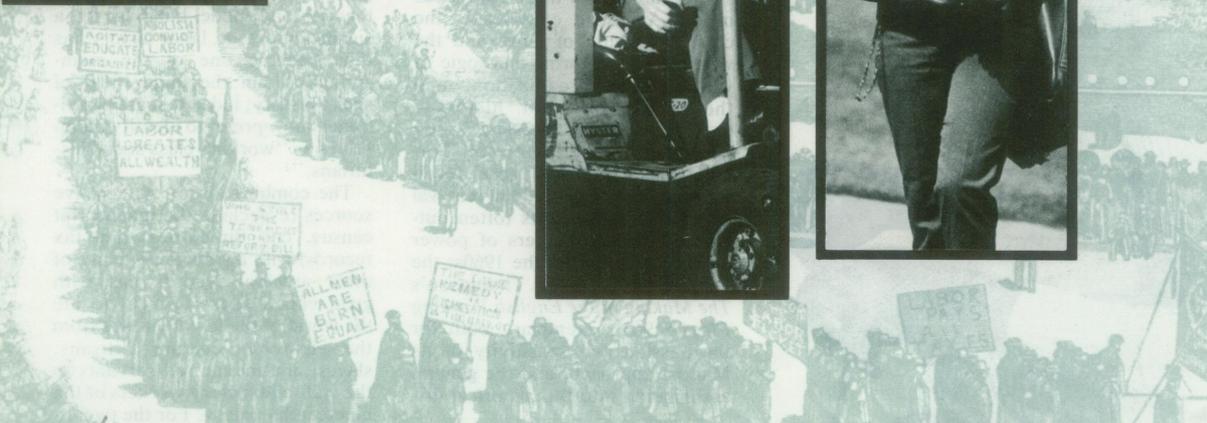


# SOCIAL EDUCATION

Official Journal of the National Council for the Social Studies



## Teaching About American Labor History,

### Plus: Social Studies in Rural America

Reprinted from *Social Education*, Vol. 46, no. 2, Feb. 1982.  
Reprinted by the Education Department,

American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial

INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL LABOR RELATIONS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
BERKELEY  
AUG 18 1988

Washington, DC, 1982

JUL 08 1993

# Industrial America's Rank and File: Recent Trends in American Labor History

Leon Fink

American labor history has undergone "striking" changes in the past fifteen years. Not only the questions asked, but the subject matter under study has shifted dramatically over a very short period. From a focus on unions and their leaders, what had once been a fairly tightly-constructed subsection of economic and political history has branched out in a number of new directions. In particular, labor historians have had a great deal to say, of late, about three vital areas of the American experience: the changing nature of work and the workplace, the forms and logic of working-class organization, and the impact of labor history—or "the workers' presence"—on American history in general. Formative influences on these developments have included the renewal of popular movements (often outside established centers of power and organization) in the 1960s; the publication of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), exemplary both for the passion and sensitivity of its Marxist approach; and the general assimilation into the historical dis-

LEON FINK is an Assistant Professor of History in the Department of History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. This article and the teaching lesson by Fay D. Metcalf that follows will appear in a new *NCSS Bulletin* (No. 67), edited by Matthew T. Downey, which will be published in 1982.



Department of Labor Photo

cipline of social science methodology in the form of quantification and sociological-anthropological theories and model-building. To a significant extent, labor history has thus become one of the mainstays within the larger field of social history; indeed, some practitioners now prefer to identify themselves as "working-class social historians."<sup>1</sup>

The combination of quantitative sources (especially the manuscript census, city directories, and tax records) with an imaginative use of other archival records has with great effectiveness brought to life the world of the lower classes from the eighteenth-century artisans, slaves, and indentured servants to the craft and factory workers of the nineteenth century. For the twentieth century, the addition of oral testimony has likewise begun to yield rich rewards. As such, the so-

<sup>1</sup>For other useful overviews of developments within labor history, see David Montgomery, "To Study the People: The American Working Class," *Labor History* 21 (Fall 1980): 485-512; and David Brody, "The Old Labor History and the New," *Labor History* 20 (1979): 111-26; and D. Fahey, "From Labor History to Working Class History," *Journal of Urban History* 6 (Nov. 1979): 105-11.



Department of Labor Photo

called "inarticulate" of history have proved all too often simply to have gone uncatalogued, unread, or unremembered. For a good example of a new use of a standard source of labor history, we might look at what has recently been done with the formal records and proceedings of the Knights of Labor, the largest and most significant labor organization of the nineteenth century. Norman Ware (1929) and Gerald Grob (1961) put parts of this incredible collection of materials—now grouped on dozens of microfilm reels under the Terence Powderly Papers—to use in very effective institutional histories of the Knights. More recently, however, the official records of this labor body, together with the vast incoming correspondence to its leaders, have been combed for an understanding of the kinds of people who joined the organization and their concerns, aspirations, and problems in specific local contexts. Much of this work, circulating in the papers and dissertations of young scholars, remains to be published; but it has been helped immeasurably by Jonathan Garlock's and N. C. Builder's (1973) quantitative guide to every known local outpost of this social movement.<sup>2</sup>

#### Herbert Gutman and "New" Labor History

Of the several distinguished North American scholars who have charted the way towards a "new" labor history, the work of Herbert Gutman (1976) most dramatically exemplifies the changing preoccupations of the field. Gutman's early work, at least in its point of departure, bears the strong imprint of the categories of economic history through which most studies of labor movements had been conceived. Still, from the start Gutman had brought a new perspective to his material. Assessing the reaction of different groups of workers to the depression of the 1870s, Gut-

man quickly found that neither the swings of the business cycle nor the fluctuation of the labor market adequately accounted for the relative abilities of some workers to sustain a considerable measure of influence in their relations with employers. Rather, the larger relationship of a given body of workers to the surrounding community (i.e., other workers, shopkeepers, local officeholders, police, etc.) might prove equally decisive in industrial battles. This initial work propelled Gutman further into the complexities of the social structure and culture of industrial America. The competitive individualism and success ideology which had frequently been taken as the cultural masthead of the Gilded Age, for example, he found at odds with other traditions and values which also carried considerable contemporary appeal. Taking his cue from Thompson, Gutman pursued the idea that "behind every form of direct popular action, some legitimizing notion of right is to be found." From the symbols of a common culture, in fact, workers often drew quite different inspiration from their middle-class contemporaries. Evangelical Protestantism, Gutman discovered, sustained doctrines of trade unionism and mutualism, as well as *laissez-faire* economics and the Gospel of Wealth. One of those whose work fit the former category was Richard L. Davis, a black coal miners' leader and UMW officer from the Ohio Hocking Valley. Davis's own career, as Gutman elucidated it, also belied the historiographic image of a docile, anti-union Black labor force in the "age of Booker T. Washington."

