

Systems of Male Privilege: The Industrial Relations Policies of the Ford Motor Company in the 1940s

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This article examines the industrial relations systems constructed by Ford and United Automobile Workers (UAW) leaders for the Ford Motor Company in the 1940s. Ford's industrial relations systems extended privileges to men and male-dominated groups to the detriment of their female counterparts and women seeking employment and advancement. Systemic male privilege was integral to Ford's operations throughout conversion to military production for World War II and reconversion back to civilian production.

Keywords: gender; labor relations; US 20th; women

Introduction

Henry Ford Sr. constructed his company with an ideal employee in mind: a man who worked to provide for his wife and children. Operations at the Ford Motor Company (Ford) changed significantly during conversion to wartime military production, reconversion back to civilian production, and the leadership transition from Henry Ford Sr. to Henry Ford II. However, one constant underpinned operations at Ford throughout the 1940s: policies that sustained male privilege.

As a major wartime producer of military equipment, Ford temporarily suspended civilian automobile production from February 1942 until July 1945. Military production for World War II necessitated a large increase in Ford's workforce when male labor was scarce. Female employment increased nearly a hundredfold, from only 450 in the

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spring of 1941 to a wartime peak of 44,380 women across the United States. At the end of the war, physical reconversion of the plants to once again produce civilian vehicles required mass layoffs during the disposal of facilities and the relocation, acquisition, removal, and retooling of machinery. Female employment declined drastically during reconversion: By November 1947, barely five thousand women remained, predominantly in salaried rather than unionized hourly employment.¹

Academics have extensively studied women's efforts to combat corporate gender and racial discrimination in the American automobile industry and elsewhere during the World War II period. The general academic consensus, supported primarily by wartime surveys and union grievance procedures, is that following World War II, although many women voluntarily withdrew from the American workforce, significantly more women than were successfully sought to remain employed.² Labor academics, expanding beyond employer-employee rivalry as the central analytical theme, have demonstrated that many union officials and leaders disregarded violations of women's seniority rights and sometimes actively assisted management in removing women from the workforce during reconversion.³ What has remained underexamined are the systems that conveyed superior access to employment, advancement, and job security to men. Privileges extended to individuals of a particular group are often taken for granted, accepted as normal, or regarded as proper, without consideration of those who are disadvantaged.⁴ This male "privilege" conveyed in policies, many of which were not on their face discriminatory against women, played a major role in both the gender order of the workplace and how a company operated. At Ford, as recently noted, "The company's production methods have received detailed scrutiny, but its financial and administrative realities remain almost

1. "Ford Car, the First for Civilians Since February, '42, Rolls off Line," *New York Times*, July 4, 1945, 15; Monthly Report of Employees, 5-6-41, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942-1944 3 of 3; Monthly Employment Report, December 1946, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports; Women 21 February 1947, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports; Weekly Employment Report, 11-4-47, Cameron Records, Box 4, Form 2783 12-11-45 thru 11/4/47.

2. D'Ann Campbell, who downplayed the extent to which women were forced out of jobs during reconversion, conceded that women in the automobile industry were forced out of good jobs. Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 222-226; Chafe, *The American Woman*, 178-184; Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 162-164; Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 99-104; Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 111-112; Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*, 13.

3. Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 111-133; Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 99-152; Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 161, 165-168; Halpern, *UAW Politics in the Cold War Era*, 46-47.

4. McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege."

unexamined.”⁵ This article explores the industrial relations policies that affected women’s employment at Ford in the 1940s.

As Ford Sr.’s role declined and ended, union and company leaders, while motivated to achieve somewhat different outcomes, had interests that fundamentally aligned to create systems that benefited male-dominated groups of employees. Ford managers sought to promote a loyal workforce while United Automobile Workers (UAW) leaders sought to reward long-term employees. To achieve these goals, Ford and UAW leadership created systems that either directly benefited men more than women or benefited male-dominated groups to the detriment of women. At Ford in the 1940s, the most important of these systems, but far from the only one, was the seniority system. Together in 1942, Ford and UAW leaders created a seniority system designed to benefit two predominantly male groups: pre-war employees and veterans. The cost of privileging these groups was paid by another group that comprised almost all women employed at Ford: employees first hired after June 20, 1941. This date marked Ford’s recognition of the UAW, but it was also a convenient date for UAW leaders to separate pre-war and wartime hires. The second-tier seniority possessed by wartime hires coupled with incidents of direct discrimination against women by Ford and UAW leaders led to women effectively being displaced from Ford’s hourly workforce. This article examines Henry Ford Sr.’s labor policies, the wartime hiring of women, the dynamics and difficulties of employing women during wartime, the seniority system and reconversion layoffs, and finally the industrial relations policies of Henry Ford II in the late 1940s.

Henry Ford Sr.’s Industrial Relations Policies

Henry Ford Sr.’s belief that the ideal employee was male was integral to how Ford operated prior to World War II. The ideal employee was a man with a wife at home looking after their children. Examining Ford between 1903 and 1930, the economist Wayne Lewchuk attests that as Ford’s labor force transitioned to highly repetitive work on assembly lines, Henry Ford Sr., to promote a loyal and productive workforce, excluded women as part of an employment package “that raised the status of men within their households.”⁶ Henry Ford considered women’s ongoing role to be to “keep house”: maintain the household and raise children.⁷ Henry Ford Sr.’s policy was to exclude women who

5. Link, “The Charismatic Corporation,” 87.

6. Lewchuk, “Men and Monotony,” 848.

7. Ford, *My Philosophy of Industry*, 5–7.

did not have a dependent to support. The few women who gained employment at Ford had to navigate a company with a leader who openly believed that “women’s least valuable contribution to life is made through industry” and “only a small portion of our work is suited to them.”⁸

Henry Ford Sr. molded Ford’s workforce via selective hiring, interfering in the gender dynamics of employees’ home lives, and in the granting of employment benefits. In the 1920s and 1930s, Ford hired parolees, physically disabled people, and African American men, particularly married African American men. Ford had significant leverage over these employees who had limited options elsewhere in the labor market.⁹ Meanwhile, the Sociological Department, particularly in the years before Ford’s recognition of the UAW, meddled in the domestic affairs of employees, ensuring that employees did not live with an unmarried partner, share living quarters with other families, or maintain other arrangements that did not meet Henry Ford Sr.’s moral conception of the family.¹⁰ Workers who conformed to expectations, including not allowing their wives to work outside their homes, could reap benefits such as the famous five-dollars-a-day wage, assistance to secure a mortgage, and company-provided health care services.¹¹ In 1915, Henry Ford Sr. founded the Henry Ford Hospital, which provided employees and their families with health services to be repaid without interest through pay deductions. Access to these health services on credit was dependent on the discretion of managers who evaluated if the employee’s family matched the expectations of Henry Ford Sr.¹² This direct provision of health care services evolved into the later system in which Ford purchased third-party insurance for employees and their spouses and children.¹³ Thereby, Henry Ford Sr.’s system was a precursor to the company-paid, third-party health insurance that emerged in the 1950s as a powerful means of binding both employees

8. Ford, *Moving Forward*, 94–95.

9. Norwood, “Ford’s Brass Knuckles,” 378–379; Lewchuk, “Men and Monotony,” 847; Maloney and Whatley, “Making the Effort,” 465–490; Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*.

