



A Covenant with Color

Race and Social Power in Brooklyn

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CHAPTER SEVEN

FRUIT OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

LABOR SEGMENTATION AND EXCLUSION IN BROOKLYN, 1865-1950

There was a fundamental and basic difference, as marked as that which in one soil produces beautiful roses and in another grows rank weeds. Widely different must have been the social atmosphere which produced [sic] Robert Toombs, John C. Calhoun, Alexander Stephens and Jefferson Davis, from that which produced Wm. Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, DeWitt Clinton, John Jay, Charles Sumner and John Andrews; a difference infinitely wide. Truly we know a tree by its fruits. Social systems as well as soils will express themselves in fruits.

—Samuel R. Scottron

"For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. "For every tree is known by its own fruit."

—Luke 6:43-4

On the evening of June 6, 1944 sixteen black women trolley drivers pulled their cars off line or refused to report for work. Nostrand Avenue had three idle trolleys, the busy Utica-Reid route lost eight, two Flatbush cars were missing, and Tompkins Avenue was short three. The action protested threats and violence against black transit workers in Brooklyn. The spark was an assault on driver Lillian Oliver. Only three nights earlier Oliver had exchanged words with a

white woman who boarded her Flatbush Avenue car. Two white men intervened. Ninety witnesses saw the men attack Oliver and strike her in the face. She defended herself with a switch iron. Oliver was standing alone on the street when the police arrived. She declined medical attention and refused to give the officers the iron that she used in the altercation. She was then jailed for disorderly conduct. Black women at the Flatbush Depot organized the June 6 wildcat strike. The following day they and representatives from the *Amsterdam News* and the Women Voters Council met with Spencer Hamilton of the Board of Transportation. Hamilton insisted that it was more efficient to replace black women drivers than to provide them protection, even at night, and that the war emergency required that everyone sacrifice. In a report to his superior, Hamilton boasted that he had not granted the women any "special privileges." The strikers were not fired; however, the episode was recorded in their employment files. The Brooklyn branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) provided Oliver's defense. She was allowed to return to work and eventually exonerated. Over the following weeks two other Brooklyn trolley drivers were victimized. Gadson Goodson was assaulted and pulled from his moving car. A white retired police officer then beat Goodson in the street. A white man battered Mary Gaskin aboard her trolley while the passengers robbed her. The Brooklyn NAACP responded with a special Trolley Operators Unit and an October cabaret and dance at Smalls Paradise to establish a "Protection Fund" for the drivers' defense. A letter from Unit chairman Charles H. White read: "The race rioting now going on in Philadelphia CAN HAPPEN HERE IN BROOKLYN against Negro trolley operators. Become an effective opponent of race prejudice by becoming a Senior Member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People."¹

A year before the public assault on Lillian Oliver, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia's office received an anonymous phone call from a white woman "complaining that the Mayor and the city are employing too many colored people in the subways." The woman insisted that there were ten black people for every white man. Black workers were lazy, inefficient, and a danger to the public welfare, she continued. The complainant sent similar remarks to Governor Thomas E. Dewey. A

year after Oliver's victimization, Spencer Hamilton told the Board of Transportation that nonwhite workers avoided weekend shifts and had poor attendance records because of "too many night social functions" but "otherwise they are reasonably competent." The contradictions of that statement were aggravated by his report that black laborers were disciplined in no greater proportion than white.²

Not even the national crisis kept white Brooklynites from violently reacting to black people's encroachment into jobs from which they had been excluded, and public outrage and official callousness protected a labor advantage that these citizens had demanded for better than a century. The rise of Jim Crow in Brooklyn might establish an irrational pattern were it not concurrent to this methodical struggle to subordinate black people as workers. Social segregation and labor exclusion gave experiential and material meaning to white supremacy and both emanated from white Brooklynites' ability to use the state to translate their group status into individual privilege. What emerged from the Civil War was a limited democracy, freed of slavery, but still fully dependent upon the exploitation of minority populations. It was defined by a two-party, single-philosophy system of social dominance that stabilized white communities by destabilizing communities of color.

Some historians have used the prevalence of racism as evidence that the United States was less class conscious than Europe. The class struggle as documented in England by historians from Friedrich Engels to Charles Booth to E. P. Thompson was not repeated in the United States because here racial identification overwhelmed class stratification. For these historians, the caste system and all its racial trappings are proof of the classless society.³ Yet, racism does not negate class consciousness; race is the ideological product of class. White workers had come to believe that self-selection was necessary to their well-being, so they used the political monopoly created by their numerical majority in the local labor pool and the disenfranchisement of black Southerners to pursue that goal. It seemed a rational response to a system in which people appeared to rise and fall on something far less rational than individual effort. In theory, the worker competition inherent in

capitalist culture was supposed to make those who toiled more fit; in fact, it rarely resulted in anything more than their desire to eliminate their competitors. Black workers were the most vulnerable laborers and, thus, the most thoroughly excluded. Race prefigured Brooklyn's labor markets against black people long before there was a significant migration of black Southerners to New York. It was not good enough to expel people of color. Left to that white Brooklynites would ever be haunted by the deed, because people who had once been competitors were now antagonists, coiled waiting to strike. Black labor had to be degraded if the triumph of exclusion was to be an advantage to white people.

Segregation as a social ideal was born in white labor's attempt to secure its position through exclusion. Brooklynites had always accepted that their world was strictly divided into social classes; they had not insisted that those relations have spatial expression. In fact African Americans' nineteenth-century campaign against the etiquette of racial subordination overturned many aspects of social segregation, but the twentieth century brought its return as well as the reordering of the social geography of the borough. At the turn of the century W. E. B. Du Bois noticed that black people's physical isolation in Philadelphia was "more conspicuous, [and] more patent to the eye" than other urban groups,⁴ and that was becoming true in every great city.

By the Civil War the broadening of the city's industrial base and the tremendous growth of its white laboring population marginalized Brooklyn's African-American workers. Two-thirds of 260 black workers listed in an 1865 city directory were laborers, laundresses, seamen, porters, and whitewashers. The enclaves at Weeksville, Carrville, and the Navy Yard supported a core of servants and craftsmen. The maritime industry provided many men with craft work and the chance to go to sea. Laundry work dominated the time of black women while black men served their neighbors as gardeners, carmen, drivers, hairdressers, cooks, waiters, coachmen, stewards, and porters. The black settlements allowed for some entrepreneurship. Five black tailors were operating. There were four barbers, including Weeksville's Francis Myers. Men also worked as

teachers, shoemakers, machinists, and painters. Interestingly, the city supported a black penman, carpenter, engineer, paperhanger, chairmender, metal smith, and the herbalist Doctor Burton. Robert Jackson, a drygoods dealer, had his operation in the Navy Yard district. Henry Johnson kept a grocery shop downtown. While women had fewer chances at skilled labor, Brooklyn counted several black dressmakers and seamstresses and two black women nurses. Perhaps the most interesting of the working women was Mary Smith, a photographer who lived across from the Navy Yard.⁵ This working-class sustained a small professional stratum of doctors, lawyers, journalists, ministers, teachers, and merchants.

Black women's opportunities to work were narrowing although their earnings were critical to sustaining their families. A turn-of-the-century federal study of women laborers assigned only four job categories to black women but thirty to white women (see table 7.1). By 1900 most of Brooklyn's adult African-American women were in the job market and 85 percent of black working women were laundresses and domestics. In contrast only half of white immigrant women were domestics and less than 10 percent of white native-born women, with two native-born parents, did that work. That concentration forced personal sacrifice. Two of three black women domestics were single and three quarters of the single women lived with their employers or in boarding houses. Forty-one percent of the black married women who entered the job market had to accept such accommodations. African-American women remained the preferred servants among the city's wealthier white families. An 1880 advertisement in the *Eagle* for a chambermaid not only designated race but specified that any applicant be "a light colored girl." The servants who occupied this tier of jobs had elevated service to a profession; however, middle-class white families did not stick to racial traditions of hiring servants, rather they recognized the greater availability of immigrant women and tailored their racial logic to the supply. In the following decades the *Eagle* advertised the changes in demand for maids, nannies, cooks, and laundresses: "competent white girl," "experienced white girl," "neat white girl," "Scandinavian girl," "young white girl," "reliable white part time girl," "white woman," "two white girls," and "nice, clean white girl." Only among the rich did

black servants survive as a symbol of status; for the middling, servants were selected more democratically. Advertisements usually gave the order of preference as American, German, or Swedish. The first reflected their nativism, the latter two were somewhat determined by supply. Black women were demanded in greater proportions than their population justified because of their disproportionate availability for such work. Interestingly, Irish women were rarely requested and Jews and Italians were even less desired. Laundress adds often singled out women of color.⁶

TABLE 7.1

Black Women's Occupations in Brooklyn, 1900

<u>Category</u>	<u>No. Employed</u>
Dressmaker	213
Laundress	1,001
Servants/Waitress	2,850
Other Occupations	454
Total	4,518

Source: Bureau of the Census,
Statistics of Women at Work
 (Washington, DC: Government
 Printing Office, 1907), 270–71.

