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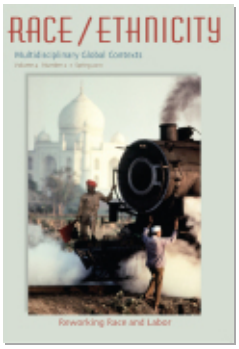

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Race, Immigration, and Contested Americanness: Black Nativism and the American Labor Movement, 1880–1930

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This article explores what is sometimes called Black Nativism: African American antipathy to immigrants between 1870 and 1930. It notes how several African American leaders of the 1920s and the New Deal era soon cultivated a more solidaristic posture toward immigrants and working-class members of ethnic groups.

Introduction: Immigration, Labor, and the Race Question

Much has been written in the last few decades about immigrant views of African Americans during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, especially as related to the place of immigrants in American society and to the idea of whiteness. Comparatively little, by contrast, has been written about the inverse, about African American anti-immigrant prejudices during this same period. Even so, the term *Black Nativism* has been coined as part of a study about the pre-Civil War era, and Black Nativism as it has evolved in recent times has been much more intensely studied (Rubin 1978; Schuck 1998; Steinberg 1991). Indeed, the literature on current tensions between African Americans and recent immigrants is vast and deep, but rarely includes references to the history behind these problems (Hammermesh and Bean 1998; Bean and Bell-Rose 1999). Race and labor both figured very much into addressing this question (Glenn 2002). Specifically, the question of what made a worker an American worker, entitled to not only employment but also union protection, was particularly contentious. This article, therefore, will

address the issue of Black Nativism during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era not merely as a phenomenon but also as a strategy for group advancement during a critical period in American labor and immigration history.

The essay deals with a fairly broad swath of history, encompassing a time frame that covers the decline of the Knights of Labor and rise of the American Federation of Labor to the period when the exclusive legitimacy of the AFL was seriously challenged within the American labor movement by the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. I will focus mainly (though not exclusively) on African American interactions with the AFL, because during this period the AFL was largely regarded, and indeed regarded itself, as *the* legitimate American labor movement. Although I will be giving some attention to the pre-AFL history, the paper's main focus will be the often virulently anti-immigrant rhetoric used by African American newspapers and thinkers during the period of AFL dominance, the AFL's responses (or nonresponses), and how these along with other factors influenced the changing relationship between African Americans and the American labor movement.

Unequal Labor Citizenship and the AFL

It is well known that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the struggle to organize increasingly proletarianized American workers was an uphill battle. The post-Civil War era saw multiple attempts at mass organizing, most famously with the Knights of Labor, known as much for its comparative racial openness as for its opposition to strikes and vision of a cooperative commonwealth. By the 1890s, however, the Knights' idealism had fallen out of favor in the wake of the failed eight-hour strikes in 1886, internal conflict, and the stepped-up official repression of the labor movement in the wake of the Haymarket riot, all of which led to the organization's collapse (Glenn 2002, 78–79). Into the breach stepped the rival American Federation of Labor, led by cigar maker Samuel Gompers, who emphasized organization along craft lines and a comparatively narrow focus on work issues popularly described as "pure and simple trade unionism." During a period of increased assaults on the rights and even legitimacy of organized labor, this narrow focus was considered the best way to organize. As a result, by the early twentieth century, the AFL was the only American labor group to enjoy widespread legitimacy to the point that its president, Samuel Gompers, was appointed to the business-backed National Civic Federation in 1900. There, he used his connections to further secure the AFL's respectability (Livesay 1998, 148–58).

