

# Engineering an Industrial Diaspora: Homestead, 1941

By Curtis Miner and Paul Roberts

Here is the story of a modern Acadia. It is the story of 9,000 men, women and children banished from their homes and from their towns, to wander about in search of a place to lay their heads....

— Gilbert Love, *Pittsburgh Press*

SINCE the beginning of steel production in Homestead, mill workers made their homes in the area between the railroad tracks and the river. For approximately 50 years this lower part of Homestead, dubbed “the Ward” by locals, had bustled with life. The earliest residents of German and English extraction gave way to an influx of East Europeans and blacks. These people slowly built a dynamic community rich in ethnic culture; their stores, bars, churches and homes embodied their values and past, as well as their poverty, and became the only life they knew outside the mill.

This changed in 1941. In June the U.S. government designated the Homestead Works for the nation’s single largest war time expansion of a steel-making facility. The \$86.3 million contract between the government’s Defense Plant Corporation and Carnegie-Illinois Steel, U.S. Steel’s subsidiary, provided some \$75 million in plant additions and construction contracts, delivering Homestead from the ravages of the Depression. But the mill expansion carried costs as well. The homes, churches and businesses in the Ward fell victim to the expansion. Nearly one-half of Homestead’s population was



Everyday life of women in a Ward courtyard, c. 1920.

dispersed in what government and local interest groups billed as an act of patriotism, a sacrifice for national defense. But a term such as patriotic sacrifice obscures the compulsory nature of this mass migration and the variety of reactions it caused. To many of the 1,566 families it uprooted, the expansion meant fear and confusion; many of them lamented to public assistance officials, “Where shall we go?”<sup>1</sup> To others the mill expansion meant new business opportunities and assured mill employment.

This paper addresses only part of the untold story. It focuses on the role of a set of national and local actors, both public and private, who engineered the diaspora by stressing the glories of patriotism and modernization while obscuring and limiting the reaction of displaced families. To a lesser extent this paper addresses some of the reactions and clashes inherent in an orchestrated migration.

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Michael Masley, seated in front, became the first Slovak-American to penetrate Homestead's political power structure when elected to borough council in 1921. Relying on close personal and kinship ties, Masley was prominent in Ward politics for more than a decade.



16 October 1941. With the largely residential Ward beside the mills, Homestead was the prototypical steel town during America's industrializing era.

At the national level, military leaders worked with industrial manufacturers to devise a financing scheme for producing more weapons for the war effort. But because this required new capacity at specific sites, powerful local interest groups had to become engaged. Affluent Homestead "civic leaders," and businessmen and local associations such as the Chamber of Commerce supported the plant expansion because it brought new investment into a local economy that they dominated. Both shared the same interest and concern for industrial strength and expansion. The demolition and relocation involved the Federal Works Administration as the key agency charged with providing housing for war time workers and also other federal and local housing agencies. Although the goals of these government, industry and business elites were generally complementary, New Deal government officials believed that only the federal government had the power to bridge the conflicts inherent in a capitalist system of competing interests.

Together, these groups comprised a force of

people and institutions that political scientist Robert Salisbury in 1964 called the "new convergence," a coalition of local government officials and "locally oriented economic interests" that he said have come to decide the general economic structure of modern urban areas. Salisbury says this coalition began to take shape during World War II, after New Deal urban aid programs opened opportunities for a new breed of "political entrepreneur." Expanding on this concept, political scientist John Mollenkopf identifies roughly the same members in his "progrowth coalitions," which he argues dominate America politically and socially. Historian Sam Hays has written extensively along the same lines about these government administrators and other professionals with a "wider" vision of society's needs. He calls them "cosmopolitans," and traces their origins to the Progressive reform movement of the early century.<sup>2</sup>

With government at the helm of the Homestead demolition and relocation, these forces relied on the age-old combination of themes: modernization and patriotism. Their ideology is exemplified by FWA Director John Carmody, who oversaw the national program for building war-time housing units. Local housing agencies took orders from Carmody's office, and hundreds of the Ward's displaced residents ended up in FWA units in Allegheny County. Carmody himself entered homes by radio in mid-1941 in a broadcast entitled "The United States Government is Building Thousands of Homes For Our National Defense Workers from Coast to Coast." The broadcast begins over sounds of hammering and sawing. A narrator exclaims: "Homes, homes, homes. Workers bring their families and some small factory towns are doubling or tripling their population." Then the FWA's chief continues: "We have been late in beginning to defend our freedom (against) Hitler and his allies.... In some places the need for private investment may seem too temporary or uncertain for private investment. Sometimes

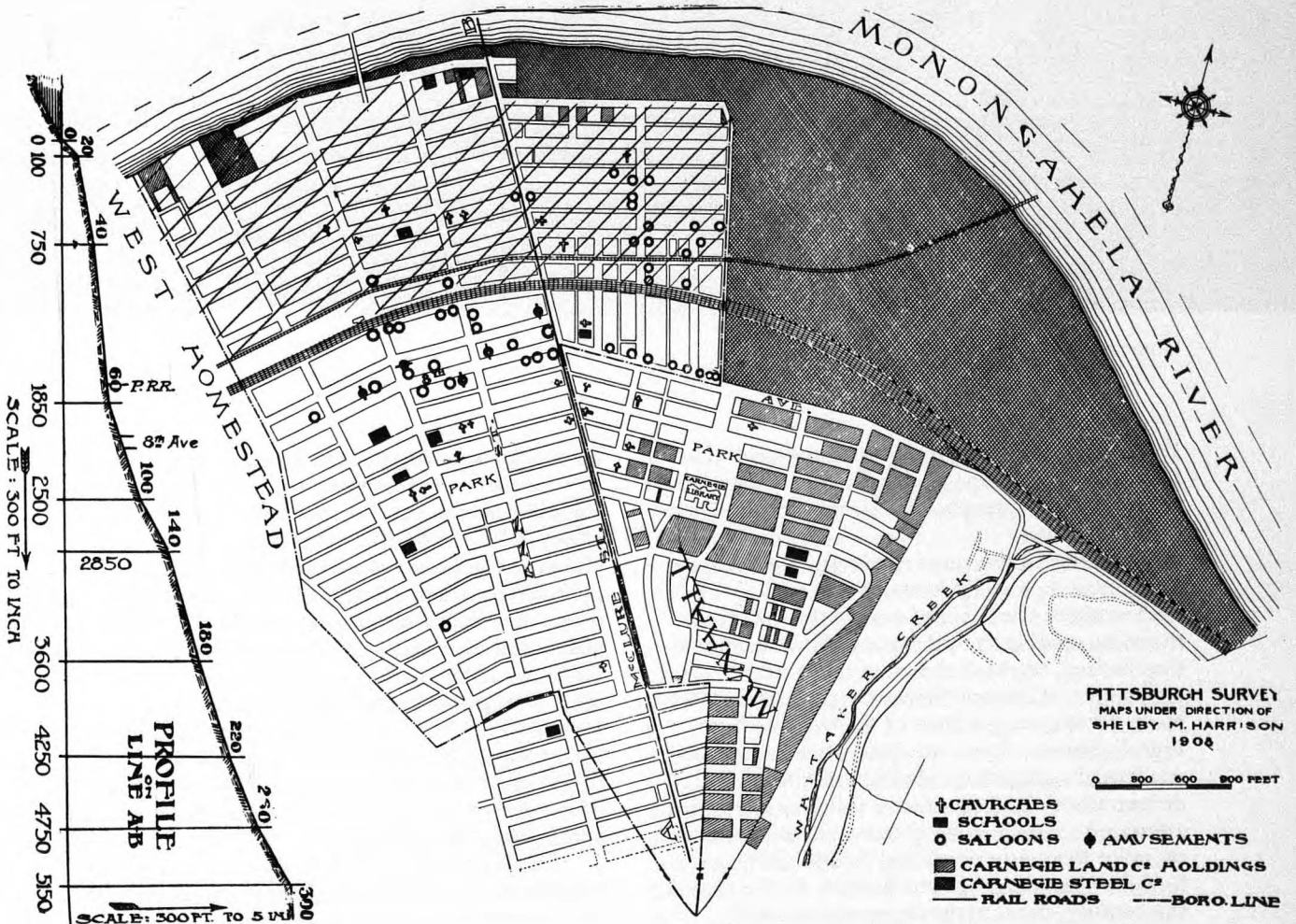


private enterprise is not prepared to operate on the scale required, and in general, the housing is required for comparatively low-income groups. And here the federal government steps in."<sup>3</sup>

Uprooted Homestead residents were relocated to government housing units, while others found new homes on their own. The final body count to clear the 121-acre site included more than 8,000 displaced people, some 1,363 buildings, 12 churches, five schools, two convents, an estimated 28 saloons, and countless groceries, confectionaries and small businesses.<sup>4</sup> During the next three years, lower Homestead would be transformed into one of the most powerful industrial workshops on the

homefront. The Ward, which in its 50 year life served as a first home to thousands whose families now populate greater Pittsburgh, was literally wiped from the map. One newspaper following the unfolding human drama called the evacuation a modern "Acadia"; another more embittered witness likened the manner of human removal to Nazi deportations.<sup>5</sup>

The area cleared for the new mills represented the prototypical world "below the tracks." Nearly every mill town dotting the Monongahela Valley featured similar concentrated areas of settlement.



