

Cat Crackers and Picket Lines: Organized Labor in US Gulf Coast Oil Refining

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INTRODUCTION

“The true majesty of the oil industry is best seen in a modern refinery,” wrote American oil journalist Harvey O’Connor in 1955. Few monuments of industrial architecture could compare to a refinery’s giant crude oil tanks, topping plants, distilling columns, fractionating towers, platformers, extraction plants, lubricating oil units, and de-waxing facilities. The centerpiece of the modern refinery, however, was that “sublime industrial cathedral known as a ‘cat cracker’,” where petroleum molecules were broken down and rearranged to form high-octane motor gasoline and other fuels. “By night,” mused O’Connor, “with a thousand lights pricking the darkness along soaring platforms, catwalks, and ladders, the catalytic cracking unit affords one of the magic sights of twentieth-century technology.”¹

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Fig. 1 Catalytic Cracking Units, Standard Oil of New Jersey Baytown Refinery, 1946. *Credit* Standard Oil of New Jersey Collection, Image Number 43680, Archives and Special Collections, University of Louisville.

As Harvey O'Connor, who was once a publicity director for the Oil Workers International Union (OWIU), clearly understood, a large modern refinery was not just an assemblage of tanks, towers, pipes, and valves, but also a place where, in the United States, more than 2000 workers earned their living. Although petroleum refining was a relatively capital-intensive industry, it depended, from inception, on a large and stable workforce—more than 200,000 people nationwide by 1955, in nearly 300 refineries of all sizes across 39 states—to keep the units running smoothly, around the clock. One third of these workers were employed on the Gulf Coast, most of them in 13 major refineries on the Upper Texas Coast and in Louisiana, the largest concentration of refineries and chemical plants in the United States. Shortly after the 1901 discovery of oil at Spindletop, Texas, the region's first large refineries, owned by Gulf Oil and Texaco, sprang up in nearby Port Arthur and Beaumont. With subsequent discoveries along the

Gulf Coast, refineries spread southwest to Houston and Corpus Christi, and east to Lake Charles, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans, Louisiana. By 1941, the Gulf Coast accounted for 28% of national refining capacity, rising to 32% by 1956, and 36% by 1976.²

During the early decades of the century, oil company management enjoyed unchecked authority over their refineries and the people they employed. Across the region, they exerted their influence in both subtle and strong-armed ways, dominating the civic life of refinery communities, fiercely resisting unionization, and dividing workers against each other, often along racial lines. Working-class people of all races in the Gulf region nevertheless coveted refinery jobs, which were equivalent to those in northern automobile or steel plants. Almost all the higher paying skilled work was reserved for whites, which along the Upper Gulf Coast included both Anglos and Cajuns. The jobs paid well, included generous benefits after the First World War, and offered a means of upward socioeconomic mobility. Minorities, too, including African-Americans as well as Mexican nationals and Mexican-Americans,³ found desirable wage-labor work at refineries, albeit in segregated classifications. Job losses in the oil industry during the Great Depression, however, forced white and minority workers alike to organize. The union movement in oil targeted refining, the least isolated and geographically dispersed sector of the industry.⁴ As was the case across the racially segregated, "Jim Crow" South, labor organizing in refining consisted of a dual struggle, by all workers for dignity, job security, and workplace control, and by racial minorities for workplace equality.

Explaining the failure of unionization in the US South has long pre-occupied labor historians, who debate the relative importance of southern laborers' cultural opposition to unions, the racism of southern whites, and management hostility to unions in small-firm industries.⁵ The pioneering work of F. Ray Marshall inspired a wealth of scholarship on labor and race in the South. Unlike Marshall, however, labor historians have paid little attention to Gulf Coast petroleum refining, which developed into one of the largest industries in the southern United States.⁶ By 1945, the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) oil workers union, the OWIU, bucked the odds against organized labor in the South by winning representation in nearly all major Gulf Coast refineries. Union organizing in the South, in other words, was not quite the abject failure southern labor historians have portrayed it to be.

Successful labor organizing in the US oil industry was really only possible in the refining sector. Oil field workers—the drillers, roughnecks, roustabouts, and pipeliners—were widely scattered across the oil-producing regions. They also moved from community to community, from field to field, and from drilling rig to drilling rig, never remaining in one place long enough, or in large enough numbers, to sustain collective action against employers. Refineries, on the other hand, were fixed and permanent installations that brought together large numbers of workers in one place. They were also the choke point in the flow of oil from wells to consumers. If workers were to shut down a series of wells or even an entire field, production would likely be found elsewhere to make up for the shortfall. Large refineries, by contrast, processed crude oil from many different fields and regions. The cessation of operations at just one of them could sharply pinch company profits and disrupt oil markets. By the 1930s, the Gulf Coast had become the region with the most large refineries, making them the prime target for union organizing.

Several other factors enabled the CIO oil workers' union to "challenge the giants"⁷ along the Gulf Coast. The legacy of populism in East Texas, with its distrust of big business, especially Standard Oil, helped override rural whites' suspicions of outside unions. The role of "independent" unions in early refining provided workers with nominal representation and elevated their expectations. The strategic importance of oil during the First World War, Second World War, and Korean War, along with persistent labor shortages as refining expanded, gave the refinery unions' bargaining leverage. Federal intervention to protect workers' collective bargaining rights during these crises bolstered CIO victories. The unusual autonomy that the oil workers' union afforded its local chapters helped them adapt to changing circumstances. Finally, minority workers provided critical support in organizing some key plants.

Through a series of strikes during 1945–1955, the OWIU and its successor, the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers (OCAW) union, built on organizing successes to obtain concessions on wages and job security in most of the major Gulf Coast plants. Although a political backlash against organized labor in the United States constrained worker power beginning in the late 1940s, the OWIU-OCAW nevertheless strengthened its hand within the refineries and won greater say over workplace rules, enforced by the union's ability to strike and shut down refineries. Louisiana and East Texas became the union's largest district in the nation. Although Gulf Coast refineries remained segregated and simmered with racial tensions,

they also had lower racial barriers to employment than in other southern industries, thanks in part to the union movement. As F. Ray Marshall observed in 1963, they were the places where “one of the most systematic efforts has been made to provide better employment opportunities for Negroes.”⁸

OCAW was not able to cling to industrial power long. In the 1950s, management discovered another way to divide and conquer workers, not so much through the manipulation of racial divisions, but through the contracting out of jobs and other manpower reductions made possible by advances in “twentieth-century technology” that so awed Harvey O’Connor. These developments undermined organized labor’s main source of workplace control: the strike. OCAW retained a large membership and national clout through the 1970s, but the focus of bargaining narrowed to compensation and occupational health and safety issues. Meanwhile, oil companies resolutely affirmed management prerogatives in the organization of work in refineries, and automation further diminished the role of workers and thus the negotiating leverage of OCAW. By the time minorities won something close to equality in the refineries, with assistance from federal desegregation measures in the 1960s, the refinery labor market had begun to shrink and union membership had started to plummet. The transformation of refinery work thus foreshadowed labor market trends not only in the South but also across the United States.