As was the case with black coal miners, the specific social contours of the communities that Gutman studied continued to make him raise new questions. Beginning with his extensive work on Paterson, New Jersey, Gutman came to see the open conflict and considerable violence of the Gilded Age as a function of the attempt by a new class of industrial entrepreneurs to socialize and gain control over a diverse, discordant, but often resistant populace. Gutman found in the pre-industrial and/or immigrant

background of America's new factory recruits two important bases of opposition to the consolidating economic and political needs of the corporate capitalist order. From the farm women of Lowell to Afro-American slaves and Irish canal-diggers, from Welsh miners to Slavic steelworkers and Jewish seamstresses, the oft-mentioned "problem" of the American work ethic has masked a continuing cultural, as well as political-economic, battle between owners and policymakers on the one hand and workers on the other. Having considered the cultural forms of working-class resistance, Gutman has most recently followed-up with reference to a group of workers debarred from overt workplace and political organization—namely, the Afro-American slaves. Here, in a work which showed just how far from their point of origin the concerns of a labor historian had led (and appropriately so), Gutman documented how the creation and defense—against all external obstacles—of coherent and distinct Afro-American family networks laid the basis for the survival and resistance of a people during and after slavery.

#### Recent Focus on Three Major Areas

It is worth looking, in turn, at the three major areas of recent focus: namely, work, worker organization and motivation, and the worker's impact on American life. The first area has yielded a particularly rich analysis of the changing shape of America's Industrial Revolution. In general, a picture of a continuous, but erratic and uneven, appropriation by management from workers of the knowledge and day-to-day direction of the production process has emerged from this literature. An exemplary study of this transformation of American working life is found in Alan Dawley's treatment of shoemaking in Lynn (1976).

In a story extending from the turn-of-the-century through the Gilded Age, Dawley presents a vivid picture of the steady erosion and ultimate decimation of an earlier artisan way of life. In 1800 the household served as the basic unit

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Melton A. McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978); Michael J. Cassity, "Modernization and Social Crisis: The Knights of Labor and a Midwestern Community, 1885-1886," *The Journal of American History*, 66 (June 1979): 41-61; and Leon Fink, "Irrespective of Party, Color or Social Standing: The Knights of Labor and Opposition Politics in Richmond, Virginia," *Labor History* 19 (Summer 1978): 325-49.

of shoe production. The master shoemaker (and head of the household) purchased the leather and supervised production in a "ten-footer" behind his family's cottage. Working under him were a couple of (usually younger) journeymen, who brought their own kit of tools with them and who received from the master not only wages, but room and board, firewood, and clothing. Within the master's house, wives and daughters, working as binders, hand-stitched the upper part of the shoe. Younger sons, serving as apprentices and entrusted with a variety of odd jobs, completed the work team.

Household production was characterized by the unity of home and work life, as well as control by the artisan of the work process and workday. Although each household contained an internal hierarchy, interdependence and a rough equality characterized the relations among shoeworking households and, indeed, between shoeworking households and most of the other households (farmers, craftsmen, small shopkeepers) of the "republican" community.

By the 1830s, household shoe production had given way to the central shop. The master, who had fashioned his finished goods on customer order or else sold them to a small shopkeeper, had fallen victim to his supplier and distributor. Taking advantage of credit and access to a protected national market, Lynn shopkeepers now took sole command of production. Their general stores became the center of a vast putting-out system, a characteristic part of the "middle passage" of United States industrialism. The central shop system expanded the scale and lowered the cost of shoe production. By loosening the ties between work and home, it helped to "free" the individual, narrowing the relation between employer and worker to the wage payment.

The real production explosion occurred in the 1860s, when the sewing machines and the McKay stitcher were combined with an intricate division of labor to create a factory system of mass production. Two thousand fewer workers produced seven million more shoes in

1875 than in 1855. The factory system had a drastic effect on the shoeworkers and their community. No natural line of mobility allowed the average worker to escape lifelong wage dependency. Fewer workers could expect to earn even a "competence"—"to possess real estate or saving sufficient to house a family, or tide it over during hard times, or support husband and wife in old age." A seasonal production cycle unleashed a vast army of tramps across the New England countryside. With the breakup of the shoeworking household, young men moved away from their parents, and the "lady shoebinder" gave way to the "factory girl," who left the labor market upon marriage.

Daily interaction between farmers and workers, men and women, children and adults, and dependent helpers and independent artisans in small-scale production had given way to a new order of work that stretched the ends of each of these polarities into separate social spheres. Workplace authority—previously exercised by the father or master craftsman or by one's fellow journeymen—for the first time yielded to external supervision in the person of the foreman.

Although we shall not here treat it in the same detail, a valuable body of scholarship also exists on the extension of the division of labor and managerialism into the workplaces of the twentieth century. Richard Edwards (1979), for example, challenges the notion that the nature of industrial jobs and bureaucratic administration has moved along a smooth technologically-defined continuum. Rather, Edwards argues that it has been the interaction of corporate practice with the responses of the workers themselves that has molded a dynamic managerial approach. In particular, he cites an evolution from simple (family firm) to hierarchical (foreman-run) control of industrial enterprise, increasingly complicated by resort to various union-evading strategems, such as welfare capitalism, scientific management, and company unions. Ultimately, monopoly sector firms resorted to a combination of "technical" (or machine-set pace of work) and

"bureaucratic" (or complex organizational) forms of control over their work force.<sup>3</sup>

Among those who have most ably synthesized attention to the work process with the changing dimensions of the labor movement itself have been David Montgomery and David Brody, who, along with Gutman, have served over the last period as a kind of informal triumvirate giving coherence and direction to the discipline. Brody's seminal work (1960) on the steelworkers at the turn of the century sets the demise of the nation's strongest craft union in relation to the rising concentration of the steel industry, craft-union exclusiveness and native-immigrant conflict, and the effective use of the state's police power by the employers. In addition to his wide-ranging investigations of social structure (1968) and social conflict (1972) within early nineteenth-century manufacturing centers, Montgomery (1979) has provided a most convincing portrait of the character of labor ideology, particularly among the skilled industrial craftsmen who lent leadership and stability to labor's organizational efforts, from the American Labor Union of the 1860s through the A.F. of L. and its anarcho-syndicalist critics early in the twentieth century. Amidst the changing technological and managerial constraints imposed from above, workers—first, as autonomous craftsmen; then through union work rules; and, finally, through sympathy strikes—struggled to maintain or regain control over decisions exercised on the shop floor. Montgomery argues that these control-oriented struggles, which crested in the unparalleled militancy of the years 1916–1920, had their roots in the craftsman's ethic of the work "stint" (the self-imposed limit on worker output), a defiant strength in the

<sup>3</sup>Other important works reflecting on changing authority within the twentieth-century workplace include: David F. Noble, *America By Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); and Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). Contrast these to the happier picture presented by Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).

face of unwarranted exactions from above, and a disciplined solidarity with fellow workers.

