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# Race, Labor, and Migration: The Legacy of the FEPC and Puget Sound Navy Yard

Aaron Chapman  
aaroncch@uw.edu

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**Race, Labor, and Migration:  
The Legacy of the FEPC and Puget Sound Navy Yard**

Submitted to  
The History Department  
As a requirement for the Degree of  
Bachelor in the Arts – History

by  
**Aaron Chapman**

Tacoma, Washington  
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On June 25, 1941 President Franklin D. Roosevelt exercised his presidential power in the form of Executive Order 8802. This order instructed government agencies and companies contracted for defense industry work, the only employers over which the president had this authority without Congress, to adopt a policy of nondiscrimination in their employment practices. It also asserted that it was the “duty” of labor organizations to do the same.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the order also outlined the creation of a special committee, the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), to enforce the order where necessary.

Presumably, this order was issued with the intention of securing equal employment opportunities for black workers, given that at the time President Roosevelt was under pressure in the form of a planned all-black March on Washington, organized by a coalition of religious, labor, and advocacy organizations and headed by A. Philip Randolph, leader of the all-black labor union the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.<sup>2</sup> However, Roosevelt very carefully crafted the order as an apparent effort to utilize the entire available workforce effectively rather than an outright advancement of minority rights.<sup>3</sup> Although this took place fully six months before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and prompted the United States to enter World War II, the defense industry was already expanding in anticipation of possible U.S. involvement and in order to supply Britain with supplies and war material, and thousands of new jobs were becoming available as a result. When the United States joined the Allied Forces to fight a war on a massive scale in two theaters across the world, the defense industry grew almost exponentially. It is not

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Order 8802 dated June 25, 1941, General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=72>.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Ruchames, *Race, Jobs & Politics; the Story of FEPC*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Eileen Boris, “Fair Employment and the Origins of Affirmative Action in the 1940s.” *NWSA Journal* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 143, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4316606>.

surprising that the question of who would be afforded the opportunity to fill those new jobs was an important one in an era of powerful and widespread discrimination.

The overall effectiveness of the FEPC has been a hotly debated topic for decades.<sup>4</sup> Scholarship is and has been split over whether the FEPC accomplished anything of significance, with some asserting that it was essentially powerless and useless and others insisting that it not only accomplished much but was a precursor to later highly successful movements during the era of the Civil Rights Movement. The committee certainly had few real powers at its discretion. It could, and did, utilize formal public hearings to expose racism and employment discrimination in order to pressure employers, unions, and even federal agencies into abiding by EO 8802. It also relied heavily on negotiation and talks, but had no real firm legal grounds or punitive measures at its disposal beyond a direct appeal to Roosevelt; an unrealistic measure in most cases due to the sheer number of complaints. Either way, an examination of scholarship on the FEPC reveals a major opportunity for further study; that of the experiences of FEPC-era black workers in a federal shipyard.

Ultimately, what scholarship on the subject of the FEPC lacks is an effective evaluation of the comparison between private and public employment outside the heavily entrenched segregation and discrimination of the South. Federal agencies, in theory more immediately subject to the issuance of executive orders issued by the president – particularly after EO 9346's issuance – and thus possibly more inclined to institute nondiscrimination policies without excessive resistance, represent the possibility of a model for the FEPC's potential legacy had it been afforded the proper influence and tools to carry out its mission.

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<sup>4</sup> William J. Collins, "Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets," *American Economic Review* 91, no. 1(2001): 284-5, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.91.1.272>; Harris, 71-2.

In particular, federally-run shipyards such as Navy Yard Puget Sound – since renamed Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, or PSNS – constitute a valuable opportunity to undertake a direct comparison between privately and federally run wartime industries. Though much has been said on the subject of other industries, especially the aircraft industry, those industries did not have a direct federal counterpart with which they can be compared, a situation not shared with the shipyards. What is more, the government department which was responsible for the operation of Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, the Department of the Navy, was one of several departments that had a special agreement with the FEPC to “make an effort to eliminate discrimination, inform the FEPC of complaints they received, and turn over to the committee those complaints which they could not adjust satisfactorily.”<sup>5</sup> Puget Sound Naval Shipyard’s open and aggressive recruitment methods and oft-stated policy of using a person’s ability as the sole source of consideration for employment and advancement led to a significant migration of black workers to the Bremerton area and the employment of many of those workers at the Shipyard. Although Bremerton did not, during the war and its immediate aftermath, see the type of racial justice that followed the Civil Rights movement, it became a testing ground for the possibilities and benefits of well-enforced FEPC policy.

Before the March on Washington, planned for July 1, 1941, even began its major organizational journey, discrimination in the defense industry was already a topic of interest and concern for the government. With the defense industry already ramped up to supply British troops, an efficient production process without distraction was crucial. Reports from the Bureau of Employment Security on “Labor Market Developments,” however, detail difficulties with racial discrimination. The January, 1941 report found that though age requirements were vanishing, employment requirements of a racial nature remained unchanged and “racial

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<sup>5</sup> Ruchames, 157.

discrimination [is] still strong.”<sup>6</sup> In a similar report filed three months later, in April, the Bureau’s findings were only very slightly more hopeful; “there have been more reports of skilled Negro workers finding jobs in plants which have hitherto hired white skilled workers exclusively. Public employment offices in many sections, however, report continued discrimination against competent workers because of race.” The Bureau goes on to say that “Racial discrimination continues both on Hawaii and on the mainland,” and reports that the discrimination was total in the case of aircraft plants, “regardless of their need for skilled workers.”<sup>7</sup>

The Fair Employment Practices Committee, or FEPC, had its work cut out for it. Founded on the already rather uncertain legal ground of presidential order – Kevin M. Schultz and Louis Ruchames have called the presidential order’s legality “relatively weak” and “emasculated,” respectively – particularly in regards to private employers utilized by government contract, the committee faced an uphill battle of attempting to enforce compliance.<sup>8</sup> Though the private companies with which the FEPC had to contend were challenging enough, at times even federal agencies, for which presidential orders had far more substantive legal ground, refused compliance and had to be targeted for negotiation and campaigning by the FEPC.<sup>9</sup> Even where the FEPC was successful in their negotiations and action with private employers, they at times

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<sup>6</sup> RG 181, “Labor Market Developments,” Federal Security Agency, Social Security Board, Bureau of Employment Security, Division of Research and Statistics, January, 1941, Record Group 181, box 34, folder P8-1(1), Central Subject Files, Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments, National Archives Building, Seattle, WA, 55.