Map adapted from Margaret Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*, 1910. The striped area represents the Ward and roughly the area torn down to make way for the mill expansion in 1941. Although the number of churches, schools, saloons, etc., changed in the intervening 31 years, the Ward's general boundaries did not.





Homestead, 15 June 1942

The working class neighborhoods in Braddock, Duquesne, McKeesport, and Clairton all developed at roughly the same pace and because of the same historical forces.

Until the 1890s, most of Homestead's population gravitated toward lower Homestead. For early steel workers, the flat land next to the mill made the most sensible site for homes. With transportation limited, the level terrain of the Ward and its proximity to Carnegie Steel were preferable to the more distant, steep terrain of the hilltops above Eighth Avenue. There was little desire, either, for residential segregation. Homestead was small and decentralized, its nascent steel and glass industries attracting a largely homogeneous skilled workforce of native born Americans and "older" immigrants from northern and western Europe. By the turn of the century, though, the reorganization and growth of Carnegie's steel empire and the flood tide of new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe altered the Ward's character. Conditions that interested earlier immigrants attracted new ones, most too poor to afford the newly mecha-

nized transportation — first streetcars and later automobiles — to emerging suburban areas, or the suburban land prices. Meanwhile, those who could afford to left the Ward, pulled by the space, cleanliness and homogeneity of the hilltops and pushed by hordes of new faces speaking foreign tongues, with strange customs, in the older, dirtier, noisier and increasingly more congested streets under the smoke-belching mills.<sup>6</sup> By the 1920s, more immigrants had stirred the ethnic mix. Hundreds of blacks, part of the great migration from the rural south to northern industrial cities, joined other black families in the Ward who had been hired by management earlier to break strikes at the Homestead Works.

These economic and demographic changes left Homestead a bifurcated town in almost every way — economically, socially, politically and culturally. Boarding houses and immigrant courts characterized the Ward; single family dwellings were more common in the hilltops. Skilled machinists, prosperous Eighth Avenue businessmen, and middle class professionals claimed real estate above the



main street; unskilled and semi-skilled employees of Carnegie Steel dominated below the tracks. Residence and occupation, though, were only two indicators of Homestead's split social personality. By 1910, the town's population stood at about 18,700, with an industrial proletariat in the Ward that was emphatically Eastern European and Catholic.<sup>7</sup> As older immigrants and Protestant skilled workers left, they took their cultural baggage along. The Ward's last white Protestant church is believed to have headed for the hills in 1914.<sup>8</sup> A Russian Orthodox church reclaimed the building.

The immigrant working class nature of the Ward was reaffirmed, with characteristic progressive zeal, by outside observers. To social workers compiling the Pittsburgh Survey in 1907, the Ward embodied the social evils endemic to rapid industrialization and urbanization. They felt overcrowding and poor sanitation could be remedied with thoughtful, scientific reform. But they also saw a moral decay that seemed irreversible: the preponderance of transient male immigrants was fertile

ground for a culture buoyed by filthy living quarters, saloons, squalid gambling dens and scores of cheap brothels. Vice in lower Homestead had become as legendary as the town's steel. An equally corrupt political machine ensured that the immigrant vote would be cast in its proper place.<sup>9</sup>

Well after reformers were around to notice, though, the face of lower Homestead began to change. By the 1920s, prostitution and gambling still colored nightlife, especially on Sixth Avenue, but other sections had evolved into well defined urban villages and immigrant sectors. Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, Lithuanians, Russians and blacks all found space below the tracks.<sup>10</sup> So, too, did their houses of worship and fraternity. A dozen churches, in all shapes and sizes, almost all Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox or black Baptist found niches. Fifth Avenue reflected the relative prosperity of an ethnic middle class.<sup>11</sup> Moving west from Dickson Street, social and athletic clubs represented most nationality groups: the Lithuanian Club, Turner Hall (German), Sokol Hall (Slovak), Rusin People's Home (Carpatho Ruthenian). A plethora





Deputy Federal Loan Administrator Joseph H. Rice, representing the Defense Plant Corporation, closed the first home purchase 30 July 1941. He congratulates Walter V. Barauskas, who holds a check for \$5,500. The Barauskas family (the *Messenger* identified the wife only as "Mrs. Barauskas") lived at 342 Fourth Avenue. Three children grew up in the six-room frame house bought in 1914. The *Messenger* said Walter had worked at the Homestead Works since 1904. The man at the far left wasn't identified.

of small shops, mostly owned by Slavic entrepreneurs, dotted the mixed lower and middle class neighborhood.

These conditions set up a striking contrast with upper Homestead and neighboring Munhall. While the Ward's growth and change were decentralized and haphazard, the hilltops in Homestead and much of Munhall reflected more careful urban development. Homestead was hardly a "company town" in the nineteenth century sense: no company store, limited company sponsored housing, etc. Meanwhile, Carnegie Steel bestowed on Munhall the rewards of its industrial wealth. The company built an endowed library there; its land company zoned a portion of Nineteenth Avenue for solid, middle management company built housing; land

around the library was saved for a well manicured park; and the superintendent got an elaborately designed mansion.

Carnegie Steel did expend some effort to control the shape of the Ward, too. In 1913, for example, it built and financed a local playground on Second Avenue. The library also sent missionaries into foreign quarters and established temporary cultural outposts in the Ward for the distribution of books and good middle class morality.<sup>12</sup> But the dynamic culture of the Ward outstripped the corporation's ability to impose its own notion of order. While company and middle class professionals secured the upper ground, newer arrivals shaped the community in the flats according to their own priorities and tastes.

When one enters town via the Homestead High Level Bridge today, nearly all of the area where mill buildings are now visible on the left side of the bridge, between the river and the railroad tracks at Sixth Avenue, was once residential. This area, lower Homestead, was rubble by the spring of 1942. Carnegie

Steel began an industrial makeover that would end with 80 new buildings and 30 new miles of rail. Construction began 12 March 1942. The new furnaces fired in June 1943 did not reach full production until November. The armor forging mill came on line in August, while other new mills did not start until early 1944.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, full production came only when the war was three-fourths over. The now empty Rusin People's Home, converted to a general office building by the steel company, remains as the only physical evidence of the "other Homestead."

The Defense Plant Corporation, established in August 1940 to finance production of industrial material for military uses, managed the mill expansion project. This federal bureaucracy, a wing of the



Reconstruction Finance Corporation, had grown out of a union between New Dealers and big business in the midst of a national defense frenzy.<sup>14</sup> While the government preferred to see private capital invested during the defense mobilization period, steel was one of a handful of industries in need of coaxing. As a "mature" industry, it had already experienced the pangs of overcapacity and was therefore reluctant to build new facilities, especially for specialized products of use only in wartime.<sup>15</sup> So, the government agreed to finance new steel capacity, especially for integrated and finishing steel. The DPC experienced, according to one observer, "little difficulty" in negotiating with U.S. Steel for additions to existing plants. By the war's end, U.S. Steel ranked third among all corporations receiving DPC assistance, worth about \$372 million.<sup>16</sup>

The government termed the Homestead Works a "scrambled facility" — an existing steel operation slated for additions. The War Production Board, which guided the defense buildup, consulted with Navy Secretary Frank Knox and other leaders of government and industry and designated Homestead as the primary facility to supply the Navy's "Speed Up Program." In the New Deal's bureaucratic maze, the Board then "sponsored" the plant expansion before the DPC's board of directors in Washington. On 17 July 1941, the DPC board approved the contract. The same contract approved expansions at the company's Duquesne Works, and called for the two plants to produce a total of 1.8 million tons of steel for armor plate, ship plate, heavy forgings and other products.<sup>17</sup> By the time the DPC was disbanded 1 July 1945, it had financed some \$7.3 billion worth of new industrial capacity at 2,300 sites. Although the money loaned to industry was to be repaid through rental or "lease-back" agreements with the DPC, the agency never recovered some \$5.1 billion. The government essentially forgave the debts because most of the money was tied up in capacity that became idle after the war. In fact, by the war's end, the government owned 20 to 25 percent of the nation's manufacturing capacity.<sup>18</sup>

Rumors of a possible expansion at Homestead had circulated for months before the announcement. The injection of federal dollars into the area's economy was bound to attract much attention, and one letter from FWA Director Carmody attests to the nascent coalition New Deal Democrats were building through their new federal programs. Sent to Pittsburgh's David Lawrence, the letter is addressed to him and the Democratic National Committee. "By how much rumour precedes fact, only time will tell," Carmody wrote to "my dear Mr. Lawrence" on 10 April 1941. "If houses are

built there will be some architectural work. I hope... they will be good architects and good draftsmen, experienced in low cost housing..."<sup>19</sup> Lawrence was an early FDR supporter who would rise to national prominence in the party as Pittsburgh's mayor.

