



Perceptions of the Burning River: Deindustrialization and Cleveland's Cuyahoga River Author(s): David Stradling and Richard Stradling Source: *Environmental History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Jul., 2008), pp. 515–535 Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Forest History Society and American Society for Environmental History Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/25473265 Accessed: 22-08-2018 11:04 UTC

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perceptions of the burning river: deindustrialization and CLEVELAND'S

ABSTRACT

In 1969, Cleveland's Cuyahoga River caught fire and burned for about twenty minutes, damaging two railroad trestles. After initially receiving little local news coverage, the fire evolved into an iconic event of the environmental crisis. Significantly, the river had caught fire at least nine times before 1969. Why, then, did the 1969 fire garner so much interest? We argue that the growing importance of the burning river reveals one consequence of the long, wrenching process of deindustrialization in Cleveland and much of the United States. Press coverage of the earlier fires focused on economic issues. The Cuyahoga and its industrial flats were at the heart of Cleveland's economy; the area's docks, railroads, warehouses, and refineries were essential to the city's well-being. By the 1970s, however, as the 1969 fire story evolved, the flats were rapidly emptying, as were nearby neighborhoods. No longer did most Clevelanders make their living near the industrial river. From a greater physical and psychological distance, then, the burning river looked much more troubling than it had close up in an earlier era. Cleveland's postindustrial sensibilities—like those of the nation as a whole—created new meanings for the Cuyahoga and its 1969 fire.

IN THE 1980s, CLEVELAND BEGAN to rediscover the industrial flats along the Cuyahoga River. Once the heart of this Midwestern metropolis, the flats had been slowly abandoned and bypassed for nearly fifty years, with new highways bridging the narrow valley and old factories giving way to grassy, unused fields. By the mid-1990s, though, Jacobs Field and Gund Arena brought sports fans downtown, and bars and restaurants had sprung up along the crooked river below. Despite decades of deterioration, evidence of the city's industrial past remained abundant,

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including the many archaic drawbridges, brick warehouses, and rows and rows of pilings that constitute the river's banks through much of the city.' Part of the return to this once-industrial landscape included the marketing of a new beer, Burning River Pale Ale, created by Great Lakes Brewing Company of Ohio City, the neighborhood just above the Cuyahoga on the near west side of Cleveland. Burning River's brilliant packaging is emblematic of the city's postindustrial selfmockery. But it is also much more. The package claims that the 1969 fire on the Cuyahoga "built as much character in the city as there is in this beer." And so, while surely many Clevelanders still feel some embarrassment about the famously



Since the early 1990s, Great Lakes Brewing Co., Cleveland, OH Burning River Pale Ale, using imagery that romanticizes Cleveland's industrial past.

flammable Cuyahoga, others, including those at Great Lakes Brewing Company, have begun to take ownership of the city's flawed history, and even have taken pride in an urban character forged by fire. In an image that appears on every bottle, flames on the water add a glow to a rose-tinted skyline framed by two of the drawbridges in the flats. Adding to the romance, brilliant stars shine down on the fortunate city. The Burning River packaging reaches back to an industrial identity, before the "Mistake on the Lake" era of 1970s, back to better economic times, when Cleveland was a city that made things. In this postindustrial imagining, the burning Cuyahoga represents an industrial past, worthy of pining and pride.²

Although now the fire might represent Cleveland's industrial past, in the 1970s it helped solidify Cleveland's reputation as one of the nation's most troubled cities, "identified with urban blight, white flight and decay of the river and Lake Erie," as *U.S. New & World Reports* reporter Jack A. Seamonds described in 1984. As Seamonds' phrase suggests, for many Americans the Cuyahoga's burning helped connect urban decay with the environmental crisis. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, the Cuyahoga fire only gained in cultural currency, as more Americans–

Figure 1. A Local Brewery's Burning River Pale Ale

including Clevelanders—intimately linked environment problems to deindustrializing landscapes.³

The fire memorialized by Burning River Pale Ale, and by Seamonds' remembrance on its fifteenth anniversary, occurred late on a Sunday morning in June 1969. An oil slick and debris burned intensely for less than half an hour, damaging two railroad trestles, one seriously. Firefighters arrived in time to douse the blaze before it could do more damage; photographers arrived too late to catch the flames on film. Instead, Cleveland's two dailies, the *Press* and the *Plain Dealer*, published photos of the damaged trestles the following day, though only the *Plain Dealer* included a story, which appeared on page 11C and was so clumsily handled that it contained two typographical errors in the lead paragraph. Under the headline, "Oil Slick Fire Damages 2 River Spans," the article began: "An (sic) burning oil slick floating on (sic) Cuyahoga River caused \$50,000 damage to two key railroad trestles at the foot of Campbell Road Hill SE about noon yesterday, closing one to traffic." In both Cleveland papers, the news was the damaged trestles, not the burning river.

Clearly the local press made little of the fire, and the national press initially ignored the blaze altogether. If the Associated Press or any other wire service produced a story about the Cuyahoga fire that summer, it was not used by the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, or the Columbus Dispatch, although the latter did carry a story two weeks later about the finger pointing between Cleveland and the state over who was to blame.4 The situation changed dramatically after a short essay appeared in *Time* magazine in early August. Under the headline "The Cities: The Price of Optimism," the unbylined piece listed several troubled urban waterways but focused on the Cuyahoga. "Some river!" the essay exclaimed. "Chocolate-brown, oily, bubbling with subsurface gases, it oozes rather than flows." After repeating a joke about how people who fall into the river decay rather than drown, the essay quickly told the story of the fire. "A few weeks ago, the oil-slicked river burst into flames and burned with such intensity that two railroad bridges spanning it were nearly destroyed." Perhaps that one sentence about the fire would have had less influence had it not appeared above a dramatic photograph of a boat nearly engulfed in flames on the water, dark smoke filling the sky, streams of water from bridge-bound firefighters feebly spraying the tug. "Boat Caught in Flaming Cuyahoga" was the only caption.⁵

Time failed to note that that photo had been taken seventeen years earlier, when another fire swept across the Cuyahoga's waters. It's not clear whether the editors at *Time* mistakenly used the older photo or did so deliberately, perhaps thinking the more dramatic scene would grab readers' attention. Either way, *Time* created a new story for the 1969 fire, connecting an old image with a new interpretation. When combined with the prose above, the photo suggested that the river's pollution had finally gotten so bad the river simply and spectacularly "burst into flames," seemingly for the first time.

