seen the mob pull a Black woman out of one of the railroad camp cars and roll her in the mud. Edwards knew that many of the expelled people owned property in town and were considered to be peaceful and law-abiding.[78]

As the night wore on, the mob began to target those Black residents who made their permanent homes in town. At around eleven o'clock, Alex Tye's wife Fannie called him to the window to see what was happening at John Turner's house. Rogers and the crowd moved towards them but stopped at their neighbor's house first, apparently mistaking it for the Tye residence. Rogers ordered the door open, telling the men to "hang them if they didn't come out." Hearing this next door, Alex, Fannie, and Cearney made an escape through the back window. As they climbed the hill behind their house, however, one man in the mob spotted them and fired two shots in their direction. The family separated in the chaos, with Alex and Cearney hiding in the storeroom of the Manhattan Hotel. As they stayed out of sight, they heard a member of the mob declare, "that Damned Alex Tye and Cearney have not shown up, if they don't show up by the time these trains run, we are going up there and burn that damned house down." When someone told them, "boys there will be a hereafter to this thing," the man replied, "there won't be any unless some dirty S.B. like you goes around and tells it." Tye and his stepson stayed in

[78] Statement of Dr. B.J. Edwards, GMRP File 177.

the room until the town quieted down, sneaking back to their home just before daybreak. Fannie arrived at six o'clock, having sheltered in the home of a white neighbor. The family assessed the damages, which included a missing shotgun, electric iron, a pair of opera glasses and destroyed canned fruit. They made plans to leave Corbin for good.[79]

Over several hours, some 500 shots were fired, but there were no reported casualties. Some fled the town on foot, while L&N trains with extra passenger cars left Corbin in all directions throughout the night. White residents of nearby Barbourville saw many of the expelled Black residents running down the road with only the clothes on their backs: "They were running and crying. They had run all night long, and come all the way from Corbin."[80] Finally, Rogers and the mob weighed the presence of Corbin's last remaining Black residents. Emma Woods, known affectionately as "Aunt Emma" and a longtime laundress and cook for L&N employees, and John Berry, who worked as a servant for a prominent white family. While some in the mob favored "ridding the place of all negroes," the two were allowed to stay. Berry, as a Lexington paper explained, was considered a "good nigger," as opposed to those they had already displaced. The last train, No. 31, departed for Knoxville just after two o'clock in the morning.[81]

Word of the expulsion spread over the state and the nation, with newspapers printing vastly different, and often incorrect versions of events. In nearby Mt. Vernon, the local paper reported incorrectly that "six or eight negroes were killed." The paper attributed the cause of the riot to be anger over robberies "done either by negroes or by a white man with face blackened."[82] By the time the news reached Lexington, the erroneous death toll grew to twenty-five with

[79] Testimony of Alex Tye, GMRP File 177.
[80] Quoted in Bill D. Whittaker, "Howard Nolan, Clara Woods, and Alberta Coleman: The Last Three Blacks in Corbin, 1919-1993," Unpublished Typescript held at Appalachian State University, 4.
[81] *Lexington Herald*, Nov. 1, 1919; *Mountain Advocate* (Barbourville, Ky.), Nov. 7, 1919.
[82] *Mt. Vernon Signal*, Oct. 31, 1919, p. 4.

bodies "lying around like rats." Needless to say, the "wild reports" had been "greatly exaggerated."[83] Lastly, in the *New York Times*, "one negro was killed, according to reports, and two others wounded." No one outside Corbin seemed to know exactly what happened, or why.[84]

White railroad workers knew what they had accomplished, however, and took further action to solidify the results of the expulsion. The next day, Alex Tye returned to the roundhouse in the company of Bradley Peace, a white coworker. As he walked through town on his way to the yards, a switchman at the post office remarked aloud, "there goes one of them negroes we didn't get last night." Harry Feather, the master mechanic, paid out his wages and gave him a discharge ticket for his stepson. Peace attempted to convince Tye to stay at his house and continue to work in Corbin, but he, Fannie, and Cearney traveled the twenty or so miles to Barbourville that evening instead. Over the course of several days, the family made trips to Corbin to retrieve their belongings, always leaving town before sundown. They then moved to Ravenna, where Alex found a similar job in the mechanical shops for the L&N.[85]

When the L&N daytime baggage agent arrived at the depot in the morning, he expressed surprised at the absence of all of the Black workers. When he asked a railroad switchman about the rumors, the railroader replied, "Yes we ran them off and we will also run all of the dammed sympathizers off if they fool with us." A few weeks after the expulsion, some of the Black employees returned to Corbin to receive their pay, and Martin convinced a few of them to stay and work. Pete Frakes was one of the Black employees who came back to work. At one o'clock in the morning, however, workers on the third trick switching crew ordered them to leave town or face violence. Frakes and the other Black workers also saw "from the demeanor of the crowd

[83] *Lexington Leader*, Oct. 31, 1919, p. 1.
[84] *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1919, p .3.
[85] Testimony of Alex Tye, GMRP File 177.

on the street that it would not be safe for us to remain." They left the following evening and did not come back to Corbin. Months later, Martin deemed Corbin "unsafe for any of the negroes to return to."[86]

A few months later in Ravenna, another L&N transportation town north of Corbin and the new home of Alex Tye, a rumor of violent Black residents was yet again the reason for mob action. The town had experienced similar growth to Corbin as the L&N hub for the coal along the railroad's Eastern Kentucky division. By January 1920 forty-six African Americans lived within the town's limits, around half hailing from further south. Outside of the bluegrass state, Alabama was the Black residents' most common place of birth. Their occupations ranged from cooks, porters, and housekeepers, but the majority worked as laborers in the L&N repair shops. Outside of the few domestic servants and cooks who lived downtown, all the Black families listed the railyard as their residence. Jackson Carew, an Alabama native, lived on railroad property with his wife Francis and their five children.[87] According to the Richmond *Daily Register*, a "young negro" attacked the son of Ike Chanler, a car repairman for the L&N, in late March of 1920. After placing the young man in jail along with his father and brother, all the African Americans living in Ravenna "were notified to get out of town quick."[88] On April 2, word of their removal reached Lexington, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio. The Cincinnati *Enquirer* described the expulsion as peaceful, with "motor cars and trains" being used in an orderly fashion."[89]

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[86] Testimony of A.C. Martin, Pete Frakes, GMRP File 177.
[87] Ancestry.com. *1920 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006.
[88] *Richmond Daily Register,* Mar. 31, 1920.
[89] *Cincinnati Enquirer,* Apr. 3, 1920; *Owensboro Messenger,* Apr. 3, 1920.

Through the forced removals of Black residents from Corbin and Ravenna, white railroaders laid a claim to their future. During the war, the USRA – and the Black railroaders who petitioned the agency – elevated the position of Black railroad labor, which white workers saw as a threat. In response, white railroaders manipulated job descriptions, invoked whites-only union clauses, and pressured railroad companies to only employ white men on their lines. When all else failed, they turned to violence. This was indeed Du Bois's "logic of the broken plate" at work. As we know from chapter two, the industry's particular dynamics channeled railroaders into racially homogenous associations along the lines of craft, skin color, and status in the labor hierarchy. Railroaders were conditioned by their employers, but also the structure of their unions, to see Black labor as a detriment to their cause. It was not at all surprising then that a railroader led the charge in the Corbin expulsion, just as other railroaders did in in Ravenna and Erwin. The occupations of the white men at the center of these events– a flagman, a car repairman, and a blacksmith, respectively – exposed them to the particular railroad worker racial ideology. In the context of the war, migration, the Red Scare, and the Red Summer, these men and others alongside them came to consider the very presence of African American workers as a threat to their livelihoods. Their efforts to rid their workplaces of Black labor took on an added dimension. Now, they sought to cleanse their communities entirely.

While the expulsions did mean that the Black populations of particular places did decrease substantially, some African Americans remained. Their occupations reveal the link between race and labor that would now be strictly enforced. The 1920 census in Erwin, Tennessee, for example, listed a cook and a janitor as the only two Black residents. Similarly, in Corbin, three Black residents remained: Emma Woods – the unofficial "matron" of the passenger depot, and two men who boarded with her. Finally, in 1930, the only two African Americans left

in Ravenna were two domestic workers, both of whom worked for railroad officials. Around forty African Americans made their homes in the county, yet Ravenna remained a town exclusively for white L&N employees.[90] The expulsions in these three Appalachian transportation towns each began with a similar incident – a rumored assault of a white railroader by an African American – and affected similar outcomes. From construction laborers to employees of the railroads, the Black industrial working class of these places had been removed wholesale. At the end of the Long Red Summer, the transportation towns truly belonged to white railroaders.

[90] H.E. Everman. "Corbin, Kentucky, A Socio-Economic Anomaly: Portrait of a Diverse Railroad Boom Town, 1895-1930," Unpublished Typescript. Ancestry.com. *1920 United States Federal Census, 1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006.

CHAPTER 5

CONSOLIDATION: HOW TO MAKE A SUNDOWN TOWN

This was in Kentucky… which may be appositely represented by the Greek god Janus of two faces. One face gazes across its northern boundary, the Ohio River… when on one shore was slavery and oppression and on the other the comparative justice of the northern states. The other face is set steadfastly toward 'Dixie,' toward the land of cotton whose old times there, it seems, will never be forgotten.

J. Everett Harris, "Kentucky: (Janus Bifrons)"

A sundown town did not emerge overnight. In the weeks after the 1919 expulsion, some Corbinites condemned the actions of the mob and what they meant for the town's future. The editor of the *Corbin Times* declared mournfully, "Our name has gone out over the nation with a black spot that can never be removed." The paper also printed a letter from a Mrs. William B. Matthews, who lamented that "no town between Cincinnati and Knoxville had as bright a future before her as Corbin," and "no town in the State was so much in the minds of far-seeing, outside business men." In a prescient diagnosis, Matthews warned that expelling the town's "black, but nevertheless respectable citizens" opened up Corbin to the shame of generations to come.[1]

All sundown towns had an origin point, as Corbin and other transportation towns did in the Long Red Summer, but the outcome was far from set in stone at that moment. Sociologist James Loewen, the most influential scholar of sundown towns, examined a variety of ways that communities "went sundown." From violence, ordinances, informal actions by officials, excluding African Americans from social institutions, forced buyouts of housing, and "other forms of bad behavior by white residents of the town," white Americans pushed Black residents

[1] *Corbin Times,* Nov. 7, 1919.

out and kept them out.[2] While Loewen's account is an indispensable catalogue of such places, it takes the production and maintenance of sundown towns for granted. In this chapter, I argue that residents of a sundown town produced and managed boundaries of race and community through the crucible of social relations, chiefly through those of labor. The initial moment – riot, expulsion, or otherwise – may have set the course, but residents of sundown towns continually made and remade racial boundaries. Indeed, to create an all-white place was to engage in the process of race-making. All the while, however, white and Black people resisted and contested this process. Through a trial that sought to bring justice against the perpetrators of the Corbin mob, to the 1922 shopmen strike and the efforts to move forward in its aftermath, white residents chose to fashion their community as all-white and wedded to the railroad.

The Spirit of Berea Returns?

The effort to hold the perpetrators of mob violence accountable brought the Berea College graduate and Black civil rights leader James Bond back to Kentucky. Since helping establish the all-Black Lincoln Institute after the forced segregation of Berea College, Bond moved his family from Kentucky to Atlanta to become pastor of the Rush Memorial Congregational Church. When the U.S. entered the war, he hoped to enter the Army as a chaplain, but was denied a commission due to his age. Instead, he agreed to serve as a Building Secretary for the YMCA at Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, having been an active member in Atlanta. Bond took up the task been of providing recreation and entertainment for American soldiers. This work, of course, took place within the Army's segregated social system. Bond's job placed him at the head of all nonmilitary activities for the Black soldiers in a

[2] Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 91-92.

barracks, with other specialized secretaries under his command as well. Bond gave lectures and taught night classes in his military-style YMCA uniform, eventually earning the soldiers' admiration as "Daddy Bond." After the armistice in November 1918, Bond looked for a way to continue his affiliation with the YMCA.[3]

Figure 10: James Bond in uniform. Image from Berea College Hutchins Library.

[3] Williams, *The Bonds*, 66-7.