By late July, armed with money disbursed by the Cleveland Federal Reserve Bank, Carnegie-Illinois began approaching property owners in hopes of quick sales. The DPC and Carnegie-Illinois predicted that lower Homestead would be razed in two or three weeks, but demolition deadlines had to be continually reset.<sup>20</sup> In the end, dismantling a way of life that had taken a half century to build took six months.

Several factors caused the delay. A major one involved confusion over land titles and who — steel company men and/or DPC engineers — could legally represent the DPC in negotiations to buy plots of land. An amended resolution on 16 October 1941 to the DPC's original authorization consisted of 14 stipulations about the project (and a similar number for the Duquesne project), all dealing with issues of proper title to land parcels in the Ward. The revised contract required that DPC Chief Counsel Hans von Klagsbrunn's staff review and verify in writing all property deeds transferred at the Homestead site. It also required a written guarantee from "Union Title Guaranty Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania... to insure the portion of the Homestead Site covered by said deed or deeds" for the purchase price.<sup>21</sup> This abetted government efforts in dealing with the intransigence of the few landowners who had held out. The final page of the amended contract allowed DPC officials in Allegheny County "to sign notices of eviction" and other legal papers for "the prompt acquisition by this Corporation of title and/or possession" of parcels in Homestead.<sup>22</sup> Other official correspondence and a telegram that Klagsbrunn sent some three months later suggest common problems at DPC projects nationally. "Please forward by wire list as of today of all Defense Plant Corporation projects in your agency for which disbursement resolutions have been received authorizing acquisition of plant sites but title to site has not yet (sic) vested in DPC." The telegram was sent to all project chiefs nationally.<sup>23</sup> Serious confusion at the federal level resulted from the shortage of personnel, changes in site engineering procedures, and a quantum leap in war-time work. The DPC never did compile an itemized record of all the properties bought.<sup>24</sup>

Finding temporary or permanent housing for nearly 1,600 families also delayed the demolition.<sup>25</sup> While the land buy-outs were occurring, federal officials were working across the country to develop



John Masley, right, with a friend at the Slavish American Literary Club at 325 Fifth Avenue, c. 1925. Masley served as a club officer. Fraternal clubs were an important part of community life wiped out by the mill expansion.

a government housing program for weapons plant workers and their families. Bitter wrangling in Congress over the appropriate extent of governmental competition with private builders caused another set of delays in federal action after passage in 1940 of the Lanahm Act, which set up the war housing program.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, in Allegheny County, a severe housing shortage in the nation's key steel region hampered production and created a defense emergency. In an *American Cities* magazine article in 1941, Brent Hovde, director of the Pittsburgh Housing Authority, pegged the county's housing vacancies at 1 percent. A nationwide shortage of building materials aggravated the problem. Government authorities blamed the housing shortage for the sluggish progress of the mill project because relocated Homesteaders competed with the thousands of new migrants flooding the area to fill positions in the weapons industry. At the time of the planned demolition, four housing projects were being built to accommodate war workers: River-view Homes in West Mifflin, 450; Terrace Village

in Pittsburgh allotted 450 units; Munhall Homesteads in Munhall, 397; and Glen Hazel Heights in Glen Hazel, 600.<sup>27</sup> As of late 1941, some 5,000 units were being built for arms industry workers in Allegheny County, more than anywhere else in America.<sup>28</sup>

Confusion among inhabitants of the Ward and some resistance also figured in the delay. Although they mounted no massive protests, some residents held out even under the threat of eviction. As late as mid-December, 85 properties had not been sold to the steel company.<sup>29</sup> One explanation for the lack of organized protest rests on what the newspaper reported as "fair prices" being paid to landowners. Threat of eviction and lack of choice, however, remained the reality to these residents. The extra effort by the demolition leaders to move these people points to a degree of emotional resistance, although most residents acquiesced when faced with the futility of the situation.

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With the DPC leading, federal and local agen-

cies provided the “wider view” and “larger scale” organization that New Deal administrators saw as necessary for the project to succeed. Since new mills were built, the steel company assumed a major role in engineering the project. But since demolition was closely linked to availability of housing, agencies under control of Carmody’s FWA (until mid-1942, when responsibility went to another bureaucracy) were drawn into the alliance. Local officials of the federal Homes Registration Office, the Pittsburgh City Housing Authority and especially the Allegheny County Housing Authority began in July 1941 to play important roles.

So great was the county housing authority’s influence and responsibility that it grew into a large bureaucracy during the war. Organized in 1938 with three employees, its payroll stood at 244 six years later. It provided low-rent dwellings for some 5,500 families and 22,000 individuals working for at least 90 area firms.<sup>30</sup> Directing the authority’s board in 1944 were a Pittsburgh city councilman and well-known trade union leader (Edward Leonard); a mayor and CIO unionist (Clairton’s John Mullen); a prominent female civic leader (Adeline Barnes); a department store vice president and Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce director (A.H. Burchfield Jr.); and a druggist (Donald C. Jefferson). Other war-time board members included a Pittsburgh architect, a prominent Homestead realtor, a Braddock banker and the McKeesport postmaster.<sup>31</sup>

These are people with exactly the class orientation and occupations that political scientist Salisbury has observed led the “new convergence”: “professional workers in city-related programs and locally oriented economic interests”<sup>32</sup> such as “major banks, utilities, railroads, department stores, large real estate firms [and] local newspapers.” Places such as Homestead were fertile ground for this business-government coalition because, as Salisbury notes, such forces had a “growing concern with that congeries of problems labeled ‘core city decay.’”<sup>33</sup> This part of the article will address the campaign that cosmopolitan elites designed to assure widespread compliance, blending appeals to patriotism with calls for modernizing Homestead; they saw “slum clearance” as a chief means of modernization. “Slum clearance” also gave reform-minded government officials the chance to introduce the working class to healthier “suburban” living conditions that middle class reformers had come to prefer for themselves.

Our research on Homestead spans eight decades, but the study of the town’s war years suggests that cosmopolitans had no genuine contempt for the urban village; they often were just insensitive or ignorant about life there. In addition, while con-

gressional commitment and funding for low-income housing programs advocated by New Deal reformers was spotty in the late 1930s, the Lanham Act provided a glimmer of hope. This reform contingent, led by Nathan Straus, head of the United States Housing Authority, realized that proceeding with a program for weapons plant workers was perhaps the only way to sustain a commitment to housing the urban poor. In reality, of course, industrial workers and the urban poor were often the same group.<sup>34</sup>

Obviously there was no monolith of opinion. Far from it. As the war wore on, a battle raged nationally among people in federal and local housing agencies and their associations — people whom historian John Bauman has called “housers” — about how social reformers, urban planners and business and real estate interests would reach their varied goals through federal low income and war housing programs.<sup>35</sup> In Homestead, the tenement housing that many people considered a representative blight came to stand for many other features of urban culture than dwellings. Cosmopolitans sought to alter values tied to obstinately old world



The typical Ward home was a two- or three-story frame structure.



community life that, according to their perceptions, contributed to moral decay. But being unaware of the real fabric of this culture — unable to see its certain strengths and subtle complexities — advocates of cosmopolitanism slighted the neighborhood for obvious features, such as saloons, brothels and crowded immigrant courts. While the way in which the Ward's demolition and the resulting housing program were handled invites comparisons with earlier progressive reform movements,<sup>36</sup> the events are also a harbinger of the progrowth coalitions' styles that have marked America's post-war development. At Homestead in 1941, the "public interest" was waging war, but the public interest would be redefined four years later, four miles downstream, for the start of the Pittsburgh Renaissance.<sup>37</sup>

Government agencies sold the razing of property and the relocation of Homestead residents as a sacrifice akin to food and gas rationing. The first message was that industrial strength equalled military strength. A prefatory passage to one government publication circulated in the Homestead area was titled "Works for the Freedom of the World" and it poetically reaffirmed the connection between industrial and military might. Thanks largely to "natural resources" and "skilled intellect," Western Pennsylvania was "destined to become the keystone to the arsenal of democracy." The same passage compared the courage of "its 130,000 soldiers of freedom" to the work of the region's "400,000 soldiers of production."<sup>38</sup> Another government broadside showed steelworkers transforming steel bars into missiles on the battlefield.