After the *Time* coverage, the 1969 Cuyahoga fire evolved into one of the great symbolic environmental catastrophes of the industrial era. *National Geographic*'s

stark issue in December 1970, under the cover "Our Ecological Crisis," prominently featured the Cuyahoga, using a foldout image of the industrial river with several smoking stacks along its shores, but no flames on the dark, shadowed waters. After mentioning the fire, the caption noted, "Along this six-mile stretch, before emptying into Lake Erie, the river receives the wastes of steel mills, chemical and meat-rendering plants, and other industries."⁶ The coverage in *Time* and *National Geographic* encouraged even more references to the fire, usually in a context that posited the Cuyahoga as emblematic of the nation's serious water pollution problem, as representative of urban ecological wastelands. Henceforth, the Cuyahoga would symbolize the environmental crisis, mentioned over and over again in the popular press and in scholarly works on the environmental movement.⁷

The fire took on mythic status, and errors of fact became unimportant to the story's obvious meaning. National Geographic got the month wrong, although the story was just a year and a half old at that point. Both the references and the mistakes increased over time. In 1990, the EPA Journal claimed people had watched the fire on television, which they hadn't. Randy Newman, who immortalized the fire with his song "Burn On" in 1972, repeated this error in the liner notes to a 1998 compilation album, claiming, "I saw the Cuyahoga River on fire on television." Earlier, author William Ashworth had claimed that "several linear miles" of the river "went massively up in flames," in his 1986 book, The Late, Great Lakes: An Environmental History. A recent history doctoral dissertation repeats erroneous statements about the fire, perhaps taken from websites that claim the Cuyahoga burned for days. Taken together, these errors suggest an interest in adding drama to an actually rather unexciting event, as if the 1969 fire had to grow to match people's expectations of what it was, to match its mythic status. Clearly this transformative fire must have been massive; the nation must have seen the flames and been appropriately moved. Neither is true.⁸

With or without the facts, almost no one has offered much of an explanation for why people came to care so much about the 1969 fire. Even those commentators who took note of the fact that the Cuyahoga had burned many times before 1969 did little to explain why it was the 1969 fire that attracted so much attention, why it was the one that everyone remembered—even if the image they remembered was actually from 1952. Apparently explanation has been unnecessary. Rivers shouldn't catch fire. In October 1997, Adam Werbach, the then 24-year-old president of the Sierra Club, was asked on CNN to explain why the 1969 fire was so important. "I mean a river lighting on fire was almost biblical," said Werbach, who was not yet born when the fire occurred. "And it energized American action, because people understood that that should not be happening."9

Journalists and environmental activists have also simplified the fire's effect on policy. In 1995, syndicated columnist Christopher Matthews repeated a common summation of the events leading to the Clean Water Act's passage in 1972: "Then, on June 22, 1969, all hell broke loose. The Cuyahoga River near Cleveland became so polluted with combustible chemical waste that it exploded into flame. Three years later, Congress acted." More recently, Steve Tuckerman, a biologist with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, stood over the site of the 1969 fire and drew an emotional conclusion. "It was the beginning of the Clean Water Act, and the EPA. This is almost hallowed ground."¹⁰ In the press, and in popular conception, it wasn't much more complicated than that; the Cuyahoga fire ignited a national movement to improve the nation's waterways.

Historians too have been rather terse in their discussions of the fire. Most references to the fire have been only a few words long-often not even a full sentence-and nowhere do we find a comprehensive explanation for the growth in the 1969 fire's importance in the historical narrative of the environmental crisis. In a typical approach, Philip Shabecoff mentions the 1969 fire on the first page of his book on the environmental movement, but then only returns to the fire by way of a list that places the fire among other great events, including Bhopal, Three Mile Island, and Love Canal. Similarly, in The Green Revolution, Kirkpatrick Sale lists the 1969 Cuyahoga fire with other events that he suggests sparked environmental activism, but offers no explanation of why earlier fires had no such effect. Ted Steinberg uses the Cuyahoga to open a chapter on the development of environmentalism, though interestingly he chooses to begin with the 1952 fire. Although Steinberg's brief discussion of the Cuyahoga fires is incomplete, it offers much more than most histories of environmental politics. After describing the 1952 blaze, he mentions an earlier, minor fire in 1899, revealing the river's long flammable history. Steinberg then moves to the 1969 fire and asks nearly the same question we pose here: "What changed to make a routine event in the local history of a gritty industrial city into an environmental cause celebre?" Steinberg's answer rests on growing ecological concern in environmental politics. By 1969, people understood that the Cuyahoga's pollution had meaning beyond Cleveland, most immediately and dramatically for Lake Erie, the most troubled Great Lake. Certainly ecological awareness had grown in the 1960s, especially in the wake of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962), as Steinberg describes. But the initial coverage of the fire, so brief in the local press and so slow to develop at the national level, suggests a more complicated evolution.¹¹

Altogether, the Cuyahoga fire has attracted considerable referencing but little research. In the one scholarly work focused on the fire, legal historian Jonathan Adler uses the burning river as evidence that state regulation was beginning to work, that federal intervention, via the Clean Water Act of 1972, may not have been necessary. After all, he notes, the fire in 1969 was not nearly as bad as that in 1952. Adler concludes of the fabled event: "It was a little fire on a long-polluted river already embarked on the road to recovery." Adler emphasizes that the city had initiated a river cleanup, to be funded by a \$100 million bond overwhelmingly approved by voters in the fall of 1968. Indeed, without federal or state help, Cleveland had begun to rebuild its sewage system, adding treatment facilities designed to improve water quality in the river and in Lake Erie, the source of the city's water supply. Of course this particular work, barely underway by the time of the 1969 fire, had not yet improved water quality nor would it address the

industrial polluters that lined the Cuyahoga and emptied wastes directly into the river without using city sewers.¹² Still, Adler is correct that the Cuyahoga's water quality had improved between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s, as better evidenced by the dramatic decrease in the frequency of fires than by the relatively small size of the 1969 blaze. Cleveland's steel mills had invested in pollution controls, and the city had taken steps to diminish the fire hazard posed by accumulating oil on the river's surface. Adler's essay, written to call into question federal command-and-control regulation, only partially addresses the issue of why the 1969 fire became so fabled, suggesting that the story–especially in exaggerated form–helped justify federal involvement in water quality. Surprisingly, beyond Adler's essay, scholars have paid little attention to the Cuyahoga fire–or we should say the Cuyahoga *fires*.