This general acceptability, though, came at the price of excluding large groups of workers considered too difficult for unions to organize and too easy for employers to replace, most of whom were immigrant, female, unskilled, or some combination of these. While there were occasional AFL unions that were

essentially industrial, such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, semiskilled and unskilled workers were for the most part consigned to "federal locals," mixed quasi-industrial organizations. These federal locals were intended to be temporary arrangements, to eventually be divided up into the appropriate craft unions, a process that often ended up leaving the unskilled and unassignable without any union (United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America 1996, 16–17; Matles and Higgins 1995 [1974], 33–36) In addition, these federal unions were directly answerable to the AFL's international leadership and did not enjoy the same autonomy in their internal affairs as full-fledged locals. This second-class labor citizenship characterizing membership in these federal locals came to play a significant role in the debate over inclusion versus exclusion in the AFL's labor movement.

Although the AFL's anti-immigrant stances from this period and support for anti-immigrant legislation are now notorious, in practice, European immigrant workers had a lot easier time carving places for themselves in the AFL unions than did their African American counterparts. Despite the AFL proclaiming nondiscrimination and equal protection of all *American* workers in its very constitution, in practice it failed to clamp down on individual locals who discriminated, on the basis of respecting local autonomy. Many unions refused to organize black workers altogether; others restricted them to separate, subordinate, or auxiliary locals, and often denied them the benefits and protections offered to white workers. Because the status of labor citizenship was consciously or not tied to skilled labor, and because African American workers were largely excluded from the skilled trades by the very unions that controlled them, many more African American workers were limited to membership in the federal locals, which meant consignment to labor as well as racial second-class citizenship. The option of forming independent all-black locals was exercised comparatively rarely, because doing so raised the issue of dual unionism at a time when the AFL and its constituent unions jealously guarded occupational jurisdictions. Beyond the AFL, the far more inclusive Industrial Workers of the World, founded in 1905, proved too radical and unstable to provide a viable alternative to the AFL's mode of organizing (Arnesen 1993; Breitzer 2002; Jacobson 1968, 4–5; *New York Amsterdam News* 1929).

As a result, for African American workers strikebreaking was in a very real sense more than black and white, due to union discrimination. For many African Americans, serving as strikebreakers often offered them opportunities to work in the very skilled occupations that the unions denied them. Although not all strikebreakers were black and not all black workers were strikebreakers, as early as 1894, African Americans had become stereotyped as a "scab race." In the midst of many

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strikes, the black workers present were targeted and often attacked, whether or not they were the actual or even sole strikebreakers. Additionally, black institutions, from churches to the Urban League, did not initially encourage the support of labor unions and promoted middle-class aspirations over working-class militancy. As a result, the animosity between African Americans and union activists became a vicious circle, leaving at first little possibility for so much as attempting to organize as a preventative measure (Glenn 2002, 124, 134; Grossman 1989, 181–82, 218–19). A few all-black unions managed to maintain their existence under these circumstances, but the first major breakthrough of the acceptance of A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) into the AFL did not happen until 1928 (Arnesen 1993). In the interim, the gradual but significant shift to an organizational push for inclusion in the labor movement was largely aided by African American anti-immigrant rhetoric.

African-American Nativism and the AFL

Although the details of the African American nativist argument would shift over time, the nub of it remained essentially the same—that African Americans, unlike immigrants, were born in the United States and knew English and American customs, and therefore should be chosen over "foreigners" for good jobs and union membership (*Chicago Defender* 1918a and b; Bousfield 1918). This rhetoric began, in many ways, with the foremost African American thinker from the post-Reconstruction period—Booker T. Washington. Washington, who traditionally has been dismissed as a racial appeaser, was in fact more complex and in some ways more radical in thought than has been realized. When it came to the economic advancement of the African American, Washington was essentially pro-labor, but anti-union (Meier and Rudwick 1968) While it was easy for the followers of his more elit(ist) rival W.E.B. Du Bois to dismiss Washington's emphasis on vocational training, Washington understood that skilled labor was the key to making a decent living—and obtaining fully recognized American citizenship. Indeed, Washington's much quoted self-help leitmotif, "Cast down your buckets where you are," also exhorted (Southern) employers, "who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South," to instead choose African American workers on the basis of long-proven loyalty and past work to build and enrich the United States "without strikes and labor wars." These sentiments were obviously designed to appeal to employers who regarded unions as a threat and menace, but were still reluctant to employ African American workers, except on a strikebreaking basis, or as an excuse to pay lower wages (Cayton and Mitchell 1970 [1930], ix–x).

