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"MEN OF COLOUR": RACE, RIOTS, AND BLACK FIREFIGHTERS' STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY FROM THE AFA TO THE VALIANTS

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Fire! Few exclamations instinctively instill an intense, visceral reaction that conjures up terrifying images of one's home engulfed in flames, families left homeless, or worse, the loss of life. Benjamin Franklin recognized this potential danger in 1735, when he declared fire "the fiercest enemy of property" in his *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Subsequent articles calling for the creation of a volunteer fire association resulted in the formation of the Union Fire Company, whose members were some of the most prominent men in Philadelphia, including signers of the Declaration of Independence. Since then, firefighters have been providing an often overlooked but invaluable public service, perpetuated partly by tradition, but mostly of necessity. What began as an early urban reform experiment rapidly evolved into an indispensable local "first responder" agency that has remained a basic institution for more than 250 years.[1]

A fire company is a unique organization. A deeply rooted social function, fire fighting provides scholars with view of human interactions through the lens of the community. Influenced by changing technology, local politics, and fluctuating demographic patterns, the fire company serves as a cross-section of American society. Fire companies, like other institutions, were also shaped by social mores predicated on ethnicity, and, throughout most of its history, race, a salient factor in the recruitment, structure and evolution of fire fighting.

Perhaps even more explicitly than the civil rights movement, the fire company provides us with a valuable "bottom up" perspective on the imperfections of race relations over the past two centuries. Civil rights leaders were committed to achieving racial equality by securing the right to vote and equal access to housing, employment, and education, all essential "quality-of-life" opportunities, to be sure. But the firefighters' world—especially the non-white firefighters' world—was a different and more intense experience. They lived together, ate together, and, of course, fought fires together, where they depended on each other. Voting and integration were not irrelevant issues for these defenders of life and property, but they were secondary to their job performance, which was literally, always, a matter of life and death.

As an effort to achieve racial equality, the experience of black firefighters is, in a real sense, a history within a history. The emergence of volunteer fire companies and the attempts of black citizens either to establish their own fire company or to integrate the white companies functions as a microcosm of the city's—and the nation's—history that parallels the larger, protracted national struggle for racial equality.[2]

More than a subordinate subplot to the civil rights movement, the black firefighters' struggle was a legitimate push for social recognition by disenfranchised, "ordinary" men who desired to assume a basic civic duty—to defend their homes and families.

The high esteem fire companies enjoyed in Franklin's day—perhaps similar to that of citizen soldiers—diminished as volunteer firemen who previously met in public halls began to convene in engine houses where they competed primarily with the neighborhood pubs for new recruits. Rivalries developed among the newer companies so fierce that fighting—even when they responded to an alarm—was a common, if not expected occurrence. By the 1820s, and continuing through the 1830s, the ranks of the fire companies had begun to change. An influx of immigrants and free blacks engendered a heightened sense of nativism among residents encouraged a stronger sense of ethnic identity. Because there was also more frequent violent behavior resulting from recruiting members of street gangs, fewer citizen firefighters came from the middle class. Fighting fires had become an established homogeneous, white-dominated institution.

Philadelphia's rich colonial and revolutionary heritage and the city's experiences with nativism and racism in the antebellum period are well documented. Less known, however, in scholarly examinations of antebellum Philadelphia is the struggle of several black citizens to provide their own fire protection during one of the more violent and nativistic eras in the city's history. Fire companies are noted in several of the early histories of Philadelphia and in more recent studies, but the focus is on white firefighters. Consequently, the black firefighters' "challenge from below" has been largely neglected. Establishing a black, autonomous fire company challenged long-standing attitudes about race that resulted in dramatic social and political repercussions.

The attempt to compete with white fire companies in antebellum Philadelphia and later to join the city's paid fire department suggests much about the white power structure in Philadelphia and civic integration from the early 1800s through the twentieth century. If it is true that a society represents the cumulative experiences of its history, the experience of Philadelphia's black firefighters merits scholarly examination because it is a notable if obscure episode reflecting cultural influences and the social dynamics of race relations in private behavior, spacial isolation, and institutional practices in a city that simultaneously earned renown as a stop on the underground railroad as it has become synonymous with Americans' most cherished ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality.

Pennsylvania may have been a tolerant, pluralistic society offering ethnic and religious diversity, but it did not extend the same rights to its black citizens, who were concentrated in Philadelphia. In 1725 the General Assembly passed legislation stipulating that "If any free negroe, fit to work shall neglect so to do and loiter and misspend his or her time . . . any two Magistrates are impowered and required to bind out to service, such negroe, from year to year." According to Gary B. Nash, the racial animus that characterized antebellum Philadelphia was fueled by a "Negrophobia preached from the middle and the top." The abolitionists' influence in the city notwithstanding, no publisher in Philadelphia was willing to put his imprimatur on the controversial *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and one foreign traveler observed that "Colorphobia is more rampant here than in the pro-slavery, negro-hating city of New York."[3]

In reality, firefighting in Philadelphia was a whites-only world. Even after the city hired its first black fireman in 1886, the department remained virtually segregated through more than half the twentieth century. The Jacksonian notion

in the antebellum period of the common man participating in the democratic process largely excluded black Americans.

The AFA

In July 1818, when Philadelphia's forty-nine fire companies collectively announced they were "all willing to receive new members," it was tacitly understood that they meant new *white* members. No one in the "Era of Good Feelings" in Philadelphia—black or white—likely assumed differently. White firemen were not going to recruit new black members, and young, black men interested in fighting fires would not have seriously considered trying to join a white company. To do so was more than just a violation of social convention, since by this time firemen had begun to acquire considerable political influence in the city. Blacks were not going to challenge white fire companies through integration, but despite, or because of, *de facto* discrimination, several "persons of color" caused quite a stir among the fire companies when they elected Derrick Johnson president and Joseph Allen secretary of the African Fire Association (AFA) with the intent of organizing the first black fire and hose company in the city. Establishing any new company drew close attention; in Moyamensing and Southwark, then two "suburban" neighborhoods where most of Philadelphia's black population lived, it is not hard to imagine the outrage provoked by the creation of a black fire company. When circulars distributed in the city reported the formation of a black fire organization, white volunteer firemen immediately expressed their disapproval and opposition.[4]

An exchange of correspondence and notices published in *Poulson's Daily American Advertiser* over a three-week period in the summer of 1818 reveals much about the mood and anxiety of white Philadelphia. On 9 July, *Poulson's* carried an announcement that "Committees that have been appointed by the Engine and Hose Companies, to devise the most suitable means of preventing the MEN of COLOUR from forming Fire and Hose Companies" should plan to meet that evening at Stell's Tavern.[5] At Stell's, representatives from 25 companies passed a resolution intended to dissuade the organization of a rival fire company. AFA members could not have mistaken the intimidating and sometimes threatening tone of the white firefighters' "concern" among

> the citizens of Philadelphia to give them [AFA] no support, aid, or encouragement in the formation of their companies, as there are as many, if not more, companies already existing than are necessary at fires or are properly supported.[6]

The following day a letter in *Poulson's* signed "V.L.I.," reiterated the white firefighter's collective apprehension over the formation of a "Hose Company, composed of MEN OF COLOUR." After giving the matter consideration the writer was doubtful

> any advantage will arise from the establishment of such an institution. Indeed, I am persuaded that it will be attended with the most lamentable consequences. Instead of rendering an important service to the citizens, it will be the means of increasing their fears, and dissipating many desires calculated to promote their security.

