

**Career Making at Pullman:
Employment Stability and Job Mobility for Railroad
Repair Shop Workers, 1915 to 1970**

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Prepared for XIII Economic History Congress, 2002

Session 5 - Making a Career: Individual Work-Life

Histories and Labour Market Structures

The concept of career would seem to have little application to the job histories of blue-collar workers in the United States before the 1940s. Workers had no legal claim to their jobs and faced frequent layoffs and much unemployment. The possibility of stable employment including well-defined job ladders for upward mobility seemed a chimera to most. One industry—the railroads—did provide such opportunities, and the experience of railroad workers prefigures that of many other groups of blue-collar workers. The history of American railroad workers suggests that when stable employment and the possibility of upward mobility to skilled jobs were available, most men, whether white or black, immigrant or American-born, responded positively and stayed with one employer as long as possible. Yet, security was the most prized attribute of “careers” for American blue-collar workers, and they would also stay at one job without prospects for individual upward mobility as long as it was a stable one.

The “system” that developed on the railroads was a product of the struggle between workers and their employers—of compromise and cooptation. From the late nineteenth century on, unions set standards that influenced the policies of all railroad corporations, even those that were militantly anti-union. Railroad workers formed unions to guarantee the skilled craft status (and remuneration) of their jobs as well as security through the application of the principle of seniority to layoffs and recalls.¹ This would allow craftsmen to have stability—to stay with their chosen craft—and at the same time have long employment with a single railroad. In their attempt both to combat unions and control their dispersed work forces, railroads pioneered bureaucratic methods of labor relations and tried to deskill the crafts through scientific management. Rules and regulations, along

with grievance procedures to assure their fair enforcement, came to characterize conditions of employment on the railroads, whether or not they were enforced by union contract. At the same time, railroad corporations continually sought to break the hold of craft traditions in their repair shops to use less skilled, and thus less costly, workers. The federal government was also an important player in this development. The railroads were the first industry to be regulated by the state, which increasingly intervened in labor relations in the industry.

The mix of employer and worker agency and federal oversight produced internal labor markets within the corporations, as seniority became a prime criterion for upward mobility. This created a situation of choice for individuals but one fraught with insecurity. Because of the unions' attachment to the concept of craft, seniority accrued for each job but not for a man's total employment with one railroad. Upward mobility meant starting over in terms of seniority and opening oneself to the possibility of layoffs. Even after the advent of unemployment compensation in 1937 this was a risk men might hesitate to assume.

The records of the Pullman Company which ran sleeping-car service on American, Canadian, and Mexican railroads from the 1870s to the 1960s provides an opportunity to explore the career choices of railroad repair shop workers over a long period of time and in many different environments. The company hired a wide range of employees—service, craft, and white-collar—in hundreds of facilities from offices to rail yards to repair shops to laundries. When the company went out of business in 1969 it donated its records including those for the Department of Industrial Relations (personnel and labor

management) to the Newberry Library. We have created a computerized database of records for three repair shops situated in Chicago, Illinois; Wilmington, Delaware; and Richmond, California based on payroll records and individual employee service records. The shop records are among the most complete in the collection in terms of time span and information for each worker.

The Pullman Company began to keep standardized and centralized records on employees in 1904 when officials created the Department of Industrial Relations. Although service records of workers who were employed at that time often contain information about their job histories prior to 1904, these cannot be considered representative of the work histories of repair shop workers in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the extant records for those hired before the 1920s overwhelmingly represent workers who stayed with the company into the 1920s. Indeed, long-term workers were always more likely to be represented in our samples than short-term workers, but from the 1920s on the database is reasonably comprehensive. The Pullman data are, thus, most useful for an analysis of career choices by blue-collar workers between the 1920s and the 1950s, when the company began to close repair shops in response to the decline of rail passenger traffic.

In the nineteenth century Pullman repair shops hired primarily skilled craft workers along with smaller numbers of helpers (semi-skilled workers), unskilled workers, and clerical and managerial staff. Virtually all of these workers were men, and there were only a few jobs typed as "women's work"—primarily the position of seamstress.²

As management applied new technologies and industrial engineering to repair shop work the percentage of skilled workers decreased and those

of helpers and unskilled workers increased. A plurality of jobs in the shops remained in the skilled category, however. Regardless of the changes, blue-collar jobs were the province of men, except for brief periods during World Wars I and II when women were employed temporarily in "men's" jobs.³ Thus we analyze the careers of male blue-collar workers in a job structure of three levels--skilled, helper, unskilled--defined by both management and craft tradition.

The structure of work in the repair shops circumscribed the choices men could make. Like the railroads, the Pullman Company was a leader in creating bureaucratic methods of labor relations and personnel management.⁴ Supervision extended from immediate oversight by foremen to a structure of rules and regulations designed to create and retain the type of worker the company wanted. Management insisted on record keeping and devoted much attention to job analysis. Each job required certain skills and workers were expected to possess them when hired. This circumscribed the power of foremen to hire and helped minimize favoritism. Bureaucratic management not only structured the workplace; it also created the job records we use. Demographic information and data on previous employment were demanded and recorded on the standardized forms provided by the central office, so that ideally the same information was collected everywhere.