REFINERY JOBS IN A POOR FARMING REGION, 1910–1935

As Gulf Coast refineries mushroomed during the first two decades of the century, they attracted migrants from eastern Texas and western Louisiana into the plants by offering better wages, shorter hours, and more job security than other industries in the region. Employers paid a premium wage in order to maintain a stable, nonunion shop, rather than suffer a shutdown if discontented employees walked off the job. The wage premium also gave employees the incentive to endure the dangers of refinery work, where explosions and fires were all-too-common hazards.

It also bought their deference to the rigidly hierarchical organization of plants. Managers wielded tremendous authority over everything that happened in a refinery.⁹ They retained substantial power well into the mid-twentieth century, even after the rise of organized labor. The chain of command typically began with the plant manager, ran through an operations superintendent directly under him, and on down to assistant

superintendents and managers of the various refinery departments. The lower an individual was on the organizational chart, the less authority he had to make decisions and the fewer duties he had to perform. Plant managers maintained control by virtue of these narrowly defined positions and tasks, but they also reserved the right to alter job duties at any time, not to mention hire and fire at will. They treated refinery work as a privilege, not a right.

Refineries were also racially segregated. Most Gulf Coast refinery workers were Anglos and people of European descent from East Texas or Cajuns from Southwest Louisiana who worked in two basic job categories: (1) process or production operations, running various kinds of equipment; or (2) mechanical operations or maintenance, as carpenters, welders, electricians, boilermakers, machinists, pipefitters, etc. The third and lowest-paid category of jobs, "laborers," chiefly employed African-Americans, and later ethnic Mexicans, at menial tasks with no opportunities for advancement. Rather than setting formal rules that segregated the workforce, refineries followed the example set by the local construction industry, creating an informal "two-pool" system that channeled racial minorities into labor gangs, while reserving skilled operating and maintenance work for whites. Refineries typically had separate and inferior wage schedules for "Colored" or "Colored and Mexican" workers, as well as segregated facilities.¹⁰ Some plants, like Shell Oil's Deer Park in Houston, hired whites with a high school education and African-Americans without a high school education, and then followed a policy of promoting only high school graduates to skilled jobs. For minorities faced with limited options in a declining sharecropper system, a job in the refinery gang nonetheless offered the best wage around.¹¹

During the production boom of the First World War, refinery workers, assisted by federal mediators, asserted claims to even better compensation and a voice in the organization of work. A wave of wildcat strikes for higher wages, an 8-hour work day, and job security in the oil fields of California, Texas, and Louisiana, and at four of the nation's major refineries—Standard Oil of New Jersey's Bayonne, New Jersey plant in 1915; Gulf Oil's Port Arthur, Texas refinery in 1916; Magnolia Oil's Beaumont, Texas plant in 1919; and Jersey Standard's Baton Rouge, Louisiana plant in 1920—resulted in the introduction of "non-union employee representation plans" (NERPs).¹² These were designed not only to accommodate workers' demands, but also to fend off outside unions, such as the American

Federation of Labor's (AFL) International Association of Oil Field, Gas Well, and Refinery Workers of America (IAOFGW & RWA), chartered in 1918.¹³

Suspicious of Standard Oil ran deep in the former Populist stronghold of East Texas, generating sympathy for oil strikers. In 1919, when Jersey Standard bought a controlling interest in the Texas firm, Humble Oil and Refining Company, and built a giant refinery at Baytown, east of Houston, the company aimed to mollify these suspicions with the most comprehensive NERP in the industry. Modeled on the "Industrial Representation Plan" instituted at John D. Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel & Iron Company after the notorious 1914 massacre of workers at the Ludlow, Colorado coal mine, Humble's plan provided contractual language on work rules, wages, and working conditions (e.g., safety devices and protocols), along with workers' election of their own representatives to a joint labor-management conference, where grievances could be settled.¹⁴ Refinery owners also introduced "welfare capitalist" programs, including pensions, paid vacations, death and injury benefits, and low-cost housing.¹⁵

Management's assertion of paternalistic authority in Gulf Coast petroleum refining brought concrete benefits to white workers. During the 1920s, refinery wages did decline in relation to some other Gulf Coast occupations, but nonwage benefits extended by NERPs, which were available only in the large refineries and only to white workers, helped to produce an unprecedented improvement in those workers' standard of living. NERPs also gave white workers a voice, however small, in the organization of refinery workplaces, fostering a conviction that a steady job with good wages and benefits was a right to be defended.¹⁶

THE RISE OF INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM, 1935–1945

As was the case in so many manufacturing industries, the labor bargain broke down in the Great Depression of the early 1930s, when thousands of refinery workers were fired or suffered reduced wages and benefits. The loss of job security stoked festering grievances against management and created an opening for outside union organizing in Gulf Coast refineries.¹⁷

The passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in 1933 inspired organizing campaigns for company representation by national unions such as the IAOFGW & RWA. The union won a critical victory in 1934 when it signed a national agreement with Sinclair Oil, covering all the company's field production, pipeline, and refinery operations. The agreement had glaring weaknesses, but it provided the membership base for

organizing other refineries on the Gulf Coast. The early efforts to expand beyond Sinclair, however, were stymied by competition from AFL craft unions, labor-management councils such as Humble Oil's Baytown NERP, and the Supreme Court's invalidation of the NIRA. After the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) of 1935 finally gave federal recognition to the rights of workers to bargain collectively, the IAOWGW & RWA was emboldened to leave the AFL for the insurgent CIO, which sought to organize workers in mass production industries under one big union, as opposed to the craft distinctions that characterized the unionism of the AFL. The CIO believed that dividing workers by craft into separate organizations within a single plant weakened the bargaining power of all workers and left the majority, who had few craft skills, unrepresented. Two years later, the CIO's IAOWGW & RWA simplified its name, mercifully, to the Oil Workers' International Union (OWIU).¹⁸

Refinery managers resisted the OWIU with the full range of tactics used by employers all over the country—threats, spies, red smears, police deputations of nonunion employees, and racist jeremiads.¹⁹ After the Supreme Court upheld the Wagner Act in the spring of 1937, oil companies recast their management-dominated labor organizations as so-called “independent unions,” usually with separate African-American auxiliaries. The Baytown Joint Conference became the Baytown Employees Federation, and the Industrial Relations Plan at Jersey Standard's Baton Rouge plant, the largest on the Gulf Coast at the time, morphed into the Independent Industrial Workers Association (IIWA). Combined with the internal weakness of the OWIU, these tactics kept the CIO at bay along the Gulf Coast for several years. By the beginning of the Second World War, the AFL and CIO unions together had organized only 3,000 employees in six refineries nationwide, whereas independent unions represented 34,100 workers in 53 refineries.²⁰

“Independent” was a euphemism for management control. Managers at Baytown, for example, orchestrated the election of the Employees Federation as the workers' bargaining agent in 1937. A subsequent National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) hearing collected testimony that the balloting had been conducted without secrecy and that supervisors had coerced employees to vote in favor of the Federation. A white supervisor reportedly ordered Mexican and African-American employees to the polling station to cast their votes for the Federation. In 1939, the NLRB upheld the CIO's challenge to the election results, concluding that management not only had organized and dominated the Employees

Federation, but that it had also intimidated and discharged CIO members and sympathizers, all violations of the Wagner Act. As a result, the NLRB ordered the Federation to be dissolved. Upon appeal in 1940, however, the Fifth Circuit Court in New Orleans, populated by business-friendly conservatives, overturned the ruling, finding that the Employees Federation qualified as a legal labor union.²¹

