

Race Relations in the Early Teamsters Union

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In 1903, T. A. Stowers, a black Teamster from Chicago, addressed a convention of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) and explained to his fellow union delegates the benefits that union organization might bring to U.S. race relations.¹ “In South Carolina and Georgia,” he said, “colored men and white men are coming together in organizations and there is no discrimination on either side.” He claimed that the growth of unions had already spurred progress in race relations. “The labor question in the United States has brought the two races nearer together than any movement that has ever been started. Men all over the country to-day who are discussing the negro question are only making it worse; but, thank God, labor organizations are doing more to stop brutality among these people than any other agency.”²

Stowers’s optimism about the power of union organization to heal the racial divisions in the U.S. South flies in the face of current scholarship by historians such as Herbert Hill, David Roediger, and Noel Ignatiev. They emphasize the ways in which labor organizations in the U.S. mainly reflected the racial consciousness of white workers. Instead of building the effective alliances among workers of different ethnic and racial backgrounds which Stowers envisioned, Hill and others have argued that unions simply sought to protect the economic advantages and guard the status of white workers.³ This

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²*Proceedings of the Joint Convention of the Team Drivers’ International Union and the Teamsters’ National Union and Proceedings of the Convention of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Niagara Falls, NY, August 3–13, 1903* (hereafter *Proceedings of 1903 IBT Convention*) (Indianapolis: Cheltenham Press, 1903), 167–168.

³Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and the Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Herbert Hill, “Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mineworkers of America,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 2 (1988): 132–200; Herbert Hill, “The Problem of Race in American Labor History,” *Reviews in American History* 24 (1996), 189–208; and finally, Clarence Walker, “How Many Niggers Did Karl Marx Know? Or, a Peculiarity of the Americans,” in Walker, *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 1–33.

This revisionist literature is mainly a response to a perceived weakness in the New Labor school of labor history, which is described as having ignored or underplayed the role of racial divisions in early U.S. history.

literature offers a particularly critical picture of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its affiliates in the early 20th century, the very time period when Stowers was speaking.⁴ The AFL has been portrayed as a white dominated, largely exclusionary organization.⁵

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The prime example cited in this regard is: Herbert Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning: 1890–1900," in Julius Jacobson, ed., *The Negro and the American Labor Movement* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 49–127.

For an overview of this debate, see Eric Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930," *Radical History Review* 55 (1993): 53–88.

⁴Herbert Hill, for instance, writes, "The CIO policy on race was at best an expression of abstract equality in contrast to the pattern of exclusion and segregation within the AFL," in Hill, "The Problem of Race in American Labor History," 201.

Nor is this depiction of the conservative nature of the AFL on racial matters new. Other, older studies of this subject include: Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (1931; reprint New York: Atheneum, 1974); Herbert R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944); Herman D. Bloch, "Craft Unions and the Negro in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Negro History* 43 (1958): 10–33; Herman D. Bloch, "Labor and the Negro, 1866–1910," *Journal of Negro History* 50 (1965): 163–184; Marc Karson and Ronald Radosh, "The American Federation of Labor and the Negro Worker, 1894–1949," in Julius Jacobson, ed., *The Negro and the American Labor Movement* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 155–187; Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619–1973* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 64–103, 136–239.

New work on race and the AFL unions includes: Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labor," and Keith P. Griffier, *What Price Alliance? Black Radicals Confront White Labor, 1918–1938* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

⁵Nell Irvin Painter, for instance, wrote, "With the exception of the mineworkers' and longshoremen's unions, the left-led unions, and the unique Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, black workers and organized labor were mutually exclusive until the rise of the CIO in the mid-1930s" in Painter, "Black Workers from Reconstruction to the Great Depression," in Paul Buhle and Alan Dawley, eds, *Working for Democracy: American Workers From the Revolution to the Present* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1985), 67. A more recent review of the treatment of race in the field of labor history, and one which takes a different perspective from Painter's and covers a broader time period, is Eric Arnesen, "Up From Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race, and the State of Labor History," *Reviews in American History* 26 (1998): 146–174.

Much has been written on race relations in the exceptional AFL unions. Work on the United Mine Workers Union includes: Stephen Brier, "Interracial Organizing in the West Virginia Coal Industry: The Participation of Black Mine Workers in the Knights of Labor and the United Mine Workers, 1880–1894," in Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds, *Essays in Southern Labor History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 18–43; Joe W. Trotter, Jr., "Class and Racial Equality: The Southern West Virginia Black Coal Miners' Response, 1915–1932," in Robert H. Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 60–83; Trotter, *Coal, Class and Color: Blacks in South West Virginia, 1915–1932* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Alex Lichtenstein, "Racial Conflict and Racial Solidarity in the Alabama Coal Strike of 1894: New Evidence for the Gutman–Hill Debate," *Labor History* 36 (1995): 63–76; Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class and Community Conflict, 1780–1980* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987); Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878–1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

Studies on the longshoremen include: Daniel Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labor, and Unionism, 1892–1923* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863–1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and more recently, Howard Kimeldorf and Robert Penney, "Excluded" By Choice: Dynamics of Interracial Unionism on the Philadelphia Waterfront, 1910–1930," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 51 (1997): 50–71.

Regarding the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, see: William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925–1937* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

Studies focusing on the concept of whiteness quite correctly highlight the importance of white working-class racial consciousness in union history but do so, however, at the cost of creating a misleading uniformity, de-emphasizing the actual details of race relations in AFL unions, and overlooking important episodes of cooperation across racial lines which did occur. Indeed, labor historians writing on the known cases of interracial unionism have chided Hill and others for replacing one oversimplification with another.⁶ Coal miners and dock workers did not make decisions based solely on their class identity, but neither did a sense of racial identity completely determine their actions. The interplay of these powerful forces, along with other social and economic circumstances, shaped the course of union organization. The current work of labor historians has come to reflect that understanding. As Daniel Letwin has written, “For recent scholars, the corrosive effects of racism upon the relations of black and white workers do not negate the significance of interracial organization where it materialized, but instead render its exploration all the more compelling.”⁷

The history of the early IBT provides an example of such cooperation in an AFL union. Scholars have ignored the Teamsters, even though at the turn of the century they were a large union operating in a racially mixed industry, and therefore a good potential case study. By 1904 the IBT had 84,000 members, making it the third largest national union in the AFL.⁸ Unlike other unions that came to previously segregated workplaces, the IBT did not seek to organize an exclusively white workforce. According to the 1900 U.S. Census, fully 12.5% of teamsters nationwide were African Americans.⁹ The question of race—to what extent would this union seek to organize African Americans and how would they be treated once in the union—was therefore central to the early history of this important AFL union.

At least part of the reason that studies have neglected the Teamsters might have been an assumption that we already knew the racial policies of this conservative union. William Tuttle, in his book, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (1970), provided the best known picture of race in the early Teamsters Union. Tuttle argued that a strike by Chicago Teamsters in 1905 served as a precursor for the race riot of 1919. The strike in 1905, as he explained, degenerated from a labor dispute into a violent racial conflict. Drawing on newspaper reports he traced how, during the three month long dispute, strikers and their allies went from initially attacking African American replacement drivers, to more generalized attacks on any African Americans who wandered into white working-class neighborhoods. Tuttle concluded that it was “the bloody teamsters’ strike of 1905” which confirmed “the image of blacks as a ‘scab race.’” The implication of his work was that an already racially exclusive Teamsters Union became even more anti-black after 1905.¹⁰

⁶In a recent essay, Eric Arnesen described an emerging trend towards “racialism,” by which he meant that some authors have come to replace one type of determinism, “economist” as he puts it, with a view that all of history can be explained in terms of racial divisions. See Arnesen, “Following the Color Line of Labor,” 80.

⁷Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism*, 3.

⁸The first and second respectively were: United Mine Workers (251,000) and the Carpenters (161,200). Leo Wolman, *The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880–1923* (1924; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 110–119.

⁹U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Special Reports: Occupations at the Twelfth Census* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), cviii, 480–763.

¹⁰The implication of exclusion is most clearly made towards the end of the chapter on labor. Tuttle surveys the general policies of discrimination and exclusion practiced by AFL unions and, in the face of the earlier section on the strike of 1905, a reader would most likely conclude that the early IBT shared

The other major secondary work on the question of race in the IBT, Richard D. Leone's *The Negro in the Trucking Industry* (1971), confirmed Tuttle's conclusion. Leone asserted that, because of the strike in 1905, "Negroes were prototyped as strikebreakers and much of this anti-Negro sentiment continued to exist over the years." The result, he wrote, was a policy of discrimination and exclusion within the union for decades afterwards.¹¹

Leone's assessment was incorrect. In fact a significant number of African Americans did belong to the early IBT. The aftermath of the 1905 strike did not lead the union towards a policy of exclusion; instead, the Teamsters went in the opposite direction and redoubled their efforts to organize African Americans. Instead of exclusion or subordination, white union leaders offered black workers a pragmatic bargain: in return for loyal membership, blacks would get equal wages and fair treatment. Not surprisingly, it was a bargain frequently violated at the local level by white union members, and those failures undercut the union's efforts to organize more African American workers. Still, in the first two decades of the 20th century the Teamsters became a biracial union. Historically, it improved the wages and working conditions of black members, and also at times it provided a forum in which black Teamsters could exercise leadership roles in a largely racist society.

The history of the early Teamsters Union argues for a more nuanced understanding of the role of racial attitudes in early organized labor. Historical evidence indicates that, to varying degrees, white Teamster leaders accepted the popular racist notions of their day.¹² However, in spite of their private racist views, Teamsters Union leaders argued

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in such practices. "Undoubtedly, some white workingmen were willing to admit blacks to their locals, if not as a matter of principle, at least as a means of self-defense; but too often these locals were hamstrung by policies at the national level. Most unions in Chicago in 1919 probably had no black members at all." William M. Tuttle, Jr, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); regarding the strike of 1905, see 120–123, and for his survey of union discrimination, see 142–146.

¹¹Leone quoted an unnamed Teamster representative who told him in 1968 that "probably very few Negroes were members during these earlier years, unless they were employed as helpers in the livery stables before the horse-drawn carts were replaced with trucks." Richard D. Leone, *The Negro in the Trucking Industry* (Philadelphia: Industrial Research Unit, Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, 1971), 21–22, 29.

¹²Descriptions of racial beliefs of the day can be found in I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); and Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir 1877–1901* (New York: The Dial Press, 1954), 79–96.

An example of the sort of white racial concerns that I am referring to can be seen in a letter printed in the union's *Official Magazine* in 1913. Charles Markard, a local union secretary-treasurer, from Galveston, Texas, wrote about an issue regarding the union's official button raised by his white local union members. "Quite often I have some of the boys come to me and say, 'I saw a negro wearing the same kind of button that we wear. How about that?' they say. 'If a negro can wear the same kind of button that we do, why I won't wear mine.'" Markard's response to such complaints illustrated his acceptance of such racial concerns, along with his continued belief in union membership. " 'Now remember this,' I tell them all, 'that because a negro does wear the same button it does not make one bit of difference to us.' Cannot you, as well as anybody, see and tell the two different colors? You are white; everybody knows that. So do they know that the negro is black." *International Teamster* (then known as the *Official Magazine*) 11 (Dec. 1913): 14–16.