10. Reminiscences of William O. Rinehart, Bombard Interviews Series, 8; Reminiscences of Charles C. Krueger, Bombard Interviews Series, 61; Reminiscences of Robert A. Shaw, Bombard Interviews Series, 9–10.

11. May, “The Historical Problem of the Family Wage,” 412–415; Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day*, 141.

12. Reminiscences of H. S. Ablewhite, Bombard Interviews Series, 14–15, 57–58.

13. “Ford Plans Insurance for 100,000 Workers; Each to Pay Half Cost of \$150,000,000 Plan,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1939, 48; “Ford Adds to Insurance,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1948, 23; Life Insurance, Accidental Death & Dismemberment, and Accident & Sickness Benefits—John Hancock Group Insurance Policy, Press Releases Subseries, Box 117, #3-25-3 - ... #3-25-8; Henry Ford II to all Salaried Employees 11 October 1948, Press Releases Subseries, Box 117, #3-25-3 - ... #3-25-8.

and employees' family members, particularly women excluded from jobs providing similar benefits, to the employee's continued employment at Ford.¹⁴ By excluding women and providing relatively high wages and benefits to men with dependent families, Ford gained significant leverage over each employee.¹⁵ Overall, Henry Ford Sr.'s policies helped to ensure that Ford's workforce consisted of men.

During World War II and reconversion, several internal factors incentivized management to cooperate and collaborate with the UAW. Managers were accountable for costs: Human labor was the primary cost that they could both track and control. Management knew whether the company overall was losing money, but it did not have a sufficiently complex managerial accounting system to assess costs accurately on separate units of production or segments of the business.¹⁶ This was in no small part due to the whims of Henry Ford Sr.: "The Cost Department was always open season to Mr. Henry Ford if he happened to think about it."¹⁷ Ford's chief accountant described how, under the pre-war and wartime accounting system, "the manager was mostly involved in physical problems and controlled costs by controlling the number of people working in his operation."¹⁸ During wartime, minimizing labor costs was not paramount in order for Ford to make a profit because Ford could pass the costs on to the government under the terms of the commonly used "cost plus" contracts.¹⁹ However, reconversion renewed the importance of reducing costs by laying off employees.

Before unionization, shop foremen had an immense amount of power over their subordinates, including considerable discretion when making layoff and hiring decisions.²⁰ Ford's recognition of the UAW in June 1941 made seniority the gauge for measuring employees for layoffs and rehiring and thereby significantly limited the power of foremen over their subordinates. With UAW shop stewards empowered to handle employees' grievances, foremen became accountable not just to their supervisors, but also to their subordinates and union representatives. Making matters more difficult for Ford managers, Ford was in a leadership crisis during World War II. In the early 1940s, Henry Ford

14. Klein, *For All These Rights*, 228.

15. May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage," 400, 406–418.

16. Reminiscences of Howard D. Beebe, Bombard Interviews Series, 54, 58–59; L. D. Crusoe, Interview 2 January 1960, Hill Papers, Box 15, Interviews, 2–3.

17. Reminiscences of E. F. Wait, Bombard Interviews Series, 79.

18. Reminiscences of O. H. Husen, Bombard Interviews Series, 86.

19. *Ibid.*, 59; Summary of Government Contracts as of 30 September 1945, La Croix Records, Box 27, Auditing Summary All Contracts.

20. Reminiscences of H. S. Ablewhite, Bombard Interviews Series, 30; Reminiscences of P. E. Haglund, Bombard Interviews Series, 83.

Sr.'s mental acuity declined following two strokes, Edsel Ford died in 1943, and factionalism arose as two top managers vied to fill the power vacuum.²¹ In this uncertain and chaotic environment, managers were empowered to seek the path of least resistance, which meant cooperating with the local UAW leadership during hiring and layoffs.

Wartime Hiring of Women

Knowledge of when and where Ford hired women is critical to understanding the process of layoffs. A useful lens for examining the biases present in hiring policy is through the intersection of race and gender. Although there were distinct differences in the opportunities available to women and African American men during World War II, each were hired as needed and where needed into positions that would minimize resentment from white male employees. African American women experienced compounded racial and gender discrimination.

Wartime military production necessitated a significantly expanded workforce at a time when male labor was scarce; Ford management had no choice but to hire women. In mid-1941, Ford employed only 450 women across its U.S. operations and had not yet admitted women into the Henry Ford Trade School that Henry Ford Sr. had created to provide education for "boys."²² Ford's deluge of female hiring began in the autumn of 1942.²³ Lacking any educational requisites for employment, prospective female employees were screened in what one manager described as a process whereby "we [management] tried to get a better type of woman."²⁴ A "better type of woman" was one whom was not Black. Ford management did not want African American women working in their plants, considering them to be less desirable employees than white women, who were in turn less desirable than white men.

As late as summer 1942, Ford did not employ any African American women. African American labor organizers, such as Rose Billups, the unpaid chairman of the Women's Auxiliary for Local 600, led a concerted effort to end the discrimination against African American women. After protests, Ford began hiring African American women

21. Nevins and Hill, *Ford*, viii, 156–272, 294–358, 412–416, 431–432; Link, "The Charismatic Corporation," 110–113.

22. Monthly Report of Employees, 5-6-41, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942–1944 3 of 3; Ford, *Moving Forward*, 275–277.

23. Factory Count, 12-1-42, Cameron Records, Box 4, Miscellaneous Recaps + Notes; Report Showing the Number of Men and Women Employed in the Detroit Area, 9-17-42, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942–1944 3 of 3.

24. Reminiscences of H. S. Ablewhite, Bombard Interviews Series, 23.

for placement in entirely female units in the small Ypsilanti generator plant. Hiring of African American women gained support among the significant cohort of African American men at Local 600, who could elect union leaders who would advance their interests and garner the support of the executive board. Nonetheless, Ford representatives refused to meet with UAW representatives to discuss hiring African American women at the large plants. It took a further series of protests in front of the Rouge and Highland Park plants to effect Ford management to hire African American women at these plants. Ford employed over fifteen thousand women before ceding to pressure and hiring any African American women to work at the major Detroit area plants, an employment practice that began only in December 1942.²⁵

The opportunities at Ford for African American men were distinctly different than those for women. Henry Ford Sr. began hiring African American men during World War I. By the outbreak of World War II, Ford employed over ten thousand African American men. Although many African American men at Ford were employed in dangerous and less desirable jobs, Ford was an outlier in American industry because it trained African American men for the skilled trades, and a select few became foremen or entered white-collar employment.²⁶

Aware that the introduction of African Americans to new plants and positions was potentially problematic for labor peace, managers limited the job opportunities for African Americans. As wartime production began, African American men experienced difficulty securing job offers at the new and rapidly expanding Willow Run plant: Initially, only those transferred from the Rouge plant found employment.