In the interest of preserving public order, or possibly anticipating a further challenge, "V.L.I." then advised "my *sable brethren* to be cautious how they proceed."[7] AFA members had been duly warned.

At Stell's Joseph P. McCorkle, chairman of an *ad hoc* committee of fire company committees, called the meeting to order for "the different fire companies to devise measures for suppressing the Negroes." To deter the "men of colour" from forming an effective rival organization, one member suggested they "prevent the African Hose Companies from opening the Fire Plugs," making it impossible for them to extinguish a blaze.[8]

The firefighters' fraternity gathering at Stell's was adamantly opposed to allowing black men to answer fire alarms, but some Philadelphians did seem to be sympathetic with the AFA's attempt to organize. In a letter appearing in the 11 July issue of *Poulson's,* one citizen who identified himself as "A White Man" dismissed what some people believed was a correlation between the increasing number of false alarms and the creation of a black fire company, and accused white firemen of fearing competition. The writer was "glad that the Sons of Africa could find some proper objects of ambition to make them respectable in their own eyes," but he did not think "they have well chosen their ground at this time" because it "will certainly be unpleasant even to the *moderate* members of the Fire Companies." Just as others had questioned the legitimacy of the AFA, "A White Man" cautioned that if the "Men of Colour" wished to make themselves respectable through "industry, frugality and sobriety . . . nothing will tend to more surely to prevent it than projects like the present."[9]

Another concerned citizen, however, reasoned that the existing fire plugs already were too heavily used, and that more hoses would reduce engine efficiency and compromise the firefighters' effectiveness. This realization, he hoped, would be "a sufficient reason with the men of colour to desist from their intention of forming Fire Companies, which would only have a tendency to do harm." If they really wanted to do some good, he concluded, they should "form Companies for the purpose of cleaning the gutters through the city by means of the Hose and Fire Plugs during the hot season of the year."[10]

Wanting to insure that readers understood the position of the fire companies, yet another letter on 14 July expressed concern that the African company threatened to undermine the social order. Because the current forty fire companies were more than sufficient, it was unnecessary for the "proposed organization of the Men of Colour & Hose and Engine Companies," which "has caused a great degree of agitation." Apparently black firefighters needed to understand that "White firemen are willing to respect blacks in their places and rights, but they will not associate with them as companions." If the AFA were allowed to organize, white volunteers will "resign their post as Firemen, render their Carriages useless, and shut up their engine houses, leaving the whole business to Men of Colour, and those who choose to support them." The letter was signed, "JUSTICE."[11]

No doubt recalling that only five years earlier the mayor, aldermen, and a large contingent of distinguished citizens formally complained to the legislature about Philadelphia's minority population, some influential members of the black community who believed the white fire companies would make good on their barely disguised threats, wanted to avoid disorder. On 21 July 1818, a com-

mittee chaired by James Forten, Philadelphia's most prominent and wealthiest black citizen, met at the home of George Jones to weigh the consequences of establishing a rival African Fire Association. After considering the matter, AFA members unanimously resolved that

> A few young men of color [who] had contemplated the establishment of a fire or hose association, and although the same may have emanated from a pure and laudable desire to be of effective service in assisting to arrest the progress of the destructive element, we cannot but thus publicly enter our protest against the proposed measure, which we conceive would be hostile to the happiness of people of color, and which, as soon as known to us, we made every effort to repress.[12]

On 19 July, not wishing to challenge or defy the white power structure, the African Fire Association convened for the last time when it adopted an obsequious resolution, regretting that "had we conceived that such dissatisfaction would have resulted, we should not have progressed this far." No doubt Forten and others discouraged the AFA from competing with the white companies because they were cognizant of their deteriorating legal status as free blacks and realized that following the Revolutionary period, as John Hope Franklin has observed, "they lived somewhat precariously upon the sufference of the whites." To diffuse any recriminations for their impertinence from either the white firefighters or the white community, the committee abruptly announced the dissolution of the AFA.[13] Facing strong opposition from much of the majority white population and their own leaders, the aspiring firefighters disbanded.

Antebellum Philadelphia

In the decade following the War of 1812, Philadelphia served as a quasi "relocation center" for the dispossessed. Destitute, illiterate blacks from the South and poor, unskilled white European immigrants competing for the same menial jobs heightened racial tensions. In neighborhoods where fire companies drew their membership, race and ethnicity defined and determined social mobility. Racism no doubt negatively influenced many white firemen who genuinely resented the AFA. But even though a large white majority controlled state and city politics, many whites had to be uneasy with the rapidly growing black population in Pennsylvania, which had more than tripled in thirty years, increasing from 10,000 in 1790 to 32,000 in 1820.[14]

Perhaps it was their second-class status that prompted a group of young black men to attack members of the Fairmount Engine Company and run off with some of their equipment on the night of 9 August 1834, an act that precipitated Philadelphia's first full-scale race riot. Three days later, on Tuesday, 12 August, white vengeance manifest itself when a "lunatic fringe" attacked an amusement hall that housed a carousel called the "Flying Horse," a popular entertainment for blacks and whites living in the South Street neighborhood. The estimated mob of 400 or 500 whites then moved beyond South Street into the Moyamessing black ghetto where three nights of rioting ensued. With brickbats, clubs, and paving stones, they destroyed black churches and orphanages, and devastated entire blocks of black homes. Firemen who tried to extinguish the flames engulfing black-owned property were physically molested and verbally threat-

ened by an angry white mob. One black person was killed and several others were severely injured. "Hunting the nigs," as the rioters described their activities, so intimidated many black families they left their homes and moved to the city or sought refuge and crossed the river to New Jersey. Within the next year the "Flying Horse" riot had turned Philadelphia into a city "riven with strife."[15]

Philadelphia's rapidly expanding population, from 250,000 to 360,000 in the 1840s, and dislocations resulting from industrialization created uncertainty and insecurity among working whites fortunate enough to be employed during an economic depression. As people saw their identity with the general community diminish, they became more committed to their own ethnic, religious, or occupational groups. Urban historian Sam Bass Warner, Jr., describes the transferral of Philadelphians' loyalties in the 1830s and 1840s as "*par excellence* the era of the urban parish church, the athletic club, the fire company, and the gang." Neither gangs nor violence was new to Philadelphia or other cities, but as historian Richard Stott notes, "gangs became more aggressive with the immigration of the 1840s and 1850s." For firefighters who might have felt displaced, alienated, or who were seeking social attachments, "the engine house was their sanctuary."[16]

Sometimes membership in the neighborhood fire organizations overlapped, making it difficult for residents to know if firemen were protecting or victimizing them. During another race-fueled episode just after dark on 9 October 1849, the Moyamensing Hose Company, under the control of a gang ominously called the "Killers,"—both groups headed by William McMullen—rammed the four-story California House, a combination tavern and hotel, with a wagon full of blazing tar because the mulatto owner was living there with his white wife. When the hotel occupants opened fire on the invaders, the "Killers" returned the shots and chased away police responding to the gunfire. Two volunteer fire companies soon arrived but McMullen's "Killers" prevented them from extinguishing the fire. When the smoke cleared three members of the Good Will Hose Company lay dead. The police made no arrests.[17]

The political ferment of the 1850s hardly favored the social acceptance or employment of black firefighters, not only in Philadelphia, but also nationally with the emergence in May 1854 of the nativistic American Party, more popularly known as the "Know-Nothings," who appealed to lower- and middle-class Americans worried about their jobs and disruptive new forces in their lives. In Philadelphia, the Know-Nothings won the mayoralty with a majority of 8,000 votes in 1854, and in the November elections they won 40 percent of Pennsylvania's votes and 25 percent of New York's, as they elected a sizable minority to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Nationally and locally the Know-Nothings had become such a dominant issue that the New York *Herald-Tribune* predicted the party would win the presidency in 1856.[18] In Philadelphia the "Killers," Irish immigrants asserting their social standing by committing violence in an increasingly violent and nativist atmosphere, epitomized the core principles of the American Party.

