

A LAWCHA Forum

## “The Return of the Working Class”

by Bob Bussel (bussel@uoregon.edu) and Joe McCartin (jam6@georgetown.edu)

Although still widely used in academic and certain political circles, the term “working class” has rarely appeared in American political discourse over the last three decades. Reflecting America’s historical discomfort with the notion of fixed social classes and an enduring faith in the possibility of upward mobility, political leaders and social commentators have tended to describe almost all workers as “middle” rather than “working class.” Moreover, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term seemed associated with a set of political assumptions that had been rendered obsolete. Even the AFL-CIO has shied away from characterizing its members as working class, instead opting for the term “working families.”

However, the term working class re-emerged in public discourse with a vengeance during this year’s Democratic presidential primaries. Barack Obama’s comments about “bitter” Americans led to charges of elitism and close scrutiny of his difficulties in connecting with the working class. Hillary Clinton seized on Obama’s struggles and portrayed herself as the champion of “hard working white Americans,” mingling class with race to rally white working-class voters behind her candidacy. Journalists and pundits speculated at length about the reasons why Obama could not “close the deal” with this bellwether Democratic constituency, while neglecting to examine more precisely how racial, ethnic, or gender considerations might shape perceptions of social class. And after years of proclaiming that politicians needed to appeal to middle-class concerns, commentators now looked to the working class as the prototypic constituency that a presidential candidate (at least on the Democratic side) needed to reach in order to be successful.

We have invited several scholars and activists from different disciplines to comment on the role of the working class in our current political conversation. We encourage readers to respond with their observations, which we are prepared to publish in our next edition.

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Letter from the President

## Teaching the Past with Hopes for the Future

by Michael Honey (mhoney@u.washington.edu)

LAWCHA’s June 2008 national conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, our sterling historical journal *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, our outreach through this newsletter, and the many projects of our members speak to our collective efforts to anchor a place in American history for the frequently neglected people whose work helps make this world a home. This June in Vancouver, we took steps to further these efforts with a tremendous labor history conference (see my report in this issue) and our LAWCHA Board of Directors meeting.

The Board discussed a dozen or so written reports from committee chairs, which demonstrated member activities in many areas. One high note is that we consolidated procedures to encourage labor scholarship through the Herbert Gutman Dissertation Award and the Philip Taft Labor History Book Award. Both awards will now given at our annual LAWCHA meetings and LAWCHA members serve on both prize committees. James Barrett, an editor of the University of Illinois Press’s “Working-Class in American History” series, chaired this year’s Gutman Award committee. I presented it on behalf of LAWCHA and the Press (which provides prize money and publication of the winning dissertation) to Jarod Roll for his fine, nuanced study of sharecropper organizing in the 1930s. On behalf of LAWCHA and the Philip Taft Labor History Award Committee which she chairs at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Ileen DeVault

presented this year’s Taft Award to Laurie Beth Green for her outstanding work, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (University of North Carolina Press). A panel of historians at the Vancouver conference also discussed Nancy MacLean’s *Freedom is not Enough, the Opening of the American Workplace* (Harvard U. Press), the 2007 Taft Award winner.

Our board also took an important institutional step when it voted to establish a permanent history and memory labor landmarks project, and I later ap-

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## President's Letter

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pointed former LAWCHA President Jim Green to create one (see his article in this issue). The Board tentatively scheduled LAWCHA's projected annual conferences and discussed our special efforts to support other labor history groups. We discussed plans for the 2009 Chicago conference and ways to better connect our Program Committee with various conference planners. Vice-President Kim Phillips later met with Erik Gellman from Chicago and LAWCHA Program Committee Co-Chair, Colleen O'Neill, to coordinate that conference (see the call for the Chicago conference in this newsletter). We also affirmed the role of Lisa Phillips as our special liaison to support the North American Labor History conference in Detroit (see our list of coming conferences).

Another high point came at LAWCHA's membership luncheon when Alice Kessler-Harris and Nelson Lichtenstein presented a Distinguished Service to Labor and Working-Class History award to David Brody for his pioneering work. Brody delivered a marvelous keynote address analyzing labor law reform as an essential element in history of U.S. union organizing. Our board also recognized Betsy Jameson for her work to make the Ludlow Massacre site a national landmark. Dan Walkowitz offered poignant remembrances of Roy Rosenzweig and Alan Dawley, who passed in recent months but left behind a great legacy of scholarship and activism. We applauded Jacob Remes, who is moving on to write his dissertation, for his able work as our LAWCHA executive assistant at Duke University and gave him a gift certificate at the ILWU-organized Powell's Bookstore. Jacob reported on our updated LAWCHA website, which has reached a new and improved state of usefulness. Please take a look at: <http://www.lawcha.org>. We now welcome Abby Goldman, who has an Master's in Social Work, is pursuing a doctoral degree in American History at Duke, and now begins her work as LAWCHA's executive assistant this fall. We have great confidence in her abilities, and she has expressed enthusiasm for the tasks ahead. Please contact her with questions and suggestions at [LAWCHA@duke.edu](mailto:LAWCHA@duke.edu). Our LAWCHA Executive Board holds bi-monthly phone conference calls, and we welcome your input. LAWCHA's strength is the work of its members. Please let us know what you are doing and help us find more ways to build a national labor history organization.

Of special note, I called together an ad hoc group after a Vancouver conference plenary session on the right to organize, and we called on LAWCHA members to write, lecture and in other ways to "demonstrate that the right to organize remains critical to related debates over foreign and domestic policies including war, trade, immigration, and social and economic citizenship rights." [<http://www.lawcha.org/actionalerts.php>] We mailed it electronically to LAWCHA members, so if you did not

receive it, please send us your current electronic mailing address. On this front, see my accompanying article on "Telling Labor's Story: Fighting for Employee Free Choice."

Last, I would like to emphasize the essential links we continue to make with unionists and workers. They played an especially exciting and important role in our successful Vancouver conference. This year I also had the privilege of speaking to AFL-CIO members in Memphis, at the AFL-CIO national headquarters in Washington, D.C., and at the Washington State and national conventions of AFSCME. At the latter event held in San Francisco, I met dynamic women day care workers and others from various occupations across the country engaged in hopeful campaigns of organizing public employees. While there, I also visited Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), where workers had etched an outline of the bodies of Howard Sperry and Nicholas Bordoise, killed by police in the 1934 longshore strike. On May Day, the ILWU held a precedent-breaking one-day work stoppage against Bush's occupation in Iraq. The ILWU reminds us that "an injury to one is an injury to all."

Our efforts are all in keeping with LAWCHA's stated intention to "promote public and scholarly awareness of labor and working-class history through research, writing, and organizing." Please let us hear about your efforts, and please encourage students, colleagues, and labor activists everywhere to join LAWCHA.

### **Stay in the loop!**

LAWCHA has a lovely new website! Check it out for LAWCHA news, action alerts, Peter Filardo's updated labor bibliography, calls for papers, prize announcements and much more!

**[www.lawcha.org](http://www.lawcha.org)**

Please make sure your information is up-to-date in our membership directory. Go to [www.lawcha.org/members.php](http://www.lawcha.org/members.php).

Please send updates or changes to [lawcha@duke.edu](mailto:lawcha@duke.edu)

# Telling Labor's Story: Fighting for Employee Free Choice

by Joseph Hower (jeh67@georgetown.edu), project coordinator, Telling Labor's Story and Michael Honey (mhoney@u.washington.edu)

From indentured servitude and slavery to women's domestic labor, from mine, mill, immigrant, industrial, service and agricultural work and the global economy today, labor's struggle for democratic rights runs as a red line through our past. That history often speaks loudly to the present. This summer, federal agents imprisoned thousands of immigrants, turning deportation proceedings into felony charges and smashing union organizing. Meanwhile, the Government Accountability Office found the Department of Labor to have "inadequately investigated" thousands of complaints by low and minimum wage workers, usually revolving around illegally-low wage levels, non-payment of overtime, or a refusal to pay a last paycheck. (GAO Report # 08-973T, 7/15/08) Working-class housing, health care, transportation, education and job needs grew acute, while the government subsidized predatory lenders with billions in taxpayer funds and the Bush regime perpetuated war, torture, and devastation of labor standards and the environment.

Jason Barton-Norris, a Midwest field organizer for the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, called this summer and asked us to tell LAWCHA members how desperately the voices of labor historians are needed today. The workers he tries to organize are bombarded with biased information by the "union avoidance industry" while the Department of Labor does almost nothing to protect workers' First Amendment rights. Anti-union organizations funded by employers place full-page newspaper ads blaming unions for America's huge job losses (half a million in the last six months), and send anti-union literature into the homes of the workers Jason tries to organize. Employers curse and run him off job sites, while governments from New Orleans to Iowa, sometimes led by Democrats, accept the lowest bids from unscrupulous private contractors to drive down wages and work standards.

He also reminded us that employers through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have made defeat of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) in Congress a top priority. Wal-Mart and other companies hold captive audience meetings warning employees against voting for Democrats and telling them EFCA will force them to join unions. ("Wal-Mart Warns of Democratic Win," Wall Street Journal, 8/1/08). They don't like EFCA because it allows workers to form unions through majority sign-up (shielding them from anti-union employer election campaigns), substantially increases the penalties for illegal employer actions, and creates mechanisms for binding arbitration for first collective bargaining contracts when workers and employers cannot reach an agreement. (Readers should watch for David Brody's forthcoming article "The Problem of an Employer-Dominated Labor Law," which will

appear in *The American Prospect* after the fall elections.)

The Employee Free Choice Act may not be enough to fully restore worker rights (it would be good to repeal Taft-Hartley, as Congressman Dennis Kucinich urged), but it would allow greater freedom of choice, something as American as apple pie. As the AFL-CIO's Stewart Acuff and Sheldon Friedman wrote in the *Huffington Post* (3/12/08), unions provide the most direct way to reduce the growing, monstrous disparities between the top ten percent of the population and virtually everyone else. Unionized workers earned 30% higher wages, are 59% more likely to have employer-provided health insurance, and are 400% more likely to have pensions than their non-union counterparts. "Social security, civil rights, women's rights, progressive taxation, high-quality public education and health care for all are but a small sample of the national policies that cannot be defended or implemented without a strong labor movement."