<sup>7</sup> RG 181, “Labor Market Developments,” Federal Security Agency, Social Security Board, Bureau of Employment Security, Division of Research and Statistics, April, 1941, Record Group 181, box 34, folder P8-1(1), Central Subject Files, Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments, National Archives Building, Seattle, WA, 2, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ruchames, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Merl E. Reed, “FEPC and the Federal Agencies in the South,” *The Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 54, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3031547>.

had to contend with hostile labor unions that used their positions and membership policies to effectively either prevent black workers from gaining employment or else to make their employment experience less than fair and equal while still requiring union dues from them.<sup>10</sup>

What is more, the very existence of the FEPC was constantly in doubt. In July 1942, just over a year after its inception and with hearings already under its belt, the committee was suddenly and unexpectedly transferred by President Roosevelt to the War Manpower Commission, under the supervision of an unsympathetic official, Paul V. McNutt. If, as some have claimed, the move was a deliberate attempt by President Roosevelt to shelve the FEPC, it was nearly successful.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that this uncertainty with regard to the FEPC helped to bring together a significant group of religious, civic, and labor groups to lobby for its rescue and reaffirmation – an early precursor to the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s that is arguably one of the FEPC’s greatest legacies.<sup>12</sup> It was only after nearly a year of uncertainty that the committee was finally transferred once again, this time to relative autonomy directly under the president himself, with the issuance of Executive Order 9346. EO 9346, issued possibly in the hope of retaining the voting support of the groups lobbying for the FEPC’s survival, reaffirmed the earlier stance towards discrimination in government and defense industry, but also clarified the language of the first order to ensure that federal agencies were explicitly included.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> William H. Harris, “Federal Intervention in Union Discrimination: FEPC and West Coast Shipyards during World War II,” *Labor History* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 327-8, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00236568108584623>.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, “The FEPC and the Legacy of the Labor-Based Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s,” *Labor History* 49, no. 1 (February 2008): 75, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00236560701740093>.

<sup>12</sup> Schultz, 76.

<sup>13</sup> Schultz, 76.

Following the close of the war and the death of President Roosevelt, the FEPC faced a future for which the word ‘uncertain’ is hardly adequate. Under attack from a legislature determined to both take command of its funding and subsequently cut that funding and without the need for efficient wartime production to lend credibility to its mission, the committee was doomed. A movement in Congress to create a permanent, post-war FEPC took shape for a time, but it was ultimately defeated by Republicans and southern Democrats painting it as rampant Statism and a subversion of liberty through forced integration.<sup>14</sup> For a time, activists made efforts to create state and local versions of the committee across the United States, but these efforts ultimately amounted to nothing.<sup>15</sup> The era of the FEPC drew to a close.

No examination of the FEPC is complete without Louis Ruchames’ *Race, Jobs, and Politics: The Story of FEPC*. Published in 1953, only seven years after the FEPC’s demise, Ruchames’ work tells the tale of the FEPC’s triumphs and difficulties, in the context of the factors which contributed to its creation and what followed after its demise. It is important to note that Ruchames wrote *Race, Jobs, and Politics* prior to the successes of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, and published it in a still segregated culture; one year prior to the handing down of *Brown v. Board of Education* by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1954. Toward the FEPC itself, Ruchames takes a positive view, asserting that it proved “law...could alter customs and mores, and hasten the elimination of discrimination in significant sections of

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<sup>14</sup> Clarence E. Wunderlin Jr., “‘Be Patient and Satisfied with Their Progress Thus Far’: Senator Robert A Taft’s Opposition to a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, 1944-1950,” *Ohio History* 120 (2013): 114, 117, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ohh.2013.0001>.

<sup>15</sup> James Wolfinger, “‘An Equal Opportunity to Make a Living – and a Life’: The FEPC and Postwar Black Politics,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 4, no. 2 (2007): 93, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/15476715-2006-066>.



American industry.”<sup>16</sup> In discussing the achievements and success rates of the FEPC, Ruchames claims that the commission was successful in the “vast majority of instances in which it intervened,” resulting in a growth of employment opportunities for black workers.<sup>17</sup>

Ruchames takes great care to describe the challenges which the commission faced in attempting to implement President Roosevelt’s order;

In reviewing the story of the committee’s eventful life, one is hard put to find a period in which it did not face a crisis or a serious problem. Lack of funds, limited power, attacks by congressmen, difficulties in securing annual budgetary appropriations from Congress, the insufficient cooperation of some government agencies...harassed the committee continually and constituted almost insuperable obstacles to effective action.<sup>18</sup>

Even this opposition and obstruction, however, is seen by Ruchames as proof that the committee must have been successful in its efforts, for that success is likely to have been the cause of much of the opposition to those efforts.<sup>19</sup>

In the years since Ruchames’ work, scholarly attitude toward the legacy of the FEPC has by no means reached a consensus. Merl E. Reed, with the benefit of a post-Civil-Rights-era perspective long after the fact published in 1991 his work, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*. In this work, Reed contends that the FEPC had a powerful impact, not only in terms of its effects during the years it existed, but also long afterwards in the Civil Rights activism of its former agents and the allies they made.<sup>20</sup>

Much of what they did made a difference, partly because it involved a federal presence. After leaving the FEPC, they carried the message into the future in their individual

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<sup>16</sup> Ruchames, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ruchames, 163.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Merl E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 356-7.

pursuits. They had witnessed the implementation of FEPC procedures and policies that helped many individuals in minority groups aspire to better lives because of improvements in the quality of employment and in standard of living. In later decades, they would watch and participate as different organizations formed new networks of support for civil rights.<sup>21</sup>