The concentration of native- and foreign-born black women in unregulated, unprotected, and unorganized domestic service jobs made them "the most oppressed section of the working class." Each morning black women gathered at the "slave markets" of the Bronx and Brooklyn—street corners abutting middle-class districts where white housewives with pennies to spare for domestic help inspected black women day workers. In her novel, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Paule Marshall described the Barbadian women who swarmed "the train to Flatbush and Sheepshead Bay to scrub floors. The lucky

ones had their steady madams while the others wandered those neat blocks or waited on corners—each with her apron and working shoes in a bag under her arm until someone offered her a day's work." A historian of Brooklyn's Paragon Progressive Community Association recalled that the plight of black women in Brooklyn's "slave markets" helped push the organization's founders toward economic nationalism. In 1937 the National Negro Congress pioneered a short-lived Domestic Workers' Association.⁷

In 1873 a local paper provided a look at the life of a poorer black woman as it examined the work of a "colored clairvoyant" who made her living telling the fortunes of white folk. Ms. Wilson—who the *Sun* described as so old that the oldest (presumably white) resident of Brooklyn recalled that when her grandmother was a child she knew "Mrs. Wilson"—lived downtown in a small house in the black community of Hart's Alley off Bridge Street. "Hart's Alley is a collection of little tenements, whose front doors are reached by rickety [sic] flights of steps." Wealthy white gentlemen from New York, white ladies seeking husbands, and white sporting men in need of lucky numbers and wagers gathered in the anteroom of the Wilson home. They sat with a handful of black people in a hall decorated with pictures of General Meade in battle, a ballerina, a chart of the steamboat *Continental*, a bird cage with canary, a mirror, and a picture of Lincoln. An album filled with portraits of black ladies and gentlemen rested on a table.⁸

In 1876 Theophilus Gould Steward, the pastor of Bridge Street A.M.E. Church of Brooklyn, glimpsed into the lives of black Brooklynites as he paid unannounced visits to the homes of his parishioners. The wealthy lived in imposing houses that were decorated with such niceties as pianos and often included private libraries. The modest majority lived in humbler homes that they labored to keep tidy and decorated with pictures of John Brown, Charles Sumner, Bishop Richard Allen, and Abraham Lincoln. In contrast to his experiences in the South, Steward was now pastor to a congregation with stark class distinctions.⁹

Black Brooklynites' loyalty to Republicanism brought them only a sliver of government patronage and did little to relieve their plight. In 1881 Brooklyn's black Republicans took the occasion of President Garfield's assassination to reassert their fidelity to the party and to restate their political expectations and goals. At a meeting of the Kings County Colored Club, with T. A. Barnswell presiding, the following resolution was passed:

As true and loyal representatives of the colored branch of the Republican party of the City of Brooklyn, we desire to express our profound sorrow for the death of the President, and while we lowly bow in sorrow and sadness before the Divine will who has laid this great affliction upon us, we are ever mindful that He doeth all things well. We are also thankful that the noble successor to the highest honors which the nation can bestow, is one who has ever been a lover of humanity, a champion of equal rights, *and particularly a true and tried friend of the colored American citizen in defense of his rights*; and we do hereby accord to him our highest confidence; we share likewise largely in the universal sympathy for the bereaved wife and children of the late President.¹⁰

Neither party supported black candidates for local offices because Brooklyn had no predominantly black districts and the aspirations of its black citizens were more easily channeled through political clubs like the citywide United Colored Democracy and the Kings County Colored Citizens Republican League. In 1887 James Mars, president of the latter, made an unsuccessful bid for the Assembly (Third District); in 1900 Fred R. Moore lost a race to represent Brooklyn's Eighth District. W. T. R. Richardson, a native of St. Kitts, helped found the pro-Tammany United Colored Democracy, and leaders like John Nail, Tammany's envoy to the black community, were anointed by the machine, given a few patronage posts, and directed to collect black votes.¹¹

Local Democrats actually doled out more patronage to African Americans than Republicans did; however, those positions were

overwhelmingly in the same dull, unskilled labor that black workers were confined to in the private market. The white working-class' demand for a privileged labor position limited all political rewards to nonwhite voters. In 1897 Tammany leader Richard Croker promised the black voters of New York and Brooklyn patronage in proportion to their numerical strength; and, between 1897 and 1913, Democrats provided more than 800 jobs to black workers. However, more than 600 of the black hires were drivers and sweepers in the Street Cleaning Department and virtually all black municipal workers were menials and common laborers. Kings County's District Attorney, Coroner, and Register each employed one black clerk and the most prestigious municipal job that a black Brooklynite could acquire was as a teacher in the public schools that served black children.¹²

While black and white people viewed each other through the lens of race, the most striking difference between them was the absence of an ordinary black working class. In every Northern city, African Americans were caught in an atypical job market in which they could be doctors and lawyers but not plumbers or builders; maids and porters but not secretaries or clerks. W. E. B. Du Bois objected to these barriers when he observed in Philadelphia in 1899 "all those young people who, by natural evolution in the case of the whites, would have stepped a grade higher than their fathers and mothers in the social scale, have in the case of the postbellum generation of Negroes been largely forced back into the great mass of the listless and incompetent to earn bread and butter by menial service." Maritcha Lyons blamed the declining status of Brooklyn's black workers on the desperation of immigrants. The days when "work was always in waiting for any and everyone who wanted it" and when it was possible to make "money with limited capital and by slow degrees" were gone, she lamented.

Opportunities for getting a liv[e]lihood having become restricted, many of our people were compelled to accept less congenial employment and lower compensation. Discrimination in [the] apprenticing of our boys, the pernicious caste exclusion by rising labor unions, combined

to develop [sic] a triangular conflict with cupidity, caste and callousness.¹³

Inventor, historian, and editor Samuel Scottron of Brooklyn also saw a connection between immigrant workers and the segmentation of labor. He thought that the Irish "assumption of ownership, power and authority" through politics had resulted in a "war upon the Negroes." Scottron continued:

... the Irish captured at a very early day the whole police department, the aldermanic chamber and the courts of justice, by their political activity; and they took to themselves the public employments, street cleaning, ditch digging and janitors in public buildings. They took to themselves stevedoring, car and cab driving, hod carrying, bricklaying, fruit peddling and rum selling, and early assumed the tone and demeanor of those whose fathers had discovered or invented everything in sight, and had left them the patent right.

He then argued that the Irish also attempted to use their political power, with differing degrees of success, to control competition from Italian and Jewish immigrant workers.¹⁴

While European ethnics displayed tremendous hostility toward each other—which explains the peculiarly segregated labor market of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century, with its stereotyped Irish cops, Jewish garment workers, and Italian laborers—exclusion was most effective when African Americans were its victims. Unions often found it necessary to include new European immigrants, but rarely thought it prudent to reach out to people of color. Even municipal unions and agencies systematically barred black workers. By 1910 Brooklyn had few black police officers while Manhattan had none, the Fire Department was segregated, and black doctors and nurses were not hired in most public hospitals. The city's first African-American police officer was from the Brooklyn system. About 1892, before Consolidation, Paul H. Lee joined the Brooklyn City Police Department. He remained on the force for four

decades. By the turn of the century the handful of African-American officers were allowed to patrol the streets. Black cops were not permitted on patrol until 1911. Samuel J. Battles was the first black man to do uniformed patrol. A somewhat legendary figure among black New Yorkers, Battles rose from foot patrol to sergeant's rank and then became "brass." By 1929 there were ninety black men and two black women in the NYPD. The Fire Department excluded people of color more efficiently than any other major municipal union or trade. By 1929 no women and only five African-American men had entered the ranks of that brotherhood. Before their prominent role in the 1863 Draft Riots, white firemen established a tradition of racial exclusion. By the early twentieth century, Julius Crump)—who was born enslaved in Virginia in 1842 came to Brooklyn in 1867 and volunteered as a fireman—was the only black person to parade with the Flatbush firemen.¹⁵

Private unions had an equally egregious record. A 1910 survey found only 1,358 unionized black workers in all of New York City. Of the trades and trade divisions listed by the Central Federated Union in New York State, 102 had no black membership. As late as 1930 less than one-twentieth of black laborers were organized while one-fifth of white laborers were union members.¹⁶ While it is frequently suggested that people of color were less unionized because they were unskilled; in fact, black workers were less skilled because they were not unionized.

As Louise Venable Kennedy has noted, New York City unions barred African-American labor more effectively than unions in other major metropolitan areas,¹⁷ so black workers at times sought to undermine organized labor in order to overcome these barriers. The late nineteenth century offered many occasions to seek revenge on Brooklyn's white unions. "There were numerous strikes on the elevated lines, along the water front, in the breweries and construction trades," writes Henry Coffin Syrett. Widespread job stoppages in the city accompanied the national struggle for the eight-hour day. In 1895 the Knights of Labor led a bloody trolley strike in Brooklyn. Thousands of city police, company security guards, and National Guardsmen brawled in the streets with striking workers.