Transition and Integration

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, firefighters—at least the white firefighters—had become nearly cult heroes. Probably since the first alarm, ex-

cited youngsters closely followed the fire engine and curious spectators of all ages were fascinated by the sight of heroic firemen racing through neighborhood streets to save life and property. Their deeds were celebrated in songs, posters, lantern slides, and dramatized in periodical and newspaper accounts. When observing how "The old-fashioned manual engines have been sent into the country to keep company with the stage-coaches," an editorial in the July 1873 issue of the *North American Review* noted how "newspaper reporters still rejoice in extensive 'conflagrations.'" In his "Heroes Who Fight Fire" essay published in *Century Magazine* in February 1898, Jacob A. Riis admired the firefighter because "From the time when he leaves his quarters in answer to an alarm until he returns, he takes a risk that may at any moment set him face to face with death in its most cruel form." A *New York Times* reporter also praised the fireman's courage, "Because of the strict discipline of the fireman's life he becomes an athlete. He must cultivate agility, for speed is one of the chief requisites of the successful fire fighter."[19]

Contrary to the perception of fire companies as lawless gangs, lithographers Currier & Ives also celebrated the firefighter in their prints. *The Life of A Fireman* (1854) exuded the courage, manhood, and confident determination to keep the public safe. At least white firefighters possessed those enviable attributes. The artists viewed black firefighters in a very different and much less flattering light. In *The American Fireman* series (1858), and a collection titled *The Darktown Fire Brigade* (1885), they portrayed black firemen as bumbling, inept, and comical. In *The Darktown Hook and Ladder Corp: In Action,* five nearly sub-human and incapable black firemen are shown rescuing several black residents trapped in a crude, two-story house. Two of the black firemen are using what appears to be a red-checkered tablecloth to "rescue" a falling cast-iron cook stove. In contrast, when white firefighters are represented in a similar crisis they are saving the lives of women and children. No doubt reflecting deeply entrenched slavery stereotypes and the new anti-black imagery growing out of Reconstruction, black fire fighters' ape-like appearance in these prints validated the commonly held belief that the black race possessed atavistic characteristics which made them generally inferior to whites.[20] The heroic, chivalrous image of firefighters presented by journalists and artists for a national audience enhanced the stature of white firefighters in their transition from a volunteer service to a professional department; conversely, disparaging, racist representation reinforced the negative perception of their black counterparts.

Little wonder that it would be another fifteen years until the Quaker City integrated its fire department. When Mayor Samuel G. King appointed Philadelphia's first black police officer in April 1884, he won the black community's political support and created expectations of black patronage. Two years later, in 1886, Philadelphia accepted its first black firefighter—in a department of 300 members—perhaps a surprising move considering it was only five years earlier that Governor Henry M. Hoyt signed legislation prohibiting racial segregation in Pennsylvania schools. Hired at an annual salary of $750, Isaac Jacobs was assigned number 111, and officially listed as a "hoseman" with Engine Company No. 11, located at 1035 Lombard Street. The hoseman designation was a misnomer, however, since his real duties were to care for the horses that pulled the fire wagon and perform other menial tasks unrelated to fighting fires. In Novem-

ber 1891, Jacobs either resigned or was dismissed; no official reason was given in the Fire Department's *Membership Record*.[21]

Six years after Jacobs broke the color barrier, the department appointed its second black firemen, Stephen E. Presco. In contrast to Jacobs' marginal firefighting responsibilities, Presco's duties were not limited to tending the horses. Originally assigned to Engine 17, he remained there for only 35 days until, like Jacobs, he was transferred to Engine Company 11, the city's unofficially designated "black" fire station, where he fought the "red devil" for seventeen years.[22]

On 6 March 1907, Presco's company was called out to contain a pre-dawn blaze at the J. Stern & Sons shirtwaist factory on the sixth floor of a building on Filbert Street that resulted in $50,000 damages. Because their ladders were not long enough to reach the sixth floor, firemen were forced to enter the building by way of an old and rickety fire escape railing. Intense heat had badly weakened the railing, and when it suddenly collapsed, five firemen fell to the ground, sustaining serious injuries. Presco, described in the *Philadelphia Bulletin* as the "only colored fireman in the city," suffered fractured ribs, internal injuries, and contusions. Later that day he died at Jefferson Hospital. Because of his meritorious performance in the line of duty, members of Engine 11 honored him as a "Fireman's Fireman."[23]

Philadelphia had integrated its fire department, but it hardly set a precedent. By the time Jacobs was hired several other cities already employed black firefighters, some more than a half-century before Philadelphia. New Orleans hired its first black firefighter in 1817. Seven years later, blacks were fighting fires in Savannah, Georgia; Columbia, South Carolina (1840s); Richmond, Virginia (1864); San Antonio, Texas (1866); Athens, Georgia (1873); Topeka, Kansas (1882); and Nashville (1885) all employed black firefighters before Philadelphia. Several factors explain this disparity between northern and southern urban centers. First, the appearance of black firemen in southern cities can be attributed at least in part to the enlarged civic identities of blacks during and because of Reconstruction that recommended them for such service. Second, although southern cities did employ black fireman, they were always under the direction of white supervisors. In the antebellum era free blacks could earn exemptions from paying a poll tax. Kept under close surveillance after the Civil War, blacks exemplified the racist division of labor throughout the New South. Also, the potential for civil unrest may have been another reason why Philadelphia was reluctant to hire black firefighters. According to Roger Lane, "the sight of a uniform symbolizing power and authority could easily trigger a brawl." The sight of a black man in uniform was more than many white Philadelphians could bear.[24] An examination of Philadelphia's membership records also reveals that although the city employed blacks in the fire department, it did not actively recruit them.