That industrial resistance did not necessarily devolve from skill or "manly" assertion, however, has been skillfully documented by Thomas Dublin's recent work on the Lowell millworkers (1979). A work force recruited not from artisans, but from young, unmarried women of New England small farms nevertheless showed a capacity for collective action through the "turnouts" of the 1830s and Ten Hour petitions of the 1840s. Rather than a tradition of craft, the Lowell women relied on a "sisterhood" formed in the common association of work, boarding house, and social life. A still-vibrant republican political tradition also still had meaning for these Yankee daughters, who would meet worsening industrial conditions with American Revolutionary invective:

We will show these drivelling cotton lords, this mushroom aristocracy of New England, who so arrogantly aspire to lord it over God's heritage, that our rights cannot be trampled upon with impunity; that we will not longer submit to that arbitrary power which has for last ten years been so abundantly exercised over us.<sup>4</sup>

In entirely different circumstances, a "workers' culture" among twentieth-century women department store workers, according to Susan Porter Benson (1978), continually frustrated managerial attempts at rationalization from above.

While it is true that, except for the early mill operatives, most scholarship has concentrated on those skilled trades that produced stable, or at least strong, unions, the analytic emphasis for the most part has been less on the unions themselves as historical agencies than on the larger environment which nourished them. Thus, as we have noted, there has been considerable attention devoted to the nature of the work process with its changing skill requirements. The associational networks, antedating as well as sustaining formal union organization, have also figured prominently in the recent litera-

ture. Lodge meetings, voluntary fire companies, neighborhood taverns, as well as churches, ethnic societies, and political ward organizations, all played a role in the creation of cross-craft understanding and sympathy among urban workingmen. Many nineteenth-century studies, in particular, refer to the existence of a "working-class culture" which gave a meaning to contemporary values, such as respectability, self-help, and mobility, distinct from that applicable to its middle-class counterpart. Gregory Kealey's study (1980) of specific Toronto trades and social organization and Daniel Walkowitz's contrast of a mixed skilled-craft cotton and a textile town in upstate New York (1978) offer particularly rich accounts of the larger associational world of organized workers in the late nineteenth century.

The working-class community, as such, has been explored from a variety of angles. In his study of ante-bellum Lynn shoemakers, for example, Paul Faler (1974) divided the shoeworking community into three cultural categories: "traditionalists," "loyalists," and "rebels." Eschewing both the discipline of the new industrial morality and the radicals' efforts to organize for collective protection, the traditionalists stuck to the "looser," more casual, and less routinized life style of the eighteenth-century working people. The loyalists, on the other hand, bent to the standards of their new employers, embracing temperance and self-improvement, while likewise shunning labor organization. The rebel mechanics, while culturally indistinguishable from the loyalists, nevertheless turned a workplace morality conditioned by the labor theory of value, republicanism, and Christianity into a sharp critique of monopoly, exploitation, and political elitism.

Other authors have identified ethnicity as the basic reference point for workers' values. Contradicting older historiographic denigrations of the capacity for organization among lesser-skilled immigrant workers, Victor Greene portrays the militant coming-of-age of Slavic coal miners in Pennsylva-

nia. In a wave of strikes near the end of the century, whole communities found inspiration both in the words of their priests and in the new political rights beckoning in the symbol of the American flag. Through an astute use of oral history, Peter Friedlander (1975), in a study of the organization of an auto workers local in 1930s, and Nell Painter (1979), in her collaboration with the southern Black Communist organizer Hosea Hudson, have also produced searching explorations of the intersection of the forces of ethnicity (or race) and class among American workers. Particularly in periods of weak labor organization, as David Montgomery (1972), among others, has demonstrated, ethnic rivalry and racial antagonisms among workers have come to the fore. But besides the complex question of whether ethnic consciousness reinforced or undermined "class consciousness" in America is the even more basic question of what impact ethnic identity had on working-class behavior. Virginia Yans MacLaughlin (1977), for example, has found that work and occupational decisions among Italians in Buffalo were conditioned by sex-role proprieties shaped in the Old Country. While Italian-American men gravitated towards outdoor work as construction laborers, women were culturally forbidden to leave home as domestics or factory workers, except under adequate familial (i.e., patriarchal) supervision, and only so long as female wages did not exceed those of male family members.

The study of unions themselves, a sustaining center of interest at least for twentieth-century labor historians, has itself undergone a changing emphasis in recent years. Labor history in the United States, in part, was born out of the attempts of progressive-era labor economists to defend and justify the existence of organized labor within liberal, capitalist society. By the 1960s, both the permanence of the unions and the failings of that society were taken for granted by many labor historians. As such, the unions themselves generally received critical scrutiny as established institutions. The growth of

<sup>4</sup>Caroline F. Ware, *The Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (Boston: 1931), p. 292.



*Immigrants, having cleared inspection at Ellis Island, are shown in a railroad car enroute to their destination and work. Circa 1921-1924.*

labor bureaucracy, "corporate ideology," opportunism, and corruption within major unions were emphasized, even as more radical rank-and-file efforts throughout the century were exhorted for future emulation.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, the declining economic strength and political influence of the labor movement amidst the stagflation of the 1970s has again touched off a scholarly revision of the unions' historic role. David Brody (1980) and James Green (1980), have offered the most mature, balanced synthe-

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973); Ronald Radosh, "The Corporate Ideology of American Labor Leaders from Gompers to Hillman," *Studies on the Left* 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1966): 66-88; Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1970); John Hutchinson, *The Imperfect Union: A History of Corruption in American Trade Unions* (New York: Dutton, 1970). Compare such works to Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All, A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969); Alice and Staughton Lynd, *Rank and File: Personal Histories By Working Class Organizers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); and James J. Matles and James Higgins, *Them and Us: Struggles of a Rank-and-File Union* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

**“. . . the so-called ‘inarticulate’ of history have proved all too often simply to have gone uncatalogued, unread, or unremembered.”**

ses extant on the twentieth-century experience of American unions. Meanwhile, excellent specific studies have also been written on such varied topics as the career of John L. Lewis (1977), the Communists and the C.I.O. (1977), Black workers and the UAW (1979), and the textile workers' struggle at Roanoke Rapids (1979).