Soldiers opened fire on the rebellious laborers and even charged at them with bayonets.¹⁸

Ira DeA Reid encouraged the "colored press" to direct its readers' dollars toward businesses that hired black people, a tactic that got fifty black men hired in a Long Island shoe factory. It was more common for black laborers to enter trades as replacements for striking white workers. In August of 1901 the influential *Colored American Magazine* declared a steel strike to be "a boon to the black people." The editors were excited to bursting at the prospect of black scabs taking the strikers' jobs because union barriers left them to form "an alliance of the capitalist and the Negro North and South against the reactionary forces that would govern intelligence and wealth by mere numbers and disregard of law." In 1905 T. Thomas Fortune's *New York Age* blasted the stupidity of a local transit strike. During the summer of 1912 a strange combination of black scabs and student volunteers from Columbia University and other local colleges helped break the Hotel Worker's International Union strike in Manhattan. A Brooklyn longshoremen's protest ended when "Negroes were imported from the South as strike-breakers." The struggle on the docks, writes Sterling Spero, began in 1855 when African-American laborers were used to replace Irish strikers. "Strikes in 1899 and 1907," continues Spero, "further strengthened the Negro's position on the New York water front." The fall-off of immigration during World War I made black laborers more important. In 1919 black workers were again used as substitute labor on the Brooklyn shore. In 1930 Local No. 968 in Brooklyn had a membership of 1,200 of whom 1,000 were African American, but the full integration of waterfront did not even begin until the 1950s when a split within the white unions forced one side to merge with the black local.¹⁹

There were attempts to remind workers of their common interests. James Wallace, an African American and a representative of the International Union of Pavers and Rammersmen, tried to diversify his organization by organizing people across the state. Similarly, the Association of Colored Employees fought to make unionizing efforts more inclusive. Mary White Ovington began organizing African

Americans out of necessity. In 1910 Ovington worked to ensure interracial cooperation in a shirtwaist makers' strike. Three years earlier, during the white Ladies Garment Workers strike, she contracted the services of a more experienced organizer for a unity meeting of black and white women at Bridge Street Church in Brooklyn. The Central Labor Union asked all Brooklyn's churches to observe "Labor Sunday" and called "upon all within and without the church, both empoloye[e]s and employers, to recognize and to study the present complex social and industrial situation, and so to act, that justice and fraternity may increasingly dominate our industrial life." In November 1917 A. Philip Randolph cut his teeth by organizing the United Brotherhood of Elevator and Switchboard Operators. In Brooklyn and Manhattan, African Americans enjoyed a monopoly in such work and within three weeks the organization had 600 members. Three years later Randolph founded the Friends of Negro Freedom to unionize migrants, protect tenants, and "elevate the race" in New York City.²⁰

African-American businesses were another response to the community's exclusion in the labor market. Brooklyn had a cadre of well-to-do, well-educated black businessmen, who catered to a largely black clientele. They were often leaders of secret societies, state clubs, and uplift organizations. T. Thomas Fortune, who published the *New York Age*, was a leader of Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League. Another member, Fred Moore, headed the Afro-American Investment and Building Company which used subscribers' savings to provide mortgages to local families. Subscriptions were only a dollar and the company held over \$25,000 in real estate. John Connor ran the elite Royal Cafe, which "only a few white cafe's can surpass it in beauty or in up-to-date service." William Pope was proprietor of the rising Square Cafe. Professor B. H. Hawkins owned property in the South and the New National Hotel and Restaurant in Brooklyn. Early Taylor, a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, owned a tailoring establishment downtown where he produced clothing and had a cleaning shop. George Harris was black Brooklyn's leading undertaker. Yet as late as 1930 Brooklyn had only ninety-four black-owned businesses, with

combined net sales of just \$500,000, forty-eight full-time employees and two part timers (see table 2.7).²¹

TABLE 7.2
Black-Owned Businesses in Brooklyn, 1930

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number</u>
Candy stores	7
Grocers	20
Meat Markets	2
Other food stores	2
Dry goods	1
5-and-10	1
Garages and repair	9
Other automotive	4
Men's/boy's clothing	1
Women's apparel	1
Other apparel	2
Antique shop	1
Cafeterias	1
Lunch rooms	9
Restaurants	4
Lunch counters	2
Electric shop	1
Lumber dealer	1
Cigar stores/stands	2
Jewelry stores	2
Florist	2
News dealer	1
Optician	1
Pharmacy	3
Printer	4

Undertaker	1
Second-hand stores	9
Total	94

Source: Bureau of the Census,
Negroes in the United States,
1920–32: Retail Business
(Washington, DC: Government
Printing Office, 1934), 36–40.

The Brooklyn labor struggle also provided a chance for white progressives like Mary White Ovington to engage questions of racial justice. She attended Radcliffe while W. E. B. Du Bois was at Harvard, but the two never met there. After graduation she spent seven years as the head worker of Brooklyn's Greenpoint Settlement House. Inspired by a Booker T. Washington lecture to the Social Reform Club in 1903, she applied for and received a fellowship from the Committee on Social Investigations to study the Negro in New York. She began the research in 1904 and published it as *Half A Man* in 1911. When the grant was first awarded, Ovington sent a letter to W. E. B. Du Bois seeking to confer with him. "I am not planning to go into an investigation simply for the sake of adding a few more facts to what is known of conditions among Negroes in poverty in New York," she assured him, "but with the hope of helping to start social work among them." One of Ovington's long-range goals was to establish an African-American settlement house in Manhattan. Crediting Du Bois as her inspiration, she concluded, "you see, you have talked to me through your writings for many years and have lately made me want to work as I never wanted to work before."²²

Du Bois invited Ovington to attend a conference at Atlanta University, where she met the "man who could write inspired prose and who had dared to counter Booker T. Washington." And there

began one of the great partnerships in the struggle for the equality of Brooklyn's African Americans. Ovington later wrote of Du Bois:

Among the distinguished Negroes in America, none is so hated by the whites as Burghardt Du Bois. And for an excellent reason. He insists upon making them either angry or miserable. So great, moreover, is his genius, that it is impossible to read him and not be moved. Anger or misery, according to the disposition of the reader, comes from his merciless portrayal of the white man's injustice to the black. He exposes a system of caste that eats into the souls of white and black alike.²³

The effort to secure a place for African-American labor was broader than a few lasting friendships suggest. In 1905, following yet another anti-black riot in Manhattan, Samuel Scottron and realtor Philip A. Payton, Jr. reestablished the Citizens' Protective League. That same year Dr. William L. Bulkley, the African-American principal of a public school in Manhattan, helped Ovington and Scottron establish the Committee for Improving the Industrial Conditions of Negroes. Six years later it merged with the Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes and the National League for the Protection of Colored Women to form the National Urban League (NUL). By that time at least five Brooklynites were active, including Scottron, Ovington, and Verina Morton-Jones, MD, a black woman who headed the Lincoln Settlement in the African-American enclave at Fleet Place in Brooklyn.²⁴

The fight for economic justice was never popular. After Ovington met some of the "well-established colored families" ("the Petersons, Mars, Wibecans, and others") they formed themselves into an informal group "calling itself the 'Cosmopolitan Club.'" They held regular meetings in the homes of Brooklyn's white and black elite where they "discussed various phases of the race question." A contemporary described the group as "distinctly socialistic in all of its views." They opposed all concepts of racial superiority and were committed to eradicating ignorance and prejudice about color. "The Society deprecates the policy of effacement and non-resistance to

oppression which has never improved the condition of any down-trodden race and has only made the oppressor bolder," an observer concluded.²⁵

A typical club event brought a surprising response that underscored the national consensus on race. Oswald Garrison Villard was invited to address the Brooklyn group. "We secured the restaurant," Ovington recalled, "sold tickets, and when the evening came, sat down at a pleasant gathering of quiet, well-dressed people—and to be well dressed in public in those days meant to be inconspicuously dressed." The modest gathering drew great attention. Reporters worked their way into the restaurant and the following day "the storm broke." The meeting was scored as the work of "degenerate whites." The intellectual and religious themes of the evening were forgotten in the controversy over the sacrilege of interracial meals and social equality. Congress even discussed the issue and "as we fell below the Mason and Dixon's line, our sober dinner became an orgy." One paper made specific mention of sable men who had previously dined at Ovington's home, another described an older white woman who was reportedly "leaning amorously against a very black West Indian."²⁶ At seventy, she probably was leaning but the lusting was likely imagined.

It was against this social machinery—which worked as well in Brooklyn as it did in Birmingham—that the militant Niagara Movement was formed in the century's first decade. The name came from the place where Du Bois convened a group to respond to the racial polarization of the society. In 1908 a second meeting was held at Storer College in historic Harper's Ferry, Virginia. Here, Mary White Ovington, reporting for the *New York Evening Post*, watched Dr. Owen M. Waller, who moved to Brooklyn from South Carolina and became a physician and rector of St. Luke Protestant Episcopal Church, "reverently walk barefooted over the rough grass and stones" where John Brown led his glorious raid. In May 1910, from these convocations, the NAACP was established. Du Bois went to New York as Director of Publications and Research, or editor, of the Association's independent organ, the *Crisis*. In 1914 a Brooklyn

chapter of the NAACP was established after Du Bois and Villard spoke to a gathering at Concord Baptist Church.²⁷

"The colored people in New York are more Jim Crowed, politically, than in many Southern cities, although they have the ballot and vote," black Republican leader George E. Wibecan wrote in an essay on Brooklyn associations for the 1915 National Negro Exposition. The Henry Highland Garnet (Republican) Club, founded in 1898, held forums and lectures on the condition of the race in the South, and on one occasion even filled the Brooklyn Academy of Music with the borough's best citizens to hear Virginia's James H. Hayes. In 1914 the Citizens' Club was organized to monitor

all attempts to deny to the colored people any of their rights, and to create an environment where the leading men might get together and consider or discuss questions of mutual benefit; to watch or shape such legislation as would tend toward their progress; to study conditions of the poor, and plan to remedy them; to oppose men in public office, irrespective of party, who are unfriendly to our interests or unfair.

