The United States steel industry is essentially what brought many towns in the United States to prominence. Pittsburgh, for example, is known as the steel city because of all the steel mills that have come and gone from Pittsburgh. It is a city whose sole purpose was to produce steel to help build a nation. But what happens to a town that was brought to existence by a steel company only to be deserted by that company years later?

In 1853 a partnership was formed between Bernard and John Lauth, B.F. Jones, and S.M. Kier for a new ironworks called Jones, Lauth, and Company. In 1856, John Lauth sold his interest to B.F. Jones and S.M. Kier. Later in 1856, James A. Laughlin, who was the President of the Pittsburgh Trust Company, bought an interest in the firm. The Jones, Lauth, and Company listed that they specialized in iron, nails, and cut and pressed spikes as principal products for sale. In 1861, after Bernard Lauth retired from the Jones, Lauth, and Company, James Laughlin bought his interest and the company became known as Jones and Laughlin’s American Iron Works.

In 1883 B.F. Jones became the chairman, G.M. Laughlin became secretary-treasurer, and T.M. Jones became general manager where they built J&L’s first two Bessemer converters in Pittsburgh. B.F. Jones then became the president of the American Iron and Steel Association, a position that he would retain for eighteen years; J&L would then add seventy-six puddling furnaces, one five-ton Bessemer converter, a rail mill, and fifty-four beehive ovens. This shows the continuing expansion of the J&L Steel Company ultimately leading to their expansion to Aliquippa.
B.F. Jones died in 1903 and in 1905 J&L purchased Woodlawn Park and other various farm lands twenty miles down the Ohio River from Pittsburgh to use as the site of a new steelworks plant, the Aliquippa Works. The first blast furnace was completed at the Aliquippa Works plant in 1909 and Coke ovens, soaking pits, and billet mills were under construction at Aliquippa Works. Tin Mills, blast furnaces, and south coal hoist all started operations at the Aliquippa Works. J&L then got into the wire business with the completion of the new rod and wire mills at Aliquippa Works.

[Photo 1]

By 1937 Jones and Laughlin Steel had numerous plants and buildings at the Aliquippa Works facility. This is when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the National Labor Relations Board by finding that Congress has the authority, under the Commerce Clause, to regulate labor relations. The Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation produced steel and shipped it across state lines and elsewhere. Amidst the climate of social unrest throughout the nation during the 1930s, relations between the employees of the Aliquippa Works facility and Jones and Laughlin Steel had been continuously deteriorating. The employees of the Aliquippa Works facility decided to form a bargaining unit with the national American Federation of Labor, or AFL, labor union to represent their interests. Jones and Laughlin wanted to keep employees from joining the AFL and officially unionizing.

Later in 1935, four days after President Roosevelt signed the Wagner Act into law, Jones and Laughlin fired ten workers that were union leaders at the Aliquippa Works facility. The Local 200 of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers of America filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board accusing the company of engaging in unfair
labor practices by firing members of the union. The National Labor Relations Board upheld the complaint by finding that Jones and Laughlin Steel did in fact violate the Wagner Act. The company was ordered to reinstate the men and provide compensation for the time the men had off.

When the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation refused to comply with the National Labor Relations Board, the NLRB filed a petition with the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to enforce the order. The appeals court ruled in favor of Jones and Laughlin and refused to enforce the ruling dealt by the National Labor Relations Board. The National Labor Relations Board then appealed the decision of the appeals court to the United States Supreme Court. Jones and Laughlin Steel again tried to argue that Congress did not have the authority under the Commerce Clause to regulate labor relations between a company and its employees. They claimed that the act violated the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment protecting the “liberty of contract.” They also felt that the federal government had no power to interfere with the rights of the private property owners and their employees. The Supreme Court decided in a 5-4 decision that the act neither went beyond Congress’ powers under the Commerce Clause nor did it violate Due Process.

Chief Justice Charles E. Hughes wrote the opinion for the decision in favor of the National Labor Relations Board. “The congressional authority to protect interstate commerce from burdens and obstructions is not limited to transactions which can be deemed to be an essential part of a "flow" of interstate or foreign commerce. Burdens and obstructions may be due to injurious action springing from other sources . . . That power may be exerted to protect interstate commerce no matter what the source of the dangers which threaten it.” This statement by the Chief Justice shows that the Supreme Court believed that labor unrest could lead to strikes
which in turn could lead to the disruption of interstate commerce. An interference of this magnitude would be particularly harmful to the nation during such a time of economic crisis. They found that workers held a right to organize; the Wagner Act played a beneficial role by requiring employers to negotiate agreements with their workers. This requirement increased the employees’ protection under the law by allowing them power to negotiate with employers through democratically elected representatives.

