Pick Up the Broken Peaces: The Rise and Fall of the *Taifa* Kingdoms in Islamic Iberia

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Following over three hundred years of Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula, the Christian *Reconquista*,[1] so long dreamed of, began to become a reality. In the twenty-first century lands of Portugal and Spain, Muslim warriors ruled with very little challenge from 711 until late into the eleventh century. They called their beloved new territory *al-Andalus* in reference to the Slavic Vandals who dominated the headland prior to the arrival of Islam. Upon acquisition, the Muslims did not annihilate the ethnic Christians and Jews of the domain. Instead, they allowed them to coexist in a subordinated role. They did, however, attempt to remove political opposition. But the remnants of the Visigothic kingdom managed to maintain their own territories in the far north of the peninsula.[2] It would take several centuries until the Christians grew powerful enough to challenge the Muslims, but once able they began the process of land reclamation. The Christians used a variety of instruments to achieve their objectives. Some were diplomatic, in the form of alliances and truces; others were militaristic and included

[1] *La Reconquista*, or "The Reconquest," is a Spanish term that deals with the Christian Kings of the Iberian Peninsula who, together with the Papacy in Rome, used religious ideology to remove opposing belief systems (Muslim and Jewish) and political groups from the region of modern Spain and Portugal. It is worth noting that this retaking of land took centuries to complete, while the Muslim conquest of the 8th century took roughly two years.

[2] The Visigoths were an East Germanic people who, after sacking Rome in 410 CE, established kingdoms in southern-France and Iberia.

Langlois, Janet. "The Belle Isle Incident: Legend Dialectic and Semiotic System in the 1943 Detroit Race Riots." *The Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983): 183-199.

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workers in Detroit became marginalized as the UAW proved unable to handle its white membership and improve wartime work opportunities.

The 1941 River Rouge strike, violence and discrimination at the Sojourner Truth project, racist hiring and management policies and the openly racist hate strikes of 1943 were the explosive material that had been added to the tense racial environment of wartime Detroit. All that was necessary to ignite the tension was be an incident of violence, and a failure to control the initial event by the authorities. Just over two weeks after the Packard strike, a fight broke out at Belle Isle Park and quickly grew into a riot that consumed the city for the better part of two days. Death and destruction followed as society lowered itself to the lowest common denominator. Looting, assault and murder were seen on the 20th and 21st, and thirty-four individual lost their lives as a result.

The 1941 River Rouge strike, violence and discrimination at the Sojourner Truth project and the openly racist hate strikes of 1943, and in particular, at Packard were the antecedents of the 1943 race riot. These events clearly accelerated the level of racism and violence in the city preceding the 1943 race riot. Blacks and whites were agitated due to living and working conditions, and violence exploded wherever the city's institutions were unable to cope with discrimination. As the newspaper publisher Louis Martin extolled in a column after racism divided the UAW vote during the 1943 Mayoral election, "Here was a partnership of the two groups wrecked on the shoals of racism. Until this bogey of color is dispelled, such an alliance will always be at the mercy of those who dare to exploit racial prejudice."[40]

[40] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 207.

only keep their jobs with, "white worker approval."[36] When these promises could not be kept, a fact of which Packard management was aware, the white workers went on strike.

The strike was against UAW policy as blacks were members of the organization. UAW president, R.J. Thomas, claimed that the strike was the work of, "agents of the Ku Klux Klan or its successor body in Detroit," and that he had proof of KKK involvement.[37] The KKK had also been involved with the Polish families in the Sojourner Truth incident. Racism clearly ran deep at Packard. At one point during the strike a southerner yelled to the crowd that, "I'd rather see Hitler and Hirohito win than work beside a nigger on the assembly line."[38] The Packard strike was resolved by June 7, and nearly all the men involved went back to work that day. War production was unharmed, but the damage to Detroit had been done.