Bond's wartime experience left him well-placed to play a role in the nascent Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC). Founded in Atlanta by southern white and moderate Black leaders in 1919 in response to the racial violence of the war years, the CIC proved to be an influential voice for reform. A conservative operation at its core, the CIC did not seek an end to Jim Crow, only better schools, facilities, and to mitigate the effects of racial violence for those on the Black side of the color line. The YMCA played an active role in the commission's founding and fully funded its work for the first two years. The group chose Will Winton Alexander, a Missouri-born Methodist minister, as its executive director, while Jesse Daniel Ames headed up the women's auxiliary group the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. The CIC left the organization of state committees up to individuals to encourage the spirit of biracialism.[4]

The CIC was not alone in combatting the ills of racism and Jim Crow in Kentucky. The Louisville chapter of the NAACP, founded in 1914, mounted challenges to lynchings, mob violence, and local segregation ordinances. The chapter scored a major victory in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), which ended the practice of city-mandated racial segregation in residential zoning. In early 1919, NAACP assistant secretary Walter White crisscrossed the state to drum up support for the organization. Several branches sprung up during the year, but the initial wave of support faltered due to the backlash against the "radical" outfit. Kentucky's cities hosted the most active branches. The Frankfort branch in particular, founded in April 1919, became known as a staunch advocate for Black civil rights second only to Louisville. Yet outside of the cities, white Kentuckians, and some African Americans as well, were hesitant to join hands with the NAACP.[5]

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[4] Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 205-6; Williams, *The Bonds*, 68-69.
[5] Wright, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, vol. 2, 152-53.

The more conservative CIC, however, attracted a willing partner in Kentucky's new governor, Edwin P. Morrow. Morrow, who defeated Democrat James D. Black in the bitterly fought 1919 gubernatorial race, was an inheritor of the legacy of the Republican Party's progressive wing. Born in 1877 in Somerset, Kentucky, his father Thomas Zanziger Morrow had been a founding member of the state's party operation and ran an unsuccessful campaign for governor in 1883. His mother Catherine Virginia Morrow, née Bradley, was the sister of William O. Bradley, the state's first Republican governor and the candidate who "broke the solid South" with his election to the office in 1895. Morrow attended St. Mary's College near Lebanon, Kentucky, and Cumberland College in Williamsburg before enlisting in the Army and serving in the Spanish-American War. After the war, he entered law school at the University of Cincinnati and graduated in 1902. Upon starting his own practice in Lexington, Kentucky, Morrow won an acquittal for a Black man accused of murder. The case gained him acclaim among many state Republicans and marked him as a progressive of sorts on issues of race. Morrow moved back to Somerset with his wife and children in 1903, serving as city attorney and U.S. district attorney for eastern Kentucky. In 1915, he ran for governor against his friend and Democratic candidate August O. Stanley, losing by fewer than 500 votes. In 1919, Morrow ran again, this time against James D. Black of Knox County who had ascended to the position after Stanley resigned to become a U.S. Senator. Morrow staked out a progressive platform on women's suffrage and prohibition and railed against the alleged corruption of the Democratic incumbent. Timely evidence of mismanagement redounded to Morrow's benefit; he defeated Black by a comfortable 40,000 votes. Morrow assumed the office in December with a Republican majority in the House

and a narrow margin in the Senate. At the end of a tumultuous year, Morrow's election placed a Republican with progressive tendencies in the state's most powerful position.[6]

Almost immediately, the governor faced a test of his opposition to mob violence. In January Lexington authorities arrested Will Lockett, a Black veteran of World War I, for the murder of a young white woman. Lockett entered the state reformatory in Frankfort, where a mob gathered and demanded he be released to their custody. In the dead of night, Morrow intervened personally and persuaded the group to disband. At Lockett's trial the next month in Lexington, the governor ordered nearly a hundred National Guardsmen to stand watch. The trial lasted only half-an-hour, with the jury delivering their guilty verdict without having ever left the courtroom. Outside, the mob grew violent and broke through a barrier after a cameraman goaded them into action. The National Guard soldiers fired into the crowd, killing five – eventually six – and wounding nearly fifty. The mob then looted storefronts in search of weapons to retaliate, only to be stopped by the arrival of war veterans with their own rifles in hand who restored order. The victory over mob rule did not result in the same fate for Lockett, however. The state relocated him to the penitentiary at Eddyville where he was executed in March. Nevertheless, some observers have seen the incident in Lexington as "the first forceful suppression of a lynch mob by local and state officials in the South."[7]

Throughout his early tenure, Morrow set his sights on the perpetrators of racial and mob violence. "The people of Kentucky are opposed to mobs," Morrow proclaimed, "and do not desire to be served by a cowardly public officer who surrenders a prisoner at the demand of those

[6] John E. Kleber, Thomas D. Clark, Lowell H. Harrison, and James C. Klotter, ed., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 655.
[7] James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900-1950* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1996), 69.

who, crying out in the name of the law, disgrace and destroy law."[8] With Morrow's backing, the state legislature passed an anti-lynching bill in early 1920. The law tasked law enforcement with preventing mob violence and provided the governor with the ability to replace them if they failed to do so. Notably, the bill faced no opposition in either chamber. Morrow signed the bill in March with members of the Kentucky NAACP in attendance. As a sign of his loyalties, he presented a Frankfort organizer with his gold pen.[9]

As fellow travelers of sorts, the formation of the Kentucky CIC brought Morrow and Bond together. The governor called the first meeting together and acted as honorary chairman. To lead the state committee and spearhead the organization of counties, the organization tapped James Bond. With Bond at the helm, the CIC began organizing work in Kentucky in late 1919. In February of 1920, the CIC reported that the state had the "strongest Negro force." By November of that same year, the Kentucky Interracial Commission organized in fifty-eight counties and could point to Gov. Morrow as the head of the state-wide committee.[10]

One of the attendees at the CIC conference in Louisville was Joseph Buchanan Snyder, the Commonwealth's Attorney for the district covering Corbin and Whitley County. Snyder had grown up in Whitley County and had been educated in its local schools before pursuing a career in the law. At the conference, he approached James Bond, who claimed to have known Snyder "his whole life," to detail his plans to bring the leaders of the Corbin mob to justice. Snyder went back to Williamsburg "just full of the subject," according to Bond, and agreed to become chairman of the Whitley County chapter of state interracial committee. James Bond's brother,

[8] Willard R. Jillson, *Edwin P. Morrow: A Contemporaneous Biographical Sketch* (Louisville: C.T. Dearing Printing Co., 1921), 105.
[9] Wright, *Racial Violence*, 202.
[10] CIC Papers, Reel 20, Minutes of Meeting in Atlanta, GA, Feb. 17, 1920, 3; Ibid., Nov. 17, 1920, 51.

Henry Bond, counted himself as a member of the committee as well.[11] Snyder pledged the Whitley County Interracial Committee to a "strong effort" to ensure the "conviction and punishment of the mob that drove the colored people out of the town." As chairman of the committee and the elected official in charge of prosecuting felonies, he dedicated himself to the task.[12]

Back in Williamsburg, Snyder wrote to the L&N's attorney to elicit the company's help. He had the understanding that "the Railroad Company… was interested in running down and having indicted the guilty parties who incited the mob… and ran all the colord [sic] people out of Corbin." As Commonwealth's Attorney, Snyder did not have access to a detective, but hoped the railroad would enlist their police force to investigate and interview several individuals. He provided a list of ten names that included white and Black residents of Corbin, some of which had since been forced to relocate. He desired testimony from Alex Tye and his wife, as well as from a Black porter who worked on an L&N train to Knoxville, Tennessee but refused to go to Corbin. Snyder requested specific information on Pistol Pete Rogers and Tom Gallagher, the two "recognized leaders of the mob," and instructed their "detailed statements" be sworn before a notary or other officer so that they could be used in a grand jury trial.[13]

The L&N Inspector of Police worked quickly, returning the results of his investigation at the end of the month. He was not able to track down all of the individuals named by Snyder but felt that the evidence gathered was substantial enough to be used in the trial. He also suggested a few people who "by reason of their acquaintance among the people making up the mob," would have valuable information: the mayor, the proprietor of the pool room, a switchman and an

[11] CIC Papers, Reel 20, Minutes of Meeting in Atlanta, GA, Nov. 17, 1920, 51.
[12] *The Crisis*, vol. 21, no. 6 (April 1921), 250.
[13] J.B. Snyder to Judge H.H. Tye, Jan. 5, 1920. GMRP File 177.

assistant yard master for the L&N, and the town police judge. The inspector's correspondence to Snyder and the L&N attorney arrived on the letterhead of the United States Railroad Administration, a reminder of the federal power that could be invoked to combat racism and discrimination.[14]

In February, the Whitley County grand jury indicted twenty-seven Corbin residents for their involvement in the mob.[15] The bringing of these charges marked Snyder as an enemy of many in the county, including the local Republican Party machine. The *Corbin Times*, owned by Charles Finley, a powerful Republican operative with ties to the assassination of William Goebel in 1900, attacked Snyder repeatedly throughout the trial. The paper often juxtaposed the transportation town of Corbin with Snyder's home, the county seat of Williamsburg. Corbin was a "great big, hustling, bustling, busy, prosperous city," the *Times* argued, which made it "fat picking for the politicians." Snyder's crusade was just "another plan… to hold up the citizens of Corbin, and replenish the sadly depleted pockets of some of our supposedly honorable citizens of Whitley's Capitol City – Williamsburg." The *Times* faulted Snyder for leaning on the circuit court judge to indict members of the mob and wondered how he "got the dope" on who was involved, before excusing the expulsion as simply the town's Black population being "asked to move on to other points more suitable for people of their particular type." One wing of the Republican Party was more than willing to provide cover for the expulsion. Snyder and his allies, however, were not.[16]

Under the microscope and in the midst of a political tug-of-war, white Corbin residents found a common cause in the doctrine of "100 percent Americanism." The phrase, which

[14] Inspector of Police to Judge H.H. Tye, Jan. 26, 1920. GMRP File 177.
[15] *Richmond Daily Register*, Feb. 13, 1920, p. 1. Other accounts stated there were thirty-six indictments. See *Messenger-Inquirer*, Feb. 8, 1920, p. 3.
[16] *Corbin Times*, Feb. 27, 1920.

communicated unwavering allegiance to the government during the war, came to be applied against domestic upheaval in its aftermath. Veterans and their families continued to express these sentiments through the American Legion, founded by veterans in 1919 to improve the morale of ex-soldiers. Local posts encouraged Americanism, nationalism, and the bonds of brotherhood made in war. Yet in their endeavors, according to one scholar, the Legion "kept alive the whole cluster of war hatreds," which included racism and anti-radical sentiments.[17] Like so many communities in 1920, members of the Corbin post of the Legion gathered to honor the lives of "Corbin boys" who died in France. The auditorium of the Majestic Theater hosted a program of speeches, patriotic music, and prayer in remembrance of the deceased soldiers. Speakers admonished the crowd "against wild talk and continued unrest," according to the *Corbin Times*, instead urging all to adopt "patriotism based upon real Americanism." "A timelier meeting could have not been held in Corbin or in any American city," the paper concluded. For in a time of "unrest and continual strife," the American Legion reminded citizens of the "examples of real sacrifice… of those who died to make this world a fit place in which to live." For Corbinites, however, that world only included Americans with white skin.[18]

Throughout the trial in Williamsburg, the testimony of Alex Tye, John Turner, and other African Americans helped secure a two-year sentence for Rogers in the state penitentiary. White and Black witnesses alike pointed the finger at "Pistol Pete" Steve Rogers for his role as the mob's ringleader. The court eventually dropped the charges against all of those named except for Rogers. In September, the grand jury returned a verdict of two years in the state penitentiary for

[17] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 224.
[18] *Corbin Times*, March 20, 1920, p. 1.

"Pistol Pete" on the charge of confederating. To describe the convicted party, the *Courier-Journal* noted succinctly, "Rogers is a railroad man."[19]

Far from recalcitrant, Corbin residents began to define themselves against those who sought justice for the expelled African Americans. When the *Corbin Times* sought nominations for the most popular citizens in 1920, it asked, among other things, who was "the 'whitest' man in town."[20] A year after the expulsion, Snyder informed Gov. Morrow that Black people still could not live in the town. Those who dared pass through were "run, shot, and whipped." In offering his assessment of the situation, Snyder described the "opposition to the Negro in Corbin" as "something fierce."[21]

In 1921, a group of Corbinites petitioned the governor to pardon Steve Rogers. Their reasons revealed how the founding myths of a sundown town had begun to take hold. The actions of Rogers and the mob were justified, they argued, because they sought to "remove from the neighborhood a lawless dangerous and menacing factor – a might host of colored law breakers." "The colored element congregated in the town of Corbin, Ky.," the petition went on to describe, "living in temporary abodes, Rail Road cars, and makeshift tenements." The population was "a menacing and floating one, very gregarious in habits, and lawless in acts," and the very presence of the "colored marauders" threatened the "lives and property of citizens." Law enforcement had proven "helpless," and thus the confederating was instituted for a "lawful not an unlawful purpose." In *The Crisis,* James Bond reassured readers of the futility of the pardon effort. "This office has taken up this question with the proper authorities," he wrote, "and has assurance that in no case will a pardon be granted."[22]

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[19] Testimony of Alex Tye, GMRP File 177. *Courier-Journal,* Sept. 26, 1920.
[20] *Corbin Times,* Apr. 16, 1920, p. 2.
[21] Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters,* 178-9.
[22] Petition in GMRP File 177. *The Crisis,* vol. 21, no. 6 (April 1921), 250.