The Citizens' Club hosted W. E. B. Du Bois, Joel Spingarn, and other prominent guest lecturers. The Frederick Douglass Club also sponsored lectures from leading African Americans. In December 1912 Brooklyn's League's Forum was organized to sustain Brooklynites' appreciation for "the best authors of the race." Among the largest of the local associations were the Sons of Virginia and the Sons of North Carolina. The Charleston Club, the Convivial Club, and the Comus Club, established in the early decades of the century, were also active socially. The Bachelors Club of Brooklyn held the "most elaborate and exclusive" public functions, replacing the older Ugly Club as the zenith of black social life.²⁸

Social organizations often addressed the economic and political needs of black Brooklynites. The Society of the Sons of North Carolina began in the 1890s when a group of Brooklyn's black men pooled their money to bury a pauper from their native state. As a

result a permanent organization was formed to provide relief to the ill and distressed and burial aid for widows. The Sons began with twenty men; by 1925 it had more than 400 active members. It owned a three-story building on Bridge Street in Brooklyn where its meetings were held. Among its notable members was political insider George Wibecan.²⁹

Black organizations acted as employment and migrant aid associations, a function that the "colored YMCA" perfected. In 1901 the push for a black YMCA began and it bore fruit a year later when Dr. William L. Bulkley got hundreds of interested citizens to pledge their support and George Foster Peabody to buy and equip a three-story building on Carlton Avenue. Bulkley served as the Association's first chairman. The "colored Y" offered "pleasant parlors, a reading room, a library with excellent books, magazines, daily and weekly papers; a room for games and a limited number of nicely-furnished rooms for men," in addition to "educational classes, Bible class, religious meetings, literary society, glee club and orchestra, employment bureau, baseball club, and other features to attract and help young men."³⁰

By 1905 an African-American branch of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was established on Lexington Avenue in Brooklyn. Offering a more limited menu of services than the men's association, it focused on courses to prepare women, particularly migrant women, for work. Students could even defer the cost of their education since "skilled labor is in demand, for which good wages are paid, and the training in these various courses will increase the wage-earning ability of the student, this will be considered a loan, for which, after completing the course and employment is secured, a return to the Association of a stated sum, which may be paid in installments, will be required." Easily the most ambitious of the Association's listings was a class in home nursing that provided students with a rudimentary education in anatomy, physiology, and medical science. More typical was training in cooking and kitchen care, serving, laundering, a housemaid course, seamstressing, and a nursemaid course. Essentially, the YWCA exposed the central contradiction of black women's economic lives: their earnings were

necessary to their families and communities yet their economic opportunities remained severely constrained.³¹

The black elite's desire to see the swift assimilation of the resident poor and Southern migrants defined the social work of Brooklyn's black institutions. In 1905 the Howard Colored Orphan Asylum announced its plan to add a building for industrial training. In 1907 Scottron and four leading ministers visited one of the evening industrial schools that Dr. Bulkley established in Manhattan, hoping to re-create the experiment in their borough. Scottron was concerned that "Jews and Italians are picking up everything that is offered free, while the colored people shun the schools necessary to their elevation." More alarming were "leaders among the people [who were] so blind as to persuade them to let these things pass." He found the situation "awful and discouraging." The planned Brooklyn industrial school was to have an impressive queue of offerings: "carpentry, practical electricity, care of boilers, janitor-engineering, mechanical drawing, architectural drawing, bookkeeping, common school subjects, embroidery, millinery, dressmaking, flower making, stenography, typewriting, and domestic science."³²

A few black West Indian associations appeared in nineteenth-century Brooklyn; however, the black foreign-born were more frequently absorbed into the political and social clubs, societies, and churches of native-born black New Yorkers. In the first decades of the twentieth century the growth of Caribbean immigration to the United States allowed for the emergence of independent organizations tuned to the particular needs of black immigrants. That in-migration resulted from a more regular maritime trade with the West Indies, the emergence of the Caribbean as a vacation site, and the United States' ascendancy as an imperial power in the region.³³

By 1909 Brooklyn's West Indian Forum was offering political and cultural events and holding regular meetings at 349 Bridge Street. Caribbean benevolent and progressive associations—such as the Barbuda Progressive League, the Grenada Benevolent Association, and the Jamaica Progressive League—primarily sought to help black immigrants find work and housing and adjust to New York

(particularly Harlem); organize relief efforts to respond to crises in the West Indies; encourage trade between the United States and the Caribbean; and reinforce cultural connections with the islands. In 1920 the St. Vincent Benevolent Association was established. It preserved familial and cultural links and provided the island with relief and assistance. The Association was also a harbinger of the growing complexity of black politics and black ethnicity in Brooklyn. As Joyce Toney has asserted, "a combination of kin and friendship ties blurred the barriers between the two societies, and increasingly, St. Vincent would appear to be just another section of Brooklyn."³⁴

Brooklyn's size allowed black people a wide range of leisure activities despite social segregation. Fraternities, sororities, lodges, and clubs organized comedies, dramas, and musicals. Professional and amateur sports were open to the public through local, regional, and national conferences. Larger sporting and cultural events were held at rented gyms and armories. The Brooklyn (later Newark) Eagles offered professional "Negro League" baseball. The West Indian Cricket Club had two squads competing in an integrated regional league with segregated teams. Students from black colleges toured with glee clubs, theater groups, and athletic teams. Various societies and institutions hosted lectures. Churches offered socials and dances for men and women of courting age. Literary societies arranged book clubs, debates, and speeches. The colored Y's held children's carnivals. And newspapers passed along information about which beaches, pools, and parks were open to and safe for nonwhite families.³⁵

In the early 1920s the Brooklyn Urban League (BUL) united with Lincoln Settlement for a more pointed attack on racial inequality. The League offered support services for unmarried girls (particularly migrants) and travelers' aid; a children's health clinic; clothing, food, rent, and funeral relief; Christmas baskets; home visits for courts, schools, and charities; childbirth and childcare classes; Big Sister programs; conferences and public meetings; and a housing department. Lincoln Settlement provided a summer playground; kindergarten; daycare for working women; Boy's and Girl's Clubs;

visiting nurses; Sunday school; Red Cross; and meeting space for lodges and societies.³⁶

Black Brooldynites were clearly divided on the issue of separate social, economic, and political organizations. Most people recognized them as a necessary response to a racially exclusive society. They understood that these adjustments had allowed their most vital needs to be met. Still, on some level, the fact of a separate institutional life seemed to legitimize or, at least, accept exclusion. A running debate on the use of community resources for self-help versus fighting the rise of Jim Crowism marked black political discussions.

African-American institutions could attack segregation and still address the community's problems. Churches responded to both the spiritual and the political goals of their parishioners. Social organizations transformed themselves into agencies for uplift and equality. Schools offered job training courses. Societies helped place workers and relocate migrants. Brooklyn's black blue-bloods even came to recognize the need for united action. However, these efforts met with marginal success, for the subordination of African-American workers became more pronounced as the borough's black population increased.

Few white Brooklynites looked forward to economic competition with nonwhite workers and most were hostile to the challenge of social justice. In 1915 Brooklyn's R. S. King wrote in a brief letter to the *Eagle*: "There has been too much bragging about the negro's one-sided advancement." "Under the condition for which neither the white man nor the negro is responsible, while it may seem a sad decree, it is a fact that the negro is what he is, and where he is, and is helpless to be otherwise, it matters not however much attempt is made to cultivate them." King anticipated the logic of Gene Barbish, a white deputy sheriff from Austin, Texas, who wrote Mary White Ovington during the 1919 race riots to condemn "negro loving white men" and to defend white Southerners' right "to attend to our own affairs."³⁷

The Brooklyn Urban League fought to guarantee the opportunities that King thought wasted. While the League provided important social services it did not organize an industrial department until the early 1920s. Its staff had helped people find work on an *ad hoc* basis as they were informed of openings and approached by job seekers. In 1919 the League became proactive, interviewing factory managers to locate those industries that were open to black labor.³⁸

In the summer of 1923 the BUL mailed more than a thousand questionnaires to employment officers at Brooklyn factories and stores. It was able to place black men in service and menial positions and black women in service and clerical work; however, in spite of the Urban League's optimistic outlook, the employment market for nonwhite workers remained narrow and unstable (see table 7.3). Black men proved particularly vulnerable. As BUL's own reports reveal, employment for African-American men was shaped and controlled by white workers' demand for service and manual jobs as the better job categories expanded and contracted.³⁹

On the eve of the Great Depression the League admitted the impact of employment discrimination. "It is a familiar sight to the average New Yorker to see white men employed as elevator operators, bellboys, waiters, janitors, and messengers, where 16 years ago there would have been no thought of such a transition," lamented BUL Industrial Secretary Henry Ashcroft. While describing the efforts of its nursery and daycare center, the League pointed out the growing importance of paid work for black women. In 1929 attendance at the League's daycare and nursery facilities ran well over 5,000 children a day.⁴⁰

TABLE 7.3
Brooklyn Urban League Adult Job Placements, 1929, 1931

	1929 Men	1929 Women	1931 Men	1931 Women
New Applicants	234	330	533	515
Openings	165	444	73	209
Placements ^a	128	333	60	133

^aIncludes temporary and permanent placements.

Source: Brooklyn Urban League-Lincoln Settlement, Inc., Annual Reports, 1929, 1931 (Brooklyn: privately printed, 1929, 1931).

By 1929 the BUL was seeking jobs outside menial service, encouraging black applicants to take civil service exams, and denouncing the fetters that restricted them to the bottom rung of the occupational ladder. In the early years of the Depression, Henry Ashcroft was able to get the Emergency Work Bureau to establish Registration Station No. 32 on site at the Brooklyn League. It would place at work 2,000 men of every race.⁴¹ The League's efforts to assist black workers failed; and, as the Great Depression settled upon Brooklyn, federal work relief proved to be a greater salvation to white labor than to black.

