

ABSTRACT

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PLACING LABOR HISTORY

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“Placing Labor History” provides a foundation for integrating place-based history into the field of labor history. Through a close examination of places and spaces relating to the history of labor in the United States, this project examines how actors in labor history have used places and public spaces to challenge social, cultural, and political norms. It also illustrates how spaces actively shaped key events in labor history and how the public nature of certain spaces enabled different actors to participate in labor struggles. Finally, it explores how a place-based approach can be instrumental in facilitating the public commemoration of oppositional history.

PLACING LABOR HISTORY

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Introduction: Rooting the History of Labor

The study of labor history in the United States has a long history in and of itself. The field's origins date to the early twentieth century, when historian John R. Commons helped to initiate the historical exploration of industrial relations and union organizing at the University of Wisconsin. Viewing this history as an offshoot of political and economic history, the Commons School, as it became known, dominated the study and interpretation of labor history for much of the early twentieth century. By the mid-century, Marxist historians, including Philip Foner, Eric Hobsbawm, and E. P. Thompson, were challenging the institutional focus of the Commons School and initiating a new phase of examining this history from below—interpreting the history of labor from the viewpoint of the workers and their communities. Influenced by this emphasis on grassroots history as well as the social turn of the late 1960s and 1970s, “new” labor history broadened the field from focusing on institutions to exploring all facets of working-class life. In the United States, David Montgomery and Herbert Gutman, leaders of this turn, also pioneered the infusion of cultural history into labor history. The evolution of the field continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s as labor historians, influenced by the Birmingham School and the writings of Michel Foucault, began to use cultural theory as a lens through which to explore various aspects of labor and working-class history.¹

While labor history has become increasingly inclusive in its examination of workers and their communities—including perspectives of the rank-and-file as well

¹ Thomas A. Krueger, “American Labor Historiography, Old and New,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Spring, 1971): 277-285 (277). Richard Ely also had a profound effect on the early development of the field.

as labor and union leaders—it has rarely examined the *places* and *spaces* where labor and labor activism occurred. When labor historians have considered place, they have done so largely in exploration of poor working conditions (e.g. poorly ventilated mines, cramped ship bunks, factories that violate safety conditions). Yet, examining the physical sites where labor happened and where organizing took place can broaden the field even further by enabling a greater understanding of the intersections among the social and cultural groups that constituted the working class. It also challenges contemporary understandings of the participants and leaders of labor activism, and facilitates new forms of labor history commemoration in the public realm.

“Placing Labor History” provides a foundation for integrating place-based history into the field of labor history. Through a close exploration of different places and spaces of labor, the goal of this project is threefold: to illustrate how historical actors used places and public spaces to challenge social, cultural, and political norms; to reveal how spaces and places actively shaped key events in labor history and how the public nature of certain spaces enabled different actors—even those disconnected from the actual acts of labor—to participate in labor struggles; and to demonstrate how a place-based approach to labor history assists in rendering the invisible past visible by stimulating historical memory and fostering tangible commemoration of the oppositional history of labor in the United States in the public realm. Through several case studies, “Placing Labor History” provides a framework that can broaden the study of labor history as well as supply examples of how to incorporate labor history into public history in ways that would serve to preserve public memory.

Place-Based History, Labor History, and Historic Preservation

In a series of editorials in the *New York Times* during the winter of 1975, urban sociologist Herbert Gans argued that preservationists ought to direct their attention to the protection of common buildings rather than solely focusing on examples of high architecture or buildings associated with the rich and powerful. He evoked the public-private debate by arguing, “when preservation becomes a public act, supported with public funds, it must attend to everyone’s past.” Gans was especially interested in vernacular architecture, sites in which significance is rooted in social structures and use rather than architectural type—buildings like factories, tenements, and working-class saloons that formed the core of working-class life and culture.²

