

The changing face of the



A look at the demo- graphic shifts of the last 25 years

A quick glance across the floor of the NALC's national convention in Minneapolis last July told the story of our union's broadly diverse membership. Faces of every color, old and young, male and female filled the hall, representing letter carriers nationwide. We look like America.

Thanks to the sacrifices and hard work of NALC members before us—particularly during the Strike of 1970, which brought collective bargaining and pay raises to our craft—carrying the mail is an opportunity for Americans from all backgrounds to make a decent living and retire with security.

Our membership reflects the sweeping social change that was happening at about the same time as the strike. Our ranks have grown to include more women, African-Americans, Latinos and other underrepresented groups who wanted their chance to work hard for fair wages.

Numbers compiled by the USPS show the pace of our union's changing demographics in the past 25 years. In 1987, whites held three of every four city carrier jobs. By 2009 (the last year data for race is available), that figure had dropped to 60 percent. African-Americans constituted 19.4 percent of the city carrier

workforce that year, with Latinos at 11.4 percent and Asians at 8.4 percent.

According to the Census Bureau, the overall U.S. population is 13.1 percent African-American, 16.7 percent Latino and 5 percent Asian.

Women also made big gains in that period. In 1987, one of every five carriers was female; today, 55,000 women are carrying the mail, representing nearly a third of the city carrier workforce. That percentage lags behind the overall workforce, though, where women have reached parity by holding about half of all civilian jobs.

"I am pleased the NALC is becoming more diverse in gender and race," NALC Secretary-Treasurer Jane Broendel said. "Everyone, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. has something to offer this union. By being aware of our differences, we can transform differences into assets."

A good fit for military veterans

The data include active carriers who are veterans of our armed forces. Over the years, many veterans have found the letter carrier craft to be a good "landing spot" after their service, and their skills—logistical know-how, ability to do physical work in adverse conditions, getting a job done whatever the obstacles, and even

bravery when called for—make them great postal workers.

The Vietnam War and the military draft pushed the veteran population to a peak in the early 1980s, and many veterans found jobs as letter carriers, joining others who had signed on with the USPS after World War II and the Korean War. By 1987, every other letter carrier was a veteran.

In 2012, the proportion of letter carriers who served in the military stands at 21 percent, reflecting the population's overall drop in the number of veterans following the end of the Vietnam War and of the draft. Even so, with 42,000 veterans carrying mail, the USPS remains the largest civilian employer of veterans. The proportion of veterans in our ranks still greatly exceeds the share of vets in the U.S. population, which is about 7 percent.

As soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines return in greater numbers with the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan winding down, our share of veterans may rise again. While veterans overall are more likely to have jobs than non-veterans, the typical young veteran (aged 18-24) is more likely to be unemployed than a civilian in that age group, and more young vets may seek jobs at the Postal Service.

In the midst of the congressional battle over postal reform in Congress, NALC ran TV and print ads around Veterans Day of 2011 reminding the public of the contribution veterans make to the Postal Service. "Our service never ended—and neither should yours," the TV ads said. It's a fact that NALC will stress again when a newly elected Congress takes up postal reform.

"As we celebrate Veterans Day this month, we remember that veterans deserve a good job to come home to and have much more to contribute," President Fredric Rolando said. "Letter carriers get an essential job done every day, they play a role in national security through programs like the Cities' Readiness Initiative and sometimes they

answer the call to save lives. NALC won't hesitate to remind the new Congress and the president of the important role veterans play in the Postal Service."

Righting an historic wrong

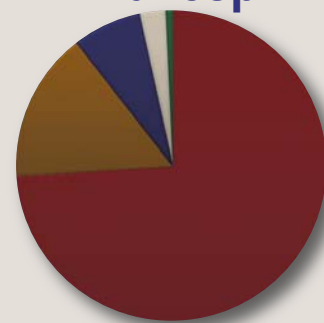
The figures on race reflect the larger story of the nation's legacy of bias, of course, but some NALC branches had a hand in that injustice, too.

Even after the Postal Service and NALC welcomed African-Americans into their ranks, some NALC branches discriminated against black carriers. In some cities, NALC had segregated branches. In other cases, African-Americans joined different postal unions. The NALC finally forbade the creation of new whites-only branches in 1954, but the task of ending segregation in existing whites-only branches took longer. Racial discrimination didn't end completely in the NALC until 1962, when President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order outlawing discrimination by federal employee unions.