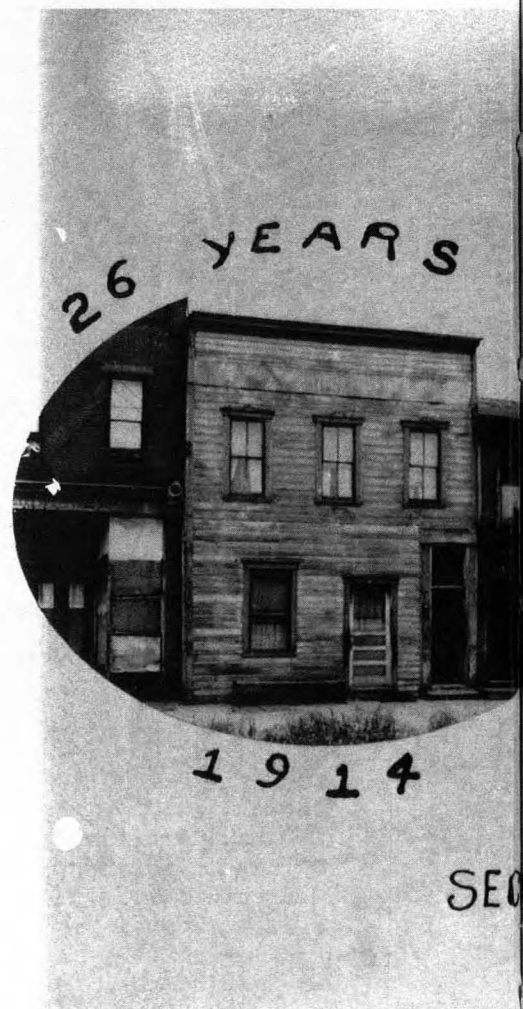
With Homestead's armor plate production, linking

industrial output to a buttressed war machine was not implausible. Couching human relocation to government projects as a patriotic act, though, was more tenuous. Nonetheless, the propaganda mills worked overtime. Indeed, a government sponsored summary bulletin, "Victory on the Homes Front," suggested nothing short of the idea that the demolition of homes meant the destruction of the Nazi war machine:

Allegheny County is rich in mills...but poor in housing.... Our housing program has smashed the barriers to that goal. Here are forged the mighty weapons for victory on the battlefield. Here too are built the dwellings for Victory on the Homes Front.<sup>39</sup>

FWA Director Carmody, at the forefront of the media blitz, had a similar idea in his 1941 radio message. Building new quarters for war workers, he said, "will help our national morale.... We must use our whole national strength in the struggle to maintain democracy. When we think of defense homes, we will think of ships and tanks and airplanes...." And with those thoughts, he said, will come reassurance about the "United States of America holding its historic place in the world." Eleanor Roosevelt's 4 September 1941 dedication of Riverview Homes, the first local project, symbolized this relationship between the patriotic defense of democracy and freedom and the slum clearance program.

Occasionally public pronouncements about slum clearance were linked to the corporate mechanisms responsible, historically, for industrial workers' poverty, of which inadequate housing was only one symptom. In "Victory on the Homes Front," the county



housing authority noted that more than 500,000 people in Allegheny County "live in slums not by choice but by necessity." Furthermore, it admitted that the same dynamics that made Pittsburgh "the workshop of the world" prevented good housing. Developing industries created "depressing company housing"; smoky mills made the low lying areas inhospitable for "residential use." Finally "very low incomes" forced a bifurcation between the density of population in the flats and the relative sparsity of growing suburban hilltops. Only public housing, the agency concluded, could "rescue" the thou-



After six moves between 1905 and 1914, the Second Baptist Church found a home on Sixth Avenue, in Homestead's red light district. In 1924, the black congregation bought the United Presbyterian Church building at Fourth and Amity Streets and remained there until the mill expansion in 1941. They sold their church to the government for \$35,000. Rev. Morton headed the congregation from 1914 to 1951. The church is now on Twelfth Avenue in Homestead.

sands "condemned to live and die" in core city slums.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, workers not easily convinced faced the ultimate brand. Shortly after Pearl Harbor's bombing, A.H. Mercer, head of the local Homes Registration Office, took advantage of the national mood to inveigh against the 80-plus property owners still in the Ward. Stubborn families were "absolutely unpatriotic" in Mercer's estimation. "By such an attitude, they delay and hinder the war effort of the nation."<sup>41</sup>

Here is where "slum clearance" fit into the equation. Certainly anyone familiar with

the Pittsburgh region could be persuaded that the valley contained a lot of substandard housing. On the basis of scattered property surveys conducted through New Deal programs, the housing authority estimated about 40 percent of the county's housing was below the national average in condition. In a report to Allegheny County commissioners, ACHA Director Leonard emphasized that the underlying "objective" of slum clearance was "being reached." Defense housing, he argued, supplied a "blueprint" for "happier living for every family in need of a better

home."<sup>42</sup> Carmody, in his 1941 radio appeal, said: "No organization has ever attempted to build 50,000 homes simultaneously in 200 cities at an average of less than \$3,000 each." What's more, he said, "the houses we are constructing are fit to live in, too. They are provided with civilized, modern conveniences."

But timing a renewed attack on slums with the push for war worker housing is puzzling, given that Margaret Byington first addressed substandard housing in Homestead for the 1907 Pittsburgh Survey. Her findings attracted considerable attention but no government or

private money until 1938, when the county housing authority was charged, through the United States Housing Authority, with replacing slums with low income housing. But as mentioned, congressional attacks on the budget made a sustained effort impossible. By 1941, the county housing agency had cleared few slums and had built eight projects, but its list of projects grew to 22 by the war's end, 16 under the rubric of "defense housing." The fact is that war time priorities, not urban squalor, prompted the strongest actions.<sup>43</sup>

Organized labor was an early supporter of federal housing programs, not only because urban union families were among those most in need of decent housing,<sup>44</sup> but with their strong trade union membership and links to the Democratic Party, their members had an inside track on contracts in any government financed building boom. Leonard was perhaps the most visible personality in ACHA negotiations for slum clearance. A New Deal Democrat, Leonard was a one-time political crony of David Lawrence and a self-styled populist popular in working class wards in his own area of East Liberty. Before election to council, he was active in the local plasterers' union, and even after appointment to the ACHA, retained his position as the secretary of the Building Trades Council, a group of construction craft unions. (A similar relationship between union builders and housing agencies in Detroit led to a political scandal in the early 1940s.)

Carnegie-Illinois' motives were especially fascinating. Company spokesmen were careful not to suggest private gain from the federal investment and increased industrial output. As managers of the "arsenal of democracy," the company's inertia and participation was driven by national interest, but applying the power of eminent domain<sup>45</sup> for slum clearance, to mobilize the defense industry, was a godsend for Carnegie-Illinois. Since the turn of the century, the company had operated along the river in Munhall, but as operations expanded early in the century, real estate near river and roadway access points became valuable. During World War I, the company secured riverfront property in West Homestead almost a mile away, but the two mill sites remained unconnected. In between sat the Ward, which lined nearly eight blocks of riverfront property. Stubborn property owners refused to move, and demanded, according to the company, exorbitant prices. In one surprisingly candid moment, a county housing authority report summarized Carnegie-Illinois' dilemma, and the resolution for the homes below Sixth Avenue:

Efforts to buy adjoining properties failed. The company had given up hope of joining its two mill



By the 1920s, Homestead was a two-industry town. One was steel, the other vice, which was tacitly sanctioned by Homestead's political establishment. Evelyn Marshall Robinson, a leading entrepreneur in the Ward's red light district, married Councilman Michael Masley.

sections because owners demanded prohibitive land prices. The war made a difference. The war needed steel. Steel companies had large orders, but limited facilities. These homes were in the way of expanded mill facilities and the homes had to go.<sup>46</sup>

In the end, theories about the ideology ascribed to cosmopolitans flow from the obvious: these people had the power and influence to pursue their own ends, and while their interests weren't always the same, slum clearance was the corner at which the actors all met.

Behind the narrow definitions of suitable housing lies the fact that in the countless surveys marshalled to identify "slums," not a single report was filed that examined the quality of life in the Ward, something equivalent to a modern environmental impact survey. (Neither the federal nor local housing agencies employed sociologists.) Yet some



outside observers seemed cognizant of the complex social issues involved in relocating residents from the condemned areas. A six part series in Fall 1941 by Gilbert Love, a young reporter with the *Pittsburgh Press*, explored the impact of the relocation with surprising candor. One academic observer formulated a more sophisticated analysis. A study by Joseph H. Louchheim, a sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, identified the most glaring problems. Early delays in getting the demolition done, he noted, were not the result of financial strain on the residents; Carnegie-Illinois had used federal funds "generously." Rather, he faulted local and federal agencies not just because of a shortage of government housing but also because the housing that was open was incompatible with the social profile of the population being shifted.<sup>47</sup>

(This sort of analysis is common in modern environmental impact surveys.) Louchheim focused on particularly acute obstacles for blacks, an issue addressed later in this article.

