

Rapp Road and the Great Migration

Education Material

Background

This episode will delve into the history of Rapp Road in Albany County, an African American community of Southern migrants who moved north for a better life in the 1920s and 1930s.

Marker of focus: Rapp Road Community Historical District Marker, Albany County.

NYS Social Studies Standards

11.7 PROSPERITY AND DEPRESSION (1920 – 1939): The 1920s and 1930s were a time of cultural and economic changes in the nation. During this period, the nation faced significant domestic challenges, including the Great Depression.

11.7 b African Americans continued to struggle for social and economic equality while expanding their own thriving and unique culture. African American cultural achievements were increasingly integrated into national culture.

11.8. WORLD WAR II (1935 – 1945): The participation of the United States in World War II was a transformative event for the nation and its role in the world.

11.8 b United States entry into World War II had a significant impact on American society.

- Students will examine United States mobilization efforts and wartime production and their effects on unemployment rates.
- Students will examine the contributions of women, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican workers, and Mexican Americans to the war effort, as well as the discrimination that they experienced in the military and workforce.

Questions

Review the primary sources below and answer the following questions:

Using the interview excerpt from *Southern Life, Northern City*, what challenges did James Stamper face in finding industry work? How was James Stamper able to secure employment at General Electric?

Using the war poster print *Americans All*, what is Franklin D. Roosevelt encouraging employers and labor organizers to do? What can this tell us about hiring discrimination during this time?

Using A New York Minute in History podcast episode *Rapp Road and the Great Migration*, why did African Americans living in the south migrate to northern cities? Why was the Rapp Road community created in Albany, New York?

Primary Sources

Oral History Interview of James Stamper, an African American who migrated with his family to Schenectady, New York in 1930 at the age of 17 from Atlanta, Georgia. In 1942, Stamper took a job at General Electric where he later became the first black foreman in the company's history.

"I applied many times [at the General Electric Company] and they would tell me that they kept these applications on file for six months, and they would say come back in six months if you don't hear from us and we will have you apply again. And I applied many times, I go down and they would say, "sorry, we're not hiring." So I would make another application, leave it, and go to work. I would continually go back, I wanted them to know that I wanted to get into industry because there was a lot of industrialization in this area, but to get a good job in industry was very difficult. I went back time and again until about 1942; I was very desperate then because that's when they started putting everybody in the service. I said I am gonna have to get inside somewhere. Finally they told me there was a job available as a material handler, I had never heard of such a thing in my entire life, what was that? The government had control of all the material because of the war effort... it was really a glorified porter's job. I had to go around and check materials at all the machines and make sure the porters were putting the different kinds of scrap metal into the right barrels, my job was to take record of that and send it down to the foundry...But, when they decided to give me the job, they called me in, and they had all of my applications clipped right together. At the top of the application there was a red circle: AMERICAN NEGRO. I found they did not destroy all those applications; it was a way of keeping track of who was who. Because in those days it seemed to have meant so much more to them who you were rather than what you were going to do for the company."

Lemak, Jennifer A. *Southern Life, Northern City: The History of Albany's Rapp Road Community*. Excelsior Editions, 2015. Page 49.

Photograph of James Stamper



James Stamper. Photograph. *Electric City Archives: Remembering Schenectady's Ralph Boyd and James Stamper*. The Daily Gazette, February 23, 2021. <https://dailygazette.com/2021/02/23/electric-city-archives-remembering-schenectadys-ralph-boyd-and-james-stamper/>.

Americans All United States War Manpower Commission 1942 War Poster Print



United States War Manpower Commission, Funder/Sponsor. *Americans All*. United States, 1942. [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/96502727/>.

A New York Minute in History Podcast- *Rapp Road and the Great Migration*



Listen here: <https://wamcpodcasts.org/a-new-york-minute-in-history/>

Rapp Road and the Great Migration. *A New York Minute in History*. podcast episode.

Additional Resources

To learn more about the Great Migration and the challenges that migrants faced in northern cities through the artwork of Jacob Lawrence and supporting first-hand accounts visit <https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/the-migration-series> .