



1943

The Packard Motor Company strike

Although Packard Motor Company employed African Americans the plant was segregated and restricted black workers to the foundry or sanitation. In 1941 racial tensions became violent when Packard promoted black employees into a white area of the plant. White workers walked out, Packard acquiesced and the black employees were removed. Racial conflicts between black and white migrants from the South caused racial tensions within many plants. Rumors spread that the Ku Klux Klan facilitated this violence and Packard did little to correct the situation.

The federal government pressured Packard to desegregate certain areas of operation and promote black workers. In response, the company promoted three black women to work the drill press. Immediately, white women within the department went on strike and vowed not to return until the three women were demoted. Packard again removed the black employees and supported gave into pressures from the strike. Three months later, the company promoted three black men to the aircraft assembly line. 25,000 white workers walked out on a wildcat strike.

After 3 days on strike, government and union leaders negotiated with Packard to suspend 30 strike agitators, causing the remainder of the strikers to re-evaluate the importance of their jobs. Workers returned to Packard, but racial discrimination did not stop.

¹ Outside of Packard Motor Company

Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

² African American foundry workers

Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

³ Black workers on the assembly line

Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

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Credits:

Adler, Dennis. *Packard*. St. Paul: MBI Publishing Company, 2004. Print.

Asher, Robert, Ronald Edsforth and Stephen Merlino. *Autowork*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. Print.

Barnard, John. *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers During the Reuther Years, 1935-1970*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. Print.

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Race Relations, Work/Jobs

Questions:

1. What caused the strike at Packard Motor Company in 1943?
2. Why were the Packard plants segregated?
3. How did the 1943 strike help to desegregate the Packard plants?

Links to Internet Websites:

http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/cliio/detroit_riot/DetroitNewsRiots1943.htm

<http://www.americaspackardmuseum.org>

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Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

In 1899, brothers James and William Packard formed Packard Motor Company and built their first automobile. Packard soon became a leading company in the industry through design and engineering. The image above shows the Detroit Packard Plant, which opened on September 22, 1903 and was located on East Grand Boulevard.

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Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

During World War I Packard began to hire African American workers. Packard's plants were segregated and the majority of blacks were in the foundry or sanitation.

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Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

In the image shown above, African Americans work on the assembly line at Packard. Generally this area of the plant was reserved for white employees. Although racial discrimination did not stop after the 1943 strike, it put an end to racial violence at Packard.

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