The company also recognized seniority as governing employment even in the absence of union contracts, and job histories were carefully recorded. Continuous service was prized and rewarded, as those who left voluntarily lost their seniority. If they returned to company employ, they began at the bottom of the seniority list. During non-union eras (for the Pullman Company, most of the years between the late 1910s and the early 1940s) there was a discretionary

element to the application of seniority: foremen could lay off or fail to recall workers who were "not much good." But if one did not displease the foreman, long and, after a few years, steady employment was possible. Like the railroads, the Pullman Company also established a pension plan designed to reward long service in an era before social security or union-controlled retirement plans.⁵ The pension plan, unlike the union-inspired ideal of seniority, was not based on continuous service in one job, but on total employment with the company. Indeed, a few workers spent forty or more years working for Pullman repair shops, but many stayed for much shorter periods. The database allows us to explore why some men lasted for decades and others left after only a few weeks.

Although long-term employment was a possibility at Pullman repair shops before the 1920s, formal internal job ladders facilitating upward mobility from the lowest levels did not exist. This reflected the nature of crafts in the nineteenth century as defined by workers themselves. Crafts were learned through apprenticeship and practitioners enhanced their market power by limiting the number of teenagers they trained. Helpers, who assisted craftsmen, were not taught enough to assume skilled jobs. Unskilled laborers, who worked in repair shops primarily in toting and hauling heavy loads and objects, similarly found no formal path upward. Most skilled men pursued their crafts for their entire lives, as long as they were well paid and had control over their work. A few would be promoted to supervisory ranks, as foremen, but most would not, and few assumed this to be a natural progression for an individual.

As Pullman management sought to enhance productivity in the 1910s they began to transform repair shop work to use mass production

methods. At first this entailed breaking each craft down into specialties and assigning men to one and only one task. Men were tied to their tasks by recognizing seniority on the basis of specialty rather than craft. With a much narrower range of skill required for a "craft" job, more helpers and unskilled men could aspire to move up. But Pullman's craftsmen resisted specialization, and during World War I when the federal government assumed control of the railroads and the Pullman Company, they joined American Federation of Labor craft unions. Under federal control, the AFL railroad craft unions established contracts with every corporation, and at Pullman they abolished specialization and task breakdown in the repair shops. When Pullman and the major railroads tried to break union contracts after the war, four hundred thousand railroad shop workers, including virtually all of the twelve thousand Pullman repair shop and yard workers, struck for three months beginning on July 1, 1922. With the help of a new, and again pro-business, American President the corporations broke the 1922 Railroad Shopmen's Strike. After the strike, the Pullman Company found it had to rebuild its shop forces, since most men initially refused to return to work when the shops reopened. Although many came back in defeat the following year, management began to train new workers who would better fit their plan to reestablish task breakdown in the crafts.⁶

During the war federal administrators had created a new position—helper apprentice—designed to overcome a shortage of skilled labor by training adult helpers in a three to five year process to become craftsmen. After the strike, Pullman shops adopted this method to train new workers for the specialties and thereby created the first formal internal labor market. Shops could hire adult men in unskilled

and helper positions and give them the possibility of learning a specialty through the helper-apprentice position and then getting skilled workers' pay. Thus as long as the company needed new craft workers, unskilled men had a choice to move up to helper positions, and helpers had a choice to train for skilled ones. The desire for steady employment could conflict with the desire for upward mobility to a better paying position, however, since when one moved up, one went to the bottom of the seniority list for that position. Thus a focus for this study is to understand how men chose between upward mobility and steady employment.

In order to increase control over craft workers, the company also further subdivided the specialties into three levels of difficulty with increasing rates of pay. Skilled workers now had the possibility of moving up a job ladder from level A positions to B and C ones. Level A positions all paid one rate, initially 70 cents per hour, but B and C jobs could pay more (up to 75 cents per hour). Foremen had discretion as to whether to award the higher rates, thus making the choice to upgrade more problematic. Moving up could result in higher pay, if not immediately then in the long run, but a man lost his seniority if he did so. While many men might be expected to upgrade during periods when Pullman employment seemed steady and layoffs few, one would expect many fewer to take such a chance during bad times. One might also expect that age would influence the choices men made, with younger men more likely to risk insecure employment for a chance to move up.

Beginning in the mid 1930s, when the federal government once again supported workers' rights to unionize, Pullman shop workers began to organize, and the company responded in a piecemeal fashion

beginning in 1937 to revise the structure of employment. Workers sought to restore the crafts as the unions and their traditions had defined them, and by 1949 all Pullman repair shop workers were unionized, the specialties were gone, and seniority was once more based on craft and skill level. The helper-apprentice position remained, however, as a route to upward mobility, but men who completed the program had to be immediately upgraded. They could not wait for a propitious time to risk going to the bottom of a seniority list.⁷

The evolution of the structure of employment constrained workers' choices. In the decade prior to the 1922 Railroad Shopmen's Strike, Pullman repair shops were in flux. Management attempted to impose a new job structure of specialties, workers' resisted, and during the period of government control they briefly abolished the specialties through union contracts. After the strike, the company reestablished the specialties and created a ladder of upward mobility within them at the same time that it instituted a formal mechanism for unskilled workers and helpers to move up to skilled positions. By World War II, the ladder of opportunity within the specialties and indeed the specialties themselves were disappearing, while the possibility of upward mobility for the unskilled and helpers remained. Thus workers made careers at Pullman within a structure of employment that had three distinct phases.