During the war, the national interest in defense production gave greater urgency and legitimacy to federal intervention in labor relations. This was true for unions in many manufacturing industries, but above all, in southern ones. The NLRB opened plants to fair elections, curbed union-busting tactics, and forced reforms to company-dominated unions. Beginning in 1942, the War Labor Board (WLB) tied defense contracts to union elections. In return for unions' pledge not to strike, the WLB also authorized "maintenance of membership" provisions in union contracts, which required employees to remain members of the union until a collective bargaining agreement expired. The NLRB and WLB thus helped fuel the OWIU's growth from 27,000 members in 1939 to 65,000 members in 1945.²²

A large part of that growth took place along the Gulf Coast. Many Louisiana refineries and Humble's Baytown elected AFL or independent unions, but the OWIU became the dominant labor organization in the Upper Texas Gulf Coast refineries. By the end of the war, the OWIU had 12,000 members in Jefferson County, Texas (home to Port Arthur and Beaumont) alone, the largest concentration of OWIU workers in the nation.²³ One reason for the OWIU's growth was the union's newfound internal stability and resolve, backed by the CIO's Oil Workers Organizing Campaign (OWOC), established in 1941. A year earlier, at its national convention in Fort Worth, Texas, the union elected a new generation of officers, led by president O. A. "Jack" Knight, who had been an effective organizer in California and who would remain president for the next 25 years. The convention also revised its constitution to enhance the decision-making autonomy of locals, establishing the OWIU as one of the most democratically organized CIO unions. Although local autonomy hampered efforts to launch national campaigns against an oil company or group of companies, forcing unionists to organize each plant individually, it nevertheless boosted the *esprit de corps* of rank-and-file workers, with demonstrable effects on the Gulf Coast.²⁴

Race was a critical factor in the OWIU-OWOC campaign. In 1939, African-Americans working in Gulf Coast refineries numbered about 1450,



Fig. 2 Cover art, Harvey O'Connor, *History of Oil Workers International Union-CIO* (Denver, CO: Oil Workers International Union, 1950).

or 4% of the total workforce of approximately 36,000, and Mexicans about 750, or 2% of the total. Because nearly 90% of these minorities were concentrated in refineries on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast, there they comprised as much as 12% of the workforce.²⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that the OWIU, with its commitment to the CIO's policy of interracial unionism, had its greatest appeal in East Texas. Houston-Pasadena OWIU Locals 227 and 367 integrated minorities into their membership, helping the union win representation at the Sinclair, Shell, and Pan-American refineries. Although racial discrimination persisted in promotional ladders and in other informal ways, union contracts in these integrated locals formally eliminated separate wage scales, thus granting black and Mexican workers significant wage increases. A separate pattern emerged in Beaumont and Port Arthur. During the First World War, black workers in these communities had formed their own all-black locals (229 and 254, respectively), which endured and later proved crucial to OWIU's victories at the Texaco and Gulf refineries.²⁶

The Beaumont and Port Arthur victories, in particular, were hard won. The OWIU's organizing of minority workers stirred up white supremacist reaction. Port Arthur police chief, Hardie F. Baker, a former refinery supervisor at Gulf Oil, and a "notorious Negro-beater" and harasser of CIO "agitators," infamously led a group of policemen through black neighborhoods on the eve of a 1938 NLRB election at the Gulf refinery, threatening African-Americans who intended to vote.²⁷ The intimidation worked. Members of the all-black Local 254 stayed home, and the OWIU narrowly lost. Four years later, however, newly vitalized unionists stood up to the intimidation. In February 1942, Baker and two deputies brutalized OWIU organizer F.H. Mitchell, a Native American from Oklahoma who was assigned to recruit Port Arthur's black refinery workers. Afterward, those black workers defiantly showed up in large numbers to give the OWIU a crucial victory in the second Gulf Oil election.²⁸

Union advances and community-based organizing in Gulf Coast refineries turned the local political tide in Port Arthur, Beaumont, Texas City, and Pasadena. Activism by OWIU leaders, along with the work by their women's auxiliaries, helped to elect union-friendly city officials and garner support from local businesses, civic organizations, and churches. In Jefferson County, unionists pressured the Port Arthur city government to fire Police Chief Baker in 1943, and they took credit for forcing oil companies to withdraw their support for the anti-CIO crusader and zealous red hunter, Martin Dies, who, in 1944, chose not to seek reelection to Congress. At the state level, oil workers and CIO unionists formed the nucleus of a new liberal faction of the Texas Democratic Party.²⁹

The OWIU still came up short in extending industrial democracy to racial minorities. The Wagner Act did not name race discrimination as an unfair labor practice, and so federal intervention to guarantee all workers' rights was limited. Despite the CIO's and OWIU's egalitarian position on race, most rank-and-file white unionists opposed any alteration of the two-tier, segregated job system. "The Negro was at a disadvantage," admitted John Crossland, a white unionist with Shell Refinery Local 367 in Pasadena. "A lot of white membership... did not want them to have a line of progression."³⁰

Where "independent" unions had a strong presence, racist appeals held off the CIO. Jersey Standard, one of the most anti-union oil companies, stubbornly fought the OWIU at its Baytown and Baton Rouge refineries.³¹ At Baytown in 1942, Humble hired a former newspaper publisher to circulate hundreds of bulletins for the Employees Federation assailing the

CIO, often by inflaming the racial prejudices of rank-and-file white workers. “The CIO already has a large block of votes in this refinery in almost 100% of the Negro workers, whom they have blinded with promises of complete social and industrial equality with white people, both men and women,” stated one of the bulletins in 1943, insinuating that the CIO was promising black men sexual access to white women.³² At election time, a group of well-dressed white women appeared at the refinery gate handing out a pamphlet entitled, “CIO Promises Negroes Equality with Whites,” and telling white workers that unionized black workers in other plants were earning so much that their wives and daughters refused work as maids.³³ Baytown’s white workers overwhelmingly voted for the Federation, to protect what had become their racially defined job security, as well as, perhaps, the gendered social order of Jim Crow.

Still, federal officials and minority workers made determined efforts to challenge this system. During the war, the Texas office of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), the agency charged with enforcing President Franklin Roosevelt’s executive order banning racial discrimination in defense plants, targeted three refineries—Humble-Baytown, Sinclair, and Shell-Deer Park—for discriminatory practices, hoping to force changes across the entire industry. Anticipating white opposition to upgrading African-Americans, the FEPC focused on complaints by ethnic Mexican workers, whose numbers were growing as refineries staffed up to meet defense needs. Ultimately, however, this strategy failed. Both Anglo workers and refinery management resisted any nondiscrimination directives from the FEPC, whose lack of enforcement powers and brief existence in Texas hobbled efforts to reform the two-tier job system.³⁴