Gov. Morrow denied the request, but many Corbinites did not appreciate the state's attempts to discipline the mob. Although not all residents agreed with the expulsion, a strong public sentiment sided with Rogers and his accomplices. According to the petition, "hundreds of the good citizens assisted in driving out this lawless element, in putting them on trains, and sending them out of Whitley County, in a quiet and determined way." The lack of chaos during the expulsion revealed that "such action was at the time demanded, and sanctioned and approved by the whole community of law abiding citizens." In a remarkable display of moral gymnastics, the petitioners characterized the expulsion as an attempt to ensure "the fruits of their labors, and to "be guaranted [sic] the rights of 'peace and happiness'."[23]

Bond, Snyder, Gov. Morrow, and the Kentucky CIC secured some measure of justice by trying and convicting the ringleader of the Corbin expulsion. All three were connected, either through ties back to Williamsburg or affiliations with the more progressive wing of Kentucky's Republican Party. Their success in prosecuting mob violence harkened back to the influential days of Berea College and the possibilities of interracial cooperation it once represented. Through Bond in particular, the spirit of Berea lived on long after its demise at the hands of the Day Law in 1904. Yet this progress was limited, as the response from the Corbin petitioners revealed. The ties between racial ideology and railroad labor had long held the town's white residents together. The expulsion of Black residents reinforced that coupling, and anyone who sought to undo it faced a strong opposition. The social ties of a transportation town would be hard to pry loose.

[23] Petition in GMRP File 177.

Railroads and Coal, Redux: Capital Resurgent in the Coalfields

These ties would be tested once again in the crucible of labor relations. As we have seen, both railroaders and miners had benefited from the higher wages and increased union influence of wartime industry. Wielding the racial ideology of their workplace, white railroaders took the opportunity to exclude Black labor from the industry as well as their communities. Coal miners, on the other hand, exhibited far less willingness to turn against fellow workers of different races and ethnicities. When a period of capital retrenchment set in after the war, workers again faced similar choices. In 1922, coal operators and railroad management drew on their own specific, well-established practices to recruit labor and ward off unionization. For transportation towns like Corbin, the strike tested just how far residents were willing to take their commitments to railroad labor ideology.

Railroaders, executives, and the state all knew that federal control of the railroads would cease at some point. In December 1918, President Wilson set New Year's Day 1920 as the date, with the USRA retaining its authority until then. Not eager to return to the days of private control, railroad workers pushed for the nationalization of the roads through the Plumb Plan. The plan garnered considerable support from railroads of all stripes, from brotherhoods to the shopcrafts. These dreams ended in February 1920 as Congress passed the Esch-Cummings Act, also known as the Transportation Act of 1920. The bill restored private ownership of the railroads, guaranteed a percentage of earnings for owners, and most importantly, established the Railroad Labor Board (RLB) to mediate disputes. Labor and owners were required to attempt to come to a solution on their own before approached the board, which would then settle matters through specific adjustment boards. Notably, the RLB's decisions bore no legal authority and left open the possibility that companies would ignore the rulings. Unionists also disagreed with the

makeup of the board itself, which would be composed of nine members: three for labor, three for capital, and three for "the public." The public members, railroaders argued, would side with the owners. Yet these fears did not materialize immediately, as the RLB issued a wage hike for all railroaders in July 1920 that amounted to an average increase of twenty percent.[24]

The election of Republican President Warren G. Harding and his stated "return to normalcy," however, signaled a different phase for the tripartite relationship between capital, labor, and the state. It also coincided with a slowing economy. Wartime government spending evaporated, the Federal Reserve raised interest rates, and by 1921, a recession was under way. Railroad companies sought their own return to normalcy, one to a prewar era with weak unions and a business-friendly government in Washington. Unionists' worst fears were realized in the summer of 1921, when the RLB reduced their wages by an average of 12.5 percent. These cuts rankled workers in the shopcrafts in particular. With the right to organize granted by the USRA General Order number 8, the shopmen's Railway Employes' Department of the AFL (RED) saw its numbers increase alongside other railroad unions. Many of the 420,000 blacksmiths, boilermakers, machinists, carmen, sheet-metal workers, and electrical workers across the country readied for a strike.[25]

Coal miners in Central Appalachia had been engaged in intense labor strife since 1919. Under the leadership of vice president John L. Lewis, the union called a strike after operators refused to meet their demands a walkout if operators did not meet their demands.[26] In Kentucky, 20,000 union miners struck on November 1, two days after the Corbin expulsion. No mines operated in Knox or Clay counties, while in Harlan, only the model extraction towns of Lynch

[24] Davis, *Power at Odds*, 48-49.
[25] Davis, *Power at Odds*, 46.
[26] For the details, see Johnson, *Politics of Soft Coal*, 96-103. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 197.

and Benham continued to ship coal for U.S. Steel and International Harvester.[27] Under the pressure of the anti-Bolshevism hysteria that flooded the nation's newspapers, the UMWA folded ten days later. Yet some striking miners stayed out of the mines, most notably across the river from Kentucky in southern West Virginia. Despite the union's capitulation, in March of 1920 a commission appointed by Wilson instituted a wage increase of 27 percent. Miner's pay had never been higher, but the Matewan Massacre in West Virginia – in which a shootout between union sympathizers and Baldwin-Felts agents resulted in ten dead – revealed a struggle larger than wages. In the subsequent March on Blair Mountain a year later, African Americans made up one-fourth of approximately 8,000 miners who marched against the operators' private army in the largest armed uprising since the Civil War. Their presence testified to the truth of the campaign for democracy in the coalfields, a revolt against the powerful companies, and a movement for the rights of miners, regardless of race or ethnicity, to have a say in their living and working lives.[28]

In 1922, coal miners confronted the postwar situation. Nation-wide coal production had fallen to 415 million tons, down from nearly 600 million in 1918, with the unionized coalfields suffering the biggest cutbacks. Operators in the non-union fields of Central Appalachia reduced wages and gained more of the market as a result, drawing the ire of unionized miners in nearby Pennsylvania and Ohio. The UMWA cried foul, but operators were emboldened by a pro-business administration and the success of open-shop movements in other industries. On April 1,1922, the union contract expired and 610,000 miners in both bituminous and anthracite fields

[27] *Courier-Journal*, Nov. 2, 1919, p .1
[28] Johnson, *Politics of Soft Coal*, 109. Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, 359-69, 368. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 197-201.

went on strike. Dead strikers and strikebreakers in Herring, Illinois moved the Harding Administration to action, but the strike continued throughout the summer.[29]

Coal mining operations in the nonunion coalfield of southeastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia became more crucial in the midst of the walkout. At the close of the 1919 strike, operators had fired union checkweighmen and evicted union miners from company housing. A weak agreement with the Harlan County Coal Operators Association in August of 1920 did not apply to the largest operators in the field – U.S. Steel and International Harvester among them – and did not require the recognition of the union. As a result, District 19 of the UMWA was in no position to shutter the mines in 1922. A "feeble strike," in the words of one student of the union, the walkout failed to bring the operators to the bargaining table. With the union largely absent, operators took advantage. In comparison to the unionized mines in Pennsylvania, Illinois and Indiana, miners in the Appalachian fields of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia worked more days on average for lower wages throughout the 1920s.[30]

In Virginia, Stonega's Daniel Wentz, fresh off his experience as a dollar-a-year man, wielded a judicious mixture to take advantage of the market situation. As they had in the early days of the Great Migration, the company looked to Black labor from the South. Soon after the advent of the strike, Wentz made contact with the president of the nearby Clinchfield Coal Corporation, who told him of his plans to begin recruiting Black laborers from Alabama. The fellow operator turned southwards because he was reluctant to import white miners from Pennsylvania, reportedly because all were "Union men sent… to our field to start trouble." Wentz considered his plan to be sound and suggested his vice president Otis Mouser make

[29] Johnson, *Politics of Soft Coal*, 113-14.
[30] Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 4-11.

arrangements to do the same.[31] Mouser contacted the company's old labor agent in Bessemer, Alabama, who agreed to straighten out the licensing issues and begin routing Black workers to Virginia. Many Black miners had already left the state for West Virginia, the agent informed them, and the prospect of the steel mills ramping up their operations threatened to infringe on the transportation of workers. Nevertheless, he reported "plenty of labor just begging for work," which made the renewal fee for the license more than worth the cost.[32]

Within the week, Stonega's agent had shipped several carloads of Black miners north. The company could have sent up to one hundred in one trip, but officials thought it best to divide up the miners into smaller groups for transportation, to "avoid their getting dissatisfied and leaving" upon their arrival.[33] They boarded passenger trains in groups of forty, with sometimes up to two "transportations" arriving in Virginia in a single day. In addition to the miners from Alabama, the company also recruited labor from Kentucky, Tennessee, and within the state. In mid-May, vice president Mouser reported the mines were "picking up right along," thanks to the "bunch of good-looking men" the company had hired to-date. [34]

Coal operators continued to triangulate wages with respect to other companies and other coalfields. By August, almost all of the mines in eastern Kentucky and east Tennessee had issued wage increases retroactive to July 15. The exceptions to this rule were the captive mines of U.S. Coal and Coke and Wisconsin Steel at Lynch and Benham, which were not beholden to the whims of the open market and therefore could pay miners higher and steadier wages. Over the mountain in Virginia, the officials of the Stonega Company found the advances troubling to their

[31] D.B. Wentz to Otis Mouser, April 28, 1922. Penn Virginia Corporation Records, Accession 1765, Series II Box 310: Virginia V.P.'s Files (Individuals), Virginia File #8: D.B. Wentz, President 1921-1923.
[32] Otis Mouser to D.B. Wentz, May 1, 1922. Ibid.
[33] Otis Mouser to D.B. Wentz, May 9, 1922, Ibid.
[34] Otis Mouser to D.B. Wentz, May 11, 1922, Ibid.

bottom line. Vice President Otis Mouser met with Edward O'Toole, general superintendent of U.S. Coal and Coke, to voice his concerns. Mouser relayed that "it would be the policy of our Company to keep in line," but remained worried about the effects of a wage increase from the larger companies.[35] Ultimately, the Cleveland Agreement settled the strike for most of the coalfields in the fall of 1922. The product of a wage conference called by John L. Lewis, it maintained the former wage levels until April 1923 and authorized Congress to establish the U.S. Coal Commission. In the end, however, the Commission did little to improve conditions in the industry.[36] The operators of Central Appalachia entered the post-strike era poised to profit. In 1923, Lynch miners shattered a world record by extracting 12,880 tons of coal for U.S. Steel in a single shift.[37]

During the strike and subsequent boom period, African Americans from the Deep South found steady work in the mines. While the wartime numbers totaled around half a million, over 800,000 more Black southerners migrated from 1920 to 1930. The population of the mountain coalfields grew as a result, as Harlan County alone doubled in size in a decade. By 1930, the population of the county numbered 64,557. Its total African American population was 5,879, still only about ten percent of the county's makeup but a 100 percent change nonetheless. The Black population grew at a slower pace that it did during the war, when it spiked by over 400 percent, but the increase was notable nonetheless: all told, the county's Black population had increased tenfold in twenty years. After the initial population boom of the World War I years, Harlan County would maintain a steadily growing population of white and Black miners for several decades. The figures for Harlan County tracked alongside those of Central Appalachia on the

[35] Otis Mouser to W.C. Kent, Aug. 11, 1922, Ibid.
[36] Johnson, *Politics of Soft Coal*, 116-18.
[37] *Coal Age*, v. 24, no. 15 (Oct. 11, 1923): 541.

whole. In 1930, over 100,000 African Americans made their homes in the Appalachian counties of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Of these, only West Virginia outpaced Kentucky in the number of Black mountain residents. In a sign of the enduring effects of operators' judicious mixture, the percentage of African Americans in the Appalachian region remained relatively stable through 1930. Never more than fifteen percent and never less than ten, Black miners played an integral part in the heyday of King Coal.[38]

While the extraction towns owned by coal companies continued to experience Black migration, transportation towns maintained their racial exclusiveness. The two were as intertwined as ever, though. As the nonunion fields became a larger part of the national market in 1922, railroad hubs like Corbin came to possess an outsized influence. Wartime growth had marked it as "probably the most important freight terminal south of the Ohio River." The centrality of the Corbin yards to the surrounding area, and its role as a conduit of industrial activity, led one observer to liken its location to "the neck of an hourglass."[39] The UMWA walkout, as a correspondent for the *Courier-Journal* observed, gave the railroad town of Corbin its "place in the sun." A "mere dot" on the map, its role as a conduit of coal took on increased importance in the midst of the miners' strike.[40] At points all over the country, railroad shopmen, angered by repeated wage cuts handed down by the RLB since the end of the war, looked to rectify their situation. After yet another wage cut in the summer of 1922, the shopcraft unions distributed strike ballots and prepared to walk off the job. On July 1, 400,000 shopmen dropped

