



## David Montgomery, 1927 – 2011

Posted on August 30, 2015 by Rosemary Feurer

David Montgomery has had and will continue to have an incalculable impact on the historical study of workers' lives, aspirations and struggles in the U.S. and worldwide. He brought to his scholarship a perspective honed through years of his own trade union and political activism. He was a creative, defining force in the "new labor history," a historian who placed workers' self-activity, both on and off the job, at the center of the story and in the process fundamentally altered our understanding of the course of American history.

**New:** The OAH is celebrating David Montgomery's life and scholarship by starting a [David Montgomery Book Award Fund](#).

December 1, 1927 – December 2, 2011

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the process fundamentally altered our understanding of the course of American history.

We learned from his major work the place of working-class struggles in the politics of Reconstruction, the traditions of shop floor control exercised by skilled workers, the profound challenge scientific management posed to workers in his own metal trades, the processes of class formation rooted in the “frictions of daily life” and in the limits to popular democracy imposed by state action, and the contradictions of globalization that recast the ethnic and racial composition of the working class and sowed the seeds of working-class internationalism, even as capitalism refashioned ever more powerful engines of accumulation. His research brimmed with new and diverse primary sources and old sources freshly interpreted.

As a teacher and mentor he inspired whole generations of students and colleagues to pursue their own insights and their own understanding of the lives of workers, ever mindful of their agency and the economic and political structures of power that constrained their actions. He encouraged students to act in the present ever attentive to the relevance of the past and its meaning.

In [one of his last public talks](#), he ended an inspiring summary of the work he and his students had done with some final words to a next generation: simply “carry it on.” And so we must.

You are invited to share your memories and stories of David Montgomery and his work on this website. In 2007 he received the first LAWCHA award for lifetime service to labor and working-class history.

Please send messages (limited to 250 words) for posting on this site to Shelton Stromquist, [shelton-stromquist@uiowa.edu](mailto:shelton-stromquist@uiowa.edu). Please identify yourself.

Below are a list of prominent obituaries and remembrances in various publications across the country.

- Michael Honey, “[Remembering OAH Past President, David Montgomery](#),” *OAH Outlook*
- Al Hart, “[David Montgomery, Prominent Labor Historian and Friend of UE, Dies at 84](#),” *The UE News Update*
- James R. Barrett, “[Obituary: David Montgomery \(December 1, 1927 - December 2, 2011\)](#),” *AHA Perspectives* (forthcoming).

- Dana Frank, [David Montgomery, Grandmaster Workman](#), *The Nation Online*.
  - Fernando Fasce, ["David Montgomery: Un Tessitore Di Storie Operaie" \(Italian\)](#).
  - Julie Greene, ["From the Shop Floor to the Lecture Hall: David Montgomery, 1927-2011,"](#) *Dissent Magazine*
  - Bruce Weber, ["David Montgomery, 84, Dies; Chronicled Lives of Workers,"](#) *New York Times*.
  - Eric Foner, ["David Montgomery obituary: US labour historian who approached the study of capitalism through workers' experiences,"](#) *The Guardian*.
  - ["Obituary: David Montgomery / Scholar had longtime passion for labor activism,"](#) *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.
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## Photographs



"Working-class Worlds" Conference, Iowa City, July 2011. Credit: Sharon Wood.



David Montgomery with past LAWCHA presidents Michael Honey, Jim Green, and Alice Kessler-Harris. Durham LAWCHA conference, May 2007. Credit: Tom Klug.



UE Convention, New Haven, 2009. Credit: Ron Flowers, UE.



UE Convention, New Haven, 2009. Credit: Ron Flowers, UE.



UE Convention, New Haven, 2009. Credit: Ron Flowers, UE.

## Remembrances

### **James R. Barrett, University of Illinois, Urbana**

[toc]David Montgomery was the most important labor historian — perhaps one of the most important historians of any description — of his generation. But who knew that he could also do Flamenco dancing if called upon? The scene was a Spanish bar and restaurant in Detroit where he had ventured with a group of other labor historians. When the dancer challenged someone from the group of professors to join her on stage, the younger historians quickly volunteered David. To everyone's surprise and delight, he climbed onto the little stage. It must be said that he was a better historian than a Flamenco dancer, but the bravery displayed was quite typical.

Skilled machinist; brilliant researcher, writer, and teacher; mentor to scores of his own students and hundreds of others; labor and civil rights activist; devoted husband father, and grandfather, . . . Montgomery's legacy is everywhere one looks – in International Labor and Working Class History, the journal he edited for many years; in unions and local labor history societies; in the Organization of American Historians, which he served in many capacities and led as president; in Historians Against War, a group he helped to found; in the Labor and Working Class History Association whose work he consistently supported; in the Working Class in American History series he co-edited for more than thirty years at the University of Illinois Press; and perhaps most importantly in the lives and careers of two generations of historians he deeply influenced as a role model.

David lived a life that combined outstanding scholarship and teaching with an abiding commitment to make the world a better place. For all these reasons and many others inscribed in the hearts of those who knew and loved him, he will be sorely missed.

*(From forthcoming obituary in Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas)*

### **Joe Berry, Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor**

*Formerly of University of Illinois*

One thing that no one has yet mentioned in the various obits I have seen is that David took on the OAH presidency and said to me that his main objective for his term was to address the issue of contingent faculty, which he did try to do (though without too much effect, but mostly not his fault, I think). He was also personally very helpful and encouraging to

contingent and grad activists (including myself) in many ways. He wrote introductions to books by people he'd never met, but respected their activist and academic work (like "Cogs in the Classroom Factory", a collection about adjunct and grad labor) partly because it would help the volume to get published at all. This is combined with his being one of the very few tenure stream faculty at Yale to openly support the grad organizing effort there over all the years it has continued. He never quit being an activist and active citizen when he left the factory (and the CP) to come to academia. He was not afraid to apply his activism and principles to "the house he lived in", which is often the hardest thing to do. It's a lesson we can all learn from. David was not a secular saint. He made errors, in my and other's judgment. But his errors were always honest errors of principle as he saw it, never of opportunism. We should all wish to have that as our own epitaph.

### **Eileen Boris, UC-Santa Barbara**

I met David Montgomery in the Fall of 1974, when David came to Newberry Library in Chicago as a resource faculty to advise students from the Associated Colleges of the Midwest who were taking a seminar "Machine in the Garden" on work and society in the Anglo-American world. George Tselos invited him and I was the graduate student fellow with the course. Along with our students, I benefited from David's now legendary generosity when he sat down to talk with me about my dissertation research on Ruskin and Morris and the Craftsman Ideal in America. From David, I learned that I was actually a labor historian! He also introduced us to Chicago's vibrant radical present, taking the group to a multi-racial meeting of the meatpackers union. That too was vintage David Montgomery: the activist scholar who modeled what it meant to make a difference in the world. His inspiring words on capitalist crisis last September at the LABOR conference at Georgetown remind me why he will be so missed.