Nonetheless, throughout the late nineteenth century, instances of African American workers being brought in to re-

place white union workers in Northern industries were reported upon favorably in African American newspapers. For example, in 1892, the Springfield, Illinois, *State Capital* included a triumphant report from the *Pittsburgh Chronicle Tribune* that when African American workers replaced the white union men at an iron mill in question, "the success of the colored men securing work in the union mills fills them with triumphant feeling against [Amalgamated A]ssociation," adding, "they have been trying hard to get into the local mills since 1887" (*The State Capital* 1892). During this period, the strikebreaking that was repellent to organized labor was regarded as a necessary and even positive action by African American workers as long as the unions would not protect their interests on an equitable basis (Cayton and Mitchell 1970 [1930], ix).

Washington's chief post-Reconstruction rival, W.E.B. Du Bois, also spoke out in the early 1900s against union discrimination in the labor movement, albeit in a more nuanced way, and acknowledged varying degrees of discrimination. His cautious support for black workers forming their own labor unions paved the way for his backing of Randolph's later efforts to push for equality within the AFL, as well as for the genuinely interracial organizing efforts that were newsworthy even into the late 1920s (*The Crisis*, 1927a and b; Washington 1974). Although Du Bois also rebuked some African Americans for making alliances of convenience with white nativists who were just as determined to exclude blacks from their vision of Americanness, African Americans jumped on the anti-immigrant bandwagon even before the Civil War period, when black workers were placed in competition with Chinese workers as railroad-building and other laborers. The choice of employers to hire Chinese for their supposedly comparative docility and willingness to work for less was enough for African Americans to support anti-Chinese legislation in the late nineteenth century, even as white nativists showed no hesitation about lumping blacks together with the Chinese as "undesirables." On the face of it, these activities appeared to be efforts to identify with white native America in opposition to immigrants, and in some fairness, they were partially that. African American hostility toward Asians began with the building of the Union Pacific-Central Pacific rail lines when black workers were placed in competition with Chinese workers, and employers chose Chinese workers in the belief that they would more readily submit to management's orders and what were commonly called coolie wages (Lewis 2000, 19–20, 27–28, 62–63; Saxton 1971). Moreover, solidarity among peoples of color was not yet on the horizon during this period, and would have to be built consciously and deliberately over the next century (*New York Amsterdam News* 1927; Glenn 2002, 11–12, 39–40).

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Things became less simple, in any case, when African Americans began to also speak and write against the inclusion of Eu-

ropean immigrants, in an unprecedented assault on the comparatively privileged position of European immigrants. However, from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century, the racial privilege of European immigrants was a fairly shaky category, more rhetorical than real. It is important to remember that the idea of European immigrant "whiteness" was actually not a given during the peak period of scientific racialism and classification of every ethnic group according to a hierarchy of superior and inferior "races" (Higham 1994, 153–57). For this reason, whiteness had to be consciously cultivated, and a good part of doing so involved adopting white racism—a necessary strategy in immigrant eyes at the time when anti-black racism and anti-immigrant racialism were both at a peak. In this environment, the African American effort, therefore, to flip this tactic on its head and claim Americanness as a separate category for whiteness was audacious, though not without public foundation.