[38] Brown, *Gone Home*, 24. Lewis, "From Peasant to Proletarian," 81. Turner, "The Demography of Black Appalachia," in *Blacks in Appalachia*, 238.
[39] *Appendix to the Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1922,* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1922), 273.
[40] *Courier-Journal*, July 30, 1922, p. 6.

their tools and went on strike. Although the operating trades did not join them, the shuttering of shops across the country threatened to ground interstate commerce to a halt.[41]

The residents of transportation towns stood firmly behind the striking shopmen. In Corbin, almost all of the 686 workers in the L&N shops walked out. The only workers left in the shops were the master mechanic and three foremen. City officials sided with the strikers against the company and refused to appoint additional deputy sheriffs as requested by the L&N, while practically all of the businesses in Corbin displayed signs denying service to strikebreakers. As for the strikers, they vowed to prevent anyone from accepting a job with the L&N while they remained out. All told, President Mapother judged it to be "distinctly a railroad town."[42] Ten days later, fifty engines and almost 4,000 loaded cars – almost all of which was coal – stood still in the yards. Upon inspection, company officials discovered that the cars' air hoses had been cut, their couplers removed, and brake shoes damaged. The *Railway Age* estimated that "30 to 40 cars have been rendered unserviceable in a single night." A few months later, that number grew to 2,000.[43] Company officials and yard laborers managed to move some freight despite the congestion, while the brotherhood operators continued to run passenger trains through the junction. L&N President Wible L. Mapother deemed the situation "intolerable" and set in motion plans to operate the shops without the strikers.[44]

Railroad companies' efforts to break the strike, however, had to consider the racial dynamics of the shopcrafts. Like most skilled railroad work, the crafts were practically lily-white. From a practical standpoint, the railroad companies could not import Black strikebreakers even if they wanted to. In spite of this, railroad companies dispatched labor agents to procure

[41] Davis, *Power at Odds*, 54-63.
[42] *Courier-Journal*, July 12, 1922, p. 2.
[43] *Railway Age*, vol. 73, no. 13 (1922): 559.
[44] *Courier-Journal*, July 12, 1922, p. 2.

workers to keep the shops operational. The L&N advertised in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, for air brake testers, blacksmiths, boilermakers, car inspectors, and machinists to work in the South. They would be paid at the rate prescribed by the Labor Board, and their travel and lodging would be provided for.[45] Yet labor agents found themselves often hamstrung by the need for skilled white labor. In Chicago, a freight agent for the PRR lamented the "very few white people idle" that made procuring shop labor a difficult task. The railroad company had given him orders "not to hire any colored help," despite the fact that his office was "over run" with Black jobseekers.[46] Similarly, a labor agent in Louisville asking if he could send Black workers to Chicago and Logansport, Indiana was told the company "cannot use colored mechanics."[47] In Corbin the L&N constructed shelters on its property to house the "several hundred men" that it planned to employ as the new shop force, along with armed guards to protect them and L&N property. Eventually, three different tent camp villages of 150 tents each stood in the yards, complete with floors, electric lights, kitchens and dining units.[48]

The white strikebreakers in Corbin faced some of the same tactics that had been used against Black workers in 1919. Strikers did not allow the imported workers to walk on the town's streets, secure a place to lodge, or even visit the post office. Threats, intimidation, and physical force on behalf of the striking railroaders forced 245 of the strikebreakers to leave town in one week alone. One strikebreaker arrived in Corbin in the early morning hours of August 1st and attempted to walk to the shops. A union railroader stopped him, called him a scab, and made sure he saw the pistol on his hip. As he walked the strikebreaker along the tracks, he pointed to

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[45] *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Sept. 5, 1922. Found in PRR Files, Box 1047, Shopmen's Strike Advertising for Replacement Workers, 1922.
[46] To Mr W.W. Burrell, Aug. 25, 1922. PRR Files, Box 1047, Shopmen's Strike Advertising for Replacement Workers, 1922.
[47] Shopmen's Strike Correspondence with Labor Agents, 1922. PRR Files, Box 1047.
[48] *Railway Age*, vol. 73, no. 13 (1922): 559.

the makeshift camp and declared, "We are going to clean out that camp shortly and kill every scab in it." The railroader then turned the man over to a group of thirty to forty strikers with instructions to ship him out of town. Before they did so, however, they stripped off his clothes, took his money, and dragged him into a car. On a hillside some miles away, they hurled insults at him as they beat him, kicked him, and threatened to shoot him. He survived the assault but did not attempt to go back to work. His was just one example of the "hundreds of cases" of intimidation faced by strikebreakers.[49]

As negotiations continued, discontent spread beyond the shops to encompass other aspects of railroad labor. President Harding entered the fray and concocted two different peace plans, each of which fell apart over the issue of seniority for shopmen. The Big Four unions of the engineers, conductors, firemen, and trainmen had supported the shopmen in spirit, but in typical brotherhood fashion, they had not actually taken a side in the struggle. By August, however, engine crews complained of harassment by company guards and the deterioration of their equipment. With repair shops either struggling to keep up or shuttered altogether, engines and rolling stock became increasingly dangerous to operate. Then the death of a striker and a railway guard in Joliet, Illinois, and subsequent arrival of troops, escalated matters. Troops fired on the strikers a few days later, and the Big Four unions voted to cease work until the armed contingent was ordered to leave.[50] The walkout in Illinois triggered similar movements across the country, including in Corbin. On August 14, some 1,500 engineers, conductors, firemen, and trainmen of the Cumberland Valley division went on strike to protest dangerous equipment and working conditions. Call boys looking for train crews at their homes and in boarding houses could find no one willing to work, resulting in the cancelling of passenger runs out of town.

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[49] *Appendix to the Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1922*, 274.
[50] Davis, *Power at Odds*, 110-13.

Their walkout also tied up all of the coal along the Cumberland Valley line, including those of U.S. Coal and Coke, Wisconsin Steel, and the Ford Motor Company.[51] After five days, the L&N agreed to confine its guards to the outskirts of railroad property and vested conductors with the authority to determine if equipment was safe enough to operate. The Big Four went back to work, once again leaving the shopcrafts alone in their strike.[52] Their willingness to act, in Corbin and in other transportation towns, demonstrated the emergence of a tenuous alliance among all railroad workers.

The congested yards in Corbin began to draw the ire of one of the nation's leading industrialists, Henry Ford himself. Ford had purchased the Banner Fork mines in Wallins Creek, Harlan County in 1920 and planned to link Kentucky's coal mines to Detroit in his "Great Ore Belt."[53] Yet these mines lay along the Cumberland Valley division that funneled coal into the bottlenecked junction of Corbin. To end the stoppage, Ford proposed to send workers from his own Detroit, Toledo, and Ironton Railroad to operate the L&N yards and shops. Furthermore, mechanics from the Ford Motor Company would be sent to conduct locomotive repair work that they would do at camps along the railroad line. The L&N issued a statement that scoffed at the idea, which was "apparently made seriously… but of course it could not be seriously considered." President Mapother of the L&N called the proposition "unheard of," for it would entail that the company "should turn over to strangers the operation of one of its most important mechanical terminals." The L&N countered with a proposal for Ford to lend them some of their many mechanics. Representatives from Detroit felt their workers would not be safe at Corbin, however, and so talks stalled without a resolution.[54] Their concerns were soon validated. On

[51] *Courier-Journal*, Aug. 15, 1922, p. 1. *Railway Age*, vol. 73, no. 13 (1922): 559.
[52] *Courier-Journal*, Aug. 18, 1922, p. 1.
[53] *Courier-Journal*, Aug. 8, 1920.
[54] *Manufacturers Record*, vol. 82, no. 7 (Aug. 17, 1922): 69.

September 13, unionists and strikebreakers exchanged gunfire in South Corbin near the yard. Deputy U.S. marshals descended on the scene after the battle and met several union men standing in the street, armed with weapons. Sixty shots had been fired before the marshals' arrival, but no parties involved sustained injuries, and no arrests were made.[55]

On Labor Day, the national shopmen's union deemed the strike to be a continuation of the sacrifices workers had made during the Great War. The shopmen-led RED praised striking railroaders for "standing shoulder to shoulder in the front line trenches of the industrial battle-ground." Neither the railroads' "'poison gas' of… paid propaganda" nor the "heavy artillery of public condemnation" could lodge them from their position. For they were "Labor's great hope" in the battle that had been raging since the world war's end, a battle that industrialists had been preparing for while labor toiled at home and died abroad for the country's well-being. These so-called "rotten barnacles on American society" were determined to return organized labor to its proper place as "simply a cog in a machine, or a number on a clock." As the determined position of the shopmen revealed, they planned to make good on the promises of wartime government.[56]

Striking shopmen began to feel the pressure as the work stoppage wore on, however, with some choosing to abandon the cause altogether. In November, a Louisville-based labor agent for the PRR received a letter from a pipe fitter in Corbin who requested transportation for "a great many mechanics." The labor agent arrived early Monday morning and checked into the Smith Hotel. Thirty minutes after advertising his presence, he saw the hotel lobby "full of men wanting jobs." Some of the workers were "L&N men who wont [sic] work here," he wrote his superintendent, while others had come from other railroads. Most of them had experience as car

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[55] *Richmond Daily Register*, Sept. 14, 1922, p .2

[56] "Railway Employes' Department Strike Bulletin No. 9," Records of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company Accession 1810, Personnel Department, Western Region, Superintendent of Labor & Wage Bureau Series I: General Files, Box 1047: Shopmen's Strike General 1922.

repairers and builders, but the report of mechanics proved to be a false one. The labor agent tried and failed to find the man who wrote him the initial letter, concluding that he was "one of the floating element of men" that had come to Corbin as strikebreakers. In the end, he sent several shipments of repairmen and a few machinists to PRR operations in Indiana before leaving town. While some of these workers were strikebreakers, some were also Corbin residents. Several months without work, it seemed, had made them reevaluate their commitment to the union.[57]

Acts of violence against railroaders testified to a decaying situation in 1923. On January 20, an explosion at a Corbin boarding house injured two railroaders and triggered a manhunt for the person responsible. Agents of the railroad tracked down the culprit several weeks later, the wife of a former L&N shopman who had fled Kentucky for California. The railroad deputized additional police officers in the aftermath, straining the already frayed relationship with workers. In the early morning hours of January 30, two railroad employees exchanged gunfire with a pair of L&N policemen as they walked home from the yards. Reports about the cause of the conflict differed: one version held that the railroad employees had fired at a rabbit which in turn attracted the attention of the L&N guards; another version blamed the policemen for approaching the two railroaders and escalating the situation unnecessarily. Regardless, one of each party was dead and two more received treatment for their injuries.[58]

The death of a railroad man – although not a shopman – only spurred more anger among from the strikers and sympathetic residents. Special policemen recently appointed began to resign rather than support the L&N, leaving the city officials in fear of losing control of the situation altogether. To keep law and order, Governor Morrow dispatched a machine gun

[57] Shopmen's Strike Correspondence with Labor Agents, Oct.-Dec., 1922. PRR Files, Box 1048.
[58] *Messenger-Inquirer (Owensboro, KY),* Jan. 30, 1923, p. 1. *Corbin Times-Tribune,* Feb. 16, 1923, p. 1.

squadron of National Guard troops from nearby London.[59] The guardsmen patrolled the streets of the town day and night with a machine gun mounted on a truck, while displeasure with the mayor's action led some members of the city council to threaten impeachment. Calling for help from the governor was, according to a statement of one of the striking shopmen in the *Corbin Times-Tribune*, "an attempt to poison to public's mind" against their cause.[60]

Ultimately, the railroads' ability to import strikebreakers proved decisive. In Corbin and across the country, the shopmen's strike came to a gradual and painful end in 1923. A vote in late February saw strikers in Corbin elect to end the strike by nearly a two-thirds majority. While official action required the support of all the shopcraft unions on the L&N, the vote in Corbin signaled a desire to end "one of the most bitterly fought battles in the annals of organized labor."[61] L&N shopmen called off their strike on June 1, 1923, while some shopmen in the Midwest continued the strike into 1924. Defeated by the twin forces of the company and the state, railroad shopmen reckoned with their steep decline from the wartime heights of labor's influence.[62]

For a transportation town, the result was a crushing blow. In resisting the strikebreakers imported by the L&N, railroaders in Corbin utilized mob tactics similar to those wielded against Black workers during the Long Red Summer. While the tactics achieved white railroaders' goal in 1919 of ensuring African American workers never returned, the shopmen's defeat a few years later signaled the limits of the railroad labor ideology. White railroaders did not "lose" to Black labor in 1922, yet they did lose to the company. Although united by racism, railroaders were separated by the divisions of craft on the job and in the union halls and not able to establish the

[59] *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 3, 1923, p. 1.
[60] *Corbin Times-Tribune*, Feb. 9, 1923, p .1.
[61] *Corbin Times-Tribune*, Feb. 23, 1923, p .1.
[62] Davis, *Power at Odds*, 154-55.

kind of industry-wide solidarity needed to withstand the companies' power. The industry's labor hierarchy, as it had before, provided convincing incentives for railroaders to hew to a conservative vision of organizing. Thus, outside of a fleeting moment of cross-craft cooperation, the shopmen remained isolated and vulnerable to the repressive capabilities of capital and the state. At the end of the strike, the political standing of labor – and workers' beliefs in its ability to represent them – had been weakened. To recover, railroaders and the community at large would take solace in their shared ties of racial identity.