### **Barbara Bowen, President, Professional Staff Congress, City University of New York (AFT Local 2334)**

When David Montgomery died December 2nd he was the foremost historian of the U.S. working class in the country, and the world. He brought to this work an appreciation of class struggle forged in the shop floor battles of the trade union movement; a comprehension of the socioeconomic structures within which working people organize to better themselves and their families and communities, schooled by participation in progressive and socialist movements; and an awe-inspiring integrity founded on a keen eye for injustice and a sharp ear for suffering.

The Professional Staff Congress represents the faculty and staff of the City University of New York, an institution established 165 years ago, at a time of much expanded immigration, as an experiment “whether the children of the people, the children of the whole people, can be educated; and whether an institution of the highest grade, can be successfully controlled by the popular will, not by the privileged few” (Horace Webster, first President of the Free Academy of New York). The City University has ever since aspired to that mission provide the very finest education to all the people of New York.

As successors and beneficiaries of that legacy, the Professional Staff Congress salutes the historian who excavated and restored to us the saga of the U.S. working class. Even those of us who are not familiar with his Work have benefitted from his research and activism. Those of us who know and study his work have profited from his instruction. Those of us who know and love him as a friend miss his wisdom, his sympathy, and his endless repertory of stories of triumphs large and small of the working peoples whose day-by-day and decade-by-decade struggles he so thoughtfully studied, and so stoutly supported without hesitation or fear. We offer our condolences to his many students and friends, and especially to his wife and to his children and grandchildren.

## **Steve Brier, City University of New York**

I met David almost four decades ago (in 1972) when I embarked on my first research trip for my dissertation on coal miners. My comrade at UCLA, Paul Worthman, said I couldn’t begin that work without talking to David first, who was only a name to me at that point (though a legendary one, to be sure). Paul arranged a meeting for me with David in his Squirrel Hill home in Pittsburgh. I had the pleasure on that occasion to meet Marty, David’s wife, for the first time that day (she is an incredibly friendly and supportive person), before she ushered me into David’s book-lined study to talk about coal miners. He listened carefully to my complex tale of what I wanted to do, talked at length about various aspects of coal mining history and pronounced my topic worthy of pursuing. I left an hour or so later elated that one of the nation’s two preeminent labor historians (the other being Herb Gutman, who I wouldn’t meet until I moved to NYC four years later) thought my interest in exploring the intersections of race and class in the coal industry was important.

I was never David’s student but I found him over the years incredibly generous, nonetheless, with his time and compendious knowledge and more than willing to share that knowledge with younger scholars. My last communication with David came in a long and incredibly generous and thoughtful email message he sent to me and Nando Fasce about our recently published article in *Labor* on Italian radicals in the Western coal fields.

The field of labor history is diminished by David Montgomery's loss. We need to carry forward his deep commitment to the field as well as his passionate support of working people's struggles worldwide.

## **Joshua Brown, CUNY**

David Montgomery's spirit has long imbued the American Social History Project. Herb Gutman, with Steve Brier, founded it and to this day his commitment to an inclusive U.S. history and democratic education shapes our programs and perspective. But, from the start, David was a silent partner in our work: we only occasionally saw him at conferences and events, but his research and ideas reverberated through our meetings, at our desks, as we wrote, and as we drew. David's scholarship exhorted us to be forever mindful of the significance and intricacies of and struggles over work and the workplace (his impact, I hope, readily apparent in our *Who Built America?* books, documentaries, CD-ROMs, online projects, and education programs). And his life reminded us to revere and respect learning but to never succumb to the solace, refuge, or privilege of the ivory tower.

## **Cecelia Bucki, Fairfield University**

I remember my very first seminar with David Montgomery at the University of Pittsburgh in January 1976. Here I was, a working-class kid from Bridgeport, Connecticut, trying to switch from rank-and-file labor activism to an academic career. Montgomery's classroom was intense. His seminars were a combination of readings in secondary sources as well as deep reading in primary sources (whether business magazines, industrial relations expert reports, or radical and union journals), in addition to student-generated political debates on one or another left-wing ideology (we were a very mixed group!). One reading that caught my attention was a piece by Montgomery that had not yet been published. There I learned about the World War I strike waves that had engulfed Bridgeport. What? I had to go to grad school to learn about labor struggles that had happened in my home town? In which my grandfather, a brass molder, had probably been involved? No one in Bridgeport knew about this either. This was too much — I was hooked. I particularly resonated with David's shopfloor approach, and he even lent me his old machinist's manual so I could figure out the many debates about job classifications as I delved into my own local research. He always loved to talk about the process of making things.

David was truly the Master Mechanic. And he kept in mind the old question: why do those who work the hardest get the least? He was, at his core, passionately committed to social



justice and a better world.

## **Jon Butler, Yale University**

*Eulogy given January 28, 2012, in Yale's Battell Chapel. LAWCHA thanks Jon Butler for sending us the text of his eulogy.*

Each of us individually and all of us collectively are here today because we wish to celebrate the life of David Montgomery. Put simply, it was a privilege to know David, to hear him, to be his student or his colleague, to be inspired by him, to be led by him. With a consistency that seems almost impossible, especially across such a long and varied life, David had a subtly uncanny ability to raise up every setting in which he was active, whether it was the machine shop floor or the halls of great universities. He truly made the world a better place in a life driven by the principles he espoused, a personal dignity, a simple charm, and an exceptional care for others. If we are here today from an amazing variety of backgrounds, we share common reasons. We know in our experience of David that he set standards for each of us individually, just as he showed what all of us could be together if we would think at it and work at it.

In my own experience, whenever David's name is mentioned, stories roll out with a force, passion, and clarity whose breathtaking intensity illustrates an emphatic truth: there was nothing vague about David Montgomery. You knew when you were in his presence, and you knew it would make you better.