Yet general economic conditions, and the fortunes of the Pullman Company, also affected workers' careers. During the 1920s as it rebuilt its shop forces, the Pullman Company wanted workers but the general prosperity meant workers had other choices. We might expect much upward mobility but also that workers who were not upwardly

mobile would be more inclined to leave the company. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the company needed fewer workers and workers had few prospects elsewhere. We might expect less upward mobility, as workers were afraid of layoffs and the company needed fewer new skilled workers, but also that few workers would leave the company voluntarily. During World War II, when workers had so many opportunities elsewhere and wages at Pullman and the railroads lagged behind those in armaments production, we might expect workers to voluntarily leave the company in greater numbers and that more workers would choose upward mobility over security. In the postwar years, the company and the railroad industry entered a steep decline. Then, we might expect workers, especially younger men, to look elsewhere for opportunity and to leave voluntarily in larger numbers. At the same time older men might have been less likely to try to upgrade because layoffs would undermine their pensions. Thus this analysis explores blue-collar careers over five periods: 1) pre-strike-up through June 1922; 2) rebuilding--September 1922 through 1929; 3) depression--1930 through 1940; 4) World War II--1941 to 1945; and 5) postwar--1946 to the shops' closings.

Although the choices of all Pullman repair shop workers were made in this context of five periods, the extent to which other employment was available locally entered into their calculations too. The three Pullman shops scattered across the country allow us to investigate this phenomenon. The Chicago shop was in a region of the city with extensive heavy manufacturing subject to the business cycle for that sector. The Richmond shop was in the fast growing San Francisco region with a more transient population and great booms and busts of employment. The Wilmington shop was in an old industrial city that

had been losing heavy industry since the 1880s and had only brief upturns in blue-collar employment during World Wars I and II. Thus in general workers at Richmond had the best opportunities for other employment or were the least wedded to the locality and the most mobile. They might be the greatest "risk takers." In Wilmington, not only did workers have few opportunities that were as attractive as employment at the Pullman repair shop, but many workers were locally born and thus tied more to the area. They might be the most risk averse. We might posit Chicago workers at some in-between position, but whether they chose to make careers at Pullman, stay in one job, or go elsewhere and why is the subject of this analysis.

The database for this study consists of male workers who were hired into jobs labeled unskilled, helper-level, or skilled. Of those hired before the 1922 Railroad Shopmen's Strike only men who stayed with their shop at least through June 1922, when the strike began, are included in the analysis. The database for the Chicago shop consists of 1,379 men; 1,111 from random samples of workers on specific payroll records, plus 268 from an oversample designed to include sufficient numbers of black men for detailed analysis. The database allows us to analyze the careers of men hired in all periods except World War II (Table 1). The number of men in the database who were hired during the war itself is too small (thirty-nine) to allow for detailed analysis of this particular group. It was so difficult for the shop to attract male workers during the war, that most of the new hires then were women. The databases for the Wilmington and Richmond shops were constructed from random samples of workers on specific payroll records with no oversampling. The Wilmington shop was the oldest, and company executives considered it marginal by the 1930s. Not

surprisingly eighty percent of the 819 men in the Wilmington database were hired before 1930. Thus the analysis of Wilmington workers focuses on the two earliest cohorts. With its more transient population and because of its importance as the only western repair shop, the Richmond shop continued to hire and its database (583 men) is relatively evenly divided between the five periods. It does not always provide enough workers in a specific skill level, however, for in depth analysis.

The Chicago repair shop was Pullman's largest, with over 1,000 employees at any one time, and the one where management innovated in methods of supervision and production. What worked at the Chicago repair shop could then be introduced elsewhere. In the 1910s the Chicago shop felt the brunt of scientific management, and its workers resisted and spearheaded the union movement during the period of government control. The extent of turmoil at the shop in the period before the 1922 strike can be seen even in our sample that over-represents those who stayed long-term. On average these men worked at the Chicago repair shop for twenty-two years and sixty percent left for "natural" reasons (retirement, death, sickness, or injury). Yet the type of behavior that the seniority system might mitigate and that long-tenure with the company seemed antithetical to, quitting voluntarily and then returning to company employ, was characteristic of workers at all skill levels in that period. Fifty-three percent quit voluntarily and later returned to the shop (Table 1).⁸ Before the strike, management was only beginning to impose the new procedures at Wilmington and Richmond, and workers in those shops were much less likely to quit and return. After the strike, once management control had been firmly established at all the shops, Chicago workers ceased

to evidence particularly high rates of this behavior, and for most shop workers quitting became a permanent decision.

Virtually all skilled workers and helpers went out on strike in the summer of 1922 and most of the unskilled did too (Table 2). Only those who had been upwardly mobile to supervisory or clerical positions generally refused to strike. Although over time seventy-two percent of strikers returned to the Chicago shop, neither age, length of service, or skill level at the time of the strike correlated with a return to the shop. The only significant predictor that a man would come back was whether he had quit previously and returned to the shop.

Of those who came back from the strike, fifty-nine percent had quit before, but of those who did not return, only twenty-seven percent had quit previously.⁹ Men with a less firm attachment to Pullman apparently found it easier to accept the loss of the strike. Perhaps having tried employment elsewhere they found Pullman jobs superior even with task breakdown. The strikers at the Richmond and Wilmington shops evidenced similar behavior, even though quitting and returning had not been nearly as common at those shops. Eventually sixty-four percent of Richmond strikers returned to the shop, but the only predictor of who would return was whether a man had quit previously. For Wilmington strikers, only forty-two percent of whom returned after the strike, both having quit previously and longer employment with the shop were significant predictors of whether a man would return.¹⁰

As the company rebuilt its shop forces in the 1920s, management also began to hire black men in large numbers for the first time and to hire them outside unskilled positions.¹¹ Integrating work forces in order to use workers' racial prejudices to counter the unity needed for organizing was a common strategy of American employers in the

1920s. We can see if white men and black men made different career choices at Pullman's Chicago repair shop, because black men were given an opportunity to rise to the highest skill levels at that shop.