The Sun Sets in a Transportation Town

Amidst the rubble of the shopmen's failure, Corbinites looked to carve out a position as an all-white transportation town that was also friendly with its parent company. The militance exhibited by strikers during the shopmen's strike fell out of favor, and in its place stood a cautious, business-oriented unionism exemplified by the railroad brotherhoods. With capital ascendant, consumption and conservatism became salves for the wounds of the upheaval of the recent years. Through it all, Corbin residents emphasized their racial homogeneity that hinged on the exclusion of African Americans.

As the strike came to an end, Corbin's leaders sought to repair its relationship with its principal markets. The two most prominent were the nearby river cities of Cincinnati and Louisville. Corbin's mayor declared May 24, 1923 "Cincinnati Day," as businessmen of the Queen City stopped in the town as part of a tour of Appalachian Kentucky. The group of over one hundred designated the entire region as a "Treasure Land" fit to be served by the city's producers of consumer goods. Corbin, for its part, declared the gates of its city to be open wide. "Welcome, Cincinnatus; thrice welcome, Grand Old Cincinnatus," the Corbin *Times-Tribune*

announced. In a revision of the booster language from decades prior, the newspaper touted the area's geography and people. The foothills of southeastern Kentucky's mountains, "picturesque and romantic," as they were, were no longer "wild and barren," and played host to a "bona-fide resident citizenship." Corbin's proximity to the coalfields marked it as the next "dominating trade center and point of distribution in southeastern Kentucky," and a working relationship with Cincinnati industries would only redound to its benefit.[63]

In the summer, business interests in the Bluegrass's biggest city embarked on a tour to mend their own partnerships in the coalfields. Their presence was not welcome all throughout the region, as seen by the hostile resolutions passed by civic organizations in the Bell County towns of Pineville and Middlesboro that disagreed with a pending tax championed by the Louisville press. Corbin, however, welcomed the Louisville businessmen with open arms. "The people of Corbin," its paper told the emissaries, "sincerely hope that your trip into the mountains will prove both pleasant and profitable." In June, 150 Heads of Houses of the Board of Trade headed southeast on the L&N to visit southeastern Kentucky towns. Among the group was L&N chief Wible L. Mapother, who received a "noisy welcome" in the transportation town. Mapother assured the crowd that the company harbored "no ill will" against any of the town's residents or the railroad employees, and promised to make Corbin "the model railroad town in the United States." To that end, he announced the company would invest several hundred thousand dollars on new equipment and trackage into the coalfields. The trip underscored the fact, as the *Courier-Journal* argued, "the L.&N. can no more do without Corbin, than Corbin can do without the L.&N."[64]

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[63] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* May 18, 1923, p. 1.
[64] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* June 8, 1923, p. 2. *Courier-Journal*, Jun 15, 1923, p. 1.

The railroad bonded Corbinites together, no doubt, but so too did an emerging social conservatism clothed in whiteness. The Ku Klux Klan became increasingly visible in the town throughout the 1920s, distinguishing it from other communities. In April 1923, "Reverend Corbett," a national representative of the Klan from New York addressed a gathering of several hundred Corbin citizens at a vacant lot on Main Street. In attendance were prominent Corbin leaders, members of the local Klan chapter, and curious bystanders. For over two hours, Corbett expounded on the principles and objectives of the secret order, and denied some of the more nefarious allegations levied against it. When Corbett attempted to speak in nearby Williamsburg, however, an injunction secured by one of the town's leaders prevented the gathering. Corbett spoke to large crowd just outside the city limits instead. As had been true in the actions of James Bond and Joseph B. Snyder, Williamsburg natives by and large opposed the outright racism of Corbin and the Klan.[65]

In Corbin and all across the country, practicing Christians began to turn to religious fundamentalism to make sense of what they thought was a frightening postwar world. For many conservative Christians, hopes for a "new and beautiful world" had produced "nothing but crime, moral chaos, and organized selfishness on a grander scale than before." In the midst of a dismal tide of social unrest and an ascendant secular culture, religious fundamentalists urged a return to the true word of God. "Surely here was proof that the nation had misplaced its faith," an observer of the period wrote, "that the only true salvation for a sinful society lay in blotting out the whole spirit of innovation and returning to the theological and moral absolutism of an earlier day."[66] The Corbin *Times-Tribune* promoted the first Sunday in May as part of national "Go-to Sunday School Day," which the majority of states "and even Canada" observed since its inception in

[65] *Corbin Times-Tribune*, Aug. 24, 1923.
[66] Higham, *Strangers in the* Land, 293.

1914. President Wilson had praised the initiative as redeeming the nation, while Theodore Roosevelt castigated the irreligious as "a menace to the country." The *Times-Tribune* proclaimed its success, where the "gospel… and its place in the life of the city and in the life of the young people are stressed." Several congregations reported highs in attendance in 1924, including the Christian, Methodist, and both Baptist churches.[67]

During the cultural conflicts of the Twenties, Protestant churches in Corbin became bastions of fundamentalism. In a sermon rife with racist overtones, Rev. E. H. Blakeman railed against the evils of modern life from the pulpit of Corbin's Central Baptist Church. His choice target was jazz, a phenomenon emblematic of the "present tendencies toward modernism and a faster life" that seemed poised to dominate American society. Its connotation as "Negro music" made it especially dangerous to white religious conservatives. Far from the more elegant forms of dance in days past, the reverend saw jazz as appealing "only to the beastly, or animal nature." "Wherever jazz is found it's a sign of retrogression and decay," he continued, "Jazz throws off religion and walks in sin and revelry. Its utter intentions are to uncivilize mankind." Alongside Unitarianism, Universalism, and Darwinism, the preacher now placed the concept of "jazz theology" that contained a "bundle of beautiful, ideal falsehoods." A people that believed in the Bible, sin, and heaven and hell could have no tolerance for jazz or its attending theories, he counseled. Its prevalence surely heralded the arrival of the last days, about which he asked the congregation, "are you ready?"[68]

Another Corbin Baptist church provided the venue for a marriage of religion and racism, as Klansmen received recognition from the pulpit. As Rev. W.L. Singleton addressed the congregation of First Baptist Corbin, over one hundred robed Klansmen entered and took their

[67] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* May 2, May 9, 1924.
[68] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* Sept. 14, 1923.

place in the center aisle. The pastor asked that no attention be paid to the group, and remarked that if the lives of the Klansmen were "as clean as the robes they wore," it reflected well on them. Rev. Singleton briefly described the doctrine of the Klan before returning to his sermon. At the close of the service, the robed visitors presented the pastor with an envelope containing cash and a letter, and departed in silence. "We the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Corbin," the letter declared, "heartily approve of the good work you are engaged in," and claimed to "wish to assist and cooperate with you in your earnest endeavor." The Klansman hoped that the church would accept the donation, and pledged to "hover still closer under the rugged and time worn cross."[69]

Additionally, Corbinites began to pride themselves on their whiteness through their consumption of popular culture. When the Hippodrome Theater brought D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* back to Corbin for a return tour, it hosted a ten-piece orchestra. The Saturday showing of the "greatest picture of the age" began at 11 in the morning to benefit the L&N employees of the second shift.[70] Additionally, minstrel shows proved to be a profitable, and popular, form of entertainment in Corbin throughout the 1920s. The American Legion presented their own minstrel program at the Hippodrome Theater in the spring of 1923. Thirty-five blackface actors, both veterans and other "local talent," promised a varied program. They rehearsed under an employee of the John B. Rogers Production Company out of Ohio, which supplied smaller theaters with costumes, scenery, and stage direction.[71] An annual performance from the Kosair Shriner Minstrel troupe was one of the most anticipated events in town. Thirty white Shriners donned blackface to entertain the Corbin crowd at the Hippodrome Theater, for both an

[69] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* April 11, 1924.
[70] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* Oct. 17, 1924, p. 8.
[71] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* April 11, 1923.

afternoon matinee and an evening show.[72] Minstrelsy, with its comedic and degrading portrayal of African Americans, provided a way for the town's white residents to assert their racial superiority, even in the absence of a sizable Black population. Years later, a white Corbinite fondly recalled a line from a Legion minstrel show, in which a performer proclaimed, "the devil never would look for a nigger in Corbin."[73]

Business-oriented unionism, not the radicalism of the shopmen's strike, engineered reconciliation as well. As the *Times-Tribune* put it, the the L&N shops were "Corbin's real gold mine." "The L&N Railroad built the city of Corbin," the paper pointed out, and every coal train that passed through the yards ensured that it would continue to be an important regional hub. Yet it was also the workers themselves that deserved recognition. L&N railroaders were "of exceptionally high type… always ready to cooperate in every good movement in the community in which they live." As "splendid citizens," Corbin's railroad employees were "a valuable asset to civic and moral life."[74] Unions and businesses pledged to work together more closely under the banner of the L&N. In the late 1920s, the Corbin members of the Brotherhoods of Railway Clerks sent letters to local businesses to urge them ship their goods over the L&N alone. "As you know this is strictly a Railroad town," their letter explained, with the L&N and its employees "the source of all the revenue coming in to our city." The union's circular came bearing the endorsements of the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club, and the American Legion. In a full-page ad response, a group of the town's merchants and businesses pledged "100 percent co-operation." They pledged to only ship over the L&N lines and asked that the railroad men do their part to patronize local companies as well. If "everybody put his shoulder to the wheel," the businessmen

[72] *Corbin Times-Tribune*, July 4, 1923.
[73] The quote is from the 1:30 minute mark of *Trouble Behind: A Film About History and Forgetting*, prod, and dir. Robert Henson, Cicada Films, 1990.
[74] *Corbin Times-Tribune*, June 21, 1929.

argued, they all could make Corbin a "bigger and better community in which to live, trade and raise our children."[75]

In the midst of a booming economy, Corbinites coalesced around white supremacy and their control of the coalfield's black diamonds. Indeed, it was a time of prosperity, not deprivation, that prompted the town's white residents to stake a claim on the transportation town's identity. U.S. Steel, International Harvester, and the Ford Motor Company all relied on the Corbin yards to channel coal out of the mountains. Beginning in 1917, the state of Kentucky climbed from the fifth-most coal producing state in the nation, to the third-most in 1929, behind only Pennsylvania and West Virginia.[76] The Harlan coalfield was essential to this ascendancy, producing a record 15 million tons in 1929, all of which had to pass through the Corbin terminal.[77]

White Corbinites also remained keenly aware of the migration that continued around them. The passage of Johnson-Reed Immigration Act in 1924 ensured that industries would still recruit Black labor out of the South. An article in the *Courier-Journal*, reprinted in Corbin, pointed out that "the Negro laborer… has proven himself reliable, law abiding, tractable, good natured and easily handled." As a result, the next quarter century would no doubt bring "a constant and ever increasing migration" even though the "the South is the natural habitat of the Negro." The author claimed the stereotypes that African Americans loved the "sunny climes," "easy-going methods," and "fertile fields" of the South, where "cotton is still king and the Negro… has been its chief producer." Yet the cotton South did not offer "living wages" nor the

[75] *Corbin Times-Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1929, p. 4.
[76] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Mines and Quarries, 1929, General Reports for States and Industries*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1933): 255.
[77] Kentucky State Department of Mines, *Kentucky Coal Mines: Output for Calendar Year 1929* (Lexington: Department of Mines, 1929).

"guarantee of justice and security" that the North and even some Appalachian states did. Until these conditions improved, a great many Black southerners would make their living elsewhere.[78]

Throughout the 1920s, residents of Corbin hammered out the boundaries of a socially conservative, business-friendly, transportation town. The doctrine of racial exclusion commingled with these movements. When a promoter of Corbin described its population of around 12,000 in 1926, he made sure to note that there were only "a few negroes and only a very few foreigners." A few Jewish residents made their homes there, but they were "of a very high type and are good citizens." Indeed, most of Corbin's citizens were born and raised in Kentucky, where the author claimed, "the purest Anglo-Saxon blood in the world is found." "It is just as near to heaven from Corbin as anywhere else on the globe," he continued, where contented residents looked "to the east towards the rising of the sun – not to its setting."[79] To Black Americans, though, the setting of the sun in Corbin would come to mark a boundary altogether more sinister.