This fall, union members are signing millions of post cards and a national petition to take to the next Congress. Our future hangs in the balance as Senator Barack Obama, who co-sponsored EFCA, and Senator John McCain, who voted against, battle it out for President. LAWCHA is not, nor need it be,

an action or lobbying group. Hopefully, many of us belong to such groups. What else can we do, as labor historians? At LAWCHA's Vancouver conference, a group of us appealed for labor scholars to educate the broad public about the need to restore the right of workers to organize. LAWCHA members such as David Brody, Nelson Lichtenstein, Gordon Lafer, and others have written op-eds in local newspapers and other forums, and we urge others to do the same. As individuals, we can certainly engage in political and legislative activity, and as an educational organization we can explore other ways of "Telling

Labor's Story." For a bibliography on EFCA and related issues, and for the Vancouver statement, see the LAWCHA web site under "Civic Engagement." To find direct links to campaigns to strengthen American labor law, contact LAWCHA's labor liason, Joe Hower, at jeh67@georgetown.edu.

This time of crisis holds the possibility for sweeping change. Jason Barton-Norris told us he is excited to learn there is a group of academicians trying to educate the public about labor's past and to connect it to workers struggling against tremendous odds today. It is important for us to link up with people like Jason, to educate students and others about the importance of unions, and to help people realize that the status of workers continues to measure the advance or failure of American democracy. Please help us find ways to strengthen our efforts to tell labor's story.



# A LAWCHA Forum on the Working Class

## “Working Class Heroes and the 2008 Presidential Election”

by Julie Greene

Politicians and pundits across the United States are talking about the working-class again, a clear sign that we're in an election year. Have times ever been more rich for those of us who keep an eye on class, race, and gender in U.S. politics and culture? Search Google or Youtube for terms like “white working-class” or “Obama blue-collar” and you will have a feast laid before you, with the commentary during the last six months ranging from the sublime to the silly. As the competition between candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama reached a climax in the late spring, journalists increasingly saw the election's outcome as resting on class dynamics. Obama's early victories faded as an apparent “white flight” occurred from his candidacy and as Hillary positioned herself as the candidate of the (white) working-class. We watched as Hillary struggled to find words to specify how her coalition differed from Obama's. She declared famously to USA Today that Obama was losing support among “working, hard-working Americans, white Americans...” Obama's campaign began to focus more attention on improving his standing among workers. Journalists on CNN and Fox debated trivial matters—like whether Obama's asking for orange juice instead of coffee from a diner's owner showed him to be hopelessly out of touch with blue-collar America. Yet they agreed that the working-class was the crucial swing vote for the election. Whether they used the word ‘white’ or not, we all knew whom they meant. The working-class was back, and the term's meaning and significance was as racialized as ever. No African-American, whether toiling in the factories or fields, counted as a member of the working-class. The same went for Latinos and Asian-Americans. They counted purely as members of a specific racial or ethnic group. Women, likewise, all seemed to be older and middle-class. ‘The American worker’ was firmly and forever a white male. He liked bowling and he was good at it. He was devoted to God, guns, and beer. He wasn't too sure about electing an African-American to the presidency, especially some elitist guy from Harvard who couldn't bowl to save his soul.<sup>1</sup>

So go the strange uses and limitations of class in American politics. From the days of Samuel Gompers to FDR,

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Don Van Natta, “They Got Game, It Just May Be the Wrong Game,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2008; Oliver Willis, “Hillary White Power Clinton,” at <http://www.oliverwillis.com/2008/05/08/hillary-white-power-clinton/>, (this link includes an audio clip of Hillary Clinton's quotation); John Harwood, “The White Working Class: Forgotten No More,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2008. For a labor historian's take on these matters see Leon Fink, “Obama and the Unmaking of America's Working Class,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 2, 2008.

to Nixon's ethnic strategy, and on to the present, notions of the working-class have historically had an unusual power at election time, and have consistently been highly racialized and gendered. Especially during presidential campaigns, politicians, commentators, and pundits all position themselves as best able to represent the interests of that class—and simultaneously they define it as consisting of a white minority of male Americans. This dynamic has bedeviled U.S. history across the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first. The only surprising thing, really, is its endless ability to reinvent itself, to seem fresh and important and revealing even as it reoccurs again and again. Never has this been more clear than in 2008.

The unprecedented successes of one African-American and one female presidential candidate during the primary season—triumphs which posed a profound threat to traditional racial and gender hierarchies—made appeals to ‘the working-class’ extremely important. In a recent article Thomas Sugrue provides a clue to understanding this, when he argues that Richard Nixon in the 1960s and 70s appealed to northern ethnic working-class voters by framing a “system of values that hearkened back to ‘traditions’—a romanticized past of hard work, discipline, well-defined gender roles, and tight-knit families.”<sup>2</sup> This allowed Republican campaign directors to reassure whites made insecure as a result of the ongoing social transformations surrounding them—especially those related to race, gender, morality, and status. Much the same is happening now, although so far it has been the Democratic rather than Republican candidates who have finetuned the approach. Talking about the working-class in 2008 allows politicians to generate and speak to reassuring and comforting values. And there is a larger lesson here as well. The U.S. political system has always been highly constrained and limited. With large numbers of eligible voters unregistered, and many of those who are registered failing to vote, democracy is at best severely incomplete and uneven. Those who don't vote because they see little real chance for political change are disproportionately the poor, the old, the most transient, women, and/or people of color. They are most likely to be working-class. The limitations of democracy in the United States—and the way those limitations are structured around class, race, and gender, make it important for politicians to seem inclusive, to speak as populists, and to paint their opponent as elitist. Populist rhetoric becomes a surrogate for true democracy. This heightens the importance of class because appeals to “the working-class” provide a quick way for politicians to prove that they are men or women ‘of the people’. Ironically, whether they are Republican or Democratic, their rush to populism usually involves oversimplifying and fracturing the identities of those they are addressing. These constraints—the anxieties caused by unstable gender and

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Sugrue, “The White Ethnic Strategy,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, 171-92, especially page 175.

racial hierarchies, the fundamental limitations of democracy, and the need for politicians to appear populist—the dominant political language is unable to deal with multiple identities.<sup>3</sup>

Amidst the pundits' blustering and candidates' posturing about class, race, and gender, there remain the larger issues of who will vote and who will not. The challenge remains of expanding the electorate by reaching out effectively to those working-class Americans of every race, ethnicity, and gender who have chosen not to participate in the political system, or have been disfranchised as a consequence of prison terms. Watching the candidates campaign during the primary season was exciting because, as record numbers turned out to vote, one could sense that Hillary and Obama had the potential to energize and expand American democracy—in part precisely because of the way they were transforming expectations regarding gender and race. The potential for social and political change might prove to be fleeting, but it felt real.

Finally, as we now throttle rapidly towards the major party conventions and into the general campaign between Obama and McCain, it's worth noting how many of the dire predictions regarding the 'working-class' appear, at least right now, to have been false. Particularly emerging as untrue is the idea that white working-class men will not support an African American candidate. The most recent poll suggests that working-class Americans are supporting Obama by a large margin and that McCain is finding it difficult to appeal to working-class values or position himself as a populist candidate. According to a Washington Post poll released days ago, low-income working Americans of all races and genders support Obama by a two-to-one margin. Support for Obama is especially strong among African American and Hispanic workers, but even their white counterparts are supporting Obama more than McCain (47% to 37%). Nonetheless, there remain important areas of concern for Obama. Many of those surveyed are not registered to vote, 1/6 have not decided to support either candidate, and even those who support Obama feel unsure that he will solve the economic problems they face.<sup>4</sup> Obama will need to develop policies that can identify and solve the problems working-class people face in the United States if he is going to win their votes. And he needs to work on expanding the electorate by reaching Americans who don't vote. Whether he can emerge as a true working-class hero will depend on matters like these—not on his bowling scores or his preference for orange juice over coffee.

## “Understanding the White Vote”

by Jack Metzgar

In the nine presidential elections since 1972, white folks have voted for Republicans over Democrats by 59 to 39 per-

<sup>3</sup> On voting, non-voting, and registration, see U.S. Census Bureau Press Release, “The 2008 Presidential Election,” at [http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/010725.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/010725.html).

<sup>4</sup> Michael D. Shear and Jon Cohen, “Obama Leads, Pessimism Reigns Among Key Group,” *The Washington Post*, August 4, 2008.

cent on average. Democrats have done better among white voters in the last three elections but have still been losing by an average of 53 to 42 percent. Constituting nearly four-fifths of all voters, white Americans, hard working and not, are the base of the Republican Party. Worse, given historical expectations, the white working class votes slightly more Republican than middle-class whites. Even if Democrats can dramatically increase the minority vote (black, Latino, and Asian), where Dems get large majorities, they still probably need to get upwards of 45 percent of the white vote to win a presidential election.

These basic racial demographics are essential to understanding all the attention that is being paid to the “white working class” during this election cycle. Despite some ugly embarrassments in the hands of the mainstream media, the focus on white working-class voters this time around is not simply based on the racial identity of Barack Obama. Rather, a good part of it comes from nearly a decade of work by progressive social scientists and journalists, political operatives and organizers who argue that the white working-class should vote much more Democratic than it does and that it would (or might) if Democrats presented an economic program broadly addressing the needs of production and nonsupervisory workers of all races and genders.

When Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers published *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters* in late spring 2000, they blew up a consensus vision of the electorate among political professionals that had grossly overestimated the education, income and occupational status of white voters, particularly those who live in suburbs. Teixeira and Rogers presented an analytic breakdown of the electorate that combined class, race, gender, and union household, and Teixeira has since used various versions of it to keep Democratic politicians and their staffs conscious of the importance of white working-class voters.