In the 1920s, the shop forces were composed of two distinct elements—returned strikers and new hires—but the major fault lines remained those of skill level. The majority of those who returned from the strike were skilled workers, and those newly hired in skilled positions after the strike resembled them in race and nativity, although they were younger on average (Table 3).¹² Virtually all men who began at the skilled level after the strike were white. The differences between the shops in the nativity of skilled workers—Chicago craftsmen were primarily foreign-born, Wilmington native-born, and Richmond divided—characterized both returning strikers and newly hired men. The new racial hiring policy had its greatest impact at the helper and unskilled levels. After the strike, forty-four percent of those hired as helpers at the Chicago and Wilmington shops were black, while eight percent were at Richmond (Table 4). Those hired in unskilled positions were even more likely to be black (Table 5).¹³

How did these workers respond to the possibility for upward mobility in the 1920s? At Chicago and Richmond the overwhelming majority of newly hired helpers took the chance to upgrade when it was presented (Table 6). Age at hire was not a significant predictor of whether a helper was upwardly mobile in the 1920s at any of the shops—men of any age were apparently eager for the opportunity to attain skilled jobs. Black helpers were offered opportunities equal to white helpers at Chicago, and the vast majority of each group took them (eighty-seven percent white vs. seventy-six percent black). At the Wilmington shop fewer helpers ever rose to skilled status, and the

shop did not provide black helpers with equal opportunities to rise. In this border city with many forms of legal segregation and discrimination, only thirty-one percent of Pullman's black helpers, but sixty-seven percent of white ones were upwardly mobile.¹⁴ But because black men found few jobs in Wilmington that could compare to being a helper at the Pullman shop, black helpers did not leave the shop significantly sooner than white helpers.¹⁵

Even at Chicago and Richmond, not all helpers experienced upwardly mobility quickly, however. At Chicago fifty-one percent of helpers moved up to the skilled level before 1930, while at Richmond forty-one percent did. Only ten percent of Wilmington helpers were upwardly mobile in the 1920s, because the shop manager kept many doing skilled workers' jobs for helpers' pay until 1934, when workers at other Pullman shops pressured the central office to force him to follow company policy. Perhaps not surprising, average length of service for helpers hired in the 1920s was longest at the Chicago shop where opportunities were greatest and shortest at Wilmington (Table 4).

Yet comparison of helpers who moved up in the 1920s and those who did not also underscores the high value that many workers placed on stable employment. At every shop helpers who did not rise in the 1920s were more likely to quit than those who did, but many helpers whose primary concern was a steady paycheck stayed for years despite their lack of mobility (Table 7). At the Chicago and Wilmington shops although the average length of service was longer for helpers who rose in the 1920s than for those who did not, the differences were not statistically significant. Helpers who rose in the 1920s at Richmond actually stayed with the shop for less time than those who were not

upwardly mobile, although this difference was not statistically significant either. Perhaps the pattern at Richmond reflects men's reasons for leaving. Richmond was the only shop where helpers who rose in the 1920s were more likely than those who did not to end their employment because of a layoff.

Like the helpers, those hired as unskilled workers at Chicago and Richmond in the 1920s also took the opportunities presented to upgrade. About two-thirds became helpers, and they did so quickly, in less than two years (Table 6). At Chicago, younger men were more likely to upgrade than older ones, but black workers were also significantly more likely to upgrade than white workers: eighty-two percent of black men but only fifty-three percent of white were upwardly mobile.¹⁶ We may surmise that the black men who were hired in unskilled jobs, having had few opportunities to excel in the past because of discrimination, had considerably more potential than unskilled white men. Not surprisingly, those who became helpers in the 1920s at Chicago stayed with the company somewhat longer than those who did not (19.4 years on average vs. 13.6), but as was true for helpers who upgraded in the 1920s the difference is only weakly significant. Furthermore there were no significant differences between unskilled workers who were upwardly mobile and those who were not in why they finally left company employ.¹⁷ The steadiness of unskilled jobs at Pullman, compared to most unskilled labor, may have appealed to many men without skills whether or not they had the opportunity to move up.

The careers of the men hired for unskilled jobs at Richmond in the 1920s underscore the existence of a group of men who preferred steady employment to upward mobility, even when the risk it entailed

was relatively low. Unskilled workers at Richmond had the same opportunity as those at Chicago to rise quickly to the helper level (Table 6). There was no significant difference in age between those who rose and those who did not at Richmond, but those who did rise stayed with Pullman for fewer years and were more likely to quit than those who did not.¹⁸ That is, those who had taken the risk to upgrade were willing to take more risks, while some unskilled men clung to a steady job regardless of other opportunities.

New job ladders for the unskilled and helpers provided choice for men in the 1920s, but the three-level system designed for skilled workers did not have as pervasive an impact. The Wilmington shop manager simply did not implement the new job titles and pay rates (Table 3). Just as he exploited the helpers, he insisted that the skilled each do one task, but without the designations that would entitle them to higher pay for more difficult jobs. Having few opportunities for better jobs in the depressed Wilmington economy, these skilled workers stayed with the shop for long periods, comparable to those of men at the Richmond and Chicago shops where the new system was implemented.

Yet even at the Chicago and Richmond shops, skilled workers were less likely than helpers or unskilled workers to experience upward mobility in the 1920s (Tables 6, 8). At Chicago, newly hired skilled workers or those who returned from the strike had relatively similar careers despite their initial difference in age. About one-third of each group began at each level of the skilled ladder (Table 3). Three-quarters or more of those in A and B positions rose further, but only about thirty-five percent did so in the 1920s (Table 8). At the Richmond shop, more returning strikers began at C level jobs than was

true at Chicago, and more newly hired skilled workers began at B level ones (Table 3). Perhaps the tighter labor market in the Richmond area induced the shop manager to rate workers more highly. At the same time, the fact that more men were rated highly to begin with may have limited the opportunities for lower rated men. Both returned strikers and newly hired skilled workers who started at the A or B level at Richmond were less likely to rise in the 1920s than were workers in similar jobs at the Chicago shop (Table 8).