Janus Bifrons

On the whole, Kentucky continued to occupy a contradictory position with respect to African Americans in the 1920s. The subject animated one of the *The Messenger*'s articles on "These Colored United States." In his analysis of the Bluegrass state, J. Everett Harris observed a contradiction at the its core. Caught between the conflicting pulls of North and South, Kentucky was perhaps best captured by the Greek god Janus of two faces. The god of thresholds, doorways, and new beginnings was an apt choice for the state that straddled the cultural Mason-Dixon line. Yet Harris's Janus also lumbered inexorably in one direction. "Kentucky… in spite

[78] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* Oct. 3, 1924, p. 3.
[79] *Corbin Times-Tribune,* May 21, 1926, p. 5.

of its northern face," Harris wrote, "yet reaches out with open arms to the South and his feet move in that direction." Wary of this dichotomy, the state's African Americans had to "trust in its northern face but notice the southern steps." Harris ended on a pessimistic note, characterizing the state's southward march as an inevitable "Olympic decree."[80]

CIC director James Bond would have agreed with him. In 1924, Bond observed a "backward movement" in terms of race relations in the state. One of the most troubling incidents was one that bore many similarities to the Corbin expulsion. At the construction site of the Dix River Dam in Mercer and Garrard counties, 700 Black construction laborers worked alongside white laborers. On a cold November night, after rumor spread of a murder committed by one of the Black laborers, the white workers joined with farmers of the nearby countryside to exact retribution. The mob attacked the Black workers, Bond told the committee, "beating up many of them," and "taking from them their clothing and other valuables." They then began to march them to the nearest railroad depot. Local law enforcement and the construction company put a stop to the proceedings, but not before many of the Black construction crew were left "in different sections of the country wandering about dazed without sufficient clothing and in a highly excited state of mind." The Mercer County sheriff and his deputies sheltered the men in a rock quarry, brought them food from the dam project, and built bonfires to ward off the cold. Remarkably, most of the Black construction workers returned the next day. A National Guard unit watched over the site for the duration of the project, and grand jury indictments came down against Black and white workers alike. While the white men accused of an unlawful assembly received acquittals, however, two Black men received prison sentences for murder. As one historian has observed, if law enforcement in Corbin and other towns had pushed for the return

[80] J. Everett Harris, "Kentucky: (Janus Bifrons)" in Lutz and Ashton, ed., *These "Colored" United States: African American Essays from the 1920s*, 129-38.

of the expelled African Americans, they may have been saved the judgement of history. Yet a remote construction site was one thing, while a town full of railroaders and their families was another altogether. For railroad companies, it was simpler to accede to the prevailing ideology held so strongly by their workers.[81]

In the coalfields proper, however, the connection between Alabama and Harlan County continued to draw African Americans to Kentucky. Lynch and Benham, the extraction towns of U.S. Steel and International Harvester, respectively, were an attractive destination for those looking to get out of the Deep South. Of the 5,789 African Americans that lived in Harlan County in 1930, the majority did so within the boundaries of the two model towns.[82] William Morrow's father moved the family to Lynch from Ansley, Alabama in the 1930s. "It got so bad down there, this company U.S. Steel hired a man they call Limehouse," Morrow later explained. The labor agent drove many families from Alabama to Kentucky on behalf of the company. Gean Austin's father left Alabama in 1940, fleeing the authorities who sought to imprison him for making moonshine. From Lynch, he made contact with Limehouse, who told the family to meet him in Birmingham so that they could be sent to Kentucky. The labor agent drove the Austins and other Black families all the way to Lynch. "I got up the next morning," Gean Austin recounted in an oral history years later, "and didn't see nothing but mountains." Austin "cried for about a week," but eventually came to appreciate his mountain home. Like his father, he too dug coal for U.S. Steel, retiring after thirty-five years in the mines. Speaking of the fond memories he

[81] "The Fourth Annual Report of Dr. James Bond, Director of Interracial Commission for Kentucky," 1, 7-9. CIC Papers, Reel 52. *New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1924, p. 25. Griggs, "Removal of Blacks from Corbin," 306-8.
[82] Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 3-4.

and other Lynch residents kept of their home, Austin compared it to what had come before: "Well, say their home was in Alabama. Well, they wasn't going back there."[83]

The presence of a racially heterogeneous working class in Kentucky often surprised observers. Rose C. Field, a journalist for *Success Magazine*, found Lynch to be a revelation in 1926. The "finest mining town in the world," she wrote, was also a "melting pot in the Cumberlands." Out of a population of 6,500, thirty-two nationalities joined white and Black Americans to dig coal for U.S. Steel. The company paid good wages, and its miners lived in quality housing. Segregation existed, of course, in both facilities and the separate schools provided "with great wisdom" by the company. In this, however, Field saw the height of corporate benevolence and largesse, a true demonstration that "American industry to-day has the advantage over the pioneering of the nineteenth century." That such a place could be in Appalachia, the land of "feuds, of hunters and trappers, of moonshine and revenue officers" was "strange indeed." In Lynch, Field explained, "Nationalities, color lines, languages didn't matter. Coal and mining was the thing."[84]

It took until the late 1930s, but Lynch and Harlan County finally experienced phenomenon that historian Ronald Lewis called "the fruits of judicious mixture." Mountain whites, African Americans, and European immigrants organized UMWA locals in the county throughout the decade. While the UMWA had a firm footing by 1933, mine owners fought its every advance with private mine guards, gun violence, and forced evictions. Miners had Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal on their side, however, which eventually tipped the scale in their favor. Even the recalcitrant captive mines of U.S. Steel were under a contract by 1939. In nine years of

[83] William Morrow (b. 1922) and Dwain Morrow interviewed by Karida Brown in Lynch, Ky., 13 July 2013; Gean Austin (b. 1930) interviewed by Karida Brown in Lynch, Ky., 10 July 2013. Eastern Kentucky African American Migration Project (EKAAMP), Southern Historical Collection Digital Files, University of North Carolina.
[84] Rose C. Field, "What I Found in Lynch, Kentucky," *Success* (March 1926): 58-61, 114-19.

conflict, the county earned the moniker of "Bloody Harlan" and its figures, from Sherriff J.H. Blair to Florence Reece, became ensconced in labor history lore. The arrival of the union ended the autocratic rule of King Coal and allowed miners to balance the scales of power in the coalfields.[85]

For Black miners in Lynch, the UMWA "opened up everything." Bennie Massey, whose father had moved the family to Kentucky from Alabama, experienced the difference. "US Steel was making a place for you to work," yet it mandated that miners "spend all your money here, and give your labor back to them." "Don't get me wrong, it was a good living for our fathers and stuff," he continued, "but they had spent it all here." The union, however, "changed all that."[86] In Gean Austin's estimation, the UMWA provided a sense of equality for African Americans in the midst of Jim Crow. "You feel more at ease and more free," he explained, "whatever your opinion is, you can speak… you don't fear no reprisals from anybody, you know."[87] During much of the next two decades, the UMWA helped bring about cooperation between miners across the color line. According to another resident, "When the union was at its height in Harlan County, they had a lot of interrelationship between the blacks and the whites because you couldn't be accepted into the union if you were not willing to accept everybody." Beginning with the first wave of the Great Migration, decades of movement to the coalfields had laid the groundwork for the development of interracial working-class solidarity.[88]

Just down the mountain from Lynch in Corbin, a different regime reigned. By the 1930s, its designation as a sundown town had taken hold. When white newspaper editor John L. Crawford moved to Corbin in 1928, he found prejudice against African Americans was "still

[85] Hevener, *Which Side Are You On?*, 175-85.
[86] Bennie Massey (b. 1949) interviewed by Karida Brown in Lynch, Ky., 23 June 2014, EKAAMP.
[87] Gean Austin Interview, EKAAMP.
[88] Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County*, 175.

fresh in mind," and the expulsion was "common talk."[89] After 1930, Howard Nolan, Emma Woods, John Berry, and a small number of African Americans worked as cooks, janitors, or porters at one of Corbin's hotels. Often held up in later years as examples of the town's racial diversity, the remaining Black residents were considered "Corbin negroes," their occupations considered acceptable according to white residents' paternalism.[90] Woods, known affectionately as "Aunt Emma," was a longtime laundress and cook for L&N employees. She and her daughter Clara would become the unofficial "matrons" of the passenger depot in the 1920s. In a haunting image from 1930, Emma Woods stood in the middle of a group of station employees at the Corbin depot. Alone, and surrounded by white railroad workers, her position was as clear as black and white.[91]

At last, the parallel tracks of historical development had reached the end of the line. While miners in extraction towns like Lynch embarked on the branch characterized by a "judicious mixture," railroad workers in the transportation town of Corbin chose the path of severance. There would be very little of what James Bond referred to more broadly as a "daily discovery" of the "interracial spirit." Bond believed that this idea depended on white and Black people experiencing "the proper kind of contact to bring it forward and make it active and effective." Without this, Bond predicted there would never be "permanent peace and satisfactory progress."[92] There were very few such daily discoveries in a transportation town, and fewer still once it became a sundown town.

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[89] John L. Crawford, Interview by George C. Wright, Jan. 30, 1987, Blacks in Kentucky Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.
[90] H.E. Everman. "Corbin, Kentucky, A Socio-Economic Anomaly: Portrait of a Diverse Railroad Boom Town, 1895-1930," Unpublished Typescript.
[91] *L&N Employes' Magazine,* vol. 27, no. 10 (Oct. 1951), 52. Image from *L&N Employes' Magazine* vol. 6, no. 5 (July 1930): 71.
[92] *The Southern Workman*, vol. LIV (1925): 254-56.

CORBIN, KY., STATION EMPLOYES

Seated: Ernest Jones, porter; and Frank Mitchell, extra baggage clerk.

Standing: C. P. Brachey, station foreman; J. W. Stronge, conductor; M. O. Seaman, assistant inspector of police; J. C. Eads, supervisor of track; Sam Price, porter; Ed. Roller, conductor; Wheeler Meadows, conductor; Emma Woods, matron; J. L. Stark, train baggage master; H. H. Wilburn, baggage clerk; Walter A. Payne, ticket agent; Thomas Burnfin, operator; John P. Wilder, porter; and Everett Tuttle, porter.

Figure 11: Emma Woods, the sole Black employee of the Corbin passenger depot. *L&N Employes' Magazine* vol. 6, no. 5 (July 1930): 71.

EPILOGUE

"YOU CAN'T CHANGE HISTORY": REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST IN BLACK AND WHITE

I never thought I'd live to love the coal dust
Never thought I'd pray to hear the tipple roar
But Lord how I wish that grass could change to money
And them greenbacks fill my pockets once more
I was born and raised at the mouth of the Hazard holler
Coal cars roarin' and rumblin' past my door
Now they're standin' in a rusty row all empty
And the L&N don't stop here anymore

Jean Ritchie, "The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore"

Almost seventy years after Corbin's birth as a sundown town, historian George C. Wright interviewed a pair of its residents. John L. Crawford, a newspaper editor, acknowledged what some people were ashamed to admit. "Folks all through the South know that Corbin – that's where they ran the colored people out of town."[1] For Lillian Butner, the Black woman who was a child during the 1919 expulsion, it was more than just talk. Butner still remembered hearing the constant beating of drums punctuated only by gunshots. "They said they had to march," Butner told Wright, "and then for a long time if you come through here on a train, the conductors would tell you to pull your shades down." "If you were Black?" Wright asked, to which Butner replied simply, "Yes."[2]

As both Crawford and Butner testified, the violence of the Long Red Summer cast a shadow that loomed over ensuing generations. Over time, the twisted reasonings that justified the

[1] John L. Crawford, Interview by George C. Wright, Jan. 30, 1987, Blacks in Kentucky Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.
[2] Lillian Butner Oral History Interview by George C. Wright, Jan. 30, 1987, Blacks in Kentucky Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky.

violence ossified, creating an insular mythology all their own. Lies and half-truths passed around and down eventually became received wisdom. Outside its boundaries, the particulars of the story were not as important as their overall effect. Eventually, as Crawford explained, the tale of white railroaders claiming the town for themselves became "part of the history of the town," and caused "black folks to shy around" Corbin.[3] Similar stories existed about Erwin in east Tennessee. While the region's industrial economy boomed and then went belly-up, the tellings and retellings of history became one of the chief methods by which the parameters of a sundown town were maintained and managed.