By contrast, Reed's 1980 article "FEPC and the Federal Agencies in the South" emphasizes the extreme prejudice and difficulty facing the FEPC and black workers in the South, and the FEPC's consequent inability to make significant headway there. As his title implies, federal agencies themselves in the South challenged the FEPC at every turn and limited its success.<sup>22</sup>

Josh Sides, with his 1996 article "Battle on the Home Front: African American Shipyard Workers in World War II Los Angeles," and William H. Harris with his 1981 article "Federal Intervention in Union Discrimination: FEPC and West Coast Shipyards" are fundamentally at odds in their interpretations, with Sides finding the FEPC to have been ineffective on the West Coast and elsewhere, whereas Harris considers the West Coast some of the FEPC's best and most important work.<sup>23</sup> Andrew E. Kersten in "Jobs and Justice: Detroit, Fair Employment, and Federal Activism during the Second World War" contends that the FEPC not only had a high success rate with its caseload, but also contributed to the overall success of a nondiscrimination movement through fostering activism and raising awareness of the issues.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Reed, *Seedtime*, 356.

<sup>22</sup> Reed, *FEPC*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Josh Sides, "Battle on the Home Front: African American Shipyard Workers in World War II Los Angeles," *California History* 75, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 259-60, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/25177597>; Harris 325.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew E. Kersten, "Jobs and Justice: Detroit, Fair Employment, and Federal Activism during the Second World War," *Michigan Historical Review* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 100-1, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20173794>.

Though for the most part there is a consensus that the FEPC was tenacious and committed in the carrying out of its mission, current scholarship is clearly divided over the objective interpretation of the committee's effectiveness. Additionally, the committee's meaning and long-term effects are the subject of continued debate, with scholars divided over whether the FEPC effectively set change in motion, or utterly failed to have any lasting effects. It is unlikely that this debate will be easily resolved any time soon, and undoubtedly it will remain the object of considerable scrutiny.

It is clear that labor unions had an unusual and at times contradictory relationship with black workers and with the FEPC in the era of the committee. Naturally, experiences with individual labor unions varied greatly, just as the experiences with different employers varied. Black workers often found a powerful ally in the Congress of Industrial Organizations, or CIO, though individual affiliates of the CIO could sometimes take the opposite course of action and uphold discrimination against nonwhite workers at the union level.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, there is some question as to whether what help black workers did receive from the CIO was at times motivated by a desire to strike a blow at uncooperative management and increase their own power at the bargaining table rather than to open job opportunities for black workers.<sup>26</sup> Even so, there are notable examples of unions friendly to the cause of eliminating employment discrimination, such as the United Auto Workers, which, "Even within the progressive CIO...was famous (or infamous, depending on one's location) for its leaders' public commitments to racial equality," though even within the UAW discrimination and racial

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<sup>25</sup> Bruce Nelson, "Organized Labor and the Struggle for Black Equality in Mobile during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 3 (December 1993): 953, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2080410>.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Abel, "African Americans, Labor Unions, and the Struggle for Fair Employment in the Aircraft Manufacturing Industry of Texas, 1941-1945," *Journal Of Southern History* 77, no. 3 (August 2011): 601, accessed June 11, 2014, retrieved from *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost.

inequality held firm in local chapters in the South.<sup>27</sup> This is important to recognize, though unions in many cases created an unfair and unequal work environment and blocked access to employment and skilled jobs for black workers, this was not universally true of organized labor, as the UAW and other CIO affiliates demonstrated.

On the other hand, the American Federation of Labor, or AFL, and its affiliates were frequent opponents to nondiscrimination policy and a constant roadblock to work opportunities for black workers. Reed refers to AFL craft unions as “staunchly racist” in many cases, a characterization born out in the history.<sup>28</sup> The AFL’s “racist” influence was particularly impactful in the shipyards on the West Coast, where their affiliated Boilermaker’s Union possessed a closed-shop agreement with private shipbuilders, meaning only union members were allowed to work in those yards, and the union could therefore effectively block black workers from employment opportunities by discriminatory union membership practices.<sup>29</sup>

Local chapters in privately owned West Coast shipyards refused to allow black workers to become union members, blocking their eligibility for employment in thousands of jobs within those shipyards. That was not the end of the story, however. Eventually, the Boilermakers created “auxiliary” unions which the prospective black employees could join instead, securing the authorization to seek employment at the yards. The trouble with the auxiliaries, besides the obviously degrading segregation, was that they were both separate and quite unequal. Auxiliary union members received half the insurance coverage, none of the voting rights for representation at the local and national union government level, and were barred from essentially every other

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<sup>27</sup> Abel, 620.

<sup>28</sup> Reed, *Seedtime*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Sides, 251-2.

service offered as part of union membership with little hope of advancement.<sup>30</sup> The only thing that remained the same for auxiliary members as full members of the chapter was their union dues.<sup>31</sup> They still had to pay the full dues despite a nearly complete lack of benefits, or in other words they had to pay just to be allowed to work. Once black workers joined the auxiliaries and secured employment in the shipyards, they found that, though the discriminatory benefits and dues practices were bad enough, there were other problems within the actual yards as well.

The Boilermakers at one point even tried to make an agreement to certify black workers to work in the yards only in segregated work gangs.<sup>32</sup> This proposal is indicative of a larger, long-term attitude about black employment, as all-black work gangs could be more easily let go en masse once the demand for wartime production slackened, without seeming to pick and choose black workers from all over the yard. Similarly, black workers who were able to secure employment quickly found themselves working at the newer, temporary shipbuilding facilities rather than enjoying the more coveted jobs at the older, permanent facilities.<sup>33</sup> Like the proposed segregated work crews, this was a warning sign that they could easily all be laid off at the war's end without any obvious sign of racism to the an observer. Auxiliary members who tried to protest all of these unfair practices and lack of benefits by refusing to pay their union dues were soon released in large numbers by the shipyards for no longer being in good standing with the union, in accordance with closed-shop agreements.<sup>34</sup> During the war regulations concerning production prohibited workers from moving from one employer to another in the defense

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<sup>30</sup> Harris, 326, 329.