The escalating instances of violence between blacks and whites and open discrimination against blacks were caused by racism. It was magnified by the rapidly expanding population of wartime Detroit, which had only increased overcrowding in the inner city slums, and added more racist citizens as a result of heavy recruitment in the south.[39] Housing was in short order, and when provided a chance for decent living conditions blacks were met every step of the way with protest and violence. Despite labor shortages in Detroit, blacks were largely under-utilized, and when they were hired their presence was so offensive to whites that hate strikes were staged as signs of disapproval. Black

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[36] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 168.
[37] "UAW Says Klan Formented Strike; Thomas Charges He Has Evidence of Its Activity in Tie-Up at Packard War Plant," *New York Times*, June 7, 1943.
[38] Holli, *Detroit*, 189.
[39] Lee and Humphrey, *Race Riot: Detroit 1943*, 91, 92.

employment.[30] In fact, out of 25,000 employees at Ford's Willow Run bomber plant, only 200 were black.[31] Racism had become a system-wide policy with the Ford position change, and the black community allied with the UAW.

Hate strikes began occurring regularly in 1943. In fact, there were twelve hate strikes in the first six months of 1943.[32] The racism that permeated the auto industry was largely responsible for the significant labor shortage reported in Detroit. Meier cites a government report listing the "25,000 available black women as the city's 'largest neglected source of labor.'"[33] The racism that permeated the Packard Motor Car Company brought about the most significant hate strike in June of 1943.

Of the major manufacturers in Detroit, Packard was the most openly racist. Meier claims, "hate strikes occurred in a stronghold of virulent anti-black hostility that characterized not only the workers but high levels of management as well."[34] The company had a large contingent of Polish and southern American workers in its employ. The Sojourner Truth incident had taken place in a Polish neighborhood and there had been some ongoing agitation between Poles and blacks in the Detroit. Meier claims that the Ku Klux Klan had attempted to recruit men from Packard, and may have even infiltrated the company.

When the Packard strike began in earnest on June 3, 25,000 men walked off the job in protest of the promotion of three black men.[35] The strike was largely encouraged by Packard management who told whites, "they did not have to work with blacks," and that the black men could

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[30] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 136.
[31] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 153.
[32] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 162.
[33] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 154.
[34] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 126.
[35] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 169.

property. So they gathered on the morning of February 28 to fight for their neighborhood.

Meier writes that the Ku Klux Klan, who had burned the cross the previous night, was operating with "the tacit approval of the improvement association," and had decided to intervene.[27] By the time the 200 police arrived at the project to supervise the move they found an overwhelming white force opposing the black tenants. However, the police did little to control the situation as they began arresting the peaceful blacks whose moving vans had been tipped over by the mob.[28] At this point that the police lost control of the crowd; blacks from nearby neighborhoods responded to the rumors of trouble at the project by fighting with the whites there. In all, 200 blacks and a small number of whites were arrested according to Meier. By mid March, blacks were allowed to move in under a more imposing police escort.

Detroit's war factories were not impervious to strike during World War II, as demonstrated by the River Rouge strike. Most strikes, however, were in response to firings or frozen pay levels. A different type of strike began to occur with more frequency in Detroit. These strikes were known as hate strikes, and were simply a form of wildcat strike motivated by race. White workers staged infrequent hate strikes as early as October 1941, when 250 workers at Packard staged a strike after two black men where transferred to a war factory.[29] Hate strikes occurred irregularly over the following fifteen months, and were generally small, brief incidents. White protests were seen at Chrysler, GM, Dodge and Hudson, and after the 1941 River Rouge strike, Ford Management increasingly rejected black employment while increasing white

[27] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 181.
[28] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 181.
[29] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 127.

mid-November a storm of protest had reached proportions that could be heard in Congress. Rep Rudolph G. Tenerowicz, Democrat of Michigan, sought to arrange a changeover to white occupancy."[24] Eventually, the FPHA changed occupancy status of the black project to white only, but reversed the decision when no suitable location could be found for the black housing project. Black families were authorized to begin moving in on February 28, 1942. The whites of Hamtramck responded to black occupancy on the night of February 27.

That day, a group of whites gathered at what had come to be called the Sojourner Truth Defense Housing Project. The AP reported that, "more than 150 white pickets who had patrolled the project last night, when a fiery cross was burned at the site, were augmented by hundreds more at dawn." In fact 1,200 whites formed lines against the black families on the morning of the February 28, and they were found wielding "knives, clubs, rifles and shotguns, ready to do battle in the street separating the project from a row of dwellings occupied by white persons." The president of the Seven Mile and Fenelon Improvement Association, which encompassed the area in which the Sojourner Truth project had been erected, claimed, "the area had been all white until Negro occupancy was encouraged."[25] Others in the area believed that, "Negro occupancy of the project would lower the value of their homes."[26] The whites who gathered demonstrated racist motives, whether by their pure dislike of blacks or a fear of devaluation of their

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[24] "Storm Over New Housing in Detroit; History of Project Which Brought on Race Riots," *New York Times*, March 15, 1942.
[25] "Detroiters in Riot on Negro Project; 1,200 Armed Whites Repel Families Ready to Move Into New Federal Houses," *New York Times*, March 1, 1942.
[26] "Detroit Riot Issue Put Up to Capital; Mayor Going to Washington on the Question of Negro Tenancy for Housing," *New York Times*, March 2, 1942.

lines."[21] NAACP leaders had real fear that the violence at the River Rouge plant, or in any similar situation, would lead to large-scale race rioting, adding further struggles for blacks in Detroit. Meier writes that the UAW was also guilty of manipulating blacks during the strike, as had been done at Chrysler in 1939 by "exploiting the Negro leaders' fears of a race riot"[22] in an effort to get blacks to leave the factories. In truth, neither Ford nor the UAW conducted itself with the blacks' interests in mind, but took advantage of and manipulated the racial awareness of blacks and whites for gain during the 1941 strike.

Just ten months after the fighting between blacks and whites at the River Rouge plant, another significant buildup to 1943's race riot came in the form of a dispute over who would occupy new defense housing near a Polish neighborhood.[23] Defense housing projects had sprung up in the industrial centers of the United States in response to the lack of housing available to migrant war workers.

The Federal Public Housing Authority (FHPA) had instructed the Detroit Housing Commission (DHC) to select two sites for future projects in 1941. The FHPA rejected the proposed project locations of the DHC and arbitrarily relocated them. The problem with the government's plan was that it had relocated the black project in a white neighborhood, against the DHC's initial plans to locate the black project in a black neighborhood. Detroit had long operated under a system of neighborhood homogeneity during the twentieth century to ensure high property values of white homes. The DHC appealed the FPHA decision of locating a black housing project in a white neighborhood, but the appeal was denied. Protest continued to pour out of Detroit, and, "by

[21] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 88.
[22] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 92.
[23] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 177.

before at a Chrysler plant in 1939, where the strategy "was to provoke interracial violence and thus force the governor to break the strike,"[17] and in April 1941, the Ford Motor Company showed no qualms about using similar tactics.

Union men had walked out of the foundry on the night of April 1, 1941 after eight UAW members were fired. As the striking UAW membership exited, 2,500 non-union blacks remained at work. Only 300 whites refused to join the picket line.[18] The strike was relatively peaceful, with the pickets even allowing some men to cross their lines during the morning of April 2. As *Time Magazine* reported, there was no violence until,

> 200 non-striking Negroes, who had remained inside the beleaguered plant, made a sortie through Gate 4 armed with iron pipes, steel bars, bolts, razors, knives, and charged the pickets. Hot & heavy was the battle until the attackers withdrew, fled back inside.[19]

The black workers aimed to break the strike. These men were not union members and had been ordered to undertake the attack. The blame for the violence was laid at the feet of Henry Ford himself.

The NAACP objected to the events at the Rouge, claiming, "Ford had deliberately injected the race issue by utilizing blacks as strikebreakers."[20] Historian August Meier agrees with the accusation that Ford had manipulated racial tensions when he writes that "the corporation's tactics on that first morning, April 2, lent credence to these suspicions when strikebreakers were sent out twice to smash the picket

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[17] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 88.
[18] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 87.
[19] "Showdown at Ford," *Time Magazine,* April 14, 1943.
[20] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 89.

in population during this time, but the actual black population there only grew by 4,916, whereas Detroit added 35,791.[12]

The third migratory phase took place between 1940 and 1943. The city grew from a population of 1,623,452 in 1940 to a population estimated at 2.1 million by 1943. It is believed that 440,000 whites migrated to Detroit during this phase.[13] Nearly 350,000 of the white immigrants came from the southern United States.[14] These white immigrants originated from states where Jim Crow laws were still enforced: "there has been a large influx of southern white[s]...They are ignorant and hold traditional southern attitudes toward the Negroes."[15] Detroit was a city transformed by the migrant Germans, Poles, Austrians, Hungarians, Italians, blacks and whites, and in just forty-three years the population had ballooned from 285,704 to 2.1 million. It was this rapid growth that would accentuate and facilitate the growth of racial strife in the Motor City.