25. AJL To Ford, 4/30/42, Edsel Ford Papers, Box 264, 1942-War Production Board; Horace L. Sheffield, John Conyers, and Oscar Noble to Harry Bennett 27 July 1942, Edsel Ford Papers, Box 169, Fl-Fo; Blacks in the Labor Market Oral Histories, Interview of Joseph Billups by Herbert Hill on 27 October 1967 in Detroit, used by permission of Herbert Hill, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, #2 pages 6, 7, 12–16; Blacks in the Labor Market Oral Histories, Interview of Shelton Tappes by Herbert Hill on 27 October 1967 in Detroit, used by permission of Herbert Hill, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Interview #1, Part 2, n.p.; Reminiscences of Willis F. Ward, Bombard Interviews Series, 81–87; “Does Henry Ford Hire Negro Women? Well, Maybe ...,” *New York City Sunday Worker*, December 27, 1942; Factory Count, 12-1-42, Cameron Records, Box 4, Miscellaneous Recaps + Notes; Minutes of Executive Board Ford Local #600, 3 September 1942, Local 600 Records, Box 45, Folder 3; Executive Board Minutes Ford Local #600, 27 October 1942, Local 600 Records, Box 45, Folder 4, 2.

26. A Chronology of Information Illustrating Non-discriminatory Policies and Practices at Ford Motor Company, Industrial Relations Policies, Box 1, 1; Questionnaire on Employment of Negroes, Locals 400, 600 and 900, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 19, Folder 6; Reminiscences of Willis F. Ward, Bombard Interviews Series, 9–10, 53–54, 59–60, 105; Christopher C. Alston, Henry Ford and the Negro People, Ganley Collection, Box 36, Folder 14, 5.

Thereafter, managers placed a quota on African Americans.²⁷ Willis Ward, an African American who was a supervisor in the Employment Department, attributed the policy to the desire on the part of management to “integrate the thing so that it worked”: If African American employment got too high, it was believed “the white man would not want to come out to Ford’s to work.”²⁸ In the violent environment that was the Ford shop floor, African American men were subjected to verbal abuse and violence from coworkers who resented their presence. Many African American men literally had to fight for their jobs and those of their less physically able colleagues.²⁹ Ward hired physically attractive African American women in the hope of minimizing white antipathy toward female African American coworkers.³⁰ Ford managers were no doubt eager to minimize the threat of “hate strikes”—white employees striking in protest to the hiring or promotion of African Americans—virulent among other automobile manufacturers.³¹ Likewise, Detroit employers found that placing African American women into plants alongside white women was particularly problematic for labor stability. Toilets in particular were an area of conflict as white women at General Motors and other firms refused to share toilet facilities with their female African American colleagues.³² Ford’s policy of resisting employing African American women was similar to that of General Motors and Chrysler.³³

In a reversal of Henry Ford Sr.’s hiring policy, when Willow Run began operations in 1942, its hiring policy for female applicants was to only hire single women or married women whose husbands had either been drafted or were incapable of working due to illness. Management deemed women working alongside men as detrimental to both family life and workplace productivity. Despite the restrictions of this policy, employment of women at Willow Run grew dramatically during 1942 and 1943, in part because women demonstrated job commitment in a plant with a high rate of employee turnover.³⁴

27. Herbert W. Francis to Edsel Ford, 22 April 1942, Ward Papers; J. Lawrence Duncan to Edsel Ford, 29 July 1942, Edsel Ford Papers, Box 264, 1942-War Production Board; Reminiscences of Roscoe M. Smith, Bombard Interviews Series, 67.

28. Reminiscences of Willis F. Ward, Bombard Interviews Series, 81–82.

29. For violence against African Americans, see Reminiscences of Willis F. Ward, Bombard Interviews Series, 86–87, 98–100. For violence on the shop floor in general, see Reminiscences of J. M. Waggoner, Bombard Interviews Series, 52–53; Reminiscences of A. G. Bondie, Bombard Interviews Series, 19, 22–24.

30. Reminiscences of Willis F. Ward, Bombard Interviews Series, 86.

31. Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 125–136, 166–172.

32. Boris, “‘You Wouldn’t Want One of ‘Em Dancing With Your Wife,’” 93–97.

33. Meier and Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 154.

34. Employment of Women in Bomber Plant and Sperry Job, 3/10/42, Edsel Ford Papers, Box 169, Em-Ex; Reminiscences of H. S. Ablewhite, Bombard

Union leadership at Local 600, representing workers at Ford's largest plant, the Rouge, did not want Ford to hire women. In response to a 1942 UAW Research Department questionnaire on the employment of women, several divisions at Local 600 reported that their division was not planning to employ any women, even during peak production, and that their local had done nothing to have women employed under a wider range of classifications. Union officials at the Rouge B Building expected that their workforce would remain male exclusive despite the addition of 1,800 employees to meet the demands of peak military production. The policy of these union officials was to refer female applicants instead to Willow Run.³⁵

For African American women, access to employment at the Rouge was predicated on a male family member's employment at Ford. Local 600 and Ford agreed that for "colored women," preferential access would be given to wives or daughters of Local 600 members in the military or undergoing some other form of "hardship."³⁶ According to Local 600's response to a UAW questionnaire in April 1943, 600 African American women—comprising 12 percent of total female employment, 4 percent of African American workers, and 0.8 percent of all employees—were employed at the Rouge on "any job qualified to do," a stipulation that likely meant unskilled work.³⁷ Only ten African American women worked at Highland Park and fifty worked at the Lincoln plant, where some reportedly worked in production jobs, including the semiskilled job of welding.³⁸ This level of employment was comparable to many other Detroit shops at the time. A 1943 UAW Research Department survey of the fifty largest plants employing women in the greater Detroit area revealed that "negro women" constituted only 1.6 percent of the women employed, with most working in segregated units and very few in production jobs: Many worked in janitorial roles.³⁹ Such work was typically lower paid and less secure. Perhaps most

Interviews Series, 26–28; Employment Report—Willow Run Bomber Plant: For the Month of September 1942, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942–1944 3 of 3.

35. Questionnaire on Employment of Women, Ford Rouge B Building, Ford Open Hearth Division, Ford Spring & Upset, and Ford Motor Co. Fdry. Mach. Shop, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 32, Women Employment Survey E to K.

36. Willis Ward to Richard T. Leonard and George Trapp & Gordon Traye, 3 February 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 44, Folder 3.

37. Questionnaire on Employment in UAW-CIO Plants, Local 600, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 11, Folder 8.

38. Questionnaire on Employment in UAW-CIO Plants, Locals 400 and 900, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 11, Folder 8.

39. Notes on Women Workers in UAW-CIO Plants, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 11, Folder 4, 5; Women Workers in the UAW-CIO, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 11, Folder 4, n.p.

importantly, due to their late arrival to the Ford workforce, African American women had a very short window in which to gain seniority before reconversion layoffs began.

Overall, African American employment held steady through reconversion.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Ford did not keep records on the intersection of race and gender of its employees. As a result, little can be ascertained as to what happened to African American women during reconversion. However, because African American women entered Ford's workforce relatively late in the war and faced significant racial prejudice in the workplace, they would have likely faced even greater challenges than white women, and the most severe difficulty in being recalled.

Women's Wartime Employment: Dynamics and Difficulties

As large numbers of women entered the workforce during 1942 and 1943, Ford management conceived of methods to pay women less than their equivalent male counterparts. Ford managers paid women working at the small and female-dominated Phoenix plant in Plymouth, Michigan, a lower hourly rate than their counterparts at larger plants.⁴¹ Management evaded Michigan state law and War Labor Board policy by claiming clerks were not directly involved in production and therefore equal pay for equal work was not applicable. A confidential 1943 salary schedule contained a separate "class," with inferior remuneration for female clerks, complete with the description "same positions as listed under 'Male.' To be filled with female help only when competent male help is not obtainable."⁴² Ford management wanted male employees and were willing to pay more for them.