Despite the fact that the vast majority of A and B-level skilled workers at Chicago and Richmond would not rise to a higher level in the 1920s, they made long-term careers with Pullman. Being somewhat older when hired than the helpers and unskilled may have made skilled workers willing to stay put despite the lack of upward mobility (Tables 3, 4, 5). They also acted like traditional craftsmen, however—either they made their peace with their job and stuck to it or they sought to improve their prospects through collective action. Indeed many of those who “rose” after the 1920s did not do so by individual choice, but when worker pressure forced the company to change the classification system. In the 1937 contract, foremen’s discretion over pay rates was eliminated and some A and B level jobs were upgraded to a higher level. At Chicago twenty-four percent of the skilled workers who had been hired before the strike and fourteen percent of post-strike hires rose from the A to the B level in 1937. Through collective action these men were able to move up in pay without risking their seniority. Similarly, all remaining B level jobs were made C level in 1941, and at Chicago the twenty-three percent of returned strikers and thirty-six percent of post-strike

hires who moved from the B to C levels in 1941 also did so without threat to their seniority.

The value that skilled workers put on secure employment can be seen in the careers of men at both the Chicago and Richmond shops. There were no significant differences between those who were upwardly mobile in the 1920s and those who were not in either why they eventually left the shop or in the length of time they stayed. At Chicago, most left for "natural" reasons and few quit. The same was true for the returned strikers at Richmond, although those who had been newly hired in the 1920s were more likely to leave because of a layoff whether or not they had been upwardly mobile in the 1920s.¹⁹

The layoffs experienced by these skilled workers at Richmond point to the impact of the Great Depression. At every Pullman shop, the percentage of men who ended their careers because of layoffs increased substantially during the 1930s (Table 9). At the same time, workers' concern for security was visible in the precipitous drop in the percentage who quit. Not surprisingly, those hired during the depression did not have as much opportunity for either long-term employment or upward mobility as those hired in the 1920s. The average length of careers declined significantly for helpers and mechanics in comparison to those hired in the 1920s (Tables 3, 4).²⁰

Upward mobility did not disappear, but as the company had less need for new workers opportunities to rise declined. Men hired as skilled workers at Chicago in the 1930s were less likely to move up from the A or B levels than those hired in the 1920s (Table 8). Many who did move up in the 1930s itself did so because of reclassification, not individual choice. Compared to helpers hired in the 1920s, fewer of those hired in the 1930s at the Chicago and

Richmond shops ever became skilled workers (Table 6). Those who did rise did so more quickly, however, because of new rules that the company adopted in response to worker pressure. Helpers could not wait for a propitious time to upgrade, but were promoted as soon as their training was complete. Compared with upwardly mobile helpers in the 1920s, the careers of the depression cohort who were upwardly mobile were much shorter: three-fifths as long at Chicago and only two-fifths as long at Richmond. They were much less likely to end their career at Pullman for "natural" reasons and much more likely to either be laid off or quit.²¹

Opportunities for the unskilled to rise also declined during the depression, but sixty-one percent of men hired in unskilled jobs at the Chicago shop in the 1930s did become helpers. Yet, they had to work over twice as long as those hired in the 1920s before they had the opportunity to become helpers (Table 6). Unlike the helpers and skilled workers hired in the 1930s at Chicago, who had much shorter careers than those hired in the 1920s, the average number of years that an unskilled worker remained employed did not decline significantly (Tables 3, 4, 5). Indeed, unskilled workers had, on average, the longest careers of those hired in the 1930s. This reflects again the existence of a core of unskilled men who clung to steady employment when it was offered. Unskilled workers who did not rise to helper level in the 1930s itself had careers of equal length to those who did.²²

When the American economy rebounded in 1941, new and better job opportunities for blue-collar workers suddenly appeared, and many men were eager to take them. At every Pullman repair shop, quitting became a more common reason for leaving than it had been during the

depression decade, as some men responded to the higher wages and chance to upgrade in armaments manufacture and shipbuilding (Table 9).

But there was no mass exodus of workers from Pullman repair shops. For older men the stable employment that Pullman shops offered remained attractive, especially as many were nearing retirement age. Indeed the percentage of those leaving for "natural" reasons—primarily retirement or age-related health concerns—was increasing at all the shops. Even for younger men who had remained employed during the depression and built up seniority, new job opportunities were problematic. Many people did not expect the boom to outlast the war, and so switching jobs raised the specter of layoffs and unemployment.

Since older men are more likely to retire or become incapacitated by illness than younger ones, it is not unexpected that age would be an important determinant of reasons for leaving. But for unskilled and skilled workers, age was the only variable that correlated highly with reasons for leaving during the war (Table 10). Men who quit were younger than those who left the shops for other reasons, but neither lack of mobility nor race had any significant effect on propensity to quit. (Length of service was highly correlated with age at leaving, but so drops out of the regression equations.) Only helpers, who as a group were somewhat younger when hired than the unskilled and skilled and had always shown the greatest mobility, did other variables correlate with quitting during the war. For Chicago helpers, both age and lack of previous mobility correlated with quitting. Here are the workers who were willing to take a chance for a better job. For Richmond helpers, length of service was the most important correlate of quitting, and age dropped out of the equation. In part this reflects the rapid turnover of men hired as helpers during the war

itself rather than, as at Chicago, the choices of men who had worked for the shop for a more extensive period.²³

Although the war boom did not induce most Pullman workers to reject security for higher wages and possibilities for upward mobility, the postwar decline of the company and the railroad industry made jobs at Pullman significantly less desirable than they had been.