Black workers suffered not just discrimination, but total labor market segmentation. Brooklyn's subway and surface transit industries were systematically segregated. Unions barred black people as members and transportation companies only hired black workers for crude labor positions. In response to George Schuyler's queries in 1927, the president of the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Corporation (the BMT subway system) admitted that the "companies employ comparatively few Negroes in our general office, and we employ none as motormen or conductors." Earlier he mentioned, "the porter service ... consists of practically all Negroes." In the 1930s, when the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen moved to

organize New York City's other privately owned subway system, the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) workers, 170 black employees risked losing their jobs because of the organization's color bar. Although Mayor LaGuardia refused to negotiate with the Jim Crow union, black workers remained unprotected. The BMT and the Independent Subway (IND) (a city-owned operation) refused to hire people of color except as porters, watchmen, and laborers. In 1938 the BMT came under attack for its outrageous hiring practices and a company spokesman admitted its guilt, simply stating that since the economic downturn the company had not done much hiring anyway. On the eve of World War II the Brooklyn chapter of the National Negro Congress accused the borough's Board of Transportation of discriminating against black workers in hiring and promotions. With no pretense at fairness, the Board directed the complaints to the Municipal Civil Service Commission. In the mid 1930s one of the first cracks in transportation industry exclusion came with the Transport Workers Union's decision to begin unionizing black porters in Brooklyn (see table 7.4).⁴²

In January 1941 the Brooklyn Council of the National Negro Congress met with the Board of Transportation to discuss opening positions on Brooklyn bus routes to black drivers. Several months later Malcolm Martin wrote the Board to complain that no African-American drivers had been hired and that seventy openings for ticket agents had been given to "new people" instead of "Negro porters who, on the basis of seniority, were entitled to promotion." Those black rapid transit workers who were not porters were still concentrated in the ranks of menial and unskilled labor. In January 1943 only 1,703 of the industry's 36,570 employees were black,⁴³ and African-American applicants were routinely denied employment or tracked into servile jobs.

TABLE 7.4**Porters as a Percentage of Black Rapid Transit Employees, 1942**

	IRT	BMT	IND
Porters	356	207	260
Other	62	159	251
% Porters	85	57	51

Source: Report drafted by A. T. Bennett, Clerk, and John C. Laffan, Personnel Clerk, dated 24 April 1942, New York Board of Transportation Records, Discrimination 1938–1963, Box 18, File 1, New York City Transit Museum Archives.

Race was a critical factor in determining the occupations of women working in rapid transit (see table 7.5). In December 1944 there were 2,158 white women and 1,058 black women working under the Board of Transportation. White women received a far broader range of professional and administrative employment. The Board of Transportation hired black women in fifteen categories while white women enjoyed thirty-two. Moreover, women of color were massed in the least desirable jobs, a fate from which most white women were spared as displayed by their minority status in such occupations in spite of their greater overall numbers.⁴⁴

Transit companies were willing to forge racial divisions whenever their employees did not. One of the more divisive issues that the integrated Transport Workers Union faced was the extent to which it would fight discriminatory hiring practices in the industry. "Non-discriminatory union practices," argues Joshua Freeman in his history of the TWU, "meant little if blacks could not get transit jobs or could get only the lowest-paying and most demeaning work." Ultimately, African-American workers were forced to battle discrimination with the assistance of civil rights organizations, but

with only sporadic union support, for the companies consistently manipulated the fears of the union's majority.⁴⁵

Fred Johnson, a black Brooklynite and a member of the local Sign Painters' Union, met a harsher fate. He spent thirty years in a union that was working to oust him. In 1925 he was indefinitely laid off without reason. The National Urban League took his case.⁴⁶

TABLE 7.5

Distribution of Women by Race in Common Rapid Transit Jobs, 1944

<u>Title</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
Car maintainer	8	2
Car cleaner	29	111
Clerk	323	19
Maintainer's helper B	11	18
Maintainer's helper C	11	4
Office Appliance Op.	130	5
Railroad Clerk	1,116	411
Railroad Porter	35	237
Stenographer	167	4
Stock Assistant	16	5
Street Car Operator	25	164
Telephone Operator	110	1
Typist	76	13

Source: Office of the Personnel Clerk, Board of Transportation, "All Females (White) by Classification as of December 31, 1944" and "All Females (Negro) by Classification as of December 31, 1944," New York Board of Transportation Records, Discrimination 1938-1963, Box 18, File 2, New York City Transit Museum Archives.

Utility companies were also marshaled against African-American workers. Mayor LaGuardia's Commission on the Harlem Riots

uncovered the utilities' bar against black labor. While large monopolies like Brooklyn Edison were decreasing their work forces at the beginning of the Depression, it and the borough's other major utilities actively nonetheless discriminated throughout the period. In 1938 the New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population, under State Senator Jacob Schwartz of Brooklyn, investigated racist hiring policies at Consolidated Edison and New York Telephone. Six years later New York Telephone hired twenty-six black women as operators after the federal Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) began a probe into the company's hiring policies. Anti-Semitism at Brooklyn Union Gas, Consolidated Edison, and New York Telephone led to a 1946 grand jury investigation into those companies' policies. Brooklyn Union Gas was then slapped with another suit for violating the rights of Jews, African Americans, and Italians. "The method of recruitment of personnel admittedly utilized by the company insured the perpetuation of the original racial and religious composition of the personnel and was effective insulation against the population changes in the area," argued the Commission Against Discrimination, a Brooklyn watchdog group.⁴⁷

The exclusion of people of color by constitution and custom were important tools in establishing white rule in labor unions; equally important was limiting the pool of qualified black candidates. "Opportunities for apprenticeship training in special trades have shown greater restrictions than the trades themselves," warned the National Urban League (NUL) in 1930. If kept from training, few black workers would ever be able to challenge restricted unions. The Urban League's study of four national trades painted a bleak picture. Between 1890 and 1920 the number of African-American apprentices in blacksmithing and carpentry dramatically declined while the gains in painting and masonry were unimpressive. Thirty years after the NUL's study of black labor, a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) examination found that little had changed (see table 7.6). "Underlying the absence of Negroes in significant numbers from skilled-craft employment is their almost total exclusion from apprenticeship training programs," the

study concluded. By 1950 less than two percent of the nation's 112,000 apprentices were black.⁴⁸

TABLE 7.6

Black Apprentices in Various National Trades, 1950

Trade	All Apprentices	Black	% Black
Auto mechanic	3,600	90	2.50
Bricklayer	6,510	270	4.14
Carpenter	9,930	60	0.60
Electrician	9,360	90	0.96
Machinist	14,550	60	0.41
Other mechanic	6,720	210	3.12
Plumber	11,010	90	0.81
Building Trade	3,690	150	4.06
Metal working	7,170	150	2.09
Printing	14,160	180	1.27
Other Skilled	11,610	450	3.87
Unspecified	13,440	90	0.66

Source: Labor Department, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *The Negro Wage-Earner and Apprenticeship Training Programs: A Critical Analysis with Recommendations* (New York: NAACP, 1960), 10.

In a city that daily generated injustice and daily levied its burden there could be little motivation for the ruling elite or the laboring masses to entertain questions of social justice. Together white Brooklynites exposed the Janus face of democracy: it was at once an instrument of individual rights and a tool of social dominance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE COVENANT OF COLOR

RACE, GENDER, AND DEFENSE WORK IN BROOKLYN, 1930 TO 1945

The problems facing the Negro workers as well as those facing other minority groups must be faced squarely by all of us active in the defense program if our democracy is to live and thrive in a world threatened by hostile, aggressive, undemocratic forces.

—Brooklyn Coordinating Committee on Defense
Employment

If we suggest that Negroes, as they achieve employment opportunities, should become integrated as far as possible into organized labor, it is because past experiences have shown that gains so made are more permanent than those which are purchased at the price of placing Negroes between employers and labor unions. As in the case of the demand for trained workers, the importance of labor organizations seems destined to continue after defense production has passed. Patterns are being established in our economy today which will be with us for at least a generation.

—Robert C. Weaver

At the close of World War II black Brooklynites were marching through the Bedford-Stuyvesant area demanding a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission. A diverse group of leaders

warned a crowd gathered at Boys High School that the return to peacetime production would bring rising unemployment, greater racial antagonism, and violence. The Brooklyn Non-Partisan Citizens Committee for F.E.P.C., an umbrella association, organized the mass meeting.¹ However, the attempt at coalition politics was not nearly broad enough to impact the segmentation of Brooklyn labor or to reverse a decade and a half of relentless exploitation. Public and private employers were committed to marginalizing nonwhite workers. During the war, black Brooklynites made a major contribution to defense production but they did not enter into the skilled trades in large numbers after the conflict. Defense contractors favored women as replacement workers, ensuring that black men would find it nearly impossible to turn their wartime training into lasting opportunity. Sexism wedded racism as women acquired skilled jobs that they were ineligible to keep and black men were kept from jobs that they might hold. Ultimately, black workers' wartime fortune did not upset the peacetime racial hierarchy. When the war ended, federal money continued to boost employment in Brooklyn through trades that remained exclusive. After more than a decade of depression and war, African Americans' job opportunities had changed little and white Brooklynites had tethered themselves more tightly to the idea that paid work was a right of race.

White Brooklynites responded to the Great Depression by fully exercising their power over people of color. If the racial division of labor brought the ideology of segregation to Brooklyn, the Depression brought more dramatic social schisms as Brooklyn's white workers clung to race as the primary mechanism for distributing economic burdens. African Americans' future was determined when white laborers reacted to the industrial collapse by snatching jobs that were once unacceptable and by hoarding government-funded employment and training programs. The segregated labor patterns of private industry were repeated in public employment. New Deal funds flowed into the borough to relieve unemployment, but black workers received no immediate benefits since that money inflated building trades and defense industries that excluded people of color. The Brooklyn Navy Yard's roster of employees swelled and its production elevated a number of related

industries, but the Yard was always the preserve of white men. Long after World War II the racial segmentation of labor continued. Local, state, and federal discrimination reinforced private market segregation to make the work experiences of black and white Brooklynites radically unequal.

