

changed dramatically. Influenced by the Civil War, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction period, blacks had for years solidly supported the Republican Party. It was the only major party that offered them a modicum of political power before the 1930s. Dr. George E. Cannon, a physician from Jersey City, for example, was active in the party at the city, county, state and national levels; as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1924 he seconded the nomination of Calvin Coolidge. When, thanks to the Great Migration, blacks reached sufficient numerical strength to start electing public officials in New Jersey, the first winners were Republicans. Walter G. Alexander of Orange, the first black member of the state legislature, was elected to the general assembly as a Republican in 1921. In the next decade he was followed by other black Republicans from Essex County.

During the 1930s blacks shifted to the Democratic Party, and in 1937 Guy Moorehead of Newark became the first black Democrat to serve in the assembly. The identification of the Democratic Party with the New Deal and the egalitarian vision of Franklin Delano Roosevelt were instrumental in this change in allegiance. The social welfare measures with which the New Deal addressed the hardships of the Great Depression were especially well received by the black community.

Between 1910 and 1940 the number of separate black schools continued to increase. From 1919 to 1930 it grew from fifty-two to sixty-six, and there were seventy black schools by 1935. On the eve of World War II, from Princeton south every city or town with an appreciable black population supported a dual system of elementary schools. A report submitted to the state legislature in 1939 deplored much about this system. Most commonly white pupils were taught in larger and more modern facilities than black students, and in some cases blacks were not even given the minimum essentials for adequate instruction—books, maps, gymnasium facilities, shop equipment. In a less common arrangement whites and blacks shared a school but had separate classrooms and sometimes separate entrances, toilets and playgrounds.

1940-1980s

World War II lifted the nation out of the Great Depression. It created a general shortage of workers that made many war-related



Whereas southern states virtually excluded Afro-Americans from voting until the mid-1960s, New Jersey did not. This photograph shows blacks voting at the Prince Charlton School in Newark in the 1930s. During this decade Afro-Americans shifted their allegiance from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party. Courtesy of the New Jersey Division of Archives and Records Management.

industrial jobs available to Afro-Americans. These jobs offered wages that were high compared to those of the Depression days, and some also provided an opportunity to upgrade skills. A much higher percentage of black women joined the industrial work force than in World War I. Most of them left some form of domestic service.

The war also triggered a new surge of migrants to the state, as once again black southerners formed an industrial labor reserve. Like the earlier newcomers of the Great Migration, they tended to settle in the larger municipalities—Camden, Trenton and such northern urban centers as Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, East Orange and Elizabeth.

Finally, because the war involved a struggle against racist and

antidemocratic forces abroad, it created a climate that strengthened the resolve of New Jersey blacks to struggle against racial injustice at home. In some ways a new era dawned in the state's race relations. According to Marion Thompson Wright, New Jersey "blazed trails in the improvement of human relations." With the assistance of whites who were committed to social justice, Afro-Americans achieved increased civil rights in the immediate postwar years.

In 1945 the state passed a Fair Employment Practices Act that forbade racial discrimination in employment. A Division Against Discrimination was established in the Department of Education to administer the act; this was the first state agency established to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination. In 1949, with the strong support of Republican Governor Alfred E. Driscoll, the 1945 law was revised to prohibit discrimination in public accommodations. The Freeman Act of 1949 enabled victims of racial or ethnic discrimination to file complaints with the Division Against Discrimination. Further legislation in 1954 prohibited racial discrimination in public housing.