As the relocation proceeded, advocates of modernization within Homestead began to exert a strong influence. They saw a rosy picture of economic recovery. The advocates — mill managers, various professionals and affluent businessmen — generally were clustered above Eighth Avenue. These hilltop residents also looked beyond the impact on the Ward because, in short, they could afford to. They believed the mill expansion, regardless of the immediate costs, would favor the borough as a whole: it guaranteed a larger tax base, much-needed investment and long term prosperity. They, of course, were literally beyond reach of the most pressing side effects of demolition.

The reaction of the local Chamber of Commerce was characteristic. A *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* story on the new president of the "young but hustling" Homestead Chamber revealed the organization was already

estimating more than \$2 million in new payroll income. Businessmen, the article concluded, were "watching Recovery rolling down the street with a capital R." (Some *Homestead Daily Messenger* articles suggest the Chamber gave qualified support to the expansion because it feared losing as customers Ward residents who shopped on Eighth Avenue.) But the tone of articles about the new money in town generally conveyed local merchants' faith in consumer behavior. Good times had already resulted in "brides, new homes, new cars," one article noted. Heralding 1950s-style fixations with "modern" and "time-saving" consumer goods, the article said the new mill would maintain Eighth Avenue's reputation as a bustling district which the chamber represented. In editorials, the *Messenger* admonished local and national critics of the demoli-



Office of Negro Welfare Work at the Homestead Works, May 1918. This office oversaw employment, housing and personnel issues for the company's black workers.

tion and attacked property owners who quibbled with Carnegie-Illinois about purchase prices. One article used the razing of several saloons to make light of the Ward's "culture." Noting the first demolition that took three Slovak owned saloons, the *Messenger* quipped that the DPC had "a Carrie Nation complex."

Adding on to the Homestead and Duquesne works provided hundreds of new construction industry jobs for the lower Mon Valley. In Homestead, accommodating the new facilities brought about \$1 million in improvements to the borough's electricity distribution grid, \$2.1 million in new streets and transportation additions, and some \$1.6 for the water supply system.<sup>48</sup>

But just as cosmopolitans when calling certain areas "slums" failed to distinguish cultural components from the term's structural meaning, the Chamber and other groups tended to view economic recovery in a petty bourgeois vacuum. Payroll money might indeed revive existing businesses that catered to middle class tastes. But in the Ward, the destruction wiped out the structure of life upon which confectionaries and saloons, the two major small businesses below the tracks, were based. Even if those mom and pop stores found new homes, they would have been hard pressed to recover the social and cultural configurations of the neighborhoods that made their businesses possible. This failure was entirely consistent with the historical relationship between people of the two Homesteads. While empirical indicators did not always support sharp distinctions, perceptions did. Residents recall being identified according to residence; being from "below the tracks" carried with it a social and class stigma up until the mill expansion itself. The hilltops, in short, looked down on lower Homestead in more ways than one.<sup>49</sup> While the division was not total — there were scattered Catholic churches and saloons in the hilltops — upper Homestead looked to its well-tended homes as an indication of its middle class "American" status. By 1940, many of its residents were conditioned to dismiss the working class ethnic Ward, increasingly foreign to them, as a "slum."

A 1937 realtors' survey, done at the direction of the Federal Home Loan Bank System, provides fascinating insight because it is based not on empirical data, but rather the dominant realtors' opinions of various factors affecting land prices. J.C. Kuhn, a Homestead real estate agent active in Eighth Avenue business affairs, headed up the team that surveyed Homestead and Munhall. The survey is divided into four parts. Starting from the Ward and going up the hill, reports get progressively "better." In the Ward area "many houses have two and three families living in two or three rooms.

Rents were not collectible when mills were shut down... Good possibility of ground between river and RR being purchased by industry..." Banks would not loan money for home purchases there. The average home was "50 to 60" years old and in "poor repair," with a \$3,500 "predominating" market price, down from \$7,500 in 1929; "good" rental demand. Estimated average annual family incomes ranged from \$800 to \$1,800. "Inhabitants: Common and skilled labor type." Noted were "35 percent infiltrating blacks," (in Squirrel Hill, surveyors called the situation "threatening Jewish") and a "50 percent mixture of foreign-born nationalities. Relief families heavy." Detrimental influences were listed: "Smoke from steel mills. Houses are overcrowded; mixture of population." Perhaps most interesting of all is "Favorable influences: Near employment — convenient to shopping district on 8th Ave." (Emphasis added; the convenience that mattered to these realtors was that which benefitted Eighth Avenue merchants, not retailers in the Ward.)

Property prices were slightly higher in the area starting up the hill from Eighth Avenue, with a lower rate of "infiltration by foreign-negro," an extra \$200 in family incomes, "somewhat limited" mortgage funds and a "static trend of desirability" as opposed to the "downward" grade given to the Ward. Farther still up the hill, the relief family load was "moderate," home prices averaged about \$7,500, incomes hit \$3,500 ("many mill superintendents and better paid office employees live here"), and most homes were for single families. "Favorable influences: Near employment, near Park and Library. Good class of populace." As for Munhall, one can almost feel the sunny attitude: "Suburban atmosphere. Convenient location near employment and shopping district. Good elevation." The inhabitants were "white collar — skilled" with family incomes up to \$4,000, no blacks, new brick homes costing \$8,500 and a slowly increasing population. In Munhall, there was also infiltration — by "desirables."<sup>50</sup>

It should come as no surprise, given the number of "undersirables" among the "soldiers of production," that Munhall Borough Council originally fought a proposed government housing project there. Mifflin Township followed suit. More affluent communities were, like upper Homestead, anxious to see the slums bulldozed but less enthusiastic about taking responsibility for the casualties. The projects, the *Messenger* observed 16 October 1941, "...would result in a lower tax base. They are putting up these barracks in a residential district made up of a pretty good class of property."

Eventually the federal government had to force both towns to accept the projects.

*Day Dreaming*

No love affair has torn my heart  
 Yet I grow sad whenever I start  
 To think back on by childhood years  
 My home, my chums, the smiles and tears,  
 The alley where we'd meet each day,  
 The rough and ready games we'd play!

I see myself at the age of four  
 The day I met the girl next door  
 We learned how much a friendship means  
 And palled together through our teens  
 Beneath the glowing corner lamp  
 We'd meet each night and start our tramp  
 To high school games, perhaps a show  
 (Wherever my pal went -I'd go)

But that is past, the curtains close  
 On all my childhood years and those  
 Dear days I spent below "The Track"  
 Are memories that come crowding back.

In college now I make new friends  
 And hope before my school life ends  
 Old Father Time will somehow ease  
 The pain of lonely memories.

—Reflecting upon her childhood in the Ward,  
 Deloris Sedlak Jackson wrote this poem while  
 in college in the early 1940s.

Although many of the Ward's residents felt they recieved a "fair price" for their home, most expressed regret at leaving. By 1941, the average resident had lived there 25 years and felt deeply rooted in the community.<sup>51</sup>

To what degree the diaspora engineers' packaged message influenced the residents' decisions is nearly impossible to measure. At the least, feelings about patriotism, employment opportunities and slum clearance undoubtedly helped to mute protest—by providing residents with a variety of immediate considerations. Residents encouraged to think of the Ward clearance as an important gesture to the "boys overseas" often expressed sentiments similar to those of Elizabeth Keiger. With seven sons, Keiger felt it would be unfair to "make a fuss" while some of her boys fought the good war, a popular expression of patriotism observed by other researchers of the war.<sup>52</sup> Since most of the Ward's residents were connected to the defense plant, they also saw the expanded mill as

ensured employment, particularly for returning sons and husbands. Other Homesteaders felt attracted to the cleaner, more attractive homes and welcomed the opportunity to shake off their working class stigma.

The responses seem to vary along generational and occupational lines. The younger residents who desired to assimilate — not unusual for second generation ethnic people — looked more favorably on modernizing aspects of the project, while older residents tended to suffer over the uprooting, although such responses have not been systematically tabulated.<sup>53</sup> The politicians, clergy and small businessmen of the Ward, having much at stake, felt more threatened by the demolition than did many of the mill workers. Although they may have disagreed on some issues, the clergy and small shop owners understood that their success rested on the ability to service a constituency, and this service rested upon highly personal contacts. Consequently, these ethnic middlemen took the lead in dealing with the problems of the demolition.

The political leaders of the Ward, for example, attempted to ameliorate the immediate impact of the demolition by focusing on the location of the dispersed residents and the timetable. The diaspora meant the loss of two entire wards and parts of two others — six out of ten borough council seats. It also meant the dismantling of a well defined voting bloc catered to by Ward bosses. Some voters would be absorbed above Eighth Avenue, but the balance would leave Homestead. With bulldozers at the ready, reversing the federal government's decision appeared unlikely. Shortly after the mill expansion was announced, borough council sent Burgess John McLean to Washington to lobby on behalf of local residents. The subject of the trip was to reiterate pressing needs of future homeless and to receive federal funds for local government projects. The otherwise altruistic proposal, though, carried more obvious political overtones. The project, according to McLean, should be built within the borough's boundaries so "residents could continue to play their part in the patriotic effort."<sup>54</sup> His effort brought a new injection of federal housing aid, but no projects were built in Homestead.