THE ZENITH OF UNION POWER, 1945–1959

The unionization of most Gulf Coast refineries by the OWIU did not dismantle workplace segregation, but it did alter the balance of power between labor and management. It gave white workers, and to a lesser extent, minority workers, enforceable guarantees on wages, expanded benefits (vacations, sick leave, paid mealtimes, etc.), and seniority and grievance procedures. The most potent weapon of enforcement in the union arsenal was the strike—or the threat of a strike. Shutting down and restarting a refinery were time-consuming and potentially dangerous processes. Any sustained interruption in the commercial conversion of crude

oil to marketable products also strained an oil company's bottom line. The first-ever industry-wide strike, initiated by the OWIU in 1945, shut down refineries in the region and provoked President Harry Truman to authorize the Navy to seize the refineries and to appoint a government panel to mediate the strike. In the end, OWIU workers received an 18% wage increase. With this settlement, the OWIU surpassed Jersey Standard and its independent unions as the industry leader in setting wage rates. By backing up their negotiating positions with a strike, OWIU locals also obtained more generous fringe benefits and pressed their advantage to shape contractual guidelines on tenure, promotion, seniority, and job classifications.³⁵

Securing this advantage remained an uphill battle. After the war, the OWIU, and organized labor in general, operated in an increasingly hostile political environment. The passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, over President Truman's veto, permitted states to outlaw closed union shops (which Texas did immediately), prohibited some of the practices unions had employed to shut down plants, required advance-notice of strikes, and banned sympathy or solidarity strikes. Taft-Hartley also allowed companies to reduce the size of union bargaining units by classifying more employees as "supervisors," a provision of which oil companies took great advantage in refineries. The act's requirement of anti-communist affidavits from union officers led to the purging of radicals, more so in other CIO unions than in the OWIU, which had never leaned far to the left. However, this did not prevent the red-baiting of the OWIU and its leadership. Beginning in 1951, OWIU president Jack Knight, who served part-time on the National Production Authority, which advised government officials on defense mobilization for the Korean War, endured a nasty investigation by the Loyalty Board of the Department of Commerce into charges that Knight had been a member of the Communist party or at least a sympathizer. Although the charges were eventually dropped, the investigation had a chilling effect on Knight and perhaps the union itself.³⁶ In all, Taft-Hartley and the crusade to root out leftists from the ranks of labor narrowed the scope of union action from broader based political organizing in the quest for greater social democracy to a focus on collective bargaining, "cost-of-living" wage increases, and workplace control issues.³⁷

After the humiliating 1948 defeat of a campaign to organize California refineries, the OWIU learned lessons about planning and carrying out strikes, which it then applied to the Gulf Coast region with noticeably greater success than the CIO's "Operation Dixie" efforts in southern

textile mills. The OWIU began shifting greater resources and power to the national office to coordinate collective bargaining and establish national patterns in contract language. The OWIU also began forming alliances with non-OWIU unions, obtaining in the early 1950s cooperation from some AFL unions and even many independent unions to carry out a month-long strike in 1952, during the Korean War, that shut down one third of the nation's refining capacity (excluding California plants that directly supplied the war effort) and won a 15% wage increase.³⁸

In 1953, the OWIU and the independent unions explored the notion of forming a single, powerful refining union. Oil companies responded with a negative press campaign branding the merger talk "a development of fearsome portents."³⁹ The campaign worked, discouraging the independents from consolidating with the OWIU. However, in 1955, the OWIU aligned with workers in burgeoning petrochemical plants by joining with the United Gas, Coke, and Chemical Workers to form the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), shortly before the grand merger between the AFL and CIO. At the same time, independents, such as the Employees Federation and IIWA at the two large Jersey Standard plants, pursued coordinated actions that reinforced their bargaining leverage.⁴⁰

By the mid-1950s, operators and maintenance workers in Gulf Coast refineries enjoyed enhanced job security, power to shape workplace rules, and steadily rising wages that far exceeded those of all other workers in the region.⁴¹ As demand for oil and chemical products soared during the 1950s, oil companies seemed to accept, grudgingly, the new labor arrangement as a way to force issues at the bargaining table and maintain a stable labor supply to staff expanding refinery operations. Strikes had become more predictable than in the past, and companies could make preparations to deal with them. "When our local union met with Shell," recalled Roy Barnes, a union official at Shell and later president of OCAW Local 4-367, "there were two givens: one was we would give them a strike, and the other, they'd take a strike."⁴²

The growing privileges of the refinery jobs that were reserved for whites generated rising aspirations among minority employees, who stepped up their challenge to the two-tier labor system. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People filed numerous complaints with the President's Committee on Government Contracts against companies and OCAW locals. These efforts won promotions for some minority workers and produced various contractual settlements, such as those ensuring that minorities who possessed high

school diplomas could move into line for skilled jobs. Companies and locals still found ways to defend racial barriers, for example, by hiring only African-Americans who lacked high school diplomas or by making unit seniority, as opposed to plant seniority, a prerequisite for advancement. By the late 1950s, segregation and racist attitudes remained entrenched in many refineries. Yet, in a growing number of them, thanks to federal intervention and grassroots activism by African-Americans and Mexican-Americans, the color barrier was beginning to break down.⁴³

“THE QUIET REVOLUTION”

Just when OCAW and other refinery unions were consolidating their power and minority workers were gaining some access to skilled positions, the effects of a “quiet revolution” in refinery operations began to undermine that very strength. Improvements in refinery technology, such as remote controls, automatic controls, digital computers, and new kinds of sensors and instrumentation, meant that operations that previously required a human hand could now be automated; the number of gauges and valves to be checked manually could be greatly reduced. This substitution of capital for labor, or the deskilling of the workforce, was not necessarily a direct response to the unionization of the refineries, but rather a long, steady transformation dating back to the First World War. Only in the late-1950s did this transformation begin to produce results dramatic enough to convince refinery managers that technology was making many operational workers redundant.⁴⁴

Technology, in other words, gave them an opportunity to redress the balance of power in the industry. Oil companies had long viewed union-enforced job definitions as “featherbedding,” the practice of adopting make-work rules and retaining surplus employees. If repairs or routine maintenance was needed in an operator’s area, for example, contractual work rules required him to call in a maintenance man—carpenter, welder, pipefitter, electrician, etc. Refinery management saw this as an inefficient way to deploy labor, especially as technology reduced the number of tasks assigned to operators, who had time and skills to perform work not included in their contractual job description. From the perspective of some workers, on the other hand, operators could not always do a tradesman’s job.⁴⁵

In 1958, faced with declining profits due to intensified competition in oil products, and armed with ideas from a new generation of engineers,



Fig. 3 Cat Cracker Control Room, Shell Oil Deer Park Refinery. *Credit* United Steelworkers Local 13-1, Pasadena, Texas.

refinery managers began trimming costs by eliminating jobs through attrition and layoffs. When they required large maintenance or “workover” jobs, they brought in cheaper outside contractors—usually white workers recruited from AFL-CIO building trades hiring halls. Managers also altered work rules to combine craft jobs (i.e., welder and pipefitter) and require operators to perform more maintenance duties. Most controversially, many refineries introduced a new job called a “universal mechanic” who performed multiple tasks previously done by several tradesmen.⁴⁶

These job losses affected both white and minority workers, closing the narrow avenues of promotion the latter had begun to find in some refineries. Beginning in 1958, labor unrest spread throughout the industry, increasing OCAW’s attractiveness to hitherto independent unionists. In 1959, facing demotions and disappearing jobs, workers at Baytown finally elected OCAW to represent them, a seemingly momentous victory after years of struggle. However, few other victories followed. The national union was forced to cut back on organizing in order to defend its representation in existing OCAW refineries, where management was reasserting

prerogatives to reorganize work, reclassify assignments, and contract out jobs.⁴⁷

