


TAKE THREE: The Color Line

The Trouble with Bathrooms

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Western Electric's constellation of factories in Baltimore's Point Breeze section manufactured the kinds of heavy-duty wires and cables that the American military could not get enough of during World War II. That demand turned the company's workforce into production soldiers, vital cogs in the war machine. Government-issued films and posters urged these women and men to take vitamins, eat healthy, and never miss a single shift. But on an August afternoon in 1942, Western Electric workers were away from their posts. They were gathered in a courtyard as officials from Washington presented Western Electric plant managers with a tri-colored banner and the Army-Navy "E" award. Despite its innocuous sounding name, this honor was not doled out easily. Only five percent of the nation's 85,000 war production plants earned an "E" award between Pearl Harbor and V-J Day. Before heading back to their posts, each and every Western Electric worker received a lapel pin in recognition of the "quality and quantity" of their contributions to the war effort.¹

But the summer celebrations at Western Electric could not cover up the tensions roiling below the surface, tensions that not even patriotic calls to duty could keep a lid on. By the end of 1942, these pressures boiled over into a "hate strike," one that mirrored the walk-outs that broke out during the war in response to efforts to integrate Mobile shipyards and Philadelphia trolley car operations.² Each of these strikes represented a defense of segregation, and each put race, really whiteness, ahead of wartime unity. Each revealed fractures on the homefront and some of the earliest stirrings of massive resistance against the breakdown of white privilege or what the journalist Isabel Wilkerson has recently described as a caste system that prevailed in the United States long before the 1940s and long afterward.³

The issue that would trigger white workers at Western Electric was access to bathrooms. This was no accident. Public bathrooms have played a unique role in modern societies. As broad notions of privacy took shape, and as work and home became physically and ideologically separated in the last decades of the nineteenth century, access to a bathroom became an absolute requirement. It was the essential entry point to the public. And quickly, those in favor of exclusion, of upholding caste systems, recognized that cutting off access to a bathroom translated into cutting off access to the public and social equality. The opposite was true as well. Those fighting for equality brought their struggles to the public bathroom door. This article, therefore, reveals the racial tensions of the war years, and at the same time, makes a case for what might be called toilet studies, for the importance of paying attention to the role that public bathrooms played in upholding, and in many cases, creating color lines.

¹"Army-Navy 'E' To Be Awarded to Point Breeze, Western Electric Company," *Baltimore Sun*, Aug. 23, 1942, 20. For more on the award, see David D Jackson, "The American Automobile Industry in World War II," <https://usautoindustryworldwartwo.com/Army-Navy%20E%20Awards.htm> (accessed Jan. 4, 2020); "Army-Navy 'E' Award," Wikipedia.com, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army-Navy_%22E%22_Award (accessed Jan. 4, 2021).

²Bruce Nelson, "Organized Labor and the Struggle for Black Equality in Mobile During World War II," *Journal of American History*, 80, no. 3 (Dec. 1993), 952–88; Allan M. Winkler, "The Philadelphia Transit Strike of 1944," *Journal of American History* 59, no. 1 (June 1972), 73–89.

³Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York, 2020).

Just months before the Stock Market crashed in 1929, Western Electric, one of the nation's largest corporations, bought the 140-acre site of a shuttered amusement park in Baltimore's Point Breeze section. Company officials promised to turn the property into a mega-factory complex. Over the next few years, they applied for permits for fourteen buildings and talked about employing as many as 40,000 people at Point Breeze to manufacture heavy-duty electrical equipment.⁴

The Great Depression forced Western Electric to scale back its plans in Baltimore. By the time the United States entered World War II in 1941, the company employed only 2,500 workers, almost all of them white. But as government orders poured in, Western Electric went on a hiring spree. Employment at the plant jumped to 6,200 by 1943. Young white men from farms and hilltop towns in Virginia and Maryland and African American women (and some men) from West and East Baltimore made up the bulk of the company's new recruits.

Keeping the assembly lines humming in wartime Baltimore with a mixed-race labor force meant making a number of strategic decisions about inclusion and exclusion. At first, Western Electric decided to maintain segregated facilities. In those early war years, Black men and women and white men and women worked, for the most part, in separate divisions with separate supervisors, went to lunch in separate lunchrooms, showered and changed in separate locker rooms, and used sex-separated toilets, with white employees typically getting the largest, cleanest, most convenient, and private of these lavatories.