Perhaps more than any other identifiable group, black leaders were motivated by concerns beyond the simple loss of constituency. Their problems were more fundamental because the most conveniently located government housing tended to exclude blacks on racial or occupational criteria. Munhall Homesteads, for example, was a white only project set aside for weapons industry workers. Of the approximately 1,400 blacks in lower Homestead, less than half fell in such occupational categories, well below the rate of whites.<sup>55</sup> Blacks



seeking space in government projects, therefore, would have to go to the few integrated projects outside the district, and then only if they worked in the mill. As housing problems for blacks in the demolition zone grew more acute, the ACHA caved in to public pressure and classified all "demolition victims," regardless of occupational status, as weapons industry workers.

Most blacks occupied substandard housing closest to the mill, although some attained a degree of affluence through the Ward's underground economy.<sup>56</sup> Churches such as Second Baptist also added a cultural and social cohesiveness to the black community (the Ward's only remaining Protestant denominations were black Baptist and AME churches, most established by Southern migrants), and there was a community center, the McClure House.

In mid-October 1941, a group called the Homestead Civic League, apparently a loose coalition of black community leaders, sent a committee to Washington to lobby on behalf of Homestead's blacks. Their major concern was the prohibitive public housing process.

They pointed out that the process discriminated against non-defense workers, single mothers, and welfare relief families — those most in need of assistance and least likely to receive it. The same group sought to ensure that black culture would find a place after demolition.<sup>57</sup> In late October, the McClure House was ordered closed. The Civic League protested the closing and received a guarantee that it would be reopened in another location not far from the original sight.

Many Ward residents were not comfortable with dismissing the neighborhood of their forebearers — and their churches and fraternal halls — as a slum district. People writing in Pittsburgh papers predicted the demolition would "breakup...lifelong associations," and force oldtimers to "take up residence in some strange new community." Churches and fraternal associations drew their life blood from the culture of the Ward, but churches played an even larger role in community life because they often included schools. In both structure and congregation, St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church at Third and Dickson was the largest house of worship below the tracks. Founded in 1908, its history reflected the climb to respectability and middle class status of its Slovak parishoners. St. Anne's began as a traveling congregation; its members split from St. Michael's parish in Munhall. During its first decade, St. Michael's had been content to carry out its mission in the Ward. Then, in 1908, it acquired more attractive property in Munhall on land adjacent to the Carnegie library and park. The more bucolic setting

proved irresistible to middle class members anxious to escape the soot, smog and overcrowding below the tracks. Half of the congregation, though, insisted the church remain in the Ward near its other constituents.

In 1915, that half acquired a former Methodist Church on Fourth Avenue. (The building had been abandoned in a classic case of Protestant flight.) Parishoners of the new church, St. Anne's, worshipped there until a fire in 1920. The next year they began a new building at Third and Dickson, and over the next 20 years St. Anne's rose to a majestic church. Some Homesteaders still recall its elaborate rosetta window, marble altars from Italy and expensive frescoes, many donated by Slovak businessmen in the prosperity of the 1920s. The grounds also included a new parish house, convent and parochial elementary school.

With the scheduled demolition of the Ward, Rev. Clement R. Hrtanek, St. Anne's longtime Slovak speaking priest, sensed the threat of a dispersed flock. Rev. Hrtanek predicted publicly that St. Anne's would lose at least two-thirds of its congregation to other parishes. Even if the church could find land nearby and enough materials to rebuild, it was unlikely the location would be convenient for former parishoners. St. Anne's took an active role in assisting its parishoners. During earlier crises, such as the 1919 steel strike, Rev. Hrtanek was outspoken about his parishoners' rights. During the relocation crisis, he used his influence as a mediator between parishoners and agents of the federal government. (The local Homes Registration Office set up office in St. Anne's.) Hrtanek did his best to allay fears of the upheaval. Shortly after government agents descended on the Ward, he warned owners from the pulpit to wait for a "fair price" and not to be intimidated. St. Anne's eventually rebuilt on West Eleventh Avenue.<sup>58</sup>

The halls of fraternal organizations added local color and entertainment, hosting everything from wedding receptions to athletic events and political meetings. Their uses had been readapted over the years as the nature of the population changed; the Rusin People's Home, for example, opened its membership to groups other than Carpatho Ruthenians. But their existence continued to depend on a local, established clientele of ethnics who sought out social functions for both camaraderie and a taste of old world culture and traditions. Demolition would seal the fate of most clubs. There was a shortage of building materials, and even if they could rebuild elsewhere, most fraternal could not reconstruct the cultural backdrop necessary to sustain them or halt the Americanization process threatening to render them obsolete.



Funeral of the Homestead Gypsy king, early twentieth century. Possessing distinctive ideas about rites of death, Gypsy music syncopated the industrial din in Mon Valley mill towns. About turn of the century Braddock, Thomas Bell writes in *Out of This Furnace*, that "there were times when the music of the gypsies' beribboned fiddles was drowned out by the riveters' iron clamor."

In one newspaper article, an officer of the Homestead Turner, a German-American club, succinctly captured the bleak future fraternalists faced. "What's the use?" he said.

Notwithstanding the various issues in the minds of the Ward residents, their representatives focused on problems of relocation and the priorities for obtaining new housing.<sup>59</sup> The selection process became a media event in itself; the *Messenger* followed the drama with daily updates. The ACHA, when it announced the lucky winners, faced the considerable task of persuading the losers to move to other projects in Allegheny County. Although many of the displaced did eventually agree to temporary shelter in other projects, they moved with much less enthusiasm. As late as December 1941, county housing director Leonard reported 376 of the original 1,443 applicants had no home even though other projects still had room.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly the human side of the story needs further attention. This article has merely attempted to point to the actors and issues in this compulsory migration. A mass human displacement of this magnitude necessarily involves engineers of change. Their success in demolishing the Ward so quickly and in muting large scale resistance suggests the effectiveness of their tactics during a war economy. It does not obscure the fact, however, that a way of life had ended for these people, or that they felt deeply about the destruction of their homes.

As Homestead's fighting men returned from the war, they entered another chapter in the history of their steel town. Family homes and familiar neighborhoods were gone. And while many steelworkers resumed the identical job they had left to serve the nation, organized labor's role in the intervening years had brought major changes to the workplace. Having won its battle for collective bargaining through New Deal legislation, the United Steelworkers of America looked to a second decade of promising a better life for people dependent on metals manufacturing.

Meanwhile the pace of industrial workers abandoning towns such as Homestead, Duquesne, Braddock and McKeesport for Baldwin, Irwin, West Mifflin and other infant suburbs accelerated through the 1950s. Using educational benefits from their military service and rising wages, workers cooperated fully in buying the mass culture package — fast food, new cars, televisions, and other gadgets of luxury — that have characterized the post war era. Within a few years of the mill expansion, many of the valley's people were rushing headlong toward a world they had approached with much trepidation in 1941. ■

<sup>1</sup> Joseph H. Louchheim, "Evicted By National Defense," *Social Work Today* (Dec. 1941), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Salisbury, like Hays, considers the Progressive Era the watershed and noted that social work, police and fire protection, bookkeeping, urban planning, the field of "rehabilitation enthusiasts," just to name a few, have gradually become the exclusive domain of professionals trained since 1915. See Robert Salisbury, "Urban Politics: The New Convergence of Power," *Journal of Politics* 26 (Nov. 1964), 775-797. Salisbury pays special homage to Robert Dahl and his classic study *Who Governs* (New Haven: 1961).

Mollenkopf elaborates his argument in *The Contested City* (Princeton: 1983), saying that these progrowth coalitions have flourished in "postindustrial" America. Speaking of the dozens of government programs developed mostly for cities by New Deal administrators, Mollenkopf (page 15) says: "From the New Deal onward, national and local political entrepreneurs, for the most part Democrats, constructed new political alignments and new coalitions around the framework of federal urban development programs. These programs provided a means by which diverse local constituencies, all of which had some stake in stepping up the rate of urban development, could be brought together in the new 'progrowth' coalitions." Incidentally, he believes these programs provided largely temporary cures, encouraged the rampant growth of suburbs, and in so doing caused demographic changes that in the end undermined Democratic party hegemony, especially at the national level.