#### **The Unifying Lesson**

Perhaps the unifying lesson implicit in the work of recent labor historians is that their subject not only touches on, but necessarily reshapes the way we look at the

larger contours of American history. Herbert Gutman has pointed out that the essential subject matter of labor historians is sometimes mistakenly balkanized into labor history, mobility history, immigration history, women's history, family history, Black history, urban history, business history, religious history, and so on. What we are really talking about is simply what is required "to study the people" who have composed the American industrial heritage. There is, perhaps, something more as well. Early in the 1960s, the cry went up from scholars like Jesse Lemisch (1968) and Staughton Lynd (1964) to study history "from the bottom up," an invocation which pointed to the importance of non-elite experience, not only as a matter of intellectual curiosity, but as a way to revise our basic understanding of the nation's past. Lemisch (1968) and Alfred Young (1964) did this in particular by focusing on the role of artisans and other plebian groups in the era of the American Revolution. From a quite different

vantage point, Stephan Thernstrom's study of working-class mobility (1964, 1973) also seeks to explain the peculiarities of American political culture through an understanding of the objective experience of the lower classes. David Montgomery's *Beyond Equality* (1967), which sets the labor question at the center of the republican tradition, likewise is as much a revision of political history as it is of labor history.

The past fifteen years of scholarship have, in short, seen a critical redefinition of issues of concern to labor historians. No doubt, the field has not seen the last of its internal "upheaval."

#### Works Cited

- Benson, Susan Porter, "The Clerking Sisterhood," *Radical America* 12 (March-April 1978): 41-55.
- Brody, David, *Steelworkers in America, The Non-Union Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Workers in Industrial America, Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle*. New York: Oxford, 1980.
- Cochran, Bert, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict That Shaped American Unions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Conway, Mimi, *Rise Gonna Rise, A Portrait of Southern Textile Workers*. New York: Anchor, 1979.
- Dawley, Alan, *Class and Communism: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn*. Harvard Studies in Urban History. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Dublin, Thomas, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
- Dubofsky, Melvyn and Van Tine, Warren, *John L. Lewis: A Biography*. New York: Quadrangle, 1971.
- Edwards, Richard, *Contested Terrain, The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1979.
- Faler, Paul, "Cultural Aspects of the Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts Shoemakers and Industrial Morality, 1826-1860," *Labor History* 15 (Summer 1974): 367-394.
- Friedlander, Peter, *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936-39, A Study in Class and Culture*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975.
- Garlock, Jonathan and Builder, N. C., "Knights of Labor Data Bank: Users Manual and Index to Local Assemblies," Unpublished ms., University of Rochester, 1973.
- Green, James R., *The World of the Worker, Labor in Twentieth Century America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1980.
- Grob, Gerald, *Workers and Utopia, A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961.
- Gutman, Herbert G., *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America*. New York: Knopf, 1976. See, especially, in chronological order: "Two Lockouts in Pennsylvania, 1873-1874" (1959); "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age" (1966); "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth Century American Industrial Cities—Paterson, New Jersey: A Case Study" (1968); "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning, 1890-1900" (1968); and "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919" (1973).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*. New York: Pantheon, 1976.
- Kealey, Gregory S., *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism 1867-1892*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.
- Lemisch, Jesse, "The American Revolution Seen From the Bottom Up," in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*. New York: Pantheon, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 25 (July 1968): 371-407.
- Lynd, Staughton, "The Mechanics in New York Politics," *Labor History* 5 (Fall 1964): 225-246.
- Meier, August and Rudwick, Elliott, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*. New York: Oxford, 1979.
- Montgomery, David, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans 1862-1872*. New York: Knopf, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the Kensington Riots of 1844," *Journal of Social History* 5 (Summer 1972): 411-46.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Working Classes of the Pre-Industrial American City, 1780-1830," *Labor History* 9 (Winter 1968): 3-22.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Workers' Control in America, Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Painter, Nell Irvin, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Thernstrom, Stephan, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Poverty and Progress, Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Pantheon, 1964.
- Walkowitz, Daniel J., *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-84*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1978.
- Ware, Norman, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895, A Study in Democracy*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1929.
- Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia, *Family & Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Young, Alfred, "The Mechanics and the Jeffersonians: New York, 1789-1801," *Labor History* 5 (Fall 1964): 247-76. □

A LESSON FOR STUDENTS

# The Transformation of the Working Place: Its Impact on the Shoemakers

Fay D. Metcalf

**A**s Leon Fink suggests in the preceding article, the transformation of the working place has had a profound effect on the daily lives of American workers. If Alan Dawley's book (*Class and Community, The Industrial Revolution in Lynn*) is available, teachers will find it useful in preparing a background lecture for this lesson. However, the lesson may be used as it appears as a simple example of the changes which industrialization forced upon individual working people.

---

FAY D. METCALF is a member of the Social Studies Department, Boulder High School, Boulder, Colorado.

**To the student:** In the following exercise, you will be reading accounts that describe the shoemaking industry. As you read the excerpts, keep these questions in mind:

1. What do these accounts of the shoemaking industry have in common? How are they different? Do they all reflect the bias of the writers?
2. The first account makes the domestic system appear to be a sort of "golden age" for the artisans. How would you find out if that were really so?
3. The two union organizers look upon the changes in the shoemaking industry from the point of view of the workers. In what ways would the perspective of the factory owners be different? How might consumers view the changes?
4. The last account was written in 1972. How would you find out the conditions in the shoemaking industry today? What changes would you anticipate had taken place?

**Account #1:** From Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1964), pp. 39-40.

In 1830 nearly all the shoemakers of Lynn (Massachusetts) had owned their homes with some land about them. . . . Almost every family kept a pig and many had their own cow. . . . With a garden, a pig, and some fishing tackle the shoemaker "could bid defiance to financial tempests." In the winter he could go clam and eel hunting, and if he had two or three cords of wood split and piled in the shed he considered himself in easy circumstances. . . .