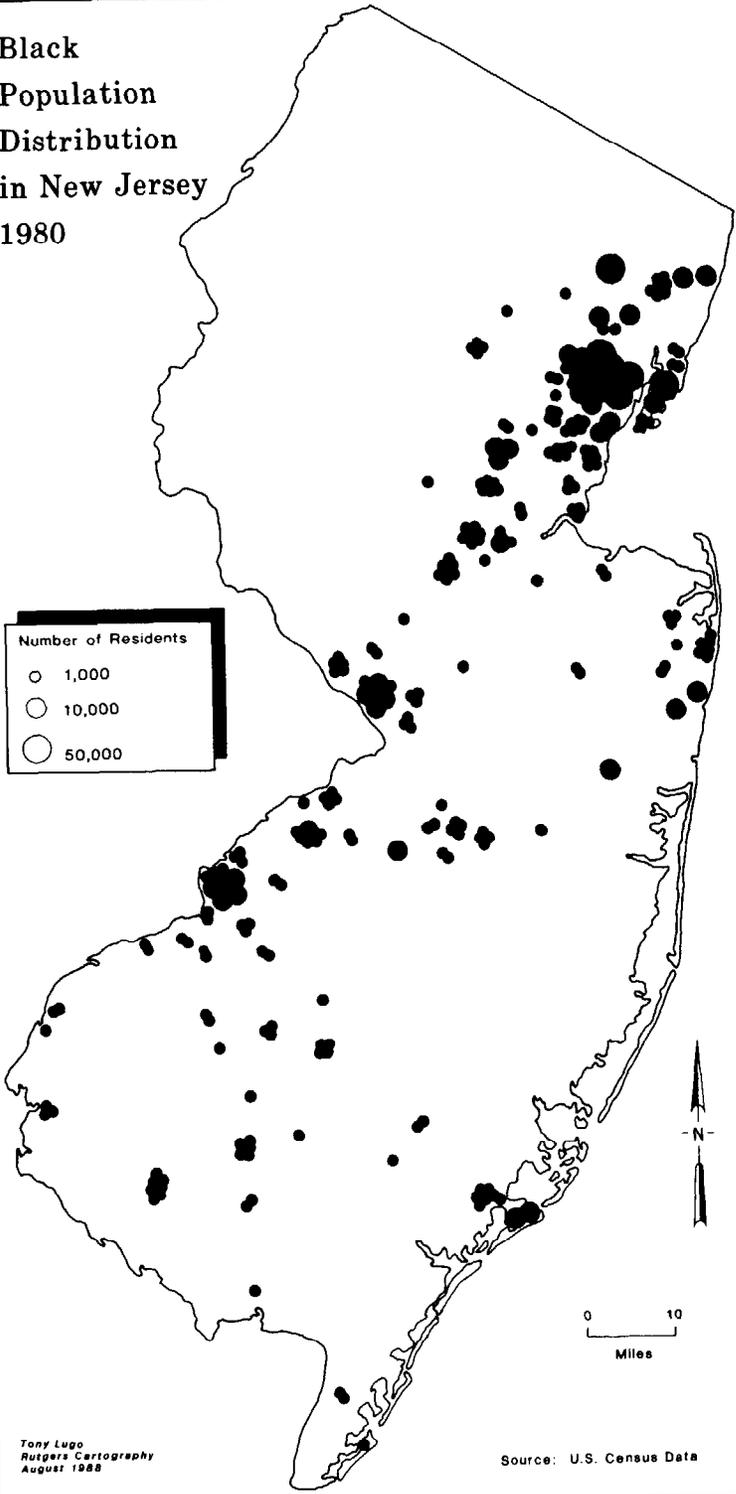
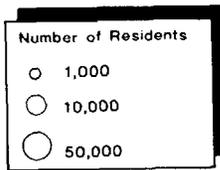
Another postwar achievement in the African-American community's battle against racism can be found in the state's third constitution, adopted in 1947. It outlawed racial segregation in the public schools and the state militia. As the first state to make such provisions constitutionally, New Jersey altered its image of racial conservatism. More important, for the first time black pupils and teachers in the southern counties were placed in schools and classes on a nonracial basis. The integration of the New Jersey militia was among the catalysts for similar action by the Truman administration that led to the desegregation of the nation's armed forces.

Blacks continued to arrive from the South in droves during the immediate postwar period. All told, the state's black population increased by 40 percent during and after the war, from 226,973 in 1940 to 318,565 in 1950—close to 7 percent of the population.