One of the first signs that Detroit was on the path to large-scale racial violence came in 1941 at a strike at the Ford Motor Co. River Rouge plant. The company had a large contingent of non-union blacks in its employ. Most of these men worked at the foundry located at the Rouge. Blacks were not unionized in any significant numbers as there was "much skepticism" among blacks as to the goals of the UAW.[16] One reason for this was the racism that ran through the rank-and-file members of the UAW. The adversarial relationship between blacks and whites in the auto industry had been utilized as a strikebreaking technique once

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[12] Holli, *Detroit*, 145, 146, 269-271.
[13] Lee and Humphrey, *Race Riot: Detroit 1943*, 92.
[14] Janet Langlois, "The Belle Isle Incident: Legend Dialectic and Semiotic System in the 1943 Detroit Race Riots," *The Journal of American Folklore* 96 (1983): 185.
[15] Lee and Humphrey, *Race Riot: Detroit 1943*, 92.
[16] Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 103.

167,016. The war industry of World War I accounts for some of this growth. By 1921, manufacturers and employees both decreased to 1,684 and 95,376 respectively. However, two years later the city added only two more plants while the number of employees had risen to 170,960. The number of manufacturing facilities and employees would continue to rise every year until 1939 when Detroit had 2,684 facilities employing 372,900 persons. Detroit had become the model of efficient manufacturing in the United States, and half of the working population was employed in manufacturing.[10]

The lure of employment in Detroit's manufacturing industry motivated thousands from across the world to migrate to the city, which grew in three separate, overlapping stages. The stages are defined more by the type of immigrant than by the chronology of migration. The city's first substantial growth occurred at the turn of the twentieth century when Europeans entered the city in great numbers. Significant numbers of Poles, Germans, Canadians, Austrians, Italians and Hungarians increased the population of Detroit and by 1916, one of every three in a population of 725,000 was foreign born.[11]

Southern blacks define the second migratory phase, which occurred near the end of the large European migration. Known as the Great Migration, this period saw hundreds of thousands of blacks migrate to the industrialized cities of the Midwest. The black population in Detroit increased by 611% at the height of the Great Migration, between the years of 1910 and 1920; and Detroit's total population increased by 113%. Only Gary, Indiana had a larger percentage increase

[10] Holli, *Detroit*, 275, 279.
[11] Holli, *Detroit*, 135.

cut costs to the company. The rationale was that assembly line work was highly monotonous and had an inherently large turnover rate as a result. The constant hiring and training of workers brought inefficiency to Ford plants.[5] The tactic worked. Fifteen thousand jobseekers applied for just 3,000 available positions at Ford's Highland Park factory after the wage change.[6] Turnover difficulties diminished as Ford expected, allowing him increase productivity by implementing three shifts instead of two.[7]

By inventing an efficient production system that minimized cost and maximized production, and by improving the work conditions of employees, Ford gave his company the chance to expand to the massive vertically integrated River Rouge plant. "The Rouge," as it was known, employed 100,000 workers at the height of production, and generated 800 car bodies per day by 1919.[8] The Rouge was just one of many massive plants that Ford would build during the first half of the twentieth century. The Willow Run factory built bombers during World War II and employed 25,000 women.[9] The Ford Motor Company is a prime example of the widespread industrial growth and success experienced in Detroit during the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1909, there were 2,036 manufacturers located in Detroit, employing 81,011 employees. By 1919, the city had added just another 140 manufacturers, but the number of persons employed had grown to

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[5] "Henry Ford's $5-a-Day Revolution," Ford Motor Company, accessed November 20, 2010, http://corporate.ford.com/about-ford/heritage/milestones/5dollaraday/677-5-dollar-a-day.

[6] "A Timeline of the Ford Motor Company," NPR, accessed November 20, 2010, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5168769.

[7] "Ford's Rouge Complex Is Known as an Industrial Trend-setter in Both the 20th and 21st Centuries," Ford Motor Company, accessed November 20, 2010, http://corporate.ford.com/about-ford/heritage/places/rouge/665-rouge.

[8] "Ford's Rouge Complex Is Known as an Industrial Trend-setter in Both the 20th and 21st Centuries."