OCAW could always file grievances to test management actions, and if that failed, go on strike to resist changes in contract language. In 1959, OCAW workers struck Standard Oil of Indiana (Amoco/BP) refineries in Texas City, Port Arthur, and El Dorado, Arkansas to protest cross-crafting. In pre-strike negotiations, company officials indicated that they wanted a pipefitter to undertake routine tasks like rewiring an electrical panel. The union countered that if the pipefitter did not complete the work satisfactorily, he could be fired for incompetence, thus setting him up for discharge. After workers walked off the job, management experimented with a new tactic. The company brought several refinery units back on line using engineers, clerks, and supervisors—those who were exempted from the bargaining unit by Taft-Hartley. Union workers came back after 191 days and signed a new contract that included a “work incidental” clause, which allowed the company to assign work that crossed craft lines.⁴⁸

By operating part of the plant without workers, Standard of Indiana not only weakened the union’s bargaining leverage in its own plants, but it also emboldened other companies to take harder lines in negotiations with OCAW. At its Port Arthur refinery in 1961–1962, Gulf Oil deployed 600 supervisors and technical staff to keep part of its plant running, forcing OCAW’s striking workers, after 6 weeks on the picket line, to agree to management’s terms, which included Gulf’s use of contract workers for many maintenance jobs. “Management has a right to run its business,” company spokesmen increasingly declared. According to an official OCAW history, “employers kept pressing for broader ‘management rights’ to tinker with work assignments, manipulate overtime, and otherwise weaken contract terms.”⁴⁹

While oil companies exercised their newfound muscle to alter postwar arrangements with organized labor in refining, OCAW sensed its ability to protect jobs and deliver the goods to its members slipping away. By the summer of 1962, the stage was set for a major confrontation.

THE WATERSHED

In 1961, during a period of slumping corporate profitability in the oil industry, a new president, Monroe “Monty” Spaght, took command at Shell Oil Company, the partially owned US subsidiary of the Royal Dutch

Shell Group, and launched a cost-cutting campaign that included the company's first significant layoffs since the Second World War. He ordered some salaried employees into early retirement and terminated others. In his first 2 years, he reduced the workforce by more than 11%, saving \$21 million in wages and benefits.⁵⁰

Spaght targeted manufacturing (oil products and chemicals) for streamlining and cutbacks. Top management believed that Shell refineries were burdened by underemployed workers, outmoded operating practices, and the growing power of unions to block changes in workforce assignments. In 1957, Shell had begun a policy of workforce reduction by attrition, not hiring replacements for employees who were reassigned, discharged, retired, or promoted. Then, in March 1961, the company began laying off workers. During the 1962 contract negotiations, as pink slips were issued, Shell refineries submitted proposals to remove long-standing contract clauses regarding work assignments. In response to the escalating challenge to their job security, Shell refinery workers resorted to dramatic action. On 19 August 1962, some 5200 unionists simultaneously struck Shell Oil's three major East-of-the-Rockies refineries and chemical plants at Wood River, Illinois, Norco, Louisiana, and Houston-Deer Park.⁵¹

Shell management was surprised that the three different unions at the three refineries could pull off a coordinated strike. A loose federation of 13 AFL building trades unions represented workers at Shell's largest refinery, Wood River; OCAW represented the Houston-Deer Park refinery and chemical plant; and Norco had an independent union. There were no natural lines of communications or necessarily the same problems among the three. In 1959, however, the unions representing major Shell oil and chemical installations East-of-the-Rockies found enough common ground to pursue a joint and coordinated program of bargaining. Their contracts all expired at the same time, so they could legally call simultaneous local strikes in all three places. The West Coast unions were still under contract, had not suffered the layoffs that the other plants did, and thus did not join in the strike. Nevertheless, the East-of-the-Rockies unions felt that their alliance could defend the gains that they had made during the 1950s.

The main job security issues were the amalgamation of job assignments or cross-crafting, as in the 1959 Standard of Indiana strike, and contracting out, the main source of conflict in the 1961 Gulf Oil strike. "They've cut out several jobs and combined them," complained Jack Cooke, a striking chemical plant operator at Houston. "The combined jobs are too much;

they have not lessened the responsibility—you just have to work more things, do more things.”⁵² As workers from maintenance crafts were reassigned to fill vacated operating jobs, Shell had begun to contract out some plant maintenance tasks, such as cat cracker turnarounds, to outside specialists. Since one out of every two employees in Shell’s refineries and chemical plants was engaged in some kind of maintenance, the threat to the workers’ job security was real.⁵³ Furthermore, when a maintenance employee was transferred to the operations department, he maintained his total company seniority, but his seniority in operations was zero. He also received a reduction in pay and was required to work shifts rather than straight days as in the maintenance department.⁵⁴ Such changes created ill will toward the company among a growing number of workers. “It had to stop,” said Johnny Garrison, vice president of the OCAW refinery workers at Houston. “We had hit a brick wall.”⁵⁵

Several other issues concerned the unions. One was advance notification and consultation before layoffs. The unions wanted longer notices and detailed explanations for why layoffs were needed, which would allow union representatives to present counterproposals to management. Increased wages and severance pay, the biggest concerns at Wood River, also came under discussion. Still, compensation was not the main issue in the 1962 strike. The differences between Shell labor and management went beyond wages and benefits. OCAW accused Shell of seeking to establish “unilateral control” over all working conditions.⁵⁶ Shell sought to reclaim a measure of the authority that it had enjoyed before the rise in union power after the Second World War. Monty Spaght took an uncompromising stand on this. He condemned management’s laxity and the union leaders’ shortsightedness in permitting the rise of practices that left workers underemployed. “He ran the flag up to the mast and nailed it hard,” said John Quilty, vice president for personnel and industrial relations and Shell’s chief negotiator during the strike.⁵⁷

When the battle was joined, Shell unleashed the same weapon tested by Standard of Indiana and Gulf, maintaining operations with supervisory and technical employees. Rather than bringing the plants back into partial operation, as in the previous strikes, Shell announced that it would bring all three back into full production. Shell sent staff to occupy the plants and obtained court injunctions at Wood River to assure entry past the mass pickets. Supervisors, engineers, researchers, clerical workers, accountants, secretaries, and stenographers all contributed to getting the plants running again. After intensive safety training, they worked 12-hour shifts, 7 days a

week, some even sleeping in the plants in the beginning. Within 3 months, the refineries were operating at close to capacity with only one-half the usual complement of people.