Adam Rome advises historians to pay attention to the 1960s context of the waxing environmental movement, arguing that the rise of liberal politics, heightened women's political activism, and the developing counterculture all contributed to environmentalism's growing influence. Rome has also argued elsewhere that suburbanization helped drive some aspects of the environmental movement–concern for open space particularly.¹³ Surely Rome is right, as is Steinberg in emphasizing the growing awareness of ecological science, even among average citizens. All of these trends, these cultural changes, speak to the different reactions to the 1952 and 1969 fires. But, we ask further, why did Cleveland's burning river gain so much currency in the movement? Perhaps more important, why has that currency grown dramatically over time? Why would a minor fire in a long-industrialized landscape matter so much to the nation's evolving environmental politics?

We argue that the growing importance of the burning river reveals one consequence of the long, wrenching process of deindustrialization that occurred in Cleveland and across the Midwest and Northeast beginning in the 1950s. Earlier fires concerned city leaders as threats to the economy. Initially this was the reaction to the 1969 fire as well, as the cursory coverage in the local press indicated; the concern was for the damaged railroad bridges, not the terribly polluted river. Through the 1970s, this changed. Environmental concerns took precedence over those of rail travel through the flats and shipping along the river. Ironically, though the burning river would come to represent the costs of industrialization, the growing reaction to the fire actually represented the process of deindustrialization. In the 1960s, and increasingly thereafter, Clevelanders garnered decreasing benefits from industry, especially as industrial employment plummeted. At the same time, and not coincidentally, Cleveland itself experienced a horrible decline, as race riots, crime, blight, poverty, and municipal insolvency all contributed to the growing urban crisis-a crisis Cleveland shared with dozens of American cities. Although Cleveland experienced deindustrialization and urban decline more intensely than most American places, both of these trends swept across much of the nation. That the Cuyahoga fire evolved into one of the great disasters of the environmental crisis tells us something about Americans'

growing suspicion of industrial landscapes, a suspicion encouraged by the decreasing benefits they derived from such places. In this way, the deepening urban crisis of the 1960s and 1970s shaped Americans' conceptions of the environmental crisis that developed in these years.¹⁴

We do not mean to suggest that deindustrialization alone explains the different reactions to the 1952 and 1969 fires on the Cuyahoga, but it does help explain the focus of the environmental movement. Beyond open space and wilderness, environmentalism expressed concern for the rapidly deindustrializing urban landscape. By 1970, most Clevelanders, most Americans, could look upon the urban-industrial landscape and its many negative environmental consequences in a disinterested way. Most Americans no longer lived near older industrial zones, their polluting stacks and their sewage outfalls. Most no longer relied on paychecks from these heavy industries, or even knew people who did. From a greater physical and psychological distance, then, the burning river looked much more troubling than it had close up in an earlier era, when the Cuyahoga and the industries and businesses that lined it meant so much more to the average Clevelander. In other words, deindustrialization is part of the context of the 1960s and 1970s that we ought to concern ourselves with as we explain the growth of environmentalism.

Our argument relies on three interrelated areas of evidence. First, the mild initial reaction to the burning river suggests that Clevelanders, and Americans generally, still had limited expectations for urban, industrial environments. Indeed, even after the fire, Clevelanders were much more likely to express concern about air pollution, which escaped from industrial zones to plague residential neighborhoods, many of them in the suburbs. In other words, in 1969 Clevelanders were not ready to think of a burning river as an apocalyptic symbol of a rapidly developing ecological crisis. This symbolism would be learned over time, beginning with the Time and National Geographic coverage, as the press and politicians presented the burning river as the poster child of the degraded urban environment. In addition, eventually most people no longer remembered the long history of Cuyahoga fires, allowing the 1969 fire to take on even more significance. Second, a recounting of several Cuyahoga fires, beginning with a major blaze in 1868, reveals how much Cleveland and the nation changed over time. Over the years Clevelanders were hardly complacent about the burning river, but not until the 1970s did they begin to think of its meaning in anything other than economic terms. Third, and most important, deindustrialization fundamentally reshaped the city's economy in the second half of the 1900s. Over time, Clevelanders who had no connection to the Cuyahoga as an industrial waterway, at the heart of their own economic well-being, could now develop different relationships with the river.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1969, the Cleveland papers offered a few, sparse follow-up stories on the fire. The first featured Mayor Carl B. Stokes, the first black mayor of a large American city, and Cleveland's Utilities Director Ben S. Stefanski touring

the site the day after the fire and announcing that the city would file a formal complaint with the state. Stefanski blamed the state for literally permitting industries to dump pollutants into the river, and he defended Cleveland, noting, "We have no jurisdiction over what is dumped in there." The state later returned the finger pointing, claiming the city's own failing sewage system was the major source of oil on the river and that the state was considering banning all new construction in Cleveland until the city improved its sewer system. The city retorted that the state had failed to provide matching funds for sewer construction. The newspapers faithfully reported the back and forth, adding little more to the story. Finally, two weeks after the fire, a *Plain Dealer* editorial stated bluntly: "Bickering between Cleveland and the state over who bears responsibility for the condition of the Cuyahoga, a stream so polluted it catches fire from time to time, will not improve the quality of the filthy stream." The phrase "from time to time," used in two *Plain Dealer* editorials after the fire, was the only hint in the newspaper coverage that the Cuyahoga had caught fire before.¹⁵

In the months following the fire, hundreds of people wrote letters to Carl Stokes asking that he take steps to improve the city's environment. The vast majority of these letters came from children, who wrote them for school assignments, and most of these children attended school in the city's suburbs, such as Cleveland Heights, Mentor, and Beachwood. Tellingly few of these letters mention the Cuyahoga River. The children, and undoubtedly their teachers too, were much more concerned with air pollution, which they experienced as soot fallen on snow or as a brown cloud that hung over a city they did not know well. Dozens of letters did discuss water pollution, but they focused on Lake Erie, where fish kills, foul odors, and closed beaches threatened these children's favored recreational pastimes: fishing, boating, and swimming in the lake. ¹⁶ Indeed, Lake Erie had been the focus of an intense campaign against water pollution for many years, led in part by the League of Women Voters and suburban residents like David Blaushild, a Shaker Heights auto dealer and recreational fisherman, who helped initiate the "Save Lake Erie Now" campaign across northern Ohio in 1964. Aided by a long series of articles by Cleveland Press reporter Betty Klaric, the campaign put considerable pressure on the state of Ohio and the city of Cleveland, both of which participated in a number of conferences concerning the pollution of Lake Erie and its tributaries. One of these meetings had taken place in Cleveland just months before the 1969 fire.17