Although the effort may not have been a part of mainstream historic preservation in the United States, some preservationists had already begun to turn towards protecting and interpreting sites of labor and working-class history at the time when Gans wrote his editorials. In 1974 the house of Samuel Gompers, co-founder and first president of the American Federation of Labor, was designated as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). Individual sites of labor such as the Highland Park Ford Plant in Michigan and Sloss Furnace in Alabama also received NHL designation in 1978 and 1981, respectively. Key areas related to the history of industrialization even became National Parks; Lowell, Massachusetts, for instance,

² Quoted in Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT Press, 1995), 3-4.

received this designation in 1978. In the early 1990s, the National Park Service commissioned a Labor History Theme Study to assist in the process of identifying sites of labor history for designation as National Historic Landmarks. A few years later, in 1996, Congress approved the creation of Rivers of Steel, a National Heritage Area devoted to the history of Big Steel in Pennsylvania. Other sites relating to the long history of labor activism have also received official recognition. In 2011, The Forty Acres, the headquarters of the United Farm Workers, became a National Historic Landmark—a notable feat, for the site did not meet the fifty-year requirement of the National Historic Landmarks Program.³

The official recognition of sites of labor reflects a shift in historic preservation towards protecting and commemorating sites relating to the histories of marginalized or underrepresented groups. The history of labor is closely tied to the social histories of race, gender, and ethnicity in the United States, histories that only started to become incorporated into the narrative of the nation's past in the 1970s. As academic historians have done extensive work to broaden the social perspective of American history, preservationists and public historians have ensured that this social inclusivity was reflected in the public realm. Preservationist John Kuo Wei Tchen argues, "Gaining public recognition for historic sites helps make invisible communities visible; it also helps educate other Americans about them." Official recognition of

³ For further information on the designation of these and other National Historic Landmarks, see the National Historic Landmark website (<http://www.nps.gov/nhl/>); for information on Rivers of Steel see <http://www.riversofsteel.com/>; and to access a working draft of the Labor History Theme Study see <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/learn/themes/Labor.pdf>.

sites not only aids in protecting places, but also publicly acknowledges the significance of the cultural heritage of the groups that occupied these places.⁴

The concept of cultural heritage has become increasingly important in historic preservation as preservationists have turned their attention towards protecting sites relating to communities of racial and ethnic minorities as well as those of economically and politically marginalized groups. Heritage is an assortment of tangible things and intangible practices that create a record of the past. For instance, included in ethnic heritage are the cultural things and practices that immigrants or migrants bring with them to new places and the things and traditions that they create by adapting their practices to new cultural and social conditions. Dell Upton divides these into the categories of “architecture of memory” (things and practices that people bring with them) and “landscapes of experience” (the cultures of ethnic groups in the United States). Ethnic heritage is particularly important in labor history in the United States because these two histories are inextricably intertwined.⁵

Preservationists who have practiced what Herbert Gans preached—directing their efforts toward protecting sites that represent a cross-section of Americans rather than continuing to focus on sites of the economic and political elite—have pushed historic preservation in the direction that it ought to move. Incorporating a greater diversity of perspectives not only enables preservationists to ensure that their efforts are relevant to a broader section of the public, but also ensures that historic preservation remains a dynamic movement rather than a static and culturally

⁴ Quoted in Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 83.

⁵ *Ibid.*

antiquated (and irrelevant) endeavor. At the same time, this turn towards greater social inclusivity poses unique difficulties for preservationists. Many sites relating to marginalized communities like the working class lack the qualities traditionally deemed necessary for historical recognition. Members of these communities frequently relocated from one place to another in search of work and greater economic opportunity. As a result, places of the working class have lost tangible aspects from their identified periods of significance. As such, many working-class sites have lost physical vestiges of historical association, in addition to lacking the architectural distinction and physical durability that mark places of the elite. Often constructed from poorer quality material or adapted for multiple uses, working-class buildings do not fit neatly into the categories of integrity as established in the National Register or National Historic Landmarks Program.⁶ Yet, preservationists have recently developed new conceptual understandings of place that will help in identifying and preserving historical sites of the working class.

