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*Black Fades to Green:
Irish Labor Replaces African-American
Labor Along a Major New England
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Nineteenth Century*

By MICHAEL C. CONNOLLY

NEW ENGLAND lies at the periphery of the major concentration of population in North America. Within New England over various time periods certain population groups have themselves been seen as peripheral. This essay will attempt to explore the relationship between two such marginalized groups, African Americans and Irish, within the major New England coastal city of Portland, Maine, in the mid-nineteenth century.

A chronological approach will be used while, at the same time, central themes are identified: the growth of the port of Portland; the arrival of a small but notable black population with a maritime-related occupational niche and demographic comparisons with Boston; labor and racial comparisons with other ports, particularly New Orleans and Portland, Oregon; racial theories of whiteness and their impact in America, New England, and Portland, Maine; and finally the arrival of the Irish and their dockside hegemony by the mid-nineteenth century. Local demographic conditions in Portland, especially in terms of race, will be reviewed in comparison with the larger and major New England rival port of Boston. Literature on whiteness and its impact on the American working class will be analyzed in the context of the replacement of one small peripheral group in Portland, that is, blacks, by another, albeit much larger group, that is, Irish.

Growth of the Port of Portland

PORTLAND, MAINE'S, "Golden Years," 1832 to 1866, were temporarily and disastrously halted by the Great Portland Fire of July 4, 1866, probably the nation's worst inferno to that time. From a boatyard on Commercial Street the

fire spread to a lumberyard and then on to John B. Brown's huge Portland Sugar House. Before it burned out at the base of Munjoy Hill the fire had destroyed six million dollars worth of property, nearly 1,800 buildings, more than one-quarter of Portland's assessed valuation, including the greatest part of the city's business district, and left nearly 10,000 residents homeless. The poet Longfellow, a Portland native, returned to the city of his birth in July of 1866 and wrote: "I have been in Portland since the fire. Desolation! Desolation! Desolation! It reminds me of Pompeii, the 'sepult city'."¹

Portland's men of enterprise, however, were up to the task of rebuilding the city, and their economic vitality enabled Portland to recover from the disaster in a remarkably short time. Within two years Portland was virtually rebuilt, its vitality in large part the result of the continued efforts of John Poor, John Bundy Brown, Charles Q. Clapp, John Mussey, James Phinney Baxter, and other Portland businessmen who had made the city a major shipping and transportation center. Capital gained from these commercial and shipping sources, as well as from supplying the Union Army during the recently completed Civil War, was confidently reinvested in Portland's rebirth. The writer John Neal commented that "a new spirit took sudden possession of our property holders ... and straightway they began building for the future so Portland is now ... at least fifty years ahead of what she would have been otherwise."²

Many of Portland's present-day central structures and services were built in the years following the Great Fire. The business district reappeared as did a beautiful new Post Office, Customs House, and the Maine General Hospital on Bramhall Hill. Lincoln Park was created to serve the dual purpose of an urban recreational facility and also a firebreak, and in 1868 Portland began to pipe water from Sebago Lake as the city's major water supply. The spirit of public concern and the confidence demonstrated in these years were neither romantic nor entirely altruistic. Portland had revealed its potential as a major commercial center, and its chief natural resource, a deep-water, ice-free port closer to Europe than any other major American Atlantic port, was still there to be exploited for private as well as public profit.

Prosperity bred prosperity. In the period between 1866 and 1880 Portland business concerns grew along with the general expansion of the port and the railroads serving it. Some of this growth was directly connected, such as the Portland Company, which manufactured steam engines, the Portland Sugar House, which depended on shipping to provide the molasses from the West Indies, and the Portland Dry Dock Company. Businesses directly connected to shipping included ship stores and chandleries, repair and supply companies, as well as marine insurance, which blossomed in Portland during this

1. Greater Portland Landmarks, *Portland* (Portland: Greater Portland Landmarks), 75. For a special report on the Great Fire of 1866 listing all buildings destroyed, along with their valuation, see the *Portland Directory 1869* (Portland: B. Thurston and Company, 1869), 319-28.

2. Greater Portland Landmarks, *Portland*, 78.

period.³ It is clear that these businesses, and also nonmarine-related businesses, were dependent on capital accumulated by transport and maritime commerce, and that they all profited by having a readily available means of distributing their manufactured goods to potential markets.

To handle the increasing demand for water-borne merchandise and transportation several maritime companies expanded their facilities. The Portland Steam Packet Company was formed in 1843 to provide safe, dependable propeller service between Portland and Boston. In the first twenty years of business, its boats made nearly 11,200 trips and carried nearly 1.5 million passengers and 2.5 million tons of freight without the loss of a single life.⁴ The International Steamship Company was incorporated in 1860 to transport freight and passengers between Portland and major Southern and Eastern ports, especially Saint John, New Brunswick and Halifax, Nova Scotia. The New England Screwship Company provided twice weekly round-trip service between Portland and New York City.

By the end of the Civil War, Portland had become Canada's winter port. It was visited by such important shipping companies as the Canadian Line, the Glasgow Line, and the Anchor Line, all of which served generally as transport connections between Great Britain and Eastern Canada. Between the months of November through April many transatlantic steamers owned by these companies would dock in Portland with cargoes bound for Quebec, Montreal, or other ice-bound Canadian cities. Portland benefited greatly from being the conduit for these passengers and commodities, and although Boston and New York handled greater volumes of dry goods and more passengers, the Grand Trunk connection was especially advantageous to the much smaller city of Portland. Portland served as a major Eastern terminus for goods and passengers from Eastern or Midwestern United States and Canada to be transported back to Europe via these great shipping lines.