Their breakdown begins by separating racial minorities (assumed in 2000 to be secure and large Democratic majorities) from the white vote. Then the electorate is divided into a series of key couplets – men/women, union/nonunion households, and middle class/working class. If you have at

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### About the Forum Participants

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**Bruce Smith** (bsmith@allegheny.edu) is Arthur E. Braun Professor of Political Science at Allegheny College, and a former member of the United Auto Workers and the Laborers International Union.

least a bachelor's degree, you're "middle class"; if you don't, you're "working class." Teixeira and Rogers are aware that this two-class model is woefully simplistic for most purposes, but by showing how tightly a bachelor's degree correlates with income, wealth, and managerial and professional occupations, they made a strong case for using it as a key class marker.

Based on a study of exit polls that Columbia political science professor Dorian Warren and I did in 2006 for the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University, here's what the last three presidential elections look like using Teixeira and Rogers categories.

### The White Vote

Average vote for Democratic presidential candidate in 1996, 2000 & 2004

Class & Union Household	White Men	White Women
WC-UH	48%	54%
MC-UH	49%	61%
WC-nonUH	31%	43%
MC-nonUH	34%	48%

WC = no bachelor's degree / MC = bachelor's degree or more  
UH = at least one union member in household /  
nonUH = no union member in household

Probably the most important conclusion from this breakdown is that in general class is relatively insignificant compared to race, gender and being in a union household. White men in union households vote alike regardless of class, as do white men in nonunion households, but being in a union household increases white men's Democratic vote by 15 to 17 points. Though similar dynamics are present among white women, class does make a difference in how they vote. Middle-class white women vote 7 points more Democratic than working-class white women if they're both in union households, and 5 points more Democratic if in nonunion households. But, holding class constant, being in a union household has a larger effect – 11 points for working-class and 13 points for middle-class white women. Likewise, gender gaps are larger than class gaps, with women being at least 6 points and as many as 14 points more Democratic.

Three kinds of action conclusions have been drawn from this Teixeira-style analysis:

- Decrease the white vote as a percentage of the electorate by registering and turning out more black, Latino and Asian voters. As Teixeira's recent work with Alan Abramovitz has shown, whites are decreasing as a percentage of the U.S. population, but they still vote at substantially higher levels than minorities. Much get-out-the-vote work has been and is being done among blacks and Latinos, but even the most optimistic projections find Democrats still needing to get at least 45 percent of the overall white vote to win this November.
- Increase the Democratic majority among union household voters. The labor movement has done a terrific job during the last decade in turning out union household voters, who still constitute nearly a quarter of all voters despite continued declines in union membership. But these voters have been stuck at 59 percent Democratic in the last three presidential elections, and as the table above shows, this figure would not even be that high without the whopping majorities produced by black and Latino union households. This is the one place where the labor movement can have a direct effect on the white vote – among its own members and their households. Given the stakes and the black man leading the Democratic ticket this year, unions need to challenge more of their members to vote for their union instead of their whiteness.
- Rally nonunion working-class white women, what punditry shorthand now calls "waitress moms" or "Wal-Mart women." Close to 20 percent of the electorate all by themselves, this group of women moved strongly against Democrats in the last three presidential elections – they gave Bill Clinton 47 percent of their vote, Al Gore 44 percent, and John Kerry only 38 percent. If that trend is not reversed, Obama is unlikely to be our next president. Getting these nonunion women back to the 47 percent range of 1996, is doable, however, since like other white women, they are more open to Democrats, more disposed toward active government, and even more favorable toward unions than white men.

The good news is that after much discussion of "Kansas" and "NASCAR dads," not all of it fruitless, these three conclusions have been embraced by Democrats of all stripes, including Obama himself, and by large parts of the labor movement. Much of the Democratic program, speechifying, and, most importantly, grassroots organizing is (or intends to be) focused on these three priorities.

## "On Two Wheels"

by Kim Phillips

Yesterday I drove past a black man riding a child's bicycle. He wasn't wearing a helmet and I recognized his checkered pants as those worn by line cooks. I slowed down and kept my distance. "Don't drift into the road," I whispered. Lately I've seen a steady stream of black workers riding bicycles. They wear the splattered pants of painters, or the gray jumpsuits of mechanics. In the small-town South where bike paths and reliable public transportation are a dream, most people own a car. I gauge the health of the economy by the number of men I see riding bicycles, by the crowds of black women clutching plastic grocery bags as they stand in the heat waiting for the local buses.

These working women and men form the backbone of America's new economy, which is an economy in crisis. How they work and where they work has not captured much

attention from any of the major candidates for president. Based on the rhetoric Senator Hilary Rodham Clinton used to describe the 18 million voters who dashed 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling (her ceiling, I presume), all of them are white. And they all work, but not the sort of jobs that land them on a child's bicycle.

Clinton's rhetoric, of course, was intended to galvanize voters suffering from a slowed economy and tighter wallets. She courted white workers in states where manufacturing jobs—old economy jobs—teeter on extinction, yet she repeatedly claimed that during her husband's administration, Americans' experienced a broad based income growth like no other since World War II. She did not remind her audiences that her husband helped make these jobs nearly obsolete, or how he helped usher in and then solidified the new economy. Moreover, during his eight years in office, he lowered trade barriers and irrevocably altered social welfare programs, thrusting millions of poor women into low wage service employment.

In this new economy, there are more security guards (81,004,130) than machinists (385,690), and more casino dealers (82,960) than lathers (65,840). American workers continue to produce more each year than the previous year, but they produce more services, not manufactured cars or television sets. Fewer than 15% of American workers labor in manufacturing jobs, half of the 30% in such occupations in 1950. Unions have tried to stem these losses and organize new workers, but service occupations tend to be casual, subject to frequent layoffs, have shorter hours, and come without benefits, especially healthcare. Despite some gains during the Clinton presidency, overall the American economy has not benefited American workers for more than three decades. For workers, the pain has been particularly acute these past eight years. High gas prices and the housing crisis are additional blows to workers already reeling from a barrage of punches leveled at them.

And that has been the case for black workers. By any measure of employment data from the past eight years, as a group black workers have lost ground in these old economy jobs. And they are worse off than ever before, perhaps more so than any other group of workers. Black workers have 3-4 times higher unemployment (and in Philadelphia black male unemployment has hovered around 40%). Their rate of underemployment fluctuates between 24 to 30%, more than two times that of white workers. Their higher rates of no work, and too little work, means that many black households choose between feeding their kids and putting gas in the car. So in the South, black mothers and fathers walk, or they have interminable waits for buses. But during the primary campaigns, the candidates did not speak directly to, or about these workers.

While Clinton reached out to white workers through her use of divisive rhetoric that excludes black workers from the imagined working class, Barack Obama has struggled to connect with workers. His intemperate comment about "bitter

rural voters clinging to their Bibles and guns" suggests he forgot (or ignored, or worse, did not know) what these workers share with black and Hispanic urban workers: their sons and daughters serve disproportionately in the military. And toting a gun in Iraq does not mean, however, that these soldiers are the conservative corps waiting to be swayed by conservative political blather. Compared to jobs in the new economy, the military provides better pay and better benefits. Just ask black women, who comprise thirty percent of women in uniform. The military subsidizes childcare and provides healthcare. Despite Obama's clumsy statements during the Pennsylvania primary, he has not ignored working people. He won in South Carolina and Virginia because of the coalition between black workers, interracial civil rights groups, and black churches. Several big unions quickly endorsed him during the primaries and already they and others have organized their members on his behalf. To win in November, he'll have to learn from the progressive unions working hard to attract and represent diverse workers.

It is not an overstatement to say that the Democrats and Republicans understand how working class voters are critical to the election, but they have few new ideas about how to fix the economy. Hiding behind old rhetoric that sows race, class and gender divisions means they do not have to explain how is it that the government has no concrete plans to fix the inequalities in the nation's tax system; that it lacks a clear plan to make the economy work for workers who work more than ever before. Dividing America's working class makes it too easy to ignore workers' appeals for good jobs and health care.

Imagine what the campaign might sound like if a presidential candidate stopped at a bus stop in the small town South, held a Latina's, or a black woman's, grocery bag, and asked her what mattered. What if the candidate stood there along the shallow shoulder of the roads and listened, really learned about what it's like to travel in the new economy.

## "The White Working Class and the Fierce Urgency of Now"

by Bruce Smith

On January 23, 2007, I listened to Virginia Senator Jim Webb give the Democratic response to the President's State of the Union. The next day, my son—who was eleven years old in 1981 when his parents first stepped across the divide between working class life and the life of the professions, and who has a keen memory of that step—e-mailed me the text of Webb's speech. We both had heard something new. Webb emphasized the spirit that animated the Bush administration—a spirit he found wanting in its capacity for sacrifice and in its commitment to substantive social equality. Clintonian rhetoric had been unabashedly meritocratic—reflecting the powerful, upwardly mobile drive of the Clintons themselves. Webb

*Forum continues page 8*

*"Dividing America's working class makes it too easy to ignore workers' appeals for good jobs and health care."*

offered instead a view of “American-style democracy” that he associated with Andrew Jackson—“that we should measure the health of our society not at its apex, but at its base.” In doing so he also implied a critique of the increasingly thin egalitarianism of the Democratic Party. Webb presented a vision of a democratic community characterized by the principle that ordinary people must share in the rewards of our society even as they shouldered the burden of defending it. The middle class, in which Webb explicitly included both workers and white-collar professionals, was now “losing its place at the table” as “America...drift[ed] apart along class lines.” Webb demanded more than equality of opportunity and its Clintonian corollary, the politics of empathy (“I feel your pain”). He insisted rather that broad-based participation in the promise of American life must become again the standard by which we judge the quality of American society.

Webb had been a Reagan Democrat of sorts, descended from the Scots-Irish Appalachian working class, who had quit the Democratic Party when Jimmy Carter granted amnesty to draft resisters. A year after Webb’s arresting speech, “Scots-Irish” and “Appalachian” would become short-hand for a largely rural white working class that the Clinton campaign would attempt to mobilize in an increasingly desperate effort to keep Hillary Clinton’s Democratic presidential nomination bid alive. But the reappearance of a distinctively working class politics surprised and worried many Democratic elites.