Equal pay for equal work regardless of gender gained support among hourly workers, but this was based on the assumption that women would leave Ford at the war's end. Locals at Rouge, Lincoln, and Highland Park reported "equal-pay for equal work" to be generally in effect.⁴³ It was in men's interest for rates to be equal. Olga Madar, a UAW executive board member and former Willow Run employee,

40. 1947, Ganley Collection, Box 36, Folder 14.

41. Questionnaire on Employment of Women, Local 894, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 32, Women Employment Survey E to K.

42. Executive Salary Schedule, 6-10-43, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll and Sociological 1942-1944, 2; Attention Harry Mack Re: Rates for Female Timekeepers, 2 June 1943, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942-1944 3 of 3.

43. Questionnaire on Employment in UAW-CIO Plants, Locals 400, 600 and 900, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 11, Folder 8.

recalled: "The men gave utmost support to seeing to it that there was equal pay for equal work because they wanted those job rates left so that when they came back they would not be lower."⁴⁴ Similar support came from the top of the UAW in 1942, as its president R. J. Thomas argued for the importance of equal pay for equal work to protect men's wages.⁴⁵

As the war progressed, women entered into many previously male-exclusive work categories both salaried and hourly, but Ford managers refused to promote women into management. To enter managerial roles, employees needed the recommendation of a Ford manager. An isolated recommendation for promotion occurred in 1943 when a foreman at the Rouge Aircraft Building submitted paperwork to promote a woman to a leadership position within her all-female unit. The foreman's supervisor denied the promotion, and the case went to the Ford-UAW Umpire: a neutral party empowered to make binding contractual interpretations to resolve a limited range of disputes. The representative of Ford management admitted in his deposition that "we don't feel that female employees are capable in assuming the duties of working leaders."⁴⁶ The Umpire found that "the conclusion is inevitable that A's reclassification as a working leader was turned down because of her sex and not for any other reason."⁴⁷ The Umpire determined that sex was an improper ground for denying a reclassification and ordered that the woman receive the classification of a working leader. Managers could circumvent this determination by not recommending women for promotion. Management succeeded in completely excluding women from the ranks of foremen.⁴⁸

Management and union leaders experienced new problems when women entered the plants en masse. Ford managers disliked the labor discord and disturbances that they perceived was caused by women working in the plants.⁴⁹ Steve Meyer's research supports that women on shop floors raised a number of issues including workplace romances, sexual harassment of women by coworkers, and incidences

44. Interview with Olga Madar & Nancy Bryk, 6/20/89, Madar Oral History, 37.

45. Gabin, "Women Workers and the UAW in the Post-World War II Period," 9.

46. The Umpire Ford Motor Co. and UAW-CIO, Case No. 191, Opinion A-83, 12 April 1944, Local 600 Records, Box 24, Folder 36.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*; Ford Motor Company Factory Count 26 November 1946, Rouge Plant, Lincoln Plant, Highland Park Plant, Outlying Plants, Cameron Records, Box 4, Accession 2004.1.1866.

49. A head of the Sociological Department, the department that in previous years routinely interfered with the home lives of employees, was particularly concerned about the domestic discord caused by large quantities of women working alongside men. Reminiscences of H. S. Ablewhite, Bombard Interviews Series, 26–28.

of sexual exploitation of women by managers.⁵⁰ Women working alongside men also raised relatively banal issues for managers. For example, women's clothing became a contested issue as foremen attempted to enforce their own interpretations of acceptable styles and colors—sometimes based on what was assumed to be distracting to male workers—on grounds of worker “safety.”⁵¹ The lack of codified rules gave managers agency to discriminate against women. Conversely, foremen and union representatives were not always prompt or cooperative when women made complaints against male coworkers.⁵²

The large-scale employment of women, coupled with the gendered expectations that women should not work when pregnant, made pregnant employees a significant issue for Ford management.⁵³ The wartime Ford-UAW contracts did not cover pregnancy or maternity leave. Ford policy was that a pregnant woman was to be “laid off and placed on the inactive roll until such time as she is physically able to return to work. At such time she will be automatically reinstated with full seniority rights.”⁵⁴ In 1944, the Ford-UAW Umpire decided that Ford could place a pregnant woman on a leave of absence until “her physical condition warrants her return,” at which time “she may return in accordance with her seniority rights.”⁵⁵ This contractual interpretation ensured that pregnant women would retain their seniority when placed on maternity leave as long as they returned when recalled. However, the company retained a significant role in deciding when a woman's “physical condition” warranted an exit from and return to work. The Umpire based his decision on his interpretation that pregnancy, although not explicitly in the contract, was within the meaning of two contract clauses pertaining to illness and temporary disability.⁵⁶

UAW leadership, when negotiating the 1946 Ford-UAW contract, did not learn from wartime experiences to add secure protections for pregnant women. Instead, the 1946 contract added a clause with wording indicating that it was intended to be a partial repudiation of the

50. Meyer, “Workplace Predators,” 77–93.

51. The Umpire Ford Motor Co. and UAW-CIO, Case No. 342, Opinion A-117, 30 June 1944, Local 600 Records, Box 24, Folder 36; The Umpire Ford Motor Co. and UAW-CIO, Case Nos. 76 & 77, Opinion A-43, 23 December 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 24, Folder 35.

52. Meyer, “Workplace Predators,” 86–87; The Umpire Ford Motor Co. and UAW-CIO, Case No. 89, Opinion A-42, 23 December 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 24, Folder 35.

53. Meeting of the Executive Board Ford Local 600 UAW CIO, 25 May 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 45, Folder 6, 5.

54. The Umpire Ford Motor Co. and UAW-CIO, Case No. 162, Opinion A-103, 29 May 1944, Local 600 Records, Box 24, Folder 36.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

earlier Umpire decision. The new clause made it a general “duty” of each employee to inform the company of an illness that would cause the employee to miss work, otherwise, barring reasons beyond the employee’s control that precluded giving notice, the “termination” of employment would be “final.”⁵⁷ Under the new contract, women who delayed disclosure of their pregnancy could be fired and stripped of seniority. This clause survived the 1947 Ford-UAW contract until its absence in the 1949 contract.⁵⁸

Seniority and Reconversion Layoffs

The seniority system was a critical factor in the decline in women’s unionized employment. Three main interrelated issues with the seniority system and its application disadvantaged women. First, Ford’s pre-war discriminatory hiring practices led to few women in the workforce, and thus, overwhelmingly, women at Ford had relatively limited seniority by war’s end. This exclusion of women from fair opportunity to accumulate seniority ensured that a seniority system would disadvantage women. Second, Ford and UAW leadership during wartime created a seniority system that gave qualitatively better seniority to pre-war employees than those hired during the war. Third, after reconversion layoffs, management widely hired less senior men and resisted recalling women with sufficient seniority. Vigorous UAW action needed to enforce women’s seniority rights was only partially forthcoming.

UAW leaders acknowledged that women formed a large portion of wartime hires and entertained different ideas of limiting their seniority rights. Local 600 executives agreed with a report by a union official in the employment office who advocated the “limitation of certain rated jobs that will be open to new employes [*sic*], namely female” on the basis that “hiring women on the higher paid jobs ... tends to lower the morale of the seniority employees who are trying to get these jobs” and thus was detrimental to maintaining production efficiency.⁵⁹ His

57. Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 26 February 1946, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 50–51.

58. Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 28 September 1949, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 64–66; Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 21 August 1947, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 64.

59. Meeting of the Executive Board Ford Local #600 UAW-CIO, 12 January 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 45, Folder 5, 2–3.

argument conflated “new employes [*sic*]” with “female”; by implication, women did not deserve the wartime jobs into which they had been placed. Local 600 leadership entertained the idea of creating additional formal limits on the seniority rights of wartime hires. Soon after the United States became a combatant in World War II, there was an unsuccessful motion within Local 600’s executive to bar “new employees” from gathering seniority.⁶⁰ A UAW International representative expressed concern about any modifications to seniority that would generate “second-class” union membership for new Ford employees.⁶¹ Nevertheless, soon thereafter it was the leadership of the UAW International and Ford who established, in the Ford-UAW contract of 1942, a second inferior tier of seniority for wartime hires.

UAW executives sought to provide veterans “the widest possible [seniority] protection.”⁶² UAW policy was for “strict” seniority to be administered at rehiring: A veteran would receive seniority for time spent in military service even if the veteran had not been employed at a UAW plant prior to enlistment.⁶³ Hiring for a given role was to be based first on seniority and second on ability. Veterans employed at Ford before the war could add their seniority accumulated during military service and use it to gain favorable rehiring rights. Veterans not previously employed at Ford could use their wartime seniority only once they had gained employment. A veteran could not be hired for a job if that appointment would lead to a “bump” of an employee out of a job.⁶⁴ However, once laid off, as a great many were during reconversion, wartime hires found themselves in an unfavorable position for rehiring.

To minimize labor unrest during conversion to military production, Ford and the UAW gave transferred pre-war employees seniority in two work units.⁶⁵ Two seniority lists were in operation: Employees would gain and retain seniority in their work unit as of June 20, 1941, and also separately in the last unit into which they were transferred. Employees transferred for defense work had the right to return to their old work

60. Minutes Local 600 Executive Board Meeting, 27 January 1942, Local 600 Records, Box 45, Folder 2, 3.

61. General Council Meeting Minutes, 29 March 1942, Local 600 Records, Box 44, Folder 1, 6.

62. Special Meeting International Executive Board International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America C.I.O., 9–10 November 1944, Thomas Records, Box 4, Folder 2, 36–38.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*; Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 4 November 1942 Supplementary Agreements 10 May 1943, 6 June 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 16.

65. This followed the recommendations of the Office of Production Management. U.S. Civilian Production Administration, *Industrial Mobilization for War*, 168–169.

units with their accumulated seniority. This system ensured that each person working at Ford before the war would have seniority rehiring rights in both the unit into which they were last transferred and the pre-war work unit. This system gave pre-war workers security when transferred into a wartime work unit that might close upon reconversion. Wartime hires only acquired seniority in one work unit.⁶⁶

Employees whose jobs were permanently discontinued were entitled to transfer to another job in another qualification and to retain their seniority. However, to be successfully transferred, the employee needed to be qualified to perform the available work, have greater seniority than an employee in that classification to be able to bump an employee for that job, and have managers amenable to the transfer.⁶⁷ Women were thus exposed to biases of managers who needed to be willing to employ women, and union officials who did not want to assist women finding postwar employment.

Ford and UAW leaders created two tiers of seniority. The first Ford-UAW contract, created in 1941, stipulated the order in which employees would be laid off during a reduction in force. Probationary employees would be laid off, then work hours per week were to drop to thirty-two, and lastly, employees possessing seniority would be laid off.⁶⁸ The 1942 Ford-UAW contract extended seniority protection to create two tiers of employees, those with pre-war seniority and those without, by adding the stipulation that employees hired after June 20, 1941, would be laid off before a thirty-two-hour week would be instituted.⁶⁹ Therefore, the employment of second-tier employees was to be sacrificed before reducing the working hours of employees with pre-war seniority. Women overwhelmingly belonged to the second tier.

The potential impact that a policy of strict adherence to seniority would have upon women was noticeable when there was still time for

66. Don Grant, Re: Seniority Lists, 12 April 1943, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll and Sociological 1942–1944; Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 4 November 1942 Supplementary Agreements 10 May 1943, 6 June 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 12, 14–15.

67. Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 4 November 1942 Supplementary Agreements 10 May 1943, 6 June 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 15.

68. Agreement between Ford Motor Company and the International Union United Automobile Workers of America-C.I.O. 20 June 1941, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 13.

69. Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 4 November 1942 Supplementary Agreements 10 May 1943, 6 June 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 15–16.

Ford or UAW leaders to act. In January 1944, when wartime employment was still very near to its peak, Harlan Hadley of the Automotive Council for War Production (ACWP) investigated how “veterans, negroes and women are the last employes [*sic*] to be hired ... and thus will be the first to be laid off under the present seniority provisions of most union agreements.”⁷⁰ An ACWP report contained particularly salient observations:

Some management believes that steps should be taken to provide the Negro with equality of economic opportunity. Less attention has been given [to] the equities of the woman worker. Labor spokesmen, particularly of the UAW-CIO, are publicly stating that management will be laying-off Negroes and women, virtually as a class, at the war's end—but the same spokesmen do not link this with their own demands for strict enforcement of seniority provisions.⁷¹

By the time negotiations began for a postwar contract with Ford, upper-level UAW leadership knew that large numbers of women had been laid off early in the reconversion process and were experiencing difficulty securing postwar employment.⁷² In 1944, the UAW International formally resolved that “women workers must receive fair and just treatment in seniority rights” and publicly committed itself to “review[ing] all UAW-CIO contracts from the standpoint of helping Local Unions eliminate clauses discriminating to women and adding clauses protecting women workers.”⁷³ However, the UAW International continued to permit new contractual clauses in company agreements that indirectly reinforced women's second-tier seniority. The 1946 Ford-UAW contract contained a stipulation similar to that of the 1942 Ford-UAW contract whereby employees working at Ford on June 20, 1941, would have four years to be recalled while retaining seniority. The 1946 contract, however, contained an additional stipulation whereby employees hired after June 20, 1941, would lose their seniority if they remained

70. Harlan V. Hadley to H. H. Hughes, 27 January 1944, Automotive Council for War Production Records, Box 28, Manpower Comm: Post-War Planning; Employees on Payroll, 1943 and 1944, Cameron Records, Box 4, Miscellaneous Recaps + Notes; Weekly Employment Report, 12-11-45, Cameron Records, Box 4, Form 2783 12-11-45 thru 11/4/47.

71. Employment and Employee [*sic*] Relations Problems of the Reconversion Period, Automotive Council for War Production Records, Box 28, Manpower Comm: Post-War Planning, C-4.

72. R. J. Thomas to Harry S. Truman, 9 June 1945, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 11, Folder 4, 3.

73. “Resolutions State UAW Position on Vital Problems,” *United Automobile Worker*, October 1, 1944, 5; Special Meeting International Executive Board International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America C.I.O., 9–10 November 1944, Thomas Records, Box 4, Folder 2, 38.

unemployed by Ford for a period of eighteen months or their total accumulated seniority, whichever was greater. This addition had two important consequences. First, after reconversion layoffs, wartime hires would have a shorter time period to be recalled while retaining seniority than those employed before the war. Second, and critically, this addition provided a gateway for the permanent removal of women. By the time the UAW agreed to the 1946 contract, many women had been unemployed for nearly eighteen months. If managers could avoid recalling women for a few more months and hire less senior men instead, then many women would lose all their seniority rehiring rights. This limited window of time before women lost their seniority made it all the more imperative that union leaders vigorously pursued any alleged violations of seniority in recalls and rehiring.⁷⁴ To the detriment of female employees, widespread vigorous enforcement of women's seniority rehiring rights by UAW officials was not forthcoming.