The shoemaker had always been regarded as a thoughtful and intelligent artisan. Every shoeshop was a lyceum. It was a common thing for the journeymen to hire a boy to read the paper to them while they worked. . . . The shoemakers were distinguished for general intelligence. It was a social business, conversation was not drowned by the noise of machinery, and there were many opportunities for reading and mutual improvement.

**Account #2:** From the testimony of Horace M. Eaton, General Secretary-Treasurer of the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, September 21, 1899 to the U.S. Congress, as reprinted in Leon Litwack, *The American Labor Movement* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, © 1962), pp. 5-8.

- Q. Taking the material as it is prepared for the shoemaker, how many hands does a gentleman's finished shoe pass through in the process of manufacture?
- A. To answer that question in another way, there are about one hundred subdivisions of labor in the manufacture of a shoe. . . .
- Q. Now, let me ask, in connection with that, what effect has that specializing, . . . upon the workman? Has it a beneficial effect or otherwise?
- A. Oh, it has been detrimental to the workman.
- Q. The workman only knows how to perform the labor of one department?
- A. That is all, and he becomes a mere machine. . . .
- Q. What is the effect, generally speaking, of the employment of boys and girls in factories?
- A. That is quite an evil. I have seen small children standing on boxes because they were not tall enough to stand up to a man's work and operate machines . . . the introduction of child labor is quite a factor, sometimes displacing the head of the family. There was an instance . . . where a man was receiving \$2 a day; the firm turned him off and put in his own son at \$1, at the same job.

**Account #3:** From Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Pantheon Books, a Division of Random House, Inc. © 1972), pp. 356-357.

Jack Spiegel, an organizer for the United Shoe Workers of America, is quoted in the following account.

About sixty percent in the industry are women. In some shops it goes as high as seventy percent. A great many are Spanish-speaking and blacks. It's low paying work . . .

Small shops are going out of business because they can't compete with the giants. There's been a lot of mergers in the shoe industry. Importation has cut into a third of the shoes being sold in our country. Shoes are brought in from Spain, Japan, Italy . . . The average wage in this country is \$2.60. In Italy it is \$1.10.

The same manufacturers who exploit here open up factories there, bring the shoes in here, finish 'em in some places, and put a 'Made in America' label on them . . .

Up to about twelve years ago, we had about a quarter of a million work-

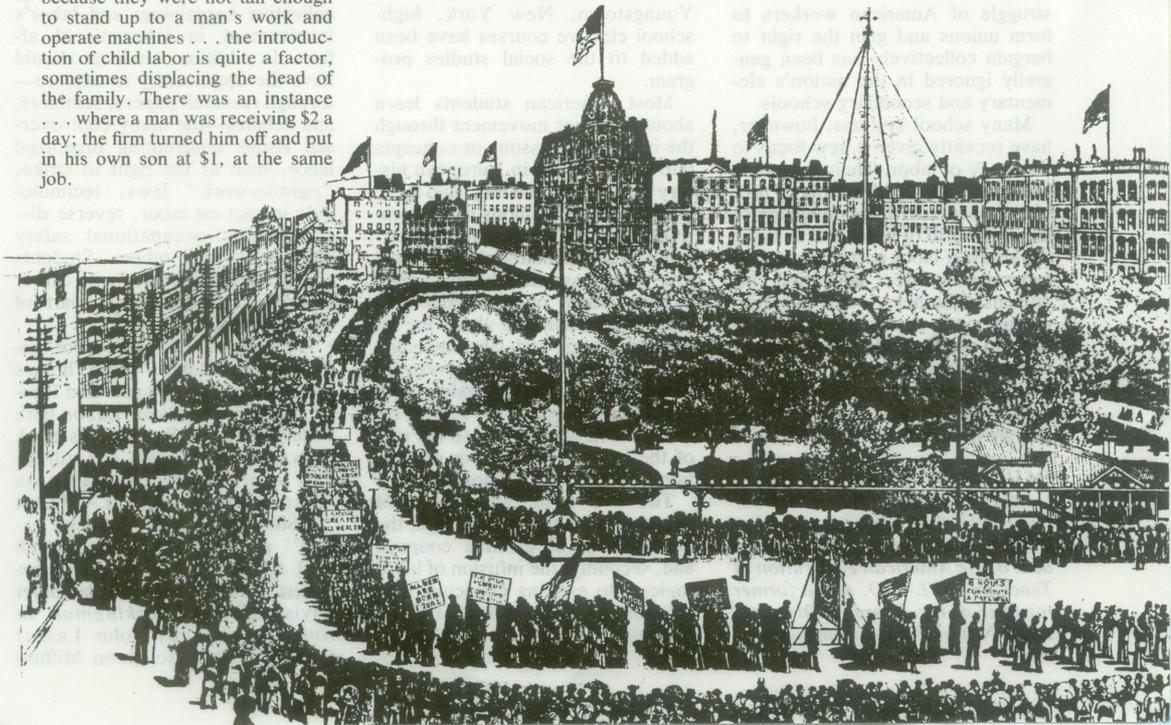
ers. There are now less than 170,000. In the next ten, fifteen years it may diminish to less than fifty thousand . . .

If some measures aren't taken by the government to tax those who send money out and establish those factories in other countries, and take jobs away from people here, it will be good-bye to the American shoe industry. Those in their sixties will retire. Those who are still able to work will find it more difficult.

**Follow-up:** Discuss the reading questions with your classmates. List topics on which there is disagreement, and try to discover why such disagreement occurs. Select one of the questions which these excerpts raise in your mind and do research for an answer. Find other accounts of the shoemaking industry and compare them with these accounts. Check your textbook to see if its account leaves you with the same general impression of the changes in the shoemaking industry as these excerpts do.

*New York's first Labor Day Parade, 1882.*

Photo courtesy of AFL-CIO



# Revitalizing the Study of Labor

Paul Cole

**H**ubert Humphrey, in one of his last appearances, told a labor gathering, "The history of the American labor movement needs to be taught in every school in this land. . . ." Humphrey's concern, echoed by many in the labor movement itself, was that the historic struggle of American workers to form unions and gain the right to bargain collectively has been generally ignored in the nation's elementary and secondary schools.