<sup>31</sup> Reed, *Seedtime*, 275; Sides, 252.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, 330.

<sup>33</sup> Reed, *Seedtime*, 277.

<sup>34</sup> Sides, 258-9.

industry without proper signed clearance, in order to discourage workers from constantly changing jobs and hampering production efforts. The shipyards and the Boilermakers used this to their advantage by refusing to cite the reason for some laid off employees as a union dues dispute and instead forcing them to sign statements that they had voluntarily quit, subjecting them to fines before they could find work elsewhere in the defense industry.<sup>35</sup> At the heart of the problem and part of the aforementioned long-term attitude toward black employment was the Boilermakers' unwillingness to accept black workers into the union proper because unlike the shipyards themselves, the union could not kick them out after the war's end. If they accepted black workers, the change would most likely become permanent.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of the constant stream of complaints coming from black workers in West Coast shipyards, the FEPC spent more time working on their cases than any others.<sup>37</sup> Negotiations and public hearings followed, in which the committee found the yards to be every bit as guilty as the labor unions of violating nondiscrimination policy as part of what Harris calls the committee's greatest work in its lifetime.<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to quantify the FEPC's exact contribution to the changes which eventually followed. Sides claims the FEPC was "toothless" in its attempt to force the unions and yards to eliminate racial discrimination, attributing the eventual elimination of the auxiliary system to activism and litigation on the part of black workers and activist groups.<sup>39</sup> Harris, on the other hand, asserts that the FEPC not only worked alongside black activism to achieve those successes, but through continued pressure and

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<sup>35</sup> Sides, 259.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>37</sup> Harris, 326.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>39</sup> Sides, 259-60.

negotiation contributed to the outcome in its own right.<sup>40</sup> In either case, the gains came too late as they often did in the era of the FEPC. With the end of the war, industries wound down to post-war levels, and the opportunities that had been gained faded away.<sup>41</sup>

The activism that helped fight the discriminatory unions on the West Coast hints at one of the FEPC's arguably most enduring legacies; that of the hope and inspiration the idea of government support of black workers inspired in the civil rights groups that formed and came together out of that hope. Randolph's planned March on Washington brought together various black labor, religious, and activist groups to cooperate and recruit for the March; the beginnings of a coalition.<sup>42</sup> This initiative convinced President Roosevelt to take action on discrimination, which led to the formation of the FEPC. The creation of the FEPC itself, whatever the motivations, created the impression among black workers that the government was paying attention to their problems and willing to hear them and do something about it.<sup>43</sup> The FEPC's work with the activist groups of the March on Washington after the committee's inception, such as in the case of activists in the West Coast shipyards, ensured that, as Kevin M. Schultz attests, "the FEPC cause lived on long after the war and, moreover...it helped create and sustain a coalition of civil rights liberals that culminated in the formation of the now-venerable Leadership Conference on Civil Rights."<sup>44</sup> The New Deal of the previous decade had already primed

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<sup>40</sup> Harris, 346-7.

<sup>41</sup> Sides, 261-2.

<sup>42</sup> Schultz, 74.

<sup>43</sup> Katherine Turk, "A Fair Chance To Do My Part of Work," *Indiana Magazine of History* 108 (September 2012): 220, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/imh/VAA4025-108-3-a01>.

<sup>44</sup> Turk, 71.

workers to view the government as body to whom labor problems should be taken.<sup>45</sup> Now with the seeming success of the movement to March on Washington in spurring the government to action and the FEPC's apparent tenacity in pursuing its objective, there was hope.<sup>46</sup>

This hope was one of many factors that led to another of the FEPC's most enduring positive legacies, that of migration of black workers and their families, a migration that included as many as a million black Americans.<sup>47</sup> Segregation and discrimination were at their worst and most entrenched in the geographical South of the United States. Unfortunately, the South is also where the vast majority of black Americans lived at the start of the Second World War.<sup>48</sup> Wartime industry changed all of that, however, and triggered a migration that brought many out of the South and to a variety of regions around the country, including the Puget Sound area. These migrants did not escape discrimination altogether, but they did in many cases manage to escape from Jim Crow, and often found their health improving as a result of better food and better access to healthcare.<sup>49</sup> Where the poverty-stricken and rural culture of the South had held them back, the industrialized centers to which they migrated represented a wealth of new opportunities.<sup>50</sup> Puget Sound Naval Shipyard was one of these newfound opportunities for black

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 212-3.

<sup>46</sup> Ruchames, 45.

<sup>47</sup> US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, *World War II and the American Home Front: A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study*, by Marilyn M. Harper et al., October 2007, 117-8, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/learn/themes/WWIIHomeFront.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 188-9.

<sup>49</sup> Kersten, "African," 14-5.

<sup>50</sup> Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (June 1982): 97, Accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1887753>.



workers, and the Yard and the city of Bremerton experienced some of the effects of the migration.

Puget Sound Naval Shipyard struggled throughout the war to bring employment numbers up to required levels, a fact which led to a significant contribution to migration on the part of the shipyard through its recruitment program. Set back off the main body of the Puget Sound in the midst of a little town called Bremerton, PSNS was hardly within easy reach of significant housing or other amenities. With Seattle either a lengthy ferry ride or a long drive around the Sound away, Bremerton was relatively isolated and therefore a difficult location to both recruit workers and to adequately house and supply them if they moved to the area from an outside region.

In 1943, desperate to bring on enough staff to keep up with their workload, PSNS distributed a recruitment pamphlet entitled *Keep the Ships Fighting: Work at Puget Sound Navy Yard* far and wide across the country. Such a measure is hardly surprising given the intense demands of wartime production and repair placed on the shipyard and the consequent need for massive quantities of labor to keep up with the workload. What is more unusual for its day, however, is some of the language and pictures of the pamphlet itself. There is a strong emphasis throughout the pamphlet of equal opportunity in employment. There is even a section describing opportunities for advanced training which, along with pay increases, are cited as opportunities based entirely on merit, without discrimination.<sup>51</sup> The message here is clear, and very much in line with the idea of President Roosevelt's order: no matter who you are, just come work hard and you will be rewarded on the basis of that work.

