

WWII Liberty Bell Attack: black transit workers promoted

In 1944 the Philadelphia Transportation Co. promoted eight black men to positions previously reserved for whites only. Labor groups used race-baiting propaganda to incite white members. As a result, 4,500 people hit the streets, refusing to work at a time when conscription meant intense labor shortages across the nation. The strike impacted production of military artillery, heavy ammunition, armored vehicles, grenades, bombs, and other supplies vital to the war effort.

Within this backlash, one employee expressed his opposition by attacking the Liberty Bell. His explanation upon arrest? "We're being kept from our jobs and stopped from turning out equipment necessary to win the war. I want my brother serving in the army with five children waiting on his safe return to have a chance."

Later study of the event by the National Urban League concludes: "It's the Philadelphia Story, another stirring episode in the struggle for genuine democracy and equality of opportunity in America."