For the largest American companies, the war brought a surge of orders and record-breaking profits. But making money also meant managing a changing workforce and their bodies, and bodily fluids. According to an NAACP observer, the Rock Island Railroad refused to hire African Americans laborers in 1942, even in the face of labor shortages, because it lacked "separate toilet facilities for colored women and none could be provided."⁵ When a San Francisco restaurant and an Ohio rubber plant de-segregated their workforces, they faced resistance from white workers who refused to share toilets with Black workers.⁶ By contrast, Western Electric tried, at first, to manage its mixed-race workforce by maintaining local Jim Crow rules—by operating separate cafeterias, lockers, and toilets. But the ground started to shift in 1942 when President Franklin Roosevelt, under pressure from A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement, issued Executive Order 8802, a landmark measure prohibiting racial discrimination in the nation's defense industries.⁷ Responding to the president's mandate, the Baltimore branch of the Urban League challenged a citywide plumbing ordinance that stipulated that businesses maintain separate toilet facilities. Shifting directions, Western Electric went along with the civil rights organization and the new executive order. The company announced that it would no longer provide separate Black and white bathrooms. Some observers speculated that the company made this move not because it believed in racial equality, but because it wanted to save money and avoid building additional bathrooms.⁸

White workers complained about the new arrangement. Protesting the company's bathroom policy, they engaged in repeated "slow-up[s]" on the job. Still at this point, the production of wires and cables for the war effort continued. Maybe this was because whites in 1941 and 1942

⁴"Progress Of Work on Great Western Electric Plant at Point Breeze," *Baltimore Sun*, July 16, 1929, 29; "Western Electric to Erect New Unit," *Baltimore Sun*, Jan. 16, 1930, 7.

⁵Leon R. Harris (President of the Tri-City Branch of the NAACP, Moline, IL) to Roy Wilkins, Jan. 1, 1944, microfilm, Part 13: The NAACP and Labor, Series A: Subject Files on Labor Conditions and Employment Discrimination, 1940–1955, Papers of the NAACP, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

⁶Eileen Boris, "You Wouldn't Want One of 'Em Dancing with Your Wife': Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Mar. 1998), 94.

⁷William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York, 2014), 41–78.

⁸NRLB Report, "Decisions and Orders, Sept 22, 1943," folder Western Electric, box 34, RG 228, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

continued to hold onto the best jobs and all of the supervisory roles. When Black workers filed grievances against the company with the newly created Fair Employment Protection Committee, claiming that they were barred from employment or better jobs, Western Electric stonewalled and upheld racial divisions. But then the company knocked down the last, and perhaps most important pillar, of segregation.⁹

In August 1943, Western Electric hired—why, exactly, the documents do not say—Dorothy Jones, an African American woman, as an inspector in a “white” area of the factory. That meant that she was placed in charge of checking on and making judgments about white laborers’ work. Just days after James started her new job, twenty-three white women walked off the job determined, in their words, “to keep the colored employee out of their department altogether.” When pressed, the women contended that the walkout had nothing to do with Jones’s new authority or with job classifications. They talked, instead, about bodies. Mixing workers meant mixing toilets and mixing, in the minds of some, clean white bodies with “dirty,” “foul smelling” Black bodies. Throughout the war years, this “cleanliness taboo,” as the historian Eileen Boris has labeled it, generated resistance to inter-racial contact on buses, in stores, and, most alarmingly, in bathrooms and on toilet seats. Angered white Point Breeze workers told the press, “It goes without saying that among the colored race venereal disease is greater than among whites.” We will not, they followed up, “share toilet facilities with the colored wom[a]n employee who was been assigned to the group.”¹⁰

Over the next several months, Western Electric officials went back and forth with the Point Breeze Employees Association (PBEA), an almost completely all-white company union that represented the bulk of the plant’s laborers, over access to bathrooms. The conflict over integration at Point Breeze overlapped with another conflict. From the start of the war, progressive unions from the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO), a federation of unions that expressly barred segregation in its ranks, had tried to organize Baltimore’s Western Electric plants. Local white conservatives clung to the PBEA to hold off integration, and the company went along with the group to hold back the CIO and its more radical demands about pay, seniority, and shopfloor issues. But by 1943, Western Electric was in a bind. If it stood with the PBEA, it went against the Roosevelt administration’s new dictates. Yet if it upheld the law, it risked inflaming most of its white laborers. In the end, Western Electric sided with the federal government, the more powerful of the two. It told the PBEA that it intended to uphold the president’s nondiscrimination orders and integrate its workforce and bathrooms.