This was true even when he was just an image. My own first encounter with David came long before I had ever met him and typified graduate students at the University of Minnesota in the later 1960s, a half-decade after David had left with his Ph.D. in 1962. We learned not to grouse about our prospects, as midwesterners might. Someone named David Montgomery had shown what a Minnesota graduate student could do and through a path whose complications expressed an energy we ought to emulate. He had served in the Army after high school as WWII ended, then studied at Swarthmore College. But rather than taking a white collar job, he worked as a machinist in New York and then Minnesota where he was hounded by the FBI for his temerity not only to have been a member of the Communist Party, not least because it supported racial equality and workers rights together when so many Republicans and Democrats still mouthed racism, but also sought to organize labor unions on the machine shop floor. And didn't we know that once in graduate school, he didn't dilly-dally. He'd written an exceptional Master's thesis on labor and the Radical Republicans in 1960 that he'd expanded to a Ph.D. dissertation in only two years, got an Assistant Professor position at the University of Pittsburgh but also worked in England with



the famed E. P. Thompson, then quickly published his revised dissertation in 1967 with the most prestigious commercial publisher in the United States, Alfred A. Knopf, as *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872*, that had won stunning reviews, and now, at Pittsburgh, he was already training Ph.D. students. If we were left breathless by Montgomery's example, it was because it was thrilling, all the more for someone just beginning his professional career and driven by three characteristics that typified his life: force, passion, clarity.

(Here, an aside: David described much of his life and career before he pursued a Ph.D. in a remarkable interview with the historians Paul Buhle and Mark Naison published in the Spring 1980 issue of *Radical History Review*. The journal and its publisher and its publisher, Duke University Press, have recently made it freely available on the web. Simply Google "David Montgomery Machine Shop Floor" and you'll find it about 3/4 of the way down the first page of responses.)

This afternoon, many different people will describe David's force, passion, and clarity as a union organizer and supporter, a teacher and mentor at Pittsburgh and Yale, and simply a friend.

What I want to do here is to describe the force, passion, and clarity that distinguished David's career as a historian, teacher, colleague, and intellectual. In fact, the force David displayed on the machine shop floor and then in graduate school simply never abated. David followed *Beyond Equality* with *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1979, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*, again published by Cambridge, in 1987, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market During the Nineteenth Century*, yet again published by Cambridge, in 1993, then *Black Workers' Struggle for Equality in Birmingham* published in 2001, a beautiful book of oral interviews he edited with [Horace Huntley](#) of the [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#) on Birmingham Alabama's parallel struggles for racial equality and civil rights, in a sense a return to the subject of his dissertation and first book, *Beyond Equality*.

There was so much more, of course — articles, essays, reviews, many conferences — but the books can stand for all. As many accounts testify, was a major force in creating the "new labor history" with David Brody, Herbert Gutman, and E. P. Thompson. Listen to the titles of David's books — *Beyond Equality*, *Workers Control in America*, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, *Citizen Worker*. They were all about America and the broad roles laboring men and women had played, and yes, still could play, in shaping the nation *and* their own lives.

Yes, the books were about culture, national politics, labor policy, and and lawmaking and necessary law-breaking. But above all, they were books about real individuals whose toil and sweat and activism and defeats and victories could be felt by every reader as though David had sat you down right next to them. David saw in the stories of these real men and women not antiquarian chatter but life as real laborers experienced it. And he could do that because he labored so hard himself. Not one of us historians worked harder for an entire career slogging through lonely research in archives and newspapers and oral interviews to find men and women too often lost to history, and then possessed the literary gifts to bring their stories alive with dramatic interpretative impact. David's books simply reshaped the way America's historians and teachers teach American history.

And there was the passion of David Montgomery's teaching and mentoring — and it was *passion*. His job talk at Yale in the late 1970s still resonates. A New Haven snowstorm began the afternoon of his talk. But neither the snow nor any concern that David's kind of history hadn't ever been taught at Yale could compete with this Pittsburgh professor. As one colleague described it to me, when David began talking "the power of what he said rose up from the floor through his body, and out into an absolutely spell-bound audience — informed, brilliant, organized, intellectually compelling, replete with modesty and good humor. He had everybody." In the mid-1980s, I think when David was teaching the History Department's lecture course on the Civil War and Reconstruction, I passed by two undergraduate students talking about a problem, of all things, with David's course: Montgomery was *too* compelling! They had listened so intently to his passionate, eloquent lectures on the slavery crisis that they had hardly taken notes. Now, how would they study for midterms? And David was equally passionate as a graduate student mentor. Had students thought of this source or that archive? Could they draw chapter arguments more tightly and sketch characters more vividly? How were they approaching their job search?

And there was the clarity that put things in the light that counted. Even David's simplest words in department meetings brought issues back to their essence. What were we up to? Was this really serving the larger good? Hallway conversations had beginnings, middles, and ends and never meandered. Even the shortest about the social gospel or Father John Ryan, one of David's heroes as the author in 1906 of the remarkable "living wage" proposal, made you want to run back to take notes so you wouldn't end up like the undergraduates who didn't. And during his presidency of the Organization of American Historians in 1999-2000, the professional honor that rightly conveyed his enormous regard in the profession, his moral clarity enabled the organization to make a massive shift in convention sites only three months before its annual convention, after the U.S. Justice Department charged its hotel with racial discrimination against African American guests. David's

handling of the move is widely credited with the hotel's sudden settlement of the case a week before the historians met.

Force, passion, clarity. David Montgomery raised up this University. He raised up those he supported. He raised up American history. He raised up learning and the regard for intelligence.

And David raised up another, plainer quality. He was, simply, a wonderful, warm person. When you saw him on the street or in the hallways, you'd love his conversation, even if you might hang back in the library because you'd know this was his time for history. And he conveyed this warmth in one simple gesture: his smile. He drew you in with it, he cared, and he cared that you should care.

We thank Marty, and Edward, and Claude for lending him, and we treasure all that he gave to history, to life, and to America.

## **Nando Fasce, University of Genoa, Italy**

A quick message from the other side of the ocean to express the sense of loss that the terrible news regarding David's passing away has produced among us. Here too, in Italy and more broadly in Europe, like in the rest of the world, David stood out as a unique example of extraordinary scholarship, public commitment, personal coherence, and human generosity. What I want to emphasize especially here is the immeasurable contribution he gave to the development of a sustained, rich, and most fruitful conversation across national boundaries through his work, his example, and the countless exchanges he developed with myriad scholars, students, and people all over the world. This true internationalist spirit of human and scholarly solidarity and cooperation that he taught us all to treasure and pursue will stay with us now that the Master Craftsman has sadly gone as one of the many and most important facets of his precious legacy.

## **Albert Fitzgerald, former UE President**

Al Hart forwards us these kind words from the late UE president Albert Fitzgerald:

In the 1960s and '70s and finally in 2009, David spoke to four conventions of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, of which he had been a member in the 1950s when he worked in a machine shop in lower Manhattan. A measure of the strength of those

speeches is the comment of the late Albert Fitzgerald, UE's tough and long-serving president, at the conclusion of David's address to the 1975 convention in San Francisco. Fitzgerald, never a source of undeserved or insincere praise, said:

"I think maybe instead of having Dave with us only three times we ought to make him an annual fixture and I don't think we will need anyone else. All three times that he has been with us he has talked about something different and I know from discussing it with the delegates, Dave, that they have received you in the most enthusiastic manner, and I think you have brought them more things that they can work on than anyone else that speaks before our conventions. Thank you very much for coming."