In the second half of the twentieth century the pace of southern black movement to New Jersey quickened, and it did not abate until around the end of the 1960s. Afro-Americans became much more visible in the populations of certain industrial cities like Paterson, Passaic and New Brunswick. Between 1950 and 1970 the state's black population more than doubled. And by 1980 the 924,786 blacks in the state constituted almost 13 percent of the population, the highest percentage ever (see Map 8).

The increased presence of blacks in New Jersey was keenly felt in urban areas. By 1980 the Afro-American population was over 95

**Black
Population
Distribution
in New Jersey
1980**



Tony Lugo
Rutgers Cartography
August 1988

Source: U.S. Census Data

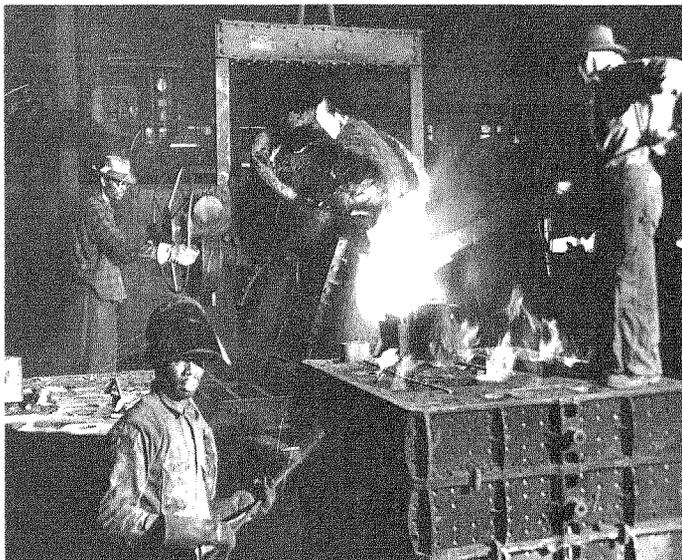
percent urban and was centered in the northern part of the state. Six virtually contiguous communities in North Jersey—Newark, East Orange, Orange, Elizabeth, Irvington and Jersey City—had over forty percent of the state's black population.

As the numbers of blacks in the urban areas grew, several developments occurred that were to undermine gains made during World War II. One was the spread of the ghettos, which was accelerated especially as whites, encouraged by federal highway and housing policies, began fleeing to the suburbs during the 1950s. Another was the increasing economic depression among ghetto dwellers. Many of the factory jobs that had initially attracted blacks from the South were lost as companies mechanized and automated their plants or moved them to other parts of the country and abroad, and as the economy shifted from industry to services.

By the mid-1960s new problems had been added to ghetto life. For example, fewer black men were participating in the labor force, and de facto segregated schools developed with low levels of academic achievement and high dropout rates. Such manifestations of racial inequality, against a backdrop of rising expectations, caused some of the state's larger black communities to erupt in violence in the 1960s. During the early part of the decade, Jersey City, Elizabeth and Paterson experienced rioting by blacks. Later, major riots occurred in Newark, Plainfield and Englewood, and lesser ones broke out in Trenton, Camden, Paterson, Atlantic City and New Brunswick. The Newark riot of July 1967, which brought out the State Police and the National Guard, was one of the most severe civil disturbances of the decade. Property damage exceeded \$10 million, and twenty-three persons died. Only the riots in the Watts section of Los Angeles (1965) and in Detroit (1967), cities with much larger black populations, involved more fatalities. Thirty-four died in Los Angeles, forty in Detroit.

Afro-Americans in the state were also involved in other forms of protest in the 1960s. A militant black community consciousness, often called "Black Power," was embraced by urban activists. Amiri Baraka (born Everette LeRoi Jones), the poet, writer and playwright, was at the vortex of militant black cultural and nationalist activities. When he returned to his native Newark in late 1965, he placed the city in the forefront of radical protest efforts. In 1967, for example, a National Conference on Black Power was convened there.