In November 1943, the PBEA voted to strike for segregated toilets. At this point, the men in the union spoke up the loudest. They announced their determination to withdraw their labor, if necessary, to protect endangered white women. At the last minute, PBEA leaders agreed to postpone the walkout and keep talks open. When the company did not budge on bathroom integration, the union announced a strike to begin in mid-December 1943.¹¹

⁹Will Maslow, Director of Field Operations for the FEPC, Executive Office of the President, to Sylvester Garrett, Nov. 16, 1943, Case Number, 111-979-D, National War Labor Board-Region III-Series PH-6520-Dispute Case Files, 1942–1945, NAID 563817-Box 2013, RG 202, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁰On the tensions in the plant, see Charles Dorn to the National War Labor Board, Apr. 16, 1943; Non-Partisan Committee of Western Electric Employees to War Labor Board, Dec. 2, 1943; Alice Kahn to Will Maslow, Dec. 15, 1943, Case Number, 111-979-D, National War Labor Board-Region III-Series PH-6520-Dispute Case Files, 1942–1945, NAID 563817-Box 2013, RG 202, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA. For overviews of the tensions at Western Electric and the eventual strike, see Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940–1980* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 28–30, 58; and David Taft Terry, *The Struggle and the Urban South: Confronting Jim Crow in Baltimore Before the Movement* (Athens, GA, 2019), 99, 103–4. See also Dana Frank, “White Working-Class Women and the Race Question,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 54 (Fall 1998), 80–102; and Boris, “You Wouldn’t Want One of ‘Em Dancing with Your Wife,’” 93–6.

¹¹“WLB Orders Hate Strikers Back to Work,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 18, 1943, 1. See also “500 Negroes Oppose Strike,” *Baltimore Sun*, Oct. 18, 1943, 5.

By then, what might best be described as a moral panic gripped Point Breeze. Typically, according to sociologists, moral panics erupt when established patterns of difference—differences, such as racial classifications at work, that benefit one group over another—come under attack. In these strained moments where social boundaries are breached, the aggrieved group members exaggerate the fundamental differences between themselves and those on the other side of the divide. They do this to mask their self-interest and dramatize what will happen if the proposed changes to the social order come to pass.¹²

In Baltimore and other places, the bathroom became the site of panic and the meeting point of dangerous change. Some white women insisted that Black women took too long on their bathroom breaks. “Colored women,” one told Roosevelt, “race for toilets and hang there, uselessly keeping white women out.”¹³ But the real problem, she and others maintained, was that sharing toilets meant the mixing of bodily fluids and the pollution of purer white bodies by over-sexed Black bodies. In other words, the breakdown of segregation entailed much more than shared work spaces; it threatened the white community’s public health. These were the kinds of panic-filled and morally charged conversations taking place on the stoops and in the taverns and union halls frequented by white Western Electric workers. Trying to protect their workplace privileges, to hold on to that moment when, as Ira Katznelson put it, “affirmative action was white,” white laborers said they could not possibly share bathrooms or let their wives and daughters share bathrooms with Black workers.¹⁴ They were, they believed, morally obligated to uphold the past order of things.