This renewed talk about the politics of social class, sometimes awkward and sometimes ugly, has had a de-centering candor about it. That such talk has begun may suggest that the iconic hold Ronald Reagan has had on American politics may finally be weakening. But it is as yet unclear whether the erosion of Reaganism will lead to the creation of a new progressive majority and a revived Democratic Party.

In the year and a half since Webb’s speech, Barack Obama has occasionally ruffled the feathers of some Democrats by praising Ronald Reagan. Obama has insisted that his praise of Reagan is not based on agreement with Reagan’s policies but on the recognition of the nature of Reagan’s achievement. Indeed, Obama has implied that only when Democrats are able to come to terms with Reagan’s achievement, will it be possible for the Democratic Party to rebuild its foundation. Reagan’s greatest accomplishment was at once psychological and rhetorical. He solidified certain political sentiments in enduring ways. The most significant feature of Reagan’s achievement was the creation of the Reagan Democrat.

Reagan succeeded in taking the free-floating anger and sense of political abandonment rife among some segments of the white working class in the late 1970’s, and shaping them into something approaching a new class consciousness. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama singles out the durability of the Reaganite appeal to white working-class Democrats as the most important feature of Reaganism. A barometer of Reagan’s success has been the near silence, even among Democrats, on matters of social class during a period of rapidly growing social inequality. Obama’s praise of Reagan is jarring precisely because it underscores the magnitude of Reagan’s accomplishment.



*Obama supporters at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, August 2008*

Reaganism endured, in part, because of its psychological boldness. Consider two events that defined Reagan’s first term—his destruction of PATCO in 1981, and his reframing of the idea of the American Dream in the campaign of 1984. Reagan’s willingness to destroy PATCO aimed not just to weaken the labor movement, but to de-legitimize the idea of the union as the voice and natural organizational expression of working class Americans. That event was followed by a re-election campaign which proclaimed that “it [was] morning again in America”—a claim that proved to have enormous resonance with the white working class.

Taken together, the crushing of PATCO and the vision of a new American beginning wedded a deepened sense of powerlessness and loss of dignity among workers to an aspirationalism that suggested that America’s best days were ahead. This fusion of a palpable sense of weakness with a vague, patriotic optimism was the core element of the Reagan Democrat. Webb’s speech and the subsequent Democratic primary campaign have emotionally excavated the materials out of which this political atmosphere was originally constructed.

Obama may have recognized early the need to dismantle Reaganism if a new progressive Democratic Party was to come into existence, but his two notable responses to that need during last spring’s primary were thrust upon him by the Reverend Wright episode and his ill-considered comments about “bitter” working-class voters. Both sets of remarks were steeped in political sociology. The race speech was immediately hailed as a tour de force, turning a serious challenge to Obama’s campaign into an historic triumph. The “bitter” remarks were quickly seized upon by opponents as evidence of Obama’s elitism, and the resulting uproar threatened to destroy his campaign. These pendular reactions pointed to the continuing power of Reaganism.

Despite the contrast between Obama’s artful speech on race and his clumsy “bitter” comment, there were important continuities between the two sets of remarks. In the race speech, Obama gave equal standing to the legitimacy of “black anger” and “white resentment.” He noted that the white working and middle classes do not feel “particularly privileged by their race.” Seen through the lens of the “immigrant experience... no one’s handed them anything, they’ve built it from scratch.” Obama’s candor about the intersection of race and class in American politics was a frontal assault on the foundations of Reaganism. Similarly, Obama’s so-called “bitter” comments were a rejoinder to a New York Times article that explained



resistance to Obama's candidacy among white working class Democrats as, in Obama's phrase, "sort of a race thing." Against this racial explanation, Obama argued that the white working class had been "beaten down so long, and [felt] so betrayed by government" that his message of hope was not yet getting through.

Sensing the opportunity to gain political advantage, the Clinton campaign drew on the explicit categories and sentiments of Reaganism. Senator Clinton brazenly appealed to "working, hard-working Americans, white Americans," while Bill Clinton slyly observed, "I don't think it's your background or your income that makes you an elitist. It's your attitude."

Had Senator Clinton prevailed in the Democratic primary contest, the force of her white working-class strategy would have strengthened the legacy of Reaganism. Such an outcome would have been the culmination of Clintonism, since Bill Clinton, who came of age politically at the nadir of post-war liberalism, never doubted that Reagan had won. The distinctive features of Bill Clinton's style—the fusion of Democratic Leadership Council wonkishness and down-home idiom, triangulation and his so-called Third Way—were predicated on the axiom of liberal weakness. Obama's campaign was based from the outset on a different notion—that Reagan's victory needn't be permanent.

Yet Obama's much-discussed difficulty in connecting with the white working class involves more than the stubborn persistence of Reagan's legacy. Two related elements are at work. In a famous anecdote, a distraught mourner was asked as he waited for FDR's funeral train to pass by if he knew President Roosevelt personally. The man said, "No, but he knew me." If Obama is to succeed in setting in motion a twenty-first century progressivism, he too must impart to ordinary people a sense that he understands their lives—even if his life is not quite like theirs. For all his rhetorical gifts, Obama has struggled to convey the possibility of a renewed dignity for ordinary people in ways that move the white working class. Some have argued that Obama's own life story should have this effect, while others have suggested that his story only reinforces a view of him as an exotic. Both views miss a deeper point. Obama's overcoming of the hidden injuries of class (and race) is so freighted with the meritocratic markers of contemporary class relations that many ordinary people doubt that Obama can understand them. In Obama's rhetoric, populist and meritocratic themes are often promiscuously mixed. But if Obama is "an imperfect vessel," the loss of a sense of possibility among white workers has also never been greater, thus his ability to connect with white workers remains the great imponderable.

Several years ago, Studs Terkel, in *Hope Dies Last*, called attention to the greatest threat confronting any progressive renewal—the prospect of the death of hope. Obama's politics rests upon the conviction that hope is not dead. But in the matter of the white working class, he now finds himself confronted with the practical difficulties of restoring hope. One measure of whether a new progressive moment is upon us will be the extent to which, on November 4, the white working class is prepared to take a chance.

## New LAWCHA Committee on Labor Landmarks, Public History & Memory

Jim Green (james.green@umb.edu)

At the last LAWCHA meeting in Vancouver, Elizabeth Jameson reported on the successful efforts of a committee she led to create a study and a proposal to the National Park Service to make the Ludlow massacre site a national landmark. She expects the proposal to be approved by the NPS soon. Betsy also proposed to the LAWCHA Board that a permanent committee be created to pursue other public/labor history projects with the support of the association. Her proposal was approved by the board. President Mike Honey asked me to chair such a committee on an exploratory basis.

I am, therefore, issuing a call to LAWCHA members to volunteer to work on this committee for the coming year. We will then issue a report to the LAWCHA Board when it meets in Chicago in June of '09. It is not easy to conduct business via the internet, but we will do our best, and I will meet with any one from the committee who can make it to the AHA in New York in January. What I hope to do this fall is to solicit proposals and ideas from volunteers and test their viability.

Most of what is going on in the commemorative/public history field has been initiated by local union groups, union retirees, librarians, preservationists and academics, like our exemplary LAWCHA colleagues in Chicago and Seattle who have created labor history tours, maps and websites of their cities. It is not clear yet what LAWCHA and the exploratory committee can do to support such initiatives, but this is an issue we will consider.

We may also discuss whether we can initiate public history projects, for example, of celebrations, the anniversaries of big events such as the centennial of the New York City "uprising of the 20,000," in 2009, the 90th anniversaries of the Centralia massacre and the Seattle General Strike, and so on.

We should also take up the question of continuing the work of Betsy Jameson's successful LAWCHA "Ludlow Committee." Many other labor history sites were proposed for landmarking by a theme study for the NPS directed by the Newberry Library in 1993. So far only the Waldheim Haymarket martyrs' monument and the Ludlow site have been formally nominated. The committee could vet the remaining sites, choose one, and produce a site study and landmark nomination to the NPS, a process that would take several years—an ambitious project and one that would gain the kind of credibility for LAWCHA the Ludlow nomination process has gained the United Mine Workers and other stakeholders.

I also hope that such a committee can make contact with and solicit more reports from the field on public history initiatives we can feature in this Newsletter and perhaps, in a more analytical way, in our journal *Labor*. If you would like to join this exploratory committee (no prior experience required) and begin an internet dialogue, please send me an email at james.green@umb.edu

## The Right and Labor: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination

The Center for the Study of Work, Labor, and Democracy at the University of California, Santa Barbara invites paper proposals for a January 16-17, 2009 conference: "The Right and Labor: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination."

An intense and systematic hostility to trade unionism on the part of American conservatism is hardly news. It has been a notable feature of the nation's political landscape for decades. But an understanding and deconstruction of this phenomenon requires something more than mere condemnation, especially during the next few years when a labor-liberal effort to reform of the American labor law, along with the rise of labor's influence within the Democratic Party, is almost certain to generate a furious and determined counter attack from those who seek to limit the power and marginalize the legitimacy of U.S. trade unionism. This workshop/conference seeks to historicize and contextualize this political and economic impulse, examining its regional, racial, cultural, ideological structures and tropes. Proposals from political science, legal studies, literature, sociology and other disciplines are welcome.

Participants in the conference will include David Brody, UC Davis emeritus; Jennifer Brooks, Auburn; Jefferson Cowie, Cornell; Catherine Fisk, Duke; Gordon Lafer, Oregon;

Nelson Lichtenstein UC Santa Barbara; John Logan London School of Economics; Joseph McCartin, Georgetown; Lawrence Richards, Miami of Ohio; Reuel Schiller, UC Hastings, Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, UC Santa Barbara; Jean-Christian Vinel, University of Paris, Diderot; and David Witwer, Lycoming College.