Although the preference of white employers for white workers was assumed to be a given, the circumstances under which black workers would be preferred were very much colored (as it were) by the threat of labor strife (Cayton and Mitchell 1970 [1930], ix–x). Indeed, the issue of race, immigration, and inclusion in the free labor force appeared in the pages of "mainstream" publications, even before the Civil War. For example, during the New York draft riots of 1863, over fighting to free African Americans who might then provide job competition, *Harper's Weekly* predicted that "employers who heretofore have preferred Irishmen to negroes are now going to take into consideration the riotous propensities of the former" and "extend a helping hand to the oppressed race" (*Harper's Weekly* 1863). By the turn of the twentieth century, as this prediction came to pass mainly as a tactic to break unions, pro-African American/anti-immigrant rhetoric became most frequently expressed in the pages of African American publications. It should be noted that while this rhetoric was employed by many publications, through the first three decades of the twentieth century it was most frequently and forcefully expressed in the pages of *The Chicago Defender*, which was long noted for its outspokenness among African American newspapers (*Chicago Defender* 1930). In a way, the early anti-immigrant rhetoric was partially an attempt to go after the European immigrants' (often contested) uses of whiteness, which was equated with Americanness, and partly an attempt to undercut the promotion of the idea of America as "a white man's country" as the main justification for opposing immigration (*Portland New Age* 1907; Jacobson 1998). Over time, however, as the American anti-immigrant movement grew and pushed for increasingly restrictive (and racialized) immigration laws, African American anti-immigrant rhetoric became more nuanced and selective—as if it were trying to de-racialize the issue of immigration—and by extension Americanness.

The efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League, however, ini-

tially had little effect on the AFL leadership. During the early years of the AFL's existence, the Executive Council, the federation's governing body, became more and more lenient in regard to the issue of exclusion of African American workers from their constituent unions (Northrup 1944, 8–9). In fact, over his long career Gompers shifted his stance on the issue from an at least grudging opposition to Jim Crow to a tacit acceptance of it, even as African American civil rights organizations shifted their own stance from rejecting organized labor and strikebreaking to taking a pro-labor stance that was contingent on nondiscrimination, coupled with an effort to lobby the AFL leadership for greater inclusion (Livesay 1998, 157–58).

For much of the AFL's history, from 1895 until after World War II, therefore, the AFL abandoned any good-faith effort to enforce nondiscrimination because that interfered with organizing white workers. Gompers's own retrenchment on racial issues to the point that he rebuffed public criticism by both Washington and Du Bois regarding the AFL's policies was accompanied by an increased willingness to allow "color bars" in union rituals and practices, if not in constitutions (Northrup 1994, 9). Then, according to a 1962 address by Randolph, "by 1901 the federation gave ground . . . and approved the organization of separate locals." In addition, its leaders "scolded Negro workers for strikebreaking, as if the AFL's exclusive policies were unrelated to the practice" (1862). During the decades that followed, the AFL leadership's official response remained one of defensiveness—continually denying racism, but also refusing to interfere with the autonomy of the locals who practiced exclusion, and doing little for African American workers beyond approving the chartering of segregated "federal" locals and giving lip service to resolutions to hire black organizers (Karson 1958, 13). Indeed, between 1912 and 1919, the AFL Executive Council appeared to pay comparatively little attention to the issue, and recorded only occasional efforts to cooperate with representatives of the National Urban League (American Federation of Labor Executive Council Minutes 1912–1919). Although the situation improved somewhat with the death of Gompers in 1924 and the ascension of William Green to the head of the AFL, the largest glimmer of progress was undoubtedly shown in the granting of a full AFL charter to the all-black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Still, discrimination existed into the 1930s, and the AFL's permissive attitude toward racial exclusion was not seriously challenged until the rise of the CIO (*Chicago Defender* 1925a, 1928; Arnesen 1993; Boyer and Morais 1994 [1955], 315).