The cry of "Black Power!" was also heard in the labor movement. In April 1967, for example, five hundred black workers shut down



The prospect of well-paid industrial jobs continued to lure southern black workers to New Jersey well into the 1960s. However, during this decade the number of such jobs, for a variety of reasons, began to decline in New Jersey, causing a rise in black unemployment. This photograph (c. 1950s) shows blacks working in the steel section of the Worthington Corporation plant in Harrison. Courtesy of Newark Public Library.

production at the Ford Motor Company plant at Mahwah for three days because a foreman addressed a worker with a racial epithet. After the foreman was removed and the wildcat strike ended, the United Black Workers of Mahwah Ford was organized. It maintained relations with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, an organization of black workers' caucuses at auto plants in the Detroit area.

Black New Jerseyans were also involved in civil rights protest. Beginning shortly after World War II and lasting to the late 1960s, African-Americans, often under the leadership of the NAACP, engaged in successful efforts to eliminate discrimination in public restaurants, hotels, theaters, parks, and other accommodations in communities throughout the state. In addition, some became supporters of the modern civil rights movement that emerged in the South in

the 1950s; they embraced the nonviolent protest philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and often contributed financially to the movement. Dr. King himself was no stranger to New Jersey; New Jerseyans such as Rabbi Joachim Prinz of Newark and the Reverend S. Howard Woodson, Jr., pastor of the Shiloh Baptist Church of Trenton, knew him intimately. Dr. King visited New Jersey about a week before his death to mobilize support for his Poor People's Campaign. On March 27, 1968, he made several daytime appearances in Newark, briefly met with Amiri Baraka, and spoke in the evening at church rallies in Newark, Paterson, Orange and Jersey City. He was assassinated April 4 in Memphis.

Black protest of the 1950s and 1960s helped bring about the Johnson Administration's national War on Poverty, much civil rights legislation, and other reforms during the 1960s. It also created greater opportunities for black New Jerseyans, bringing unprecedented numbers into the mainstream of society. Job training programs, for example, enabled some blacks to acquire meaningful employment for the first time. More blacks entered governmental units where the race had been barely visible, such as the state police. Afro-Americans made noticeable gains in professional, managerial and technical positions. The black presence grew on city councils and school boards. Blacks began to occupy high and powerful political posts. A notable example was Kenneth Gibson, who in 1970 was elected the first black mayor of Newark. Three years later, the Reverend S. Howard Woodson, Jr., became the first black speaker of the state assembly, the first of his race to occupy such a position in any state since Reconstruction. Also, as discriminatory housing practices lessened, a growing number of black New Jerseyans became suburbanites, adding another dimension to the history of black migration. Finally, owing to special criteria and programs created to encourage enrollment, Afro-Americans entered the state's colleges, universities and medical, dental and law schools in unprecedented numbers.

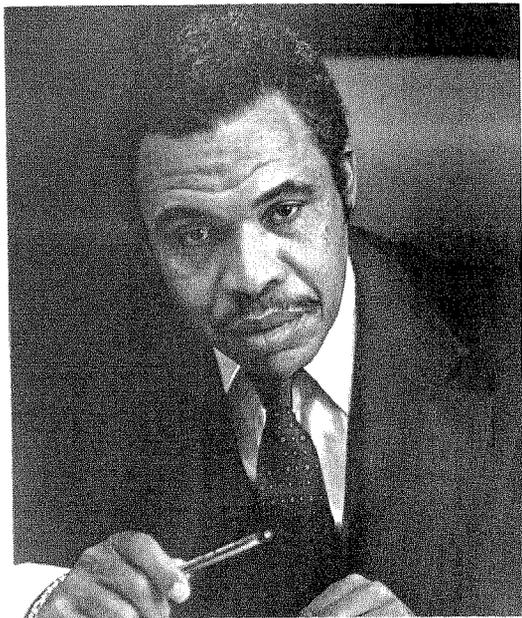
Since the 1960s some of these gains have eroded, and many of the state's blacks remain mired in poverty. Statistically a grim portrait can be drawn of much of contemporary New Jersey Afro-American life. Using various indices of poverty, analysts have declared two predominantly black New Jersey municipalities—Camden and Newark—the poorest in the nation for their size; as a result they have been greatly maligned and treated as metaphors for urban squalor and decay. In 1983 black families had a poverty rate of 24.9 percent and were about four times more likely than white families to live below