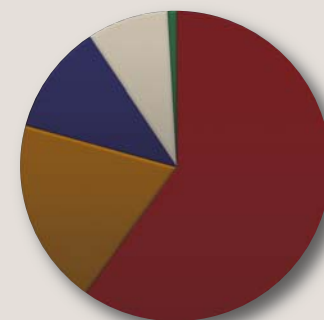
But a legacy of that painful era remained for decades for some black carriers whose service as union members in other unions wasn't recognized because they had been excluded from the NALC. (See the June 2011 issue of *The Postal Record*.) At the 2012 national convention, the NALC officially recognized years of membership in other unions as counting as NALC membership.

In the 1960s, many blacks taking jobs with the Post Office brought civil rights and union activism with them, according to Phil Rubio, a professor of history at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro and a former letter carrier. Rubio is the author of *There's Always Work at the Postal Service*, which examines the experiences of African-American postal workers. With their backing, said Rubio, postal unions pushed the government to improve working conditions and end job discrimination of all kinds, such as gender discrimination.

Racial/ethnic makeup



1987



2009

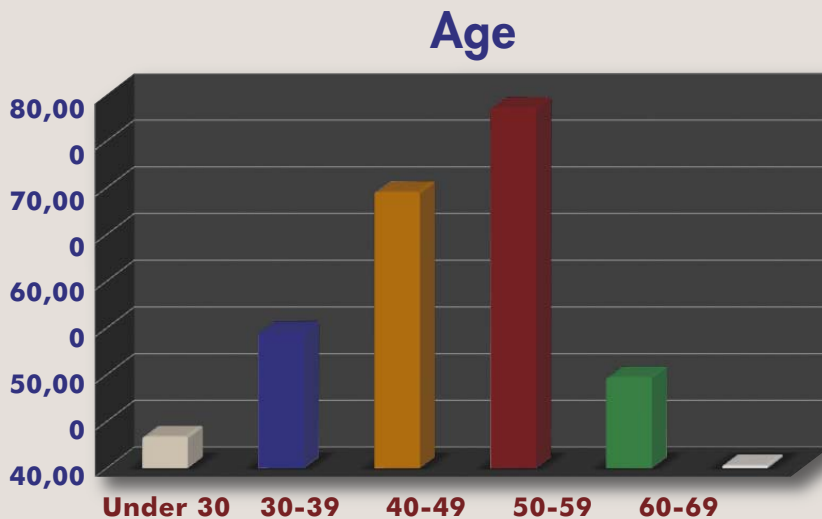


“The Post Office was, in the 1960s, one of the first federal agencies to begin hiring women” as craft workers, Rubio said. “I think the way for that was paved by civil rights struggles in the Postal Service.” Letter carriers with activist streaks also helped build support for the Strike of 1970, he added. That, in turn, made carrying mail a more attractive job.

“After the strike,” Rubio said, “people stopped feeling sorry for letter carriers and started to envy them.”

A shrinking workforce

The growing diversity of our membership is something to be proud of, and it strengthens our craft and our union. But not all the numbers bring good news.



After decades of fairly steady growth that tracked with the growth of the nation and its delivery points, the number of active city letter carriers on the streets is dropping. The last two decades have seen ups and downs, but our craft’s numbers have slipped in recent years. In early 2008, there were 231,456 active carriers; now there are 191,558.

In terms of absolute numbers, that is putting a dent in the growth of letter carrier jobs held by minorities or women.

For instance, though women hold a growing share of city carrier jobs, there actually are fewer female letter carriers today than a few years ago—because on the whole, our craft is getting smaller.

With fewer postal jobs overall, the gains for racial and ethnic minorities and women are diluted. “It’s going to be shrinking everybody’s opportunities,” Rubio said.

NALC’s membership numbers reflect this trend. Our membership numbers consist of active carriers who have joined the union and retired members. After a peak of 303,073 members in March of 2008, the number of members now stands at about 270,000.

The USPS is simply not hiring as many new city letter carriers to replace those who are leaving their jobs or retiring. As a result, the carrier force is aging, with less “new blood” coming in. Letter carriers between the ages of 50 and 54 form the largest age group, with 42,353. The next-largest group is ages 55 to 59, with 35,031 carriers. One of every two carriers is over age 50. There are only 6,441 city carriers in their 20s.

All of these changes—race and ethnicity, gender, veteran status, age—will have an impact on the union, especially at the branch level. The diversity trends vary across the country; for instance, you’d expect there to be more Latino letter carriers in the Southwest. But whatever changes in membership they see, Broendel said, branch leaders should focus on ways to turn diversity into strength.

“Is there any better place in America than a union to bring people of different backgrounds together for a common cause?” she asked. “When all are encouraged to be involved in their union—as a steward, an officer or an organizer—they all take pride in their cause, and differences become similarities that build solidarity. We all contribute to the struggle for letter carriers and their families to live better lives.”