Employment at Ford peaked at over 193,000 in November 1943 and declined by nearly 70,000 by June 1945, with further less severe declines in late 1945.⁷⁵ The layoffs that occurred during this period had a profound effect upon unionized women. Local 900, representing Lincoln, Ford's third largest peacetime plant, reported in 1944 that "most of the workers who are being laid off are women, [women] account for 80% of the layoffs."⁷⁶ Female unionized employment declined significantly during reconversion at the Lincoln and Highland Park plants, but less severely than at the Rouge.⁷⁷ At the small plants, hourly female employees had mixed success in retaining employment, however, declining employment—sometimes severe—was the general trend.⁷⁸

74. Agreement Between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 4 November 1942 Supplementary Agreements 10 May 1943, 6 June 1943, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 12–13; Agreement between International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW-CIO) and the Ford Motor Company 26 February 1946, Local 600 Records, Box 37, Folder 34, 46, 52–53; Larry Yost to Walter P. Reuther, 14 August 1946, Reuther Records, Box 89, Folder 2.

75. Employees on Payroll, 1943, 1944, and 1945, Cameron Records, Box 4, Miscellaneous Recaps + Notes; Weekly Employment Report 12-11-45, Cameron Records, Box 4, Form 2783 12-11-45 thru 11/4/47.

76. May 1, 1945, Local 900, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 22, Reconversion 1944–5 1 of 2.

77. Monthly Employment Report, December 1946 and December 1947, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports, Accession 221; Report Showing the Number of Men and Women Employed in the Detroit Area, 8-4-43, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942–1944 3 of 3.

78. Monthly Report of Employees, 8-3-43, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942–1944 3 of 3; Monthly Employment Report, December 1947, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports.

The closure of Willow Run significantly impacted female employment. Willow Run was purpose-built to construct B-24 bombers, and therefore was ill-suited for civilian automobile production. Ford management decided not to continue operations at the plant after bomber production ceased in June 1945. At Ford's wartime peak, almost 15,000 women worked at Willow Run.⁷⁹ The small number of unionized women employed across Ford after the war—1,880 in December 1946—indicates that, overwhelmingly, the women who worked at Willow Run did not secure postwar employment at Ford.⁸⁰

Unionized women's employment at the Rouge collapsed during the reconversion layoffs between late 1943 and late 1945, and men were subsequently hired for peacetime work. In November 1943, the Rouge, including the aircraft building, employed almost 15,000 hourly women: 16 percent of its unionized workforce. By late August 1945, only 515 women remained employed in unionized work at the Rouge alongside over 52,000 men. Very few women secured unionized postwar employment at the Rouge. Between late August 1945 and January 1946, Ford added almost 8,000 hourly employees to the payroll at the Rouge, but only 136 were women. By late 1947, the number of hourly women at the Rouge had only grown to 1,185: less than 2 percent of the Rouge's unionized workforce.⁸¹ Meanwhile, veterans were hired in quantity: Over 30,000 were employed across Ford by November 1947.⁸² With Willow Run closed, the Rouge was by far the most significant postwar employer of hourly women: The Rouge employed over half of the women working for hourly wages at Ford in December 1947.⁸³

Despite that many jobs after the war were comparable to jobs performed by women during the war, few women secured these jobs.⁸⁴ How many women desired to remain at Ford is impossible to ascertain.

79. L. D. Crusoe, Interview 2 January 1960, Hill Papers, Box 15, Interviews, 4; "Kaiser Urged To Buy Plant," *New York Times*, May 16, 1945, 14; "Ford Stopped on Super-Bomber," *New York Times*, August 23, 1945, 13; Monthly Report of Employees, 8-3-43, Sorensen Records, Box 101, Employment, Payroll, and Sociological, 1942–1944 3 of 3.

80. Monthly Employment Report, December 1946, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports.

81. Ford Motor Company Rouge Plant Factory Count, 23 November 1943, 28 August 1945, and 8 January 1946, Cameron Records, Box 3; Employees on Payroll, 1943, Cameron Records, Box 4, Miscellaneous Recaps + Notes; Weekly Employment Report 11-4-47, Cameron Records, Box 4, Miscellaneous Recaps + Notes.

82. Veteran's Report Salary and Hourly Employees, Recapitulation: Month Ending 31 October 1947, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports.

83. Monthly Employment Report, December 1947, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports.

84. Kossoudji and Dresser, "The End of a Riveting Experience," 521–525.

However, a 1944 U.S. Department of Labor survey predicted that 100,000 additional women in the Detroit area would be seeking employment after the war, many to provide for their families.⁸⁵ Ford managers endeavored to hire men after reconversion layoffs. Throughout Ford, managers used a variety of techniques to circumvent the seniority rights of women at rehiring, including laying off and recalling workers irrespective of seniority, not notifying women of recalls, stripping women of seniority by formally discharging each as a “quit” rather than a “lay off,” and discharging women as quits after placing women into jobs that they could not physically perform or not giving women reasonable time to train for their new roles. The officers of locals at Ford plants often only reluctantly protected women’s seniority rights, often after significant pressure was placed on them by women. In addition, some union officers actively obstructed women’s efforts to challenge seniority infractions.⁸⁶ Pamela Sugiman assessed that “[male unionists] largely took gendered divisions and inequalities in employment for granted. UAW leaders seriously took up only those matters that they could understand on the basis of their own experiences in industry.”⁸⁷

Nancy Gabin has shown that at Ford, as across the automobile industry and elsewhere, many women fought tenaciously to keep their jobs by means such as filing grievances, appealing for support from male union members, and organizing and picketing.⁸⁸ Women, excluded from key positions of power in both Ford and the UAW, had some success combating against direct discrimination.⁸⁹ Importantly, however, the systems that conveyed privileges to men remained intact.

The determined efforts of women at Highland Park yielded a unanimous vote of the membership of Local 400 to support the women’s picket line that was protesting management ignoring women’s seniority rights during rehiring. The effort of these women, 150 of whom picketed in front of Highland Park, led to Local 400 undergoing the logistical and political hardship of checking plant seniority lists and recommending substitutions of senior women into positions. In August 1946, the UAW secured an agreement from Ford to recall women with sufficient seniority, however, Ford reserved the right to select the jobs

85. Post-War, 20 May 1945, Research Department Records, Part 1, Box 10, Folder 19.

86. Gabin, “‘They Have Placed a Penalty on Womanhood,’” 376–380, 382–394; Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 114–119, 125–129.

87. Sugiman, *Labour’s Dilemma*, 41.

88. Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 118–120, 125–126; Gabin, “‘They Have Placed a Penalty on Womanhood,’” 377–380, 383–384, 386–393.