Hays credits Robert Merton, another political scientist, with the first formulation of the local-cosmopolitan approach to political and social history, but Hays has been the leading historian advocating this concept for social analysis. According to this thesis, much social change can be understood as the conflict between those groups espousing a broader view of society and those who retain a more narrow, provincial attachment to community. The latter, Hays says, looked to national or international markets over local economic systems; preferred more impersonal media for communicating to daily and personal contacts; and promoted national and centralized decision-making over local and decentralized control. In their march toward "progress" and "modernization," cosmopolitan forces generally have overwhelmed those advocating a more expansive definition of community. Hays' local-cosmopolitan continuum is a helpful framework for making sense of motivation and attitudes involved in the mill expansion program — attitudes that are more difficult to account for solely on the basis of class, ethnicity or some other analytical concept. In arguing for longterm economic benefits of the mill expansion, and its potential for resolving slums, those who engineered the Homestead relocation clearly deserve the cosmopolitan label. Among other of Hays' articles, see his "Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum," in *American Political History as Social Analysis: Essays by Samuel P. Hays*, (Knoxville: 1980); and "Toward a Systematic Social History," unpublished manuscript, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Recording 162.1, Audio-Visual Records Branch, National Archives (hereafter NA), Washington, D.C. The broadcast is 12 minutes long.

<sup>4</sup> Estimates on the number of homes, businesses and churches removed from the demolition area were often quoted in local newspapers. Reports disagree, however, on the number of people affected. Estimates range from about



6,500 in some government accounts to more than 8,000 in the *Homestead Daily Messenger* (hereafter *Messenger*), 27 July 1941; Lori E. Cole, "Down Below: An Investigation into Lower Homestead Using the 1940 U.S. Census," (seminar paper, History Department, Carnegie Mellon University, 1988), 1. Acquiring and preparing the land for construction cost about \$10.2 million. Record Group 234 (hereafter RG 234), Supplement to Appendix "A," Reports and Appendices, Plancor 186-H, 30 June 1946, in Defense Plant Corp. Engineers' Reports (hereafter DPC Engineers'), Defense Plant Corporation records, National Archives Records Center (hereafter NARC), Suitland, Md. Land purchases totaled \$8,589,674; \$1,599,712 was spent to prepare the site.

<sup>5</sup> The unnamed official was quoted by Louchheim, op. cit., 32.

<sup>6</sup> "The Second Ward," Margaret Byington observed in 1907, "has largely been abandoned to the newer immigrants." This social and cultural polarization in Homestead was repeated in countless Monongahela Valley mill towns. Thomas Bell's 1941 *Out of This Furnace* (Pittsburgh: 1976, reprint), a novel about three generations of Slovak steelworkers in Braddock, is the best literary account of this immigrant life. Scholarly accounts can be found in David Brody, *The Steelworkers in America: the Nonunion Era* (New York: 1960); Frank H. Serene, "Immigrant Steelworkers in the Monongahela Valley: Their Communities and the Development of a Labor Class Consciousness," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1979); and Byington's 1911 *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (Pittsburgh: 1974, reprint), 167.

<sup>7</sup> The most descriptive picture of the Ward is in Byington's study of living conditions for the Pittsburgh Survey. Byington, typical of Progressive reformers, saw overcrowding and poverty but also was keenly aware of the Eastern European enclave below Eighth Avenue. She devotes nearly four chapters to the "Slavic" imprint on lower Homestead, 131-171.

<sup>8</sup> *Messenger*, 31 Jan. 1914. The newspaper reported the church would "build on location above the railroad tracks as most of the other Protestant churches have done."

<sup>9</sup> By nearly all accounts, corruption in Homestead was notorious. The borough's only daily newspaper, the *Messenger*, gave the subject plenty of attention, as did a special grand jury in the early 1950s. City journalists also saw the news potential: the *Pittsburgh Bulletin Index* on 7 March 1940 noted that Homestead had "two industries: steel and vice." The reporter described the most recent activities on Sixth Avenue, the boisterous red light district. Observers liked to focus on the ties among numbers racketeers, vice captains and local politicians. One newspaper reported that several members of borough council had police records. Interview with Nick Sayko, 7 May 1988; Interview with Evelyn Sedlak, 12 June 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Since census records did not classify Eastern Europeans according to nationality, estimating ethnic compositions are difficult. Likewise, since census tracts records are not available before 1940, separate empirical breakdowns for lower and upper Homestead are not possible. General census reports from 1910 reveal that Hungarian immigrants accounted for 18 percent of the population. (The total foreign born population was placed at 41 percent.) Serene, 68-9, refers to a 1910 report that identified 26 dialects in

Homestead's "immigrant sections." Other notable indicators, from city directories, are the location of churches and confectionaries (or mom and pop groceries stores) with ethnic names. Byington, 133, arrived at her ethnic headcount through employment data from Carnegie Steel and by the nationalities identified with Catholic parishes.

<sup>11</sup> *Homestead City Directory*, 1925.

<sup>12</sup> The library's efforts to meet the immigrant and the "working man" on their own ground was championed by W.F. Stevens, head librarian from 1901 to 1942. Undated Manuscripts, Library Files, Carnegie Library of Homestead, Munhall.

<sup>13</sup> RG 234, Final Engineer's Report, Plancor 186-H, 10 Apr. 1946, 2, NARC.

<sup>14</sup> The major book on the DPC is Gerald T. White, *Billions For Defense: Government Financing by the Defense Plant Corporation during World War II* (University, Alabama: 1980); and W.A. Houck, *Steel Expansion for War* (Cleveland: 1945).

<sup>15</sup> White, 5. A major tax amortization plan, which did help spur private war-time investment in many industries, was not successful in steel.

<sup>16</sup> Edward J. Stettinius, Jr., U.S. Steel's chairman, was one of eight commissioners appointed to the advisory committee on the Council of National Defense, which helped devise the new financing scheme. Conversely, Bethlehem and Republic Steel eventually balked. White, 46, with dollar figure from 49.

<sup>17</sup> Six new plants, including an open hearth and armor forging plant, were included in the plan. On June 25, William Knudsen, president of General Motors and the head of still another consulting agency, Office of Production Management, approved the plan that set the bureaucracy's wheels in motion. For details of the contract with C-I, see RG 234, Minutes of the Defense Plant Corporation, (hereafter Minutes) vol. XI (Part I), 16 Oct. 1941, 429-437, NA.

<sup>18</sup> RG 234, General Statement of Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 30 Sept. 1946, Non-Assets File No. 3, Office of Defense Plants General Files, (hereafter ODP General Files), NARC.

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence of John Carmody, RG 162, NA. The FWA director sent a half-dozen other letters to people involved in federal housing programs locally from 1939 to 1941, none of it especially notable.

<sup>20</sup> By mid October, for example, the DPC set a Nov. 5 deadline for demolition, but no demolition work had begun. It was not until late October that the DPC awarded the contract for the project to the Monarch Wrecking and Lumber Company of Detroit.

<sup>21</sup> RG 234, Minutes, vol. XI, (Part 1) 16 Oct. 1941, 430, NA.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.

<sup>23</sup> ODP General Files, 30 Jan. 1942, NA.

<sup>24</sup> White, 53. No substantial information about the land purchases was found in a check of all relevant DPC and RFC files in the National Archives. Checks with archives branches and federal records centers in Chicago and Philadelphia also proved fruitless. A serious impediment to a full review of the events at Homestead is the state of records available to historians. The vast majority of data in federal files is either highly general about specific projects or very specific about the federal agencies' general operations. Officials at the

Allegheny County Housing Authority have no knowledge of any relevant records. In the interview 12 June 1988, Evelyn Sedlak, who once worked at Homestead, said she saw the records disposed of several years ago. USX might have records, but it has refused access to its immense archival holdings.

<sup>25</sup> Louchheim, op. cit., 12.

<sup>26</sup> The latest relevant work is Kristin Szylvian Bailey, "The Federal Government and the Cooperative Housing Movement, 1917-1955" (Ph.D. diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 1988). Summarizing the debate, the details of which are beyond the scope of this article, Bailey writes (40-41): "Some congressmen, however, were...concerned about what would happen to the housing once the defense emergency was over. They did not want to finance the construction of housing that would degenerate into slums or encourage federal competition with the private housing industry."

<sup>27</sup> "Victory on the Homes Front: A Report and a Blueprint, 1938-1944," (hereafter *Victory on the Homes Front*), Allegheny County Housing Authority, Pennsylvania Room, Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh.

<sup>28</sup> Carmody, in radio broadcast.

<sup>29</sup> *Messenger*, 17 Dec. 1941.

<sup>30</sup> Between October 1941 and February 1942, 93 companies in Allegheny and Beaver counties were designated as "defense establishments" under the Lanham Act. RG 162, Box 68, Defense Industries I (Designation of) Pennsylvania, Federal Works Agency General Files, NA.

<sup>31</sup> "Victory on the Homes Front."

<sup>32</sup> Salisbury, "Urban Politics: The New Convergence of Power," 783.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 785. Salisbury (781) holds that the mercantile coalition that formerly had dominated "had been deeply committed to the city in an economic and emotional way that was missing from the industrial manager." With the onset of the New Deal, the "Democratic partisan hegemony provided a kind of cover by which middle class values could reappear in the public decisions of a working class city." (783) The rise of the New Deal coalition in working class Pittsburgh is well documented by Michael P. Weber, *Don't Call Me Boss: David L. Lawrence, Pittsburgh's Renaissance Mayor* (University of Pittsburgh Press: 1988). Homestead's political environment in the 1930s was strikingly similar, with Burgess John McLean inviting comparisons to Lawrence by promising reform and winning middle class support. See Annemarie Draham, "Unlikely Allies Fight for Unionization: Homestead, Pa., 1933-1946" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1984).