After the war, age remained the primary correlate of quitting, as younger men looked to other industries for opportunity and older men held on hoping to get their pensions (Table 10). Among the unskilled workers at the Chicago shop, lack of upwardly mobility also correlated with the propensity to quit, as men who saw no opportunity at Pullman looked elsewhere in the booming economy. But race played a new role in the postwar era, too. At Chicago, white men in skilled or helper level positions were more likely to quit than black men were. Given the persistence of discrimination in American industry in the late 1940s and 1950s, white men had much more opportunity than black men did to find good jobs elsewhere.

Despite the company's bleak prospects, the shops continued to hire, because repair shops are only cost-effective if run at full strength. As large numbers of older workers retired and others quit, Pullman shop managers replaced most of those who were leaving until the point at which the shops had to be closed. The Wilmington shop closed in 1958 and the Richmond shop followed suit two years later, both with massive layoffs. The Chicago shop was the last to close, in 1969, and so is the only one to generate a large enough number of postwar hires in our database for detailed analysis.

Not surprising, those who came to the Chicago shop after the war were much less likely to see it as a suitable place for a career.

Half of those hired after the war quit of their own volition, and the average length of service declined for workers at every skill level (Tables 3, 4, 5).²⁴ Moreover, only workers with few other opportunities chose to work for the shop. This is most apparent in the racial composition of the new workers. The shop had no policy to favor employment of black Americans, but almost all the men hired at the unskilled or helper level after the war were black as were one-third of those hired in skilled jobs. African Americans still faced significant discrimination at many work places in Chicago at this time, and thus jobs at the Chicago shop might still be good ones from their perspective. Even though unskilled workers and helpers stayed for much shorter times than those hired in the 1930s had, similar percentages were upwardly mobile and they moved up more quickly (Table 5). Those who were upwardly mobile stayed significantly longer than those who did not move up.²⁵ For black men, opportunities in American industry were still limited enough, that they were willing to make a career in a dying industry.

The experience of Pullman repair shop workers during the early to mid decades of the twentieth century reveals the importance of stable employment to American blue-collar workers. For most, it was more highly valued than the possibility for upward mobility. Indeed skilled workers clung to their craft traditions and resisted the establishment of job ladders within the skilled division; they saw such plans as a way to narrow the content of the jobs and depress wage rates. When the risk to job security was minimal, skilled workers, as individuals, might take advantage of job ladders to upgrade, but when possible they used collective action to abolish them. Steady employment also appealed to unskilled workers, who were happy to take

it, whether or not they had chance to move up to a better job. Most unskilled jobs in America were short-term, and the application of seniority to unskilled jobs at Pullman and the railroads made this sector unusual. Only in the postwar era, as the future of the industry looked grim and long-term employment was no longer assured, did unskilled workers who were not upwardly mobile show a willingness to look elsewhere.

At Pullman, helper-level jobs were the key site for upward mobility. But even though most helpers valued the opportunity to upgrade, men would take those opportunities only when the risk to stable employment seemed minimal. This suggests why the policy of plant-wide seniority appealed to workers in other industries, like automobiles. Where workers' seniority is determined by total employment, not just employment at a particular job, the appeal of upward mobility is not lessened by the threat of insecurity. The degree to which workers stayed with Pullman even as it declined also speaks to the importance American labor unions have put on protecting the jobs of current workers, often to the detriment of younger workers and the unemployed. With no government supports for the unemployed comparable to those in European countries, American workers find the promise of long-term employment hard to resist.

TABLE 1

Number of Workers by Period Hired and Propensity
To Quit and Return

Period of Hire	Chicago		Richmond		Wilmington	
	Total Number	% Quit & Ret.	Total	% Quit & Ret.	Total	% Quit & Ret.
Pre 1922 Strike	359	53	143	20	396	36
Post Strike-1929	487	19	162	13	263	16
1930-1940	266	5	94	9	73	10
1941-1945	39	13	104	13	51	16
1946-1969	228	10	80	4	36	3

TABLE 2

Percentage of Workers Who Struck in 1922 by
Skill Level of Job

Skill Level	Chicago	Richmond	Wilmington
Supervisory	17	0	3
Clerical	0	0	63
Skilled	97	93	98
Helper	97	87	89
Unskilled	87	64	57

TABLE 3
 Skilled Workers by Period of Hire

Period Of Hire	Average Age at Hire ²		Average Career in Years	% Non White	% Foreign- Born	% Ever ¹			
						A	B	C	
Chicago Repair Shop									
Pre Strike	38.7	(10.8) ³	24.6	(11.3)	0.5	78.5	34	25	34
Strike-1929	34.0	(7.6)	22.4	(10.3)	5.6	72.2		35	
37	25								
1930-1940	39.3	(9.1)	9.9	(9.3)	1.9	67.3		37	
40	14								
1946-1969	34.9	(8.8)	8.4	(6.8)	35.8	10.8		-	
-	-								
Richmond Repair Shop									
Pre Strike	38.5	(8.6)	23.2	(10.7)	0.0	65.2			
7	28	41							
Strike-1929	30.6	(7.1)	19.1	(10.9)	0.0	45.5		16	
46	16								
Wilmington Repair Shop									
Pre Strike	44.0	(12.7)	25.6	(12.6)	0.7	22.9		1	
2	2								
Strike-1929	31.4	(6.9)	19.5	(10.3)	1.6	6.3			
2	3	2							

¹ There were always some jobs that were not classified by levels, hence the percentages do not add to 100 even at the Chicago and Richmond shops which used the classification system.