Many school systems, however, have recently given a new focus to the study of labor. Their reasoning has been that it is desirable to provide students with a knowledge of the real world of work and to make the study of labor part of expanded programs in career education. All citizens, whether viewed as labor, management, or taxpayers, have a need to understand the role of the labor movement in the American political and economic system.

The last decade has witnessed the growth and development of a

variety of labor studies curricula. States such as Michigan and Maine have instituted programs through their state education agencies. Cities such as Philadelphia and Akron have developed local programs. In other school districts, such as Lewiston-Porter Central School in Youngstown, New York, high-school elective courses have been added to the social studies program.

Most American students learn about the labor movement through the infusion of lessons or concepts into their courses in European history or American history, and there is some study of unions in economics classes. An increase in commercially available materials in the last few years has undoubtedly added to the amount of knowledge that students are learning about the labor movement and labor-management relations. Still, a survey of commercial materials dealing with the American economic system reveals a lack of attention to the role of the labor movement in our nation's history and economy.

The two basic approaches of teaching labor studies are, first, the development of elective courses, and, secondly, the infusion of labor topics into existing curricula. The infusion need not be limited to social studies or to the high-school level.

## The Independent Elective

Courses on labor studies can easily be developed to fit into existing elective programs at the secondary level. The most common is the one-semester course offered at the 12th-grade level. A number of districts, including the Newark, New Jersey system, have opted for this approach. The Lewiston-Porter course is a ten-week elective open to any high-school student. Some schools have five-week or six-week "mini-course" programs, where a labor studies elective could be added easily.

A comprehensive independent elective should include units on labor history; the organization and structure of the labor movement; labor law; the activities of the labor movement, including lobbying, use of the boycott and union label, and organizing; collective bargaining elections; education and training; collective bargaining; and labor's involvement in international affairs. In addition, students should have the opportunity to explore—through research papers, seminars, and debates—the many controversial issues confronting organized labor, such as the right to strike, "right-to-work" laws, technology's impact on labor, reverse discrimination, occupational safety and health, and others. Students should also be provided with career education information as part of the course.

A number of books on labor history are available, with Thomas Brooks' *Toil and Trouble* and Henry Pelling's *American Labor* both widely used. While Pelling's book ends in the early 1960s, it is still the best short history available on American labor. The AFL-CIO has "A Short History of American Labor," a reprint from the March 1981 AFL-CIO *American Federationist*, available from its Pamphlet Division. *The Workingman in American Life* by John Laslett (available from Houghton Mifflin)

---

*PAUL COLE is a social studies teacher at Lewiston-Porter Senior High School in Youngstown, New York. He is currently a Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, and a former member of the Board of Directors of the National Education Association.*



*President Franklin D. Roosevelt and AFL President William Green and Secretary-Treasurer George Meany with labor's poster for defense bonds. The photo is courtesy of AFL/CIO.*

contains twelve chapters of selected readings that trace the history of the labor movement, and a concluding chapter on problems facing the labor movement. Sound-film-strip series tracing the history of the labor movement are available commercially.

A labor law unit should include discussion of the Conspiracy Doctrine, the use of the injunction, child labor laws, the Sherman Act and the Clayton Act, the Norris-LaGuardia Act, the Wagner Act, the Taft-Hartley Act, and Landrum-Griffin. Contemporary public-sector labor laws should also be examined. Emphasis throughout the unit should be placed on the historic role played by the three branches of government relative to the efforts of workers to organize.

#### **Labor in Mainstream Courses**

The infusion of concepts about labor can begin in the earliest

grades. For example: the Akron, Ohio, program's *Handbook of Ideas for Involving and Integrating Labor in Career Education*, which was developed from a project sponsored by HEW's Office of Education, suggests instructional objectives for K-3 in which students learn to distinguish between those in authority and those who take orders, to accept the notion that people are paid for their work, and to understand that group membership influences a person's behavior pattern and degree of independence. They are also exposed to labor songs and folklore.

Akron students in grades 4-6 are taught the basic concept of unionism and the realization that some parents are members of unions. In grades 7-8, students learn a variety of terms associated with labor, are able to cite highpoints in the history of labor, and understand that a union generally is a democratic or-

ganization with elected representatives.

High school students in Akron are taught the structure of the labor movement and participate in simulations on collective bargaining and grievance processing, as well as exploring issues and careers in organized labor.

In Maryland, social studies teachers attending a workshop on labor curriculum underscored the need for infusing various elements of the subject into the new K-12 Maryland Social Studies Curriculum Framework. Under the broadly stated curriculum goals within the Framework, teachers would incorporate some basic learning objectives relating to labor. An example of such infusion could be materials and skills related to the curriculum goal of the Framework which asks that "students demonstrate an understanding of commitment to the rules of law." The

infusion objective, or sub-goal, of the Framework goal could be that "students understand how the rule of law has related to the labor movement from the early days of repression and restriction to current freedom under the law to organize, to bargain collectively, and to redress grievances."

Into the Framework goal of "[demonstrating] respect for majority rule and the rights of the minority," an infusion objective could be to "understand that the structure of organized labor rests on the rule of the majority as well as the rights of the minority within the democratic process, as these factors relate to organizing, choice of leadership, acceptance of contracts, etc."

*California!*, one of several fourth-grade history texts approved by the State Board of Education, has a chapter entitled "Workers Seek a Fair Share," which explores the history of the labor movement in California up to and including the role of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers.

Teachers can find some excellent suggestions for infusing labor studies into the fields of English, art, film, history, law, music, and philosophy by referring to a text compiled for a project by the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations at the University of Houston. It is entitled *The Working Americans and the Humanities*, and it was edited by Mary Schifflett and Susan Midtgaard.

#### **Curriculum Materials**

There are many materials now available to classroom teachers who wish to infuse aspects of labor studies into their existing courses:

- The newest and most comprehensive guide for teachers is *Working in America: A History of the U.S. Labor Movement*, published recently by the American Federation of Teachers and available for four dollars. The series provides a five-part chronological history of the labor movement and includes five wall posters depicting events from the five periods covered. In addition, the series includes a glossary of labor terms, an annotated

bibliography, a listing of records of labor songs, a section of films on labor, and a partial reading list from *The Working Americans and the Humanities*, mentioned above. The guide also contains some suggested classroom activities.