The Great Depression aggravated the fears of working-class New Yorkers, and local Democrats took advantage of the turmoil. For the first time in Brooklyn's history, African Americans were dependent on public relief in greater proportions than their white fellows. Discrimination against black workers in government employment programs contributed heavily to that imbalance. By October 1933 more than 687,000 New York City residents were on relief, and 78,262 of them were African American, almost a quarter of the city's black population.² Brooklyn Democrats used federal relief to reward their constituents. Employment programs floated party faithful through the crisis while hardship dragged others to the Democratic way.

The Brooklyn machine was busy with needy citizens, but the Depression and an uneasy relationship with the Roosevelt administration curtailed the local Democrats' ability to distribute jobs and relief. In 1933 the *Brooklyn Eagle* gave its readers a lengthy description of the machine process. Rows of job-seekers and favor-pleaders waited to greet Democratic boss John H. McCooey when he arrived at work. "It's the daily routine," said the boss. "If you came down any day that I'm here it would be the same." In the early years of the Depression local Democrats were impotent. "Boss John H" could offer his constituents only kind words and advice. Even with the party in control of the White House, the machine had to wait for the appointment of Democrats to head patronage-rich departments like the Post Office and the Internal Revenue Service before it could fill those bureaus with its voters. The *Eagle* took pleasure in the local Democrats' difficulties and paraded the story under the headline: "Hear the Hooey With Boss McCooey As Men With Sobs Get Words, Not Jobs."³

Brooklyn's overtaxed private charities were the first to recognize the long-term social impact of economic depression. In March 1931

the Women's Fund Committee to Provide Relief for Unemployed Single Women and Girls was soliciting volunteers through the borough's churches. Charities received requests for food, clothing, and shelter. Streams of patients who could no longer afford private care poured into public hospitals. In 1933 philanthropist Frederick Pratt, of Pratt Institute fame, called a meeting of private charities to reorganize relief efforts. "It is appalling," said Douglas Falconer of the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities, "to realize that in Brooklyn we have 250 social agencies appealing simultaneously for support." Falconer made a call for a complete restructuring of relief. There were 4,400 families on the rolls of the Bureau of Charities, which by December had distributed a record quantity of food and funds.⁴

"The NRA [National Recovery Administration] brought little or no relief to the Negro worker; and in many cases . . . increased hardships," wrote Lawrence Oxley, the Department of Labor's specialist on black employment. The New Deal failed African Americans. The federal legislation excluded agricultural and domestic workers from its protective regulations, allowed regional policy differences that often worked to impede black people's access to relief and employment, and failed to protect black workers from employers who used the codes to whiten their labor forces. "Barriers to wartime jobs were greater in the North than in the South," noted Robert Weaver in agreement. In New York City the old preserve of "Negro jobs" was disappearing as white people grew desperate for employment. A National Urban League report warned of "considerable shifts" in the black population and a "growing restlessness" among them. "In both Brooklyn and New York City," the League continued, "there has been an influx of outsiders to make a bad situation worse." The League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR) established a branch in Brooklyn to respond to these conditions, and the Brooklyn Urban League/Lincoln Settlement began a number of initiatives to collect and distribute necessities and relieve some of the signs of poverty. Black church organizations, like the Society of St. Monica at St. Philip's Church in Bedford, distributed relief to impoverished families and children.⁵

Surprisingly, Democrats still struggled to attract African-American voters in New York. In 1932, 200 angry black voters visited McCooey to protest his failure to support the Reverend Thomas D. Marten's candidacy for a local office. McCooey assured them that his actions were purely political and promised to attend a meeting of the Roosevelt-for-President Club at Marten's Holy Trinity Church as a gesture of fidelity. A month later Democratic incumbent Mayor John P. O'Brien was on Fulton Street and Rockaway Avenue in Brooklyn "facing about 2,500 screaming, arm-waving Negroes" who interrupted the spiritual message at a Major Devine (later Father Divine of Harlem) revival to hear his political plea.⁶

Local Democrats were more successful at winning over African Americans than was their national ticket. Black citizens needed the services of the municipal government so compromises and coalitions based on self-interest were always possible; however, the national slate struggled among African-American voters even in the face of an economic decay that affected black people more severely than other ethnics. Of all the Assembly Districts in New York City, Franklin Delano Roosevelt fared worst in Manhattan's Harlem and Brooklyn's Bedford section, both containing the largest concentration of African-American voters in their boroughs. Four years later many black voters continued to distrust Roosevelt and the Democracy. A month before the election, the Colored Womanhood of the State of New York, whose leadership included Brooklyn's Maria Lawton and Camille Rodman, denounced Roosevelt for his complicity in racial discrimination. These were probably the same black women who picketed outside the Democratic National Committee headquarters while wearing veils and carrying signs that read: "In Memoriam. Sixty lynchings under the New Deal."⁷

During the Depression a cadre of Brooklyn's black West Indians came to power with the Democracy. In 1931 Nevis-born, Brooklyn-raised Bertram L. Baker established the United Action Democratic Association in Kings County. Within five years Baker had gained 39 seats on the Kings County Democratic Committee. In 1939 he was appointed Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue. Ten years later he

won a seat in the Assembly and became the first black official to be elected to a state or city seat outside Harlem.⁸

The March 1931 arrest and subsequent trial of nine young black men in Scottsboro, Alabama, injured the Brooklyn machine's attempt to attract black voters. The courts of the solidly Democratic state managed to move eight of the nine "Scottsboro boys" from arrest to trial to sentencing in a few months. The absence of supporting evidence and a shabby and hasty application of justice for the alleged rape of two white women brought protests from around the world. In the years of trials, appeals, and retrials that followed, African Americans came to view Scottsboro as a dangerous threat to their lives; Northern politicians saw a chance to appeal to black voters through a new sectionalism; Communists found an opportunity to wedge into the black community and tap its revolutionary cord; and established organizations like the NAACP spied a vast challenge to their leadership by reds, rioters, and reactionaries.⁹

Scottsboro generated significant protest activity in New York City. In Harlem there was a struggle between the NAACP and the leftist International Labor Defense (ILD) to represent the accused and take credit for the thousands of black and white citizens who were parading and petitioning on Manhattan's streets. The *Eagle* temporarily abandoned its pro-Southern Democratic stance and joined in the criticism. An editorial declared that the state of Alabama had convicted itself, not the defendants. The Reverend George A. Crapullo of the Brooklyn-Nassau Presbytery dramatically compared the Scottsboro verdicts to the "misinformed, misguided public opinion [that] sent Jesus to His death." Rabbi A. M. Heller of Flatbush insisted that the phrase "miscarriage of justice" did not capture the Scottsboro fiasco. On Sunday, April 16, 1933, 4,000 people crowded into a Scottsboro rally at Arcadia Hall on Halsey Street in Bedford. The Reverend Thomas Harten, president of the National Afro Protective League, organized the event. Brooklyn attorney Samuel Leibowitz, representing the Scottsboro defendants, promised to fight the case all the way to the Capital if justice was not restored. Mayor John P. O'Brien then proclaimed Leibowitz the

"lionhearted" champion of the nine young men for his front-line role in the case and urged the audience to "have faith in the country's institutions and in its leaders" because "justice will eventually triumph." Following the mayor's lead, Boss McCooley distanced his machine from the Southern wing of the party. Before the Brooklyn protest, Leibowitz wrote a scathing article from Alabama to the *Eagle*:

A crowd of lantern-jawed bigots calling themselves AMERICAN CITIZENS, stood yesterday with smirking faces and spat upon the tomb of the immortal Abraham Lincoln. They cheered a verdict that condemned an innocent boy whose only crime was that he had black skin to death in Alabama)]s electric chair, a verdict based on the uncorroborated word of a several times convicted harlot and in defiance of unanswerable proof that her yarn was an insult to the intelligence of any fair-minded human being.

To look for justice for a black man here is futile—but the challenge hurled by these Negro haters into the faces of decent citizens of America will be met by the defense of these boys with every drop of blood in our veins and fiber in our bodies. We'll not quit—not till hell freezes over.¹⁰

Leibowitz was eventually replaced as the lead attorney, but he continued to raise funds for the defense. In December 1933 Harten held another rally at Arcadia Hall and almost 2,000 African Americans came to hear Leibowitz and to craft a resolution condemning Scottsboro and lynching.¹¹

Mob hysteria was not peculiar to the South. The murder of Mary Robinson Case, a 25-year-old white woman from Queens, proved that Gotham's cosmopolitan set could also be moved to violence and excess when defending the privileges of race. Across the city, black people found themselves being punished for an event to which they were connected only in the minds of a rabid press and the fantasies of a white citizenry addicted to its words.