89. For more detail on women in leadership positions within the UAW, see Bromsen, “‘They All Sort of Disappeared.’”

into which women were recalled and to process women as quits if they were unable to perform their assigned jobs. Women's efforts at Locals 600 and 900 were less successful, as they garnered less support from the male leadership of their locals.⁹⁰

A case from 1951 illustrates some of the political dimensions behind local union leaders' decisions to discriminate against women. When certain operations were transferred from the Rouge to a new plant in Buffalo, job classifications were permanently discontinued and workers were laid off. Local Ford managers and UAW officers chose to treat the layoffs as a reduction in force instead of transferring the seniority of these workers. To get action on their behalf, women had to circumvent their local and take their concerns directly to the UAW Women's Bureau and Ford Department. Women were initially reluctant to give their names for fear of reprisal from officers in their local. UAW investigators found that women were being laid off irrespective of seniority, and the evidence suggested that Ford management and Local 600 leadership colluded to achieve this result.⁹¹

Removing women became part of the electoral plank of the stamping plant unit president: Archie Acciaccia believed that removing women would appeal to the majority of unionists, who in turn would provide him with the popular support needed to keep his position after the next election. During the wartime manpower shortage, senior men moved into jobs that required heavy lifting to create spaces for women in jobs that required less physical strength. Although men accepted this practice during wartime, it served as a political tool to be used during peacetime. The argument Acciaccia put forth to his electorate was that less senior men were being employed in heavy jobs that women by law could not perform, and that employing more women in light jobs would unacceptably entail moving senior men from light into heavy jobs. Acciaccia refused to invoke the discontinuance of work clause for women until ordered to do so by the UAW International. Within the unit, seniority was applied laxly; some jobs previously held by women were currently held by men with less seniority.⁹² Local union leaders,

90. For detailed analysis of women's resistance to discrimination at Ford and the limited ability to combat discrimination as outsiders to positions of power within the company, even when receiving significant union support, see Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 118–120, 125–130; Gabin, “‘They Have Placed a Penalty on Womanhood,’” 377–380, 383–384, 386–393; Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 128–144.

91. Report of Investigating Committee on Dearborn Stamping Plant Layoff Procedure, Ford Department Collection, Part 2, Box 12, Folder 10, 1–4; Shelton Tappes to Pat Rice, 19 June 1951, Ford Department Collection, Part 2, Box 12, Folder 10; Caroline Davis to Ken Bannon, 25 June 1951, Ford Department Collection Part 2, Box 12, Folder 10.

92. Report of Investigating Committee on Dearborn Stamping Plant Layoff Procedure, Ford Department Collection, Part 2, Box 12, Folder 10, 3–4; The Umpire Ford

like managers, believed Ford employees would predominantly approve of removing women from Ford's workforce. Thus, leaders in both Ford and the UAW had incentives to discriminate against women.

Whereas employment of unionized women plummeted and did not recover, employment of salaried women not only remained steady but even marginally increased during reconversion. Unlike women paid by the hour, who were subject to layoffs during retooling or reduced production, women working for salaries held jobs that were relatively stable throughout reconversion. Also, salaried employees, lacking legal protections for strike activity, posed less of an immediate threat to labor peace. Salaried women's employment at the Rouge grew from 1,469 in November 1943, to 1,784 in August 1945, to 1,805 by November 1947. Wartime hiring affected long-term changes in salaried employment: specifically, secretarial work, which, previously a male role, became a job primarily performed by women. Salaried women's employment across Ford expanded in the immediate postwar period from 2,678 in December 1945 to 3,690 in February 1948.⁹³ The divergence in employment outcomes between unionized and salaried women during reconversion supports the assertion that more hourly women than were successful may have wanted to retain their employment at Ford.

Postwar Industrial Relations Policies

Henry Ford II secured control of Ford after the primary reconversion layoffs and began systematically changing the company, but retained fundamentals of his grandfather's industrial relations policies that privileged men. Upon assuming the presidency in September 1945, his first action was to fire Harry Bennett, Henry Ford Sr.'s notorious henchman and fixer in charge of industrial relations. Henry Ford II replaced Bennett with a formal industrial relations division separate from the operating divisions responsible for producing automobiles. Hiring control remained delegated to factory management, subject to company

Motor Co. and UAW-CIO, Case No. 2584, Opinion A-211, 30 November 1945, Ford Department Collection, Part 2, Box 12, Folder 10; Womens [*sic*] Seniority Rights Explained, 8-1-51, Ford Department Collection, Part 2, Box 12, Folder 10; Archie Acciaccia to Emil Mazey, 2 November 1951, Ford Department Collection Part 2, Box 12, Folder 10.

93. Ford Motor Company Rouge Plant Factory Count, 23 November 1943 and 28 August 1945, Cameron Records, Box 3; Weekly Employment Report, 12-11-45 and 11-4-47, Cameron Records, Box 4, Miscellaneous Recaps + Notes; [Women Holding Jobs in Industry #76-2], Press Releases Subseries, Box 165, Women Working at Ford; Monthly Employment Report February 1948, Ford Production Reports, Box 6, Weekly Employment Reports.

policy set and coordinated by the industrial relations division.⁹⁴ Henry Ford II updated policies but continued gender discrimination in hiring and promotion, and his grandfather's policies of paying above average wages and providing benefits for the employee and the employee's dependent family members.

Henry Ford II initiated a hiring system in which "every applicant receives a personal interview, in which the interviewer's number one job is to listen and try to learn what the applicant's interests, experience, and aptitudes are."⁹⁵ Henry Ford II also introduced a new salaried employee information system to organize personnel data, such as qualifications and interests, to facilitate improved interdepartmental promotion opportunities. This system was initiated to address the concerns of white-collar employees and foremen who believed they needed "pull to advance."⁹⁶ Employees might need less "pull" with their direct superior, but these new systems could function as a new medium for old biases. Hourly employees did not have an information system similar to that of foremen and white-collar workers to facilitate promotion, and instead were more dependent on the availability of formal training programs and the discretion of their individual supervisors for promotion and transfer opportunities.⁹⁷

Expectations of female interests, experience, and aptitudes significantly impacted job placement. Some women were placed in jobs conceptualized as being similar to female domestic work. In July 1948, Nellie Lucyk and Eileen Sheldon, who had worked as inspectors during the war, were hired to work on what was an exclusively male final assembly line: Their role was washing windows. The writer for *Rouge News* considered this a feminine role: "They are doing a job that a lot of housewives do, when the old man washes the family car: they're washing windows."⁹⁸

Management's gendered conceptions of the automobile consumer affected the jobs assigned to women. As part of its marketing efforts, by

94. Bennett, *Ford: We Never Called Him Henry*, 178–179; Henry Ford II, Deposition Harry Ferguson Inc. v. Ford Motor Company, January 1950, Hill Papers, Box 11, Ford, Henry II - (and) Harry Bennett; Biographical Note Henry Ford II [#3-1], Press Releases Subseries, Box 117, #3 -... #3.2; Report of Management Meeting Number [Number 2], May 1947, Reports of Management Meetings, Box 1, 4–5, 7, 9–11, 19.

95. "Henry Ford II Speaks Out," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1947, 32.

96. Report of Management Meeting Number 6, December 1947, Reports of Management Meetings, Box 1, 4, 15; Beaver, "Salaried Personnel Record System Inures Promotion From Within," *Personnel*, May 1948, 437–438.

97. Report of Management Meeting Number 17, April 1949, Reports of Management Meetings, Box 1, 20; Future with Ford, Ford Company Files NAHC, Ford 1944, 8, 22.