More than a million black soldiers had fought in the world's second war to defeat Nazi racism abroad and discrimination at home. Understandably, returning veterans and those who held defense jobs during the war eagerly anticipated greater participation in the democratic process in the post-war era. Expectations, however, were not reality, and racial equality remained an elusive objective. President Harry Truman supported several civil rights initiatives, and after labor leader A. Philip Randolph threatened a boycott in July 1948, issued an ex-

ecutive order desegregating the armed forces. But by the end of the 1940s, the lives of black Americans were not much different then they had been before the war. Legal subterfuges in some southern states denied black suffrage and racial tension resulting from demobilization policies produced a white backlash and even some local revivals of the Ku Klux Klan. The transition to a peacetime economy also triggered a demographic shift that, Mark Tebeau argues, fractured unity among firefighters. Still, the war experience had fomented a certain sense of empowerment and militancy that nurtured civil rights organizations. Through the 1960s and 1970s aspiring black firefighters and other municipal employees ready to challenge established racial boundaries benefitted from a rising tide of grass roots activism in the form of a nationwide civil rights movement as they gained greater access to firefighting in northern urban areas.[25]

Although more black firefighters found employment in the decades following the war, they did so under inauspicious, if not hostile, conditions. A year after Jackie Robinson broke the color line in major league baseball when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, Philadelphia's black firefighters were still assigned to either Engine Company 11 at 10th and South Streets or Fireboat No. 1, the marine unit, at Delaware Avenue and Race Streets. Since they were the only two "black designated" stations, one consequence of the department's version of *separate but equal* was to have a disproportionate number of personnel at those stations. Because the city balked at integrating the entire department and maintaining a normal crew limit of twenty-one firemen at a station house, forty-five firefighters worked out of Engine 11. This policy not only was unnecessarily inconvenient, it was also discriminatory. Even though a black firefighter might be assigned a work detail in another part of the city during the day, at night he was required to return to Engine 11. Roosevelt Barlow, who retired in 1967 as an acting battalion chief, recalled that Engine 11, "the Jim Crow station," was very crowded, since it housed "all the city's black firefighters." Moreover, while assigned at Engine 11 black firemen's applications for promotion to officer often were denied because there already were enough firemen of officer rank and they could not transfer to another station house.[26]

Neither black nor white firemen were comfortable with the racial situation that had developed at Engine 11. Dalmon S. Edmonds, a firefighter for more than forty years, said the "Only white people we saw down in that area were the shopkeepers. Because of their racial isolation, the men of Engine 11 developed a strong camaraderie." But they never would gain equality with whites as long as they were all assigned to Engine 11, and black firemen wanted city-wide integration to achieve more equitable working conditions. Black firefighters were also opposed to working out of only one station house because not being assigned to other locations deprived them of the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to provide fire protection in a changing urban landscape. Many white firemen disliked the policy because they resented being transferred to the "black" Engine Company 11, perceiving it as a punishment or demotion. Some white firemen, including officers, assumed that a white person was transferred to Engine 11 for disciplinary reasons. Likely they also did not want to be stigmatized, nor did they want to endure the ridicule and derisive remarks about sharing living quarters with black firefighters. In 1949, as a concession to its minority firefighters during Mayor Bernard Samuels's administration, the city Fire Department modified this

discriminatory practice when it began to accept transfer requests from black firefighters who wished to relocate to another engine company. With the exception of white firemen assigned there for "rehabilitation," Engine 11 and Fireboat No. 1 still remained segregated all-black units. Not until 1952, four years after the armed forces were desegregated, was the Philadelphia Fire Department (PFD) officially integrated. For Roosevelt Barlow, however, "To the white firefighters, we were always different." Barlow was not alone in expressing the occupational isolation and estrangement many black firefighters confronted and his was not an unusual experience. Anthropologist Robert McCarl observed a similar dynamic in an integrated Washington, D.C., fire house, where he "learned quickly that the black firefighter has a different orientation toward the fire service than his white colleagues."[27]

Integration was preferable to segregation, but it hardly created an ideal situation for black firemen. Expressions of white racism and retaliation ranged from annoying to life-threatening. On the job black firemen frequently were assigned to the leeward side of a fiery building, the most dangerous position because the wind and smoke came at them. More petty forms of harassment were putting on boots filled with water, climbing into beds rigged to collapse on impact, being issued dirty blankets, and placating resentful white firemen trying to provoke them to fistfights. Perhaps most unnerving for black firemen was not an overt, physical act but having to function in an already stressful "environment of aversion" where co-workers would not engage them in conversation and generally ignored them, an unspoken form of behavior that effectively relegated them to a nonexistence.[28]

The Valiants

Black firefighters who might have been indifferent about Philadelphia's discriminatory practices had to be influenced and emboldened by the political activism that emerged in an era of widespread citizen mobilization and political protest in the early 1960s. Impatient with the city's reluctance to fully and unconditionally integrate its fire department, frustrated with a history of institutional racism, and aware that groups such as "The Shomrim," the "Sons of Italy," and the "Lambskins" excluded blacks, Lieutenant Samuel Singleton, a black firefighter, invited thirty co-workers to assemble in his basement in 1962 to discuss common problems and the growing disillusionment among the department's black members. Just a few months from concluding a thirty-seven-year career with the Fire Department, Singleton realized the importance of maintaining a strong, shared identity, and proposed the formation of a "fraternal group of black firefighters for the purpose of fostering fellowship and information among our members, similar to the Vulcan Society that formed in New York City." On 10 March, Club Valiants, Inc. was founded to create a more favorable working environment for minorities. According to its charter, the Valiants were committed to "upgrading their members, maintain[ing] high professional standards in their craft, and provid[ing] community service to all the citizens of Philadelphia." Reaction to the Valiants was not unlike what the African Fire Association experienced a century and a half earlier. A modern-day Stell's coterie in the department viewed the new organization with suspicion, if not contempt,

and saw them as agitators, especially when the Valiants identified racism and lack of opportunity as consequences of departmental policies. One characteristic they did not share with their predecessors in the AFA, however, was their resolve; the Valiants would not soon disband or issue an apology for offending white sensibilities.[29]

In 1965 and again in 1966, the Valiants confronted the City of Philadelphia about the lack of black employees at the Firemen's Clinic. But because the Civil Rights Act of 1964 exempted federal, state, and local governments from being sued, they had little legal recourse. After efforts to effect a more positive change by counseling prospective applicants and consulting with several minority leaders in the community, the Valiants contacted other black firefighter organizations and met in New York City with representatives of the Vulcan Society chapters in New Jersey and New York, and the Phoenix Society in Hartford, Connecticut, to discuss mutual concerns. A year later, at a second conference held in New York City, members of local fire chapters, convinced that "a national organization was needed to attempt to combat the racism within the Fire Service," called for a national meeting. In 1970 black firefighters from around the country met in Hartford, where they founded the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters (IABPFF).[30]

Actively involved with a national organization, the Valiants, then the largest chapter of black firefighters in the nation, became more informed about statutory changes. In 1971, with the assistance of civil rights attorneys, the NAACP, and local civil rights activists, they sued Democratic Mayor Frank L. Rizzo's administration and the city of Philadelphia for discriminatory hiring practices and filed a complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). A year later, when the 1964 Civil Rights Act was amended to include state and local municipalities, the Valiants attempted unsuccessfully to initiate discussions with the city of Philadelphia to establish more equitable working conditions.[31]

In the early 1970s blacks comprised 35 percent of Philadelphia's population but less than eight percent of the city's firefighters, a statistical imbalance that convinced many Valiants that legal action was the only way to redress historical wrongs committed against them. When black firefighters were hired, they were under-represented at all levels, but disproportionate representation was especially evident in the higher ranks, making it difficult for them to believe that hiring and promotion procedures were race-neutral. Black firemen were not responsible for the demeaning task of tending the horses like Isaac Jacobs, and they no longer were assigned to a *Jim Crow* station house, but when a black applicant was not appointed until he had taken and passed the entrance examination the fifth time, the Valiants pursued a more aggressive course of action.