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<sup>51</sup> Puget Sound Navy Yard, *Keep the Ships Fighting: Work at Puget Sound Navy Yard*, 1943, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 8, 10, 26-7.

One major difference between employment in the private shipyards of the West Coast and that at PSNS can be found in the 1942 edition of *Working with the Navy*, which functioned as a type of employee manual for PSNS. In this manual there is a small section which specifically details the Shipyards policy of nondiscrimination in employment based on race, gender, creed, or national origin, even going so far as to extend that nondiscrimination to whether or not the employee is a member of a labor union.<sup>52</sup> The same message is present here that can be found in the later recruitment pamphlet; that of ability and work ethic as the only thing that is important. The item in the manual which sets Navy Yard employment apart from private defense employment is its section on labor unions. At least insofar as collective bargaining is concerned, membership in a labor union offered no real benefits to PSNS employees. This is because, as the manual points out, PSNS is run by a government agency, namely the Department of the Navy, and as such the Navy Yard by law cannot enter into collective bargaining with labor unions.<sup>53</sup> Instead, the type of labor policies, such as work hours, overtime, and pay, for which a labor union would ordinarily bargain with an employer are set according to local, national, and federal standards for that industry. These policies of nondiscrimination for union and nonunion members and prohibition on collective bargaining effectively removed labor unions as a factor in employment and advancement for black workers at the Navy Yard.

It is clear that labor unions were at times major roadblocks to equal employment opportunity for black workers, of which the labor unions of the shipbuilding industry in the West

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<sup>52</sup> Puget Sound Navy Yard *Working With the Navy*, 1942, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 77-78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Coast region where PSNS is located were a prime example.<sup>54</sup> Knowing this, the lack of labor union power in federal shipyards such as PSNS must beg the question of whether their absence contributed to a better overall experience for black workers in those facilities. It was certainly one less hoop through which the FEPC had to jump in its quest to secure fair opportunities for those workers. It was also not some sort of unknown secret of the Navy Yard, the Yard took steps to make sure that the union policies were well known. The *Salute's* March 23, 1945 edition contained an editorial specifically clarifying Yard policy regarding labor unions;

So many persons have asked questions about the Navy Yard's policy towards employee participation in labor unions that the *Salute* has been asked to publish an editorial on this subject.

Civilian employees of the Navy may join or refrain from joining a labor union without interference, coercion, restraint, discrimination, or reprisals.

This is further amplified in the Puget Sound Navy Yard handbook, "Working with the Navy," which states that no employee in order to hold his position or receive promotion may be forced into membership or non-membership in any labor group; nor is this fact cause for discrimination against him on the job.

Employees are not permitted to force their labor views on fellow workers. Supervisors and others in positions of authority are particularly forbidden to propagandize or in any way seek to persuade employees under their direction to join or not join any union. It is strictly the worker's prerogative to make his own decision and he cannot be penalized for doing so.

Any labor union which an employee might join must in no way be obligated to engage in or assist in any strike against the United States, and the employee's activity must be such that it does not interfere with the performance of his duties in the Yard.<sup>55</sup>

The relationship with labor in general, union and otherwise, was also the subject of propaganda campaigns in the Yard. The *Salute* published a number of articles relating to labor and its role in the war and production. A September 5, 1942 article in the newspaper reminded workers that the upcoming Labor Day holiday was a day that would be best celebrated by remaining on the job and contributing to the war effort. The article praises the efforts and

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<sup>54</sup> Harris, 329.

<sup>55</sup> Editorial, "Labor Union Participation Clarified," *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), March 23, 1945, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 1.

successes of labor thus far and stresses the need for cooperation “between labor and management” in order to “carry the fight to the enemy.”<sup>56</sup> A cartoon touting this need appeared in the July 14, 1944 edition of the same paper, depicting two men representing labor and management working together to pull a rope and noose over a tree limb, while the man in the noose, Adolf Hitler, nervously tries to convince them not to cooperate, “N-N-Now Fellas! W-Why pull together??!!” (Fig. 1). Once again, the encouragement was to put aside the needs of labor and work together with management in order to win the war. Theoretically, the implication was also that management’s needs should also be put aside for war effort in the spirit of cooperation, but it seems that in practice labor was the side to bow to the needs of wartime demands. The *Salute* reported in its March 20, 1943 edition that a number of trade unions in Bremerton agreed to “subordinate all interests to the main task of winning the war.” The paper quoted a pledge from the local unions;

It is apparent that our union membership, together with all labor in the Yard, has not been aroused fully to the danger facing our country...The creation of the offensive that will win this war and which will provide that offensive with the means necessary for its success is the central task of organized labor and the American people. There is not room in this country for any organization that can not [sic] subordinate its interests to this task.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the handbook labor policies and the propaganda, the Yard’s recruiters specifically advertised its labor union policies as a benefit to employment there. The *Keep the Ships Fighting* recruitment pamphlet specifically states, “As with all government employees,

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<sup>56</sup> “Labor Earns Nations Respect,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), September 5, 1942, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> “Pledge of Bremerton Organized Labor,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), March 20, 1943, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.



Figure 1. Labor and Management Cartoon, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), July 14, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.

joining or maintaining membership in a labor union is entirely voluntary.”<sup>58</sup> It is not difficult to imagine black workers, especially in the South, stymied by unions and frustrated with the low-skill jobs to which they were relegated, finding out about the Navy Yard with its freedom from union employment blocks, shortage of workers willing to learn trade skills and advance, and focus on ability rather than race. It must have seemed like an amazing opportunity, one that simply could not be ignored.

In addition to the pamphlets, PSNS sent out yard workers as recruiters across the nation. The Navy Yard’s own weekly newspaper, *The Navy Yard Salute*, documented the departure of 46 such recruiters on January 28, 1944. Interestingly, the article specifically stresses that the recruiters were selected “on a basis of ability only,” a fact which it seems possible, even likely that recruiters expressed enthusiastically to potential new workers during their three month employment drive across the country.<sup>59</sup> In late September of that same year, another 28 workers headed east to join the recruitment efforts, which the *Salute* claimed stretched “from Maine to Florida, and from Florida to the West Coast.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, the Navy Yard likely had recruiters among black populations.