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Changing Times and Shifting Views

In the interim, three historical events played key roles in the changing rhetoric of African Americans as well as in chang-

ing their situation with the American labor movement prior to the 1930s. These events were 1) the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to Chicago and other Northern urban centers in the post-Reconstruction period; 2) World War I and the labor shortages that influenced employers to consider African Americans for work to which they would not have previously had access; and 3) the post-World War I "closing of the gates" with strict quotas that severely limited new immigration. I will examine each of these factors in turn, noting their effects on both the status of African American workers and on the rhetoric of African American publications and opinion-makers of the respective periods as well as briefly during the Great Depression (Steinberg 1991, 204–209). As a postscript, I will look at the rise of the African American labor movement as both a cause and an effect of a shift away from African American anti-union and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

The Great Migration took place between 1910 and 1940. Many African Americans abandoned the South for Northern urban zones to escape the virulent Southern racism that had produced new Jim Crow laws, skyrocketing lynching, and racially motivated murders throughout the 1890s. The Great Migration first made African Americans a major factor in the Northern industrial labor market and, more to the point, first made job competition between African Americans and immigrants a serious issue. The issues ranged from immigrants taking up traditionally African American service occupations to, yes, the successful appeal to whiteness that enabled immigrants to become part of the labor movement—and treat African American workers as a threat to *their* hard-earned acceptance. Yet even during the early twentieth-century efforts to restrict immigration, African American nativistic expressions sought to emphasize work and loyalty over race. For example, in 1907, an opinion piece in the *Colored American Magazine* did not bother to mince words when editorializing against the arrival of "the scum of Europe . . . her paupers, her convicts, her socialists, her anarchists," using rhetoric barely distinguishable from that of white nativists, and only later asserting the primacy of Americanness over even race (Steinberg 1991, 201–202).

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The second watershed event was World War I. Wartime travel conditions largely shut off immigration, so during the war years African American migrants increasingly filled the employment breach. Employers also actively recruited them when the American entry into World War I also decreased the traditional white manpower pool, forcing employers to hire African Americans and other groups for what once would have been considered "white" jobs. The African American response to this unprecedented openness was a further jump in migration from the South to the North and the increased integration of African Americans workers into Northern industrial workforces, including into skilled labor (Steinberg 1991; U.S. Depart-

ment of Labor 1920, 42). The situation also greatly increased the level of racial tension in urban industrial centers that received these populations, notably Chicago, where clashes between white immigrant and black workers in the stockyards contributed to the race riots of 1919, in advance of the incident at the lakefront beach in which a black swimmer was drowned. These shocking episodes did little to improve relations between blacks and immigrants in early twentieth-century America, beyond raising awareness of the issues.

The labor issues behind the riots were addressed in an unprecedentedly nuanced way in the postwar report *The Negro at Work during the World War*, a study that acknowledged how at least in this instance, the immigrant-dominated Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butchery Workers of America *had* made "continuous effort" to organize black workers (and blamed their failures to do so on collusion between the packers and "Negro leaders"). The report also concluded that while "there has developed some friction between Negro workers and the Irish element at the yards," the tension "did not seem to have any connection with the union situation, but with individual contacts" (U.S. Department of Labor 1920, 26–27). Indeed, the greater inclusion of African American workers during the early decades of the twentieth century was, ironically, largely effected by the Amalgamated and by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, two of the most immigrant-dominated unions in the AFL (Green 1987; Katz 2000, 2003). While the efforts of the ILGWU and the Amalgamated may not have done much to end African American anti-immigrant prejudice in and of itself, their inclusive practices appeared to increasingly divorce this prejudice from African American efforts to seek inclusion in the mainstream American labor movement. This greater involvement of African Americans in the labor movement also, paradoxically, solidified opposition to immigration in order to protect the jobs of all *American* workers, regardless of race, and led to a stronger, if still rearguard, effort to shift the immigration debate into more race-neutral terms.

Even at the height of World War I, when war conditions "naturally" halted immigration, nativists feared its resurgence as soon as hostilities ceased. The renewed wartime and postwar calls for anti-immigration measures, furthermore, were increasingly racialized, and in ways that went beyond color (Higham 1994, 266–74). The African American response, then, interestingly enough, marked the beginning of a shift to a more nuanced stance on immigration, and a break with the past, both to shore up the image of African American loyalty and for them to distance themselves from the automatic association with the perceived problems with the European immigrant "races." For example, as early as 1915, an editorial decried a proposal to exclude immigrants "of African descent" (who were then very few in number) as "a stigma and reflection on African Americans" and as "political demagoguery, pure and simple" (*Chicago Defender* 1915).