Acting on the behalf of the PFD's black firemen, on 31 January 1974, Club Valiants filed a class-action complaint in the United States Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, alleging that the "employment practices of the Philadelphia Fire Department were racially discriminatory and in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Acts of 1870 and 1871, and the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments." Six months later Judge Louis C. Bechtle restricted the Fire Department from hiring any new firefighters unless it appointed at least one qualified black applicant for employment and pro-

motion for each two qualified white applicants. "To remedy the effects of past discrimination," the racial composition of the fire department also was to reflect the racial proportion of the city's population.[32]

Backlash

Black firefighters won a legal victory, but they and Judge Bechtle failed to win the hearts and minds of at least some citizens in Philadelphia, who, in 1975, sounded much like the disgruntled townsmen who protested the formation of the AFA at Stell's more than 150 years earlier. Some of the "concerns" about the recent ruling related to "reverse racism," such as a letter one woman wrote to United States Senator Richard S. Schweiker (R-PA). Apparently not realizing the distinction between municipal and federal jurisdiction, Mrs. David M. Dott lamented that "We know they are skipping white fellows so the racial balance will be equal . . . This racial trouble will probably die down in a year or so, but unfortunately it will be too late for my husband."[33]

In January 1975, Mrs. Charles Lange, outraged with the judge's decision, wondering, how Mayor Rizzo could

> stand by and watch them tear apart your brother's Fire Department? In all my seventy-seven years on this earth I've never seen such an arrogant and down right bold decision as was rendered by that senile man Bechtle.[34]

Arnold E. Spaeth was convinced that "Because of the 'Quota' system recently established in the hiring policy for the position of firemen, I have been passed over. This has been unfair, since I know how necessary it was to study hard in order to place well on this list."[35]

In September 1975, an irate John J. Sullivan probably spoke for many resentful white citizens when he told Mayor Rizzo that "The Philadelphia Fire Department will soon be one of the worst and malcontent in the country. The rulings by Judge Bechtle on the discrimination of Blacks is not only wrong but reeks of Reverse Bias." Sullivan then complained that "their [sic] is no hope in this city for anyone other than the chosen people Blacks," and predicted that "the time is coming when the white middle class says enough is enough. When this time comes I hope that I am not around because it is going to be very, very ugly."[36]

Progress?

In August 1984, three months before Philadelphia elected W. Wilson Goode as is first black mayor, the PFD agreed to hire 151 black firefighters as part of settling the ten-year-old discriminatory suit. Judge Bechtle also directed the city to launch an aggressive recruitment and training program for black candidates that would satisfy his requirement that at least 12 percent of the openings for each incoming class be set aside for black recruits.[37]

By the end of the decade expectations of racial equality clashed with reality when lower courts were reluctant to enforce federal affirmative action measures during President Ronald W. Reagan's administration. Some Valiants, feel-

ing that the court victory was only a first step, were disillusioned by the lack of progress. In May 1990, one of the department's 15 deputy chiefs, Robert Dobson, and a plaintiff in the Valiants' case against the city in 1974, attributed his transfer from a highly visible city-wide position to a less prestigious assignment as an attempt by the PFD to deny opportunities to black firefighters. In a newsletter distributed to 450 Valiant subscribers, Dobson suspected fire commissioner Roger M. Ulshafer and others saw him as a threat because he wanted to "end the domination of the Fire Commissioner's position by whites." Because only 22 percent of the department's firefighters were black, Dobson argued that "By removing me from such a visible position, perhaps he [Ulshafer] is helping the 'good old boy network,' which is very much alive."[38]

As Dobson's accusations reverberated through the department, Ulshafer issued a memorandum titled *The Ties That Bind* stating that the PFD "will not tolerate prejudice of any kind." The commissioner also denied that Dobson was a victim of racism, countering that the deputy chief was negligent in his duties and disrupted morale. Dobson and other black firefighters were not convinced the commissioner's plea for "togetherness, not divisiveness" was sincere. In anticipating a meeting with PFD officials, Valiants president Lloyd Ayers intimated that Dobson's transfer was only one such incident among "injustices and inequities, and all types of problems."[39]

For many black firefighters in Philadelphia, a federal court ruling notwithstanding, their situation had not significantly improved. As newly elected Valiants president Daniel Williams pointed out in a December 1991 *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial, only 17 percent of the department's approximately 2,600 firefighters were black. Likely aware these numbers produced an economic gap, Williams no doubt also was concerned the city's response to the court order was more one of tokenism, rather than enforcing a more effective mechanism to achieve racial parity. Moreover, the number of black-held positions decreased in proportion to their level of responsibility. Also, of the 99 recent applicants hired, only eleven were black, falling one short of Judge Bechtle's 12 percent minimum.[40]

Williams also noted that six years after the City of Philadelphia and the Valiants had agreed on hiring and promotion quotas, "the effort to hire more black firefighters stalled." More to the point, Williams stated that the Fire Department was "half-hearted in it efforts" to recruit minority members, and that it "allowed an atmosphere of racism and cronyism to prevent African Americans from advancing to the upper echelons of the department." As evidence that an "atmosphere of racism" still existed, Williams informed his fellow firefighters and city officials that the department's only black battalion chief allegedly was the victim of a cruel prank in September 1991 when white firefighters spit in his hat before he wore it. Perhaps more disturbing than statistics was Williams's charge that since the 1984 litigation, "racism has been more covert and permeates the department in the form of subtle policy decisions and practices as well as outright harassment."[41]

In January 1992, Ulshafer defended his handling of the situation in a letter to the editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer,* claiming that the "outrageous act was thoroughly investigated" and that the police and fire departments concluded "it

was not racial in nature." The Valiants were neither satisfied with the investigation nor convinced the incident was not racially motivated, and because no perpetrator had been identified, they dismissed the investigation as "superficial." They also pressured Democratic Mayor Edward G. Rendell to meet with them in February 1992, when Commissioner Ulshafer agreed to reopen an investigation into the alleged racial harassment of Ayers.[42] No one was ever charged for the offense.

When Ulshafer unexpectedly announced his retirement in June 1992, the leading candidate to replace him was first deputy commissioner Harold B. Hairston, the highest ranking black member of the fire department. On 25 June, as anticipated, Mayor Rendell appointed Hairston as the first black fire commissioner in Philadelphia's history. Although Ulshafer said Hairston was qualified for the position, he named three other candidates—all white—to succeed him. In addition to managing a $100 million budget and a disappointing thirty percent decrease in the number of firefighters, Hairston also assumed leadership of a department hampered by deeply ingrained racial divisiveness and antagonism.[43]

Williams's allegations of racism in the department were not baseless. In July 1997, Asa Grimes filed a complaint with the United States EEOC and the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations accusing the Fire Department of "gross racial insensitivity and discrimination" when another firefighter hung two crosses made from burned pieces of wood above the lockers of two firemen because they missed a chance to battle a raging church fire. Even though all the firefighters involved in the incident were white, several black members were offended by the cross-burning and urged the department to provide sensitivity training.[44]

Black males are not the only group that has struggled for equality in the very tradition-conscious fire department. The first females were not appointed firefighters in Philadelphia until 1985 when three were hired. The female firefighter experience in Philadelphia was not unique. Eight years earlier, in 1977, the first women took the firefighters' exam in New York City. After they were ostracized and physically abused by their white co-workers and allied themselves with the black male Vulcans. Male black firefighters fought against racism, but for historian Nancy MacLean, these female firefighters personified the challenge to sex discrimination. Reminiscent of the struggle for racial acceptance in the 19th century however, progress on gender hiring was slow. Ten years later there were only five females in Philadelphia's 2,300-member department, none of them officers. In December 1998, Katrina Northern, one of the city's few female firefighters sued the department claiming she was fired in 1996 after two years on the job because she was a women and an African American.