In the flood of citizens' letters that reached Carl Stokes around the first Earth Day in April 1970, there were few references to the Cuyahoga and almost none that mentioned the fire. As had been the case throughout the campaign to save Lake Erie, the Cuyahoga remained primarily a culprit, a polluter of valued resources—the beaches and fisheries of the great lake into which it flowed. In and around Cleveland, the Cuyahoga was neither the primary symbol of a polluted landscape nor the primary object of environmental activism. Although Mayor Stokes did pay more attention to the Cuyahoga than most of these letter writers, his administration neither initiated new programs nor administrative changes to deal with water pollution after the fire. The city would rely on the previously created Cleveland Clean Water Task Force Action Plan, designed to spend the previously approved bond money, to solve the river's problems. In sum, the fire brought no changes to the bureaucracy. No one lost a job; no one gained one either.¹⁸

Outside Cleveland, meanwhile, politicians and the press continued to raise awareness of the Cuyahoga fire. In late 1970, Louis Stokes, United States Representative from Cleveland and the mayor's brother, stood in the House to speak in favor of a flood control bill that contained a section empowering the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to study water quality issues on the Cuyahoga. Stokes spoke at length about the river, noting that it would "live in infamy as the only river in the world to be proclaimed a fire hazard." He added, "In June of 1969, the river actually caught fire, causing almost \$100,000 damage to two railroad bridges. A continuous and vigorous cleanup program could have prevented this shameful occurrence." As Stokes continued, it became clear that he thought the problem of the river fire was not the damage to the two bridges, as the newspapers had originally suggested. Stokes resented the stigma the fire had attached to Cleveland, the negative press his city had received, even in Europe. He noted the lower Cuyahoga had "virtually no fish life" and that recreational uses of Lake Erie, into which the river emptied its wastes, had decreased. Sport fishing had diminished and swimming had been disallowed in several areas. "In short," Stokes concluded, "the rape of the Cuyahoga River has not only made it useless for any purpose other than a dumping place for sewage and industrial waste, but also has had a deleterious effect upon the ecology of one of the Great Lakes." Stokes spoke the evolving language of environmentalism, helping to change the meaning of the story. Stokes had found a new way to talk about an old problem.¹⁹

THE LONG BURNING RIVER

BY 1970, AS STOKES SPOKE eloquently about the Cuyahoga, Clevelanders knew, or ought to have known, that their river caught fire "from time to time." It is impossible to know how many times flames spread over the river, simply because press coverage was inconsistent and fire department records are incomplete. But at least ten times the Cuyahoga burned intensely enough to catch the attention of the press. The first fire may have occurred in August 1868, when a spark from the stacks of a passing tug apparently ignited an oil slick on the river. The Plain Dealer noted that the fire could have been far worse had it spread to the vast lumber stores along the banks. Further, the *Plain Dealer* heightened its crusade to force oil refiners along the river to clean up their businesses. "We have called attention to the fact that along the whole length of the river, under the wharves, and even under the warehouses, there are deposits of this inflammable stuff," the paper reported, "and in some places to the thickness of several inches." Just the year before the 1868 fire, John D. Rockefeller had cobbled together five refineries within the firm of Rockefeller, Andrews and Flagler, already the largest oil refiners in the world. Still, the Plain Dealer had little patience for the relatively

new business, seeing oil along the water as a threat to the complex economy of the flats. Above the floating oil there were "millions upon millions of property in warehouses, elevators, flouring mills, machine shops and railroad freight depots, and extensive lumber yards, all liable at any moment, by the merest carelessness, of the use of a match or a lighted cigar, to be set on fire producing a conflagration that no human efforts could stop." The newspaper's reaction, along with that of Mayor Stephen Burhrer, who encouraged city council to take further action to outlaw oil discharges, made clear that the problem revealed by the burning river was that the flames threatened shipping and riverfront businesses, which were at the heart of the city's prosperity.²⁰

During a dramatic late-winter flood in 1883 a spectacular fire raced across the high waters of Kingsbury Run, a creek that ran past the Standard Oil refinery before joining the Cuyahoga at the Great Lakes Towing Company boat repair yard, just south of downtown. Leaking oil from a still at the Thurmer and Teagle refinery was ignited by a boiler house standing in the rising water. The New York Times described the horror of burning water moving downstream toward Standard Oil's massive refinery. Although the heroic efforts of firemen and employees saved much of the plant, several Standard tanks exploded and buildings burned. Men jumped into the high water to dam up the culvert that separated Kingsbury Run from the Cuyahoga, successfully keeping the fire from the flooded flats along the larger river. Nearly thirty years later, in 1912, another horrific blaze threatened Standard Oil's Refinery Number 1, when gasoline leaking from a barge at Standard's docks covered the river and then caught fire. No flood waters threatened to push this fire deep into the city, but the rapidly spreading flames killed five men caulking a boat at the Great Lakes Towing Company near Jefferson Avenue. "Without warning" the Plain Dealer reported, "a shriveling blast of blue flame from the water beneath them wrapped the drydock in fire." The deaths and the extent of the fire, which destroyed five tugs, a yacht, and three dry docks, heightened fears about the river as a fire hazard. The Cleveland Press reported one tug captain as saying, "We don't know at what moment the river is going to blaze up and destroy us." Although the Cuyahoga remained critical to the city's economy, "The Menace of the River," as the headline of a *Plain Dealer* editorial called it, had become unmistakable.²¹

These two fires gained national attention, but only because of their unusual circumstances, not because the press read special meaning into them. Like other urban fires, water-borne blazes gained attention when loss of life or the scale of the damage warranted it. That the fires occurred on bodies of water was significant only because the waterways themselves were important to cities as industrial thoroughfares. By the 1920s, the growing scale of the problem forced the issue of accumulating oil slicks in harbors onto the political agenda, raising concerns that international shipping might be disrupted by fire. In 1921, flames shooting from the exhaust of a motorboat ignited a pool of oil on the Hudson River along Manhattan, which in turn ignited and destroyed a frigate. In that instance, the fire marshal blamed a leaking Standard Oil pipeline under the

Hudson for the slick, but oil had been collecting on the surfaces of many harbors, especially those surrounded by industry. A year after the Hudson River fire, Congress passed a joint resolution requesting that the president call an international conference on maritime oil pollution, in part because "the fire hazard created by the accumulation of floating oil on the piles of piers and bulkheads into harbor waters [was] a growing source of alarm." Political momentum stalled, however, resulting in the passage of the modest Oil Pollution Act of 1924, which prohibited maritime oil discharges but did not address industrial discharges nor any inland waters.²²