<sup>34</sup> This is a major theme in Bailey, 39-55.

<sup>35</sup> For an excellent discussion of the debate, see John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia: 1987), 56-75. Like Salisbury and Mollenkopf, as well as Bailey, Bauman believes war-time action on the housing front set the stage for relationships that solidified after the war: "Housers, planners, and business leaders joined civic leaders and agency heads to forge the basis for a postwar alliance wherein housing would emerge as a tool for urban redevelopment." (60)

<sup>36</sup> Progressive style reforms left a mixed legacy in Western Pennsylvania. Social reformers such as those commissioned for the Pittsburgh Survey were instrumental in calling attention to the ugly side effects of industrialization and

urbanization. Investigators such as Byington were credited with raising the social awareness of the American middle class to the industrial proletariat. At the same time, though, Progressives tended to confuse cause and symptom and were often insensitive to behavior that did not conform to their own Protestant, middle class standards. In a now classic study of municipal reform in Pittsburgh, Sam Hays detected a decidedly upper middle class flavor to advocates of "good government," both in social composition and values. Many have concluded, on the basis of Hays' analysis, that "reform" campaigns were often just a repackaged effort to reapply ruling-class control. See Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55 (1964) 157-169.

<sup>37</sup> Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business and Environmental Change* (New York: 1969), 130-32. His analysis of the clearance of Pittsburgh's Lower Hill in 1956, in the name of urban renewal and the Renaissance, suggests interesting parallels to Homestead's makeover: "For the Negro community, (the civic arena project) has been a highly visible symbol of old-style renewal, indifferent to the housing needs and preferences of low-income families." (131)

<sup>38</sup> "Victory on the Homes Front." Pages are not numbered.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Messenger*, 14 Dec. 1941.

<sup>42</sup> "Victory on the Homes Front."

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Bailey also writes (46): "[T]he Pittsburgh Housing Authority and the Allegheny County Housing Authority assumed expanded roles in the local war housing program while the low income housing program languished."

<sup>44</sup> Bailey, 42.

<sup>45</sup> The legal precedent through which property may be transferred to the sovereign through "eminent domain" has a long history. At the time of the Homestead project, the key court rulings were: *Fort Leavenworth Railroad Company v. Lowe*, 114 U.S. 525, 531 (1885); *Cherokee Nation v. Southern Kansas Railroad Company*, 135 U.S. 641, 656 (1890); *Luxton v. Northern River Bridge Company*, 153 U.S. 525, 529, 530 (1894); *United States v. Gettysburg Electric Railroad Company*, 160 U.S. 668, 681 (1896). Appendix "A" to the Memorandum of July 26, 1943, re: Whether individuals engaged in employment under contracts with the Defense Plant Corporation are covered by Public Law 784 of the 77th Congress, ODP General Files, RG 234, Series 145, NA. This document was a general legal ruling by agency counsel S.M. Hammond, who summarized, in rather circular fashion, the above opinions: "...[I]t logically follows that since the United States may take property only for a public use, that a taking for any constitutional activity is for a public use." The counsel's office, according to notations in the file, also generated an opinion regarding the use of eminent domain at Homestead, but the opinion itself was not in the records. The exigencies of national defense appeared to have dampened any challenge to the DPC's authority. Simply the threat of condemnation was enough to break the backs of stubborn property owners. The political climate of war, in short, muted what may have been a more protracted struggle, as has been proven in more recent legal battles over eminent domain's use. For a recent discussion of eminent domain in the battle to restart (rather than expand) steel plants, see Staughton Lynd, "The

Genesis of the Idea of a Community Right to Industrial Property in Youngstown and Pittsburgh, 1977-1987," *Journal of American History* (Jan. 1988), 926-958.

<sup>46</sup> "Victory on the Homes Front."

<sup>47</sup> Louchheim, op. cit., 12-15.

<sup>48</sup> RG 234, DPC Engineers', 30 June 1946, NA.

<sup>49</sup> In the best of times, attitudes of hilltop residents to their poorer cousins below the tracks took the form of benighted paternalism. During the 1910s and 1920s, temperance advocates sent missionaries below the tracks to seize stills and preach on the evils of alcohol. The hilltop alliance, reflected in the incessant clamoring of the *Messenger*, also inveighed against gambling and prostitution, both of which thrived in the urban villages in the Ward. The Carnegie library sent "missionaries" into lower Homestead to disseminate wholesome reading material and to conduct "Americanization" classes in the immigrant courts. And once numbers rackets usurped the one time company controlled political machine, "good government" proponents targeted electoral reform and vowed to replace the despotic ward heel politicians with "clean" candidates.

<sup>50</sup> RG 195, City Survey, Box 0094, NA. Pages unnumbered. Seventeen Pittsburgh area realtors assisted the Division of Research and Statistics of the Homeowners Loan Corporation, part of the Federal Home Loan Bank System. These reports are even more shocking when one considers that, according to a brief history of the HOLC in the files at the National Archives, the agency existed to "grant long-term mortgage loans at low interest rates to distressed home owners who were unable to procure financing through normal channels."

<sup>51</sup> Hovde, *American Cities* article.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Rita Flynn Keegan, 4 April 1988. See, for example, Studs Terkel, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II* (New York: 1984).

<sup>53</sup> These were predominant viewpoints expressed in more than 25 interviews conducted during our Homestead research.

<sup>54</sup> *Messenger*, 12 July 1941.

<sup>55</sup> Louchheim, op. cit. He cited statistics from a WPA survey that found 48 percent of the black families tied to defense industry work, compared to 70 percent for whites.

<sup>56</sup> Our research on the black community in Homestead is not exhaustive but suggests that the underground economy — numbers writing, moonshining, etc. — offered more opportunities for blacks than did the steel industry. A survey in 1919 showed that blacks were the second largest "ethnic" group employed in the Homestead Works. Many of the more skilled and managerial positions, though, were racially proscribed. Mobility and power for blacks was probably more likely via the vice economy once it opened up the 1920s. Rufus "Sonnyman" Jackson along with Joe Franks,

a Russian immigrant, reportedly controlled numbers writing in Homestead. Jackson, according to one newspaper article, "followed the rails" to Homestead in the early 1920s. After Prohibition was lifted in 1933, Jackson opened the Skyrocket Lounge on Sixth Avenue, a nightclub that became the center of the jazz scene for much of black Pittsburgh. *Report on the 1919 Steel Strike*, Interchurch World Movement Report, (New York: 1920), 133. For a more extended discussion of the relationship between illegal gambling and the black middle class, see Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana: 1987), 140-152.

<sup>57</sup> Louchheim, op. cit., 14.

<sup>58</sup> St. Anne's seemed to adapt better than Hrtanek predicted. Parishoners pitched in to dismantle much of the interior, the rosetta window that adorned the front of the building, and other original ornaments for reuse when the church rebuilt on West Eleventh Avenue in 1950. Interview with parishoner Donald Rettger, 2 May 1988. Although church anniversary booklets are not the most objective sources, they do at least suggest the parishoners' perceptions of change. The account of the mill expansion's impact on St. Anthony's, the Polish Catholic church in the ward, seems typical. "The parish suffered a great loss not only in members but also was compelled to discontinue the parish school and the services of the Holy Ghost nuns who were connected with the parish for many years." "St. Anthony's Golden Jubilee," 13, Pittsburgh Roman Catholic Diocese archives, Pittsburgh.

<sup>59</sup> In deciding who got government housing, weapons industry workers were first, ahead of citizens on low income or with previous abject living quarters. The only exceptions were the projects around Homestead and Duquesne, where families and individuals displaced by plant expansions were given preference. Under a May 1941 FWA order, rents were set nationally on a sliding income scale. Families with annual earnings of \$700-\$800 paid \$13 monthly; at \$1,501 to \$1,800, rent was \$25; at \$3,001, rent topped \$50. Rents were the same regardless of the unit's size and there was a \$5 monthly surcharge for all boarders. This meant war-industry workers generally paid about 20 percent of their income for government housing. In September 1941 the rates were changed to flat rates for units with one bedroom (\$27.50), two (\$30) or three (\$32.50). Variations were allowed "where there are marked differences in amenities in dwellings in the same project and in different projects" and "in localities where the established rental pattern of other public and private housing varies materially from the above schedule." RG 162, "Tenant Selection and Renting in Defense Housing Developments for Industrial Workers," FWA circulars 4477 and 7046, NA.

<sup>60</sup> *Messenger*, 12 Dec. 1941.