Spreading the Word: Myths and Menacing Encounters

From the outset, lies and rumors passed around by white residents smothered the truth of why Steve Rogers and the Corbin mob took action. The first lie was that the expulsion was to avenge a robbery committed by two of the Black workers. In the ensuing years, the link between Black men and criminal behavior convinced many of the mob's righteous cause. Yet even at the time, investigators acknowledged that the initial assault was not committed by the Black workers, but rather two white men whose names were not publicized. According to a long-time Corbin resident, the two men "had been doing a lot of robbing, with blackened faces." Though they were eventually apprehended after a murder, "the harm had been done." The image of Black marauders was a powerful one, however, and squared with racist connotations of crime in America and the myths that continued to justify lynchings.[4]

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[3] John L. Crawford Interview, Blacks in Kentucky Oral History Project.

[4] *Corbin Daily Tribune, 75th Anniversary Edition,* February 23, 1967, p. 8; Many sources corroborate this claim. See the report of James Bond, Director of Kentucky Commission on Interracial Cooperation, in "Minutes of Inter-Racial Commission, Held November 17, 1920, Atlanta, Georgia," Commission on Interracial Cooperation Papers, Reel 20; See also *The Crisis,* vol. 21, no. 6 (April 1921): 250; John L. Crawford, *A Tale of One City,* 59-60.

The robbery story was only the first fabrication. Many different explanations arose to rationalize the expulsion over the years. One was that a Black man, or several, raped a white woman, which resulted in a lynching. Others dealt with Thompson himself. Some said he lost his paycheck gambling at the rail yard, or spent it all on women and drink and blamed the nearest scapegoat. The gambling story was the truth according to Gus Hausman, employed by the construction company building the east yard in 1919. "It all started when these two switchmen lost their money and reported two black men held them up and robbed them…. There was no robbery."[5] Some asserted that the Black workers were imported as strikebreakers or came to replace the white railroaders. "Blacks were coming from other places, some from down south," the son of a railroader later explained, while another claimed, "My daddy told me it was the very poor people that was jealous of the blacks in the round house." While none of these were completely true, over time the lies replaced the truth.[6]

The most convenient way for white people to deal with the town's reputation was simply to bury it. In the 1970s, Corbin resident Ira O. Chitwood acknowledged that there was a sizable Black population in Williamsburg, but in his hometown of Corbin, there "might be two or three families." Chitwood thought the rest of county was "very much like it is here in Corbin… no blacks here." The absence of Black people soon became taken for granted.[7] At the same time, a resident of nearby Barbourville looked on what she viewed as progress. Bertha Valda King Tye claimed that Black people had been "accepted" in southeastern Kentucky: "There's no feeling at all, as far as I know." Tye, who had attended Berea College, did notice that the African Americans there "were more to themselves than they were at Berea." She employed a Black

[5] "Account of 1919 Corbin Race Riot Disputed," *Corbin Times-Tribune*, Dec. 18, 1987, 1B.
[6] Bill D. Whittaker, "Howard Nolan, Clara Woods, and Alberta Coleman: The Last Three Blacks in Corbin, 1919-1993," Unpublished Typescript held at Appalachian State University, 3; Griggs, "Removal of Blacks," 305.
[7] Ira O. Chitwood Oral History Interview. Whitley County Oral History Project, KHS.

woman as a housekeeper and thought "as much of Lizzie as I do the other girl that comes – white girl." This sentence apparently made her reconsider, as she continued, "Not quite as much but… I have my… you know how it is. I don't know whether you are southern or not; are you?" After the interviewer let out a nervous laugh, she concluded, "Well, they still need a lot of understanding."[8]

Yet the reality of what happened that night in 1919 started to weigh on white residents, some of whom developed feelings of guilt and shame. From a nursing home just north of Corbin in Rockcastle County, John Dishman "Pete" Feather looked back on his life in Corbin. Feather worked for the L&N for five decades. He retired at age 65 to a railroad man's pension, keeping the wristwatch he received from the company stowed away in a lockbox. In 1978, he spoke to an oral historian about many things, including the "Negro situation" in his hometown. When the interviewer raised the subject of the 1919 expulsion, Feather paused and then began in a shaky voice, "They were mobbed there. It was a pitiful incident, agitated by a gang of roughnecks. It should never have happened."

He told of the rift the night caused in his family, explaining that his brother "thought it was a great thing to be out and be mixed up in that." As Feather walked home from work, he spotted his brother in the mob and told him to "get hisself up Gordon Street and home just as quick as he could." Afterwards, his brother complained to their father that Feather had "talked mean to him," but their father agreed he had been in the wrong. "It took everything we could do to keep brother… from going up to the penitentiary," he admitted. When asked about the reason

[8] Bertha Valda King Tye Oral History Interview. Knox County Oral History Project, KHS.

for it all, Feather condemned his brother and the other participants: "they didn't have any reason, only that the colored population was niggers… That was all the reason in the world."[9]

At least one person involved that night was not embarrassed of his role. Steve "Pistol Pete" Rogers had served prison time in the state penitentiary for his leadership of the mob, moved to Texas after his release, and worked as a brakeman on the railroad. He died at the age of 70 in 1965 from acute myocarditis, not helped by chronic alcoholism. A headstone in Amarillo marks his grave, complete with a carving of an L&N steam engine and the nickname he earned that night in 1919, "Pistol Pete." Even after his death, it was clear that Rogers and his family remained proud of his actions.[10]

Black Kentuckians often learned about Corbin through word of mouth. Families and friends spread tales of caution about a place that was considered dangerous. Born and raised in Harlan County, William Turner's mother found out about it when by the time she was 4 or 5 because "people relayed the message that Corbin was an unwelcome spot." His parents' generation passed the knowledge on to him and his siblings. As he grew up in Lynch, the fact of the expulsion was as important to them as "the Eighth of August or the Fourth of July. We knew – hey, that happened in Corbin in 1919." The sundown town was a reminder that "you weren't welcome; that you didn't belong."[11] To many, it was representative of the overt racism lurking beyond the boundaries of an extraction town. On the way to Knoxville," Dorothy Wilkerson explained, "we never came off in … Corbin, Kentucky. They didn't allow black people there—you didn't even get off the train."[12]

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[9] John Dishman "Pete" Feather Oral History Interview. Rockcastle County Oral History Project, Kentucky Historical Society.
[10] Death Certificate for Stephen Peter Rogers, in Texas, U.S., Death Certificates, 1903-1982, Ancestry.com. For his gravestone, see https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/18676143/stephen-peter-rogers
[11] Interview with William D. Turner, May 26, 2022, in possession of author.
[12] Radcliffe Roye, "'They Will Remember Us': The Miners of Black Harlan," *The New York Review of Books*, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/05/03/they-will-remember-us-the-miners-of-Black-harlan/.

Those African Americans that experienced a sundown town personally did not forget it. When he was ten years old in 1956, William Turner and his father left Lynch on a fishing trip. They stopped at a service station in Corbin. When the coal miner and his son walked in, in Turner's words, "time seemed to freeze." A group of white men, "grisly looking… unshaven and grimy" awaited them in the store, sitting in chairs and on short stools in "their creepy gathering place." Behind the register hung a sign with a message that Turner remembered vividly, "'Nigger, if you can read this sign, run! If you can't read, nigger, run anyway!'" His father greeted the men despite their dispositions and the two walked out of the store unharmed. The only thing his father said to him about the incident was, "'They probably can't read that damned sign.'" The brief stop had ensured William Turner had been "taught Corbin's infamous reputation," something he would never forget. To him, the town became a watchword for places he was not welcome, or what he called "Corbin-like places."[13]

Corbin was certainly not alone in its sundown status. In east Tennessee, Erwin and Unicoi County became known as a place where, as the *Johnson City Press-Chronicle* put it in 1979, "blacks dare not go." A few African Americans worked in the Clinchfield Railroad yards and at a chemical plant, but they lived in other counties. Dr. Arthur J. Cox, president of the Johnson City chapter of the NAACP, explained that "word-of-mouth" kept the county's sundown status in place. "Basically, what I know is hearsay," Cox told the newspaper, "People just say, 'Don't go there if you're black.'" White East Tennesseans were equally aware that Black people weren't welcome in Erwin, but often didn't know why. Fields trips from Erwin to

[13] William H. Turner, *The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2021), 217-18.

nearby cities included white schoolchildren rushing to the bus windows to catch what was often their first glimpse of a Black person.[14]

As their reputation grew, sundown towns had a hard time shedding the distinction. In 1987, Danville, Kentucky native Robby Henson came to Corbin to film a documentary on the expulsion and its lingering effects. Initially, Corbin residents thought the documentary was about railroad towns. When word spread that Henson's work was actually about a sordid episode in its past, some residents were upset. The *Corbin Times-Tribune* ran a story with the headline "Corbin not stronghold of prejudice" wherein several community leaders spoke against racism. The paper's managing editor wrote that "the community as a whole has stood up and said this is the 20th century; we don't think that way anymore." The Chamber of Commerce made plans to publish a position on racism, while the superintendent of schools touted Corbin's welcoming of Black student teachers as evidence of progress. He could not, however, massage the fact that there were no Black teachers or students in the district. The Black pastor of a Baptist church in nearby London, meanwhile, pointed to harassment experienced by his children when attending a movie in Corbin as evidence of persistent prejudice. He also recounted conversations with Black CSX employees who, when transferred to Corbin from Louisville, expressed concern about living in the town. None of the Black workers lived in the town, which the mayor said was due to a housing shortage. "People just feel like they're not welcome," John Pennington, president of a regional NAACP chapter explained.[15]

The documentary, which debuted as *Trouble Behind* in 1991, enraged many townspeople who felt it was an unfair portrayal. Allen Dizney, Corbin's de facto local historian, was adamant that what occurred in 1919 "was not a race riot," and that the town was no more racist than any

[14] *Johnson City Press Chronicle*, June 17, 1979, p. 3.
[15] *Courier-Journal*, Dec. 15, 1987, p. 1, p. 2.

other place. Although he was too young to have been alive for the event in question, Dizney framed his version of the past as the gospel truth. Yet even the town's most ardent defenders had trouble explaining why the Louisville *Courier-Journal* could report in 1992 that "inside the city limits, there are no black families." Black people lived in towns mere miles away, according to the paper, but for whatever reason, they had "not chosen" to live in Corbin. When a Black man moved to town to manage a fast food restaurant, a cross burning in his front yard soon convinced him to leave.[16]

Paternalism accounted for white residents' acceptance of a few African Americans that could live and work in Corbin. Those who did– the Woods family and Howard Nolan – kept a low profile. They turned down interview requests and refused to talk to Henson's documentary team. This reticence endeared them to white residents, who thought of them as "Corbin negroes," as opposed to those from elsewhere.[17] Clara Woods "lovingly allowed" townspeople to call her "Aunt Clara," a Corbin native later explained, which allegedly made her part of an "extended family."[18] Only later did the families of the Black Corbinites begin to understand their unique place in the town's social life. "The people of Corbin always looked up to my grandfather and had utmost respect for him," Howard Nolan's granddaughter said after his death. "It made us feel good, and they accepted us because we were his blood." But when the hospital that treated Nolan wouldn't admit his son, this loyalty came into question. Richard Nolan had suffered a stroke while in Corbin, and the family could not understand why the hospital "would not take the son when the father died here just two days ago." When the staff finally learned the man was Howard

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[16] "Corbin: Railroaders, Republicans, and Redhounds Call It Home," *Courier-Journal,* Feb. 24, 1992, 5; "Reader Frustrated with Dizney's Comments," *Corbin Times-Tribune,* https://www.thetimestribune.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editor/reader-frustrated-with-dizney-s-comments/article_09aff589-3e72-54c4-be83-758237e277a6.html.;Loewen, *Sundown Towns,* 381.

[17] H.E. Everman. "Corbin, Kentucky, A Socio-Economic Anomaly: Portrait of a Diverse Railroad Boom Town, 1895-1930," Unpublished Typescript.

[18] "Aunt Clara and the Secret of the 1919 Race Riot," *Corbin Times-Tribune,* Sept. 30, 2002, 2D, 7D.

Nolan's son, "it was a totally different atmosphere." They admitted him within minutes.[19] Howard Nolan may have been respected in Corbin, but even his immediate family was not afforded the benefit of the doubt.