Navy Yard recruiters did not limit themselves to pamphlets and cross-country excursions, however. They also made use of arguably one of the most powerful tools of recruitment in their arsenal, their own workers. In a *Salute* article from as late as the June 29, 1945 publication workers were given dramatic accounts of warfare with the Japanese Navy and battle damage swiftly repaired at PSNS. They were told that the yard still required another 6,000 workers for

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<sup>58</sup> *Keep the Ships Fighting*, 27

<sup>59</sup> “To Sell Navy Yard In Midwest; Party Numbers 46,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), January 28, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> “Recruiters Leave For Duty in East,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), September 29, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 1.

the workload, and they were encouraged to “[write] back home to friends and relatives telling them of the Yard’s need for manpower to get these crippled warships out to sea again.”<sup>61</sup> The recruitment needs were far higher the previous year in May, when the *Salute* made a similar plea for workers from other states to write back to everyone they knew back at home not already helping the war effort to come out to PSNS and “help keep the nation’s fighting ships on the firing line.” The article lists the recruitment needs for the following six months at 20,339, a staggering number for such a short span of time.<sup>62</sup> The Yard even put out a list of Frequently Asked Questions in the *Salute* and specifically urged workers to mail the entire newspaper back home to friends and family so that they could examine the list for themselves.<sup>63</sup> Both this article, which lists the recruitment needs at 10,000, and the previous one specifically mention a need for able workers with the ability to advance into skilled positions, an opportunity that was not lost on black workers back home receiving the newspaper.

Archival evidence reveals that the recruitment drive attracted black workers from around the United States. The *Salute* contained many accounts of black Navy Yard employees who had migrated to the area from all over the United States. These migrants, people like Louisa Fletcher and her husband, both from Kansas, all had one thing in common which drew them to the area: they came for the work.<sup>64</sup> R.J. Williams for instance also left an occupation in the South, not as a

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<sup>61</sup> “Their Need Is Our Need,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), June 29, 1945, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> “Tell Folks Back Home to Come Work In PSNY,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), May 26, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> “Notify Relatives, Friends of Need For 10,000 Men,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), May 1, 1943, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Louisa Fletcher, interview, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), August 25, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 4.

farm worker but a farmer with his own farm.<sup>65</sup> Some, such as Ada Holland from Louisiana, came for better wages than they could get in the South.<sup>66</sup> Others, such as Mack Myers from Oklahoma and Ruth Lewis from South Dakota had to acclimate to a very new home, with new sights and new weather.<sup>67</sup> When asked about conditions back home, James Long, a recruit originally from Indianapolis, insisted that jobs were still available back east, and the people there were “pretty doggoned conscious of [the war].”<sup>68</sup>

Yet if jobs were still available, at least in Indianapolis – wartime labor shortages did mean there were jobs available in many places, and unemployment all but vanished during wartime – then why move to the Navy Yard in Bremerton?<sup>69</sup> According to Audry Miller, who migrated to Bremerton with her family, the Smiths, during that time, the black families that came to the area from all over the country did so “to better themselves,” and their experience “was a beginning.”<sup>70</sup> Interviewed many years after her parents’ move to Bremerton from all the way down in New Orleans, Louisiana, Audry Miller explained that she felt that the families that migrated to Bremerton “came out very fortunate.” Her reasoning for this is indicative of the

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<sup>65</sup> R.J. Williams, interview, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), March 31, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Ada Holland, interview, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), August 31, 1945, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 8.

<sup>67</sup> Mack Myers, interview, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), November 13, 1943, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2; Ruth Lewis, interview, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), January 28, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> James Long, interview, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), August 4, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> US Department of the Interior, 88.

<sup>70</sup> Audry Miller, interview by Dianne Robertson, Oral History Research Number 07, *The Sinclair Park Project*, Black Historical Society of Kitsap County, CD-ROM (Tacoma, WA: Artifacts Consulting, Inc., 2004).



importance of the migration of black workers. She felt that if they had not moved they would all have remained in their hometowns and would likely still be there, stuck and unable to leave.<sup>71</sup>

In another interview, along with her brother Earl, Audry explained a little more about the significance of her family's move to Bremerton and their motivations for making a move over such a long distance. Down in the South, Audry and Earl's parents could not find very good work. Their mother could only find work doing jobs such as housekeeping and waitressing, a situation not unique to the Smiths. Work in the Navy Yard represented to their parents "a chance to come up [to Bremerton] and do something with their lives."<sup>72</sup> What was more, the type of employment they could get down South did not pay very well, making work in the Navy Yard a great opportunity to better themselves financially. Perhaps most important of all, Audry and Earl explained that part of their parents' reason for leaving the South to come to Bremerton was to bring their children away from the South, away from what, as Earl said "they knew that was trouble," and into a new beginning and a new chance far away.<sup>73</sup>

The experiences of these families who made their way to Bremerton were indicative of the mentality of the war-era migration that took place. With the news of the FEPC and Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, hope for a brighter future blossomed. When experiences with unions and employers, especially in the South, failed to live up to the expectations of EO 8802, the recruiters and literature of PSNS saw their chance and drew workers and their families away from their hometowns and their roots. Real jobs with a path for advancement, better pay, an opportunity for a better life, and a chance to get the next generation away from the awful

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<sup>71</sup> Audry Miller, interview.

<sup>72</sup> Audry Miller and Earl Smith, interview by Dianne Robertson, Oral History Research Number 11, *The Sinclair Park Project*, Black Historical Society of Kitsap County, CD-ROM (Tacoma, WA: Artifacts Consulting, Inc., 2004).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

prejudices and segregation of the South all beckoned. Yet, despite the benefits for the Navy Yard and for black families, life was far from perfect in Bremerton.