For further information or to submit a paper proposal, contact Elizabeth Tandy Shermer at [ellie@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:ellie@umail.ucsb.edu).

### LAWCHA's Joe Trotter Wins Honor

Former LAWCHA president Joe Trotter, chair of Carnegie Mellon University's History Department since 2001, has received the school's first Giant Eagle Professorship in Humanities and Social Sciences. A nationally recognized labor historian, Trotter served as the Mellon Bank Professor of History from 1996-2007. Trotter is the founding director of CMU's Center for Africanamerican Urban Studies and the Economy (CAUSE), an interdisciplinary research institute that fosters scholarship on the intersection of urban history, race and policy. The Giant Eagle Foundation established the professorship to support an outstanding faculty member in Carnegie Mellon's College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

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## Conference Meets in Vancouver, B.C.

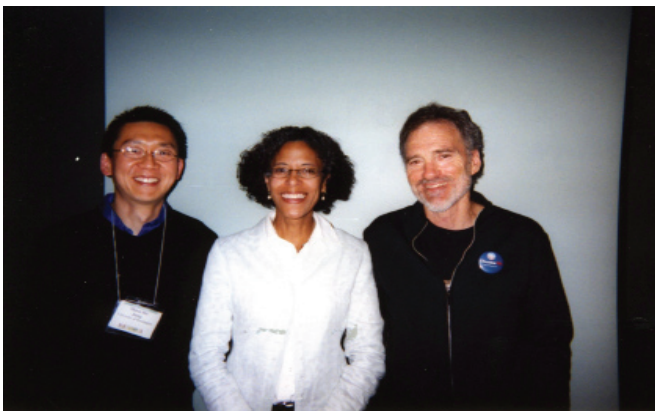
by Michael Honey

From June 6-8, 2008, 225 labor scholars and union activists, about half of them Canadian and half of them from the U.S., met at the Simon Fraser Conference Center in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia. This unusual conference, jointly sponsored by the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association (PNLHA) and the Labor and Working-Class History Association, focused on the theme, "Indigenous, Immigrant, Migrant Labour and Globalization." Dozens of presentations provided insights into how global capitalism has disrupted traditional communities and also considered how people's movements have challenged racial-ethnic, gender, and class domination.

Participant comments marked the conference as an extraordinary gathering. "As a scholar of American Indian history, I was pleased to see room made for Indians and Labor, especially at the keynote plenary session," wrote Josh Reid, a Ph.D. candidate from the University of California-Davis. Virginia Chui, of the BC Nurses' Union, wrote, "I enjoy learning about the labour history and labour movement in North America, especially the impact on immigrants... we learn from the history so that we can prepare ourselves for the future."

Members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Canadian Hospital Employees Union (CHEU), both of which have experienced major conflicts with the Canadian government over neoliberal efforts to slash jobs and benefits for workers, played important roles in the conference. Wrote CUPE's Ron Verzuh, "This was a great exchange of ideas about innovative ways to approach labour history and generate new possibilities to explore the nooks and crannies of the history of working people."

Said University of Washington graduate student Trevor Griffey, "the conference shifted the ongoing discussions of race and labor toward Asian and First Nations issues... It was great that the conference brought activists and academics together, and I'm grateful for the support that labor organizations gave to make this possible."



*Moon Ho Jung, Kim Phillips, and Michael Honey at the June 08 Vancouver Conference*



*Kent Wong and Devra Weber in Vancouver*

Plenary sessions featured, among others, Kent Wong, Colleen O'Neil, Joan Sangster, David Kamper, Ruth Milkman, Gilbert Gonzalez, Nelson Lichtenstein, Karen Brodtkin, David Brody, and CHEU's Judy Darcy. (David Brody's LAWCHA talk is available from our office, lawcha@duke.edu.) Scholars of ethnic minority and immigrant history included Jerry Garcia, Will Jones, Franca Iacovetta, Jose Alamillo, Raul Garcia, Maria Cuevas, Gilberto Garcia, Henry Yu, Kornel Chang, Kim Phillips, Moon Ho-Jung, while union activists included May Farrales of the Philippine Women's Centre BC, Cynthia Oka from No One is Illegal, and numerous others.

Graduate students from Canada and the Pacific Northwest, organized by LAWCHA graduate student committee chairperson Alex Morrow of the University of Washington, met with various individual faculty members to discuss their research, and presented papers at panel sessions.

LAWCHA had opened the conference with a luncheon, where it presented an award to David Brody for his pioneering work in labor history and to Betsy Jameson for her work to make the Ludlow Massacre site into a national landmark. Jarod Roll received the Herbert Gutman Dissertation Prize while Laurie Beth Green received this year's Philip Taft Labor History Award. At a Saturday night banquet, the PNLHA gave a special award to Ben Swankey for his lifetime of struggle, from the movements of the unemployed and unionists in the 1930s to his anti-war and anti-imperialist organizing in later years.

By combining with LAWCHA, PNLHA produced perhaps the biggest conference in its forty-year history. Participants from both organizations had the opportunity to learn from their cross-border colleagues and comrades. Evening sessions of food and music, the beautiful coastal environs of downtown Vancouver, and many individual exchanges made this a very special meeting. Conference planners Joey Hartman and Jim Gorman for the PNLHA, and LAWCHA Program Committee co-chairs Colleen O'Neill, Dorothy Fujita Rony, and LAWCHA President Mike Honey spent over a year preparing this extraordinary conference. Their hard work certainly paid off!

Mark Leier, Professor and Director of the Simon Fraser University Centre for Labour Studies, concluded, "I think it was one of the best conferences I've been at, ever, period, end of story!"

## Reports from the Grassroots

The following reports from LAWCHA activists detail our members' activities in different parts of the country. We encourage submissions from all members. Send them to Joe McCartin ([jam6@georgetown.edu](mailto:jam6@georgetown.edu)).

### Greater Chicago

From Bob Bruno ([bbruno@illinois.edu](mailto:bbruno@illinois.edu)) & Liesl Orenic ([lorenic@dom.edu](mailto:lorenic@dom.edu))

The Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies looks forward to welcoming LAWCHA members to Chicago for the 2009 meeting. Over the last academic year the CCWCS hosted two panel events highlighting labor and politics in Chicago. As reported in the Spring newsletter, a November 2007 panel at Roosevelt University examined the local political successes of new labor-community alliances and addressed the housing, transportation and privatization pressures on Chicago's working-class communities. In March 2008 a second panel held at the Rudy Lozano Public Library in the Pilsen community offered a gendered focus on these pressures with UIC planning and policy faculty Janet Smith and Pauline Lipman, Kim Wasserman of the Little Village Environmental Organization and Andrea Dakin from Housing Opportunities for Women led a discussion on how educational, environmental and housing policy especially have impacted working-class women in Chicago. In the spring the CCWCS hosted its 4th annual "Getting Paid to Cause Trouble: Careers in Social Justice" an event which brings together community and union activists and college students interested in careers working for change. In the spring CCWCS also hosted two book events: DePaul University labor educator and long-time organizer Bob Breving discussed his new book *Changing Society: The Lives of Worker Heroes Who Made a Difference* (Charles Kerr Press, 2008) which grew from twenty years of teaching writing and researching to unionists. The CCWCS also welcomed New York Times reporter Stephen Greenhouse to UIC to talk about his book, *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker*.



films. Some events highlighted the 75th Anniversary of the New Deal. This year saw the First Annual LaborFest Book Fair. New books introduced by their authors included Ken Burt on "California Latino Politics", Dan Cassidy on "How the Irish Invented Slang", and Peter Cole on "Wobblies on the Waterfront." Many strikes in Northern California history were touched on, including the 1901 San Francisco waterfront strike, the 1934 Waterfront and General Strike, the 1946 Oakland General Strike, and the 1968 San Francisco State Faculty strike. A LaborFest highlight was a tribute to the deceased folk-singer Utah Phillips. These crowded events finally ended on July 31.

The Bay Area Labor History Workshop is entering its 29th season this Fall. The season opens on September 21st with Richard Bermack and Robin Walker on an exhibit about the ILWU 1948 Waterfront Strike. In October Rhian Miller from the television series "We Do the Work" will present. In November Archie Green will introduce an awaited new Labor Archives produced Labor Landmarks book. In January author Gray Brechin will present on the impact of the New Deal in California. BALHW coordinator Bill Issel has won a Fulbright to teach a year in Hungary and a committee is keeping the Workshop moving until he returns. For information on programs, contact Catherine Powell or Carol Quenod at the

Labor Archives: 415-564-4010.

Archie Green's Fund for Labor Culture and History will be presenting "LaborLore Conversation V" on September 20th at the Sailors Union of the Pacific in San Francisco. This is an annual event that moves about the country. Anyone interested in attending should contact Archie at 415-552-3741.



The Pajaro Valley Arts Gallery in Watsonville will be presenting "A Community Retrospective" on the Watsonville cannery strike of 1995-

97. For more information, contact Don Watson at: [dwlabor@earthlink.net](mailto:dwlabor@earthlink.net).

### Bay Area

from Don Watson ([dwlabor@earthlink.net](mailto:dwlabor@earthlink.net))

This Summer's 15th Annual LaborFest was fuller than ever using an array of mediums. These spread out from the July 5 "Bloody Thursday" event at ILWU Local 10 to the rest of July. Over 40 labor history events were held in 15 locations in the San Francisco Bay Area. The ongoing International Film and Video Festival featured about 20

### Seattle

from James Gregory ([gregoryj@u.washington.edu](mailto:gregoryj@u.washington.edu))

A Labor Archive for Washington State. That is the goal that the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, LAWCHA members, and the Washington State Labor Council (AFL-CIO) have agreed to pursue. Recognizing that the la-

bor heritage of this region needs to be preserved and publicized, the State Labor Council passed a resolution supporting the Labor Archive initiative and pledging funds at its annual convention held in Vancouver, Washington, August 4-8.