In May 2000, when the department was under pressure to increase diversity, Northern filed a federal sexual- and racial-discrimination lawsuit against the city and Hairston, maintaining she was dismissed because fire officials could not tolerate female firefighters. At the time she was fired ten women—about .5 percent—were employed in the department's workforce of 2,300. Fire officials argued that her dismissal was a result of her refusal to participate in an ambulance run. Regardless of what prompted her firing, in 2003 she was awarded an out-of-court settlement, and won her reinstatement, but chose not to return to the Fire Department. Historically, racial differences have been difficult to re-

solve, but Carol Chetkovich argues that "they paled by comparison with the gender divide, for women as a group confronted a deep-seated and widespread resistance.[45]

At the end of 1999, eight years after the PFD pledged to hire more blacks, the demographic rank and file profile barely had improved: 438 firefighters, or twenty percent, of the 2,147 member Fire Department were black. Blacks holding officer rank also had improved little: thirty were lieutenants, eight were captains, five were battalion chiefs, and none was a deputy chief since Hairston was appointed from that rank.[46]

Northern's and Grimes's experiences confirm that black and female representation in the fire department has improved dramatically since the Valiants sued for more equitable employment policies in 1974, when eight percent of Philadelphia's firefighters were black. In mid-2004 that number had more than tripled to 26 percent of uniformed personnel, just more than half the city's black population (43 percent). Other gains have been equally impressive: three of four of the department's administrative positions have been held by black males.[47]

Final Thoughts

Contemporary black firefighters may find it difficult to comprehend that in 1818 the African Fire Asssociation was so intimidated by the local white power structure it disbanded rather than challenge the status quo, or that more than a half-century later Stephen Presco was fortunate to be hired as a hoseman/stable hand, or that as recently as 1992 a battalion chief charged he was a victim of a racist act. In many ways the modern political world would be unrecognizable to early black firemen. When the Valiants challenged existing discriminatory practices and forced the city to redress its hiring and promotion policies, they reversed a long history of segregation in the fire department.

In February 2005 the *Northeast Times*, a Philadelphia-area weekly newspaper, published a story titled "White Firemen Are Hot and Bothered" in reference to a protest of the preferential hiring of minority candidates. One disconsolate reader wrote that "The idea that people of color are being given a job because of their color concerns me and also frightens me even more." The contemporary author likely would have concurred with her counterpart in 1818. Uneasy then about the AFA, a *Paulson's* reader was fearful that "The formation of fire-engine and hose companies by persons of color will be productive of serious injury to the peace and safety of citizens in times of fire."[48] Nearly two centuries have passed since that subtle threat appeared in *Paulson's*, but the ambivalence over translating abstract notions of racial equality into practice is a reminder of the imperfections of our social order. Owing to the enforcement of "equal protection under the law," however, the experiences of the Valiants differ markedly from that of Philadelphia's early black firefighters, and their successful effort to break down racial barriers demonstrates progress their predecessors could only have imagined.

Recognizing the Valiants as a movement within the civil rights movement enhances our understanding of what was at stake when they initiated legal action to redress injustices committed within structural or institutional racism. Their struggle for equality within the firefighting community and their ability to mus-

cle concessions from a city government was reminiscent of the local campaigns waged by civil rights activists to gain national remedies. Not only have black citizens historically been denied access to fire fighting employment opportunities, they also have not benefitted from the same level of protection from the terror of fire as their white neighbors living in more affluent suburbs.

Commissioner Hairston retired in July 2004. He was succeeded by Lloyd Ayers, the department's second black commissioner—the battalion chief who found saliva in his hat.[49] Ernest Hargett, Jr., also black, is the department's deputy commissioner. Philadelphia's black firefighters have struck a powerful blow against an enduring bigotry of low expectations. Change is inevitable and seldom a graceful operation, but the changes that have occurred within the fire service have been profound and pervasive. Members of the African Fire Association would probably be incredulous that in 2007, two "men of colour" hold the highest positions in Philadelphia's fire department. They might even regard it as a valiant effort.

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ENDNOTES

My profound gratitude to Brian Black and Randall Miller for their insightful commentary and to the anonymous reviewer for convincing the author to recast the manuscript to better demonstrate the broader historical significance of black firefighters. I would also like to thank members of Club Valiants, Inc., for their willingness to share their experiences in the Philadelphia Fire Department and for generously allowing me access to their archives. I thank Earnest F. Hartgett, Jr., for his valuable critique of an early draft. Mike Tharan and Shawnda Hau were indispensable research assistants.

1. For early fire prevention in Philadelphia, see, J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, eds., *History of Philadelphia, 1609–1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), vol. I, 1883; Willis Hazzard, *Annals of Philadelphia in the Olden Times* (Philadelphia, 1879), vol. III; George Cuthbert Gillespie, "Early Fire Protection and the Use of Fire Marks, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 54 (1930), 240, 248; and Benjamin Franklin, "Containing the Freshest Advices Foreign and Doemestik," *Pennsylvania Gazette,* 28 January–February 1734. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were George Clymer, Francis Hopkinson, Benjamin Rush, and James Wilson.

2. Useful sources for the early history of volunteer fire companies are James Mease, *The Picture of Philadelphia, Giving an Account of Its Origin, Increase and Improvements in Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, Commerce and Revenue* (Philadelphia, 1811); Hazzard, *Annals of Philadelphia in the Olden Times* (1879); Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia (1884);* and Ellis Paxon Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia: A History of the City and the People* (Philadelphia, 1908). For discussions of race and violence in antebellum Philadelphia, see Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787–1848* (Philadelphia, 1988); Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Its Three Periods of Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968); Laurie, "Fire Companies and Gangs in Southwark," 71–87; and Michael Feldberg, "Urbanization as a Cause of Violence: Philadelphia as a Test Case," 53–69 in Davis and Haller, *The Peoples of Philadelphia;* and Weigley, *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History,* 254; Andrew H. Neilly, *The Violent Volun-*

teers: A History of the Volunteer Fire Department of Philadelphia, 1736–1871 (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1960), 62–67; and Ric N. Caric, "From Ordered Buckets to Honored Felons: Fire Companies and Cultural Transformation, 1785–1850," *Pennsylvania History,* forthcoming.

3. Susan Klepp, "Encounter and Experiment: The Colonial Period," 75; and William Pencak, "The Promise of Revolution, 1750–1800," 140, in Randall M. Miller and William Pencak, eds., *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth* (University Park, PA, 2002). Also see, John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York, 1980), 161–62; Ira V. Brown, *The Negro in Pennsylvania History* (Gettysburg, 1970), 5–6; and Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia, 2002), 167–68. In another study of antebellum Philadelphia, Nash notes that ironically, it was of little consequence that the most destitute and incarcerated newcomers were Irish immigrants. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 173). The American Anti-Slavery Society (1833), the Female Anti-Slavery Society (1833), and the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (1837), all founded in Philadelphia, built Pennsylvania Hall after they were refused accommodations in the city's public meeting places. Emma Lapansky, "Building Democratic Communities, 1800–1850," 153–202, in Miller and Pencak, eds., *Pennsylvania.*

4. J. Albert Cassedy, *The Firemen's Record: As Gleaned from All Available Sources of the History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, undated), 52. The AFA was not the first black service organization in Philadelphia. In 1797 Richard Allen, James Forten, and Absalom Jones formed a black masonic lodge after white Masons refused them permission to organize. Nash, *Forging Freedom,* 218. As early as 1819, firemen realized their collective influence when, to insure the passage of a bill providing financial support for Philadelphia's fire companies, volunteers organized a firemen's ticket from which four out of the five candidates were elected. The only fireman who failed to get elected was "a person who was not popular." Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia,* vol. I, 593–595.