Talk of order and disorder, as the anthropologist Mary Douglas would have anticipated, generated fears of dirt and disease.¹⁵ Repeating a mantra from the pseudoscience of biological racial differences, white workers expressed their alarm about what they referred to as “the prevalence of venereal diseases among Negroes.” References to sexually transmitted viruses highlighted an alleged dichotomy in white and Black behavior and morality. But also in the context of Jim Crow rule, this distinction stirred, as the civil rights scholar Phoebe Godfrey explains it, deeply “rooted ... beliefs about the vulnerability of southern womanhood to blackness, which by its mere presence had the power to contaminate.”¹⁶

Trying to disarm the “taboo of cleanliness” in the white community, Western Electric representatives announced their intention to test all employees for “such diseases.” They also tried to reassure white employees by telling them that medical experts agreed that “venereal diseases are not contracted on toilet seats.” The PBEA and its supporters dismissed these reports as misinformation. The breakdown of workplace racial divisions, they warned, would lead to contamination. One segregationist added a bit of historical nuance to his analysis of the dangers of race mixing, explaining, “Just because our forefathers of years ago, gave these poor people diseases, are they supposed to spread it among us now?”¹⁷ But the underlying issue, as another man put it, were that bathrooms were just the start. Sharing toilets, many whites believed, was a first step to ending racial privileges at work and everywhere else. As one PBEA supporter

¹²On moral panics see the classic statement on this problem Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London, 2011). See also Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (London, 2009); and Neil Miller, *Sex-Crime Panic: A Journey to the Paranoid Heartland of the 1950s* (Los Angeles, 2009).

¹³I. S. Long to FDR, Dec. 20, 1943, Mar. 14, 1944, folder Western Electric, box 34, RG 228, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁴Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 2005).

¹⁵Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York, 2002).

¹⁶Phoebe Godfrey, “Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 42–67.

¹⁷“WLB Chairman Rebukes Union for Intolerance,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 11, 1943, 15.

asserted, “If you let this [bathroom integration] get away, Negroes will be pushing into hotels, theaters, etc.”¹⁸

With the panic about disease and disorder swelling, negotiations between the War Labor Board and the PBEA went nowhere. The wartime strike of production soldiers over separate bathrooms officially began on December 12, 1943. “All the colored employees,” the *Baltimore Afro-American* observed, “along with a number of older white employees” showed up for work on the strike’s first day. “Younger employees,” another reporter noted, perhaps talking about wartime recruits to Western Electric from the countryside, “were joining the picket lines.” So were some white women. By one estimate, women made up half of the picketers. In a press statement, PBEA officials said, as clearly as they could, that the reason for the strike was that, “Colored people are seeking to get out of place.”¹⁹ A War Department official on the ground described the situation as “really bad,” and said he expected a riot. They are “still fighting the Civil War,” he told his supervisors. One striker carried a sign that read, “We Want Separate Facilities.” Capturing the bodily fears of many, another sign asked, “Why should we be used as Guinea Pigs?”²⁰

“The Western Electric strike,” a liberal Baltimore radio host contended, “is the kind of story that Hitler loves to hear, and Tojo tells it to the colored peoples of Asia with a smile on his lips: ‘American war workers stop work because they have to share toilet facilities!’”²¹ This was largely the way the local and national media treated the Western Electric strike. They considered strikers unpatriotic. Even more, they considered the toilet issue a smokescreen. The strike had to be about something else.²² But it was not about something else. Public bathrooms have never been mere symbols or representations, even though some sociologists then and now treat them this way. They are about erecting and maintaining very real and clearly demarcated social boundaries that categorize, and then separate, bodies in absolute terms—male bodies from female bodies, trans bodies from biologically determined bodies, white bodies from Black bodies.²³ To deny someone access to a public bathroom is to make that person disappear, to erase their public presence. Integration could not happen if bodies were sorted and divided at the bathroom door. A Black woman could not oversee white workers if she did not have a bathroom to use. By striking for separate toilets, Western Electric white workers sought to maintain the Jim Crow order, to keep white and Black bodies separate because that was the surest way to preserve white privilege to the best jobs and thickest paychecks.²⁴ They also struck over their definition of America. Like many white workers across the country, they did not see a contradiction between fighting a war against fascism abroad and upholding racial privileges at home.

¹⁸Handwritten Note, Header, Western Electric: Point Breeze, Dec. 21, 1943, folder Western Electric, box 34, RG 228, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

¹⁹Quote from “Strike Arguments at Western Electric Bunk,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 25, 1943, 11.