98. "Feminine Touch Added to Fords on Final Line," *Rouge News*, July 16, 1948, 8.

late 1950, Ford utilized “women’s preference” as an input in the stylistic design of Ford automobiles including trim, color, and fabrics.⁹⁹ Ford management believed women held significant influence over the decision to purchase a family automobile, even if they were not the ones making the purchase, and that “the trim of a car is one of the first things a woman notices.”¹⁰⁰ An operating assumption was that “as compared to men, women are identificationists [*sic*] rather than realists, intuitive rather than intellectual, subjective rather than objective and motivated by inner perception rather than rationalization.”¹⁰¹ Employing women to select fabrics was part of an attempt to sell cars by adding the “woman’s touch” that would to appeal to “women’s preference[s].”¹⁰²

There was an effective ceiling on how high a woman could advance in salaried employment, and there remained significant disparities in pay for work within a given role. After the war, when Ford began significant hiring of male college graduates, college education for female applicants was acknowledged to be “not particularly important as not too great [a] chance to apply it.”¹⁰³ In April 1946, the payroll department of the Rouge had 139 female clerks and 84 male clerks. No “females” were employed in the more prestigious and higher paid positions: supervisors, assistant supervisors, leaders, and legal. Of the 84 male clerks, all but two received superior remuneration than the highest paid female clerk. The one male paid less was a “mail boy.”¹⁰⁴ There were few promotions for female salaried employees and they were notable when they occurred, such as when Stella Miknis and Eileen Lane became the first two women at Ford to work in purchasing.¹⁰⁵ Inferior positions and pay for women functioned as reminders of the gender hierarchy in the salaried workplace alongside another important reminder of male privilege: smoking. In 1947, Henry Ford

99. Release PM’s, Thursday, 23 November 1950 [#71-6-1], Press Releases Subseries, Box 165, Women Working at Ford, 1–2.

100. *Ibid.*, 1; The Ford Motor Company—and Women, Press Releases Subseries, Box 113, Women’s Influences.

101. The Ford Motor Company—and Women, Press Releases Subseries, Box 113, Women’s Influences.

102. Photograph 83573-10, Press Releases Subseries, Box 113, Women’s Influences; Release PM’s, Thursday, 23 November 1950 [#71-6-1], Press Releases Subseries, Box 165, Women Working at Ford, 1.

103. [NR-76-2-Women Holding Jobs in Industry], Press Releases Subseries, Box 165, Women Working at Ford; Employment of Women in Bomber Plant and Sperry Job, 3-10-42, Edsel Ford Papers, Box 169, Em-Ex; Arjay Miller, Interview 11 January 1960, Hill Papers, Box 15, Interviews, 3; E. R. Breech, Interview 6 January 1960, Hill Papers, Box 15, Interviews, 6.

104. Organizational Chart of Rouge Payroll Department, 29 April 1946, Martindale Files, Box 61, Organization Chart—Payroll Department.

105. “Second Woman Achieves Post in Purchasing,” *Rouge News*, January 24, 1948, 3.

II addressed a longstanding employee demand by ending the smoking ban imposed by Henry Ford Sr. Smoking became a male privilege in the office environment as the ban continued for female employees.¹⁰⁶

Henry Ford II's industrial relations strategy through reconversion was predominantly a continuation of his grandfather's policies, updated for a unionized environment. Under Henry Ford II's leadership, Ford continued to incentivize employee loyalty with above average wages and health care benefits for employees and their dependent family members.¹⁰⁷ The UAW sought a pension for hourly employees, and after several years of negotiations, reached an agreement with Ford to provide a pension plan for unionized employees. Under the plan, Ford paid one hundred dollars monthly, deducting benefits provided by Social Security, to retired employees with at least thirty years accumulated seniority. Ford paid proportionally less for employees with less seniority or for those who retired before age sixty-five. This plan rewarded the work pattern of longtime employees—most of whom were male—with some measure of continuing ability to provide for their families into retirement. The plan offered comparatively little to women, who possessed minimal seniority and were less likely to be in the employ of Ford for thirty years. Ford employees ratified the agreement and shortly afterward both General Motors and Chrysler adopted similar pension plans.¹⁰⁸ Ford's brand of corporate welfare capitalism set the precedent for the American automobile industry.

Conclusion

Henry Ford Sr. built his company with male employees beholden to Ford in order to support their families. These male-centric operations

106. Report of Management Meeting Number 6, December, 1947, Reports of Management Meetings, Box 1, 15; Ford, *My Philosophy of Industry*, 43; "Ford to Let Employees Smoke—But Not Women," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1947, 1.

107. "Henry Ford II Speaks Out," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1947, 31; Ruch, "Break in Deadlock," *New York Times*, January 27, 1946, 1; Ruch, "Deadlock is Ended," *New York Times*, February 27, 1946, 1; "Ford Adds to Insurance," *New York Times*, August 13, 1948, 23; Life Insurance, Accidental Death & Dismemberment, and Accident & Sickness Benefits—John Hancock Group Insurance Policy, Press Releases Subseries, Box 117, #3-25-3 - ... #3-25-8; Henry Ford II to all Salaried Employees, 11 October 1948, Press Releases Subseries, Box 117, #3-25-3 - ... #3-25-8.

108. Richard T. Leonard to All Ford Local Union Presidents and Recording Secretaries, 3 June 1947, Reuther Records, Box 96, Folder 11, 1; Report of Management Meeting Number 4, September, 1947, Reports of Management Meetings, Box 1, 5; "Ford Contract Ratified by CIO," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1949, 26; Release anytime [#41-4], Press Releases Subseries, Box 152, Pay Raises #41-1 - ... #41-4; "Comparison of Significant Provisions in the Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors Settlements," *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1950, 221–222.

were interrupted by World War II, which necessitated that Ford hire women to produce military equipment while men served in the military. After Henry Ford Sr.'s role in Ford ended, Ford and UAW leadership continued to perceive that the ideal family arrangement was one in which the husband acted as breadwinner and the wife stayed home as a caregiver for children.¹⁰⁹ Fundamentally, both Ford and UAW leadership conceptualized the Ford employee as male. Male privilege, integral to Ford's reconversion to civilian automobile production following World War II, existed through a distributed process of both direct discrimination against women and indirect discrimination through industrial relations systems designed to appease male-dominated groups. Women had to navigate a company where many of the policies, although they did not directly target women, had a significant adverse impact upon women and thereby privileged men by conveying them superior access to employment, advancement, and job security.

In the 1942 Ford-UAW contract, Ford and UAW leadership codified second-tier seniority for a group that leadership knew contained almost all the women employed at Ford. A "strict" application of this seniority system entailed the layoff of virtually all unionized women from Ford before employees hired prior to June 20, 1941, would suffer a part-time work week. Additionally, following reconversion layoffs, in occurrences when the seniority system would have provided some protection for some women during recalls, Ford managers selectively ignored women's seniority, and UAW protection of women's seniority rights was only partially forthcoming.

Toward the end of the 1940s, as women gained a greater voice in UAW policy, it became increasingly difficult for managers and UAW leaders to explicitly discriminate against women. Ford and UAW leadership continued to integrate male privilege in numerous guises: including indirect discrimination, such as giving benefits to male-dominated groups, and unwritten discrimination, such as not hiring women into leadership positions. Male privilege was integral to the industrial relations policies of Ford throughout the 1940s.

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