5. "NOTICE," *Poulson's Daily American Advertiser,"* 9 July 1818, 3.

6. "Fire and Hose Companies," *Poulson's Daily American Advertiser,* 11 July 1818, 3.

7. "V.L.I. Letter to the Editor," *Poulson's Daily American Advertiser,* 10 July 1818, 2.

8. Jos. P. McCorkle Letter to the Editor, *Poulson's Daily American Advertiser,* 11 July 1818, 3.

9. "A White Man," Letter to the Editor, *Poulson's Daily American Advertiser,* 11 July 1818, 2.

10. Letter to the Editor, *Poulson's Daily Advertiser,* 14 July 1818, 3.

11. *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser,* 14 July 1818, 4.

12. Notice in *Poulson's Daily American Advertiser,* 21 July 1818, 3; and Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom,* 160.

13. "At A Meeting of the African Fire Association," *Poulson's Daily Advertiser,* 23 July 1818, 3.

14. Weigley, *Philadelphia,* 254; and Elizabeth M. Geffen, "Violence in Philadelphia in the 1840s and 1850s," *Pennsylvania History* 36 (October 1969): 84.

15. One intriguing explanation for the intense racism in antebellum Philadelphia is that numerous southern medical students studying in the city who often agitated unskilled whites and frequently led them in riots against the black population. H.E. Cox, "Jim Crow and the City of Brotherly Love: The Segregation of Philadelphia Horse Cars, *The Negro History Bulletin,* 26 (October 1962), 119. Philadelphia's antebellum race riots are discussed in Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free State* (Chicago, 1961), 100–112; John M. Werner, "Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson, 1824–1849, (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1973), 188–89; and John Runcie, "'Hunting the Nigs' in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1934," *Pennsylvania History* 39 (April 1972), 190–91; Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* (Philadelphia, 1990), 62; and Nash, *Forging Freedom,* 276.

16. Warner, *The Private City* 158; and Richard Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class Ethnicity and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), 229–230. Stott focuses on New York City but in his study of Philadelphia, Laurie also concludes that "Racial antagonism was renewed as traditional tensions between the Irish and neighboring Blacks heated up in the second half of the forties and erupted into riots in 1849. Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia,* 155–56; Neilly, *The Violent Volunteers,* 62–67; Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia,* vol. I, 352; and Warner, "Race Riots in the United States During the Age of Jackson," 211. Mark Tebeau notes that several fire companies battled their way to the blaze and received commendations from the community," including the Goodwill Company, in *Eating Smoke: Fire in Urban America, 1800–1950* (Baltimore, 2003) p. 47.

17. By the time the two-day riot ended, three whites and one black person were killed and twenty-five of the injured went to the hospital. Weigley, *Philadelphia,* 353; Paul Ditzel, *Fire Engines, Firefighters: The Men and Machines, from Colonial Days to the Present* (New York, 1976), 101; "Local Affairs," *Public Ledger* 10 October 1849, 1; and Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867–1933* (University Park, PA, 1993), 12–15. Two weeks after the California House incident, the Public Ledger complained that "The condition of things in Moyamensing is truly deplorable," and that "It seems as if public authorities had given full license to the desperate gangs of marauders, composed of boys and half-grown men to do as they please." Editorial, "The District of Moymensing," *Public Ledger,* 25 October 1849. In 1853 McMullen was appointed a lieutenant of the marshal's police and later was the Democratic boss of the Fourth Ward. Weigley, *Philadelphia,* 348. McMullen's obituary noted that his "political influence in the Fourth Ward was greater than any other man." He was also a member of the Board of Prison Inspectors of the Wyomessing County Prison. Harry C. Silcox, *Philadelphia Politics from the Bottom Up: The Life of Irishman William McMullen, 1824–1901* (Philadelphia, 1989), 51; and "Squire M'Mullen Dead," *Public Ledger,* 1 April 1901, 1.

18. David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848–1861* (New York, 1976), 248–50.

19. James M. Bugbee, "Fire and Fire Departments," *North American Review,* 165 (July 1873), 108; Jacob A. Riis, "Heroes Who Fight Fire," *The Century Magazine* 55 (February 1898), 483; and "New-York's Firemen Say their Lot is Hard," *New York Times,* 17 May 1903.

20. Robyn Cooper, "The Fireman: Immaculate Manhood," *Journal of Popular Culture,* 28, no. 4 (Spring 1995), 139–70.

21. In 1896 Philadelphia employed sixty black police officers. The fire department had one black member. Weigley, *Philadelphia,* 354, 493. "A Brief History of the Philadelphia Fire Department," undated document in Club Valiants', Inc. archives, Valiant Hall, Philadelphia, PA; Marshall, *Leather Lungs,* vii; Murray Dubin, "Black Firefighters Mark Progress," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 16 October 1987, B1; "Valiants Outline Black History of Fire Department," *Philadelphia Tribune,* 13 February 1973; "The First Fifty Years," *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Fire Commissioners,* 1886, Philadelphia City Archives, Record Group 74.1; and *Membership Record,* Philadelphia Fire Department, Fireman's Hall, Philadelphia. There is some discrepancy in Jacobs' age. The *Sixteenth Annual Report* in 1886 lists him as being thirty five years old; the *Membership Record* that year, however, gives his age as thirty-three, RG 71.1; and the 1891 *Annual Report* (250), lists his age as twenty-six. His occupation also changed from porter in 1886 to laborer in 1891. In the 1907 *Annual Report* (65) his cause of death was attributed to "injuries received by fall of wall of fire."

22. "The First Fifty Years, 1886–1936," Valiants' Archives.

23. *Public Ledger,* "Five Firemen Fall With Fire-Escape," 7 March 1907; untitled article, *Philadelphia Bulletin;* Valiants' Archives; Marshall, *Leather Lungs,* viii; and "Five Firemen Fall With Fire-Escape," *Public Ledger,* 7 March 1907. The *Ledger* noted that Presco was "the only negro fireman in the city." Black firefighters were commonly identified by their race in other cities. When black fireman Wesley Williams saved six lives in New York City, the *New York Times* identified him as "New York's Only Colored Fireman." *http://www.vulcansocietyfdny.org.*

24. Other cities that employed black firefighters before Philadelphia included New Bedford, MA (1834); Cambridge, MA (1850s); and Omaha, NE (1885). Even the United States Coast Guard had an all-black crew in 1878 at Pea Island, on the outer banks of North Carolina. Chuck Milligan and Ron Ballew, "History of Black Firefighters," *http://members.aol.com/_http://Fireriter/index.html;* Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860–1900* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), 19; and Tebeau, *Eating Smoke,* 38.

25. Tebeau, *Eating Smoke,* 337.

26. Gayle Ronan Sims, "Roosevelt Barlow, 85, Phila. Firefighter," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 17 July 2003, B12; and interviews with members of the Valiants, 4 January 1989, Valiant Hall, Philadelphia.

