

Steel industry in youngstown, ohio



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Youngstown, Ohio is traditionally known as the center of the steel industry in the United States. It was named after John Young, one of the early settlers in the city. Young established the community's first gristmill and sawmill. The abundance of large deposits of coal and iron contributed to the development of the steel industry in the area. Between the 1920s and 1960s, the city was known as an important steel hub, being the location of several steel foundries and furnaces. Republic Steel, U. S. Steel and Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company were some of the major steel companies in Youngstown. Before its deindustrialization in the 1970s, " Youngstown began a long period of dynamic growth, a foundation of conflict-based on class and race was being built alongside the iron furnaces, industrialists' mansions, and modest workers' homes" (Linkon and Russo, 2003). Class conflict within mills and the community became the central element that shaped the local landscape. The social organization of work in mills was characterized by class tensions and power relations. The series of strikes in the mills " represented an important first wave of labor-management conflict" (Linkon and Russo, 2003).

The 1916 East Youngstown strike highlighted the interactions between the issues of class conflict, race and ethnicity. The mills and the community were divided between native-born Americans and immigrants who dominated the population. Native Americans perceived immigrants as immoral, undisciplined and a threat to a stable society. Native Americans also viewed labor organizing as a foreign-born movement that negatively affects the steel industry and national institutions. The growth in power of the Ku Klux

Klan in the 1920s also contributed to the increasing class conflict in Youngstown.

As it grows to power, the Klan assertively showed its anti-immigrant stance. It emphasized not only the protection of Protestant values but also the preservation of American democracy. Irish and Italian immigrants cooperated together to fight the Klan. Italian immigrants, who were more open to violence, aggressively tried to protect the immigrant community by defending it against the Klan and by offering support to immigrant families during hard economic situations. A particular conflict between the Italian mob led by the Jennings brothers and the Klan resulted in the injury and death of several people.

Despite their association with corruption, many immigrant communities saw the Italian mob as a group that could provide fairness in the community. The division between the races was used by steel companies such as Republic Steel and Youngstown Sheet and Tube to defeat union organizing efforts. The full development of labor unions in Youngstown was also prevented by rivalries among the unions and local ownership of the mills. The history of labor unions in Youngstown traces back to the 1830s, with the first meeting of the Mechanics of Youngtown held in 1843.

The first labor strikes were held by coal miners in 1865. It is said that labor strikes contributed to the growth of welfare capitalism in the city. During the growth of the steel industry, labor unions fought for increased wage, improved quality of life for workers, and better worker-management cooperation. Labor organizing led to worker-centered developments such as

housing for steelworkers, sports teams sponsored by companies, and other leisure activities. However, the division between steelworkers and companies still prevailed as Youngstown struggle to face the issue of class and race conflict.

The class conflict within mills also echoed in the community. Immigrants settled into neighborhoods which were divided into ethnic sections. The city became highly balkanized both within the mills and the community, with poverty as the central issue. Despite conflicts, there were efforts to facilitate harmony and cooperation by maintaining ethnic identities through civic groups, churches and social networks. These efforts towards harmony resurfaced in the 1970s when the community tried to prevent the massive shutdowns of mills and seek community ownership of the mills under the eminent domain principle.

The Jeannette Blast Furnace was one of the famous metallurgical furnaces in the city. The furnace was built in 1917-1918 and owned by Brier Hill Steel Co. The furnace was named after Mary Jeannette Thomas, the daughter of the president of Brier Hill Steel. The company was eventually purchased by Youngstown Sheet and Tube Co. in 1923. Youngstown Sheet and Tube was one of the world's largest steel manufacturers. Difficult economic situations led to the closure of a large part of Youngstown Sheet and Tube, including the Jeannette furnace which was shutdown in 1978. The closure of the Jeannette furnace resulted to the lost of 50, 000 jobs.

The shutdown of the mill and eventually the company in 1977 signaled the start of the demise of the local steel industry. The collapse of the steel

industry in the 1970s significantly affected local workers as well as the local economy. The industry was closely linked with the growth of other industries such as automotive and construction. Despite the failure to revive the local steel industry, Youngstown residents struggled to redefine their lives and to rebuild the city. The memories of the glory days of the industry helped residents form a collective identity of Youngstown.

The recollections of the past reminded residents that the community was once known for its struggle to offer economic and social justice that improved the lives of steelworkers. The community's history of addressing conflicts and labor tensions also helped redefine and reshape its landscape. The persistence of conflict reminded the community and its residents that "the relations of labor and the production of space are constructed on the foundation of history" (Linkon and Russo, 2003) and that the community culture will be able to survive for generations even if space changes.