The Washington Labor Archive will be part of the University of Washington Library. That facility is already home to dozens of union collections and other labor related materials. The plan is to hire a professional labor archivist and gather those existing collections and new materials into the Washington Labor Archive that will be managed jointly by the Bridges Center for Labor Studies and the library. The archivist will work with unions, advising them on records management, and acquiring materials for preservation and use in the Labor Archive.

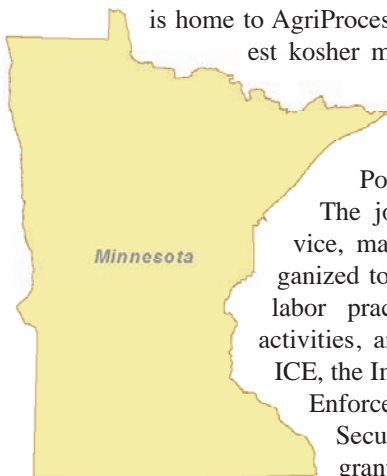
Funding is a challenge. UW libraries are contributing. The Bridges Center will contribute from its endowment. But most of the funds will come from the unions and labor councils of Washington state. Locals are pledging annual contributions. We will also depend upon individual gifts from workers and friends of labor. Working people in Washington state have a history of that kind of generosity. The Bridges Center itself operates on an endowment that derives from more than 1,000 individual contributions. We hope to have funding commitments in place by next summer and be able to hire an archivist soon after that.

## Minnesota

From Peter Rachleff (rachleff@macalester.edu)

Where do the hip labor historians meet? Why, Postville, Iowa, of course! On Sunday, July 27, LAWCHA activists Leon Fink, Susan Levine, Shelton Stromquist, and Peter Rachleff managed to find each other amidst a crowd of 2,000 immigrant rights/labor rights protestors. Leon and Susan had joined forces with the Chicago Jewish Council on Urban Affairs and Peter with Twin Cities Jewish Community Action in mobilizing Jews, trade unionists, and rights advocates to ride buses to the small northeastern Iowa community which is home to AgriProcessors, the country's largest kosher meatpacking plant. Shelton inspired Iowa City activists to make their own pilgrimage to Postville.

The journey, ecumenical service, march, and rally were organized to protest AgriProcessors' labor practices, their anti-union activities, and the May 12 raid by ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement arm of Homeland Security. Nearly 400 immigrant workers, most of them



Guatemalan (see Leon's book, *THE MAYA OF MORGANTON*, on the 1990s experiences of their sisters and brothers in the North Carolina meatpacking industry), were arrested, confined in tents in the Waterloo, Iowa, fairgrounds, charged with felony "aggravated identity theft," (See Julia Preston, "An Interpreter Speaking Up For Immigrants," *New York Times*, July 11, 2008. This includes a link to the 14 page essay by interpreter Erik Camayd-Freixas.) and railroaded to five month prison sentences, while their partners were placed under house arrest and "allowed" -- with no source of income -- to care for their children. July 27 protestors streamed into Postville from Milwaukee, Madison, Des Moines, and Davenport, as well as the Twin Cities, Chicago, and Iowa City. There were even two busloads of young Jewish teens from Minnesota "Camp Ramah."

In building the event, Rachleff circulated an article, "No Human Being Is Illegal" (<http://www.monthlyreview.org/mrzine/rachleff220708.html>). Jewish Community Action received support from UFCW Local 789, UNITE-HERE Local 17, and several SEIU locals. Rachleff also worked with Deborah Rosenstein, Labor Education Service, University of Minnesota, in developing a curriculum to be used on the Twin Cities buses. He and Deborah enjoyed nearly four hours of captive -- and responsive -- audiences along the way. The Twin Cities community is working on "Hekhsher Tzedek," a campaign to expand the definition of "kosher" to include the treatment of workers, from working conditions and wages to respecting the right to organize.

Our mobile LAWCHA scholar-activists returned to their respective home cities determined to continue to contextualize the historical relationships between immigrant and labor rights while standing up for expanding both in the here and now.

## Western Pennsylvania

From Charlie McColester (Charles.McColester@iup.edu)

This year in November marks the 250th year since the occupation of the smoldering ruins of the abandoned Fort Duquesne by the British and the end of 14,000 years of Native American control over the Forks of the Ohio. For Pittsburgh's 250th anniversary, the corporate powers-that-be were determined to both control and neutralize any serious discussion of the region's post 1970s economic collapse and its social and political significance, so the past year has witnessed a vacuous and innocuous celebration that neither confronts the meaning of the past nor discusses the city's direction in the future. In a symbolic affirmation of willed historic amnesia, the major physical change effectuated by the commemoration has been the burying of the remains of Fort Pitt to expand commercial space.

It is very timely that the Working-Class Studies Association will come to Pittsburgh in 2009. The WCSA conference, June 3 - 6, will be hosted by the University of Pittsburgh, with sponsorship from other area campuses, labor and community organizations. With three full days of panels, lectures, workshops, performances, screenings, and site visits, the gathering

*Notes continues page 14*

will provide an opportunity for participants to present their projects, make connections, and learn about resources for the work we hold in common. Participants will be invited to visit such sites as Braddock's Carnegie Library (the first one to be built in the US), the venue of the 1892 Battle of Homestead (now surrounded by the Waterfront Mall), and St Nicholas Croatian Church in Millvale (home of Maxo Vanka's extraordinary murals). (See [www.wcstudies.org](http://www.wcstudies.org) for more details and call for proposals.)

For many activists, we hope to engender a People's Pittsburgh 250 commemoration of the 250th year that will begin in November and engage the city in a discussion about the meaning of the city's history of production and struggle, how time and time again, the imperial dreams of nations and businesses were met by indigenous, collective resistance. This resistance was rooted in social class and concerted activity. An especially sharp and bitter conflict will mark its centennial in 2009, the McKees Rocks Strike of 1909. Bloodier than the much better known Homestead Strike, McKees Rocks marked the first major eastern and southern European immigrant labor union uprising. McKees Rocks, which comprises a remarkably intact, though struggling, working-class community only four miles downriver from the Point, will be another site visited during the WCSA gathering.

I am deeply honored to have been asked to co-chair the WCSA event in Pittsburgh. My friend, colleague and fellow co-chair Nick Coles has carried the bulk of the weight of organizing the conference so far in a very thorough and impressive way. I have been preoccupied with finishing my book *The Point of Pittsburgh: Production and Struggle at the Forks of the Ohio* which focuses on the working-class struggles and achievements in Pittsburgh. Hopefully, this book and events planned around the People's Pittsburgh 250 and the McKees Rocks Strike Centennial will help shift attention toward the key role played by workers and their organizations in the life of this city and the nation. Hopefully again, these efforts will create a stimulating environment for the WCSA conference to reflect on and discuss the critical relevance of the regional, nation and international working class to an understanding of human society.

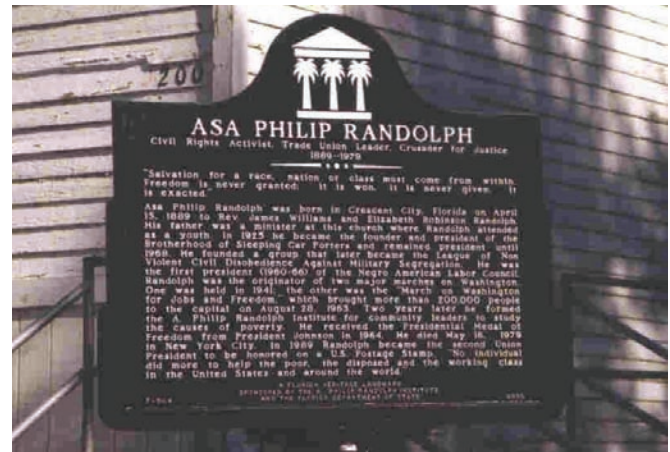
## Florida

From Bob Zieger  
([zieger@ufl.edu](mailto:zieger@ufl.edu))

After a decade or so of effort, a coalition of Florida trade unionists, civil rights activists, and public officials was successful in having a commemorative tablet honoring the memory of A. Philip Randolph, a Crescent City, Florida native erected. The A. Philip Randolph Institute and the Florida Department of State are the official co-sponsors. The

plaque was unveiled in the spring of 2006 and stands on the site of the church at which Randolph's father James W. Randolph was the pastor. The text informs viewers of Randolph's

contributions to labor and civil rights and carries this quotation: "Salvation for a race, nation, or class must come from within. Freedom is never granted. It is won. It is never given."



Recently erected plaque marking church where A. Philip Randolph's father, James W. Randolph, was pastor, in Crescent City, FL

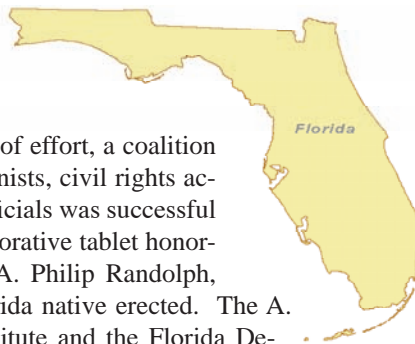
## Connecticut

From Cecilia Bucki (CBucki@mail.fairfield.edu)

In July 2008, I participated in a Local Labor History Day for Teamsters Local 1150 (Sikorsky Aircraft, Stratford). Sikorsky makes helicopters and has just landed a large Pentagon contract that will keep the plant busy for years to come. For a number of summers, the Teamsters local had partnered with management to reach out to local high school students to "intern" with skilled tradespersons, shadowing their "mentors" throughout the workday and learning skills, all at \$20 per hour. The students were a diverse group, and included some young women! The Sikorsky management, worried about the looming shortage of workers in the skilled metal-trades, has supported this union effort to recruit teenagers. If they successfully complete the program, interns are guaranteed skilled jobs at Sikorsky once they graduate from high school.