Perhaps the most significant tool that preservationists have to protect and preserve sites of labor is the National Park Service's Labor History Theme Study. This document not only provides a historical context of labor in the United States, but also identifies the types of sites that deserve recognition. The significance of many of these sites is obvious; many possess architectural significance and several are associated with important historical figures or events in labor history. While "Placing Labor History" will highlight some of these sites—places like Ybor City outside of

⁶ Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story*, 17, 104-05. Preservationists have reconciled this issue to a degree by recognizing the significance of social value along with architectural and historical value, discussed in Chapter 2.

Tampa, Florida, and the Ford Company Highland Park Plant in Michigan—it will also highlight sites that, although historically significant, lack the kind of integrity often required for historical designation. Furthermore, it identifies the means by which preservationists can argue for their protection.

While preservationists grapple with issues of reconciling the standards of the practice with the realities of preserving places representing the histories of marginalized groups, historians should follow their lead in using place to understand the historical nuances of these groups by adopting a place-based historical approach. Place-based history roots the study and interpretation of the past in physical places and spaces; it is steeped in the understanding that places and spaces are critical for telling history in ways that suit the demands of the study and practice of history and historic preservation. While places cannot speak for themselves, people are easily able to speak about them and, through their stories, illustrate just why they are important. Kaufman argues that places are critical in sustaining historical memory because the stories from individual as well as collective pasts often “live” in particular places. Places can spark historical recollection and therefore can be catalysts for oral historians to use to generate discussions of the past. It then becomes the role of preservationists to gather these explanations and to parse the various meanings embedded within a place in determining the significance of a site and its association with historical events or movements. Historical places also provide a means for connecting disparate people by generating discussions that cut across social, cultural, and economic barriers.⁷ This interpretation of the significance of

⁷ Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story*, 3, 49.

place is particularly important for labor historians because this history transects almost all social groups, connecting this history to the histories of racial discrimination, gender inequality, immigration, struggles for economic equal opportunity, and political movements in the United States. By exploring the places of labor, new perspectives on and stories of these struggles can be brought to light, and new connections can be drawn between them.

By adopting a place-based approach to labor history, historians can uncover the layers of history within a site by understanding its past uses and how those functions changed over time. This approach also allows historians to uncover the intersections among different groups—groups that may not have lived or socialized together but often *labored* together in shared work spaces. Place-based history would also help to provide recognition of spaces that have lost a physical connection to the past, either because they are situated in remote areas (e.g. agricultural fields) or have had their histories erased (e.g. transient labor communities).⁸ By connecting the study of labor history with the practice of preserving these sites, historians and historical preservationists can ensure that the physical vestiges of this history remain visible components of the national landscape and that, even with the absence of a structural fabric, labor history remains a vital part of the national historical narrative.

Through specific case studies, this project explores the various ways in which a place-based approach can provide new insight into the complexities of labor history in the United States. Chapter I examines the ways in which the spaces of labor and labor activism both broaden the understanding of the successes and failures of labor

⁸ Ibid, 87.

organization and illustrate the intersections among the different groups of the socially and culturally heterogeneous working class. This chapter also begins the exploration of how workers used space, particularly semi-private space, to advance unionism. Chapter II broadens this exploration by investigating how workers used public spaces to challenge workplace power structures and advance the cause of organized labor. Through the manipulation of public space, workers were able to subvert managements' efforts to impede collectivization to varying degrees of success. In Chapter III, the focus shifts from examining workers' actions to exploring how place-based history can assist in rendering aspects of labor history that have become invisible in the public realm visible again, and how public historians can commemorate this past in both urban and rural areas. The project concludes with a series of recommendations for beginning the process of incorporating place-based history into the field of labor history.

Chapter 1: Uncovering Layers of History

The ability to engage in the creative act of labor is what makes us human; it has provided both culture and history—it is, in Marxist language, our species being.⁹ Whether Marxists or not, few can dispute the fact that the act of laboring is something that an overwhelming majority of humanity shares in common. In the United States, after the capitalist revolution of the late eighteenth century, the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, and the end of chattel slavery in 1865, most types of labor have been in the form of wage-work. Although artisans, small business owners, and independent farmers did not disappear from the economic landscape, technological advances and consolidation led to the dominance of working for wages (or at least the promise of wages) by the end of the nineteenth century. Understanding the implications of wage work and the ways in which wage earners developed a collective class identity separate from those of farmers, merchants, and employers, became a focal point of the Commons School's investigation of labor history.¹⁰ Even when labor historians shifted to exploring the experiences of the workers themselves and the development of working-class communities, much of the emphasis remained on understanding issues and concepts relating to identity—cultural, racial, ethnic, and class.

The work that labor historians have done to parse the various identities embedded within the working-class, and how these have shifted over time, provides a

⁹ For further information on Marx's concept of species being see the discussion of the four moments of alienation that capitalism engenders in Karl Marx, *The Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Dirk J. Struik, ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1964, 1988), 106-119.

¹⁰ Krueger, "American Labor Historiography, Old and New," 277.

strong foundation for examining how physical spaces contributed to both forming workers' identities and shaping their perspectives on their communities and their labor. Sites of working-class history contain multiple layers of meaning. Various groups occupied these sites, often at overlapping times, and the places came to signify different things to different groups. By widening the study of labor history to include working-class communities, labor historians began to broaden the historical understanding of what constitutes a site of labor, an understanding that preservationists have continued to expand through the concept of landscape history.

According to preservationist Dolores Hayden, places or landscapes are spaces created specifically for productive purposes, meaning that they are where labor has happened, where things have been produced. Over time, various historical actors participated in this production and therefore helped to change the character of the landscape itself. An initial phase of this physical alteration of the land consisted of constructing an infrastructure to support production (factories, warehouses, roads, bridges); sites that supported the people (schools, churches, stores, houses) who came to reside in the space surrounding the site of production soon followed, all of which effectively turned a large space into a specific *place*. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains, "When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place." Place, therefore, is embedded with meaning: it "is a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell." Although meaningful, places are not open and accessible to all. In the industrial urban landscape, social, political, and economic factors often limited freedom of access, restricting patterns of ownership, use, and

movement. When confronted with this reality, historical actors responded by challenging this inequality, which turned industrial landscapes into contested terrains in which different groups pressed for social, economic, and political restructuring.¹¹ While this conceptualization of space addresses circumstances unique to industrial areas of urban municipalities, it is a concept that can also be applied to private, company-owned towns. For, even in these constructed and highly controlled spaces, workers, their families, and organizers still used spaces to challenge political norms as well as economic and power structures.

The various social groups that moved in and out of the productive spaces viewed these areas in different ways—perspectives that were shaped by their cultural frames as well as their personal experiences. Exploring the places of production and working-class life, therefore, enables a closer investigation of the perspectives of all groups that used or occupied these spaces. It also provides particular insight into how workers' shared interactions helped in the creation and alteration of identities. Examining these interactions as well as workers' and managers' use of space in industrial communities also sheds light on the complex difficulties that labor organizers faced. Thus, a place-based perspective provides a nuanced interpretation of the identities embedded within the various social and cultural groups of the working class and a deeper understanding of the long and complicated history of the labor movement. This type of examination can occur at sites traditionally recognized as places of labor, and can apply to sites not traditionally related to labor history. As

¹¹ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 100; Andrew Hurley, *Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 39-40; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 12, 73.

such, place-based history has the potential to widen the historical perspective on what places are connected to labor history to an even greater extent.

The Highland Park Ford Plant

Places that are almost universally recognized as sites of labor are the factories, mills, and plants of the manufacturing industry. In the industrial “rust belt” of the upper Midwest, automobile plants became a ubiquitous element of the manufacturing sector during the twentieth century. Of the many automobile factories in this area, the Ford Motor Company plants in Michigan played a particularly important role in the industrial, economic, and social history of the region. Examining the Ford plants, such as the Highland Park Ford Plant, facilitates a more nuanced understanding of how workers in a highly supervised productive space both reacted to unfavorable working conditions while also using these circumstances to their own advantage.

Located at 91 Manchester Avenue in Highland Park, just outside of Detroit, the Highland Park Plant became the center of the Ford Motor Company’s operations in 1910. Notable industrial architect Albert Kahn designed the complex, which originally consisted of a four story masonry factory, another four story masonry administrative building, and a massive power plant complete with five smokestacks. For almost two decades, the Highland Park Plant was the premier Ford facility, until the River Rouge Plant surpassed it in size and scope in 1927.¹²

While the Highland Park Plant is notable for its production of Model T cars, it is even more significant for revolutionizing the process of mass production, for it was

¹² “Highland Park Ford Company Plant National Historic Landmark Nomination Form” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1975): 2-3.

here that Henry Ford first implemented the modern assembly line. As a system in which workers constantly performed the same repetitive task without participating in the construction of a vehicle from start to finish, the assembly line epitomized the alienation of labor in the industrial economy. While it streamlined the production process, it also led to extreme worker dissatisfaction that often resulted in a massive turnover rate. The continual hemorrhaging of workers led Ford to implement the Five Dollar a Day plan in 1914, in which all employees would be eligible to earn five dollars per diem—a salary that greatly surpassed most wages for industrial workers—and a reduced workday (from nine to eight hours). Ford instituted the plan not as a benevolent gesture, but rather because he saw it as making good business sense. As a vehement anti-union industrialist, Ford designed it to secure workers' loyalty to the company and dissuade workers from organizing.¹³

For its duration, the Five Dollar a Day plan had clear social implications, for to be considered eligible for the plan, workers had to demonstrate that they were living as virtuous Americans—implications that were particularly clear for Ford's many immigrant workers. Following Progressive-era sociological notions that environmental factors were key in shaping workers' behaviors and attitudes, Ford instituted a Sociology Department to study as well as “remake the lives of their immigrant workers and win them over to thrift, efficiency, and company loyalty,” according to historian James R. Barrett. This was not restricted to the workplace—case workers invaded workers' neighborhoods and the private spaces of their homes

¹³ Walter Licht, “American Manufacture: Sites of Production and Conflict,” Labor History Theme Study Draft, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2003), 26.

and evaluated their living conditions, for the Five Dollar a Day deal was contingent on workers' adherence to middle-class norms at home as well as at work. "Thus," Barrett explains, "the company sought to show workers not only the 'right way to work' but also the right way to live." These expectations extended to cultural practices as well. When nine hundred workers missed work to celebrate the Orthodox Christmas on the Julian calendar, Ford fired them all, citing that if they wanted to live in America, they could only celebrate "American" holidays.¹⁴

Despite the excessive intrusion into the lives of workers, especially those of immigrant workers, it was the sheer monotony of the assembly line that caused workers to leave the plant. Most of the workers who left in search of better opportunities were white employees; many of the workers who stayed were African American. In fact, the Highland Park plant became a source and a symbol of economic opportunity for black workers, especially those who migrated from the Deep South during the World War I era. The Five Dollar a Day plan applied to all workers, regardless of race, which made Ford plants particular destinations for black migrants. Ford became the largest employer of black workers in the early decades of the twentieth century, not only in Detroit, where he employed black workers at a rate that exceeded other automobile companies like Chrysler and General Motors by three to four times, but also in the country as a whole. Ford even employed African Americans in important supervisory positions and paid black workers almost the same wages as white workers. Yet, Ford also participated in the racial discrimination

¹⁴ James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 3, *Discovering America: A Special Issue* (December 1992): 1003.

and prejudices of the Progressive era by employing black workers disproportionately in the hardest and lowest paying jobs, namely those in the metal foundry, such that, while these workers were earning the same as white workers, the ratio of black to white workers in the least desirable jobs was significantly higher.¹⁵