A biased investigation and public hysteria following Frank Case's discovery of his wife's body in their bathtub on the night of January 11, 1937 make it impossible to be sure that the man who was put to death on August 19, 1937 was a murderer. A *New York Times* article described Mary Robinson Case as a young dynamic figure in her hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and a standout at Skidmore College where she majored in fine arts, who married well, and who kept a spotless kitchen. There was an immediate public cry for the truth and an arrest. And, when the police commissioner announced that a culprit—"Major Green, 33 years old, colored, who for the last six years has been employed as a porter by the Bachelors Club, located at the scene of the crime"—had been arrested, many white New Yorkers took the suspect's skin color to be evidence of his guilt.¹²

Green was taken into custody shortly after the corpse was discovered. Authorities claimed to have bloodstains on clothing taken from the building's incinerator and fingerprints on the Cases' bathroom door that linked Green to the crime. The *Eagle*, having prepared readers in the preceding days with photographs of the crime scene, pasted a picture of a catatonic Green surrounded by several white detectives on its front page under the subtitle: "'No. 1 Houseboy' Grilled in Slaying." Detectives and an assistant district attorney "worked on Green" for a full day, employing a "psychological approach" in which Green was denied access to food, family, and legal counsel. The suspect was repeatedly urged "to tell the truth." Authorities later proudly revealed that when they finally gave Green a cheap chicken dinner "he began to talk," and his wife and mother-in-law were brought in to keep him cooperative. Almost 30 hours after Green's arrest, the district attorney was satisfied enough with a "version" of the confession to have a stenographer take it down.¹³

New York City was ready to try Major Green. Security was increased to protect the accused from death threats after falsified copies of Green's confession were published in the press. To cloak the racial overtones of the case, presiding Judge Charles S. Golden assigned a black attorney, Henry C. Lipscomb, to assist in Green's defense. The trial began on Monday, February 8, 1937. By Tuesday

the jury had been selected. On Wednesday Green's lawyers entered an admission of guilt and simply worked to save him from the electric chair. A black undercover detective testified that he heard Green brag of the Case murder from a neighboring prison cell. On Thursday the trial of Major Green ended. "The blue-ribbon jury," boasted the *Times*, "required three hours and two minutes, of which an hour and ten minutes was spent at dinner, to find the 33 year-old Negro porter guilty." A week later Green was transferred to Sing Sing Prison where upon his arrival he sighed, "So this is 'up the river.'" On the night of August 19, after several months of appeals and pleas for clemency, Major Green was executed.¹⁴ New York's judicial system had brought him from arrest to electrocution with a speed that could shame any Southern court.

Many African Americans in New York were punished for the murder of Mary Case. Across the city discrimination against black people increased. Brooklyn's George Wibecan, Republican insider and president of the Crispus Attucks Community Council, organized thousands of residents to stem the rash of intolerance and affronts that followed Green's arrest. Wibecan, the Reverend Sylvester Corrothers of Ralph Avenue African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Elder Napoleon Johnston of the Council tried to visit Queens District Attorney Charles P. Sullivan to discuss the case. "We are not here to defend Green if he is guilty," explained Wibecan. "We are here to see that he gets a fair break. We want to get away from [the] racial animosities in this case. Almost every time a case of this kind happens, involving a white woman, the cry is raised that a colored man is involved." Wibecan also sought to publicize the fact that all the black employees in the Cases' apartment building were fired and 400 black workers across New York City were discharged in the rage surrounding the trial. A few days after Wibecan's protest, Oswald Garrison Villard wrote the *Times* in support. Judging the "wholesale dismissal" of African Americans to be appalling, Villard pointed to his apartment building as proof that black employees' "record is 100 per cent, clean. No group of men of any race, or nationality could have made a better showing ... or shown greater fidelity, honesty and sobriety."¹⁵

The Depression exposed African Americans' weak hold on political patronage and jobs by increasing the interethnic competition for such power, but the same forces that were causing havoc among black people were at work among white ethnics. In the 1930s jockeying within the local Democratic party showed the depth of ethnic division in the city. Jews stepped forward to challenge Irish domination of the local Democratic machine and municipal payroll. Ironically, the election of Fiorello LaGuardia, a Republican and an Italian, brought Jews into the city government. The mayoralty of the "Roosevelt Republican" sapped the strength of Tammany Hall, provided Jews, Italians, and African Americans a wedge into local politics, and forced Democratic Tammany to become more reliant upon New York's crime families.¹⁶

Many Irish leaders and organizations reacted to the new political challenges by slandering Jews as disloyal and Italians as organized criminals. The heavily Irish Christian Front, formed from the Flatbush Anti-Communist League and the Flatbush Common Cause League, was a product of such pressures. Under Brooklyn's John Cassidy, the Christian Front took its moral direction from anti-Semite, radio personality Father Charles E. Coughlin and gained national attention by exposing and inventing connections between Jews and communism. The Front's leadership included many prominent Catholics. Father Edward Lodge Curran of Brooklyn was a visible Front supporter and the Diocesan organ, the *Brooklyn Tablet*, "praised and defended" the organization and reported its meetings. Brooklyn's Bishop Molloy, suggests a historian of the group, gave a subtle nod to the Front and "at least tacit approval to the pro-Coughlin stand of the *Tablet* and such priest as Father Curran." By 1939 the leadership of the Front was trying to turn its Rifle Club into a paramilitary corps, while a similar Bronx group, the Christian Mobilizers, actually established a military division.¹⁷

In the 1930s chapters of the German-American Bund were established in Brooklyn. The Bund was a working-class organization that supported Nazism and fancied itself the ultimate check on the supposed designs of domineering, communist Jews. In 1934 a single

Brooklyn local had 450 members, most of whom were immigrants or recently naturalized citizens.¹⁸

The United States' entry into World War II brought a temporary calm to the city as defense jobs increased and conscription tightened the labor pool. The borough's shipping yards became a conduit for federal funds. The Brooklyn Navy Yard (BNY) employed two-thirds of all the yard workers in the borough, but racial discrimination limited African Americans' employment opportunities. When Roosevelt took office 500 of the 4,105 Yard workers were due to be laid off. A few months later millions of dollars were funneled into the Yard as its officials and local Democratic politicians successfully attracted work orders from Washington. The Navy Yard experienced minor labor struggles over attempts to lower wages and shorten work weeks to maximize employment; however, the Yard remained the greatest employer in the borough. By 1936 there were more than 8,000 people working at the facility. Four years later, as the United States escalated military production in preparation for the war in Europe, there were 20,000 workers at the BNY and 60 new hires each day. As the war closed it had 75,000 employees. The borough's other yards experienced equally dramatic growth. In July 1941 Brooklyn's shipyards had 32,948 workers. A year later there were 60,548, and, by the summer of 1943, 96,090 were working at the Brooklyn yards.¹⁹

Converting New York City to wartime production was not a simple task since the Metropolis was the center of paper capitalism and not heavy industry. More than 40 percent of Gotham's manufacturing workers were in the garment industry, 10 percent were in food production, and as many worked in printing and publishing. State and federal officials, looking to maximize the city's role in the war effort, estimated that less than a quarter of its industries could be easily moved to defense production. Yet, as the nation prepared for war, New York City outranked all but five states in the value of its defense products.²⁰ That was largely due to the industrial capacity of Brooklyn.

Labor-starved industries pulled in previously excluded groups as tens of thousands of young men were activated and sent overseas.

In the summer of 1939 the National Youth Administration (NYA) offered black women courses in clerical, secretarial, switchboard, and reception occupations at the Brooklyn Urban League. New York NYA director Helen M. Harris agreed to cooperate with the League but limited training to fifteen women at a time. In the winter of 1941 the Brooklyn Urban League/Lincoln Settlement, the Carlton YMCA, and the National Urban League issued a report, published by the Brooklyn Coordinating Committee on Defense Employment (BCCDE), on the impact of defense industry work on New York's black population. The report called on the NYA and the Board of Education to provide more opportunities for African Americans in defense industries. Over a six-month period the coalition surveyed black applicants from every borough. It found that less than one-fourth of all solicitors received jobs and almost a third were assigned to training. Forty-one percent of the applicants were women.²¹

African Americans did not gain the number or type of jobs and training programs that they needed (see table 8.1). In 1941, 85 percent of the 13,400 black workers at United States Navy Yards were laborers, helpers, or apprentices; moreover, black people made up less than 3 percent of the New York Metropolitan-area defense workers, the lowest rate of any major defense-production region. The nonwhite proportion of the defense labor force did increase as the war progressed, but the employment and assignment process remained discriminatory. In November 1942, 95 percent of the 28,853 people being trained in New York State were white. If they escaped exclusion, black laborers still had difficulty getting desirable assignments. The United States Employment Service (USES) placed 70,056 nonwhite people in jobs in New York State between October and December of 1942, but more than 97 percent of these placements were unskilled, semiskilled, or service positions.²² While government agencies complimented themselves for the increasing number of black laborers in defense work, the concentration of black people in lowskill categories, the strategic rather than open employment of women, and the finite tenure of these jobs provided no security beyond the war years.

TABLE 8.1**Race and Employment at Brooklyn's Shipbuilding and Repair Yards, 1942**

<u>Yard</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Non-White</u>	<u>% Non-white</u>
Brooklyn Navy Yard	39,654	1,462	NA	—
Bethlehem (2 yards)	6,552	NA	180	2.7
Robins Dry Dock/Repair	6,596	65	NA	—
Sullivan Dry Dock/Repair	2,075	25	56	2.7
Atlantic Basin Iron Works	2,035	7	0	0.0
Marine Basin Co.	1,050	0	0	0.0
A. Tickle Eng. Works	509	0	1	0.2
Ira S. Bushey & Sons Inc.	502	0	4	0.8
Wheeler Shipyard, Inc.	454	4	0	0.0
Dekom Shipbuilding Corp.	275	4	0	0.0
Tollefsen Brothers	250	3	0	0.0
Liberty Drydock Co., Inc.	237	3	10	4.2
Oceanic Ship Scaling Co.	200	0	0	0.0
Cardinal Engineering Co.	91	5	0	0.0
D. Costagliola & Co., Inc.	68	0	0	0.0
Total	60,548	1,578	251	0.4

Source: United States Employment Service, "The Employment Situation in the Shipbuilding and Repair Industry in New York City" (September 1942), in the Records of the War Manpower Commission, Office of the Assistant Executive Director for Program Development, General Records of Julius J. Joseph, 1942-1943, RG 211, Entry 94, Box No. 2, National Archives.

