

Discussion Question Answer Key

African Americans and Life in a Secret City

1. How did African Americans hear about job opportunities at Hanford Engineering Works? Why did many decide to migrate to Washington?

African Americans often heard about job opportunities at Hanford Engineering works from friends, relatives, or advertisements from the DuPont Corporation, which was in charge of constructing the site at Hanford. Many migrated to Washington due to the allure of the substantial wages offered to the concrete and construction workers there—roughly \$1-\$2 an hour—when at home the average was often half of that.¹

2. Why do you think DuPont decided to recruit African Americans from the South even though the site was across the country in Washington state?

DuPont likely recruited African Americans from the South because the black population there made low wages, and many were willing to do the unpleasant concrete work required at Hanford.

3. What was life like for African Americans at Hanford?

Life for African Americans at Hanford seemed relatively favorable. Working conditions, supervisors, and wages were all fair, especially compared to those found in the South. The barracks were evocative of the “wild west,” with drinking, gambling, fighting, and hucksters in abundance.² By design, none of the construction workers were told their work was helping to develop atomic bombs.³ In addition, racial tensions and problems at Hanford appear to have been kept to a minimum.

4. How did segregation affect their daily lives? What parts of Hanford life were segregated? What parts weren't?

While Hanford retained some facets of segregation, in general the racial boundaries there were much more muddled than much of the United States in the 1940s. The sleeping barracks were segregated,⁴ although the mess halls and worksites were not, and white and black laborers ate, socialized, and worked together.⁵ In addition, white and black baseball players played on the same teams during the recreational games there.⁶

¹ Luzell Johnson's Oral History Interview, 1.

² Luzell Johnson, 1; Willie Daniels' Oral History Interview, 2-3.

³ Luzell Johnson, 2; Willie Daniels 3.

⁴ Willie Daniels, 2.

⁵ Luzell Johnson, 1; Willie Daniels 2.

⁶ Luzell Johnson, 1; Willie Daniels, 3.