[9] August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 153.

overcrowding and general misgivings between races and was observed in *Time Magazine* in the warning that "Detroit is Dynamite" in 1943.[3]

To fully understand the problems of Detroit in the 1940s one must examine the racial makeup of the city up to that point. Detroit was built on the back of a growing industry that attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants to the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1900, the population of Detroit was 285,704 and by 1904, 48,879 of its citizens made their living in industry and manufacturing. This constituted nearly one sixth of Detroit's population. Pre-war numbers (war industry had a significant effect on population and manufacturing) show that by 1939 the number of workers in Detroit's manufacturing sector had grown to 372,900, a segment that came out of a population of 1,623,452 persons. Nearly one quarter of the population worked in manufacturing.[4] Industry expanded through the innovations of the industrialists, Henry Ford in particular.

Henry Ford was one of the principal players in spurring the growth of Detroit. Ford invented and implemented the moving assembly line in 1913, and then shortened the workday to eight hours while raising the daily wage to five dollars in 1914. The intended effect of the assembly line was to cut the cost of production by eliminating all unnecessary steps and workers involved in the production of cars. This efficiency would allow Ford to produce more cars than his competition, and at a more affordable rate, thus putting the automobile within reach of a larger market. As a result, the Ford Motor Company produced 15,458,781 individual Model T cars from 1908 to 1927. The implementation of the five dollar-eight hour workday was designed to

[3] "Deep Trouble," *Time Magazine*, June 28, 1943.
[4] Melvin Holli, ed., *Detroit* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), 269, 275.

does not often result in massive violent uprising either. If racism is the spark or the cause of the riot, what events or instances shortened the fuse and built up the explosive potential of the bomb that went off on the night of the 20th? Three events that occurred during the period of 1941 to 1943 can be seen as adding momentum to the building racial tensions of wartime Detroit.

Detroit was one of the centers of military production during WWII and was even known to some as the Arsenal of Democracy. The race problems present in Detroit in the 1940s were magnified by the unique problems bundled with the demands of massive wartime production in the city. Striking, overcrowding, and the migration of persons from the southern United States added to the uneasy relations between the large immigrant groups and first generation Americans, and the black community in Detroit. It is through this understanding that the three events become important signals of the imminent explosion in the city. One event occurred each year, from 1941 to 1943, on a scale large enough to impact the racial conflict at play in the city. In 1941, a strike at Ford's River Rouge plant ended after non-union blacks were pitted against striking whites by the Ford Motor Company. In 1942, the issue of overcrowding in housing exhibited itself in the racially motivated protest and violence at the Sojourner Truth projects. Finally, a number of hate strikes set the tone and culminated in a large strike at Packard Motor Car Company.

Each event portrayed some form of overt contention and racism, discrimination and manipulation pointed at the black community of Detroit. The signs of imminent disaster were clear to several journalists. The combative nature displayed in Detroit was combined with

Detroit 1941-1943: Manufacturing Racial Strife

Matt Furnas

On June 20, 1943, Detroit, Michigan was engulfed in the fires of civil unrest, caused by long-smoldering racism and discrimination. A fistfight between a group of blacks and whites, at Belle Isle Park, escalated into a full-scale riot by the early hours the next morning. Federal soldiers were called in on the evening of June 21 to quell the violence. When the smoke cleared, thirty-four people were killed and over one thousand had been injured.[1] Twenty-five of those killed were black. The rioting and violence in Detroit is a clear manifestation of the racism that existed in the city in the years prior to and especially during World War II. One of the most fitting examples of this virulent racism comes from the case of four young Italians who admitted to killing a black man with a rifle "to have some fun".[2]

The terrible events that occurred in late June 1943 leave a single question: Why? The obvious answer is that racism and discrimination against blacks in Detroit, especially during the war years, created a powder keg of ill feelings and contempt between blacks and whites. The cause of the riot cannot be attributed to the fighting at Belle Isle Park, as fights break out often in our society, yet rarely does chaos ensue on the level seen in Detroit over a fistfight. And racism, while clearly the cause,

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[1] Alfred McClung Lee and Norman D. Humphrey, *Race Riot: Detroit 1943* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1968), 2.
[2] "Detroit Riot Killing Charged to 4 Youths," *New York Times*, July 31, 1943.