The third, and in some ways ironic, turning point was the legislation of severe immigration restriction brought about by the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and the subsequent National Origins Act in 1927 (Higham 1994, 324; Ngai 2004, 21–34). African Americans, who still largely voted Republican during this period in part because the Republican Party supported immigration restriction, cheered these measures and some civil rights leaders even publicly advocated restriction, but with a difference (*Chicago Defender* 1923; *Pittsburgh Courier* 1929; *New York Amsterdam News* 1928). While immigrant quotas themselves were heartily approved, the African American newspapers voiced their opposition to the total exclusion of Asians, arguing, instead, that Asians ought to be admitted "on the same quota basis as other nations," and even sympathized with Japan's vocal opposition to the exclusionary legislation (*Chicago Defender* 1924a, 1925b). Others picked up the theme of "let down your buckets where you are" to emphasize that employers, and by extension America, should prefer African American citizens to "bolshevistic undesirables" and emphasized that the black worker was "not subject to the many complexes of the foreign workman, nor is he at all of a 'Red' or radical turn of mind," but "is steeped in American customs and practices." In other words, while white proponents of immigration restriction were seeking to thoroughly racialize the process, African American supporters of immigration restriction instead favored protecting and prioritizing jobs for American workers, regardless of race. Simultaneously and paradoxically, though, African American proponents of restriction emphasized the loyalty of the African American race as a rationale for closing the gates (*Chicago Defender* 1921b; Simmons 1924).

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Indeed, anti-immigrant prejudice could be found in the editorial pages of African American newspapers even beyond the passage of Johnson-Reed, including calls to restrict the influx of Mexican workers, turning anti-black rhetoric on its head. In late 1927, the *Chicago Defender* approvingly reported the California State Federation of Labor's resolution at the AFL convention that declared "the same reasons exist for an immigration quota for Mexico as for European Countries" (*Chicago Defender* 1927, 1929). And in 1928, the *Pittsburgh Courier* proclaimed that "while the Mexican has worked for lower wages, he has, like all preceding groups, brought a social problem"—namely the poverty and squalor that resulted from low wages (*Pittsburgh Courier* 1928a). The triumph of immigration restriction was finally praised in this paradoxical way as "a great boon" to the black worker, while the government was hailed for having "closed the floodgates of immigration until every available American, black and white, had found employment in domestic production" (*Chicago Defender* 1924b; *Pittsburgh Courier* 1929). There was renewed editorializing against foreigners taking the jobs of African Ameri-

cans in the midst of the Depression. When desperate white workers were pushing into traditionally "black" service occupations, anti-immigrant prejudice was losing its relevance among civil rights activists in this period of severely diminished immigration (*Pittsburgh Courier* 1932, 1935; Drake and Cayton 1945, 78–79). Instead, the new African American labor movement that coalesced around A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, along with their middle-class allies, largely rejected anti-foreign prejudice in favor of promoting equal African American citizenship, for which equal labor citizenship was integral. Interestingly enough, the Trade Union Committee for Organizing Negro Workers, a labor support organization founded to promote trade unionism among African American workers, used the immigrant models of the United Hebrew Trades and the Italian Chamber of Labor to build support for organized labor within the target community. Indeed, a report from the Trades Union Congress (TUC) from 1925 expressed the hope that "in time the Committee would fill a place in the organized labor movement for Negro workers as the Women's Trade Union League does for women, as the United Hebrew Trades fills for Jewish workers and as the Italian Chamber of Labor fills for Italian workers" (Trade Union Committee for Organizing Negro Workers, Report 1925, Negro Labor Committee Records).

By the 1920s, therefore, African American labor activists found themselves in an interesting paradox—on the one hand, they knew that African Americans clearly would and did benefit from the "closing of the gates" against immigrants, and had little shame in pointing out the benefits of immigration restriction to African American workers. For example, a 1923 *Chicago Defender* editorial argued that "Our present method of restricting immigration doubtless does work a hardship on some of the poor foreigners, but self-preservation outweighs sympathy," adding "we cannot be blamed for raising our voices against the admission of a flood of foreigners of any nationality in this country to take the very bread out of our mouths" (*Chicago Defender* 1923). On the other hand, as the decade went on, the benefits African American workers gained from this new inclusion in the workplace gave many civil rights and labor leaders new confidence to seek to build interracial alliances, including with ethnic white workers, most notably in the ILGWU.

Although from the 1920s to the 1930s most of the alliances were built on the left, the goal remained to gain full inclusion within the AFL structure. The ILGWU itself responded to communist charges of Jim Crow with the assertion that while the international "would make no attempt to dictate as to what individual shall be employed," it guaranteed equal protection to all of its members (*Chicago Defender* 1929). But cooperation with the ILGWU and other ethnically diverse unions was more than a case of opportunism—rather, it was part of a growing shift among at least some civil rights advocates, notably Du Bois, toward opposing nativism, to the point that the leadership of the National Council for Protection of Foreign-Born Workers felt

comfortable appealing to Du Bois to serve on its advisory board and to support their efforts to oppose further anti-immigrant legislation (Nina Samorodin to W.E.B. Du Bois, undated, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers). In addition, the post–Johnson-Reed Americanization (voluntary and involuntary) of immigrants and their children may have increasingly negated the "foreigner" issue, and necessitated the pragmatic approach of making alliances with those workers who by choice as well as necessity increasingly identified as white (Glenn 2002, 260–64; Jacobson 1998, 91–98, 108–111). Between 1919 and 1928, the number of African American workers organized into unions severely dropped, with most black unionists part of the BSCP, and the number of active black federal locals declining from over 150 to 33. How much this phenomenon had to do with continued racial discrimination and how much with the general decline in union organization during this period is not clear. Nonetheless, T. Arnold Hill of the National Urban League and his colleagues in the interwar civil rights movement continued to hammer home the idea that black workers made good unionists if welcomed as equals, and that inclusion, not exclusion, was the key to the labor movement's survival and success (*New York Amsterdam News* 1930a and b; Hill to William Green, 13 January 1930, Negro Labor Committee Records).

This shifting emphasis not only reflected changing conditions, but also an astute understanding of the continued equation of whiteness with Americanness. While African Americans were successful in lending their voices to the anti-immigrant chorus in the name of preserving jobs of American workers, uncoupling whiteness from Americanism proved to be more difficult, especially as the children and grandchildren of previously despised European immigrant groups assimilated and eagerly claimed full citizenship on the basis of whiteness. Even Mexican immigrants and their descendants would attempt to emphasize their (at least comparative) whiteness to seek full inclusion as working American citizens (Gutierrez 1995; Roediger 2005). Nonetheless, these seemingly reactionary and self-defeating efforts to co-opt nativism for the sake of African American inclusion did help bring about the end of the general African American rejection of organized labor, and furthermore transformed it into the push for full labor citizenship that would finally begin to come to fruition with the rise of the CIO and the World War II-era March on Washington Movement (Kersten 2007, 36–64). In conclusion, although African American efforts to claim American citizenship through nativism appeared to have a larger impact on immigration policy than on the American labor movement, the outcome of these struggles definitely changed the approach of African American organizations and thinkers to labor's long heritage of exclusionary practices.

While African Americans were successful in lending their voices to the anti-immigrant chorus in the name of preserving jobs of American workers, uncoupling whiteness from Americanism proved to be more difficult, especially as the children and grandchildren of previously despised European immigrant groups assimilated and eagerly claimed full citizenship on the basis of whiteness.

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