### **Eric Fure-Slocum, St. Olaf College**

I never had the opportunity to sit in on a class or seminar taught by David Montgomery. But as a student of one of his students, I had the good fortune to benefit from the wisdom, commitment, and humanity of a great historian. He truly was at the top of his craft, inspiring all of us seek a deeper understanding of the past and present. I am grateful to have had one last chance to hear David speak in the summer of 2011, when he again made clear that scholarly integrity and deep-seated passion for a better world not only can coincide but must be joined.

### **Frank Goldsmith, Local 100 Transport Workers' Union**

*Director of Occupational Health, Local 100 Transport Workers Union; Retired, State University of New York*

While I was a Research Associate at the United Steelworkers Union, 1964 to 1968; I.W. Abel's education director, Powderly, launched an aggressive 3 week education and training program for the scores of USWA representatives.

Around 1966, I noticed that he was forced to use Meyer Bernstein in one of his formal sessions. Bernstein was the International Affairs director of USWA. Meyer was an acknowledged devotee of George Meany and fully supported U.S. foreign policy. Meyer, being a strong labor representative, was used extensively, especially in South America. I overheard him tell friends, one day, that they had finally gotten rid of Jedi Jagan from Guiana. I was totally naive about this and asked Otis Brubaker the Research Director for USW and he clued me in on Meyers nefarious activities. Meyer came to his job before Abel

was President. It was under David J. McDonald.

So, when I heard that Bernstein was lecturing the steelworker reps on the evils of communism and especially communist and left trade unionists, I suggested to Powderly to ask David Montgomery, then at Pitt, to teach also. For a different viewpoint

There was no room in the 9 to 5pm program for 3 weeks; so Dave was asked to lecture and discuss on Monday evenings. It wasn't known if any reps would show up.

Well, each time this three week program was offered, Dave gave a not required, voluntary class after the Monday class. The class was totally full. They loved him.

As you can imagine, Dave's approach to trade unionism and internationalism was 180 degrees away from Bernstein.

I thought this should be added to David's credits, since it directed affected trade union leadership in a crucial time of the Vietnam war, Civil rights, and the opposition to war mongering and jingoism.

While David spent most of his academic career teaching regular degree seeking studies; he was also a great labor educator.

## **Julie Greene, University of Maryland, College Park**

David Montgomery: so sharp and creative in his thinking, generous with his time and advice, and determined to connect his academic work to social struggles of the day. A memory I cherish comes from the days of the strike by Yale University clerical workers in 1984-1985. Yale put pressure on everyone to continue work as usual. David, of course, refused. Instead he played a leading role in organizing student and faculty support for the strike, which included refusing to teach on campus since that would require crossing picket lines. He moved his undergraduate labor history class—I was one of the TA's—to a nearby movie theater. Every day hundreds of students would head into that movie theater to hear David enlighten them on the history of working people. What a scene, David up on stage, no podium or notes, bringing to life the Pullman boycott, the great uprising of garment workers, or what he called the workers' insurrections in cities like Detroit and Watts in the 1960s. He didn't talk much about the ongoing strike, nor was that needed. The connections were there, made apparent to us by the presence of this great historian on the stage of a movie theater. When he finished lecturing, he'd head off to join a picket line, or to counsel

cheerleaders facing threats from Yale if they didn't stop supporting the strikers. Those days were among the many when the rich connections between David's teaching and activism seemed especially clear, vivid, and poignant.

## **Michael Hanagan, Vassar College**

Around 1975 I interviewed at the University of Pittsburgh for a position in European labor history. I didn't get the job but it was the beginning of a lifelong friendship with David Montgomery that was sustained by our participation on the editorial board of ILWCH. David was a fine man as well as a great scholar. What I most remember is his unfailing and infectious enthusiasm for labor and labor history, an enthusiasm that reverberated through every conversation on the subject. I also remember his broad knowledge that extended to almost every facet of our craft.

## **Al Hart, Managing Editor, UE News**



David Montgomery,  
guerrilla theater in  
support of Circuit-  
Wise workers, New  
Haven, 1989.

Credit: Al Hart, UE.

My first encounter with David Montgomery came in the 1970s when I was working at the Erie GE plant, and David spoke at a UE Local 506 stewards' council meeting. He talked about the history of labor parties in the U.S.

But my favorite memory of David is from more than a decade later in New Haven, where I was then a UE organizer. In March 1988 we had won an NLRB election to represent workers at Circuit-Wise, a circuit board manufacturer in North Haven. In the spring of 1989 – a year into what would be a seven-year fight for a first contract – we learned that both the company president and vice president were members of the Yale class of 1964 whose 25th reunion was coming up – an opportunity we couldn't pass up. We organized a demonstration in front of Woolsey Hall, where the class of '64 would be having cocktails. Demonstrators included UE members, HERE members from Yale, and other supporters. A flatbed truck parked on the corner served as the stage for a guerrilla theater skit. A labor-friendly state representative played the role of company president Jack Mettler, and David portrayed the vice president, Dave Schumacher, who happened to be tall and bespectacled. Both of our

actors wore caricature masks by UE cartoonist Gary Huck, and many of Mettler's and Schumacher's classmates watched from the second-floor balcony. I remember the gist of David's speech: in character as Schumacher, he said that unlike his classmates who after graduation went to Mississippi to register voters, he had devoted himself to making money.

### **Bill Issell, San Francisco State University**

Without ever talking down to or lording it over me, David Montgomery helped me make a difficult transition from the construction sites and IBEW local union hall of my San Francisco blue collar world to the rarefied atmosphere of the History floor in the Cathedral of Learning in Pittsburgh. I graded blue books for his US history survey and attended his US labor history classes during my year at Pitt in '64 and '65, and his high standards of intellectual craftsmanship, and his seemingly effortless combining of scholarship and community activism have influenced me ever since.

When I turned to him for advice about whether to transfer to Penn after my year at Pitt, so I could get more training in the kind of ethnography and sociology that I wanted to use in doing labor history, David helped me weigh the pros and cons of uprooting my family a second time in less than two years. I was nervous about asking him for advice. He knew I came out of a militant Catholic/ACTU family of guys who organized for Harry Lundeberg and held office in IBEW and IAM locals, but he put me at ease, saying with that gentle, wise smile of his, "we don't condemn the children for the sins of their fathers." Perhaps like others reading this page, I have tried to live up to his standards and follow his example but have a nagging feeling that David Montgomery was one of a kind.