The local arranges several training days during the summer, and Labor History Day was one Friday. It took place at the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, which has a new "Brass Valley" exhibit that recounts the history of working people from the late 18th century to today. Waterbury and the whole Naugatuck Valley was the center of the brass industry in the 19th-century United States. Museum staff, along with myself and Jeremy Brecher, co-author of the 1982 oral history book *Brass Valley* (Temple University Press), prepared different activities for the 100 or so interns and mentors. Divided into four groups, each rotated four exercises: one explored the exhibit, guided by and answering questions prepared by museum education director Marie Galbraith and myself; another group practiced oral-history training with Brecher; another watched the old ILGWU stand-by "The Inheritance;" and another participated in a mock-assembly line, where union stewards role-played obnoxious foremen abusing the worker-interns in a non-union environment. At the end of the day, everyone gathered to listen to the local chief steward explain the threatened state of the labor movement today and urge support for the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA).

Remarkably, the interns had a great time. The men-



tors were all union volunteers who were determined to impart their hard-won savvy about union-management relations. Those machinists I spoke with at lunch noted that when they retire, they wanted the new generation to carry on. This local carried on a six-week strike a few years ago to stop Sikorsky management from increasing the worker portion of health insurance premiums. Some small concessions were won at that time, but the strike garnered attention locally as public reaction generally was “finally someone is standing up to stop the bosses!” The interns, for their part, seemed determined to take advantage of these opportunities. They seemed very aware of the limited kinds of good jobs in de-industrialized Connecticut. And ironically, management, so worried about finding new skilled workers, has to agree with this union program because they had laid off many skilled workers in the 1980s, and had trained few in the 1990s, with no thought to the future.

Anyone interested in this project can contact Chief Steward Joseph Grabinski at <jgrabinski@sikorsky.com>

## Wisconsin

Andrew E. Kersten (kerstena@uwgb.edu)

Generally, Wisconsinites have not suffered as much as others during these disastrous banking and housing crises. That said, this last year has been a trying one for workers in the state. In June 2008, 4.9% of the state’s labor force was out of work and looking for employment. But, in many cities, the rate is much higher. In Green Bay, where I live, the unemployment rate in June 2008 was 6.9%. Higher rates elsewhere are expected. In Kimberly, Wisconsin, managers of the NewPage

paper mill, which is unionized, just announced that the plant will close, throwing nearly 500 workers out of work. Inflationary pressures are making the situation worse. Raises promised state employees who are not unionized have been rescinded. Unionized workers in and out of state employ have had to fight for meager gains. In May, 2008, Local 487 of the Boilermakers at Kewaunee Fabrication (Kewaunee, Wisconsin) went on strike after negotiations for a new three-year contract stalled. Managers at Kewaunee Fabrication soon brought in “replacement workers.” Lt. Governor Barbara Lawton denounced the use of “scabs” but later publicly apologized for using the term. Such political wavering did not help the Boilermakers’ cause. After holding out for two months, the union agreed to a modest 3.4% raise. The state government has failed to adequately back workers attempts to improve their lot. Bills that would allow University of Wisconsin faculty to unionize and would mandate the teaching of labor history in public schools have been bottled up by the Republican-led Assembly. It may take another election cycle to alter the situation.

I’m not alone in my desire for a meaningful political transformation. I live next to a retired farmer who spent many a cold Wisconsin winter working for a muffler manufacturer. At the plant, he was a proud member of the United Steelworkers of America. My neighbor frequently stops by to give me the union’s bi-monthly magazine, USW@Work. The last time he gave me the magazine, he said, “You know what my dad used to call these kinds of times, Andy?” “Republican times,” he quipped. It seems to me that many in Wisconsin are looking forward to a change. Expect unionists in the state to again take a leading role in the November elections.

The Cornell University ILR School, in collaboration with LAWCHA, is pleased to announce the winner of the 2008 Philip Taft Labor History Award for the best book in American labor and working-class history published in 2007:

Laurie B. Green,  
*Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*  
The University of North Carolina Press

For information on nominations for the 2009 Prize, due in by December 15, 2008, please visit the Taft Award website:  
<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/taftaward/>

Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA) announces the winner of the 2008 Herbert Gutman Prize for Outstanding Dissertation in Labor and Working-class history:

Jarod Roll,  
“Road to the Promised Land: Rural Rebellion in the New Cotton South, 1890-1945”  
(Northwestern University, Advisor: Nancy MacLean)

For information on the 2009 Prize competition, due by November 30, 2008, please visit the Gutman Prize website:  
<http://www.lawcha.org/gutman.php/>

## Teaching Labor and Working-Class History

by Bob Bussel and Joe McCartin

This section launches what we hope will become a regular feature in the LAWCHA newsletter: reflections on our teaching craft.

We encourage those who teach labor and working-class history, whether to academic, labor, or public audiences, to share ideas about how they approach their work. How has your approach to teaching labor and working-class history evolved? What types of teaching strategies and methods have you found most successful? What kinds of materials have you used to stimulate your students? How does your audience influence your pedagogy? What kinds of projects/assignments have you found most successful in encouraging your students to think critically about labor and working-class history? These questions are meant to be suggestive, not prescriptive. We offer them as a starting point in order to generate a useful exchange of ideas and strategies about how we approach our craft. Please send your proposals for contributions to us.

We open this series with reflections from the British-born Colin J. Davis, historian at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, and Marcus Widenor, labor educator at the University of Oregon.

### Teaching: A Transnational Perspective

by Colin J. Davis

I have taught a range of labor history courses over the years to a variety of students. Thus there is no one template. I first began teaching labor history at the Labor Studies Department at Rutgers University in the mid-1980's. The course was entitled "Development of the American Labor Movement" and split into two sections from Colonial to the Civil War, and Reconstruction to the Present. Most of the Rutgers students were suburban kids with little knowledge or understanding of what labor history was/is. I was somewhat constrained by the "Labor Movement" angle but managed to convey most major developments, both economic and political. I traced the emergence of the first labor movements, going through the political parties, and finally arriving at the multi-faceted present. Interestingly, I simultaneously taught Labor History through the IBEW apprentice program at Empire State College in New York City. Here the students were invariably white male apprentices with a smattering of minorities (both male and female). Now the challenge was to keep the students awake because they came to my class after either a long day of classes or work. I was freed by the title and able to incorporate indentured servitude and slavery. Just as vital: discussion of migratory waves let loose a rambunctious discussion of immigrants and their effects on culture and economy. To a large extent the experience was rewarding—the students reminded me of my apprenticeship as a tool and die maker in England (toolmaker in British parlance) and how fascinating I once found my social studies classes at the local technical college. This is not to say that the apprentices found my course "fascinating and insightful" but evaluations tended to be positive. The key was to keep the class going; using examples of labor battles certainly stirred their mostly male hearts.

What surprised both the Rutgers and Empire State students was the incredible level of class conflict.

Gun battles, use of armed guards and thugs, assassinations, dynamite, police and militia brutality, and pitched street battles all played a role in stirring the students' interest. It mirrored my own experience as an undergraduate at the University of Warwick. When first introduced to U.S. Labor History one was immediately struck by the level of class violence and state coercion. With such a backdrop the question "Why No Socialism?" had such a resonance. For most of the students the question was more like, "why didn't I get this history at school?" Whether suburban or urban students, the common refrain was that work comes with a cost. The point is either to accept the conditions or to actively change them. Hopefully my students would use history to follow the latter.

In 1991, I moved to the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and encountered a completely different range of students. Most undergraduates were first generation students—many, if not most, had working class backgrounds. Teaching labor history to them seemed like preaching to the choir. Many were grandchildren of textile workers, coal miners and steel workers, and thus brought with them a keen interest in trade union history. Some carried negative baggage, however. This was especially true of textile-related students. The 1934 textile strike defeat still held some negative feelings. Luckily, I was able to show the superb documentary "The Uprising of '34," which comes to grip with strike defeat and the lasting memory of familial schisms. The positive effect of this course made me branch out to courses in Women's Labor History and Labor History and Film. The latter has been a very popular course. Showing films like *The Molly Maguires*, *Reds*, *On the Waterfront*, *Mac*, and *Norma Rae* always led to lively discussions and insightful analysis. Like *The Uprising of '34* the *Grapes of Wrath* had a dramatic effect. Many of the students had family backgrounds linked to sharecropping and tenant farming. For others *Norma Rae* and its way of dealing with class and race struck a chord. Invariably, students identified with the main female character and the dire consequences of being an oppositional figure in a small Southern textile town.

At the graduate level (MA), I inaugurated a course on Transnational Labor History. Initially the graduate students were wary. As with most early criticisms of transnational his-



tory the students felt intimidated grappling with multiple historiographies and subjects. Helping to allay their fears I introduced them to the twin topics of “American Exceptionalism” and “English particularism.” By embracing the two theoretical debates the students could identify a much-needed synthesis and sweep away nationalistic charges draped in theoretical jargon. Thomas Bender’s *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* was a fine accompaniment to these efforts. To alleviate fears of undue complexity I assigned books by matching a traditional U.S. case study with that of a foreign counterpart. The most helpful books included Frederickson’s *The Comparative Imagination*, Kolchin’s *Unfree Labor*, Laslett’s *Colliers Across the Sea* and Silverman’s *Imagining Internationalism*. What became apparent as the course progressed was that students began opening up U.S. history, seeing the value of comparison in understanding a single or national case study. Their final papers reflected this, running the gamut of pirates, seafarers, dockworkers, coal miners, steelworkers, garment workers and slaves. Often systems were also analyzed; some compared Jim Crow with Apartheid. Others compared welfare legislation, workplace safety, trade union development, and political action.

In all, the experience has been an edifying one. The range of students has certainly enriched the process. Countless times I have learned from the students of how labor history has not just value, but relevance. At UAB, most students work and that brings into the class an added and vital ingredient. In a sense they are living labor history. Dealing with the boss/supervisor educates them on the power dynamics of work and exploitation. More than once the classroom experience has helped them come to terms with workplace issues, and in some cases have led to an interest in trade union agitation. For me, the experience continues to be rewarding, especially as I have incorporated a transnational perspective. Students are genuinely interested in how peoples cope with adversity across borders. Highlighting how ‘foreign’ workers address a similar problem enriches our understanding of a world that is constantly in flux with its attendant challenges.