27. Sims, "Dalmon Edmunds, City's 1st Black Deputy Fire Chief," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 17 October 2003, B8; Sims, "Roosevelt Barlow," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 17 July 2003, B12; and interviews with members of the Valiants. Also, Robert McCarl, *The District of Columbia Fire Fighters Project: A Case Study in Occupational Folklore* (Washington, D.C., 1985), 23.

28. Dubin, "Black Firefighters Mark Progress;" and interviews with members of Club Valiants.

29. *The History of the Valiants,* undated, Valiants Archives.

30. Robert E. Dobson, "Valiants Report II: Valiants' Impact on Improvement in Promotional Opportunities for Minorities in the Philadelphia Fire Department," 28 April

1987, Valiants' Archives; "The History of the Valiants," no date; and "Brief Resume of the History of the Valiants, Inc," no date; "Valiants Outline Black History," all in Valiants Archives.

31. Failing to win any concessions from the City of Philadelphia, Valiants president Ron Lewis appealed to the Pennsylvania Department of Justice, which supported the Valiants petition. "The History of the Valiants," 3.

32. The defendants included Mayor Rizzo, his brother, Fire Commissioner Joseph R. Rizzo, and other city officials "responsible for the formulation and implementation of the department's employment practices." The Valiants sought "equitable relief" in the form of interim hiring and promotion quotas as remedies for discrimination. *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, VIII, c, 3 and 4.

33. Letter from Mrs. David M. Dott to Senator Richard S. Schweiker, 9 December 1974, *Fire Requests*, Philadelphia City Archives, Record Group 60-2.6, Box 10.

34. Letter from Mrs. Charles Lange to Mayor Rizzo, 8 January 1975, *Fire Requests*, Record Group, 60-2.6, Box 10, Philadelphia City Archives.

35. Letter from Arnold E. Spaeth to Mayor Rizzo, 30 June 1975, *Fire Requests*, Record Group 60-2.6, Box 10, Philadelphia City Archives.

36. Letter from John J. Sullivan to Mayor Rizzo, 3 September 1975, *Fire Requests*, Record Group 60-2.6, Box 10, Philadelphia City Archives.

37. Blacks were not the only minority who felt excluded. In 1990 a letter to the *Philadelphia Daily News* editor complained that "the Goode administration has done nothing for the aspiring Puerto Rican firefighters," who represent 6% of the city's population, but only 1% of the department's firemen. Goode, a Democrat, was reelected in 1988.

38. The only black officer higher in rank was deputy commissioner Hairston. Bill Miller, "A Top Black Firefighter Cries Foul," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 May 1990, 18A.

39. Miller, "A Top Black Firefighter Cries Foul."

40. Daniel Williams, "The Fight for Equality Continues for Blacks in the Fire Department," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 December 1991, 19A.

41. Thomas J. Gibbons, Jr., "Officials Express Confidence in New Fire Commissioner," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 2004, B1.

42. From 1981 to 2000, the number of firefighters declined from 3,200 to 2,300. Thomas J. Gibbons, Jr., and Henry Goldman, "Ulshafer Will Resign Top Fire Post," 9 June 1992, A1; Gibbons, "Sources: Fire Deputy Picked for Top Post," 25 June, A1; and Jeff Gammage, "Hairston Makes History at the Top of Department Ladder," 25 June 1991, B1, *Philadelphia Inquirer;* and Marc Duvoisin, "Ulshafer Reopens Probe of Alleged Act," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 February 1992, B3.

43. Williams, "A Fight For Equality Continues For Blacks in Fire Department." Ayers took the hat to Temple University Hospital's emergency room where nurses and a doctor confirmed the substance was sputum.

44. The incident occurred on 20 November 1996. Grimes filed his complaint with the support of Valiants Inc. Suzette Parmley, “Firehouse ‘Prank’ Fuels Bias Complaint,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 31 July 1997, B1. In 1997 Commissioner Hairston tried to fire Grimes on allegations of conduct unbecoming a firefighter. Grimes contended that Hairston was retaliating against him for vocally criticizing the commissioner. Thomas J. Gibbons, Jr., “City Fire Captain Removed From Job,” *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 22 August 2000, B1.

45. Nancy MacLean, “The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women’s Struggles in the 1970s, and the Gender of Class,” *Feminist Studies*, 25, no. 1 (Spring 1989), 43–45. The earliest record of a female firefighter may be Molly Williams, a slave belonging to a member of the Oceanus Engine Company #11 in New York City, who was described “as good a fire laddie as many of the boys.” *Women in the Fire Service at www.wfsi.org/women.* Nationwide, Arlington County, Virginia, hired the first black female firefighter in 1974. Roxanne Brown, “Black Women Firefighters,” *Ebony* (March 1988), 134. Also, Robin Warshaw, “Getting Into Smoke-Filled Rooms,” *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, 11 September 1994, 22; and Suzette Parmley, “Firehouse Prank Fuels Bias Complaint,” *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 31 July 1997, B1. The complaint against Commissioner Harold B. Hairston claimed he took insufficient action against the offending firemen. “Philly Agrees to Hire More Black Firefighters,” *Jet,* 13 August 1984, 7; and Joseph A. Slobodzian, “Ex-firefighter Accuses City, Hairston of Bias,” *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 19 December 1998, B2. Myung Oak Kim, “Black Firefighters Not Amused,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 30 July 1997, A1. Also see, Carol Chetkovich, *Real Heat: Gender and Race in the Urban Fire Service* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1997), 157. See especially 7–16, 155–171, and 185–191, for discussions of isolation and sexual harassment.

46. Julie Knipe Brown, “Fire Commissioner Under Fire is Fighting to Hold onto His Job,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, 10 January 2000; Joseph A. Slobodzian, “Firefighter Tearfully Defends Colleague,” B1, 26 May 2000; Slobodzian, “Firefighter’s Dismissal Was Sexist, Official Tells Court,” B1, 31 May 2000; Slobodzian, “Firefighter’s Lawyers Wrap Up Their Case Against City, Official,” B2, 2 June 2000; Slobodzian, “Witness: Plaintiff Refused Fire Call,” B1, June 2000, *Philadelphia Inquirer.*

47. *Race and Gender Distribution Uniformed Personnel,* 1 June 2004, Philadelphia fire Department, courtesy of Deputy Commissioner Ernest Hargett, Jr.

48. Organizations posted their protests against preferential hiring on their web sites, Adversity.Net and *www.caffaphilly.com.*, (Concerned American Firefighters Association). In 2004 the Philadelphia chapter of the CAFFA announced itself as a “watchdog to protect the rights of all American Fire Fighters regardless of race or gender.” Judge Bechtel retired in 2001. “Fire and Hose Companies,” Paulson’s *Daily American Advertiser,* 11 July 1818, 3; Tom Waring, “White Firemen Are Hot and Bothered, *Northeast Times*, 10 February 2005; and Theresa Sharkey, letter to the editor, *Northeast Times*, 24 February 2005.

49. Ayers, a 30-year veteran, who had served in every rank in the fire department, was named acting commissioner on 1 August 2004. On 1 December 2004, he was appointed by Mayor Street and enthusiastically supported by Local 22 of the International Association of Firefighters. Thomas J. Gibbons, Jr., “Officials Express Confidence in New Fire Commissioner,” *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 2 December 2004, B1.