### **Kitty Krupat, City University of New York**

I did not have the privilege of studying with David but admired him deeply, not just for his remarkable intellect but for his courage and integrity. I have scarcely met a person of his stature who radiated such kindness, sweetness, and humility.

### **Paul Le Blanc, La Roche College (Pittsburgh)**

When I was an undergraduate and activist at the University of Pittsburgh in the mid-to-late '60s, and then a graduate student in the '70s, David was both my teacher and my hero - vibrant, passionate, thoughtful and joyous in his commitments. The history of the working



class and labor movement, our history, came alive when he spoke of it, sharing information and insights and challenges that nourished us. His writing and his example powerfully influenced the way I thought about things. It is difficult to express adequately how important he was to me, but it certainly seemed that it would make sense to become something like him. This notion resulted in choices that helped shape my life. I think that is true for many of us, and I feel it is a very positive thing. I deeply mourn his passing, but I savor the person that he was and what he gave to us.

### **Mark D. McCulloch, Community College of Baltimore County**

A few things about David that I know or remember that I haven't seen posted elsewhere: For a little while, right after WW2, (it must have been either before or after Swarthmore), he worked as an organizer for the American Veterans Committee, the left-wing alternative to the American Legion. He did a few speaking tours with them, at least.

Dave spoke at the first big teach-in at Pitt in Spring 1966, with Robert Colodny and Tom Quinn as other main speakers. I was a wide-eyed freshman, home at Spring break. After the teach-in, there was brief march of about 30 through Oakland, which had to disband by the time we reached "The Original," due to a hostile crowd. Five years later, Dave participated in a march from Oakland to downtown with over 10,000. Also, in 1971 and 1972, David participated in early morning leafleting at Homestead and Edgar Thompson, building worker opposition to the war.

In 1976, David went with a bunch of us to an IUE picket line at the East Pittsburgh Westinghouse. I think Pete Rachleff organized it. Police came to try to break it up and tried to pressure the chief steward. It was a David, looking like a Sears salesman among all the long-haired students and workers, who could be clearly heard, advising him that "the police have to have an injunction to make us move." That wildcat turned into a national IUE and UE strike that won some real gains. So much more, but I'm out of space.

### **Grace Palladino, University of Maryland College Park**

Along with his important scholarship and inspiring activism, David Montgomery was also a most generous scholar. He always found a way to bring up his students' work in a talk or an article, a critical boost especially when that student was just starting out. Certainly I will always be grateful for the support he offered throughout my unconventional "career." Rest in peace, friend.

## **Peter Rachleff, Macalester College**

In the 1970s Pittsburgh was renowned as the capital of major league baseball with the Pirates (“We Are Family”) and professional football with the Steelers (“The Steel Curtain”). In that same era, David Montgomery made Pittsburgh the capital of American labor history. His practices set the standard for this newly popular field — a close reading of primary sources with a watchful eye towards the struggles of rank-and-file workers and their unions to contest managerial authority in the workplace; a pursuit of scholarly work which bridged the gaps between the classroom and the archives, on the one hand, and the union hall and the shopfloor, on the other. David’s writings, his charismatic lectures, and his generous mentorship attracted dozens of dedicated graduate students and hundreds upon hundreds of curious undergraduates. His classes, from seminars to lecture halls, pulsed with energy and passion. His lectures reminded me of the jazz solos of another Pittsburgher, John Coltrane, and other students must have agreed, as we jumped to our feet with applause after David’s recreation of the 1877 railroad strike, the 1892 Homestead strike, the 1919 steel strike, or dozens of other historic (but frequently unknown) events. He made us feel like we were there.

## **Susan M. Reverby, Wellesley College**

I was almost but then not David Montgomery’s student. I, too, wandered into his office in Pittsburgh in 1974 to tell him I was working on this book that would become *America’s Working Women: A Documentary History*. He had fabulous ideas, always supported what I was doing, made me feel part of an historically important world. When my work relations group met with his students he came along: adding fabulous stories to his analytic brilliance. I never tired of hearing him lecture/preach. I still remember him in an Episcopal church in St. Louis when the OAH moved its meetings because of a labor dispute. Always there, always showing that activism and scholarship met, always a mensch. We are all better historians and committed fighters for social justice because of him.

David never once told me what I “ought” to do, but now, as I understand my life as a teacher, an historian, a public intellectual, and a citizen, I recognize how profoundly he shaped me.

## **Shelton Stromquist, University of Iowa**

David Montgomery will be remembered for a life lived with supreme integrity and the

deepest of commitments to building a truly just and equitable society. These were the ideals of so many of the working people whose lives he was dedicated to studying and they were the principles that guided his own political engagement over a lifetime of activism.

As his students, we could not imagine a more dedicated and inspiring mentor. We truly believed he must have slept only a few hours a night. Our papers and dissertation chapters were returned with astounding speed; his comments, handwritten on lined paper keyed to numbers in the margins, invariably reflected an understanding of what we were trying to say better than we did ourselves. They expanded an ill-formed idea into something richer and more interesting. His references and citations took us far beyond the modest body of sources we had consulted. However critical he might be, he was gracious, thoughtful, while at the same time challenging. We try to model, however imperfectly, his mentoring with our own students, and they in turn with theirs. This may be his greatest and most lasting legacy as a teacher.

He was, of course, one of the great lecturers of his generation of scholars. Equal parts stump speaker, scholar, and public intellectual extraordinaire he lectured seamlessly, weaving together the telling anecdote, the voice of the worker him or herself, and his brilliant insights into the broader patterns of social and historical change. But ALWAYS at the center of the story were the workers as the agents of change, the central actors in their own times, and as the reason we should care about the past (and the present).

## **Matthew Walker, Director of Strategic Affairs, UNITE HERE**

The first thing one noticed about David Montgomery was the incredible energy he brought to his lectures. He loved his job; he loved labor. He was deeply passionate about labor history. It was impossible not to be inspired by his zeal. Only later did I learn that he had spent a decade of his life as a worker in various industrial settings and I thought “of course!” because he had a deep respect for work and for workers that was not simply an intellectual commitment.

Equally important to me and to many other students who knew David was how he validated organizing and activism of all kinds. During my time as his student, I was focused on anti-apartheid work. He encouraged me and supported our work at a time when others on the faculty and the Yale administration openly scorned it.

Of course during the 1984 strike he led by example, showing faculty as well as students the meaning of solidarity.

He was a rigorous and challenging thinker who changed the way labor history was taught and written. He also taught – both by example and in his support for student activists — that we had a responsibility to be involved! To care! To act!