The headquarters of the Thirteenth Naval District, which comprised the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, received at that time monthly intelligence reports from the District Intelligence Office on the activities of minority groups such as African-Americans, Japanese-Americans, and communist activists, in order to track the possibility of “subversive activities.” In practice, this has also resulted in a record of several incidents of racial tension and racially charged violence in Bremerton and the Navy Yard. A March, 1945 report from the District Intelligence Office contains an account of an altercation outside the gates of the Navy Yard between several enlisted marines and three black Navy Yard workers. The report asserts that the altercation was initiated by the marines and “appeared to be the second of two unprovoked attacks on negro civilians in recent months at Bremerton.” Strangely, the report attributes an altercation which followed this incident between a Coast Guardsman and “three or four unidentified colored men” on the Annapolis ferry as retaliation for the marines’ attack, but gives no reason beyond the fact that the attackers were black men to substantiate this assertion.<sup>74</sup> In similar language, the May, 1945 report from the same office attributed another act of violence to “a negro Navy Yard employee [who] slashed the chest and arm of a white Navy Yard employee who inadvertently pushed against him on a crowded Bremerton bus.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> RG 181, “Review of Some Significant Information Originating in and Received by District Intelligence Office, Thirteenth Naval District,” District Intelligence Office, Thirteenth Naval District, March, 1945, Record Group 181, box 7, folder A8-2, Central Subject Files, Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments, National Archives Building, Seattle, WA, 6-7.

<sup>75</sup> RG 181, “Review of Some Significant Information Originating in and Received by District Intelligence Office, Thirteenth Naval District,” District Intelligence Office, Thirteenth Naval District, May, 1945, Record Group 181, box 7, folder A8-2, Central Subject Files, Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments, National Archives Building, Seattle, WA, 7-8.

In addition to the occasional racial violence, segregation remained a daily reality in Bremerton. Black workers who arrived in the town to work in the Navy Yard found their choice of housing limited to the segregated black community Sinclair Heights up on a nearby hill. Living in Sinclair Heights could, at times, represent a challenge compared to the other local housing projects for Yard workers. Some problems were relatively mundane, such as R.J. Williams' complaint that "the project doesn't have a plot for [victory] gardens," a reasonable complaint when understood in the light of knowledge that growing a victory garden meant not only more food for his family but also other benefits, such as an increased wartime gasoline ration.<sup>76</sup> Some problems for Sinclair, on the other hand, made life rather more difficult. For instance, Sinclair Heights did not receive the benefit of school bus service, meaning the entire community's children were required to walk down the hill to the nearest bus stop, no matter the weather and often only to arrive at school soaked through to the skin by the Seattle area's ever-present rainfall.<sup>77</sup> For a time, even regular bus service did not make it all the way up the "long hill" to Sinclair, until an early morning and early evening service to take Navy Yard employees to and from work was put in place, though that limited service was all the community received for most of the war.<sup>78</sup> The community, outside of the well-loved Community Center building, did not receive the same support for youth activities, such as playing fields and parks, from the city that the rest of Bremerton enjoyed.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "Victory Gardeners Given Promise of Extra Gas," *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), March 23, 1945, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 3; R.J. Williams, interview.

<sup>77</sup> Delse Peebles, interview by Dianne Robertson, Oral History Research Number 09, *The Sinclair Park Project*, Black Historical Society of Kitsap County, CD-ROM (Tacoma, WA: Artifacts Consulting, Inc., 2004).

<sup>78</sup> Audry Miller and Earl Smith, interview.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Black workers in the Navy Yard often ate in the cafeteria of the Yard, though not by choice. Rather they were forced to do so because the local restaurants often refused to serve them, leaving no other option but the cafeteria.<sup>80</sup> The families of the black Yard workers felt this at times as well, as they were ignored when entering restaurants and had their attention directed to “right of refusal” signs.<sup>81</sup> This did, however, lead to a subsequent local Civil Rights movement – a sit-in – that was ultimately successful in convincing an eatery owner to serve “anybody that came in” his establishment, according to Lillian Walker, a Sinclair resident who described the event as the “start of ending some of the segregation in Bremerton” and a setting of precedents for people coming after.<sup>82</sup> Some of the enthusiasm for leaving the racial prejudices of South were tempered by statements such as Mr. Webb’s, that at times Bremerton “Reminded [him] of Mississippi.”<sup>83</sup>

The Navy Yard kept a thriving internal basketball league in operation throughout the war, in attempt to raise spirits in a time when work hours reached exhausting levels. The league was usually split up by shop, with each interested shop in the Yard fielding a team from its workers. One notable exception to this was the Tug Trotters, a team with only black players. Though they played against all the other teams, it was still segregated basketball.<sup>84</sup> This segregation expanded outside the Yard with the formation of the Bremerton All-Stars, a Yard-based “all-colored”

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<sup>80</sup> Mr. Ross, interview by Dianne Robertson, Oral History Research Number 10, *The Sinclair Park Project*, Black Historical Society of Kitsap County, CD-ROM (Tacoma, WA: Artifacts Consulting, Inc., 2004).

<sup>81</sup> Audry Miller and Earl Smith, interview.

<sup>82</sup> Lillian Walker, interview by Dianne Robertson, *The Sinclair Park Project*, Black Historical Society of Kitsap County, CD-ROM (Tacoma, WA: Artifacts Consulting, Inc., 2004).

<sup>83</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Webb, interview by Dianne Robertson, 1984, *The Sinclair Park Project*, Black Historical Society of Kitsap County, CD-ROM (Tacoma, WA: Artifacts Consulting, Inc., 2004).