One of the challenges for American ports in the post-Civil War period was to generate enough export capacity to initiate and maintain regular service by these major international steamship lines. Many of the conditions of commerce were determined by large railroad conglomerates. Railroad rate structures could serve to make larger, more distant ports such as New York more economically viable than local facilities in Boston or Portland. Boston, for example, was hurt economically when the Cunard Line suspended service from 1868 to 1871 for those very reasons.⁵ Portland, however, had the distinct advantage of the Canadian grain connection throughout these years.

3. Greater Portland Landmarks, *Portland*, 78. Examples included the Portland Mutual Fire Insurance Company (1828), the Ocean Insurance Company (1832), and the Dirigo Insurance Company (1856). Of course, banking and financial services also grew apace with the maritime and railroad expansion. Many other businesses, such as the Portland Glass Company and the Portland Shovel Manufacturing Company, had a less direct connection to the waterfront. For an excellent synopsis of the business growth of Portland see William David Barry, *A Vignetted History of Portland Business 1632-1982* (Portland: The Newcomen Society of North America, 1982). See also W. P. A. Federal Writers' Project, *Maine: A Guide "Down East"* (St. Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1976).

4. William Willis, *History of Portland* (Portland: Bailey and Noyes, 1865), 732-33.

5. W. H. Bunting, *Portrait of a Port: Boston, 1852-1914* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 11.

Early Nineteenth-Century Black Dockworkers in Portland, Maine

NATURALLY, PORTLAND'S maritime prosperity and continued growth depended on a vital labor force, and the dockworkers in early nineteenth-century Portland were, at least in small part, black. The majority of Portland's blacks were the offspring of indigenous ex-slaves or those who had come from the West Indies via the molasses trade. Slavery had been present in colonial Falmouth, and even Parson (Reverend Thomas) Smith was reportedly a slaveholder as late as 1753, when there were twenty-one slaves in that town. Slavery was abolished in Maine, however, through the manumission clause of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. "The end of slavery would see declining numbers of blacks in [the] old settlements and growing black populations in the new boom towns thriving on the maritime trade—Portland, for instance."⁶

By 1828 an Abyssinian Church was incorporated. Its location at the corner of Mountfort and Newbury (then named Sumner) Streets marked the center of Portland's black community at the base of Munjoy Hill, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods located adjacent to the docks in the east end of the city. By 1835 this black church was joined by twenty-two "colored members of the Second [Congregational] Church [who] were set off to unite with the Abyssinian Church." That same year, also in that building, a separate school for black students, averaging fifty in number, initiated a period of segregated education in Portland which lasted until the Civil War. "The day scholars are, under recent arrangements, distributed in the other schools and the separate establishment for colored children is discontinued."⁷

Gary B. Nash in his study of blacks in northern seaport cities between 1775 and 1820 refers to the black church as the tie between the distant African past, the recent experience of slavery, and the future as free citizens. Nash contended that there were two major reasons for the rise of these separatist "African" churches, "discriminatory treatment in white churches and the gradual rise of a community of interest among the Afro-Americans...."⁸ Portland seemed to fit into this pattern of other northern seaport cities concerning the emergence of a separate black church. Evidence in the historical novel *Pyrrhus*

6. Randolph Stakeman, "Slavery in Colonial Maine," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly*, 27, no. 2 (Fall, 1987): 77. "Portland provided many opportunities for the former slaves and soon became the home of Maine's largest black community." See also Charles E. Clark, *Maine: A Bicentennial History* (New York: Norton Publishers, 1977), 116. For a comparison with the black experience in other antebellum states, see Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

7. Willis, *History of Portland*, 680.

8. Gary B. Nash, "Forging Freedom: The Emancipation Experience in the Northern Seaport Cities, 1775-1820," in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, eds. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 43-45. For additional literature on this topic see also Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1968); James O. and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979); Donald M. Jacobs, "A Study of the Boston Negro from Revolution to Civil War" (Ph.D. dissertation at Boston University, 1968); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968); and Litwack, *North of Slavery*.

Venture and other sources also suggest that in the early nineteenth century an appreciable number of Portland's dockworkers were black.⁹

During the Federal Period black stevedores virtually controlled longshore work at Portland, and the area around Hancock, Newbury and the Hill (above Mountfort) became a distinctly black neighborhood. It was not until Irish laborers arrived in the mid-nineteenth century that the situation on the wharves changed.¹⁰

Also, the *Portland Transcript* of January 22, 1895, described a Portland black as "one of the negro stevedores, who prior to the [eighteen] forties used to do all the stevedoring in this port."¹¹

The presence of a noticeable black population along Portland's waterfront was clear. That a goodly number of these blacks had found work as longshoremen in the early nineteenth century was not surprising. The molasses trade between Portland and the West Indies was one source of a local black population that came from the Caribbean aboard Portland-bound ships and subsequently found work along the waterfront. Longshore work was dangerous, unskilled, labor intensive, and sporadic, dependent upon the arrival of loaded ships. Before the large-scale arrival of Irish immigrants into Maine in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, blacks most often served as a source of the cheap, unskilled labor necessary for dock work.