Finally, he was an incredibly warm and personable man who despite his accomplishments and status as a popular, respected Yale professor was never arrogant or complacent.

### **Joe White, University of Pittsburgh (Emeritus)**

As you listen to and read what people have been saying in their appreciations and remembrances of David, you might mistakenly think that everybody is saying essentially the same things over and over. I think that there's a good reason for this. But one hypothesis can be rejected out of hand. There is not nor will there ever be a Montgomery Cult. A much better explanation is that with David what you saw and heard was what you got. He said what he meant, and you almost surely got what he was saying right the first time because of his clarity and directness of expression.

Certain sides of David have not received enough emphasis. For a start, he was the most thoroughgoing Internationalist I have ever known. His years at the University of Warwick presented plenty of challenges, but I'm sure that he loved every minute. Few things made him happier than to deliver a paper in French (he insisted that his accent was terrible) or to have a paper of his on the Irish in American labor history translated into Irish. Although we think of him primarily as an historian of American labor, his knowledge of world working-class history, starting with British labor history, had few equals and perhaps none at all.

There was another side of David, one that people seldom saw because he displayed it so infrequently. He actually threw people out of his office. I know of two such instances. David did not lack courage.

David taught us many things. The most important of all was that we must in the end think for ourselves. This is another reason why there will never be a Montgomery Cult.

David died at a time when movements from below were developing all over the world, precisely what he had such an astonishingly good ear for and what made his interpretations of history so compelling. He did not live to see it, but there is once again a fighting chance that his vision of communities and entire societies governed by and in the interests of working people and not the hostility and fears of the skeptics and naysayers will be vindicated.

## **John W. Wilhelm, President, UNITE HERE**

David Montgomery was the kind of teacher who transcends the usual connotations of “academic.” A scholar he certainly was. Like some but not all scholars, he valued teaching. His profound published work influenced many of us, but it is clear from listening to those who had the good fortune to have him as teacher that he was spirited, challenging, inspiring: truly, a teacher.

He was, at the same time, an activist. Like many left political people of his generation, he chose to do the work of the working class, and because of that, he brought an unusual understanding and concreteness to his scholarship and his teaching. A shortcoming of our labor history is the need for a better understanding of the damage done to the American labor movement by the McCarthy period, and the resulting post-war draining of militancy and political perspective that was so important a part of the organizing in the ‘30’s and ‘40’s.

I encountered David when I was a union organizer at Yale. While I was always sorry that I missed him as a teacher, his unabashed support of Yale workers was highly unusual for the Yale faculty of the ‘70’s and ‘80’s. When Yale clerical and technical workers sought to join the service and maintenance workers by organizing their own union, David and then-Yale Law professor Jack Getman (now at the University of Texas Law School) were the only tenured faculty willing to sign a strong public statement supporting these workers’ right to organize and criticizing the University’s intense anti-union campaign. Because of the struggle of Yale workers, and the extraordinary organizing of the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO) at Yale, there is more faculty support for workers now than there was then, though still not nearly enough.

It is hard to over-state the importance of faculty (and student) support for college and university workers who seek to organize. These workers are proud of the role they play in the life of their school, and the services they provide to students and faculty. They maintain that pride even though too often the value of their work seems invisible to most students and faculty, or at best is taken for granted. When these workers stand up for their rights, it is a tremendous morale boost—validating—for faculty and students to support them.

When that support comes from one of the nation’s foremost authorities on workers and labor, it is that much more meaningful. That impact is intensified when that person is a humble and unassuming individual who is passionate in his support. That, certainly, was David.

Among the many students David inspired is Matthew Walker, now the Director of Strategic Affairs for UNITE HERE. I asked Matthew what David meant to him as a student. His comments are posted on this page.

## Awards

### **Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-Class History Award, LAWCHA**

*At the LAWCHA annual meeting in 2007, David Montgomery was awarded the Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-Class History award. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall presented his award along with a memorable speech involving testimony from his former graduate students. Included are words from: Julie Greene, Rachel Seidman, Gunther Peck, Ken Fones-Wolf, and Jim Barrett.*

Many aspire to “Walk the walk, [not] just talk the talk.” But David Montgomery truly personifies that motto. Generations of scholars and activists have looked to him as a model for living out the principals he espouses in his books and classrooms. From his years of working as a machinist and union activist in New York and Minnesota, to his days of joining his graduate students on a picket line in New Haven in their effort to unionize, David has always “walked the walk.” In giving him the first Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-class History Award, LAWCHA recognizes both this ongoing commitment to struggles for justice and equality and the profound ways in which he has shaped the field of labor and working-class history.

David’s scholarship and his tremendous gifts as a mentor and editor have touched the lives of most of us in this room and they reach into every corner of the field. To give you just a glimpse of the ways in which this amazing man has shaped not only scholarship and teaching but individual lives, we wanted to share with you a few reflections from those who have worked with him over the years.

One former graduate student has this to say:

“For me the critical part of my education involved independent studies with David on U.S. labor history. We would meet every week or two and discuss labor and working-class history at great length-sometimes for two hours or more. Through these discussions David taught me how to think about history, and how asking new and different questions about the past

could lead to new insights and understandings. David was particularly brilliant when it came to commenting on dissertation chapters, and there he often used the same technique of expanding our notion of what is working-class history and how and why it changed over time by asking new questions. One time he commented on a dissertation chapter I'd written on the American Federation of Labor and politics by asking "What about imperialism? How did that shape your story?" At the time I undoubtedly reacted with frustration, thinking "Imperialism? My story is not about imperialism! I have enough to do already!" But over the years David's question stuck with me, and got me thinking more broadly about the relationship between U.S. working-class history and the rest of the world. In this way David nudged historians like me to think and look beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. My own work as a result has moved towards transnational approaches to labor, empire, and migration. To my knowledge David was also the first historian to take seriously the gender identity of working-class men. For me it is his brilliant, expansive, and inclusive curiosity that has been most important, for it has helped us broaden and redefine the very field of working-class history. (Julie Greene)

One student who TA'ed for his large undergraduate Civil War course at Yale recalled how David would pace back and forth in front of the hall full of students, mesmerizing his audience with his passionate oratory. His voice would rise and fall, his arms would gesture dramatically, and when conjuring a dramatic event he was liable to break into song, or recite long passages of poetry from memory. He took teaching seriously, and passed along his love of a great lecture, his careful attention to discussions, and his sense that finding the right way to ask a question could help students see and understand history in a new and important light. (Rachel Seidman)