## The Craft: A Labor Educator’s Perspective

by Marcus Widenor

When I first began working in the University based worker education field in 1978, labor history was not a mainstream topic. It took a back seat to the traditional, IR based subjects crucial to the functioning of local unions—steward training, collective bargaining, labor law. More often than not, labor history was covered in a “short course format” with the showing of the classic labor history film, “*The Inheritance*” (still the best of the genre in my mind), followed by comments and questions.

In the last five years I have witnessed a renewed interest in the subject. This has been prompted by the continuing adversity of the union movement and attempts by younger activists to

place their own experience in some historical context to gain greater insights into current trends and strategies. Santayana’s cliché, “those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it,” seems to be heartfelt by the activists who attend classes here in Oregon.

Several years ago, student comments led us to stop trying to cover the colonial era to present in one class and we are now offering a two-part, 20-plus hour course. This has allowed for greater flexibility regarding which topics to emphasize and has increased our ability to use short film clips treating important subjects. Most importantly, the new format has enabled us to include more hands-on participatory exercises that allow union members to explore how their personal and family historical experiences have shaped their views on class and the labor movement.

Two main participatory exercises help ground the subject matter in the experience of my students. At the first session I have students pair off and interview each other about their family’s experience with work. They then explain their partner’s history to the class: the jobs they have held, when their family first came to America, the occupational histories of women in their families, and their experience with unionism. I often end the exercise with the question: “what experience of your own, or of a family member, most influenced the role that unionism plays in your life?” Sometimes when I work with a class full of members of one union, I will ask a different question. For building tradesmen the prompt might be: “Tell the group about one experience you had as an apprentice when a journeyman impressed on you some of the values of the craft and the union.”

The second exercise is a game of Labor History Bingo or Jeopardy, designed to break from the traditional pedagogy, have some fun, and sometimes highlight a specific concept in labor history. I give away labor books, music and films to those who win the first couple of rounds.

Many other popular education techniques can be used to make worker education classes more participatory, but there is always a tension between this objective and covering the material. Creating individual/institutional timelines on the wall of a classroom is one effective method; historical role-playing is another (Diamond and Bigelow’s *The Power in Our Hands*, although designed for younger students, still contains ideas relevant for adult learners).

Our two-part class covers labor history from the Cordwainers through Change to Win, with varying results depending on the group and its interests. Over the years my topical emphasis has evolved. A failed syndicalist at heart, I enjoy thinking about American labor history through the prism of the struggle over work itself. In that context I’ve often spent considerable time encouraging unionists to think about historical examples of the labor process, and how they relate to their own experience. For example, I have asked nurses: how does the experience with scientific management in manufacturing inform what has happened to nursing through managed care?

With the growing divide over immigration policy in the US, I have also spent more time on this topic recently, reviewing nativism and racism in the labor movement, their effect

on organizing, and Oregon's own history of resistance to immigration. We often view a segment from the PBS New York City series on Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century, discuss the experiences of the students' own families, and consider how this history is reflected in the current immigration debate. Other major themes in my class include American exceptionalism, the failure to create an enduring labor party, and the nature of employer resistance to unionism.

**Visuals and Films:** Despite its overuse as a teaching technology, PowerPoint is very useful for displaying images from labor history. I use it to show examples of the iconography of class struggle: The Knights of Labor's application form with its exclusion of lawyers and gamblers; anti-immigrant cartoons from the popular press; Wobbly broadsides; Norman Rockwell's rendition of the "Four Freedoms." are examples that have worked well. While there are many films about American labor history, there is no longer a single one that can be used for an entire course. The old "Inheritance" is the best, but it is long, and clunky to use in 16mm. Although the revised version ("The Dream Continues") brings the story up to date, it sacrifices some of the best things in the original, like the eastern European accents, and the anti WWI sentiments.

Increasingly, and with better technology, I have been using shorter clips from films to illustrate particular themes and events. Examples include Ludlow footage from the UMW's historical film, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union footage from the PBS Depression series, and Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike footage from "Eyes on the Prize."

**Handouts and Readings:** The non-credit, short-class format doesn't allow many opportunities to assign readings. Typically I give people a national and regional bibliography, a film list, and a handout on internet sources on labor history. If there is a good short piece on their particular union I will include that. I also distribute short think pieces to read after the class on important topics. Recent examples include: Herbert Gutman's essay on "Class and Historical Consciousness," and Jack Metzgar's on "Politics and The Class Vernacular." Following the SEIU/Labor Notes dust-up, I distributed A.J. Muste's 1928 essay on union factionalism, "Army or Town Meeting."

My biggest challenge has been moving quickly enough through earlier eras of history to allow time to discuss events from the lifetime of the class members. To that end I've been devoting much more time to the post WW II era, especially the 1970's and 80's and the growth of public employee unionism. I'm now considering creating a third class, covering WWII to the present, to counter my habit of lingering in the nineteenth century.

### About the Teaching Participants

**Colin J. Davis** (cjdavis@uab.edu) a former tool and die maker born in England, is Professor of History at the University of Alabama-Birmingham.

**Marcus Widenor** (mrwide@uoregon.edu) is a labor educator and associate professor at the Labor Education and Research Center at the University of Oregon.

## Upcoming LAWCHA-Linked Conferences

*LAWCHA partners with other labor studies organizations, adding to our own diversity and strengthening labor history in various geographic areas. If you are interested in being on a LAWCHA panel contact Program Committee Co-chairs Dorothy Fujita-Rony (drf@uci.edu) and/or Colleen O'Neill (colleen.oneill@usu.edu). LAWCHA Midwest Liaison Lisa Phillips (lphillips7@isugw.indstate.edu) helps ensure our participation at the North American Labor History Detroit conference (NALHC).*

Some upcoming events in which LAWCHA will be partnering:

**North American Labor History Conference, Detroit, October 16-18, 2008.** "NALHC Celebrates 30 Years." Celebrate the anniversary of the NALHC, culminating in a special session with Geoff Eley, Christopher Johnson, Elizabeth Faue, and Janine Lanza. Plenary speakers include Ron Gettelfinger (UAW), Elizabeth McKillen, and Kevin Boyle. For information: <http://nalhc.wayne.edu/NALHC/Home.html>.

**Southern History Association: On Oct. 11, 2008, New Orleans.** The LAWCHA-affiliated Southern Labor Studies Association will sponsor a panel and reception.

**LAWCHA/Fund for Labor Culture and History, May 28-31, 2009, Chicago.** See the conference call for papers in this newsletter.

**Southern Labor Studies Association, Spring 2010, Jamestown, Va.,** William and Mary. For details: [www.southernlaborstudies.org](http://www.southernlaborstudies.org)

## Call for Paper Proposals

for the Labor Studies Journal Sessions at the 2009 UALE Conference, April 16-18, 2009

The theme for the Labor Studies Journal special papers and panels at the 2009 UALE Conference will be "Labor and Working Class Electoral Politics: Does Kansas Still Matter?" The Journal welcomes papers that specifically address the relationship between race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and religion and the emergent union and working class vote. Papers accepted for presentation at the 2009 Conference will be submitted to a peer reviewed process for possible publication in a LSJ-UALE-Special Conference Issue. Please send a short description of your proposed paper to Bob Bruno, special editor of the LSJ special issue. [bbruno@uic.edu](mailto:bbruno@uic.edu).

**Conference Call**  
***Race, Labor, and the City: Crises Old and New***  
**Thursday, May 28 - Saturday, May 31, 2009**  
**Roosevelt University, 430 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago**

**Sponsored by the**  
**Labor and Working-Class History Association**  
**And the**  
**Fund for Labor Culture and History**  
**(Laborlore Conversations IV)**

As Chicago developed into a metropolis, it became a city "proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation." Control over these and other jobs over the past two centuries also provoked the formation of organized labor, civil rights, and other working-class movements. Meeting in Chicago, Carl Sandburg's "City of Big Shoulders," this joint conference aims to bring together academics, activists, and other enthusiasts of labor history and culture around the following theme:

***"Race, Labor, and the City: Crises Old and New."***

All topics related to working-class life and history are welcome but we especially encourage proposals concerning the urban interconnections between work, migration, and culture. This includes studies of historical and contemporary working-class movements for economic and racial justice, analysis of struggles over gendered urban spaces, Latino immigration and transnational labor, and developments in working-class city life and leisure. While this conference is in Chicago, we welcome proposals that address urban working-class life around the globe.

Proposals for panels should include a one-page summary, with a list of presenters and their topics, and brief bios and/or vitas. We encourage informal presentations, and discourage the reading of papers.

For more information and submission of proposals see the conference website: <http://chi-lawcha09.indstate.edu>

Submissions for a single paper or a panel are due no later than **December 1, 2008**  
and applicants will be contacted by January 15, 2009.

Others sponsors for the conference include The Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies, UNITE-HERE, Chicago Jobs With Justice, and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History-Chicago Branch.

Convenient and low-cost housing will be available by reservation only at the University Center <http://www.universitycenter.com/conferences/housing/index.html> starting October 2008. Further information will be available at <http://chi-lawcha09.indstate.edu>. There will be two national conventions in Chicago during this conference. We suggest making housing arrangements as soon as possible.

Questions? Please contact the local committee chairs:

Erik Gellman, Roosevelt University  
Liesl Orenic, Dominican University  
[chi.lawcha09@gmail.com](mailto:chi.lawcha09@gmail.com)

**Graduate Student Travel Grants:**

LAWCHA will continue its tradition of awarding up to four travel grants to graduate students who are presenting papers at the LAWCHA conference. Graduate students whose papers are accepted by the Program Committee and who are members of LAWCHA at the time of submission may apply for these competitive travel awards by applying to Professor Kimberley Phillips, Chair of the Prize Committee, at [klphil@wm.edu](mailto:klphil@wm.edu)

Deadline: December 1, 2008

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