- The AFL-CIO Department of Education has recently published *How Schools Are Teaching About Labor: A Collection of Guidelines and Lesson Plans*. This collection of existing school-district programs includes eight different approaches, with guides and lessons offering a variety of materials, sources, and teaching strategies. Most of the materials are lesson plans organized on a daily and/or unit basis. Some, either wholly or in part, concentrate on historical background and source materials, giving teachers the flexibility to infuse understanding of the subject into the study of an era or into a conceptual framework.

- A number of state education departments have materials for teachers. Under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the New York State Education Department has developed a three-part series entitled *Working in America*. The guides contain many excellent lessons and classroom exercises on labor and work.

- The United Federation of Teachers in New York City has prepared a comprehensive and easy-to-use notebook of source materials. The publication, *Organized Labor*, contains a series of 46 "documents," each followed by questions for inquiry and discussion and suggested topics for independent study. It also contains a glossary and five wall posters.

- The Philadelphia School District has produced a curriculum guide entitled *Labor Unions: Progress and Promise*. It contains 17 specific lessons, a bibliography, a film list, and a section on community resources.

- Frequently overlooked as sources of classroom materials for labor studies are the Industrial Relations Schools and Labor Education Centers of many universities.

They produce a variety of pamphlets and materials which are suitable for high school students and as teacher reference materials.

- Perhaps the best single source of materials is the AFL-CIO. Its Education Department has a kit of materials which is sent to teachers free of charge. It contains many useful pamphlets and other materials which can be ordered in bulk at reasonable prices. Included in the kit is a publication listing films which can be rented from the AFL-CIO Film Division for only five or ten dollars. This is the largest labor film library in the United States.

- The last ten years have seen a significant increase in the number of commercial materials available from the publishers. A large number of sound filmstrips, as well as simulation games, can be found in the catalogs. One of the most comprehensive and balanced treatments of American labor history is *The American Labor Movement: A Fight for Human Dignity*, from Educational Enrichment Materials. The six sound filmstrips trace the history of American workers from colonial times to the mid-1970s.

- "Settle or Strike," a simulation game available from the Communications Workers of America, is an effective teaching tool to assist students in understanding the dynamics of the collective bargaining process.

#### **Where to Write**

AFL-CIO  
Education Department  
815 16th Street, N.W., Room 407  
Washington, D.C. 20006

American Federation of Teachers,  
Editorial Department  
11 Dupont Circle, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

New York State United Teachers  
80 Wolf Road  
Albany, New York 12205

Communications Workers of  
America  
1925 K Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006 □

# Document of the Month

Edited by Mary Alexander and Marilyn Childress  
Education Specialists, National Archives

As a regular feature of Social Education, the "Document of the Month" is intended to provide teachers and students with the chance to work with primary source materials from the holdings of the National Archives. As the repository for the permanently valuable records of the Federal Government, the National Archives is an especially rich resource for social studies classes.

The documents presented here cover a broad range of topics, including family history, settlement of the West, and Black history. Suggested teaching strategies that accompany the documents emphasize such skills as drawing inferences, using maps, and developing interpretations of historical evidence. You are free to reproduce the documents presented here in whatever quantities you wish.

In addition to this feature, the Education Division staff also develops supplemental teaching units for use by secondary social studies classes. Each packet includes from 40 to 50 facsimiles of documents from the National Archives and a teacher's guide describing suggested class activities. These units include: World War I—The Home Front, World War II—The Home Front, The Great Depression and New Deal, and The Civil War: Soldiers and Civilians. Information on ordering these packets is available from the Education Division.

If you would like to suggest topics for future columns, or to propose different approaches for working with documents in the classroom, please write: Academic and Curricular Development, Education Division, (NEE) National Archives and Records Service (GSA), Washington, D.C. 20408.

## Three Photographs of Children at Work, Circa 1908

The growth of industry after the Civil War increased the demand for workers and pulled more and more children into the labor force. In the twenty years between the census reports of 1890 and 1910, the number of working children between the ages of 10 and 15 rose from 1.5 million to 2 million. By 1910, children made up 18.4 percent of the total labor force.

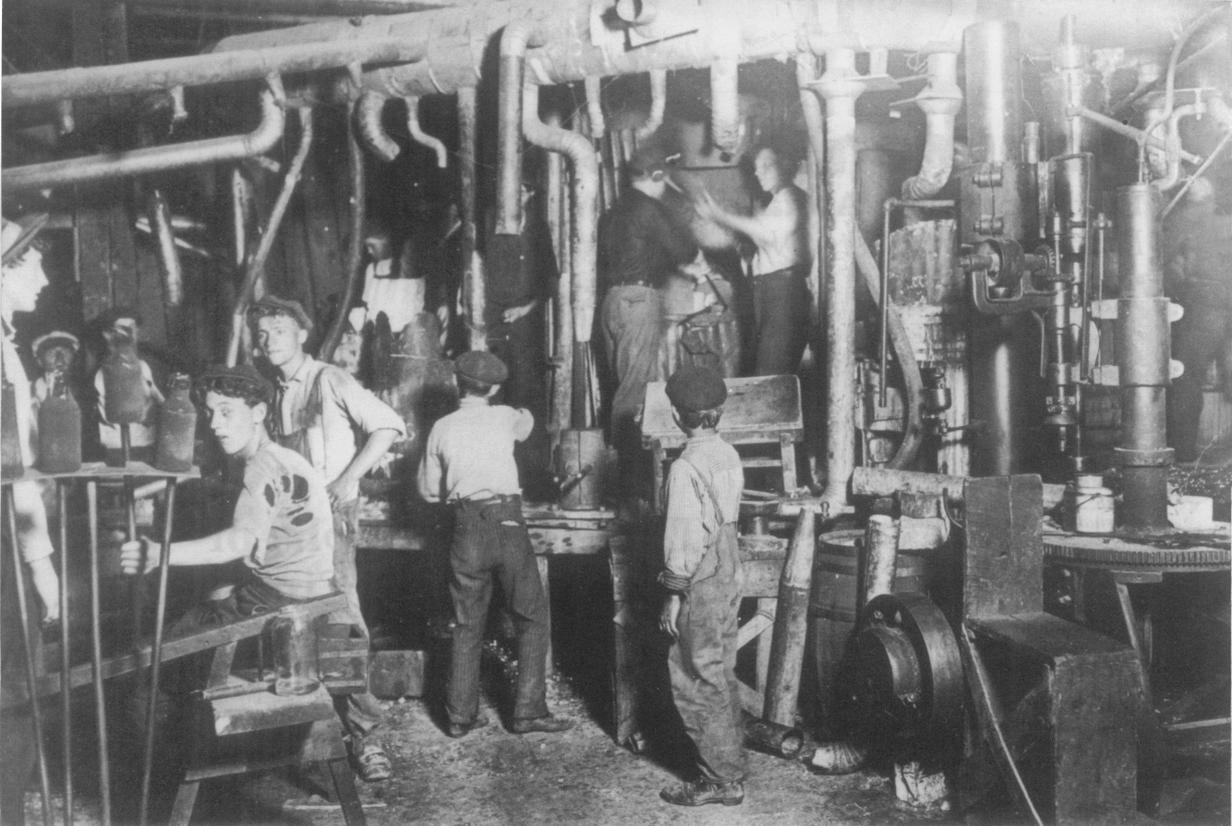
In the National Child Labor Committee, a public interest group that started in New York City in 1904, opposition to child labor found a strong voice. The NCLC began its investigations with child labor conditions in coal mines, capitalizing on the public concern raised during the nationwide coal miners strike of 1902. Later NCLC investigations centered upon the glassmaking industry, textile mills—especially in the South—and the canning industry.