²⁰“WLB Orders Hate Strikers Back to Work,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 18, 1943, 1; guinea pig quote and estimate of women picketer line, “Strike Called At Three War Plants Here,” *Baltimore Sun*, n.d.; “Visit to the Western Electric Plant, Baltimore, MD,” Dec. 14, 1943, Handwritten Note, Header, Western Electric: Point Breeze, Dec. 21, 1943, folder Western Electric, box 34, RG 228, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

²¹“Broadcast Over Radio Station WFBR, Baltimore, MD, Sunday Dec. 19, 1943,” folder Western Electric, box 34, RG 228, National Archive, Philadelphia, PA; “Army Issues ‘Request’ for End of Strike,” *Baltimore Sun*, Dec. 21, 1943, 24.

²²For instance, see “Opinion: The Latrine Case,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Dec. 18, 1943, 4.

²³Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no. 1,(2002), 167–95.

²⁴For some additional thinking about bathrooms, see “Facility: A Manifesto,” *Facility: A Magazine about Bathrooms* 1, no. 1 (2020), 4–5; Alexander K. Davis, *Bathroom Battlegrounds: How Public Bathrooms Shape the Gender Order* (Berkeley, CA, 2020); Lezlie Lowe, *No Place to Go: How Public Toilets Fail Our Private Needs* (Toronto, 2018); Harvey Molotch and Laura Noren, eds., *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing* (New York, 2010); Olga Gershenson and Barbara Penner, eds., *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender* (Philadelphia, 2009).

In December 1943 in response to the strike, President Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Army to seize the Western Electric plants and take over operations. Even after uniformed troops moved onto the site, white workers continued to walk the picket lines. But over time, a few white workers trickled back to the plants. Production gradually picked up. But so too did segregation.²⁵ While soldiers made sure the assembly lines cranked out electrical products, they did not enforce President Roosevelt's executive order barring racial discrimination. By the time the army pulled out of Baltimore in March 1944, Western Electric's locker rooms and bathrooms were, according to numerous reports, once again segregated. The army learned, it seemed, that despite government-issued posters about shared sacrifice and executive orders about equality of opportunity, it could not manufacture integration and still obtain the communication cables and wires it needed. It quietly chose the latter.²⁶

Segregation survived not just at Western Electric. In the spring of 1944, a government official visited a public housing construction site not far from the electrical plants. He observed that "lavatory facilities for workmen were separate, and signs were prominently displayed showing this." Several days later, he heard that white Western Electric workers were claiming victory in this bathroom battle as well, saying that the government now sanctioned segregation.²⁷

The Western Electric strike marked some of the earliest stirrings of what would become a long, nationwide campaign of massive resistance to desegregation. White workers in Baltimore walked off the job to hold on to racialized economic privileges that they were not willing to give up, even in the midst of a national crisis. But Black soldiers came back from battlefields overseas and military bases across the country with other ideas. Extending the wartime call of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, they wanted a Double V—victory abroad against fascism and victory at home against Jim Crow.²⁸ Again and again in the lengthy fight for civil rights, the bathroom emerged as a critical site of conflict. It happened in Little Rock in 1956. After the National Guard marched out of the city, the nine Black students enrolled at Central High School faced daily confrontations over access to washrooms. White students vowed to keep them out, saying, like the PBEA had in Baltimore, that they would not share toilet seats with Black students because they needed to protect themselves from venereal diseases.²⁹ Five years later, Black Freedom Riders walked into "whites only" bus station restrooms in Virginia and South Carolina and were promptly arrested. This same wave of protests led to the savage beating of Fannie Lou Hamer in Winona, Mississippi in 1963. Two years later, a white man shot Sammy Younge Jr., a Navy veteran and college student, in the face and killed him after he tried to desegregate a "whites only" gas station restroom in Tuskegee, Alabama.³⁰

But the most lasting form of massive resistance, as Kevin Kruse explains in his book, *White Flight*, was the retreat from the public and the turn toward the private. Rather than sit back and watch "their" golf courses, swimming pools, and neighborhood schools be integrated by protestors, courts, and federal authorities, white public officials simply shut down public

²⁵"Near Normalcy at Western Electric," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Jan. 8, 1944, 7.

