



1920

Dodge employs African Americans

By 1920 many auto companies, with the exclusion of Henry Ford, still did not employ African Americans. John Dancy, the president of the Urban League, went to John Dodge and asked him to hire African Americans. Dodge soon became the second leading employer of African Americans, and kept hiring more into the 1930s.

A friendly work environment set Dodge apart from Ford. The pace was less demanding and hard workers were often rewarded with beer and sandwiches for labor-intensive work.

¹ Dodge Plant

Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, 3763_1_vmc

² John Dodge

Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

³ John Dancy

Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, 36894_vmc

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Credits:

Meier, August and Elliott Rudwick. *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007. Print.

Zunz, Olivier. *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. Print.

Hyde, Charles K. *The Dodge Brothers: The Men, the Motor Cars, and the Legacy*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005. Print.

Keywords/Topics:

Employment, Work/Jobs

Questions:

1. Did John Dodge hire any African Americans before John Dancy asked him to?
2. Why did Dancy ask John Dodge instead of Henry Ford?
3. Why were work conditions better at Dodge than at Ford Motor Company?
4. What do you think John Dancy said that made John Dodge change his mind?

Links to Internet Websites:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Francis_Dodge

<http://www.chryslerheritage.com>

<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/dancy-john-campbell-jr-1888-1968>

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The image shown above is the outside of the Dodge Plant in Hamtramck, Michigan during a shift change.

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Courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

Born in 1864, John Francis Dodge became a very influential man throughout the state of Michigan. His family lived in Niles and Port Huron, Michigan, ultimately moving to Detroit in 1886. He and his brother Horace moved to Windsor, Ontario and started Evans & Dodge Bicycle. They dissolved their partnership with Fred Evans in 1900 and began manufacturing automobile parts in Detroit. This led to the establishment of the Dodge Brothers. Dodge was now competing with Henry Ford instead of supplying parts for him. While manufacturing cars, John Dodge became notorious for his crude and violent behavior. Many elitist clubs in Detroit did not allow him membership because of his antics. Despite his infamy, he became active in state-level politics, the Republican Party, and served on the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners from 1905 to 1910. In 1919, Henry Ford bought out the Dodge Brothers shareholdings for \$25 million dollars. Both John and Horace Dodge died of the Spanish Influenza in 1920.

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John Dancy took over as director of the Detroit Urban League in 1918. He was dedicated to helping newly arrived southern migrants find housing and jobs. Since, the auto industry employed a large number of people in the north, Dancy focused intensely on getting African Americans placed there. Companies like Ford and Packard were already in the practice of hiring African Americans but the Dodge Brothers did not hire African Americans until John Dancy asked Dodge personally.