The West Indies trade involved the importation of molasses and the export of wooden boxes and casks, and the shooks to make these. Suspended during the Embargo and the War of 1812 this trade recommenced and expanded throughout the early nineteenth century. The trade was sustained by two lucrative by-products, sugar and rum. In 1845 an experimental firm in Portland attempted but failed to produce refined sugar from molasses. Ten years later, however, the manager of that firm, John Bundy Brown together with Dependence H. Furbish, who had discovered a steam method to refine sugar from molasses, chartered the Portland Sugar Company. This company was, for a time, the largest importer of molasses in New England.¹² By 1860 six million gallons of molasses were being imported to Portland. In addition to sugar the production of rum had been significant since the late eighteenth century. "At one point Portland had as many as seven distilleries running day and night converting molasses to rum."¹³ It was second only to Medford, just outside of

9. For much of the following information on Portland's black population I am indebted to William David Barry who, together with Randolph Dominic, published a historical novel whose main character is a black Portlander. See Randolph Dominic and William David Barry, *Pyrrhus Venture* (Boston: Little, Brown Publishers, 1983).

10. Earle G. Shettleworth Jr. and William David Barry, *Mr. Goodhue Remembers Portland: Scenes from the Mid-19th Century* (Augusta, Maine: Maine Historic Preservation Commission Publications, 1981), 12.

11. *Portland Transcript*, January 22, 1895, cited in Shettleworth and Barry, *Mr. Goodhue Remembers Portland*, 6. See also Lester Rubin, *The Negro in the Longshore Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974.)

12. W. P. A., *Portland City Guide*, The American Guide Series (Portland: Forest City Printing Company, 1940), 43 and 67. See also William H. Rowe, *The Maritime History of Maine: Three Centuries of Shipbuilding and Seafaring* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1948), 116-18.

13. Frank L. Byrne, *Prophet of Prohibition: Neal Dow and His Crusade* (Magnolia, Mass.: Peter Smith Publishers, 1961), 22. See also Greater Portland Landmarks, *Portland*, 44.

Boston, as New England's primary rum supplier. Several factors converged to end this lucrative trade, including keener competition from other ports, a new centrifugal system of refining sugar, the shipment of molasses by bulk rather than wooden hogsheads and sugar in bags rather than boxes, a prohibitionist Maine Law passed by Neal Dow in 1851, and finally the complete destruction of J. B. Brown's Portland Sugar House by the Portland Fire of 1866.

Portland historian William Goold, writing in a local newspaper about the old Custom House, connected the West Indies molasses trade with Portland's black longshoremen in an interesting manner:

Here in good weather ... were collected the stevedores, sailors, boarding-house keepers, and all who had an interest in the discharging and fitting away of West Indiamen, which was the principal ... trade of Portland ... Conspicuous among the Sunday crowd was the black crew who discharged all the molasses by hoisting it out by hand, keeping time to their amusing songs while at work. They were sure to have a large audience to hear their singing. Many churchgoing people on coming out of meeting ... then took Fore Street on their way home, no matter where they lived.¹⁴

The incorporation of The Abyssinian Church in Portland in 1828 itself suggested a sizable black population, and one notable contemporary placed the number as high as 700 to 800:

[A]nd I am told that more than three hundred grown persons regularly meet together for worship. If this is true—if it is true in any degree, our missionary people ought to be applied to forthwith, yea and all others who are favorable to education or morality.¹⁵

Actual census returns from the four decades preceding the Civil War would suggest that John Neal's estimates were somewhat inflated:

*Portland v. Boston*¹⁶

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Black Population</i>	<i>Boston Blacks</i>
1830	12,601	314 (2.5%)	1,875 (3.1%)
1840	15,218	402 (2.6%)	1,988 (2.4%)
1850	20,815	395 (1.9%)	1,999 (1.5%)
1860	26,341	318 (1.2%)	2,261 (1.3%)
1900	50,145	291 (0.6%)	

The census figures revealed a fairly equal number of black males and females in nineteenth-century Portland, but it also showed the city to have a highly racially segregated housing pattern. At a time when there were seven wards in

14. William Goold, *Portland Press*, April 13, 1872.

15. John Neal, *The Yankee*, July 2, 1828, p. 215.

16. Using Boston as the larger port to compare itself to, these census returns present a statistical record of Portland's black population and also isolate the "free colored" community by sex and place of domicile. 5th Census of the U.S. (1830), pp. 2-3; 6th Census of the U. S. (1840), pp. 4-5; 7th Census of the U.S. (1850), p. 4; 8th Census of the U.S. (1860), p. 201; 12th Census of the U.S. (1900), Vol. I, Population (Part I), p. 619. Boston statistics taken from James O. and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 2-5.

the city, the black population was squeezed into Ward 1 of Munjoy Hill, derisively characterized as "Nigger Hill."

<i>Year</i>	<i>Black Population</i>	<i>Blacks in Ward 1</i>	<i>Ward 6 (Boston)¹⁷</i>
1840	402	310 (77%)	1,088 (45%)
1850	395	321 (81%)	1,219 (61%)
1860	318	209 (66%)	1,395 (62%)

The population patterns outlined above for Portland were quite similar to those of Boston in these antebellum years. Blacks, as a percentage of population, were slightly higher for Boston in 1830 and 1860 but slightly higher for Portland in 1840 and 1850. Residential concentration in Portland gave the appearance of a larger black population than actually existed, perhaps explaining the source of John Neal's inflated population estimate. Both Portland and Boston had their own "Nigger Hill," the lower slopes of Munjoy Hill and the northern slope of Beacon Hill, respectively. Portland's blacks were relatively more residentially concentrated than were blacks in Boston. Both cities also were beginning to experience the influx of large numbers of Irish by the 1850s. One source stated the consequences:

Often, a dramatic rise in the number of Irish in a neighborhood resulted in a decline in the area's black population. This was the case in ward two between 1850 and 1860, competition for jobs and housing engendered animosity between blacks and Irish...¹⁸

Even by 1900 when the number of city wards had increased to nine, the number of blacks living in the east end of Portland (Wards 1 and 2) was 179 out of a total of 291, or 62 percent.¹⁹ This racial/ethnic pattern of establishing tightly knit communities would be replicated by the newly arriving Irish immigrants in the later years of the nineteenth century.

White hostility caused segregated black neighborhoods to form, as Gary Nash has argued, and "in the cities the concentration of free blacks provided some security against a hostile world..." It was therefore to areas like Munjoy Hill within American cities and towns that free blacks migrated in the post-Revolutionary decades.²⁰ Just as residential patterns in Portland produced a compact, albeit small, black neighborhood in the east end of the city,

17. James O. and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 2-5. The reference to "Nigger Hill" is taken from the W. P. A. *Portland City Guide*, 274.

18. Horton, *Black Bostonians*, op. cit., p. 4.

19. 12th Census of the United States (1900), Vol. I, Population (Part I), p. 619.

20. Nash, "Forging Freedom," 10-11. "The dense network of urban black institutions and a rich community life made it easier to confront racism in the cities than in the countryside." According to the Horton study Boston's blacks were still confronting racism in the antebellum years, as reflected in their changing residential patterns: "much of the black flight from ward two was undoubtedly an effort by blacks to shield themselves from hostility and harassment. Since they were still barred from many neighborhoods, these families moved into predominantly black sections." See James O. and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 4. See also Donald Jacobs, "A Study of the Boston Negro,"; Peter R. Knights, *Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); and Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).

so too there was a certain amount of occupational concentration among blacks. The Reverend Elijah Kellogg (1813-1901), a novelist, collector of history, and noted local historian, in his novel *A Strong Arm and a Mother's Blessing*, described black workers unloading ships to a musical cadence quite similar to William Goold's previously mentioned recollection. Kellogg conjectured that "during the continuance of the lumber trade, Portland could boast of the largest number and most athletic body of negroes that were ever seen together."²¹

Blacks played significant roles in the maritime labor force in Portland as they did in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. This black workforce has been referred to as "part of a literally floating proletariat." Because black men had long been important on the coasting vessels and overseas ships of colonial commerce, and black women could hope for domestic service in the homes of an increasingly affluent urban upper class, they particularly headed for the maritime towns.²²

Black labor occupied a niche in early nineteenth-century Portland and other coastal seaports remarkably similar to that occupied by Irish men and women later in the century. The 1830-1860 antebellum period in Portland represented transitional years along the waterfront. The Irish replaced blacks as longshoremen in Portland, especially in the Famine and post-Famine years, from the late 1840s through the 1850s. The unskilled and underpaid nature of this work helped make it the occupational domain of those at the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder. For the most part the native Yankee population eschewed this menial labor. The timing of this labor transformation along Portland's waterfront, occurring simultaneously with the opening of the direct rail link between Portland and Montreal in 1853, was of paramount importance. The Atlantic and Saint Lawrence (later the Grand Trunk) Railway would give a completely new and much greater significance to this workforce in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Irish were also becoming a more significant portion of the city's overall population, a trend that would continue. Economically and socially this immigration was bound to have profound effects.

In Boston, New York, and Cincinnati violent confrontations between black and Irish labor took place, particularly during the July 1863 draft riots. An independent confirmation that the contact between black and other dockworkers, specifically the Irish, could be violent comes from Cincinnati around the Civil War. "Hard times also promoted scattered outbreaks of violence among desperate wage earners. Screaming 'Let's clear out the niggers,' Irish dock workers, angered by the attempts of black laborers to underbid them for jobs, initiated a two-day riot in July 1862, which left a trail of destruction that

21. Elijah Kellogg, *A Strong Arm and a Mother's Blessing* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1880), 148-55 and 195.

22. Nash, "Forging Freedom," 6 and 10.

stretched from the city's docks into the black homes along the levee."²³ In Portland racial animosity was as strong as in other American cities.²⁴ Although little evidence exists to document similar violent episodes in Portland, there is no doubt that the Irish drove blacks off the waterfront, and that only their relatively tiny overall numbers prevented the type of overt and violent racial incidents documented elsewhere.

Racial and Labor Comparisons with Other Ports

DANIEL ROSENBERG, in his book, *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labor and Unionism 1892-1923*, analyzed the complex and unique set of work rules, traditions, and racial composition along the levees of this significant Gulf Coast port around the turn of the century. The contrasts with Portland, Maine, are, of course, all generally far greater than the similarities. During many of these years, New Orleans was by many accounts the nation's second busiest port. Dockworkers numbered around 11,000, roughly ten times that of Portland. The racial composition of the two cities could hardly have been more divergent. New Orleans in 1900 had a total population of 300,000, with blacks accounting for 80,000 of the total, or roughly 27 percent.²⁵

Similarities with Portland, Maine, however, were noteworthy. Both were major regional ports. In both ports the work was casual—irregular and dependent upon the arrival and departure schedule of ships—and seasonal—much busier in winter than in summer. The major export crop, cotton in New Orleans and grain in Portland, was primarily available for shipping in the fall and winter months, forcing dockers in both ports to scramble for other temporary employment during the spring and summer.

White and black longshoremen joined together for their mutual protection in a system that became known as "half-and-half." For a generation at the turn of the century this work pattern defied local and national trends toward segregation and a "separate but equal" philosophy. Before this period, and in contrast with this Gulf port's equal racial allocation of work, the mostly Irish longshoremen of Portland had replaced the black and other non-Irish laborers. They cemented the removal of the former by prohibiting the employment of

23. Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 195. For an excellent analysis of the issues of race and class along other American waterfronts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Calvin Winslow, ed. *Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

24. In the case of Boston see Donald Jacobs, "A Study of the Boston Negro," and James O. and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians*. For New York see *Anti Negro Riots in the North, 1863* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company Publishers, 1969, a reprint of an 1863 original); Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974); Joel Headley, *The Great Riots of New York: 1712-1873* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1970); and *New York Committee of Merchants for the Relief of Colored People Suffering from the Late Riots, 1863 Report* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company Publishers, 1969, a reprint of an 1863 original).

25. Daniel Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labor and Unionism 1892-1923* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 16-17.

blacks in their original bylaws of 1881, stating that “no colored person shall at any time be admitted as a member of this Society.”²⁶

Another significant similarity is that both ports would eventually be represented by the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA), in New Orleans by the turn of the century and in Portland by 1913. Contrary to the Portland experience, “The International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) was among the few AFL affiliates freely admitting Black workers and electing Blacks to leadership.”²⁷ By the time Portland’s longshoremen affiliated with the ILA in 1913, the small black workforce had already effectively been removed from the docks for over two generations.

Relative size and self-interest appear to be the two major contrasts between New Orleans and Portland concerning race relations on the waterfront. In New Orleans the black labor contributed half of those available and looking for work, whereas in Portland the much smaller group of black labor was swamped by an incoming tide of Irish labor by the mid-point of the nineteenth century. Longshore work was about to dramatically increase and be systematized by the Grand Trunk Railroad connection between Portland and eastern Canada. Perceived self-interest led the workers in these two ports in diametrically opposite directions. The New Orleans dockers, black and white, needed each other to resist the organized and unified demands of the shipping agents and their stevedore foremen for more work from fewer workers. Today this is referred to as “efficiency” or “productivity,” but workers saw this as “speed up” or erosion of work rules, especially concerning the size and composition of the work gangs. In Portland the Irish longshoremen were numerous and secure enough in their hold on the docks to battle the employer-stevedores on their own.

Another useful comparison regarding race relations alongshore would be with Portland’s namesake, 3,000 miles to the west on the Pacific coast—Portland, Oregon. One strong similarity was the tiny proportion of blacks to the total population. As cited earlier Portland, Maine’s black population actually declined by half between the Civil War and the turn of the century, from 1.2 percent in 1860 to 0.6 percent in 1900. Portland, Oregon’s black population, in comparison, was also 0.6 percent as late as 1941 when America entered World War II. The lack of any sizable black community in each city made it possible for their longshore unions, as well as waterfront employers and stevedores as well, to exclude all black workers. This was accomplished in Portland, Oregon, in part by use of a type of “grandfather clause” that perpetuated racial exclusivity. In both ports nepotism, “the brother-in-law system of recruitment,” was used.²⁸

26. The bylaws and records of the PLSBS are housed in a major collection, including over ninety volumes of minutes and financial reports, at the Maine Historical Society in Portland, Maine. See PLSBS Records, Vol. 1, Bylaws, Section 15, p. 8.

27. Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*, 39.

28. William W. Pilcher, *The Portland Longshoremen: A Dispersed Urban Community* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 68-69.

Portland, Maine's longshoremen were overwhelmingly Irish or Irish-American, but those of Portland, Oregon, were more diverse, mainly English, Canadian, Scandinavian, or German.²⁹ The nepotism in hiring practices was nearly universal in all American ports until the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) attempted to end the practice on the West Coast in the twentieth century. Portland, Maine's nepotism was quite similar to that of Boston where "the [ILA] membership was largely Irish and Irish-American of the second generation with openings being filled by the sons of members."³⁰ The universality of nepotism is noted in the following:

[Laborers'] organization were based on ethnic ties. This was true of Philadelphia's black hod carriers in the 1870s and the Irish freight handlers of the port of New York in the 1880s as it was of the Irish grain shovelers who brought the International Longshoremen's Association to the port of Buffalo by means of a successful strike against a saloon-based hiring system in 1899.³¹

Racial Theories of Whiteness

THE RESEARCH OF David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and a growing number of other scholars concentrates on the theory of whiteness and its relationship to race, ethnicity, and nationalism as it pertains to labor patterns in antebellum, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.³²

One indication of the prevalence of animosity between the Irish and blacks in Portland is found in a November 15, 1864 editorial in the *Eastern Argus*, a pro-Democratic Party Portland daily newspaper, under the title, "The Blarney of the Press":

The miscegenation editor of the [*Portland Daily*] *Press* appeared in a new role yesterday morning. He is trying to blarney the Irish, but he will have to do it more gracefully and adroitly to deceive the sons of the Emerald isle into any sympathy with the [Republican] party which has so frequently denounced the noble old Irish people as inferior in intelligence and all manly qualities to the negro race. Some of these radical writers of the *Press* school, have gone so far as to declare that amalgamation has already commenced between the Irish and the negroes and that it will soon become general. Why, one of them said that "the fusion, whenever it takes place, will be of infinite service to the Irish!" and another that "if an equal number of negroes and Irish be taken from the city of New York, the former will be found far superior to the latter in cleanliness, education, moral feelings, beauty of form and feature, and natural sense!"

29. Pilcher, *The Portland Longshoremen*, 12-13.

30. William M. Fowler Jr., editor, the WPA Federal Writers' Project, *Boston Looks Seaward: The Story of the Port, 1630-1940* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 218.

31. David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 94.

32. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); D. Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working-Class History* (London: Verso, 1994); James R. Barrett and D. Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," in *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 16, no. 3 (Spring, 1997), 3-44; Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*; William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Dale Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1986); Catherine M. Eagan, "'White' if 'Not Quite': Irish Whiteness in the nineteenth-Century Irish-American Novel," in *Eire Ireland*, 36, no. 1 and 2 (Spring/Summer 2001): 66-81.

The miscegenetic editor of our cotemporary (*sic.*) is doubtless making these soft approaches to the Irish under the delusion that they may be used to illustrate the revolting theory of amalgamation. He will find himself woefully mistaken. The Irish are the descendants of as noble a race as has appeared in history and to insinuate that they have any sympathy with the negro loving fanatics, is an insult that should cause their ancestors to rest uneasy in their graves and it will receive the scorn of every true son of Erin.³³

This editorial diatribe was not local in origin but was part of a much larger political campaign focused on the presidential election of 1864 and on securing Irish-American votes for the Democratic Party in that and subsequent elections. The concept of "miscegenation" and the word itself had been created for this purpose by an Irish immigrant Democrat, D. G. Croly, assisted by co-author George Wakeman. In 1863 they had anonymously produced a pamphlet entitled, "Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro." Their hope was that if antislavery leaders would endorse their theories this would prove to be a major embarrassment to the Republicans in the upcoming national election. Croly even went as far as to denounce the pamphlet he had secretly authored and the anonymity that had shielded its author, still unknown to the reading public.³⁴

A local political broad sheet, probably from this same period, and addressed "To the Irish Voters," spoke of the attempts of certain office holders to convince the Portland Irish to vote for "the Black Republican Ticket." It further stated that a Whig (pre-Republican Party) newspaper once called the Irish voters "Irish cattle."³⁵ Both the editorial and the broad sheet represent attempts, not as much to drive the Irish away from African Americans, as to lure them into the protective fold of the Democratic Party. There were, of course, many more Irish than blacks in Portland at this time, and from a purely political viewpoint this tactic would have been advantageous to the Democrats.

David Roediger in 1991 concluded his excellent work, *The Wages of Whiteness*, with a chapter entitled, "Irish-American Workers and White Racial Formation." He states that "what was most noteworthy to free blacks at the time, and probably should be most noteworthy to historians, was the relative ease with which Irish-Americans 'elbowed out' African-Americans from unskilled jobs." Roediger concludes:

They had to drive all Blacks, and if possible their memories, from the places where the Irish labored. Frederick Douglass warned the Irish worker of the possibility that 'in assuming our avocation he also assumed our degradation.' Irish workers responded that they wanted an 'all-white waterfront', rid of Blacks altogether, and not to 'jostle with' African-Americans. They thought that, to ensure their own survival, they needed as much.³⁶

33. *Eastern Argus*, November 15, 1864, p. 2. This editorial was supplied to me by Professor William B. Jordan Jr. of Portland, Maine, who has published and is compiling further research on Portland during the Civil War period.

34. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 155-56.

35. This broad sheet was kindly given to me by Professor William B. Jordan Jr.

36. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 148-50.

Roediger's study was followed four years later by a major work by Harvard lecturer Noel Ignatiev who wrote that "On the docks, the Irish efforts to gain the rights of white men collided with the black struggle to maintain the right to work; the result was perpetual warfare." In 1850 the mainly Irish dock workers in New York went on strike to force the dismissal of a black fellow worker. By 1852 the Longshoremen's United Benevolent Society, which was exclusively Irish, demanded that "work upon the docks...shall be attended to solely and absolutely by members of the 'Longshoremen's Association,' and such white laborers as they see fit to permit upon the premises."³⁷ This pattern appears to have been followed not only in New York but also in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and many other ports including Portland, Maine.

Certainly America in the nineteenth century was preoccupied with the questions of race and nationality. This was caused by the rapidly increasing Famine-era immigration from Ireland after the 1840s, and the slow but steady march toward a Civil War, caused, at least in part, by the presence of chattel slavery in half of the country. "The story of Americanization is vital and compelling, but it took place in a nation also obsessed by race. For immigrant workers, the processes of 'becoming white' and 'becoming American' were intertwined at every turn."³⁸

New England, of course, was central to the nearly universal nineteenth-century concept of an Americanism that was white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. Yankees, even in mid-nineteenth century Portland, had rigid opinions of the Irish in their midst, as can be seen in this excerpt from a local religious weekly newspaper:

Prosperous Yankees knew the Irish only as servants and laborers. An Irish servant working in a well-scrubbed Protestant kitchen was forever a stranger, wilful, resentful and invincibly ignorant. They were, moreover, the stubbornest kind of Catholic. Most Yankees were prepared to pity the impoverished, ragged, and untutored Irish, but not even the most understanding could condone the "cynical machinations" of the Catholic hierarchy.³⁹

The New England Society was a nineteenth-century organization of native-born New Englanders and their children living in and around New York City. Dale T. Knobel has uncovered many references to the anguish and misgivings caused to these sons of New England by the ever-increasing levels of Irish immigration into their adopted home. This was, of course, a far cry from the New England they remembered, "the blessed domicile of their ancestors [that] had, in its early years successfully guarded its character by 'repelling from its culture the idle, the ignorant, and the enslaved.'"⁴⁰ In mid-nineteenth-century New England, the Irish were perceived not only as undesirable, but, in the opinion of historian George Perkins Marsh, speaking in 1844 to the New England Society, in this way:

37. Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 120.

38. Barrett and Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples," 6.

39. *The Christian Mirror* (Portland, Maine), February 1, 1849. Again I am indebted to Professor William B. Jordan Jr. for this source.

40. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic*, 71.

It may indeed be doubted whether it be possible now to construct a harmonious type of national character out of the discordant materials which have been assembled... A nation, like an organic being, must grow, not by accretion, but by development, and should receive into its system nothing incapable of assimilation.⁴¹

The *Atlantic Monthly*, reporting shortly after the failed Fenian invasion of Canada in 1866, just after the end of the Civil War, came to the conclusion that

All the qualities which go to make a republican, in the true sense of the term, are wanting in the Irish nature. ...when anything comes in the guise of a law, there is an accompanying seizure of moral paralysis. ...[the Irish rebel lives] in a world of unrealities almost inconceivable to a cool Saxon brain.⁴²

Finally, in Matthew Jacobson's study of whiteness there is a very revealing analysis of the mid-nineteenth-century seafaring classic, *Two Years before the Mast*, by Richard Henry Dana Jr., the son of a wealthy New England family. Dana dropped out of Harvard for the opportunity of sailing around Cape Horn to California. His observations of the natives of Latin America and its surrounding islands, their customs, character, and religion, primarily Catholic, were for many years on the required reading list of American schoolchildren. The book, first published in 1840, just prior to the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-48, has been often republished. In a postscript to the 1859 edition, phrases like "English race" and "Anglo-Saxon race" appeared for the first time as a refinement of the standard "whites" or "white men" in earlier editions. Jacobson believes this represented a sea change reflecting "a political revision of whiteness in Dana's New England during the two decades bracketing the Famine in Ireland and the tremendous Celtic exodus to North America." In this same postscript Dana's own prejudice surfaces:

The Cathedral of St. Mary...where the Irish attend, was...more like one of our stifling Irish Catholic churches in Boston or New York, with intelligence in so small a proportion to the number of faces.⁴³

Arrival of the Irish/Black Fades to Green

THERE APPEAR TO BE three major factors why the Irish replaced black long-shoremen in mid-nineteenth-century Portland. First, the West Indies trade in molasses for Maine lumber declined. Second, the trade with Canada, mostly involving the export of Canadian grain, increased dramatically at the same time that dock work in this port was becoming mechanized. Third, the number of Irish immigrants in the pre- and post-Famine period of the 1840s-1850s also rose dramatically. The importation of molasses declined at roughly the same time that new and more efficient methods of refining sugar were being perfected in cities other than Portland. This decline also coin-

41. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic*, 72-73.

42. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 48-49.

43. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 41.

cided with strong prohibition measures initiated in Maine by the temperance leader Neal Dow of Portland.⁴⁴

Mechanization appeared to have been related to the diminished black presence on the waterfront. In Elijah Kellogg's historical novel, *A Strong Arm and a Mother's Blessing*, a wealthy merchant in the West Indies trade, Mr. Jacob Knight, became the first to employ labor-saving techniques in Boston and Portland around 1833, with significant results reportedly for the "negro" workers:

In the mean time Knight went among the shipping, and found cargoes there were discharged with a winch, that this required less men, and more work could be done in the same time for less money. He therefore bought a winch (windlass turned by cranks) and brought it home in the brig. The negroes would have nothing to do with it, because they could have no song, for this machine did not admit of it. There was neither poetry, music, nor pleasant associations connected with turning a crank, and the Irish filled their places; the lumber was cut off; the negroes gradually disappeared and sought other employments, and the entire course of trade changed.⁴⁵

This fictional explanation suggested that blacks were voluntarily leaving waterfront jobs because of a perceived deterioration in working conditions there. In actuality, mechanization was inevitably linked to speedup and expansion of work output. By the year 1853 Portland was linked by rail to Montreal and by transatlantic steamship to Europe.⁴⁶ From that date onward the quality and quantity of work alongshore in Portland would be dramatically altered because Montreal supplied Portland with a volume of exports that could never have been generated within Portland's hinterland alone.

The third and most significant factor was the rising number of Irish immigrants coming into America beginning in the 1840s, swelling during the Famine years of the late 1840s, and becoming a human wave after 1850.⁴⁷ Chronologically this peak in Irish immigration occurred simultaneously with the rail linkage to Montreal. No longer would dock work be a black niche, since the increased demand for cheap labor in construction, on the railroads, and along the waterfront was being answered by a growing supply of unskilled Irish immigrants. In Maine in the year 1860, the foreign population was 37,453 of which 15,290, or nearly one-half, were from Ireland. Many of

44. Dow's prohibitionist Maine Law took effect in 1851, although prohibition had been operational in many Maine towns prior to that date. For literature on this subject see Neal Dow, *The Reminiscences of Neal Dow: Recollections of Eighty Years* (Portland: The Evening Express Publishing Company, 1898); Byrne, *Prophet of Prohibition: Neal Dow and His Crusade*, op. cit.; and A. A. Miner, "Neal Dow and His Life Work," *The New England Magazine*, 9, no. 4 (June, 1894).

45. Kellogg, *A Strong Arm and a Mother's Blessing*, 198. See also the reference to Portland's "Negro stevedores" in Rowe, *The Maritime History of Maine*, 113.

46. In 1853 the arrival of the *S. S. Sarah Sands* began the transatlantic connection between Portland and Liverpool, as well as other major European ports. The number of sailings by the turn of the century would swell to over eighty per year, bunched mainly in the winter months of November through April, when the Saint Lawrence River was likely to be frozen.

47. An excellent reference to Ireland and Irish emigration to America in the nineteenth century is Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Thomas Gallagher, *Paddy's Lament: Ireland 1846 to 1847. Prelude to Hatred* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982); Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850* (Winchester, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1983); George Potter, *To the Golden Door* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974); and Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger; Ireland, 1845-1849* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

the rest were Irish immigrants who arrived indirectly from other British provinces, mainly English-speaking Canada.⁴⁸ This pattern held true in Portland as well, where in 1860 nearly 15 percent of the population were foreign-born. In 1860 fully two-thirds of Portland's foreign-born population (2,627 out of 3,908) were Irish.⁴⁹

Between 1860 and 1880 the population of this city rose by a healthy 20 percent from 26,341 to 33,810, and the percentage of foreign-born increased from less than 15 percent to more than 20 percent. There were nearly 7,000 foreign-born persons in Portland in 1880.⁵⁰ The Irish population of Portland was increasing rapidly at the same time that the already small black population was in actual decline, as seen in the earlier-reported statistics.

As 1880 approached Portland had already undergone significant demographic, political, economic, and social changes. For some it was an exciting time that was full of opportunity for improvement and advancement. John Neal, writing in 1874, just as the nation was entering the economic depression of 1873-1877, was most optimistic about Portland's future, especially when he considered its maritime economic growth:

Our tonnage is over 100,000; imports for '72, 23,000,000, exports 22,000,000—an increase of four millions both on the imports and exports of '71...Sixty-five railroad trains enter and leave the city daily; and we have daily steamers to Boston, half-weekly steamers to New York, weekly and half-weekly ocean steamers for six months of the year, with lines touching at many ports eastward along the coast of Maine and the Maritime[sic] British Provinces...the intransitu and transshipment trade of the U.S. for [February, 1874] amounted to \$6,851,768 of which Portland furnished \$5,044,800 or about five-sixths of the entire sum...With a population such as we have, busy, active, industrious, enterprising, thrifty and liberal, again, I ask, What have we to fear?⁵¹

John Neal was describing Portland from a Yankee entrepreneurial perspective. With Yankee capital and leadership, combined with cheap Irish manual labor, great commercial improvements might be realized. Also great wealth might be gained, at least for those in a position to so prosper. For another section of Portland's dominant Yankee community, those who could not directly

48. Emigration from one British-owned area to another was often subsidized. This practice gave rise to the "two-boater," the immigrant who took one boat to Canada and a second boat from Canada to the United States. For a discussion of the "two-boater" see Lawrence F. Kohl (editor), *Irish Green and Union Blue: The Civil War Letters of Peter Welch* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986). I am indebted to Professor William B. Jordan Jr. for this reference. See also John F. Myers, "Over to Bangor: The Emigration from the Maritimes to Eastern Maine, 1880-1910," University of Maine at Orono.

49. Willis, *History of Portland*, 774. See also Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Lillian F. Loveitt, "The Social History of Portland, Maine from 1820-1840," The Special Collection, Folger Library, University of Maine at Orono; and Rosella A. Loveitt, "The Social History of Portland, Maine from 1840-1860," The Special Collection, Folger Library, University of Maine at Orono.

50. Compendium of the 10th Census of the United States (1880), Part I, p. 455; and 12th Census of the United States (1900), Vol. I, Population (Part I), pp. 800-03. Between 1860 and 1900 Portland's population nearly doubled from 26,341 to 50,145. The percentage of foreign-born remained at more than 20 percent, with fully 10,435 foreign-born persons in the city in 1900. Ireland was second among the top twelve countries in terms of contribution of immigrants to Portland in 1900: Canada (English) 3,968 (38%); Ireland 3,273 (31%); England 598; Canada (French) 408; Denmark 356; Russia 278; Norway 263; Sweden 231; Scotland 223; Poland 208; Germany 205; and Italy 148. It is also assumed that a sizable number of those from English-speaking maritime Canada, including New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Labrador, were themselves second-generation Irish.

51. John Neal, *Portland Illustrated* (Portland, Maine: W. S. Jones, Publs., 1874), 8-9.

profit from employing cheap labor, the influx of Irish Catholics into their essentially Yankee Protestant city was less than welcome.⁵² Their social and cultural concerns led to a pessimism that was at odds with John Neal's economic optimism. The increase in immigration in the mid- to late-nineteenth century must have been one further source of alarm for those older native Portlanders, portrayed by William Willis as dreaming of the halcyon days that were forever gone.

In the circle of our little town, the lines were drawn with much strictness. The higher classes were called the quality, and were composed of persons not engaged in mechanic employments. We now occasionally find some old persons whose memory recurs with longing delight to the days in which these formal distinctions held uncontrolled sway.⁵³

On the docks of Portland, Maine, the small black work force of the early- to mid-nineteenth century had been forced to yield to the numerically superior Irish. After 1880 as a second wave of Irish immigration was underway, again in the grips of yet another devastating famine, some of these Irish longshoremen decided to form the Portland Longshoremen's Benevolent Society (PLSBS).⁵⁴ One peripheral group had replaced another in this New England port city. This society would be exclusively white and predominantly Irish over the next century. It would strive, with a certain degree of success, to confront Portland's Yankee business elite in order to carve out for its ethnic membership a more secure occupational niche along the waterfront of their newly adopted home.

52. See Allan R. Whitmore, "'A Guard of Faithful Sentinels': Know Nothing Appeal in Maine, 1854-1855," *Maine Historical Society Quarterly*, 20, no. 3 (Winter 1981): 151-97.

53. William Willis, *History of Portland*, op. cit., p. 776.

54. Records of the PLSBS in the Maine Historical Society (Portland, Maine).