Thus, government regulation did nothing to improve the Cuyahoga, and the river continued to catch fire. In 1936, the *Press* announced that "Long-Feared River Peril" had arrived when another oil fire burned away the wooden piers of an Erie Railroad bridge. One worker, operating the torch that ignited the oil, was treated for minor burns. Although the fire temporarily closed the Erie line, forcing a rerouting of trains, the greatest consequence of the fire was, as the *Press* reported, "in its practical demonstration that the river will burn." Apparently the real fear was that a fire on the river would ignite gasoline storage facilities, including those of Gulf Refining Company which were imperiled by this particular fire. Fire Chief James E. Granger concluded that the city needed to reacquire a fire boat. A series of fire boats had plied the river before 1932, when the last had been decommissioned.²³

The *Press* coverage of the February 1948 fire opened with the telling phrase, "Industry in the Cuyahoga River Valley is constantly menaced by fires." The Saturday night blaze had caused \$100,000 in damage, but the three-alarm "slop oil" fire had threatened much greater damage in the flats. The *Plain Dealer* ran a front-page banner headline "River Oil Fire Perils Clark Bridge" and reported that more than thirty hoses had trained water on the fire before it was extinguished. By then, the fire had buckled parts of the Clark Avenue Bridge and burned through a bundle of electric cables, knocking out power in the nearby Brooklyn neighborhood. The jackknife bridge of the River Terminal Railroad was inoperable; hot-burning railroad ties caused serious damage to the bridge itself and the spreading fire destroyed the controls. According to the *Press*, the economic impact of the fire included a 10 percent "reduction loss" at Republic Steel because the railroad bridge linking two parts of the steel plant had been disabled.²⁴

The 1948 fire caused enough damage, and held out enough promise that more would follow, that the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce gathered together key players to discuss potential solutions. In addition to lobbying the city to rehabilitate the fireboat, the group hoped to persuade Clevelanders who worked with flammable liquids not to dispose of them in a way that might take them to the river. The committee would even study whether enough oil collected in the river to make its reclamation profitable.²⁵ A few months later, the River and Harbor Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, headed by Gifford F. Hood, president of the American Steel & Wire Company, announced a four-part plan to prevent further fires. The city would employ a fire tug or the harbormaster's yacht to patrol the

Figure 2. The Cuyahoga Fire of 1948.



Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University Library.

On a Saturday evening in February, 1948, the oil slop on the Cuyahoga River caught fire. The spreading flames seriously damaged two bridges and reminded Cleveland of the constant economic peril it faced from its heavily polluted waterway.

river several times a day in search of slicks. The chamber also recommended that the city purchase equipment to remove slicks, and that the city analyze the river's water quality at "various locations." Finally, the committee recommended a broad public campaign to discourage the draining of flammable wastes into the river through sewers.²⁶

Most press attention that summer focused on the city's Port and Harbor Commission study of methods for oil slick removal. The commission found several methods in use around the nation. Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Galveston tried to reduce the fire threat in their harbors by skimming accumulating oil. Buffalo used chemicals to disperse floating oil on its longpolluted river, while Los Angeles sucked up oil slicks with a hose. Interestingly, Thomas Lavin of Atlantic Refining in Philadelphia advised against treating slicks with sand that would carry the oil down, noting that the process "destroys all animal life in the water." The *Press* concluded, however, "That should not present much of a problem here. Any form of animal life that can live in the Cuyahoga should get fat on carbonized sand."²⁷

In August, the skipper of the city's fire boat told the *Press* that his boat had patrolled the Cuyahoga the entire previous winter "because there is not enough water in the river to freeze." The headline on the story read, "Fire Hazards Peril

Cuyahoga Shipping." In December, the *Plain Dealer* reported that chemical company representatives told the city's Port and Harbor Commission that "allout war on the fire-hazardous oil slicks in the Cuyahoga River calls for more heroic measures than the mere spraying of chemicals." Instead, skimming the oil from the surface "is the most important tactic in keeping the five river-miles of docks, bridges and industries safe from slick-fed fires, the commissioners were told."²⁸

Through all of the press coverage in the late 1940s, it remained clear that the major problem of the burning river was its threat to transportation, both to shipping on the Cuyahoga and across the many bridges that spanned the water. References to the plight of the river itself were few. A 1948 editorial in the *Press* included a reminder that, "While not entirely related to fire prevention, the whole question of sewage and industrial waste in the Cuyahoga River remains unsettled." It noted that, "Raw sewage continues to be dumped in the river today," a problem that needed to be resolved, though perhaps not as urgently as the replacement of wooden pilings with nonflammable concrete.²⁹

Coverage of the river fires in Cleveland's newspapers was undoubtedly influenced by local economic interests, but these fires garnered essentially no coverage outside the city. The New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, and the Columbus Dispatch did not run a word about the fires of 1936 and 1948.3º Further, a Cleveland Press article in early 1941 suggests that fires that caused no significant damage may have escaped media attention altogether. The last paragraph of a March 17, 1941, story in the Press referred to a "recent" river fire that caused \$7,500 in damage to an ore carrier. The Press files don't contain a story about the fire itself, however. It's likely that the paper's editors thought to mention the fire only after the Coast Guard threatened to prosecute "industries which pollute the Cuyahoga River with refuse which may impede navigation in the Cleveland harbor," which was the subject of the story. The article also noted that insurance underwriters and "shipping interests" had often appealed to city officials to stop the pollution. "The oil-covered Cuyahoga River long has been classed by marine fire underwriters as one of the worst fire hazards on the Great Lakes." Tellingly, the Cuyahoga was only "one of the worst," an indication that other ports also had difficulty controlling flammable pollutants.³¹

Despite the considerable political attention to the economic threat posed by the polluted river, the fires continued. Another railroad trestle was destroyed in June 1949, while a spectacular oil slick fire sent clouds of heavy smoke over the lakefront in March 1951. In October 1950, a year-long survey by the fire department concluded that, with some notable exceptions, most industries were cooperating with the city's requests to stop dumping flammable liquids into the Cuyahoga. But the river "still presents a serious fire hazard to the community," fire officials reported. In May 1952, *Press* reporter Maxwell Riddle took a fireboat tour of the river with city fire officials, who pointed out two-inch thick oil slicks. "In many places, the river was bubbling like a beer mash," Riddle wrote. Fire officials told Riddle that the worst spot on the river was near the mouth of Kingsbury Run. "A fire here would wipe that company out in a hurry," a lieutenant with the fire



Figure 3. The Cuyahoga Fire of 1952.

Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University Library.

The Cuyahoga fire in November of 1952 was among the most damaging. The flames destroyed three tugs and the dry docks of Great Lakes Towing Company. Firefighters attempted to save the Jefferson Avenue Bridge, while a tug struggled to escape the flames.

prevention bureau said.³² Six months later, it happened. The 1952 fire was large enough to warrant another front-page banner headline, "Oil Slick Fire Ruins Flats Shipyard," in the *Plain Dealer*. The fire destroyed three tugs and the dry docks of the Great Lakes Towing Company. It also damaged the Jefferson Avenue Bridge and came perilously close to the Standard Oil refinery. Firemen battled the blaze from the bridge and from a fire boat, attempting to prevent the fire's spread. A series of photos snapped for the *Plain Dealer* included one of a tug "enveloped in flames," which accompanied the story on page 1–and would appear in *Time* magazine seventeen years later.³³

Local coverage of the November 1952 fire and the subsequent crackdown on polluters was still framed in economic terms. City leaders fretted over pollution not for the river's sake but because it put others at financial risk. Under the headline "Danger in the Heart of Cleveland," an editorial in the *Press* on November 4 said the big fire underscored the cost of inaction. "Well, somebody had better get busy. The oil slick menace is bound to affect fire insurance rates. Vessel owners are not going to use the river for winter mooring if they feel that the ships will not be safe there. That would be an economic loss."³⁴ As with the fire four years earlier, the 1952 blaze attracted essentially no press attention outside Cleveland. The *Columbus Dispatch* ran part of an Associated Press story on the fire, but the

Cincinnati Enquirer failed to mention it at all. The *Wall Street Journal* also did not refer to the fire, though three days later it reported that Cleveland had reached a long-time low in unemployment, having apparently shaken off the effects of a recently resolved steel strike. According to a Federal Reserve Bank report, the Cleveland region had topped records in both steel and automobile production, suggesting all was well in the industrial metropolis.³⁵

In 1952, Cleveland was still obviously an industrial city. Two massive steel mills occupied the flats at the upper reaches of navigation on the Cuyahoga. Jones and Laughlin's Cleveland Works, formerly Otis Steel and Cleveland Furnace Company, was a fully modernized, integrated steel plant. Along its crooked riverfront, Jones & Laughlin handled limestone and ore delivered by tug-guided ships; its sintering plant prepared the ores for two blast furnaces. Coke ovens baked thousands of tons of coal, delivered by rail, using some of the thirty-eight miles of standard-gage track that laced the property. The plant consumed oil delivered by pipeline from a nearby refinery, as well as natural gas, used in the finishing mills, where steel took on the various shapes buyers demanded. On the opposite bank of the Cuyahoga, Republic Steel's facilities were equally impressive. Sprawling across 1,200 acres, these mills revealed industrialism's productive genius and offered thousands of high-paying jobs.³⁶ The 1950 census found roughly 42 percent of the city's workers employed in manufacturing, many of them in the industries that filled the flats and the neighborhoods around the river. No wonder the press focused on the economic consequences of the Cuyahoga's flammability.

DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

OVER THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS, roughly the years between the 1952 and 1969 fires, the city lost 60,000 manufacturing jobs. The decline persisted, and by 1990 only 23 percent of the city's workers held manufacturing jobs. Over the previous seventy years the city had lost 140,000 manufacturing jobs, the vast majority of them after 1950. Some of the attrition came through automation, as viable plants increased production without increasing payroll. This was the case in the steel industry. In 1952, Republic Steel, which kept its general offices downtown, had nearly 69,000 employees (not all of them in Cleveland), and could produce 9 million tons of steel. By 1972, fewer than 41,000 Republic employees produced more than 10 million tons of steel.³⁷ Other businesses closed or moved out of the city's core. Among the closures were some of Cleveland's homegrown companies. Standard Oil, which had long since moved its headquarters out of Cleveland, stopped refining oil there in 1966, when it cleared the site of its Refinery No. 1 and laid off or relocated the employees who worked in the flats.³⁸ In 1982, Sherwin Williams closed its Canal Road factory in the flats, where it had operated since 1873. New factories in the Cleveland metro area, such as the massive Ford complex that opened in stages in Brook Park beginning in the 1950s, were built well away from the historic core of the city, out on cheaper land near the highways that bridged the river valley.

In the city, residential districts dwindled; stores closed. As early as the mid-1960s, poverty and unemployment clustered in inner-city neighborhoods, including West Central, Goodrich, and Kinsman. By 1980, the city had lost 341,000 residents off its peak thirty years earlier. By then, some places in the city had decayed for so long that they simply seemed empty, including black eastside neighborhoods and large parts of the industrial flats along the Cuyahoga. Once a complex neighborhood of industry, warehousing, storefronts, restaurants, and bars, the flats still held some viable businesses, but the long and winding riverfront could do little but remind Clevelanders of what the city used to be.³⁹

Cleveland's decline had a racial component as well, as extreme segregation and concentrated unemployment left the city's ghettoes simmering. As Cleveland struggled with both deindustrialization and growing Black Nationalism, the city had two terribly damaging riots. In 1966, the first lasted six nights and left four people dead. Arsonists set 240 fires, mostly in the Hough neighborhood east of downtown, and the police and the National Guard made nearly three hundred arrests. Earl Gamer, who owned a meat market in Hough, reported "I can't and will not open again. I'm completely ruined." This last comment might have described the entire neighborhood, which long retained its "wasteland appearance," in the words of the riot's first researcher, Marc Lackritz. Of course, even before the riots Hough's environment was degraded. As Lackritz summarized, "Many of the rented homes were owned by absentee landlords, and the condition of most of the land and buildings was described by almost everyone as 'deteriorating.'" The second eruption of violence, in 1968, began as a gun battle in the Glenville neighborhood between militant African Americans and white police officers, three of whom were killed. Looting and arson followed over the next several days, and seven people died altogether.40

In the year between the two riots, a *Saturday Evening Post* headline asked "Can Cleveland Escape Burning?" In the lengthy exposé that followed, John Skow described Cleveland's ghetto and the city's growing economic malaise. The city, he wrote, "was worn out and feeble." People were already calling it "the mistake on the lake." And then, interestingly, Skow noted that Lake Erie was fouled with pollution, a problem that many people along the lake had also recognized as a mistake. The urban environment had been devastated—both its natural attributes and its neighborhoods. And over the next two summers both would burn.⁴¹ Combined with the shrinking employment opportunities, growing concern for the city's schools, and looming budget problems (the city actually went bankrupt in 1978, defaulting on \$15 million in loans), the riots and increasing crime helped fuel ongoing flight from the city, perpetuating disinvestment in Cleveland's core.⁴²