For references to racial differences in the internal correspondence of Teamster leaders, a good example is the description of a black led local union in the Midwest by a Teamster organizer, John L. Devering, who wrote, "They are like many colored men, they are all right, but they need a white leader." John L. Devering to Thomas Hughes, March 28, 1923, Series I, Box 26, The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers of America, Papers, 1904–1952, MSS 9, Wisconsin

publicly against racial hostility, and against racial exclusion. Stowers's speech reflects the very real promise of cooperation across racial lines that existed within this union movement. The need to build an effective labor organization, and the experiences of union leaders working in a biracial union, could create effective and long-lasting alliances between white and black workers. White racism hampered the achievements of this alliance, but did not eliminate its existence.

THE FORMATION OF THE TEAMSTERS UNION

The decision of the Teamsters Union to include African Americans as full members occurred during a time of great union growth, but also at the low point in 20th-century race relations. The Teamsters Union came into being in the first decade of the century, a time which historian Rayford Logan refers to as "the nadir" of race relations in the U.S.¹³ In a climate of increasing segregation, and amidst widely held attitudes of white supremacy, many unions contemporary with the Teamsters chose either to discriminate against African Americans or to exclude them from membership altogether, even though such a decision would limit their organizations' growth. The AFL and its president, Samuel Gompers, had come to accommodate such discrimination.

At the turn of the century, teamsters were men who drove wagons, either passenger vehicles, such as hacks, or freight hauling and delivery wagons, sometimes called trucks or drays.¹⁴ At the local level working teamsters had formed various labor organizations at least as far back as mid-century; in 1898 a group of such local leaders came together to ask for an AFL charter as a new national union. They called their organization the Team Drivers' International Union (TDIU). In 1903 the TDIU merged with another organization to form the IBT, the union that still exists today. By May 1901 the TDIU had grown to include 270 local unions and claimed a membership of over 30,000.¹⁵ This rapid growth was achieved by organizing new locals and by bringing into affiliation with the national union many preexisting independent local unions.¹⁶

The union's expansion, especially in cities with large immigrant populations and in the South, raised questions about its openness to different racial and ethnic groups. Nationwide, working teamsters were an ethnically and racially diverse group. According to the 1900 Census, of the 538,029 teamsters that year, 67% were native-born white men and 20% were foreign-born whites. Across the country about a quarter of all teamsters were the children of foreign-born parents, and so first- and second-generation immigrants made up close to half of all the workers in this occupation.

The presence of immigrants was even more noticeable in the larger cities. In

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State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin (hereafter cited as IBT Papers). Or, the reference to Southern blacks by Daniel Tobin, the president of the union, in 1928, who described them as "shiftless" and difficult to organize. *International Teamster* 25 (May 1928): 14.

¹³Logan, 79–96.

¹⁴The U.S. Census in 1900 listed 610,680 people as "Draymen, hackmen, teamsters, etc." The same report listed 906 of them as being female. U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Special Reports: Occupations at the Twelfth Census* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 10–11.

¹⁵*Team Drivers' Journal* 3 (Aug. 1903): 9–10, and 1 (June 1901): 9. Also, Frank Morrison to George Innis, January 23, 1899, *American Federation of Labor Papers: Gompers Era*, microfilm, reel no. 143.

¹⁶George Innis to Frank Morrison, April 28, 1902, *AFL: Gompers' Era*, Reel 36. See also the review of Teamster history offered at the union's 1907 convention, *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters* (Indianapolis: Cheltenham Press, 1907), 15.

Chicago, for instance, of the 23,000 teamsters, about 7000 were first- or second-generation German immigrants, 5000 were Irish Americans, and 2000 had parents born in Scandinavia. In Boston about half of the working teamsters had either one or both parents born in Ireland. African Americans made up 12.5% of the working teamsters nationwide, but in Southern cities they ranged from as much as a quarter to over 90% of the teamster workforce. Thus the ethnic make-up of the teamster workforce varied across the nation. As a general rule, however, one could assert that in the bigger cities immigrants, especially Germans and Irish, made up at least half of the teamster workforce, and in the border states and deep South, African Americans had the same kind of presence.¹⁷

Choosing to organize in the cities and in the South meant deciding whether to open up the union to immigrants and African Americans, an issue faced by other AFL national unions in the same period. AFL unions exhibited a range of nativist attitudes, but most granted membership to recent white immigrants. These same unions frequently practiced discriminatory or exclusionary policies towards potential African American members.¹⁸ In the early years of the century eight national unions in the AFL had exclusionary clauses in their constitutions. Three other national AFL affiliates barred blacks through membership rituals that pledged members to nominate only white men as new members. Other AFL affiliates formally allowed African Americans as members but discriminated against them in a variety of ways, such as limiting them to second-class membership in auxiliary locals.¹⁹ Though Gompers had strongly resisted exclusionary policies earlier in his career, by the early 1900s he had come to

¹⁷In the eight Southern cities that had populations exceeding 50,000 in 1900, African Americans on average made up 74% of the Teamster workforce. Taking the 16 Northern cities which had more than 2000 working teamsters, first- and second-generation immigrants made up an average of 69% of the teamster workforce. *Occupations at the Twelfth Census*, cxiv, 480–763.

My point here is that racial and ethnic diversity were a reality with which the Teamsters Union had to come to grips. I am not arguing that among all male workers in the U.S. the Teamsters were an extraordinarily diverse group, much less the converse of that proposition. Still some form of context may be useful. The census figures for other comparable types of work provide a benchmark comparison of the ethnic diversity of the teamsters' occupation. Miners and quarrymen, another large non-skilled occupation group, were composed of more foreign-born white men than the teamsters, 47.5%, but significantly fewer African Americans, 6.3%. More iron and steel workers were also foreign-born whites, 39.2% and once again significantly fewer were African Americans, 4.3%. By way of contrast, there were occupations with much higher proportions of African Americans. The highest was turpentine farmers and laborers, 83.9%, followed by porters and helpers, 52%, and servants and waiters, 41.8%. Among other transportation workers, about twice the proportion of hostlers were African Americans compared to the teamsters, 21% versus 12%, but both the categories of boatmen and sailors and street railway employees had a smaller proportion of black workers, 7.9% and 0.9%, respectively. *Occupations at the Twelfth Census*, cxiv–cxlvi.

¹⁸Gwendolyn Mink has argued that politically the arrival of a new wave of immigration at the turn of the century helped swing AFL unions towards a sort of alliance with exclusionist-oriented conservative business interests. In this same period, some craft unions in the AFL managed to exclude newer immigrants through a variety of formal and informal union rules that functioned like the literacy test which unionists and their allies had hoped to use to limit immigration. Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party, and State, 1875–1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 164–67. Regarding the nativism of the AFL, see A. T. Lane, "American Trade Unions, Mass Immigration and the Literacy Test: 1900–1917," *Labor History* 25 (1984): 5–25. An example of these nativist attitudes at work in a particular union, the United Garment Workers, can be found in: Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 43.

¹⁹Fraser, 57–75. For a review of the equally exclusionary policies of the railroad brotherhoods, which remained outside of the AFL, see Eric Arnesen, "Like Banquo's Ghost, It Will Not Down': The Race Question and the American Railroad Brotherhoods, 1880–1920," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1601–1634.

acquiesce to such practices.²⁰ The AFL took no real action to guard the interests of African American workers, who were either excluded or discriminated against by national affiliates.²¹

Thus in the early 1900s, when the Teamsters Union first faced the question of organizing African American workers, they knew of numerous examples of exclusionary labor organizations. The leadership of the Teamsters chose, however, not to exclude African Americans and in fact to organize them whenever possible. The TDIU, or later the IBT, were not led by selfless idealists. The Teamsters Union's motives for organizing African Americans resembled their motives for organizing immigrants in the bigger cities, and their willingness to bring in owner operators in the smaller towns and cities. The union leadership wanted their organization to grow; more members meant greater dues income for the union, and perhaps more strength and stability for the national organization. Leaders sought to bring all the working teamsters in each locality into the union as a way of protecting the membership from non-union, lower-waged competition.²² In the South this goal meant bringing in African Americans as members, just as, in a place like Rhode Island, it meant organizing recent French Canadian immigrants. This willingness to accomplish union growth by bringing in African Americans as full members did distinguish the Teamsters Union from many of its contemporaries. Many white union leaders, faced with the choice of either recruiting blacks as members or allowing their union to grow more slowly, picked the latter course.²³

It was the special character of the teamster's occupation which forced the union's leadership to move against the current of the times to build an interracial organization. The unskilled nature of teaming work meant that this union could not follow the same exclusionary path of many craft unions. White workers had long used unions as a tool to drive African Americans from various skilled occupations. They did this by denying young blacks any apprenticeships at a craft.²⁴ Such exclusionary practices worked and

²⁰Samuel Gompers to Frank M. Ronemus, April 10, [1900], and see also footnote on 327, in Stuart Kaufman, et al., eds, *The Samuel Gompers Papers: Volume 5, An Expanding Movement at the Turn of the Century, 1898–1902* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 327, 221–222.

²¹Spero and Harris, 87–115; Karson and Radosh, 157–160.

²²An example of this kind of business reckoning about the need to organize can be found, for example, in a letter from Dan Tobin, then president of the IBT, to Lawrence Grace, a union vice-president. Tobin wrote, "I find on looking over the books that a great deal of our revenues are derived from the small towns throughout the states, which are practically never heard of. Small locals having from thirty-five to one hundred members are continually paying into this office, and are very little expense to us ... and my object is to try and get to the little places in the woods and remote districts with our organization." Tobin to Grace, Aug. 11, 1909, in Series I, Box 32, IBL, paper. A reference to the ways in which Teamster organizers bent the rules to allow team owners into these small-town locals can be found in *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, [1907] (Indianapolis: Cheltenham Press, 1907), 283–284. On the imperative of organizing all of the drivers in a locality into the union, see, for example, the letter from William M. Yeomans, secretary of Local 263 in Newport, Rhode Island, who wrote in 1902, "We are driving all teamsters into the union as fast as they come." *Team Drivers' Journal* 3 (May 1903): 8. The issue of immigrants comes up, for example, in the letter from Rhode Island organizer Lawrence Grace in 1902 about his efforts to bolster a local of French Canadians in Woonsocket, in *Team Drivers' Journal* 2 (Nov. 1902): 4.

²³Michael Goldfield, "Race and the CIO: The Possibilities for Racial Egalitarianism During the 1930s and 1940s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 44 (Fall 1993): 7–8.

²⁴Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 100–102, 111–112. For other accounts of how craft unions used control over apprenticeships to eliminate blacks from various trades, see: William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39–47; Spero and Harris, 53–66.

were widely adopted by the growing trade unions of the AFL in the early 1900s.²⁵ In the teaming trade, on the other hand, no such apprenticeship system existed, and there was therefore no effective educational gate to bar blacks from entering into the occupation of driving a wagon.

True, blacks were excluded from other non-skilled occupations such as certain types of factory work. The typical description of how white workers excluded blacks from a non-skilled factory job focuses on their refusal to work alongside a black. As Ignatiev puts it, “White men will not work with him”—[was] the magic formula of American trade unionism!!”²⁶ In teaming, though, each driver typically labored alone, on his own wagon, or perhaps with a helper riding alongside. John R. Commons observed in 1905 that each teamster was in a way “an establishment in himself.”²⁷ Also, the Teamsters’ employers would resist vigorously efforts to pressure them away from a cheap labor source in the interests of racial solidarity. Team owners were usually small-scale operators caught in a highly competitive business, who cut corners in any way possible, in order to finish the year with a profit.²⁸ If qualified white drivers refused to work, team owners could, and at times did, replace them with equally qualified black drivers.²⁹ Literally refusing to work alongside blacks had little relevance in the teaming business.

Teamster leaders must have known that their organization had to succeed in an occupation where racial exclusion had not previously existed and where it would be very difficult to impose. Strategic considerations made it necessary to include black drivers in the organization.³⁰ If white unionized drivers won wage increases, a large pool of non-union black drivers could undercut those gains by offering lower-waged labor. A delegate to the union’s 1902 convention raised this concern when he asked about the inclusion of blacks as members. According to the minutes of the meeting, “Delegate

²⁵Frederick Douglass, for instance, wrote in 1853, “At this moment I can more easily get my son into a lawyer’s office to learn law than I can into a blacksmith’s shop to blow the bellows and to wield the sledge-hammer.” Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass, Volume II, Pre-Civil War Decade, 1850–1860*. (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 234; cited in Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 158. Regarding the control exercised over apprenticeships by the AFL trades unions, see: John B. Andrews, “Nationalisation,” in *History of Labour in the United States, Vol. V* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 5–15, 44–61; Harris, 45; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 123–124.

²⁶Ignatiev, 111–116, 118–119. A broader survey of how the refusal of white workers to “work alongside Negroes” effectively barred blacks from most industrial employment can be found in Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 122–123.

²⁷John R. Commons, ed., *Trade Unionism and Labor Problems* (New York: Ginn, 1905), 57.

²⁸Of the 59 stables signed up with Local 705, the main trucking local of the Teamsters Union in Chicago in 1911, the largest employed 50 drivers. The average team owner in this group employed 12 teamsters. See George W. Briggs to T. L. Hughes, April 3, 1911, Series I, Box 4, IBT Papers. From what we can tell this was a representative sampling. In San Francisco, one study has found the average team owner had seven drivers working for him and in Philadelphia trucking firms signed up with the union averaged about 15 teamsters. See Jules Tygiel, *Workingmen in San Francisco, 1880–1901* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 139; and regarding Philadelphia, William H. Ashton to Thomas Hughes, June 23, 1915, Series I, Box 2, IBT Papers. For a discussion of the highly competitive nature of the teaming industry, see Commons, *Trade Unionism and Labor Problems*, 57–60; and David Witwer, “Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union 1898–1991” (Dissertation, Brown University, 1994), 12–13.

²⁹See, for instance, Report of Streetcar and Teamsters Strike, Indianapolis, Indiana, by Luke Grant, March 18, 1914, File 0803, Reel 15, Files of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, 1912–1918, Microfilm Edition, Taniment–Wagner Archives, New York University.

³⁰My assumption here parallels that which Eric Arnesen makes about the unskilled dock workers of New Orleans and other port cities. The inability of unskilled workers to control the labor market forced them to make arrangements that their skilled counterparts in other sectors of the economy could avoid. Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans*, 63–64.

Toone referred to the fact that there were many colored men in the South, and many who were anxious to be organized in Washington, DC, and in order to protect the white union men it was necessary to organize them.”³¹

At other times Teamster officials described this arrangement as a straightforward business deal. In 1914, for instance, George Denny, an official of the St Louis Teamsters Joint Council, emphasized the pragmatic motives that encouraged racial inclusion. His letter to the union’s official journal observed that if blacks were excluded from the union they would offer a lower-waged supply of labor: “It is against the interest of the white drivers to have a body of any kind of men who work at a cheaper rate than the union knows to be fair.” Denny noted that drawing black drivers into the union and maintaining their loyalty meant offering them fair treatment: “So no effort should be spared of informing all the colored drivers that we assure them, as a strictly business proposition in which all are equally interested, the same conditions that the white drivers are getting, and the same protection from the International Union in case of trouble.”³²

The leaders of the Teamsters Union, understanding that organization could effectively occur only if blacks knew they would receive equal treatment in the union declared their willingness to organize black teamsters in 1902. And next year at the union’s annual convention, delegates confirmed that decision and debated the detail of how black members would be treated in their organization.³³

The language of the debate indicates that the union had made some progress towards building an alliance between African American and white teamsters. A black delegate from Philadelphia pictured his own local as an integrated body of 200 men, half of whom were white. He had been elected president of this local, and he told the convention, “They treat me with the same courtesy they do white officers.” He and T. A. Stowers, a black delegate from Chicago, urged the union to go on record as opposing racial discrimination.³⁴

White union officers took a different tack. Cornelius Shea, a delegate from Boston who was to become the new president of the IBT, told the convention that he wanted no reference made to race or religion in the new constitution, “in the section of the country I come from, it makes no difference what the color of a man’s skin is. We seat him in the local and he is a member as long as he pays his dues.”³⁵ Al Young, one of the top union leaders, praised the existence of integrated locals. He told the convention delegates that it was their duty to convince black workers “we want to help them and put them on a level with ourselves.” And yet, Young and others also advised

³¹*Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the Team Drivers’ International Union of America, Toledo, Ohio, September 8th to 13th Inclusive, 1902*, published as a supplement to the *Team Drivers’ Journal* 2 (Oct. 1902): 30.

³²*International Teamster* (then known as *Official Magazine*) 11 (June 1914): 14–15.

³³*Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the Team Drivers’ International Union of America, Toledo, Ohio, September 8th to 13th Inclusive, 1902*, published as a supplement to the *Team Drivers’ Journal* 2 (Oct. 1902): 30.

³⁴It was T. A. Stowers, the black delegate from Chicago whose speech was previously noted, who offered a resolution that the constitution should include a rule “that provides that no member of the International Brotherhood of Team Drivers shall discriminate against a fellow worker on account of color or race.” *Proceedings of the Joint Convention of the Team Drivers’ International Union and the Teamsters National Union and Proceedings of Convention of International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Niagara Falls, NY, August 3–13, 1903* (hereafter *Proceedings of 1903 IBT Convention*) (Indianapolis: Cheltenham Press, 1903), 119. For Stowers and White’s discussion of the issue, see *Proceedings of 1903 IBT Convention*, 167–68.

³⁵*Proceedings of 1903 IBT Convention*, 165.

that in the deep South the union would have to accept the existence of segregated locals.³⁶

In the end, the convention's debates produced mixed results. The 1903 constitution and by-laws of the IBT failed to include rules against racial discrimination. But, unlike many other contemporary labor organizations, the IBT made no provisions for exclusion of African Americans. And no one at the convention went on record asking for such a provision. The constitution did allow for segregated locals, but the language of that section envisaged that this should happen only when and where the national officers felt it was a necessary precondition for organization.³⁷

THE CHICAGO TEAMSTERS STRIKE OF 1905

While the 1903 Teamsters convention created the picture of a hopeful group of union leaders eager to see African Americans as fellow workers and union members, the Chicago Teamsters strike of 1905 revealed a complex, and less positive image of the Teamster rank and file. During the course of this three month long strike, white Teamster members and other white Chicago workers violently assaulted replacement drivers, both black and white; but increasingly, as the strike progressed, the attacks centered on African Americans in general. Racial divisions widened noticeably, but it remains less clear that white Teamsters had come to see all African Americans as part of a "scab race." When the larger context of the strike's history is considered, the Teamsters Union in contrast to the other elements involved in the strike—the police, the newspapers, and the employers—played a powerful role in moderating racial tensions.

The 1905 Chicago Teamsters strike began on April 8 as a sympathetic walk-out against Montgomery Ward and Company in support of the Garment Workers Union. Within a couple of weeks, the garment workers pulled out of the dispute, but Montgomery Ward, and the other employers involved, refused to take back any of the teamsters who had joined the walk-out. The strike became a contest between the Chicago Teamsters Joint Council and the Chicago Employers' Association (EA). By May over 5000 teamsters were involved in the strike.³⁸ Several observers suggested then, and it seems likely looking back now, that the EA sought to use the strike to break the Teamsters Union in Chicago.³⁹

³⁶*Proceedings of 1903 IBT Convention*, 165–166.

³⁷The provision's final wording read that there should be only one local per craft (for instance coal wagon drivers) in any city, "except in localities where it may be necessary. In such cases the Executive Board shall have full power to investigate and determine the advisability of issuing separate charters." *Constitution and By-Laws of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, 1903*, 28–29.

³⁸I have based my description of the strike on several primary sources. The newspapers provided extensive daily coverage of the conflict and I have relied on accounts in: the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the *Chicago Record-Herald*, and the *Inter-Ocean*. In addition, union newspapers also covered the strike. I drew on accounts in the *Union Leader*, a paper put out with the support of the Streetcar Workers, and a strike newspaper issued by the Chicago Federation of Labor, the *Daily Labor Bulletin*. In addition regular weekly coverage of the conflict was given by a reform-oriented periodical published in Chicago, the *Public*. A detailed chronology of the strike can be found in Witwer, "Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union," 43–110. Other accounts of the strike also include: Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896–1932, Vol. 4 Labor Movements* (1935; reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 65–70; John Cummings, "The Chicago Teamsters' Strike—A Study in Industrial Democracy," *Journal of Political Economy* 13 (1905): 536–573.

³⁹"The True Story of the Strike," *Daily Labor Bulletin* 1 (May 24, 1905), 1; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Apr. 16, 1905, 5; *Inter-Ocean*, Apr. 30, 1905, 4; *Public* 8 May 6, 1905, 65–68; Luke Grant, "The Rights and Wrongs of the Chicago Strike," *Public Opinion*, June 10, 1905, 887–890; "This Fight is Yours," *Union Leader* 4 (April 15, 1905), 1.

The employers first hired non-union drivers individually to replace the strikers. The EA then chartered its own teaming corporation, bought up the equipment and horses of the struck team owners, and recruited strikebreakers in large numbers, black and white, from outside the city. When the EA's wagons appeared on the streets, working union teamsters moved their wagons to blockade the street. While the non-union vehicles were stalled, striking teamsters and their sympathizers attacked the drivers, throwing stones at them, or pulling them off the wagons and beating them.⁴⁰ In response to these attacks, the city of Chicago assigned over half of its police force (by May 3, 1700 out of 2300 available) to accompany the non-union wagons, and the EA either issued or allowed their drivers to carry guns for their own protection. On April 29, a shooting fatality occurred when a white strikebreaker shot at two approaching union pickets, one of whom later died from his wounds. It was the first of what would become 21 fatalities attributed to the strike.⁴¹

In May, the strike started to involve racial divisions in the city of Chicago. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* began emphasizing the role of imported black strike breakers in its coverage of the conflict. An article on May 1, for instance, profiled the role of EA labor recruiters who were said to be bringing in new drivers "from the farms of Southern Illinois and Missouri and from the plantations of Kentucky." The paper emphasized that "a majority of those recruited from Kentucky are negroes."⁴² The next day, in the *Tribune* photospread on the strike entitled "Strike Breakers, One of Their Leaders, and the Disarming of the Men," only African Americans were pictured as strike breakers.⁴³ The following day, the paper's lead picture on the strike was captioned, "A Typical 'Black Beauty' from St Louis," and showed a young African-American teamster surrounded by three policemen who were presumably guarding him.⁴⁴ The *Tribune's* front page included a racist cartoon the next day depicting all of the strikebreakers as African Americans (see Fig. 1).⁴⁵ Under the title, "Black Drivers Have Fun," the paper ran an article that used racial stereotypes and satirized the dialect of African Americans to report on the replacement workers' day off.⁴⁶ The paper's coverage was not just racist, it was inaccurate. Throughout the strike the EA brought in more white replacement drivers than African Americans.⁴⁷

As the blacks' role received increasing attention from the press, African Americans became the targets of more violence. Black strikebreakers had reportedly been attacked as early as April 18, but this fit the general pattern of a violent strike in which both black and white non-union drivers were targeted by union pickets.⁴⁸ What changed in May

⁴⁰*Chicago Daily Tribune*, Apr. 8, 1, Apr. 9, 1, Apr. 11, 1905, 1.

⁴¹*Chicago Daily Tribune*, Apr. 28, 1; Apr. 29, 1; Apr. 30, 1905, 1; May 3, 1905, 1.

⁴²*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 1, 1905, 1.

⁴³*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 2, 1905, 3.

⁴⁴*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 3, 1905, 2.

⁴⁵*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 4, 1905, 1.

⁴⁶*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1905, 2. Nor was the *Tribune's* coverage necessarily the most egregious among Chicago's newspapers. According to the *Broad-Ax*, an African-American paper, William Randolph Hearst's *Chicago American* occupied that position. The *Broad-Ax* complained of the "hideous pictures, the shameless falsehoods and the reckless denunciations of Hearst's newspapers." Explaining the escalating violence of late May, the *Broad-Ax* asserted, "It follows that the blame of the so-called race war rests upon those white men [Teamster pickets] and still more on the yellow newspapers of William R. Hearst, which have for several weeks past systematically incited them to violence." *Broad-Ax*, May 27, 1905, 1.

⁴⁷R. R. Wright, Jr., "The Negro in Times of Industrial Unrest," *Charities* 15 (Oct. 7, 1905), 71-72.

⁴⁸Teamster strikes were always violent, probably because they involved control over public streets. In his report on a Teamsters strike in Indianapolis in 1914, investigator Luke Grant observed, "there was

The Chicago Daily Tribune.

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THURSDAY, MAY 4, 1905—SIXTEEN PAGES.

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FIG. 1.

was that members of the African American community in Chicago who were not involved in the strike became increasingly subject to attack.

The Chicago police led the way. Newspaper reports make it clear that, on May 2, the police who were assigned to guard the strikebreakers rioted in Chicago's black district. A fight between black replacement drivers and union supporters first drew the police to the district. The officers apparently took no actions against the union men, but instead focused their attention on the African Americans. As the *Tribune* reported, the event that triggered the police violence occurred when one of the African American bystanders, standing in a doorway, refused to clear out of the area, and then balked at handing over the handgun he was carrying. It took several officers to overpower the man, and in the wake of that struggle the police raided an adjacent saloon used by the black drivers. Soon the police began to riot in the surrounding area, apparently attacking and arresting anyone they encountered. Among those arrested was Dr H. S. Bell, clubbed and subdued simply for being an African American. Describing the police rampage in this black neighborhood, the *Tribune* reported that, "The negroes took refuge in stairways and stores from the onslaught of the police. Some of them were forced to run the gantlet of dozens of officers before they found a place of safety."⁴⁹

According to African Americans, this incident was only part of a larger pattern of racial hostility on the part of the Chicago police. The black newspaper, *Broad-Ax*, asserted, "The majority of the policemen in what is called the 'Black District,' for some cause or other, think they have no higher mission to perform than to arrest all colored

Footnote 48 continued

no doubt some violence attempted, as there always is in a teamsters' strike which must be fought out in the public streets." Report from Luke Grant, Mar. 18, 1914, File 0803, U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, microfilm, Reel 15. John R. Commons observed the same pattern. "Actual or expected violence is looked upon by employers and teamsters as a matter of course." Commons, "Teamsters of Chicago," 56-57.

⁴⁹ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 3, 1905, 2.

men with fire-arms and to permit white men to go heavily armed, so that they can beat up and shoot the colored people down like Jack Rabbits.”⁵⁰ In late May, black community leaders complained to the mayor about how the police urged strikers and their sympathizers to attack black wagon drivers. According to these leaders, when the police spotted a strike sympathizer holding a bag full of rocks at the side of the street, officers admonished them not to throw at the white drivers, but “to wait and throw them at the smoked meat.”⁵¹ By early May the presence of black strikebreakers had drawn hostility from both the newspapers and the police of Chicago and both institutions apparently encouraged a greater degree of racial animosity.

Another group in Chicago also seemed to want to heighten racial tensions. Some observers saw the increasingly visible role being assigned to black strikebreakers as part of a plan by the EA to stir up racial violence and use the resulting disorder as a justification for calling in the state militia. The arrival of state troops, it was believed, would quickly end the strike. While the police never could or would effectively clear the streets of strike sympathizers, it was believed that the militia would. With the streets cleared, the strike would be broken, and the union defeated.⁵² Assistant Chief of Police Scheuttler voiced his suspicion of the EA’s motives on May 5. The previous day, the EA had sent a caravan of 14 coal wagons, empty of coal, but each one containing from three to six blacks, on a slow, circuitous route through downtown Chicago. The caravan had stopped for no apparent reason in front of City Hall at 3.30 in the afternoon and it was kept there for the next hour. Scheuttler suggested that the EA had been hoping to create a riot. “There was no possible excuse for parading those empty wagons and keeping them so long on such a prominent corner.” He explained, “Their presence was bound to act as a temptation for disorder.”⁵³

Similar suspicions were voiced by elements within the African American community. The *Broad-Ax* observed early in the strike that many of the strike-bound firms, like Marshall Field and Company, had always refused to hire African American workers in any capacity but now did as scabs. Even during the strike, these firms chose not to recruit replacement workers from among Chicago’s black community, but instead brought men in “from the rural districts of the South who are like a fish out of water or a wild horse in a city like Chicago.”⁵⁴ An article in *The Voice of the Negro* reported that the recruiting agents hired by the EA had fanned out through Kentucky and other Southern states looking for replacement drivers with “special instructions to employ colored men.” The agents offered prospective recruits \$2.50 a day for driving a wagon in Chicago, a sizeable wage at the time, and told them nothing about the ongoing labor dispute. According to *The Voice of the Negro*, barely a third of the men had heard anything about the strike. “They were not from that class of colored people who read the newspapers; consequently they felt that they were going to a poor working man’s paradise.”⁵⁵ As the *Broad-Ax* saw it, the EA had gone out of its way to recruit black men in order to foster potentially explosive race hatred. When, later on, some of the strike-bound firms began to object to the use of African Americans as special policemen, the *Broad-Ax* vented some its accumulated anger. “There is no desire on our part

⁵⁰*Broad-Ax*, May 27, 1905, 1.

⁵¹*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 27, 1905, 2.

⁵²The reform journal, the *Public*, argued the employers sought to crush the union and to embarrass the newly elected reform mayor of Chicago, Edward F. Dunne. *Public* 8 (May 6, 1905), 65–68.

⁵³*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 5, 1905, 1.

⁵⁴*Broad-Ax*, May 6, 1905, 1.

⁵⁵“The Chicago Strike,” *Voice of the Negro* 2 (June 1905), 374–376.

to discourage any citizen from doing his duty in times of trouble but for our part we would prefer to be shot down like a common traitor rather than permit ourself to raise our little finger to protect the property of any citizen or individual who are always ready and willing to foster and manufacture race prejudice at the expense of any race of people.”⁵⁶

If indeed the EA had sought to heighten racial tensions, its plan succeeded. On May 4, the day after the police riot, African Americans not involved in the strike were being attacked by whites in the working-class districts of the city. Though newspapers prefaced these reports with phrases like “mistaking him for a non-union driver,” white racial antipathy against blacks had clearly been aroused. On May 4, union teamsters on a streetcar attacked a black dishwasher on his way home from work. The white assailants beat and kicked the man, finally knocking his head through the streetcar’s window and then throwing him off the train. As the wounded man lay on the ground, the police who came to his assistance had to guard him from a hostile crowd that jeered comments like, “That’s what they will all get.” After May 4, these attacks became daily events. Black Teamster Union members, like the rest of the African American community, faced assaults from hostile whites. On May 8, William O’Day, a black Teamster member driving his wagon for an employer not involved in the strike, found himself under attack from a white union sympathizer named Albert Enders. O’Day reportedly told Enders that no strike had been called against his employer. According to the newspaper, “Enders said that being a ‘nigger’ he deserved a beating anyway and continued throwing missiles.”⁵⁷

Racial tensions exploded after two shooting incidents in late May. Blacks making their way home from work at the strike-bound Peabody Coal yards had to pass through a hostile neighborhood where white teamsters, along with their neighbors and their children, would harass and attack them. On May 18, two African American replacement drivers found themselves harried by a group of neighborhood children in this district. One of the drivers fired a shot that killed an eight-year-old, white neighborhood boy named Enoch Carlson. It now became dangerous for any African Americans to travel through those working-class districts in Chicago where most of the white Teamsters lived. Tensions heightened further after another shooting occurred in the same area later that week, and by Sunday the emotions had boiled over into a full-scale race riot. Before the rioting had ended on May 22, two deaths had occurred and over a dozen people had suffered serious injuries. Historian Allan Spear describes the episode as “the bloodiest racial conflict in the city before the riot of 1919.”⁵⁸

In their studies, William Tuttle and Richard Leone both focused on these violent episodes. For Tuttle they indicated the vast racial divide that existed among Chicago’s workers and to Leone they explained why the early Teamsters Union excluded blacks.⁵⁹ Tuttle and Leone’s assessments clearly have some merit. No one can read the daily

⁵⁶The newspaper’s denunciation of the EA did not preclude it from expressing similar resentment towards the Teamsters Union, which it held partly responsible for the violence inflicted on African Americans in the city during the strike. As the journal noted, “In the past our sympathies have been with the striking teamsters, but as long as they and their followers will persist in waging an unholy warfare upon those who have never harmed them in the slightest degree, it is time to call a halt and it is the duty of all law abiding citizens to array themselves on the side of law and order.” Both this quotation and the one in the text are from the *Broad-Ax*, June 3, 1905, 1.

⁵⁷*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1905, 2.

⁵⁸*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 17, 1, May 19, 1, May 21, 1, May 22, 1905, 1, May 23, 1905, 2. Spear’s description is quoted in Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 123.

⁵⁹Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 120–123; Leone, *Negro in the Trucking Industry*, 20–21.

news reports of the strike and not see clear evidence of white racial animosity being generalized from the non-union drivers onto the African American population at large. Not all the acts of violence may have been perpetrated by Teamster members, but clearly many of them were. Still it seems to me that the conclusions of Leone and Tuttle go too far. Even after all of the violence and hatred stirred up by the strike, some signs continued to surface that members of the union, and the leadership, never accepted the equation that blacks were a “scab race.”

If one closely reviews the actions and rhetoric of Teamster members and their leadership during this strike, in light of the rhetoric and actions of the other major institutions in Chicago—the *Chicago Tribune*, police, and employers—then a new element in this strike history emerges. Unlike those institutions, the Teamsters Union sought to avoid having the strike center on race hatred. Instead of the union picturing blacks as an enemy of the white working class, a “scab race,” union leaders depicted blacks as victims while at the same time criticizing the employers for trying to heighten racial tensions. Some evidence exists to suggest that the leadership’s efforts to allay racial tensions within the Teamsters Union may have enjoyed a measure of success.

Teamster Union leaders resisted picturing the conflict in racial terms. Only one clear reference to race can be found attributed to the leader of strike, Teamster president Cornelius Shea. The newspapers quoted him telling the lawyer representing the EA, “You have Negroes in here to fight us and we answer that we have the right to attack them wherever.”⁶⁰ There is some reason to suspect that unsympathetic newspapers may have misquoted Shea in this episode. As a union leader under a court injunction to abjure the use of violence, it would make no sense for Shea publicly to threaten such violence before a group of attorneys working for the EA. In fact, such a statement, if made, should have landed him in jail for contempt. Moreover, before and after the strike, Shea always argued against racial prejudice.⁶¹ It is not that Teamster leaders never expressed racial prejudice, but they did seek to dampen rising racial tensions. This mix of bias and concern can be seen in the words of Steven Sumner, one of the assigned leaders of the union’s pickets, who told a mass meeting of the Chicago Federation of Labor, “It isn’t the little black fellows who are brought into the city to take our places that are our worst enemy; its men like Marshall Field, and [referring to two other employers] John Shedd, and Robert Thorne.”⁶²

In the strikers’ newspaper, the *Daily Labor Bulletin*, replacement drivers, always referred to as “scabs,” were denigrated, but unlike the *Chicago Tribune*, the labor paper avoided picturing the dispute in racial terms. There were no racist cartoons, pictures, or terms used. Replacement drivers were generally described as coming from “slums and levees of St Louis and other cities.” The paper made it clear, however, that scabs of all races fit this description: “They were a sorry looking lot.”⁶³ The blacks brought in from the South, like the whites used for the same purpose, were deemed to be “of questionable character” because they came “from the slums of many cities.” And the paper noted with pride that, in Chicago, African Americans neither fit this description, nor had they sided with the employers. Commenting when the EA opposed any further use of blacks for police duty, the *Daily Labor Bulletin*, asked, “Why this change? Is it

⁶⁰*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 5, 1905, 1.

⁶¹Regarding the injunction, see *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1905, 1. Shea’s attitudes opposing racial prejudice appear in: *Proceedings of 1903 IBT Convention*, 165, and *Proceedings of 1907 IBT Convention*, 116–117.

⁶²*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1905, 1.

⁶³*Daily Labor Bulletin*, May 24, 1905, 1.

because the Chicago negro, the respectable negro, cannot be used for the purposes the Employers' Association desires to use them? Is it because his character is of too high a standard?"⁶⁴

The union's official journal, the *Magazine of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, also pushed hard against the rising tide of racial hostility. In the *Magazine's* June editorial section, the leadership asserted, "We do not wish to have our members consider the colored strike breaker is any worse or any different from the white man who deliberately takes another workman's place when he is on strike to uphold a principle or to better his working conditions." The editorial went on to observe that, "A great many of our Local Unions throughout the country are composed of colored teamsters, and in other cities colored and white teamsters belong to the same Local Union and share whatever benefit might be derived from organization." Concluding that "this is as it should be," the union's leaders reminded their members of the loyalty of colored teamsters who belonged to the union.⁶⁵

This does not mean that Chicago union leaders never used racist imagery. In their efforts to condemn the strikebreakers, at least one union appeal in the *Bulletin* did end up playing on racial biases. An "Appeal to the Public" from the president of Department Store Drivers, George Reitz, urged people not to accept home deliveries from black replacement drivers. Reitz asserted, "As you are undoubtedly well aware the class of men who are continuously loafing at this time of year are men who are not anxious to work, and who brought down the wrath of the people of the southern cities upon the negro." These were not men, Reitz warned, to let into your home to make a delivery. "Men of this stamp have outraged every law of decency in their southern homes, and we believe that we are speaking the truth when we say the women and children of Chicago will not allow men of this character to deliver parcels or merchandise from these department stores."⁶⁶

However, Reitz quickly tried to disavow seeing the strike in racial terms. He also wrote, "Bear in mind that no colored prejudice enters into the controversy, as the officials of various local unions of teamsters of Chicago are colored men. We respect the right of all men, be he white or black, to obtain employment and we work cheerfully hand in hand with the respectable man regardless of color."⁶⁷ Reitz's letter shows the racism that Tuttle described, but it also reveals Reitz, a Teamster leader whose very local would be destroyed in the strike, pulling back from calling blacks a "scab race."

The *Bulletin's* most frequent reference to race came when it charged the employers with seeking to fan racial animosities. "The importation of the negro strikebreakers was morally a criminal action," the paper charged at one point. "The state of feeling throughout the country is such that to stir up race antagonism at this time can be called by no other term than fiendish."⁶⁸ Union officials, in effect, were saying that racial hostility was wrong. And unlike Samuel Gompers, who had by this time come to blame African Americans as a race for allowing themselves to be used by employers, the printed view expressed by the Chicago Teamsters was that blacks, along with whites, were both victims of the employers' efforts to create disorder.⁶⁹

⁶⁴*Daily Labor Bulletin*, May 29, 1905, 3.

⁶⁵*International Teamster* (then known as the *Magazine of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters*) 2 (June 1905), 14.

⁶⁶*Daily Labor Bulletin*, May 26, 1905, 1.

⁶⁷*Daily Labor Bulletin*, May 26, 1905, 2.

⁶⁸*Daily Labor Bulletin*, May 24, 5, May 25, 4.

⁶⁹Samuel Gompers, "Trade Union Attitude Toward Colored Workers," an editorial by Gompers that appeared in the *American Federationist* in April 1901, reprinted in *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 5, 342-346.

Some evidence suggests that the efforts of Teamster leaders had an impact on the rank and file. While racial lines hardened in Chicago during the strike, the Teamsters in that city remained a biracial union where blacks were welcomed as members and officers. Part of the reason racial tensions never tore apart this union was that, although many of the replacement drivers were African Americans, the divisions between strikers and their replacements had never really followed racial lines. Most of the non-union replacement drivers were white, and many of the union teamsters were black. All told some 2000 blacks belonged to the Teamsters in Chicago.⁷⁰ The newspapers never highlighted this aspect, but here and there one can find references to black union pickets struggling alongside their fellow white union members. On July 3, for instance, almost three months into the strike, a black union coal driver named N. D. Fuller rebuked a black replacement driver, calling him a “nigger.” When a fight broke out and the police tried to arrest Fuller, other nearby Teamster members jumped into the fray in an effort to help him escape.⁷¹

When the strike petered out to a draw by the end of July, no evidence of any new heightened level of discrimination appeared within the politics or policy of the Teamsters Union. The black recording secretary of the Chicago Coal Drivers represented his local at the union’s annual convention in mid-August.⁷² His presence at the convention meant that, during the bitter heart of the strike in June, a majority of members in his local had voted to send a black teamster to represent them.⁷³ At that convention, the union delegates gathered for most of a week in Philadelphia and heatedly debated the course of the Chicago strike, but no one raised the issue of race with regard to the strike or in any other context at the convention. Convention debates centered on the question of whether or not the union’s leadership had followed the proper procedure in calling the strike. And behind that issue lay rumors that the strike had actually been called because of a bribe paid to certain union leaders, among them the president of the Teamsters, Shea.⁷⁴

In a close vote, Shea won reelection for another year in office.⁷⁵ His campaign had been pushed by a group of delegates who functioned like a political party at the convention; these delegates had called their group “the Vaseline Club.” When Shea posed for a picture with the members of this club, he was seated between two black delegates. Their positioning in the center of the photo, nearest Shea, the official who had led the strike of 1905, seems to discount any automatic connection between the course of the strike and a policy of exclusion and discrimination within the union.⁷⁶

⁷⁰*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1905, 1; Wright, “Negro in Times of Industrial Unrest,” 71–72.

⁷¹*Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 4, 1905, 3.

⁷²Wright, “Negro in Times of Industrial Unrest,” 72.

⁷³*Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 12, 1905, 1.

⁷⁴Rumors and accusations that the strike had been called after certain unnamed parties paid bribes to Teamsters president Shea and other union leaders emerged in mid-April. The motives and identity of the alleged bribe payer varied. Debates on the history of the strike occurred on the third day of the convention; see *Proceedings of 1905 IBT Convention*, 13–59. Newspaper coverage of this contentious debate includes: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 12, 1905, 2; *Inter-Ocean*, Aug. 13, 1905, 1; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Aug. 12, 1905, 1. The first accounts of an alleged bribe being involved in the decision to call the strike are in: *Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 3, April 17, 3.

⁷⁵*Proceedings of 1905 IBT Convention*, 90–95.

⁷⁶Descriptions of the role of the Vaseline Club can be found in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 13, 1905, 2; and in “Teamsters’ Weekly Review,” *Michigan Union Advocate*, Sept. 8, 1905, 3. The photo entitled “Picture of the So-Called Vaseline Club” is in the *International Teamster* (then known as the *Magazine of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters* 2 (Oct. 1905), on the inside cover.

BLACKS IN THE TEAMSTERS AFTER THE STRIKE OF 1905: ORGANIZING

Although the IBT chose at its formation to organize African Americans, and the union's leadership resisted being decoyed by racism during the 1905 strike, the place of African Americans in the Teamsters after that strike remains to be clarified. In Leone's book, the union was depicted as closing its doors to black members after 1905. Because large numbers of black teamsters were used as replacement drivers in 1905, Leone suggested, blacks had become "prototyped" as strikebreakers. The actual history of the union's policy towards African Americans differs quite sharply from that assumption. In fact, the union made determined efforts to organize African Americans. The status of blacks who joined the union was complex, and varied according to local conditions, but pragmatic cooperation, not simply exclusion or control, best describes the policy pursued by white union leaders.

A year after the end of the strike in 1905, the leadership of the Teamsters Union explained how they had reacted to the use of black teamsters as strikebreakers in Chicago. The strike's history had led them to the conclusion that the union needed to increase its efforts to bring Southern blacks into the union. And by the leaders' own account, they did bolster efforts. Writing in August 1906, the union's leaders claimed successes in Louisville, New Orleans and several other Southern cities. They argued that "colored teamsters" had proven to be good union members. Once they received an education on union principles, blacks could be organized in "powerful local unions ... when these men know the benefits to be derived from organization and when they realize what the trade union movement means, they are just as loyal members as any." The result of organizing "colored teamsters," the leadership asserted, would be good for them and for the union as a whole acting as "a preventive against their leaving their homes for the purpose of taking the places of strikers in other cities."⁷⁷

In public statements, the union's leadership urged that black teamsters be organized as full partners in the union's cause. At the union's 1907 convention, president Shea told the assembled delegates, "We want to be fair and right; we want the colored man of the South to know that he has friends; that he will be treated as a man in these conventions and in our organization, and that he will get equal rights with every other man when he joins us."⁷⁸ One delegate to the 1906 convention appeared to suggest that the union would have to initiate a special benefits program to attract Southern blacks as members. But Emmett Flood, the union's organizer who had been active in Louisville, responded, "If you show the colored man in the South that the International Union is behind him and that it will help him educate his children and prevent his wife from looking into a washtub every day in the week, you can organize him without any death benefit."⁷⁹

⁷⁷Again in contrast to Gompers's stated views at the same time, Teamster leaders expressed far more understanding of the rationale behind blacks who served as strikebreakers. One editorial by the leadership observed: "If no effort is made to organize these men and they are left to the mercy of unscrupulous employers, whose only aim is to maintain class hatred for the purpose of using one portion of workmen against the other, it is not reasonable to suppose that these men will voluntarily refuse to take our places in time of trouble, but by making an effort to organize them, showing them what organization will do for them and advancing reasons why they should not take the places vacated by other drivers, there can be no question but that the colored teamsters of the South will become as much of a power in their locality as the drivers in all other cities where they are organized." "Colored Teamsters," *International Teamster* (then titled the *Teamster*) 3 (Aug. 1906), 25–26.

⁷⁸*Proceedings of 1907 IBT Convention*, 116–117.

⁷⁹The delegate had proposed a program of death benefits. From the union documents, it seems apparent that many Southern locals composed of African Americans had special locally based programs to ensure benefits to members at time of death. *Proceedings of 1906 IBT Convention*, 231–233.

Privately, the IBT's officers also encouraged efforts to bring blacks into the union. The correspondence between the union's organizers and the general secretary-treasurer contain numerous references to their efforts to bring in African American drivers as members. This was true not just in the South, but in the Midwest, border states like Missouri, and in East Coast cities like Philadelphia.⁸⁰ In December 1912, for instance, William H. Ashton, the union's mid-Atlantic organizer, began to write to the national headquarters about his organizing efforts in Philadelphia. Ashton put a great deal of effort into organizing the drivers working for coal hauling and lumber hauling firms, both areas in Philadelphia where there were a lot of black drivers. He eventually created Local 470 in that city, for a time the fourth largest local in the Teamsters, and an integrated organization that elected at least one black local union officer.⁸¹

This internal union correspondence makes it clear that Teamster organizers approached organizing black teamsters as an opportunity to build up membership and strengthen their locals, not as something to be avoided in the name of racial exclusion. For instance, Daniel Murphy, the union's organizer in St Louis, wrote to headquarters in 1916 about how a recent job action had allowed him to bring a group of black drivers back into the union. "We expect to get every one of those Negro garbage men and all the others that were members into our City Teamsters Union here. We have demonstrated to the garbage men what organized labor can do for them, and they are all in favor of joining our organization, as they can readily see the benefits to be derived from the same."⁸²

The national leadership even expressed a willingness to organize black drivers in the South notwithstanding hostility from the white community. In November 1916, union organizer Patrick McGill wrote general secretary-treasurer Hughes about his organizing trip to Memphis. The majority of that city's teamsters were African Americans, and McGill noted that he had already begun to meet with the black drivers. He was warned, he said, "by some of the white drivers that the feeling is against the Negro in the line of organizing them but that will cut no figure with me if I can get the colored man to organize I will." Writing back from the national headquarters, Hughes urged McGill to focus his efforts on the black drivers in spite of the pressure. "Regardless of what they may think in that city," Hughes wrote, "you proceed to organize the negro if such is possible. It seems to me that we have never been able to organize any one, but a small union of soda water drivers down there and I believe that if they do not want to organize that we had better start with the colored men and see if an organization cannot be formed."⁸³

The result of these attitudes was that the Teamsters Union had a significantly large proportion of black members. No firm racial breakdown of the Teamsters membership

⁸⁰Letters that make specific reference to efforts to organize African Americans include: George W. Briggs to Thomas Hughes, Nov. 18, 1910; Series I, Box 4, MSS 9, IBT Papers; all of the correspondence with union officials is in Series I of the papers. Other letters include: John L. Devering to Thomas Hughes, June 6, 1915; June 21, 1915; June 30, 1915; and July 4, 1915; Jan. 31, 1926, located in Box 26, IBT Papers; Thomas Hughes to Daniel Tobin, Aug. 12, 1911, Box 33; Daniel Murphy to Daniel Tobin, Dec. 24, 1914; July 3, 1916; and July 6, 1916, Box 38, all in IBT Papers.

⁸¹Ashton's formal title was organizer. For a sense of his efforts to organize African Americans, see the letters from him to general secretary-treasurer Thomas Hughes, Dec. 23, 1912; Jan. 19, 1913; Feb. 15, 1913; Dec. 3, 1913; Sept. 5, 1914; June 23, 1915; May 25, 1916; May 31, 1916; Oct. 31, 1916; Aug. 10, 1920; and Aug. 19, 1920, in Boxes 1-2, IBT Papers.

⁸²Daniel Murphy to Daniel Tobin, July 6, 1916, Box 38, IBT Papers.

⁸³Patrick McGill to Thomas Hughes, Nov. 26, 1910, and Thomas Hughes to Patrick McGill, Feb. 2, 1911, Box 37, IBT Papers.

from this period exists, but one estimate made in 1912 said that the union may have had as many as 6000 black members. This was far less than what the same estimate attributed to the United Mine Workers, who were said to have 40,000 black union members. Given that the total membership of the Teamsters in 1912 was just over 42,000, however, blacks made up probably a seventh of the membership.⁸⁴

BLACK TEAMSTERS AFTER THE STRIKE OF 1905: TREATMENT AS MEMBERS—INTEGRATION, SEGREGATION, EQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

To say that the union sought to organize African Americans, and that they apparently did organize several thousand of them, still leaves open the question of how these new members were treated in an organization that was led at the national level by white unionists. Other AFL unions also accepted African Americans as members, but then segregated them into a special sort of second-class membership. It is therefore important to see how blacks fared as members and as officers in the IBT. What sort of locals did they belong to? And, what status did they enjoy as members and leaders in the union's governmental structure?

The locals that black teamsters were organized into were sometimes integrated and at other times, especially in the South, segregated. As noted above, no hard statistics exist on the nature of these patterns within the union. The IBT did not keep membership figures by race, and though some Southern locals were identified as "colored" on their charter, there was no master list published of local charter titles. As a historian studying how African Americans fared within these locals, therefore, one is forced to rely on a few examples where the racial content was described and other data that tend to be more impressionistic than statistical.

In the North there were integrated local unions. The Coal Teamsters in Chicago, as mentioned before, was a local with about a quarter of its membership made up of African Americans and at least one officer who was black. Integration apparently remained common in that district. In 1922, the Chicago Commission on Race Relations included a quotation from a local Teamsters official in a section that began, "A number of interesting comments by members and officers of unions admitting Negroes

⁸⁴French Eugene Wolfe, *Admission to American Trade Unions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1912), 123–24; Robert D. Leiter, *The Teamsters Union: A Study of its Economic Impact* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), 33. An estimate made two decades later, and published by the National Urban League in 1930, would seem to contradict these figures, but that estimate is badly flawed. Ira De A. Reid, the director of that study, noted that the Teamsters were among a group of unions that published no membership figures based on race. Claiming to have canvassed an eighth of the membership in 1927, Reid found only 313 black members and so the final estimate of membership published was 313. If that canvass is credited, then the final estimate should have multiplied 313 by eight. But it seems unlikely that Reid, or his researchers, in fact did canvass an eighth of the then roughly 90,000 members of the Teamsters. Possibly, Reid meant his researchers contacted an eighth of the locals in the union, but even that would have required writing to or calling over 100 locals. Reid's study in fact makes reference to only three individual local unions and their particular membership figures. In addition, Reid's study also observes that in New York and Chicago alone there was a combined total of 22,000 black union members; in both cities the Teamsters Union was described as being in the group of labor organizations that accepted blacks and "have Negro memberships of some size." In Philadelphia, which had 5000 black union members, Reid's study found the Teamsters to have the fourth largest number of black union members, just behind the laborers, who had 1200. The apparent contradiction between the national estimate and the surveys of individual cities went unexplained. Ira De A. Reid, *Negro Membership in American Labor Unions* (1930; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 5, 52, 102, 130–138.

on equal terms with whites were volunteered, either in interviews or correspondence.” The actual quotation from the Teamsters official read, “We have had one Negro holding office as trustee for several years. So feeling is brotherly.”⁸⁵

Anecdotal evidence indicates that many other integrated locals existed in the North. In New York City, Mary White Ovington found 1358 black union members in the entire city in 1910, and the Teamsters Union with 400 black members constituted the single most open labor organization there.⁸⁶ Writing a few years earlier, James S. Wallace, an African American union officer in the Pavers and Rammersmen, listed the Teamsters as among the city’s labor organizations that would accept African Americans on an equal basis with whites.⁸⁷ Integrated locals, such as Philadelphia’s Local 470, also existed. In St Louis, internal union correspondence indicates that two-thirds of the members of Local 608 were black, as were two of the union’s three officers. In 1923, Local 608 merged with the Ice Drivers Local 606. The membership of both locals agreed to this merger, which again created an integrated local.⁸⁸

In the South, however, segregation was clearly the rule. The Teamsters had an active organization in New Orleans, for instance, but all of the Teamsters there were placed into separate white and black locals. Local 270 in New Orleans was thus officially titled Colored Transfer and Moving Drivers and Helpers, and Warehousemen.⁸⁹ The General Executive Board of the national union in 1908 had reaffirmed its policy of granting separate charters.⁹⁰

Racial discrimination led to segregated locals, but recent scholarship has also pointed out ways in which African Americans effectively used such locals to their advantage. Eric Arnesen and Earl Lewis have both written about cases in which Southern black workers may have actually preferred such locals. Given the white supremacist order in the South, integrated locals often left black members largely voiceless regarding how their own local union was run. Whites took all the officer positions, and blacks found themselves excluded from important decisions in areas such as wage negotiations; a separate local, in which African-American members held office and deliberated on the crucial decisions that had to be made, offered meaningful autonomy and power to black workers. Arnesen notes that African-American union members objected to a

⁸⁵Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 416–417.

⁸⁶Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1911), 96–98. A few years earlier, in 1906, Ovington reported on a similar survey. Then she found that out of a total working black male population of 27,399, a total of 1388 could be found who belonged to unions. Of this group the largest number belonged to the Asphalt Workers, who had 320 black members. The second largest contingent belonged to the Teamsters Union, which was found to have 300 African American members in the city. Mary White Ovington, “The Negro in the Trades Unions in New York,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 27 (May 1906), 551–558.

⁸⁷Letter from James S. Wallace to the *New York Age*, Aug. 30, 1906, excerpt reprinted in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, v. 2, From the Reconstruction Era to 1910* (1951; reprint, Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1972), 843–844.

⁸⁸John Devering to Thomas Hughes, Mar. 28, 1923, Box 26; Daniel Murphy to Thomas Hughes, Mar. 11, 1915, Daniel Murphy to Daniel Tobin, Mar. 19, 1923, Box 38, IBT Papers.

⁸⁹Frank Prohl to Thomas Hughes, July 16, 1938, in Local 270’s Correspondence File, Series II, Box 7, IBT Papers.

⁹⁰The printed minutes of the board’s meeting refer to a case in Galveston, Texas, and describe the general secretary–treasurer of the IBT asking for and receiving a ruling that the union would issue separate charters “to colored teamsters, where the white union refused to organize the colored men separately or take them into their local.” “Proceedings of the Executive Board on October 6, 1908,” *The International Teamsters* 6 (Nov. 1908), 12.

variety of forms of discrimination and exclusion on the part of unions, but not segregation *per se*.⁹¹

The pattern of segregated locals among Teamsters in New Orleans seems to confirm this self-segregation. In trades such as the carriage drivers or the cotton teamsters, blacks and whites had separate locals. Still black members belonging to the segregated locals received the same wages as their white counterparts. In negotiations with employers, black union leaders took an active role, and, at critical stages in collective bargaining, the white and black locals held joint meetings. Black Teamster leaders described the relationship between the locals in terms of a kind of partnership. E. A. Gorman, a black business agent in a segregated local, explained at the convention in 1907 how his local worked with its all-white counterpart: "Local 63 works nothing but white men. That is all right, but if they want to draw their men out they have to come and consult us. If we have colored men in the barn, the same action is taken in regard to them." A white Teamster official from New Orleans added, "I claim there is not a colored local in the South where colored men and white men do not go together to the office [of the employer]." Describing the relationship of his own white carriage drivers' local to that of Gorman's colored carriage drivers, the official explained, "There are two charters of colored and white carriage drivers, and we all go together to the employers." Gorman affirmed this description. "I belong to Local 479, and whenever we have a grievance of any kind nothing can be done without bringing us in. We are not denied that right. Whenever we have a grievance we have a right to go with Local 63 [the white carriage drivers] to settle it."⁹²

Such partnership arrangements between segregated white and black locals, however, did not always exist. Some white locals in the South, the Brewery Drivers in New Orleans, for instance, did strive to ban black drivers from receiving work.⁹³ In some other cities, white and black locals coexisted as bitter rivals.⁹⁴

Still leaders of the national union looked with respect at these black locals and the members who belonged to them. In 1907, Shea, the national president of the Teamsters, reminded delegates at the union convention of the impressive victory that the colored cotton teamsters of New Orleans had won in a 1905 strike: "They won, and they are the best paid men in our organization south of Mason and Dixon's line." In a union where manliness was a high virtue, Shea praised this local by saying, "They have the courage of their convictions."⁹⁵

In private correspondence national leaders took a similarly respectful line. When general secretary-treasurer Hughes planned a visit to New Orleans in 1911, he wrote ahead to both the white and the black locals of the carriage drivers; he wanted to be sure to visit the "colored carriage drivers," with whom he had worked in a strike in 1905, when he developed great respect for them. His decision to visit the local became

⁹¹Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 15–17, 46–60; Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labor," 58–62, 66–69; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans*, 74–99.

⁹²This exchange occurs in *Proceedings of 1907 IBT Convention*, 230–232. For a description of the joint organizing meeting, see letters from Patrick McGill to Thomas Hughes, Sept. 17, 1910 and Oct. 24, 1910, in Box 37, IBT Papers.

⁹³Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, 191–192.

⁹⁴See, for instance, the case of Colored Local 492 and white Local 635 in Gulfport, Mississippi, described by the Committee on Appeals and Grievances, in *Proceedings of 1920 IBT Convention* (Fourth Day), 36–37.

⁹⁵*Proceedings of 1907 IBT Convention*, 230–231.

an issue when the Teamsters organizer for the area wrote to him that some of the white carriage drivers were criticizing him for it. These drivers, organizer McGill reported, "went so far as to say that you think more of the Nigger then you did of the white." Hughes wrote back to express his anger that his visit had become a subject of criticism and told McGill that he had decided to postpone the trip. But he sternly rebuked McGill, writing, "As far as me thinking more of the colored drivers than I do of the white, I do not believe that the people who mentioned this know what they are talking about. But between the two, will say, that so long as they are members of our organization in good standing I think just as much of the colored teamsters as I do of the white men." In fact as union members, he continued, he sometimes thought better of them. "The colored teamster in New Orleans has proven himself to be just as good at all times in cases of trouble and in many instances better than some of the white men in that city."⁹⁶

The national union made efforts to promote the role of black local union leaders in the affairs of the national organization. Before the union's 1912 convention, Hughes wrote to the union's organizer in New Orleans, now James Welch, that he wanted him to encourage specially the "colored Teamsters" to send a delegate to the proceedings.⁹⁷ In 1908 and 1910, delegates representing the black locals in New Orleans were appointed to prestigious convention committee posts.⁹⁸ And in June 1908, several months before the upcoming convention, the union's magazine printed a flattering profile of E. A. Gorman, a black local union officer in New Orleans, accompanied by a photograph of him.⁹⁹ Such profiles were generally reserved for the union's most prominent officers and the national leadership's most trusted allies.

Efforts to welcome black participation in the union did not change the fact that it remained a white dominated organization. African Americans must have clearly realized that fact and recognized the pragmatic motives of the white leaders for what they were—an effort to build a strong union, not tear down society's racial barriers. Still, as Stowers's optimistic speech in 1903 indicates, the union's need for black membership offered African Americans an opportunity for progress and improvement often missing in larger U.S. society at that time. They took the union's offer of fair treatment seriously and demanded that the organization make good on its claims.

Black Teamsters, for instance, urged the union to clean up the cases of discrimination that occurred at the local level. In 1908, Gorman served on the Constitution Committee during the regular Teamsters convention. Probably because of his influence, the Constitution Committee that year submitted a proposed change to the union's constitution that barred local unions from denying jobs to black Teamsters.¹⁰⁰ Instances of discrimination still continued after this rule went into effect. But so too did African American Teamsters continue to pressure the union to live up to its own

⁹⁶Thomas Hughes to James A. Welch, Jan. 20, 1911, Feb. 2, 1911, Box 44; Patrick McGill to Thomas Hughes, Jan. 31, 1911; Thomas Hughes to Patrick McGill, Feb. 2, 1911, Box 37, IBT Papers.

⁹⁷Thomas Hughes to James A. Welch, Sept. 18, 1912, Box 44, IBT Papers.

⁹⁸*Proceedings of 1908 IBT Convention*, 15; *Proceedings of 1910 IBT Convention*, 8.

⁹⁹"A Good Business Agent," *International Teamster* 5 (June 1908), 2.

¹⁰⁰The amendment to the constitution, drafted and pushed by the Committee on the Constitution which E. A. Gorman sat on in 1908, ended up becoming Section 88 of the IBT's Constitution. The new provision said that no local union could "draft a constitution or make a law which will prevent a member of any other local union in good standing from securing or retaining employment, nor shall the members of any local, either individually or collectively, prevent a member in good standing of any other local from securing or retaining employment in their jurisdiction." *Proceedings of the 1908 Convention, Sixth Day*, 5–6; *1908 Constitution and By-Laws*, 33.

language of fairness. In 1910, two years after the passage of this anti-discrimination clause, a black Teamsters local in Galveston complained that the white local in their city had the employers sign a contract committing them to hire only white Teamsters. Garfield Lapar, an African American Teamster representing his Galveston local, lectured the delegates at the 1910 Teamsters convention on the unfairness of this action. "I am a union man in good standing, a member of Local 210," he told them, "but I had to be discharged from my position." In the face of this blatant discrimination, Lapar warned, black members had no reason to remain loyal and the local was dissolving.¹⁰¹ Lapar's rebuke carried with it an implicit reminder to the union's white leaders: black members who felt betrayed by the organization would leave and become lower-waged competitors to the union drivers. The union's needs thus offered African American teamsters a tool with which to pressure the white majority in the union.

That leverage, however, was not always enough. The national union apparently did not effectively intervene in Galveston, and other instances of discrimination also went uncorrected.¹⁰² Nor were such instances confined solely to the Southern states. Historian Peter Gottlieb presents an example of this discrimination in Pittsburgh. According to him, during a strike against Kaufman's department store there in 1916, the store hired black delivery drivers, apparently for the first time. Department store drivers enjoyed a comparatively prestigious position in the hierarchy of jobs available to teamsters. After the strike the local white Teamsters, who would not accept blacks holding such jobs, successfully campaigned to have all of these black drivers fired.¹⁰³

Such cases indicate that the union might have done more to fight discrimination at the jobsite. The failure to do more in these areas seems connected to the racial prejudices that some of the national officers occasionally expressed regarding African Americans. General secretary-treasurer Thomas Hughes, as we have seen, maintained a high level of respect for black Teamsters as union members. Sometimes the regional organizers, however, voiced less positive opinions of African Americans. We have already seen how Patrick McGill, the organizer in New Orleans, would refer to blacks as "Niggers" and obliquely give Hughes a hard time about his apparent egalitarianism. Other organizers also let their prejudices occasionally show. Writing about a local led by black officers and experiencing financial trouble, John Devering, an organizer based in the Midwest, asserted, "They are like many colored men, they are all right, but they need a white leader."¹⁰⁴

Another important example of racial prejudice can be found in the writing of Daniel Tobin. Replacing Shea as president of the Teamsters in 1907, Tobin remained in office until 1952. His opinions on race matters were noticeably less progressive than those of his predecessor.¹⁰⁵ Tobin referred to African Americans living in the South as "shiftless" and, summing up his view of their worth as union members in 1928, he wrote, "Colored men are admitted to membership in this organization without discrimination, when working at our business, but they are pretty difficult to organize."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ *Proceedings of the 1910 IBT Convention, Fifth Day*, 15–16.