²⁶"Western Electric Sets Up Separate Wash Rooms," *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 10, 1944, 9; "Army, Western Electric Won't Comment on Report," *Baltimore Afro-American*, Mar. 18, 1944, 8; Mr. Alexander Allen, Baltimore Urban League to J.F. Geany, Western Electric, March 14, 1944, folder Western Electric, box 34, RG 228, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

²⁷Memo, Clarence Davis to Joseph H. B. Evans, Apr. 29, 1944, folder Western Electric, box 34, RG 228, National Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

²⁸Frank, "White Working-Class Women and the Race Question," 97. On the longer Civil Rights Struggle, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (Mar. 2005), 1233–63.

²⁹Godfrey, "Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms." See also Elizabeth Abel, "Bathroom Doors and Drinking Fountains: Jim Crow's Racial Symbolic," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1999), 435–81.

³⁰James Forman, *Sammy Younge, Jr.: The First College Student to Die in the Black Liberation Movement* (New York, 1968); John Lewis, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York, 1997), 137–8; and Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana, IL, 2001).

facilities.³¹ They closed down parks, playgrounds, and public bathrooms rather than open them up to Black people. When that did not work, they retreated to the suburbs, backyard swimming pools, and private clubs, and from the idea that “their” tax dollars should be used to fund services for others.

When it came to public bathrooms, this often meant neglecting these places, letting toilets leak and sinks crack, and then closing the facilities down because they were beyond repair. When public bathrooms first opened in the 1890s in cities across the United States, civic leaders boasted about providing women, children, and visitors from the countryside with safe access to the public realm.³² They bragged about the marble finishes and up-to-date plumbing of these “comfort stations.”³³ This led to a surge of bathroom building in the first half of the twentieth century. But then things turned in the opposite direction. As segregation broke down, public officials no longer funded public bathrooms. In 1972, in New York City, to look at one dramatic example of decline, there were 708 public restrooms in the city’s 463 subway stations. Ten years later, that number dropped to 175. A decade after that, less than half of these bathrooms remained open and many were so grimy and dirty that they were unusable.³⁴

With so few public bathrooms available, when Black and white taxi drivers, stock brokers, and tourists left their homes, they gambled that they could gain access to toilet at a restaurant or in a hotel lobby or at their job. This worked better for some than others. By the twenty-first century, a public-ish bathroom increasingly meant a toilet at a McDonald’s or a Starbucks and that meant getting the key or the code from an employee. That turned green-aproned baristas into the gatekeepers of the nation’s largest stockpile of public bathrooms. In this new role, some, it seems, practiced racial profiling. This became clear in April 2018 when two Black men waited for a white colleague at a Starbucks in downtown Philadelphia. One of them asked a white worker to use the bathroom and was told no, unless they ordered something. Still, the two Black men continued to wait in the store. The police were called, and soon heavily armed officers walked into the coffee shop and arrested the two Black men for trespassing. Other customers filmed the incident and sent out messages and video clips over social media. As they did, they revealed that the United States still had a bathroom problem and that the color line still existed when it came to bodies and public inclusiveness. But really, it made clear that the toilet, and access to a toilet, was about the privileges that some still were not willing to give up without a fight.³⁵

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³¹Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, 2005). See also Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (New York, 2004).

³²On women and public, see Peter C. Baldwin, “Public Privacy: Restrooms in American Cities, 1869–1932,” *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 2 (Winter 2014), 264–88.

³³For instance, see “Plans Now Complete for Public Comfort Station,” *Visalia Times-Delta*, May 23, 1913, 6.

³⁴“A Problem of Public Comfort,” *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 1986, E24; Nick Ravo, “Perplexing Problem: When Streets Become Public Urinals,” *New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1986, B1; Thomas J. Lueck, “Two Adventurers, One Subway System, And a Challenge to Break a Riding Record,” *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 2006, B4.

³⁵Harvey Molotch, “All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go: America’s Public Bathroom Crisis,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 30, 2018. For more on Starbucks becoming the nation’s default public bathroom, see Lydia Polgreen, “Commerce Fills a New York Need: Toilets,” *New York Times*, Sep. 7, 2002, A1; Anne Barnard, “Baristas Lock Restrooms, Their Revolt Doesn’t Last,” *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 2011, A24; Bryant Simon, *Everything but the Coffee: Learning about America From Starbucks* (Berkeley, CA, 2009).