And so, by the time Great Lakes Brewing Company began selling its Burning River Pale Ale in 1991, the Cuyahoga was no longer the economic heart of the city, and the surrounding neighborhoods no longer thrived on the wealth industrialization had produced. Fewer and fewer people who lived in metropolitan Cleveland knew much about the city's core, especially beyond the glass towers and sports venues of downtown. In 1998, the *Plain Dealer* ran a story on Maingate Business Development Corporation, created to rebrand the postindustrial flats as a gateway to downtown. The neighborhood still held a sizeable concrete plant and a Marathon Ashland asphalt storage facility, along with a plaque that marked the site of Standard Oil Refinery No. 1, still an open field thirty years after the facility's demolition. Constance Perotti, Maingate's Executive Director, discussed the difficulty of selling this place. "It's not well-known," she said. "I give tours and there are Clevelanders, lots of them, who don't know this place."⁴³ This is the context that we think is most important in determining why the nation came to associate the burning river with environmental decline after 1969, but not after 1952, or 1948, or even 1936. Industry was fleeing the city, and once it left it seemed unlikely to return. People fled too, and, though they returned now and then, they did so for new purposes and saw the place with new eyes—eyes that saw an ecological wasteland, not an economic engine.

The 1969 fire was the last on the Cuyahoga, and this, too, affects its meaning. The Cuyahoga burned just as a growing number of Americans turned their attention to the environment, when a sense of crisis engulfed the nation. Critical environmental legislation followed—and the fires stopped. Over the years, Cleveland's economic deterioration continued, and the story of a burning river somehow seemed explanatory. It echoed for decades, with no competition from a similarly flammable river running through a similarly deindustrialized landscape.

While the press has continued to reflect on the fire, it has also reveled in the river's recovery. By the fifteenth anniversary of the fire, the city had undertaken massive improvements to its Southerly sewage plant, and both its steel plants had invested millions in water treatment and recycling. If the river itself had not fully recovered, Lake Erie was well on its way to ecological health, its walleye once again attracting a large number of fishers. The Plain Dealer marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fire by noting how much progress had been made on the Cuyahoga itself, where recreational boaters trolled the crooked river and recent bar and restaurant developments revealed Clevelanders' interest in spending time along water, despite the persistence of toxics in the sediment and litter in the flotsam. In 2001, Great Lakes Brewing Company held the inaugural Burning River Festival, designed to draw attention to the river and raise money for environmental causes. The annual festivals have continued, celebrating the Cuyahoga's recovery-a recovery that might represent environmentalism's success since 1969. On the other hand, the river's recovery may tell us more about the remarkable completeness of Cleveland's deindustrialization.44

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NOTES

- Cleveland's rebirth received national attention. See "'Mistake by the Lake' Wakes Up, Roaring," New York Times, September 10, 1995, and "From Steel Mills to Museums, A City Rises Out of Disrespect," New York Times, October 3, 1997. See, also, Barney Warf and Brian Holley, "The Rise and Fall and Rise of Cleveland," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 551 (May 1997): 208-21.
- 2. See Steven M. Schnell and Joseph F. Reese, "Microbreweries as Tools of Local Identity," Journal of Cultural Geography 21 (Fall/Winter 2003): 45-69. Schnell and Reese call Burning River an "inside joke," which by now it may be. We think they underestimate the pride Clevelanders feel in the city's industrial history, however, both good and bad. Great Lakes began brewing Burning River in 1991.
- 3. Jack A. Seamonds, "In Cleveland, Clean Waters Give New Breath of Life," U.S. News & World Report, June 18, 1984, 68.
- 4. Jonathan H. Adler reports that he has read an article that appeared in the New York Times several days after the fire, but it apparently did not run in all editions of the paper and does not appear in the New York Times online archive, nor did it appear in the New York Times Index of 1969. The Times did run an editorial, "The Deteriorating Environment," just three days after the fire. The editorial did not mention the Cuyahoga, but instead featured the massive fish kill on the Rhine that began the day after the Cleveland fire. (New York Times, June 25, 1969; see Jonathan H. Adler, "Fables of the Cuyahoga: Reconstructing a History of Environmental Protection," Fordham Environmental Law Journal 14 (Fall 2002): footnote 5.)
- 5. Columbus Dispatch, July 4, 1969; "The Cities: The Price of Optimism," *Time*, August 1, 1969, 41.
- 6. "Pollution, Threat to Man's Only Home," *National Geographic* 138 (December 1970): 5-7.
- 7. Other early references to the Cuyahoga fire include David Zwick and Marcy Benstock, Water Wasteland: Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on Water Pollution (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971), 3; Luther J. Carter, "1973: A Crisis Atmosphere: Environment: A Lesson for the People of Plenty," Science, December 28, 1973: 1324; and Audubon, November 1969, back cover.
- 8. Theo Colborn and Richard A. Liroff, *EPA Journal* 16 (November 1, 1990): 5; Randy Newman, *Guilty: 30 Years of Randy Newman* (Rhino, 1998), liner notes; William Ashworth, *The Late, Great Lakes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 140; Robert W. Gordon, "Environmental Blues: Working-Class Environmentalism and the Labor-Environmental Alliance, 1968-1985" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 2004), 32. Gordon claims that the river "burned out of control for days."
- 9. Adam Werbach, CNN Morning News 9:00 a.m. ET, October 17, 1997, transcript #97101703V09, LexisNexis.
- Chris Matthews, "Clean Water Good for Republicans as Well as Others," *The Sunday* Oregonian, June 11, 1995; "Cuyahoga River's Cleanup Reclaims 'Hallowed Ground,'" Columbus Dispatch, October 8, 2002.
- 11. Ted Steinberg, Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 239, 248; Philip Shabecoff, A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), xi, 111-12; Kirkpatrick Sale, The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 19. Hal Rothman notes that the river had caught fire before, due to heavy industrial pollution, but frames the 1969 fire as a "direct challenge to the ethic of progress." See his The Greening of a Nation?