<sup>84</sup> “Split Hoop League Clicks with Fans as Second-Half Play Proves Outstanding,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), February 4, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 4.

basketball club intending to play both within the yard league as well as on the road on the weekends.<sup>85</sup>

There was more segregation in Navy Yard Puget Sound than just an all-black basketball team or two. Though some of the other forms of segregation are equally mundane, they nevertheless stand out as casual, thoughtless contradictions to the policy of employment nondiscrimination that the Navy Yard so successfully employed to draw workers to Bremerton. For instance, an article in the *Salute* informing “all colored war workers and colored Army and Navy personnel in the Kitsap County area” of Mother’s Day services, in addition to once again casually referring to “colored folk,” indicates that such programs took place on a segregated basis in the area.<sup>86</sup> Another article in the paper advertised “Several more musicians are needed for a colored dance band being formed,” once again splitting recreational activities on the basis of race. A similar advertisement proclaimed that “Negro residents of the West End Dormitories have organized a Young Men’s Social Club,” leading to the question of whether the Dormitories themselves were also segregated, leaving these young men to feel a need to band together in the form of a Social Club.<sup>87</sup>

As late as June, 1945 across the Puget Sound in the Seattle area, black workers struggled for equal opportunity in employment against the Boeing Aircraft Company and the Aeronautical Machinists Union, Local 751. The District Intelligence Office of the Thirteenth Naval District reported that the Pyramid Workers Alliance, a group of around one hundred black Boeing

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<sup>85</sup> “Bremerton All-Stars,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), March 3, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> “Colored Folk Planning Mother’s Day Services,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), May 12, 1944, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> “Colored Social Club Founded at WE Dorms,” *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), March 16, 1945, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 4.

employees working together to push for full union members, was “the first indication of organized negro objection to industrial discrimination...this is the first [organization] in which the members appear to be more interested in racial conditions than in their individual jobs.”

Interestingly, the reason listed in the report for the workers’ interest in full union membership was “so that they may continue to hold their jobs at Boeings [sic] during the post war period.”<sup>88</sup>

This worry on the part of black workers concerning the fate of their employment following the end of the war was both understandable and justified, and was not isolated to the Pyramid Workers Alliance.

A May, 1945 intelligence report for the Thirteenth Naval District detailed the approaching situation of unemployment, explaining that more than two-thirds of black Portland-Vancouver area shipyard workers desired to stay in their jobs following the close of the war, a situation, with a parallel in Bremerton, likely to cause tension when the shipbuilding industry started downsizing.<sup>89</sup> Puget Sound Navy Yard workers were also concerned about their employment prospects after the war’s end. Ada Holland, for example, told the *Salute* on August 31, 1945, two weeks after Japan’s surrender and the effective end of World War II, that she would like to remain at the Yard to work and was afraid if she was let go she would have to return to Louisiana.<sup>90</sup>

The Navy Yard’s manual specifically laid out a limit to employment guarantees; everyone employed at the shipyard was guaranteed employment up to six months after the end of

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<sup>88</sup> RG 181, “Review of Some Significant Information Originating in and Received by District Intelligence Office, Thirteenth Naval District.” District Intelligence Office, Thirteenth Naval District, June, 1945, Record Group 181, box 7, folder A8-2, Central Subject Files, Records of Naval Districts and Shore Establishments, National Archives Building, Seattle, WA, 2-3.

<sup>89</sup> District Intelligence Office, May, 1945.

<sup>90</sup> Ada Holland, interview.

the war.<sup>91</sup> Though it was impossible to know at the time who would be laid off, it did mean that, at least potentially, even the most successful black worker at the shipyard could find themselves legally out of a job in a mere six months, replaced by former employees returning from war or even downsized in favor of peers. One month before V-J Day the Secretary of the Navy Frank Nox was mentioned in the *Salute* as having a personal belief that workers who wish to would have jobs for up to a full year after the end of the war.<sup>92</sup> This was not only a rather uncertain assurance, given that it was only an opinion, but also failed to address the question of permanent jobs. Though no one could have known it with certainty at that time given the efforts to save it, the FEPC would only survive a short while longer itself, failing to secure the necessary legislation to continue its existence on a more permanent basis following the war.

Much like the FEPC, opportunities for black workers often shrank and finally disappeared following the close of World War II.<sup>93</sup> All across the United States, jobs vanished. Even those black workers who managed to keep a job were often regulated to the menial, unskilled work once again.<sup>94</sup> While PSNS was not immune to the layoffs that followed the war's end, not all black employees were downsized. Some, such as Anthony Modisett, Henry Myers, Albert Colvin, and James Walker went on to have long and prosperous careers there.<sup>95</sup> In this way and in the hopes and dreams of migrants from across the country who were emboldened to

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<sup>91</sup> *Keep the Ships Fighting*, 27.

<sup>92</sup> "Work for One Year After The War," *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), July 6, 1945, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Sides, 261-2; Abel, 635-7; Turk, 242.

<sup>94</sup> Abel, 638.

<sup>95</sup> "Faces of the Shipyard: African American Contributions to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard," Naval History and Heritage Command, 2009, accessed June 11, 2014, 1-2, <http://www.history.navy.mil/special%20highlights/AfricanAmerican/PSNS/aatimeline1.htm>.

leave their hometowns to seek their fortunes elsewhere, the legacy of the FEPC and Executive Order 8802 is best understood. The FEPC and EO 8802 gave black Americans hope, opened doors to new jobs, enabled a migration that would give them a taste of a better life, and brought together many of the groups that would later do the work of the Civil Rights Movement, all perhaps best summarized in the words of Milton Hanks, responding to a question of what he thought about President Roosevelt shortly after the President's death in April, 1945,

President Roosevelt was my commander in chief when I was in the Army...a soldier couldn't have a finer or nobler man to serve under. But more than anything else, I honor him for what he has done for my people. He was tolerant and he was Christian. He has helped us to attain greater economic freedom: his projects and social programs will continue to do good among the Negroes. For us he has done as much as Lincoln.<sup>96</sup>

In the end, Puget Sound Navy Yard's role in this was an example of what might have been, had the FEPC had the necessary resources and authority to fully carry out its mission. A federally-run employer in full compliance with executive order and lacking the extra barrier of hostile trade unions, the Navy Yard was a perfect testing ground for the positive effects the FEPC could have enacted, had it possessed the tools to mete out meaningful punishments and force reluctant employers and unions to comply. Perhaps, if committee had been permanent and endowed with such powers, the Civil Rights Movement would have begun and had an effect that much sooner.

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<sup>96</sup> Milton Hanks, interview, *Navy Yard Salute* (Bremerton), April 20, 1945, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, microfilm, p. 3.



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