Although union officials suspected that Shell exaggerated the degree to which the refineries were brought back on line, the strikers gradually realized that they were fighting a losing battle. Tensions mounted on the picket lines and in the communities as workers and their families stretched incomes, savings, and patience to the limit. The company now had the power, and management the resolve, to outlast the strike. Roy Barnes remembered one co-worker exclaiming: "Damn it, if we stay out any longer, all we are going to do is to make scabs out of some darned good men."⁵⁸ Fortunately, there were only a couple of minor confrontations and isolated incidents of violence between strikers and picket-line crossers. The Wood River unions settled first, based on a 5% general wage increase obtained by unions at other plants. Contracting out was not the central issue with them, and Shell had not proposed new contract language there. This settlement undermined the tripartite labor alliance, and 2 weeks later, Norco's independent union settled on similar terms, plus "contract revisions to permit better utilization of manpower."⁵⁹

Houston endured another five and a half months. Both sides were strongly committed to their positions. Shell was not happy with the OCAW contract at Houston and took a hard line, demanding new language to relax restrictions on job practices, particularly in the area of cross-crafting.⁶⁰ OCAW appealed to the International Federation of Petroleum Workers (IFPW), a worldwide alliance of 120 oil unions, to mobilize pressure against Shell around the world. The IFPW threatened sympathy strikes in Venezuela and Trinidad, ostensibly to cut off crude oil supplies to Houston. But these strikes did not happen, and even if they had, the Houston refinery's crude supply, most of which came from Texas and Louisiana, would not have been affected. After marathon negotiations mediated by William Simkin, director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, the Houston workers returned to work in early August 1963. Lasting 11 months and 20 days, the Houston strike was the longest in the history of OCAW.⁶¹

In the end, Shell management extracted significant concessions from the unions. Offering severance pay and early retirement bonuses, the company reduced the workforce at all three locations, by about 400 people at Houston, 240 at Norco, and 250 at Wood River. New contract language enabled operators to do routine maintenance and provided for greater

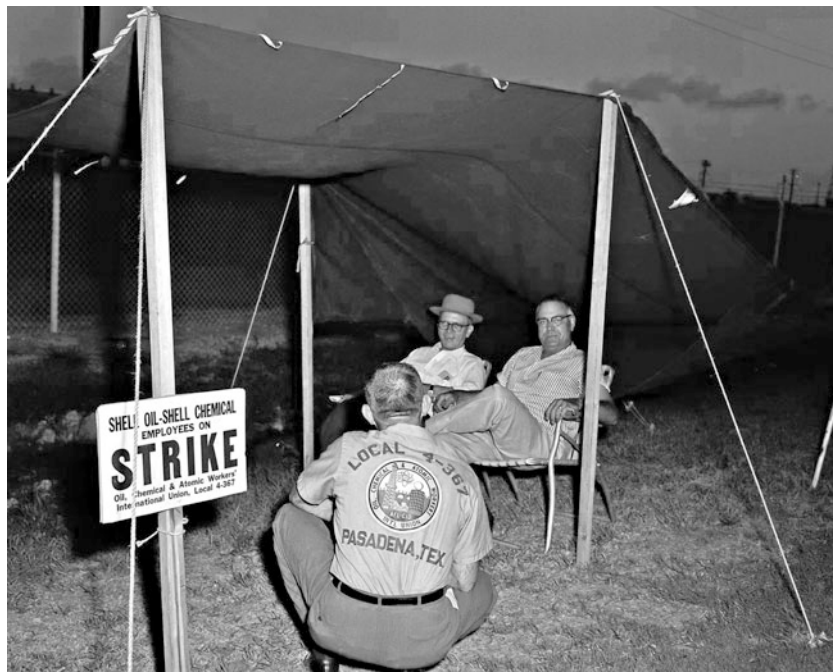


Fig. 4 OCAW Local 4-367 Picketers, Shell Oil 1962 Strike. *Credit* United Steelworkers Local 13-1, Pasadena, Texas.

flexibility in revising job and work rules. Hearings before the National Labor Relations Board upheld Shell's right to contract out some tasks. Assured of limits on the minor maintenance required of operators, OCAW called the agreement an "honorable settlement."⁶² Employees who kept their jobs were relieved to return to work. Although the bitterness built up during the year-long strike still lingered, as Garrison points out, "both the company and the union saw that they had to sit down and try to work out their differences without a strike."⁶³

The 1962–1963 Shell strike was a watershed for organized labor in US refineries and chemical plants. The OWIU-OCAW union had emerged victorious in the 1940s and had asserted increasing influence over wages and working conditions in the 1950s. The Shell showdown, however, starkly revealed the limits of the union's power. OCAW lost its most

effective bargaining tool: the strike. In the dawning age of automation, the threat to shut down plants with strikes was shown to be hollow, and the unions entered a new era of gradual decline. Meanwhile, technical and supervisory personnel grew proficient at operating refineries during strikes, limiting labor's bargaining power on all issues. As other refineries reduced their workforces, OCAW's national membership declined from its 1957 peak of 186,000 to 161,000 in 1965.⁶⁴

THE LONG RETRENCHMENT

In the aftermath of the devastating defeat in the Shell strike, OCAW regrouped. In 1965, Alvin F. Grospiron, a long-time Texas City unionist, was elected OCAW president, a position which he held for the next 14 years. Grospiron improved coordination among the locals across the nation and mobilized the union to pursue a national oil bargaining strategy. In 1966, OCAW succeeded in fixing a common expiration date for all oil contracts, which put the union in a position to bargain industry-wide, rather than continue the plant-by-plant practice that allowed oil companies to play one set of negotiations off against another. In 1969, unsatisfied with wage and benefits proposals from management, Grospiron called for the first industry-wide strike since 1952, ushering more than 50,000 workers off the job. Lasting 38 days, the strike won a concession from the oil companies to eliminate employee contributions to pension plans and established a precedent for "pattern" bargaining, whereby OCAW would come to a settlement with a lead company (usually Gulf or Amoco during the 1970s) that would establish a pattern for settlements with other companies.⁶⁵

Beginning with the 1969 strike, labor-management confrontations shifted from workplace control issues, which had dominated the relationship in the 1950s and 1960s, to a more narrow focus on wages, benefits, and occupational health and safety matters. In fact, during the 1969 strike, companies successfully operated plants again with supervisory and technical staff, and Shell obtained revisions to contract language at its California refineries pertaining to work practices that were similar to those achieved at the East-of-the-Rockies plants in 1963. The union, in effect, had submitted to formal management control over job assignments.

Workplace safety emerged as an issue that might improve working conditions in the plants while also changing the rules of engagement in what had become a losing battle for OCAW. In 1971, the union put

forward strong new language on health and safety in its contract proposals to oil and chemical companies. Central to these proposals was OCAW's call for the creation of joint committees on health and safety that would include workers, managers, and industrial health specialists chosen with union approval. Such committees would exercise broad powers in identifying and rectifying problems that might affect workers' health and safety. Under the union's proposal, workers would be compensated for time spent serving on these committees. In addition, a small tax on the throughput of refineries would be put aside to create a joint union-industry fund for research on health hazards in the industry.