¹⁰² The grievance was referred to the General Executive Board. *Proceedings of the 1910 IBT Convention, Fifth Day*, 15–16. Regarding the IBT General Executive Board's inconclusive treatment of this grievance, see the Minutes of the GEB Meeting, on October 12, 1910, printed in *Proceedings of the 1912 IBT Convention, First Day*, 90–91. No other record of what happened to this grievance seems to exist.

¹⁰³ Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916–1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 151–152.

¹⁰⁴ John Devering to Thomas Hughes, Mar. 28, 1923, Box 26, IBT Papers.

¹⁰⁵ *Proceedings of 1907 IBT Convention*, 230–231.

¹⁰⁶ *International Teamster 25* (May 1928), 14.

Tobin's remarks highlight the fact that as time passed the initial promise of the IBT's efforts to organize black Teamsters, especially in the South, faded. In August 1906, the Teamsters official union journal had optimistically predicted that "by making an effort to organize them [black teamsters in the South], showing them what organization will do for them and advancing reasons why they should not take the places vacated by other drivers, there can be no question but that the colored Teamsters of the South will become as much a power in their locality as the drivers in all other cities where they are organized."¹⁰⁷ That moment of hope and enthusiasm passed and was replaced by the more begrudging attitude of Tobin in 1928. What happened to cause this change in the leadership's attitude?

Part of the problem had to do with the unwillingness of white Teamster leaders like Thomas Hughes, the IBT's general secretary-treasurer, to fully confront the racist social customs of the day. For instance, Hughes could order a white Teamster representative visiting Memphis to ignore local white protests and try to organize the black drivers there.¹⁰⁸ But, even as it must have become clear that a black organizer would be more effective in Memphis and other Southern cities, neither Hughes nor the other top national leaders would support hiring a black to work in such a position of authority in the South.¹⁰⁹ It apparently directly challenged their racial notions. Indeed, the Teamsters did not hire an African-American organizer to work in the South until the 1940s.¹¹⁰ Nor did they strongly intervene in local cases of racial injustice such as occurred in Galveston. Southern blacks would find little appeal in belonging to an organization that did not consistently offer them fair treatment. As the union's limited efforts in the South brought limited results, the leadership seemed to conclude that Southern blacks, because of their character, could not be successfully organized.¹¹¹

It also seems probable that the change in national leadership after 1907 contributed to the decline of the IBT's efforts to build a more interracial union. Cornelius Shea, the president of the Teamsters from 1903 to 1907, had experienced the Chicago strike of 1905 first hand. He had been the day to day leader of the striking drivers in that city from April to July that year.¹¹² He had seen the employers use imported black strikebreakers and he had apparently learned the dangerously divisive role that race could play in a union under attack. During his term of leadership the union's journal

¹⁰⁷"Colored Teamsters," *Teamsters* 3 (Aug. 1906), 26.

¹⁰⁸Thomas Hughes to Patrick McGill, Nov. 28, 1910, Box 37, IBT Papers.

¹⁰⁹For the decision not to hire a black organizer for the South, *Proceedings of 1907 IBT Convention*, 115–118. In contrast, the Carpenters Union began assigning black organizers to the South in 1902 and their efforts, according to Spero and Harris, led to the creation of 25 new locals. Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, 66; the Teamsters' leadership noted the success of the Carpenters' efforts themselves in the union's official journal, "Negro Unions," *The Teamsters*, 4 (Nov. 1906), 8. On the other hand, James Grossman's work on the 1919 union organizing drive in the Chicago stock yards suggests that simply hiring black organizers offered no guarantee of success in attracting African American members. James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 219–245.

¹¹⁰*International Teamster* 42 (Jan. 1945), 8.

¹¹¹The IBT's General Executive Board decided to stop funding a Southern organizer for the union in 1912. The minutes of the meeting where this decision was made reflect the leadership's belief that because previous efforts to organize in the South had not paid off, further expenditures were not justified. *Proceedings of 1912 IBT Convention, Reports of Officers*, 108. That decision should be viewed in the light of Tobin's statement that black Teamsters "are pretty difficult to organize." *International Teamster* 25 (May 1928), 14.

¹¹²*Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 7, 5, April 8, 1, April 26, 1, May 14, 1, May 20, 1, May 23, 1905, 1, June 28, 1905, 2, July 7, 5, July 20, 1.



FIG. 2. Daniel J. Tobin.

reminded the membership of the loyalty of black Teamsters and called for more efforts to organize them.¹¹³ His speeches at union conventions consistently made a case for organizing black drivers more effectively and treating them fairly once they joined the union.¹¹⁴

The atmosphere at the national headquarters changed dramatically in 1907 when Tobin became president. Tobin had not been present during the Chicago strike. To be sure, Tobin had weathered a very trying strike in his home town of Boston in 1907.¹¹⁵ A local employers' association that year made a strong effort to break the Boston Teamsters' organization.¹¹⁶ But in Boston black strikebreakers had not played a role. Indeed, race did not figure as a significant factor in anyone's account of the Boston strike.¹¹⁷ Thus Tobin inherited a tolerant racial policy, and he seems to have continued implementing it, but without the sense of urgency that Shea had brought to it. Without that urgency, and faced with the racist social customs dominant in the South, not to mention the racial assumptions of many Northern whites, the Teamsters never built the

¹¹³*International Teamster* (then known as the *Magazine of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters*) 2 (June 1905), 14; "Colored Teamsters," *International Teamster* (then known as *Teamsters*) 3 (Aug. 1906), 25.

¹¹⁴*Proceedings of 1903 IBT Convention*, 165; *Proceedings of 1906 IBT Convention*, 73; *Proceedings of 1907 IBT Convention*, 117–118.

¹¹⁵Newspaper coverage makes it apparent that Tobin was one of the key day-to-day leaders of the striking Boston Teamsters; see *Boston Herald*, April 3, 1, April 5, 2, April 12, 1, April 18, 1, April 28, 1.

¹¹⁶According to the *Boston Herald*, "The master teamsters claim this strike gives them the opportunity they have long been waiting for to free themselves from the labor union and establish the open shop." *Boston Herald*, April 4, 1907, 2. Also, *Boston Herald*, May 2, 1907, 2.

¹¹⁷The replacement drivers used in the Boston strike were recruited by an agency in New York City. Extensive coverage of the strike and the many incidents of violence that occurred along the picket lines failed to make any mention of the race or ethnicity of these replacement drivers. See the almost daily coverage in 1907 of the *Boston Herald*, April 6, 3, April 7, 14, April 8, 11, April 9, 2, April 10, 2, April 12, 1, April 14, 1, April 15, 1, April 18, 1, May 2, 1, May 3, 1, May 11, 3. For Tobin's own, later account of the strike and description of the strike breakers, see *International Teamster* 10 (Feb. 1913), 10–11.

strong organization in the South that they might have. The goals laid out in 1906 went unrealized.

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The final assessment of this union, however, should not be wholly negative. Although prejudice and discrimination occurred, it also remains true that the early Teamsters Union should be measured according to the standards of its time, and not the present, or some racially just, ideal society. One need not be an apologist for the union to note that, given the environment of racial prejudice that existed in the first two decades of the 20th century, the biases of these white union leaders are unsurprising. Compared to other union leaders in their day, compared to other contemporary unions, and compared to society at large, the Teamsters and their officers chose a fairly progressive stance. In the Teamsters Union, the leadership sought to organize African Americans and, once organized, the union granted African Americans full membership rights. Integrated locals existed in the North, and in those locals blacks were elected to union office and served as delegates to the union's conventions. In the South, African Americans assigned to segregated locals often developed a style of union activity that made them essentially full partners in the collective bargaining process with their white Teamster counterparts. Black Teamsters in New Orleans, though forced into separate locals, received the same wages as their white counterparts.

One could still note the real level of discrimination and prejudice that occurred in the early IBT and conclude that this was a racist organization. To do so, however, would be to greatly oversimplify a complex historical case. Also, such a conclusion would overlook the very real benefits that black teamsters gained from membership to this union. The coal drivers of Chicago for instance, a quarter of whom were black, worked at a hard and dirty job, but in 1902 the pay they received for this labor nearly doubled thanks to a new Teamsters contract.¹¹⁸

In that case, and in others, black Teamsters received concrete economic gains from their union membership, but they also received less tangible benefits. Like white Teamsters, they had the structure of work rules guaranteed by union contracts.¹¹⁹ Also, when they served as union officers, black Teamsters gained a position of power and some status, and the importance of this status, given the social climate of the time, should not be overlooked.¹²⁰

Indeed, white employers, exemplifying the bias of the times, occasionally complained of having to deal with black union leaders.¹²¹ For instance, while describing relations with employers in his St Louis district, organizer Daniel Murphy noted the strained nature of negotiations between the coal team owners and the integrated coal teamsters

¹¹⁸Commons, "The Teamsters of Chicago," 39–40.

¹¹⁹"By-laws of Teamsters Local No. 704," dated Jan. 1, 1904, with attached wage agreement dated May 1, 1902, in *Pamphlets in American History, Microfilm Collection*. Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹²⁰See, for example, the riots that occurred when Jack Johnson became the first black heavyweight boxing champion on July 4, 1910, described in Lewis, *In Their Own Interests*, 26–28. Regarding the rise of white racism in this period and its effects, see: Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought the Nadir*; George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: the Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 256–319.

¹²¹Logan, *Negro in American Thought and Life: Nadir*; and Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 53–65, 174–189.

local in his city. The two business agents of the local were both black and, Murphy noted, the employers “have said things to us who have assisted the Coal Teamsters on wage committees to lead us to believe that they do not like Negro Officers to do business with.”¹²²

This issue, finally, as much as any other highlights the mixture of bias, respect, and class solidarity that shaped the Teamster Union’s treatment of African Americans. Responding to Murphy’s letter about the hostility of the white employers, Tobin revealed both his latent racial prejudices and his sense that whites and blacks shared a contest against employers. Tobin told Murphy, “I realize quite clearly the position in which the coal teamsters are placed and I also have some understanding of the feeling on the part of the employers about being reluctant to deal with colored representatives.” Having admitted his own uneasiness about the power wielded by black Teamster officers, Tobin went on to state firmly that as long as black Teamsters were exploited like their white counterparts, then black officers should represent them. “The position taken by them [the employers], however, is unfair because colored men are hired on the job, they, the employers hire them. They have no objection to the colored men working their heads off in order that they may make money for them, so those employers should have no objection to colored men choosing colored men of their own class to speak for them when necessary.”¹²³ Far less than a cry for racial justice and equality, Tobin’s letter still embodies the spirit of measured respect and cooperation across racial lines that marked the early history of the Teamsters Union.

¹²²Daniel J. Murphy to Daniel Tobin, Mar. 19, 1923, in Box 38, IBT Papers.

¹²³Daniel Tobin to Daniel J. Murphy, Mar. 20, 1923, Box 38, IBT Papers.