² For the Pre Strike period age is in 1922, not when hired initially.

³ Mean and standard deviation.

TABLE 4

Helpers by Period of Hire

Period of Hire	Average Age at Hire	Average Career in Years	% Non White	% Foreign-Born
Chicago Repair Shop				
Strike-1929	26.8 (8.6)	22.9 (13.6)		44 33
1930-1940	27.8 (8.1)	12.3 (11.8)	14	18
1946-1969	27.6 (7.4)	8.7 (7.4)	79	1
Richmond Repair Shop				
Strike-1929	27.6 (6.9)	19.6 (11.1)		8 51
1930-1940	27.1 (7.9)	7.0 (8.3)	2	10
Wilmington Repair Shop				
Strike-1929	27.8 (7.2)	17.0 (11.0)		44 6

TABLE 5

Unskilled by Period of Hire

Period of Hire	Average Age at Hire	Average Career in Years	% Non White	% Foreign-Born
Chicago Repair Shop				
Strike-1929	31.9 (9.1)	16.5 (13.3)	71	24
1930-1940	30.5 (9.0)	15.9 (12.1)	39	22
1946-1969	30.6 (8.2)	7.3 (6.8)	89	7
Richmond Repair Shop				
Strike-1929	30.0 (7.6)	16.6 (11.3)		19 33

TABLE 6

Upward Mobility for Helpers and Unskilled by Period of Hire

Period of Years Hire	% Unskilled Who Became Helpers	Average Years to Rise	% Helpers Who Became Skilled	Average to Rise
Chicago Repair Shop				
Strike-1929	71	1.8	83	4.8
1930-1940	61	4.5	59	3.8
1946-1969	53	3.1	60	2.0
Richmond Repair Shop				
Strike-1929	66	1.8	86	10.5
1930-1940			57	3.5
Wilmington Repair Shop				
Strike-1929			51	10.3

TABLE 7

Length of Service and Reasons for Leaving of
Helpers hired in the 1920s

Shop	Average Length Of Service in Yrs.	Reasons for Leaving			Quit
		Natural ¹	Fired	Layoff	
Upwardly Mobile in 1920s					
Chicago	26.5 (12.8)	61	4	20	15
Richmond	17.3 (9.4)	35	0	45	20
Wilmington	21.0 (10.0)	50	0	50	0
Not Upwardly Mobile in 1920s					
Chicago	19.1 (13.5)	34	10	26	30
Richmond	21.2 (12.0)	38	0	38	24
Wilmington	16.6 (11.1)	22	3	55	19

¹ Natural=Retired, Dead, Injured, Sick

TABLE 8

Upward Mobility for Skilled Workers by Period of Hire

Period of Hire	Chicago Repair Shop				Richmond Shop	
	% A to B or C	% Up in Period ¹	% B to C	% Up in Period	% A and B Who Rise	% Up in
Period						
Strike-1929						
Returnees	75	29	72	37	46	21
New Hires	82	43	78	31	59	29
1930-1940	62	23	60	23		

¹ Percentages who rose during period do not include reclassifications.

TABLE 9
 Percentage of Workers' Who Left Employ by Period
 of Leaving and Reason
 Wilmington Repair Shop

Period	N	"Natural"	Fired	Layoff	Quit	
Strike-1929		110	35	6	12	47
1930-1940	144	50	4	38		8
1941-1945	71	68	3	3		27
1946-1960	339	31	2	61		7
Richmond Repair Shop						
Strike-1929		27	18	0	22	59
1930-1940	130	21	7	49		24
1941-1945	80	35	3	1		61
1946-1957	115	66	0	6		28
1958-1960	198	8	1	89		3
Chicago Repair Shop						
Strike-1929		97	24	11	30	35
1930-1940	266	33	8	41		18
1941-1945	135	44	2	16		38
1946-1957	330	65	4	9		23
1958-1969	436	42	3	29		26

TABLE 10

Regression Equations: Correlates of Quitting rather
Than Leaving for Other Reasons¹

	1941-1945		1946-1957	
	Chicago	Richmond	Chicago	Richmond
Skilled workers:				
Adj. R ²	.31	.50	.57	.66
AgeL	-.565**	-.718**	-.848**	-.826**
Race			.190**	
Helpers:				
Adj. R ²	.31	.65	.47	.56
AgeL	-.439**		-.752**	-.758**
Mobil	-.281*			
Serv		-.823**		
Race			+.184*	
Unskilled workers:				
Adj. R ²	.54	.52	.49	.62
AgeL	-.744**	-.737**	-.625**	-.780**
Mobil			-.207*	

¹ Variables in the analysis include AgeL (age at leaving), Serv (length of employment), Race (if white), and Mobil (if upwardly mobile).

*significant p<.05

**significant p<.01

ENDNOTES

¹ Walter Licht, Working for the Railroad (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); Shelton Stromquist, A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Labor Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

² Susan E. Hirsch, "The Search for Unity among Railroad Workers: The Pullman Strike in Perspective," and Janice L. Reiff, "A Modern Lear and His Daughters: Gender in the Model Town of Pullman," in The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s, Richard Schneirov et al, eds. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

³ Susan Hirsch, "Rethinking the Sexual Division of Labor: Pullman Repair Shops, 1900-1969," Radical History Review 35(1986):26-48 and "No Victory at the Workplace: Women and Minorities at Pullman during World War II," in The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II, Lewis Erenberg and Susan Hirsch, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴ Richard Edwards, Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Sanford M. Jacoby, Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900-1945 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁵ The Pullman Company, which had both rail and manufacturing operations, instituted its pension plan in 1914, later than most railroads, but earlier than most manufacturing corporations.