Another former TA commented,

I remember vividly the way he used his hands as a lecturer: demonstrating how puddlers changed pig iron into steel, clenching and opening his hands for dramatic effect, thumping the podium when necessary, and inspiring his students to see and imagine a world where hands, heart, and intellect could all be expressed and unified in graceful motion. Unlike Montgomery, most of his undergraduates had never used their hands to make a living, but because of him many came to see their own hands and lives in a radically new perspective. (Gunther Peck)

Montgomery's role as an editor, notably of the journal *International Labor and Working-class History* and the University of Illinois's labor history series, brought scores of other scholars into contact with his keen observations and copious, insightful questions. As one author recalled,



I submitted a manuscript to the journal in the mid-1980s. I thought it was a fairly well developed piece because it came from my dissertation. Imagine my surprise when just a few weeks later I received four single-spaced pages of comments about connections I might consider and directions that the piece might take, all delivered in the most supportive way possible. Needless to say, the piece was much improved by just trying to respond to some of his suggestions. Twenty years later, I was fortunate to have him as a reader for my book.... Neither his insights nor his generosity to scholars he barely knows have diminished over time. (Ken Fones-Wolf)

I'm sure many of you could add to these memories. As someone who came into the house of labor history very much self-taught, on the slant, I'd like to underscore the degree to which—by the very force of his personality—David has thrown open the doors of the fields to new people, new ideas, new concerns. It is hard to think of another scholar who inspires so much love and respect and has had so much personal and symbolic meaning to such a far-flung network of people. I think of David as the charismatic center of an imagined community whose borders are wonderfully porous and whose self-renewing creativity is a source of inspiration and solidarity that has enriched countless lives.

David graduated from Swarthmore College in 1950, and after working for ten years as a machinist in New York and Saint Paul, he entered the University of Minnesota where he received his Ph.D. in 1962. He taught for fourteen years at the University of Pittsburgh. He spent two years working in England with fellow historian E. P. Thompson to establish the Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick, and held visiting teacher positions at Oxford University and a number of other universities in Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands. In 1970 David joined the history faculty at Yale where he is now Farnham Professor of History Emeritus.

I know that everyone here is familiar with David's many important books and articles. They are listed in the program so I won't name them except to say that they constitute a monumental body of work, that they repay constant rereading, that their freshness and humanity fairly leap off the page.<sup>i</sup>

Likewise, David's honors and service to the profession are too numerous to recount. But I do want to emphasize how proud all of us in working-class history were when he was elected President of the Organization of American Historians and to say from first-hand experience that his leadership of that organization, as president and in other capacities, has been simply exemplary. I just wish his brand of leadership could be bottled and passed along.

I'll end now by returning to a final testimonial from one of David's former students:

As impressed (indeed, a little awed) as I have been with David as a scholar, he has always meant more to me as a person. He is living proof that it is possible to succeed, indeed to excel, in an academic life and not sell your soul in the process. Above all, I value his honesty. His lack of pretense is a rarity in a work culture too often dominated by glib generalizations and posturing. Distinguished as he is, he reminds us by example that there are far more important things than academic productivity and distinction. As hard as he has worked at his craft, it is always clear that David lives his life with a recognition of this fact. (Jim Barrett)

The LAWCHA Board, in presenting David Montgomery with the Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-Class History, could not have put it better.

*Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Durham, North Carolina, 2007*

## Videos

[David Montgomery speaking in Iowa City, 07/08/2011.](#) (Credit: Jacob Fure-Slocum)

[Download just the audio \(.m4a\).](#)

## OAH Plenary, April 2012

### James Green, “David Montgomery, Scholar”

*For the Plenary Session: David Montgomery – Labor Historian, Activist, Teacher, Mentor, delivered at the Annual OAH Meeting Milwaukee, WI, April 20, 2012.*

David Montgomery’s contributions to our profession and to our knowledge of American history are too vast to explore here. So, I would like to highlight a few of the outstanding qualities his scholarship displays.

First, it is ambitious. David once said, “Although my specialty is working-class history, the subject I am trying to get at is the history of American capitalism.”

And get at it he did from the shop floor, up to the corporate board room.

The breadth of Montgomery's vision is reflected in the title of his last book: *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers with Democracy and the Free Market during the Nineteenth Century*. It's worth noting that this subtitle of this work forecast the theme of this grand OAH meeting: "Frontiers of Capitalism and Democracy."

Ira Berlin put it well when he wrote that *Citizen Worker* "... asks big questions, frames them in the largest perspectives, and answers them with great historical imagination..." Near the end of this eye-opening study, Montgomery summed up the *fin de siècle* situation in a sentence that has resonance in today's troubled world: "The most urgent question facing workers' movements in both North America and Europe as the new [twentieth] century dawned...was whether democracy could be rescued by extending its scope into the forbidden garden of the market itself."

Second, David's scholarship is politically sophisticated. He began by studying political science, and he always maintained his fascination with political ideas and practices, not mainly of leftist parties – although he was close to them – but of the mainstream parties. After all, his first book, *Beyond Equality*, focused upon debates with the Republican Party.

David always brought the state into his narratives and he did so in several ways that seem important to me. Like E. P. Thompson, Dave took the law seriously and he showed us that workers did as well.

Montgomery also took nationalism and working class patriotism seriously. Think of his magnificent discussion of the passionate debate among union workers during World War I in *The Fall of the House of Labor*, and his comment that, for Socialists in the labor movement, the Great War was "the greatest disaster that could have befallen civilization."

Before transnational history became hot, David Montgomery was thinking and writing about US workers in a global – or what we used to call an international – context. I love the passage in *The Fall of the House of Labor* in which Montgomery sets the world stage at the dawn and the industrial age:

An industrial core, throbbing with manufacturing activity at continually rising levels, was roughly bounded by Chicago and St. Louis in the west, Toronto, Glasgow, and Berlin in the north, by Warsaw, Lodz, and later Budapest (rather isolated outposts) in the east, and by Milan, Barcelona, Richmond and Louisville

in the south. Surrounding that core, and indeed enveloping its urban outposts, lay a vast agricultural domain in which capitalist development shattered long-established patterns of economic activity... In the periphery, nineteenth century capitalism [also] destroyed established patterns of bondage and communal life, made the quest for money wages imperative, intensified national and religious persecution, and provided the railroads and steamships by means of which tens of millions of men and woman could engage in what Frank Thistlethwaite has graphically called “proletarian globe-hopping.”

There is more to it than this, much more. One of David’s greatest contributions as a scholar was his appreciation of working-class intellectuals and their ideas. I am thinking here of *Beyond Equality* and its careful and brilliant explanation of the philosophy and political economy of William Sylvis, an iron moulder, and Ira Steward, a machinist.