Federal agencies exaggerated the opportunities that wartime production brought African Americans (see table 8.2). Black men remained a marginal force in the wartime economy, although they were frequently the subjects of propaganda photos. "In the current reorganization of industry," wrote W. E. B. Du Bois of the New Deal, "there is no adequate effort to secure us a place in industry, to open opportunity for Negro ability, or to give us security in age or unemployment." African Americans never received their share of the benefits from the federal funds that inflated New York City's defense industries during World War II. In October 1940 the Brooklyn Council of the National Negro Congress alerted the press that the Sperry

Gyroscope Company forbade the employment of black people under its national defense contracts. Sperry's officials were unmoved and exercised their right not to respond. By the winter of 1941 more than 120,000 New Yorkers were engaged in defense work, yet less than 3 percent of them were black. Moreover, people of color were concentrated in the least attractive and worst paid jobs with few opportunities for advancement. That fit a broader pattern; for 85 percent of the nation's black Navy Yard workers were in unskilled jobs. In Brooklyn the huge Navy Yard and its resident and neighboring defense contractors were at the center of labor discrimination. Beginning in 1943 the War Manpower Commission and the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) repeatedly investigated and accused the Arma Corporation of Brooklyn of discrimination against nonwhite workers. As the war was drawing to a close Arma was still blatantly ignoring federal mandates by employing African Americans in only the most menial capacities. In 1944 the FEPC questioned Yard Commandant Rear Admiral Kelly after Herman Boykin complained of discrimination against black workers seeking promotions. The admiral never revealed the formula for being promoted at the Yard, but he did send a memo assuring Boykin of an advancement in the near future. The promotion was not forthcoming. Indeed, Boykin almost lost his job at the Navy Yard during a wave of cutbacks. An embarrassed administration instead appointed him to instruct in mechanics. That same year all the black women on the night shift of the Naval Clothing Depot were laid off although many had seniority over white day-shift workers. The company did not rethink its cost-cutting scheme until the Federal Workers Union of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) intervened. Percival Legall's case, filed with the FEPC in 1945, exposed the two-tier wage scale used at the Yard— black people were routinely paid less than white people for the same work.²³

TABLE 8.2**Racial Criteria for Hiring at 202 New York City Defense Firms, 1941**

<u>Specification</u>	<u>No. of Firms</u>	<u>% of Firms</u>
“White required”	66	32.7
“White preferred”	74	36.6
“Open”	62	30.7

Source: Meredith B. Givens, Director, Bureau of Research and Statistics, and Milton O. Loysen, Executive Director, Division of Placement and Unemployment Insurance, “The Employment Situation in New York City with Special Reference to National Defense Labor Requirements,” May 1941, Appendix 13, in Records of the War Manpower Commission, Office of the Assistant Executive Director for Program Development, General Records of Julius J. Joseph, 1942–1943, RG 211, Entry 94, Box No. 2, National Archives.

New York City's defense industries selected employees by race although they were hiring under government contracts and spending public money, just as restricted unions continued to pursue the exclusion of African-American workers (see table 8.3). On June 10, 1943 three shop stewards at the Acme Backing Corporation in Brooklyn led white workers on a wildcat strike to protest the employment of a black man in the Key Department. Because of the swift intervention of the FEPC and the CIO, the shop stewards were fired and the walkout lasted only one day.²⁴ However, the incident clearly revealed white workers' ability to threaten wartime production goals in defense of their labor privilege.

The combination of white unions and calculating industrialists ensured that African Americans did not gain a stronghold on skilled jobs. Across Brooklyn public money was being used to bolster production but not all of the public was benefiting. White women were the preferred substitute laborers as the pool of white men receded and plant managers often chose women when resorting to

employing black laborers. That simple formula kept nonwhite workers from challenging the division of the labor market after the war. Whatever their gender, African-American laborers remained unskilled and they remained vulnerable.

TABLE 8.3

Black Employees at Select Brooklyn Defense Firms, 1941–2

<u>Company</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>% Black</u>
Sperry Gyroscope	17,000	300	low skilled	1.76
Arma Corporation	3,000	20	trainees	0.67
Julius Kayser & Co. ^a	740	75	mostly women	10.1
Micamold Corp.	610	0	—	0.00
C. Fisher Springa	300	25	skilled	8.33
Zip-A-Bag Corp.	100	70	women	70.0
Matam Corp.	85	1	—	1.18
U.S. Tool Co.	85	1	skilled woman	1.18
ESMCO Co.	77	0	—	0.00
Shearon Metallic Co.a	NA	6	—	—

^aOrdnance plants.

Source:Records of the War Manpower Commission, Records of the Bureau of Training, Records of the Training within Industry Service, General Records, 1940–1945, Negro Employment, RG 211, Entry 227, Box No. 11, National Archives.

Robert C. Weaver, the most consistent analyst of black labor in the defense industry, argued that people of color had their best employment opportunities with ordnance manufacturers because the plants were constructed for the war and were not the strongholds of segregated unions. "In order to supply explosives, powder, and small arms for a rapidly expanding army, there are today in this country scores of ordnance plants under construction and in operation," postulated Weaver. "Practically all of these establishments are new

factories, and they offer a desirable area for expanding the scope of Negro employment." Ordnance plants did offer wider opportunities to Brooklyn's black defense employees; however, it had little to do with federal policy. "There was no force of compulsion that made it necessary for the contractor to employ Negroes," noted an ordnance inspector assigned to examine the records of the Murray Manufacturing Corporation of Brooklyn. The gesture toward fairness was the result of a cold assessment of Murray's wartime needs that led executives to admit previous discriminatory practices: "During the tight labor market of 1943, the situation in regard to Negroes was studied in detail by the contractor's management, the decision being reached that Negroes could be trained and up-graded beyond the lower classification in which they had been heretofore used." The inspector noted that black workers were hired and promoted under the same rules as white workers, remarked that there was no difficulty with "assimilation," and then declared that the "employment of Negroes can be beneficial to employers and the fact that they contributed so much to the war effort at this plant should be an object lesson."²⁵ The day the war ended, 40 percent of Murray Manufacturing's employees were African American, but black women, white women, and white men outnumbered black men (see table 8.4).

TABLE 8.4

Race and Gender of Employees at Murray Manufacturing Corporation

Year	White Men	White Women	Black Men	Black Women	% Black	% Women
June 1942	373	248	8	2	1.6	39.6
Aug. 1945	529	513	289	434	41.0	53.7

Source: Harry M. Whittleton (Associate Head Inspector, Ordnance Materiel, War Department, Army Service Forces, New York Ordnance District), "Historical Data—Murray Manufacturing Corporation; 60 m/m, M49A2, 81 m/m, M43A1; Welded Type, Trench Mortar Shell" (Brooklyn: New York Ordnance District, 15 November 1945), 28–9, collection of the Brooklyn Historical Society.

TABLE 8.5**Black Representation in Skilled Trades (National), 1950**

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>% Black</u>
Blacksmiths	40,770	1,980	4.9
Boilermakers	34,950	810	2.3
Cabinetmakers	71,280	1,680	2.4
Carpenters	898,140	34,860	3.9
Electricians	302,340	3,090	1.0
Excavation ^a	104,760	3,300	3.2
Foremen NEC	773,100	9,450	1.2
Glaziers	10,380	300	2.9
Inspectors NEC	86,310	1,320	1.5
Job Setters	24,120	360	1.7
Line/Servicemen	205,230	2,040	1.0
Machinists	496,320	7,530	1.5
Plumbers	271,530	8,880	3.3
Stat. Engineers	212,580	4,650	2.2
Stonecutters	8,880	270	3.0
Structural Metal	48,180	1,320	2.7
Tinsmiths ^b	117,270	990	0.8
Toolmakers ^c	152,940	420	0.3

^aExcavating, grading, and road machinery operators.

^bIncludes coppersmiths and sheet metal workers.

^cIncludes diemakers and setters.

Source: Labor Department, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *The Negro Wage-Earner and Apprenticeship Training Programs: A Critical Analysis with Recommendations* (New York: NAACP, 1960), 8–9.

Toward the end of 1945 FEPC regional director Edward Lawson declared war on segregated work units. His action was meaningless. As white veterans returned, black women were swept from the employment rolls of defense plants and along with them went the threat of nonwhite skilled workers integrating unions and trades. Government contracts were terminated, the Navy Yard curtailed production, and white workers replaced black workers. As Robert C. Weaver had warned in 1942, after a brief reprieve of three years African Americans found themselves again trying to wedge into closed unions.²⁶

An avalanche of federal money expanded Brooklyn's labor market; however, government funds were channeled into industries and trades that white laborers dominated. While the Navy Yard became the largest employer in the borough and led the defense industries in a wartime boom and the building trades gorged themselves on a feast of federal subsidies to housing and public works construction, people of color were left to fight for inclusion while fending off the hardships of depression. The few jobs and training programs that black Brooklynites won lasted only as long as the war. The removal of nonwhite defense employees was completed as white veterans returned to their jobs, nonwhite industrial workers were laid off as the nation returned to peacetime production, and the defense industries began a steady migration to the segregated suburbs. Black women seized the opportunity in defense industries to sustain their families and communities, but they had virtually no opportunity to jump from defense work to organized labor. The same was true for black men, except for a *lucky* few who fought for entrance into construction unions and became laborers, helpers, and apprentices, not full members. In 1946, while federal money continued to fuel the construction industry, the National Urban League found only twenty-two licensed black electricians (six of whom held membership in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers), six black men in the plumbers' local, and two unionized black plasterers in all of New York City (see table 8.5). Even black veterans faced rampant discrimination. At the end of the war the Urban League, in a study of fifty cities, called the employment prospects of black veterans "most disheartening." "The movement of Negroes into peacetime

employment lags far behind the movement of white veterans," the report concluded.²⁷

There could be no stability in Brooklyn so long as black workers were excluded, and the Great Depression left white Brooklynites more determined to labor under the covenant of color.