the poverty level as defined by the federal government; median family income was \$16,384 for blacks and \$31,851 for whites. In 1985 the black unemployment rate was 12.6 percent, more than twice the 4.8 percent for whites. This differential remained constant from 1980. In 1984 only 40.3 percent of black children lived with both parents, compared to 82.7 percent of white children. Recent figures indicate that the number of black full-time undergraduates in New Jersey colleges and universities decreased by 7.9 percent between 1983 and 1984 and by another 8 percent—from 15,473 to 14,242—the next year. And while blacks made up a little over 13 percent of the state's total population in 1985, they constituted 61 percent of its prison population.

Yet there is another dimension to New Jersey Afro-American life since the 1960s. Some of the state's blacks have achieved success, and they are faring better in the 1980s than they were one or two decades ago. They have a life style much like that of other middle-class Americans. In recent years their proportion has increased slightly: in 1980 about 29 percent of all black families earned more than the state median income of \$22,900, whereas in 1970 only about 27 percent exceeded the state median of \$11,400. One factor in this development was the increased employment of blacks in professional, technical, managerial and administrative jobs between 1970 and 1980. In 1980, for example, 7.9 percent of all professionals and technicians in the state were black, as compared to 4.9 percent in 1970.

As we move closer to the twenty-first century, therefore, there are developments that are both encouraging and disturbing. It is cause for hope, for example, that more Afro-Americans have assumed judicial and political authority and responsibility. Nine Afro-Americans sit on the Superior Court bench. Eight are members of the state legislature; two of these are women, following in the footsteps of Assemblywoman Madeline A. Williams of East Orange, who in 1957 was the first black woman elected to the legislature. There are black mayors of such major cities as Camden, East Orange, Plainfield, Atlantic City and Newark, and Afro-American members of the Governor's cabinet. And in 1988 the first black Congressman from New Jersey was elected.

On the other hand, there has been an alarming social transformation in the urban black ghettos, where certain problems have reached unprecedented dimensions. For example, drug use has proliferated, crime has risen, and more and more households are without male adults. These, added to other social dislocations that characterize much of black urban existence, suggest that a significant



portion of the black community is isolated from the broader economic and social life of the state. Thus, some experts perceive an increasing polarization of the black race in New Jersey. On one side they see a growing middle class, enjoying the benefits of gains in civil rights, politics, housing, social status and wage equality. On the other hand, there is an almost unshrinkable segment of blacks unable to take advantage of the same gains and locked in a cycle of poverty. This polarization casts in a new light the paradox of New Jersey Afro-American life.

To a state that has made considerable progress in race relations, and to a race that has overcome formidable obstacles in the past, the poor, unemployed and undereducated blacks of the cities pose a new challenge. They challenge the state to call upon its considerable resources to accord all of its Afro-American citizens an existence consistent with their hopes and aspirations. They challenge the black community to draw on its traditional resilience and resourcefulness and its history of struggle for self-betterment.

Madeline A. Williams (1896-1968) of East Orange was the first black woman elected to the New Jersey legislature. She was elected to the General Assembly in 1957 as a Democrat. Earlier she taught in the Trenton school system for eight years. Active in a number of social, civic and civil rights organizations, she took particular legislative interest in child labor, child welfare, juvenile delinquency and migrant labor. Courtesy of the Newark Public Library.

Kenneth Gibson (1932-) in 1970 became the first of his race to be elected mayor of New Jersey's largest city, Newark. This photograph dates from 1981, when he unsuccessfully sought the Democratic Party's nomination for governor of the state. Courtesy of the Newark Public Library.

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