The oil companies dismissed this proposal with a little discussion. Undeterred, OCAW reintroduced the same proposal to more receptive ears when the next round of bargaining began in 1973. This time around, numerous major oil companies opted to accept the language of the union's proposal on health and safety. With declining profits and great economic uncertainty in refining, these companies decided that the issues at stake were not worth the threat of an extended and costly strike. Nearing a much-needed victory in establishing a new bargaining pattern with the industry, OCAW bore down on holdout companies. The most prominent was Shell Oil, which stood as one of only two major firms that rejected the union's call for joint committees. These not only would have given workers real power to shape decisions about health and safety in the workplace, but also would have empowered labor arbitrators to determine staffing levels on generating units that they judged to be required for safety reasons. Shell leaders felt strongly that such committees represented an unacceptable infringement on the firm's authority to determine staffing levels and crew sizes. They insisted that these demands merely masked an effort by the union to control manpower levels and operating methods. "So, in reality," spoke corporate publicity, "the issue is not 'health and safety,' but featherbedding [deliberate overstaffing] in disguise."⁶⁶

In January 1973, confident that it could force Shell to fall in line and accept the industry pattern, the union called a nationwide strike targeted at Shell alone. OCAW mounted an aggressive public relations campaign with the aid of 11 major environmental groups, many of which had seldom if ever become involved in labor-related issues. The centerpiece of the campaign was a national boycott of Shell gasoline and pesticides under the slogan, "Shell? No!" The union drove home its message with billboards, newspaper ads, radio spots, and millions of pamphlets and leaflets.⁶⁷

As the strike wore on, Shell negotiators concentrated their efforts on the large local at Houston-Deer Park. There, rank-and-file union members seemed increasingly skeptical of staying out for a long period over somewhat abstract health and safety issues. In May 1973, fearing that the Deer Park local might actually move to decertify the union, OCAW agreed to accept a local agreement that included a greatly watered down version of the original proposal for a joint health and safety committee that would have the authority to impose decisions on management. Once this agreement was signed, other Shell locals quickly accepted similar contracts, and the strike ended. In essence, the new committees would invite worker input, but they would vest final authority to act in the hands of management.⁶⁸

Organized labor in refining continued to give ground. OCAW orchestrated another national strike in 1980, which achieved, in addition to a wage increase to match galloping inflation, a dental plan and vacation leave. Soon after the strike ended, the union was in desperate retreat. During the recession of 1980–1981, employers closed down smaller, less profitable refineries, and reduced workforces elsewhere. The election of anti-union political conservatives pushed labor supporters out of office. Ongoing improvements to refining and processing technology, further small refinery closures, and drastic staff reductions through mergers continued to shrink the workforce. The slow decrease in OCAW membership accelerated, dropping from 140,000 in mid-1980 to under 100,000 by 1986.⁶⁹

The decline continued, year after year, into the 1990s. OCAW eventually had to combine with other unions that faced the same trend. In 1999, OCAW merged with the United Paperworkers Union to form the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical, and Energy (PACE) International Union, and in 2005, PACE merged with the United Steelworkers Union to form the United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied-Industrial and Service Workers International Union—or United Steelworkers (USW) for short.⁷⁰

THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

The possibilities looked so different many years earlier. For a time, refinery workers overcame the hurdles that frustrated the industrial union movement in the South. In the early twentieth century, the giant, expanding refining complexes on the upper Gulf Coast provided a pathway out of rural poverty for wave after wave of white and minority migrants.

Beginning in the late 1930s, grassroots organizing assisted by federal intervention led to union victories that secured workers' access to well-paying refinery jobs for many years. By the mid-1950s, labor had won a voice in the organization of refinery workforces. The crucial support of racial minorities, despite their subordinate status, in the organizing victories of OCAW on the Gulf Coast signaled at least some incremental progress toward interracial solidarity in the workplace and even held out hope for greater social equality in refinery communities.

Starting in the late 1950s, broad-based upward mobility for the working class in refining stalled. Technological change and the reassertion of managerial authority chipped away at union power until the workers' chief weapon, the strike, was rendered ineffective. Organized labor's loss of control in the workplace after the pivotal Shell Oil strike and the erosion of its membership in the years that followed narrowed the route to socioeconomic advancement for the working class along the Gulf Coast and elsewhere. OCAW steadily ceded ground until it eventually fell victim to trends that weakened organized labor across the nation.

Although, in its heyday, the OWIU-OCAW had accommodated white supremacy, the union's decline offset some of the gains that minorities finally achieved in their struggle for workplace equality. In the late 1960s, presidential orders prohibiting discrimination in federal projects forced refinery management to dismantle what remained of the two-tier labor system. When minorities and women finally won full access to refinery jobs, however, those jobs no longer provided the economic benefits and job security that working-class white men had enjoyed in unionized refineries along the Gulf Coast a generation before. As in many other US industries, the shrinking of refinery employment since the 1970s has worked against anti-discrimination measures. With fewer jobs available, racial polarization increased, and many white workers began to view unions as part of a "liberal establishment" whose affirmative action programs were giving minorities "unfair" advantages.⁷¹

The legacy of the past endures into the present. The United Steelworkers, which now represents some 30,000 US refinery workers, a fraction of the former strength of organized labor in this sector, continues to struggle over the very same issues that proved so divisive in the 1960s and 1970s. In February 2015, the USW initiated the first nationwide refinery strike since 1980 after the collapse of negotiations with oil companies led by Shell over a nationwide contract covering hourly workers at 63 US refineries. The sticking point for the USW was not wages and

benefits, but its concern about contractors performing routine maintenance, echoing the 1962 strike, and serious safety issues stemming from worker fatigue, reminiscent of 1973.⁷²

By 2015, these two issues had become closely joined. The union believed that the increasing practice of contracting out maintenance to workers with no lasting stake in, or knowledge of, the refineries that they were brought into maintain was not only eroding union job security but also compromising safety. For the 6,550 members who went on strike at 15 facilities, memories of deadly refinery accidents from the past decade were all too vivid, especially the March 2005 explosion at its Texas City refinery (the one formerly owned by Standard of Indiana) that killed 15 contractors housed in a trailer close to the blast site and wounded dozens more. This disaster led to the largest criminal fine ever up to that point against BP for felony violations of safety regulations under the Clean Air Act.

As it had in the past, Shell announced a start up of the Houston-Deer Park refinery without USW labor, undercutting union bargaining leverage and hastening a national settlement, again with mainly toothless language that addressed union demands about maintenance and fatigue management. For the first time in 35 years, organized labor in refining tried to make stand over what have become intolerable conditions in aging refineries, only to discover that their ability to shift the balance of power had changed very little, if it had not diminished beyond repair. Where once a refinery worker could gaze at lights of a massive cat cracker at night with wondrous pride, as Harvey O'Connor did in 1955, a common emotion that such a sight elicited 60 years later was one of fear.

NOTES

1. Harvey O'Connor, *The Empire of Oil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1962), 94.
2. Joseph A. Pratt, *The Growth of a Refining Region* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1980), 93.
3. Mexican and Mexican-American workers were mainly in Texas. According to a 1943 Fair Employment Practices Commission survey, 59% of Mexican refinery workers in Texas were born outside the United States. Cited in Emilio Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas: Mexican Workers and Job Politics During World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2009), 161.

