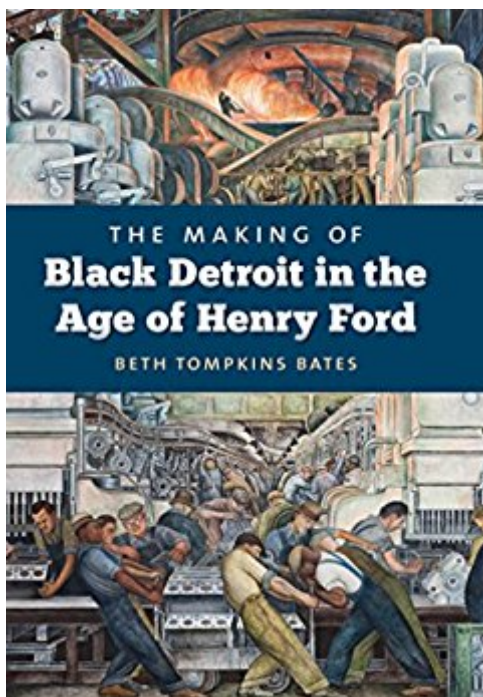


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The Making Of Black Detroit In The Age Of Henry Ford



Synopsis

In the 1920s, Henry Ford hired thousands of African American men for his open-shop system of auto manufacturing. This move was a rejection of the notion that better jobs were for white men only. In *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, Beth Tompkins Bates explains how black Detroiters, newly arrived from the South, seized the economic opportunities offered by Ford in the hope of gaining greater economic security. As these workers came to realize that Ford's anti-union "American Plan" did not allow them full access to the American Dream, their loyalty eroded, and they sought empowerment by pursuing a broad activist agenda. This, in turn, led them to play a pivotal role in the United Auto Workers' challenge to Ford's interests. In order to fully understand this complex shift, Bates traces allegiances among Detroit's African American community as reflected in its opposition to the Ku Klux Klan, challenges to unfair housing practices, and demands for increased and effective political participation. This groundbreaking history demonstrates how by World War II Henry Ford and his company had helped kindle the civil rights movement in Detroit without intending to do so.

Book Information

File Size: 16175 KB

Print Length: 358 pages

Publisher: The University of North Carolina Press (September 24, 2012)

Publication Date: September 24, 2012

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00915ZXUC

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #504,926 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #48

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Industries > Automobile Industry #80

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Industries > Transportation #128

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Labor & Industrial Relations

Customer Reviews

The Making of Black Detroit is a wonderful book, even if the title is somewhat misleading. Beth Tompkins Bates examines the relationship between automaker Henry Ford and the African American in the years between the two World Wars. By the end of World War I, the Ford Motor Company had become a beacon for black migrants. Whatever his motives, Ford chose to open up jobs to black workers even when his competitors would not. Bates then carefully demonstrates how the relationship changed over time: how black workers moved from a position of loyalty (feigned or real) to a position of assertively standing up to Ford by working to bring the United Autoworkers into Ford's plants; Ford was vehemently anti-union and apparently counted on the presence of loyal black workers to keep the union out. Bates' work, however, suffers from some of the flaws of many academic texts: repetitive writing, jargon and an overuse of acronyms. And the title: Several monographs written in the last 30 years or so have described the "making" of Black Detroit (most notably Richard Thomas' Life for Us Is What We Make It), but Bates really doesn't address the development of the African American community. Her work more accurately could be titled African Americans and the Shadow of Henry Ford. This work, however, still will be of interest to those students of African American history, urban history and labor history.

It was a very good read, being that I'm from Highland Park Mi, home of Henry Fords car company it open my eyes to things that i never knew went on in the city before my time. I understand better now what happen to Black people in the city of Detroit.

I was born and raised in Grosse Pointe, but lived in Detroit in a mixed neighborhood for five years. I learned a lot I never knew about Henry Ford and the black community, all of it fascinating.

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