Eyewitness accounts of the kind of working conditions of child laborers that the NCLC was investigating and publicizing at the beginning of the twentieth century appear in *Children and Youth in America*, Volume II, Robert H. Bremner, editor (Harvard University Press, 1971). One such account, taken from John Spargo's *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (New York, 1906), describes conditions in a glass factory:

I shall never forget my first visit to a glass factory at night . . . the boys employed, about forty in number, at least ten of whom were less than twelve years of age. It was a cheap bottle factory, and the proportion of boys to men was larger than is usual in the higher grades of manufacture. The hours of labor for the "night shift" were from 5:30 pm to 3:30 am. . . . Then began the work of the "carrying-in boys," sometimes called "carrier pigeons," [who] took the red-hot bottles from the benches, three or four at a time, upon big asbestos shovels to the annealing oven. . . . The work of these "carrying-in boys," several of whom were less than twelve years old, was by far the hardest of all. They were kept on a slow run all the time from the benches to the annealing oven . . . was one hundred feet, and the boys made seventy-two trips per hour, making the distance traveled in eight hours nearly twenty-two miles. Over half of this distance the boys were carrying their hot loads to the oven. The pay of these boys varies from sixty cents to a dollar for eight hours' work.

Another account, taken from Al Priddy's *Through the Mill* (Norwood, Massachusetts, 1911), describes conditions in a cotton mill:

The mule-room atmosphere was kept at from eighty-five to ninety degrees of heat. The hardwood floor burned my bare feet. I had to gasp quick, short gasps to get air into my lungs at all. My face seemed swathed in continual fire.



National Archives 102-LH-120

#120 9:00 P.M. Indiana Glass Works (August, 1908). [Original caption]

... Oil and hot grease dripped down behind the mules, sometimes falling on my scalp or making yellow splotches on my overalls or feet. Under the excessive heat my body was like a soft sponge in the fingers of a giant; perspiration oozed from me until it seemed inevitable that I should melt away at last. To open a window was a great crime, as the cotton fiber was so sensitive to wind that it would spoil. . . . When the mill was working, the air in the mule-room was filled with a swirling, almost invisible cloud of lint, which settled on floor, machinery, and employees, as snow falls in winter. I breathed it down my nostrils ten and a half hours a day; it worked into my hair, and was gulped down my throat. This lint was laden with dust, dust of every conceivable sort, and not friendly at all to lungs.

In 1908 the NCLC hired Lewis W. Hine to investigate and to photograph the conditions of working

children. The three photos that appear here are typical of the scenes that Hine captured with his camera. These photographs, numbered 102-LH-90, 102-LH-120, and 102-LH-348, are now in Records of the Children's Bureau, Record Group 102. (See pp. 106, 108, 109.)

The results of the NCLC investigations did not build immediate or widespread public support. The most vocal opponents included southern mill owners, supporters of states rights, *laissez-faire* economists, and, most significant politically and morally, President Woodrow Wilson. Nevertheless, the diligent work of the members of the NCLC resulted in the establishment of the Children's Bureau (1912), a federal information clearinghouse, and, in 1916, in the passage of the Keating-Owen Bill. The resulting law established child la-

bor standards: a minimum age of 14 for workers in manufacturing and 16 for workers in mining, a maximum workday of 8 hours, prohibition of night work for workers less than 16, and documentary proof of age.

Today the Fair Labor Standards Act, passed in 1938, establishes minimum wages, overtime pay, and child labor standards for workers in the United States. The child labor provisions ensure children's educational opportunities and protect their health. With the establishment of strictly enforced compulsory state education laws, full-time work for children became a thing of the past. Part-time hours vary according to hazards in the workplace. The minimum age for children employed in agriculture is 12 years, and in industry it is 14 years.



National Archives 102-LH-348

#348 Spinners and doffers in Lancaster (S.C.) Cotton Mills. 12/1/1908. [Original caption]

### TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Display the photographs on the bulletin board before making assignments, and direct students to examine them closely. Remind students that Hine's photographs were used by the NCLC to arouse public interest in and concern for the plight of working children. As when they work with all documents, students should consider the point of view of the photographer as they draw conclusions from the photographs. Student assignments should directly reflect the evidence found in the photographs on pages 106, 108 and 109.

1. Direct students to select one child portrayed in the photographs. Read to them the two eyewitness accounts of working conditions at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ask students to complete one

of the following writing assignments from the perspective of the child laborer in the selected photograph:

- A diary entry that describes in detail why you are working.
- A letter to a friend that describes in detail your daily routine at your job.
- A diary entry that describes why you like or dislike your job.
- Your comments to the NCLC staff that is investigating conditions in your place of work.

2. Conduct a class discussion of the following question: What role should the government assume in protecting workers—

especially children—from the hazards of the workplace?

3. Make a survey of students who are employed, in order to collect such information about their jobs as wage rates, hours, and safety precautions. Ask working students the following questions:
- Did your employer advise you about hours or safety laws that protect you as a minor?
  - What procedures are required of you by the federal and state governments before you can work?
  - Do you think that government regulations for employed minors provide you adequate protection? or too much? or too little? Why?



National Archives 102-LH-90

#90 A Typical glass works boy, night shift. Said he was 16 years old. 1:00 A.M. Indiana, August, 1908. [Original caption]