Trouble Behind, and the reaction to it, put the public relations arm of the city on high alert. When the Ku Klux Klan prepared to open a chapter in Corbin and hold a rally in 1992, the city government leapt into action. Advertisements in the *Times-Tribune* declared that the town supported "the rights of minorities to live, work and visit in our without fear of discrimination or threat." The city opposed violence and promised to use "any legal means" to ensure fair treatment of all of its citizens.[20] David Hudson, Corbin's city manager, felt that the town "received some bad publicity from an event that supposedly happened 70 years ago" and was still experiencing the aftereffects. "Not one single individual," Hudson told the paper, "has been in favor of or endorsed the principles and methods that the Klan teaches." Hudson did make it clear, however, that the group enjoyed "the same rights and freedoms as everyone else."[21]

White people born and raised in Corbin continued to square the reality of racism with their own personal experiences. Many in the state, Middlesboro native Howard E. Bailey included, still considered Corbin "the heart-bed of racism in the state of Kentucky."[22] In 2002, the town's centennial prompted the local paper to compile stories about the town's history. One that wasn't mentioned, according to staff writer Janie Taylor, was "the secret," that "inconspicuously marked Corbin from the Florida Panhandle to the Motor City." Taylor described the first Black person she saw – a porter at the Wilbur Hotel named Cye, who lived in

[19] Whittaker, "The Last Three Blacks in Corbin," 28.
[20] *Corbin Times-Tribune*, May 6, 1992.
[21] *Whitley Republican*, May 6, 1992, p 1, 4A.
[22] Interview with Howard E. Bailey, conducted by Maxine Ray, Dec. 13, 2000. Kentucky Civil Rights Oral History Project, KHS.

nearby London. Taylor remembered him fondly, yet the memories were tinged with the explanations she received from adults about why he and other Black people didn't make their homes in town. When Elliot Jaspin included Corbin as a case study in his *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansings in America*, a round of outrage and denial erupted. By 2007, the Times-Tribune labeled the expulsion as "the thing that happened in 1919 that no one wants to talk about."[23]

Likewise, long-time white residents in Erwin often balked when asked about the town's history of racism, usually by asserting that it was no different from any other place. Carrie Russell, a native of nearby Johnson City, researched Erwin as part of her dissertation as graduate student in political science at Vanderbilt University. When Russell pressed a local historian about the 1918 expulsion, the older woman denied the events and told Russell she had "no business" asking the questions.[24] Russell later received an article from a local newsletter written by an Erwin native and historian at nearby East Tennessee State University. The article "nostalgically" detailed the friendly relationship between white residents and the Lyons, an African American family which called Erwin home from the 1940s to the 1970s. The father, a World War I veteran, worked for the Clinchfield and the mother was a domestic servant, while their sons went on to serve in the Korean War. In the margins, the author wrote Russell with regards to her efforts at reconciliation: "You certainly have your work cut out for you."[25]

The coalfield community of Lynch, on the other hand, became an ancestral home for a generation of Black migrants. Along with Benham, the model extraction town continued to

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[23] "And Our Colorful Past," *Corbin Times-Tribune*, Sept. 30, 2002, 2D; "From the Managing Editor: The Thing that Happened in 1919 that No One Wants to Talk About," *Corbin Times-Tribune*, March 17, 2007, 4A.
[24] Carrie A. Russell, "Reckoning with a Violent and Lawless Past: A Study of Race, Violence, and Reconciliation in Tennessee," PhD Diss., (Vanderbilt University, 2010), 11-12.
[25] Russell, "Reckoning with a Violent and Lawless Past," 18-19.

attract migrants from Southern states. In 1938, U.S. Steel's workforce at the Lynch mines was 36% African American.[26] Still, after World War II, many coal miners joined the wave of migration to large cities. Thanks to mechanized mining and better opportunities elsewhere, Harlan County lost 70% of its African American population by 1970.[27] It was in one of these cities – Cleveland, Ohio– that ex-Harlanites formed the Eastern Kentucky Social Club (EKSC) in 1969.[28] Both the EKSC and annual Memorial Day reunions are sustained by the "collective memories" of African Americans with roots in the coalfields.[29]

Coal mining and the UMWA featured prominently in these memories. "The lifestyle here was so different," Gean Austin described in 2019, "because to come to work in the coal mine, the union mine, it's no race or this and that—it was just one race of people… everybody was treated the same. And we were not used to that."[30] William Turner's father, Earl, and his fellow miners were "card-carrying members of the UMWA," while a photo of union president John L. Lewis hung in the Turner family home in Lynch right above the family piano.[31] Turner still faced discrimination when he attempted to become U.S. Steel's first Black foreman in the 1970s, however. "We'd mix real good on the job, we'd work together, whites and blacks, Poles, Italians, Hungarians," Turner told a writer for the *Courier-Journal Magazine* in the 1980s, "but when you came outside was when you saw the difference." Turner had to file a lawsuit to get the job and resented the racism he faced. "Being black held me back. Everybody knows that."[32] Black miners and their families could not totally escape racism and discrimination Jim Crow, but through the union, they could fight it.

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[26] Wagner and Obermiller, *African American Miners and Migrants*, 74.
[27] Brown, *Gone Home*, 161-3.
[28] Wagner and Obermiller, *African American Miners and Migrants,* 104-9.
[29] Brown, *Gone Home*, 183.
[30] Roye, "'They Will Remember Us': The Miners of Black Harlan."
[31] Turner, *Harlan Renaissance*, 221-22
[32] Bob Hill, "Black Home in Appalachia," *Courier-Journal Magazine*, June 28, 1987, 10-11.

Like much of coal country, Lynch is now a shell of its former self. Miners no longer go into the side of Black Mountain; surface mining takes the top off instead. The world's largest tipple stands silent. Down the mountain, transportation towns eventually suffered the same fate. In October 2015, CSX finally shuttered its mechanical shops in both Corbin and Erwin. The announcement marked the end of their reign as regional railroad hubs. 225 workers in Corbin, and nearly 300 in Erwin, lost their jobs as the railroad shifted more operations southward. The railroad also eliminated its yard switching service in Erwin, citing a decline in coal revenue mostly due to a "combination of low natural gas prices and regulatory action." Kentucky politicians were quick to pin the blame President Barack Obama's "war on coal" and his alleged determination to "destroy this proud industry and the livelihood of the families that depend on it." Residents of the transportation towns, meanwhile, took the chance to simply lament the passing of the good old days. "Corbin was always a railroad mecca in this area," mayor Willard McBurney told the *Times-Tribune*, "It's a devastating blow." Erwin mayor Greg Lynch pointed to the "second- and third-generation people who worked for the railroad" that now were out of a job. The news was so crushing that the town held a vigil to pray for the recovery of the families affected. In the end, railroaders' dedication meant little in comparison to the company's bottom line. Erwin's mayor stated it clearly: "The railroad built this town, and, ultimately, the railroad is taking it away."[33]

Neither extraction towns nor transportation towns could ultimately escape the effects of an industry "which takes all away and restores nothing." Coal, Harry Caudill wrote in *Night Comes to the Cumberlands,* "mars but never beautifies. It corrupts but never purifies."[34] Just as

[33] "CSX Closes Corbin Rail Shops," https://www.thetimestribune.com/news/csx-closes-corbin-rail-shops/article_c3c60d04-77b5-11e5-a595-5f2d6108194b.html Accessed Jan. 31, 2023.
[34] Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1963), x.

the ascendancy of coal made Corbin and Erwin thriving railroad hubs a century earlier, its decline left the towns in the lurch. Forsaken by the railroad that was its lifeblood, the people left behind are saddled with the weight of a troubled past.

A Way Forward?

In 2019, the centennial of the 1919 expulsion in Corbin brought renewed interest in its acknowledgement and commemoration. A group called the Sunup Initiative, a non-profit affiliated with the University of Kentucky's Appalachian Center, planned an exhibit in a downtown restaurant. Oversized placards displayed testimonial evidence from the 1920 grand jury trial, along with a proclamation from the mayor that declared the end of October "diversity week." Rev. William Barber III of the Poor People's Campaign came to lead a workshop at the Episcopal Church, and a remembrance service marked the Oct. 30 anniversary. Not all residents agreed with the declaration or the events, however, with many wondering why such measures were necessary. A few months before the centennial, complaints caused the Sunup Initiative to rebrand from the "Corbin Racial Justice Initiative," as some residents felt the name was not suitable for "a healthy… conversation about racial equity in southeastern Kentucky."[35] Despite the good faith efforts of many, the legacy of racism appeared too difficult to shake off. "We as a community have not done what needs to be done to fix that," one Sunup Initiative organizer admitted. "Sure there is a band-aid on it but the wound's not closed."[36]

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[35] Mark White, "Racial Justice Reps Speak to Corbin City Commission," *The News Journal*, Sep. 20, 2019, https://www.thenewsjournal.net/racial-justice-reps-speak-to-corbin-city-commission/

[36] Lacey Roberts, "'October 30, 1919': The 100th Year Anniversary of the Race Riots in Corbin," WYMT, https://www.wymt.com/content/news/October-30-1919-The-100th-year-anniversary-of-the-Race-Riots-in-Corbin--564126641.html, Accessed April 22, 2020.

A year later, southeastern Kentucky, like much of America, saw demonstrations against police brutality after the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. The sight of white Kentuckians in the streets filled William Turner – who had experienced the racism of Corbin first-hand – with "unbridled joy." "Even in nearby Corbin," Turner marveled, crowds chanted "Black Lives Matter." This was all the more surprising, considering it was in a place Black Kentuckians regarded as the "World Capital of Sundown Towns."[37] Wayne Riley, founder of the Laurel County African American Heritage Center in the next county over, saw the moment as an opportunity. "I'm 67," he told the *Courier-Journal*, "and for 66 years I always heard about that riot." "Corbin ended up with a bad name," on account of its history, but Riley wondered, "How do we bring these people together – the black people, the white people, and make a better community of people?"[38]

A sense of the importance of understanding this history has been central to the work of those who seek to throw off its burden. First, the Sunup Initiative made the documents from the 1921 grand jury trial available both in public and on its website. Additionally, William Isom and the Black in Appalachia project produced a documentary short that drew heavily on the archival material. Both of these initiatives have made accessible a story grounded in historical research, as opposed to those that percolated through myth and rumor for so long. The fruit of this labor has already led to constructive community conversations. In October 2020, the Sunup Initiative hosted a live screening of the film to commemorate the 101st anniversary of the expulsion. The virtual event was co-sponsored by the city of Corbin, and included a conversation with a panel of

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[37] William H. Turner, "Commentary: Black Lives Matter at the Mountaintops in My Old Kentucky Home," *Daily Yonder,* June 25, 2020, https://dailyyonder.com/commentary-black-lives-matter-at-the-mountaintops-in-my-old-kentucky-home/2020/06/25/?fbclid=IwAR0IjNdh2rU7f1lwwHYFuDEjS9P0xuFn4AGAiVJAZEu62IZbUJJBa4TzskE.

[38] Chris Kenning, "In Former 'Sundown' Town Shadowed By Racist Past, Advocates Seek Allies for Racial Justice," Louisville *Courier-Journal,* https://www.courier-journal.com/in-depth/news/2020/09/14/former-kentucky-sundown-town-shadowed-by-racist-past/5607254002/

community members as well as the documentary team. During the question and answer period, a participant pointed out that very few places with similar events in their past were orchestrating commemorations. Indeed, outside of reconciliation efforts in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Corbin stands out for its acknowledgement of a racist past. A view of the past grounded in historical research, as opposed to those that percolated through myth and rumor for so long, is a good place to start.

Historians and social scientists, I hope, can also take lessons from this analysis of the Great Migration and sundown towns in Appalachia. “Home and hell,” Lynch and Corbin are destinations along divergent tracks. Their particular roles within a larger division of labor as extractive and transportation towns, respectively, laid the rails that promised to carry all to their destinations. By putting labor back at the center of this labor history, we can consider geography, logistics, the organization of capital, the social history of particular communities, and the peculiar fruits of anti-labor strategy as explanatory, rather than simply reproducing well-worn comparisons between craft unionism and industrial unionism, or racial exclusion versus interracial organizing. At issue was not only workers' organizations – whether we deem them to be good, bad, or otherwise – but a long history of material lived experience that put Black and white workers together in one place and drove them apart in another.

This history haunts the present, which should be a lesson to us all. More than a hundred years after the event that gave it “a bad name,” Corbin has been through a frustrating cycle. Successive generations have uncovered the history of its sundown status and called for a reckoning, while others have resisted and urged them to simply move on. If the past is a guide, this cycle will continue, as it will in other places scarred by racism. Like slurry ponds of coal waste left behind by U.S. Steel, the past often lingers on in unpleasant ways. Some things have changed. L&N steam engines have given way to the diesel locomotives of CSX, fewer of which

pass through the mountains than ever before. The coveted railroad jobs in Corbin are gone, and as a result, so is the rigid enforcement of racial boundaries. Racism and prejudice still exist there, as they do throughout the nation, but the once razor-sharp edges of the industrial Corbin have dulled. What does remain is the blot of expulsion. Right or wrong, history still casts its shadow on the town and all who are connected to it. John L. Crawford recognized as much back in 1987. "You can't change history," he mused. "A lotta folks try to doctor it, but it's still there you know, just the same."[39]

Figure 12: The Corbin depot, 2018. Photo in possession of author.

[39] John L. Crawford Interview, Blacks in Kentucky Oral History Project.

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