Environmentalism in the United State Since 1945 (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), 99. In a recent monograph concerning Congress's role in the development of water pollution regulation, Paul Charles Milazzo pays appropriately little attention to the Cuyahoga fire, in Unlikely Environmentalists: Congress and Clean Water, 1945-1972 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

- Jonathan H. Adler, "Fables of the Cuyahoga: Reconstructing a History of Environmental Protection," *Fordham Environmental Law Journal* 14 (Fall 2002): 95, 108-12.
- 13. Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," Journal of American History 90 (September 2003): 525.
- 14. In his seminal work on the modern environmental movement, Samuel P. Hays notes, "Cities were the major source of the environmental movement," but he stops short of linking the urban and environmental crises. See *Beauty, Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 71. On the important role of deindustrialization in the urban crisis of Detroit, see Thomas J. Sugrue, The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). The best monograph concerning an industrial city's struggle to control pollution in the postwar era is still Andrew Hurley's *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
- 15. Cleveland Plain Dealer, June, 23, 24, July 8, 9, 1969; Cleveland Press, June 23, July 8, 1969.
- 16. Carl Stokes Papers, Collection 4370, box 75, files 1433, 1438, Western Reserve Historical Society [hereafter WRHS].
- 17. The literature on the campaign to save Lake Erie is extensive. Of particular value are William McGucken, *Lake Erie Rehabilitated: Controlling Europhication, 196os-199os* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2000); and Terrianne K. Schulte, "Grassroots at the Water's Edge: The League of Women Voters and the Struggle to Save Lake Erie, 1956-1970" (PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2006). See, also, Terence Kehoe, *Cleaning up the Great Lakes: From Cooperation to Confrontation* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997).
- 18. Carl Stokes Papers, Collection 4370, box 75, files 1433, 1438, WRHS.
- 19. Rivers and Harbors and Flood Control Act of 1970, HR 19877, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record (December 7, 1970): H 40150. Carl Stokes also spoke on the issue of water pollution in Washington in 1970. Before the Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution, on April 28, Carl Stokes spoke in favor of a greatly expanded federal role in financing sewage treatment facilities. Stokes mentioned the Cuyahoga had caught fire and had become symbolic of polluted rivers. See Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution of the Committee on Public Works, Water Pollution-1970, Part 2, 91st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1970, 412-13.
- 20. Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, August 29, September 2, 1868; Cleveland City Council Proceedings, September 1, 1868, 303.
- 21. "A Great Oil Fire," New York Times, February 4, 6, 1883; Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, May 2, 1912; Cleveland Press, May 2, 1912; Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, May 3, 1912. "Oil Barge Explodes, 5 Dead," New York Times, May 2, 1912. Generally fires on the Cuyahoga, or any of the other bodies of water that caught fire around the country, did not make the national news. Undoubtedly the loss of life attracted the attention of the Times in this instance. We cannot be certain how many times the river caught fire, as not every blaze made the city papers. One Cleveland Press article concerning

shipping on the river noted a "recent fire," and yet the paper had run no story on the fire itself. [*Press,* March 17, 1941.]

- New York Times, May 24, 1912; Interdepartmental Committee, Oil Pollution of Navigable Waters (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1926), 1; William L. Andreen, "The Evolution of Water Pollution Control in the United States–State, Local, and Federal Efforts, 1789-1972: Part II," Stanford Environmental Law Journal 22 (2003): 223-25.
- 23. "Long-Feared River Peril Happens–Cuyahoga Burns," *Cleveland Press,* February 7, 1936. All of the referenced *Press* articles are found in the *Cleveland Press* clippings collection, Cleveland State University.
- 24. Cleveland Press, February 8, 9, 1948. "River Oil Fire Perils Clark Bridge," Cleveland Plain Dealer, February 8, 1948.
- 25. Cleveland Press, February 20, 1948.
- 26. Ibid., July 29, 1948.
- 27. "Oil Slick Removal Methods are Studied," *Cleveland Press* undated clipping, summer 1948.
- 28. Plain Dealer, August 11, December 18, 1948.
- 29. Cleveland Press, August 12, 1948.
- 30. The *Times* even had a correspondent in Cleveland to cover a labor convention the day of the 1948 fire. [*New York Times*, February 9, 1948.]
- 31. Cleveland Press, March 17, 1941. Perhaps the most famous of the non-Cuyahoga waterborne fires in the United States occurred in 1959, when gasoline on the surface of the Houston Ship Channel ignited by a passing tug engulfed a tanker, killing seven men: see New York Times, November 9, 1959. Earlier that year, Onondaga Lake in Syracuse, New York, also caught fire, after an underwater line leaked oil. New York Times, April 14, 1959.
- 32. Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 13, 1951; Cleveland Press, October 13, 1950; May 6, 1952.
- 33. Cleveland Plain Dealer, November 2, 1952.
- 34. Cleveland Press, November 4, 1952.
- 35. Columbus Dispatch, November 2, 1952; "Cleveland Recovering From Steel Strike Effects, FRB Reports," Wall Street Journal, November 4, 1952.
- 36. T. J. Ess, "Jones and Laughlin ... Cleveland Works," reprinted from *Iron and Steel Engineer* (February 1959).
- 37. Republic Steel Annual Reports, 1952, 1972, available through Proquest Historical Annual Reports. Due to the strike in 1952, Republic did not produce up to its capacity of 9 million tons, but it would in 1953.
- 38. Standard Oil of Ohio Annual Report, 1966, available through Proquest Historical Annual Reports.
- 39. See the fine summation of Cleveland's decline in Carol Poh Miller and Robert A. Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1996* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Despite the city's comeback, it continues to lose population. It now has fewer than 478,000 residents. http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/39/ 3916000.html; http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/39/3916000.html.
- 40. Marc E. Lackritz, The Hough Riots of 1966 (Cleveland: Regional Church Planning Office, 1968), 21, 40, 64. See, also, Todd M. Michney, "Race, Violence, and Urban Territoriality: Cleveland's Little Italy and the 1966 Hough Uprising," Journal of Urban History 32 (March 2006): 404-28.
- 41. Saturday Evening Post, July 29, 1967, 38-49.
- 42. On the influence of the race on disinvestment, see Townsand Price-Spratlen and

Avery M. Guest, "Race and Population Change: A Longitudinal Look at Cleveland Neighborhoods," *Sociological Forum* 17 (March 2002): 105-36.

- 43. "Downtown Cleveland's Gritty Gateway Just Outside City's Glow," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, December 16, 1998.
- 44. "In Cleveland, Clean Waters Give New Breath of Life," U.S. News and World Report, June 18, 1984, 68; "A River Reborn," Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 22, 1994; "Brewery Suggests Burning-River Fest Would be Eco-Fun," Cleveland Plain Dealer, February 19, 2001.