What I learned from David’s first book helped me figure out how to begin my narrative of the Haymarket events so that my readers understood the history and the philosophy of the eight-hour day movement, and what radical republicanism meant to workers. And so, I chose to begin my story of Chicago with Carl Sandburg’s Lincoln and David Montgomery’s Sylvis.

I should add that David’s writing could be very complicated. Unlike some of us who write old-fashioned narrative history, David embraced complexity. I am thinking here of his erudite discussion of the currency questions of the day in *Beyond Equality*. It was all part of a very intricate argument that some readers found difficult to follow.

I remember Herbert Gutman once saying to me that few scholars in the profession really understood *Beyond Equality*. Eric Foner was not one of them. As Eric wrote in his tribute to David: “The book’s title suggested that beyond equality – a momentous achievement for the former slaves – lay issues of economic justice that the political system proved incapable of addressing. ‘On the submerged rock of class conflict,’ Montgomery argued, ‘the radical Republican project foundered.’”

Third, David’s scholarship is famously grounded in the material world of work; in the stories, the songs, the rituals of mutuality, the daily struggles for dignity, fairness, and, beyond this, for control. This world of the workplace Montgomery created for us emerged from his deep knowledge of iron puddlers and iron molders, machinists and common laborers, from his own machining experience and from his intimate contacts with many kinds of “workmates,” as he liked to call them.

In the high fever of my enthusiasm for the IWW, I can recall writing to Dave in Warwick, England, and asking him to send me a paper he had delivered somewhere in the UK. A few years earlier, Paul Buhle had published Montgomery's widely-read essay "What's Happening to the American Worker?" as a *Radical America* pamphlet, and I wanted to see Dave's historical work in the pages of that magazine. I still have the photocopy the paper he sent me. On the top he had pencilled in his initials, D. M. and the date, 1969, along with a hand-written title: "Trade Union Practice and the Origins of Syndicalist Theory in the US."

On the first page, Dave attacked the IWW view that trade union practices based on craft skill were reactionary and had to be smashed and replaced by industrial unions that would one day take over the economy. In fact, Montgomery wrote, "The idea of direct workers' control of industry operated through the union came from the 'aristocracy of labor' itself."

Well, that gave me a jolt! And, when Montgomery essay on the "new unionism" later appeared *Workers Control in America*, it gave the whole field of labor history a jolt. As some of David's students wrote in his *Festschrift*, this book was part of his project to blast apart the earlier notion of labor history as merely the study of collective bargaining, strikes, labor laws, and the actions of union officials.

One of those students, Bruce Laurie, put this point in a much larger frame when he told me recently that David had singled-handedly overturned orthodox Marxist scholarship by changing the historical discussion from a focus on the struggle over ownership to a focus on the struggle over control. In this regard, I call up of my favorite passages in a little-known comment David contributed to *Radical America* magazine in 1973. It was for a forum on Jeremy Brecher's book, *Strike!*

"Socialism," Dave wrote, "grows from the working and living patterns of working people. Its tap-root is the mutualism spurred by their daily struggle for control of the circumstances of their lives. But that mutualism is manifested in values, loyalties, and thoughts, as well as actions, and it can triumph only by becoming increasingly self-conscious and articulate. The struggle for workers control advances only as it moves from the spontaneous to the deliberate as workers consciously decide what they want and how they want to get it."

I can think of no better way to end here today than by reading what Dave wrote in that vein fourteen years later on the second page of *The Fall*. I think the words he wrote then have special meaning for all of us who are gathered here today. "Class consciousness was more than the unmediated product of daily experience," Montgomery explained. "It was also a project," a project of "working-class activists, and some individuals from other strata who had linked their aspirations to the workers' movement," a "militant minority of men and

women” who “persistently sought to foster a sense of unity and purpose among their fellow workers through the written and spoken word,” and myriad of other concerted actions; “men and women who endeavored to weld their workmates and neighbors into a self-aware purposeful working class.”

David Montgomery wrote history with a passion for justice. He wrote history with a purpose. As we pay tribute to him today, we are all the better for reading his work, better for learning from him, and – for some of us lucky ones – better for knowing him as a teacher, a friend, and a comrade.

## David Montgomery Book Award Fund

[Download/Print the Form](#)

Dear Friend/Colleague of David Montgomery,

David Montgomery, former president of the Organization of American Historians (1999-2000), passed away in December 2011. David was the Farnam Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University, and a leading figure in the modern field of labor and working-class history. He was also the tireless mentor to a generation of graduate students, first at the University of Pittsburgh and then at Yale. Moreover, he connected American historians to an international group of historians through his revival and expansion of the journal *International Labor and Working-Class History* in 1979.

Throughout his life, he worked to support the rights and working conditions of all workers. Thus, David received the first Distinguished Service Award for Labor and Working-Class History in 2007 from the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA). LAWCHA officers Cecelia Bucki and Shelton Stromquist asked then OAH President Alice Kessler-Harris to bring to the OAH Executive Board a request that, in collaboration with LAWCHA, an annual book award in Labor and Working-Class History be established in Montgomery’s name. The OAH Board approved this request at its April 2012 meeting, as did the LAWCHA board.

As former students and colleagues of David, we now come to you for help in building the \$50,000 endowment needed to establish this prize. Some donations have already come in unsolicited, but we are now making a concerted call for donations. We hope to begin awarding this prize in 2014 (for books published in 2013), which means that the endowment must be fulfilled by December 2012.

Please show your support by making a donation today. We welcome donations of any size, but we hope you will be as generous as your circumstances allow. In the spirit of David Montgomery's work and scholarship, the categories are: \$2,500 and over, Master Mechanic; \$1,000-\$2,499, All-Round Machinist; \$500-\$999, Tool-and-Die maker; \$100-\$499, Machine Operator; and Up to \$99, Apprentice.

*James R. Barrett, University of Illinois-Urbana*  
*Richard J. Blackett, Vanderbilt University*  
*Cecelia Bucki, Fairfield University, LAWCHA Secretary*  
*Jon Butler, Yale University, OAH Executive Board*  
*Julie Greene, University of Maryland-College Park*  
*Alice Kessler-Harris, Columbia University, OAH Past-President and*  
*LAWCHA Past-President*  
*Bruce Laurie, University of Massachusetts-Amherst*  
*Nelson Lichtenstein, University of California-Santa Barbara*  
*Yvette Richards, George Mason University*  
*Shelton Stromquist, University of Iowa, LAWCHA President*  
*Joe W. Trotter, Carnegie-Mellon University, LAWCHA Past-President*

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## **Author**



### **Rosemary Feurer**

Rosemary Feurer is Professor of History at Northern Illinois University. She is the author of *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900-1950*, among other books and essays. She is working on *The Illinois Mine Wars, 1860-1940* and a new biography of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones.