SHINING NEW LIGHT ON U.S. LABOR HISTORY—
BUT HOW BRIGHT A LIGHT?

The period from 1910 to 1920 was a very important and interesting time for labor markets, especially for black workers in these markets, as the demand for labor reached highs during this wartime era. The past decade has witnessed increased availability of resources for studying the US labor markets of the time. These resources have shed new light on how the tight labor markets of the time affected individuals and larger groups. While some of these resources have remained unexplored. In this paper, we examine one of the more neglected but potentially very valuable sets of records—World War I selective service registration records. To measure the quality of these draft records, we compare these records to two better known resources—population samples from the 1920 census and city directories. We also generate new information on the larger picture of occupational mobility for the years prior to and after the selective service registration.