This landmark ruling gave labor unions all over the country the power to organize and negotiate with employers. The Jones and Laughlin ruling also proved to be the major turning point in the battle between Roosevelt and the Supreme Court over federal powers. The Supreme Court supported Roosevelt’s belief that the federal government had the authority to regulate the nation’s economic affairs by broadening its interpretation of the Commerce Clause. After the passage of the Wagner Act and the ruling in the Jones and Laughlin case, union membership went from 4.7 million people in 1936 to 8.2 million people in 1939. By the end of the twentieth century the Wagner Act remained the most important article of labor legislation passed in the history of the United States.

Jones and Laughlin Steel continued to operate the Aliquippa Works facility for a number of years even though Jones and Laughlin Steel were bought out by LTV Corporation. People started moving to Aliquippa from all over the United States to have a unionized job that came with a reasonable salary and health benefits in which to support their families. The town began to flourish; homes were laid out in 12 different sections or “plans” and each plan had its own nationality and social class, Plan 6, for example, was the area in which supervisors and craftsmen would call home. The city’s population reached 30,000 people and employment at the J&L Steel mills rose to 13,000 people in the 1950s. The towns of Industry and Economy began to flourish
as well because they too were right along the river and had many people employed at the J&L Steel Company facilities at Aliquippa Works.

[Photo 2]

Franklin Avenue, the road that leads directly to the water front where the Aliquippa Works facility was located began to flourish. Drugs stores, grocery stores, movie theaters, and many other shops began sprouting up. It was the most convenient and economically sound place for businesses to be in Aliquippa because the workers would always stop and spend their money in the shops on the way home from the steel mills.

[Photo 5]

In the early 1980s lower-priced steel imports started to arrive in the United States from Japan, this was J&L Steel’s first encounter with the forces of globalization. In 1984, LTV Corporation made an announcement that they would close the Aliquippa Works facility putting almost 8,000 people out of jobs instantly. The city then had to begin borrowing money from one budget to cover another until the city ran out of cash completely. Mr. Gamble, who was the state-appointed coordinator to help get Aliquippa out of the economic depression it had slipped into said that “The entire tax base disintegrated.” By 1987 the city of Aliquippa had over $400,000 in unpaid bills.

The Duquesne Light Company threatened to turn off all of the streetlights in Aliquippa. The meter maid for the city retired and instead of hiring a new one in an effort to save the city a little money, City Officials decided that taking all of the parking meters out of the ground was the best solution. The code-enforcement office, the office that inspects all structures within city limits, was reduced to one person. Aliquippa was desperate for revenue; they hoped that
implementing a two-tier tax system would make the steel company develop land that had been left vacant by the demolition of the steel mills.

Aliquippa's plan ultimately backfired when the steel company sold the land. The new owner challenged the high assessed value of the land in court and ended up paying fewer taxes than before the tax system was implemented. With the loss of the steel jobs in Aliquippa, the city's population fell 12% to 11,700 while the state's population went up by 3% during the 1990s. Aliquippa's population is now made up of 36% African Americans. 57% of the population are over the age of 60.

Houses began to fall into disrepair which diminished their taxable value. Now 40% of the homes in Aliquippa are rentals compared to the state average of only 29%. The city's population fell 12% to 11,700 while the state's population went up by 3% during the 1990s. Aliquippa's population is now made up of 36% African Americans. 57% of the population are over the age of 60.

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The city has seen a glimmer of hope however, a $112 million United States Gypsum Company plant opened on the vacant river front left by the steel company. The United States Gypsum plant opening is only a small step in an effort to revive the town from the diminished state that it is in. This plant has opened up 200 jobs in Aliquippa, but is not nearly enough to save the town. Mr. Stoner, the city manager of Aliquippa gave this quote "I figure it's going to take five to seven years to turn this city around."

**Work Cited**


6. "NLRB v. Jones and Laughlin Supreme Court Ruling [Steel and Great Depression]."

**Pictures**

1. This photo is the riverfront that runs along Aliquippa, this shows the developed state of the riverfront when J&L was running on all cylinders.

2.
This photo shows the J&L Steel over a partial view of downtown, some of the buildings shown in this picture of downtown Aliquippa do not exist anymore.

3. This photo is taken from the Bridge that connects Route 51 to west Aliquippa, all this land used to be inhabited by J&L Steel, now you can see only the U.S. Gypsum Plant in that background.
This is a picture of downtown Aliquippa, you can clearly see the vacancies of buildings and areas where buildings used to stand that had to be demolished because of prolonged vacancy.

5.

This is a picture of the Golden Jubilee Parade going through downtown Aliquippa when downtown Aliquippa was lined with stores and was a safe/fun place to be.