4. See the discussion of the union organizing potential of different sectors of the industry in Melvin Rothbaum, *The Government of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1962), 4–10.
5. See, for example, Timothy J. Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds: A History of Southern Labor Since World War II* (Gainseville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 2–3.
6. F. Ray Marshall, “Independent Unions in the Gulf Coast Petroleum Refining Industry,” *Labor Law Journal* 12, no. 9 (1961): 823–840; Marshall, “Some Factors Influencing the Upgrading of Negroes in the Southern Petroleum Refining Industry,” *Social Forces* 42, no. 2 (1963): 186–195; and F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 194–201.
7. This is the title of the official history of the oil workers’ union, Ray Davidson, *Challenging the Giants: A History of Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union* (Denver: OCAW, 1988).
8. Marshall, “Some Factors Influencing the Upgrading of Negroes,” 187.
9. Pratt, *The Growth of a Refining Region*, 153–162.
10. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 267.
11. Sethuraman Srinivasan, Jr., “The Struggle for Control: Technology and Organized Labor in Gulf Coast Refineries, 1913–1973” (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 2001), 30–31; Ray Davidson, *Turmoil and Triumph: The First 50 Years of Local 4-367* (Pasadena, TX: Local 4-367, Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, 1983), 81; Herbert Northup, *Negro Employment in Basic Industry—A Study of Racial Policies in Six Industries* (Pennsylvania: Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 1970), 535.
12. Jersey Standard would later become Exxon. For years, its Texas subsidiary retained the name Humble Oil. Magnolia was the Texas subsidiary of Standard Oil of New York, later called Mobil Oil. For more on NERPs, see Bruce E. Kaufman, “The Case for Company Unions,” *Labor History* 41, no. 3 (2000): 321–335.
13. Harvey O’Connor, *History of Oil Workers International Union (CIO)* (Denver: Oil Workers International Union, 1950), 1–17.
14. On the Employees Federation at Baytown, see Henrietta M. Larson and Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *History Of Humble Oil & Refining Company: A Study in Industrial Growth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 94–104, 350–389.
15. Marshall, “Independent Unions,” 824; Herbert Werner, “Labor Organizations in the American Petroleum Industry,” in *The American Petroleum Industry: The Age of Energy, 1899–1959*, ed. Harold F. Williamson, Ralph L. Andreano, Arnold R. Daum, and Gilbert C. Klose (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 831–832.

16. Pratt, *The Growth of a Refining Region*, 170.
17. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 55–59.
18. O'Connor, *History of the Oil Workers International Union*, 29–39; Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 61–91.
19. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 103–120; Srinivasan, “The Struggle for Control,” 45–67.
20. Marshall, “Independent Unions,” 827.
21. Michael Botson, “We’re Sticking by Our Union: The Battle for Baytown, 1942–1943,” *Houston History* 8, no. 2 (2011): 8–14.
22. Ibid.
23. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 151.
24. Ibid., 121–127.
25. Figures from Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 79–80; Marshall, “Some Factors Influencing the Upgrading of Negroes,” 188.
26. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 150–151, 267; Marshall, “Some Factors Influencing the Upgrading of Negroes,” 189, 192–193.
27. Quoted in Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism*, 77. Pratt, *Growth of a Refining Region*, 93.
28. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 109; O'Connor, *History of the Oil Workers International Union*, 314–315. A month later, a white mob descended on a black section of shipyard workers in neighboring Beaumont, burning buildings and attacking residents before Beaumont officials declared martial law.
29. Srinivasan, “The Struggle for Control,” 50–53.
30. Quoted in Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism*, 76.
31. In 1942, a smaller Humble refinery in Ingleside, Texas, near Corpus Christi, had chosen the OWIU over the Federation, giving the CIO a foothold in Jersey Standard. But in 1945, the company shut down and dismantled the plant, putting employees at its other refineries on notice about the Jersey Standard’s determination to keep its operations free of outside unions. Pratt, *Growth of a Refining Region*, 174.
32. Case File 5945, Employees Federation Bulletin No. 11, Record Group 25, Records of the National Labor Relations Board, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.
33. Clyde Johnson, *The Battle for Baytown* (Berkeley: Clyde Johnson, 1984), 169. Johnson led the CIO organizing campaign at Baytown in 1942.
34. Zamora, *Claiming Rights and Righting Wrongs in Texas*, 159–180.
35. O'Connor, *History of the Oil Workers International Union*, 52–57.
36. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 163–173; 234–239. For analysis of the political targeting and effects of federal loyalty investigations at this time,

- see Landon R.Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).
37. Nelson Lichtenstein, "From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980*, eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 122–152.
 38. Davidson, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 61, 74, 82–83; Werner, "Labor Organizations in the American Petroleum Industry," 842–844.
 39. Editorial from *National Petroleum News* quoted in Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 223.
 40. Marshall, "Independent Unions," 827; Pratt, *Growth of a Refining Region*, 177–178.
 41. Srinivasan, "The Struggle for Control," 45–67; Pratt, *Growth of a Refining Region*, 178–179.
 42. Roy Barnes interview by Sethuraman Srinivasan, February 18, 2000, Houston, Texas. All interview cited in author's possession.
 43. See discussion in Marshall, "Some Factors Influencing the Upgrading of Negroes," based on field interviews conducted during 1960–1962.
 44. Edward J. Williams, "The Impact of Technology on Employment in the Refining Industry in Texas, 1947–1966" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas–Austin, 1971).
 45. Barnes interview.
 46. Marshall, "Independent Unions," 828–832.
 47. *Ibid.*, 829; Mildred J. Fox, Jr., "The Impact of Work Assignments on Collective Bargaining in the Petroleum Refining Industry on the Texas Gulf Coast" (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas A&M University, 1969).
 48. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 273.
 49. *Ibid.*, 278.
 50. "Monty Spaght's Royal Dutch Treat," *Fortune*, June 1966, 191.
 51. Fox, "The Impact of Work Assignments," 87–90.
 52. "Why Strike Hell?" *Union News* 19, no. 2 (1963): 9.
 53. "Maintenance—The 'Man Behind the Man,'" *Shell News* 17, no. 11 (1949): 18–20.
 54. Fox, "The Impact of Work Assignments," 88.
 55. Johnny Garrison interview by Tom Stewart, 10 June 1999, Houston, TX.
 56. "Shell Strikers 100 percent Solid in 8th Month," *Union News* 19, no. 2 (1963), 8.
 57. John Quilty interview by Jim Cox, 1973, Houston, TX.
 58. Barnes interview.
 59. Shell Oil, *Annual Report, 1963*.
 60. John Sheehan interview by Jim Cox, 1973, Houston, TX.
 61. "Oil Strikers Get Global Support," *Business Week*, May 25, 1963, 62.

62. "Honorable Settlement at Shell," *Union News* 19, no. 3 (1963): 3.
63. Garrison interview.
64. Data from Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 282, 292, 317; Pratt, *Growth of a Refining Region*, 180–183.
65. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 309–312.
66. Letter from Shell Oil Company to All Shell Dealers, All Shell Jobbers, February 7, 1973, OCAW Records, University Libraries, Archives Department, University of Colorado at Boulder.
67. For a discussion of this strike from the perspective of the union, see Robert Gordon, "'Shell No!' OCAW and the Labor-Environmental Alliance," *Environmental History* 3, no. 4 (1998): 460–487.
68. OCAW Strike Bulletin No. 21, OCAW Records; Mac MacIver interview by Tom Stewart, September 24, 1998, Houston, TX. MacIver was a Shell industrial relations official involved in labor negotiations.
69. Davidson, *Challenging the Giants*, 345–350.
70. OCAW Local 4-367 changed to PACE 4-367, then to PACE 4-1, and finally to USW 13-1.
71. For a discussion of how this problem has affected American labor in general, see Robert H. Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1994).
72. Lydia DePillis, "Why Oil Refinery Workers are Striking for the First Time in Decades," *Washington Post*, February 13, 2015.