⁶ Colin J. Davis, Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen's Strike (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Walker D. Hines, War History of American Railroads (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1928); Susan E. Hirsch, After the Strike: A Century of Labor Struggle at Pullman (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming), Chap. 4.

⁷ Hirsch, After the Strike, Chaps. 5, 6.

⁸ Of those hired prior to the strike at the Chicago shop, 49% of helpers, 53% of skilled workers, and 57% of unskilled workers quit and returned, the vast majority (92%) during the pre-strike period itself.

⁹ Chi square=17.4 (.000), Phi=.281.

¹⁰ At Richmond, 19% of returnees had quit previously, but only 3% of those who did not return from the strike had done so (Chi sq.=3.28 (.070), Phi=.222). At Wilmington, 43% of returnees had quit previously, but only 23% of those who did not return (Chi sq.=11.3 (.001), Phi=.214). The average length of service in 1922 of Wilmington strikers who returned, 14.6 years, was significantly longer than that of those who failed to return, 9.5 years (F=20.06 (.000), Eta=.265).

¹¹ The first black workers had been hired at the Chicago shop in 1917, all as unskilled laborers. They comprised 1.5% of the pre-strike shop force, but 28% of those hired after the strike in the 1920s. Black men had been hired earlier at Wilmington, but also only in unskilled positions. They comprised 3% of the pre-strike work force there, but 36% of new hires after the strike. No black men had been hired at the Richmond shop before the strike, but they comprised 14% of new hires afterward.

¹² At Chicago 74 percent of returnees began again in skilled positions, while at Richmond 63 percent did and at Wilmington 59 percent did.

¹³ The percentage of black workers in Richmond was low in part because the number of African Americans in the local population remained small until World War II. The number of unskilled workers in our Wilmington database who were hired in the 1920s is too small to admit of analysis.

¹⁴ Chi sq.=22.1 (.000), Phi=.363.

¹⁵ The average length of service for white helpers was 18.3 years; that for black helpers, 15.4 years (F=3.1 (.080), Eta=.131).

¹⁶ Unskilled workers who became helpers had an average age at hire of 30 years, while those who did not were 35 (F=7.8 (.006), Eta=.237). The Chi square for whether upwardly mobile by race is 15.3 (.000), Phi=.360.

¹⁷ For age by whether unskilled became helpers in the 1920s, $F=6.07$ (.015), $Eta=.210$. 45% left for natural reasons and 27% quit.

¹⁸ Those who rose to helper level stayed on average 12.9 years, while those who did not stayed 23.7 years ($F=14.7$ (.000), $Eta=.458$). 32% of those who rose to the helper level quit, but only 15% of those who did not.

¹⁹ At Chicago, reasons for leaving for returnees who were upwardly mobile in the 1920s vs. those who were not: natural-77%, 76%; quit-10%, 5%. Reasons for leaving for newly hired skilled workers who were upwardly mobile in the 1920s vs. those who were not: natural-73%, 68%; quit-12%, 16%. The average returned striker hired at the A or B level had a career with the company of 28.0 years if he was upwardly mobile in the 1920s and 23.1 years if he was not. For skilled workers newly hired in the 1920s the averages were 24.1 years and 21.6 years. At Richmond, reasons for leaving for returned strikers who were upwardly mobile in the 1920s vs. those who were not: natural--60, 79; quit--0, 11. Reasons for leaving for those hired in the 1920s who were upwardly mobile then vs. those not: natural-30, 46; quit-20, 17; layoff-40, 33. Average length of career for returned strikers who were upwardly mobile in the 1920s was 19.9 years, for those not, 20.9 years. Average length for the newly hired who were upwardly mobile was 16.6 years, for those not, 13.7 years.

²⁰ Numbers of helpers and skilled workers hired at Wilmington and of skilled workers hired at Richmond during the 1930s were too small for analysis.

²¹ For Chicago helpers: 31% of 1930s hires were upwardly mobile in that decade and averaged 15.3 years of service; 51% of 1920s hires were upwardly mobile in the 1920s and averaged 26.5 years of service. Of those hired in the 1920s, 61% left for natural reasons, but only 24% of those hired in the 1930s did. For Richmond helpers: 31% of 1930s hires were upwardly mobile in that decade and averaged 7.5 years of service; 41% of 1920s hires were upwardly mobile in the 1920s and averaged 17.3 years of service. Of those hired in the 1920s, 35% left for natural reasons, but only 7% of those hired in the 1930s did.

²² The average length of service for unskilled workers hired in the 1930s was 15.1 years for those upwardly mobile in the 1930s and 16.6 for those who were not.

²³ On the Richmond shop, see Hirsch, After the Strike, Chap. 6.

²⁴ At Chicago, 49% of those hired after the war quit, compared to 29% of those hired in the 1930s and 21% of those hired in the 1920s.

²⁵ For the unskilled, average length of service for those who moved up was 10.0 years vs. 4.7 for those who did not ($F=10.9$ (.002), $\text{Eta}=.395$). For helpers, service for those who moved up was 11.3 years vs. 4.7 for those who did not ($F=16.4$ (.000), $\text{Eta}=.441$).