Other auto companies failed to employ black workers primarily out of compliance with white workers' expressed antipathy for an integrated shop floor. During the postwar years, Ford was able to work around white workers' racism by engaging in speed-up and stretch-out practices on his assembly lines and prohibiting workers from socializing or even speaking to each other on the job, a shift from "assimilation" to workplace "discipline."¹⁶ Racial tensions even worked in his favor, for in the competitive workplace atmosphere white workers felt the need not to be outpaced by black workers, even though they were all paid hourly rather than piece rates. While Ford had abandoned his original effort to prevent closed shops by ending the Five Dollar Plan, he was still able to thwart unionization in his plants partly because black workers recognized that they were able to acquire jobs more easily at Ford and that they paid better than other industrial positions, which made the recruitment of black workers into the labor movement particularly difficult in these plants.

Ford also used private spaces of the black community to wage his war against collectivization. One method he employed was establishing close ties to black

¹⁵ Christopher L. Foote, et al. "Arbitrating a Discriminatory Labor Market: Black Workers at the Ford Motor Company, 1918–1947," *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2003), 494-501.

¹⁶ Speed-up and stretch-out refers to situations in which manufacturing employers augmented workloads and stipulated that the work had to be completed at a faster rate. These decisions were made largely based on the recommendations of industrial efficiency experts who analyzed workers' activity levels. The practice was particularly acute in the textile industry.

churches in the communities surrounding the plants. By creating relationships with black ministers, Ford used “third places” to spread his anti-union message more effectively outside the factory gates. “Third places,” a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, refers to sites that provide opportunities for public socializing, unlike homes and workplaces. These are sites that “must provide not merely service but also a sense of place that nurtures community bonds,” according to Ned Kaufman.¹⁷ In the urban and industrial communities of the North, black churches provided important social and community roles, particularly in racially hostile cities.¹⁸ Only those ministers who expressed public disapproval of unionization were able to recommend men for jobs at the Ford Motor Company—job seekers without such recommendations were hard pressed to find employment with the company. As economist Christopher L. Foote observes, prior to World War II, ministers who had friendly relations with Ford often had the largest congregations and were thus often disinclined to let union organizers use their churches for organizing drives.¹⁹ This proved especially detrimental for labor organizing, for in hostile political environments, semi-private spaces like churches, community halls, and other sites that could accommodate larger crowds were important sites for unions to hold large meetings and rallies.

While Ford plants such as Highland Park became a destination for black participants in the Great Migration who sought greater economic opportunity, these

¹⁷ Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story*, 128.

¹⁸ James R. Grossman, “A Chance to Make Good, 1900-1929,” in *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*, Robin D. G. Kelley, Earl Lewis, eds. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 396-97.

¹⁹ Foote, “Arbitraging a Discriminatory Labor Market,” 527-28.

sites were significant for other migrating ethnic minorities as well, particularly Mexican and Mexican-American workers. Once again, of all the auto industrialists, Ford employed the highest percentage of Mexican and Mexican-American workers. During the 1920s, Ford worked with the Mexican government to select two hundred young men for training at the Henry Ford Service School located at Highland Park. The men apprenticed as mechanics on cars, trucks, and tractors as part of their training to become technicians at dealerships in Mexico and throughout Latin America. Immigrants who did not seek to return to Mexico also saw the plant as a major opportunity. Despite enduring acts of hostility that foremen and native-born, and even older immigrant, co-workers often directed towards recent immigrants, many Mexicans saw work in the auto industry, particularly at Ford plants, as a way to climb the economic ladder. According to historian Zaragosa Vargas, “To wear the silver Ford badge and short (‘white-walled’) haircut, which were the distinctive trademarks of the Ford autoworker, became the ambition of Mexicans in the climb for status.”²⁰

Sites of labor like Ford’s Highland Park were important for providing an integrated space during a period of entrenched ethnic and racial segregation in the early twentieth century, and therefore provide a way to explore the nuances of race relations within the history of labor. Although Ford plants were not an interracial utopia, they did provide a space for workers to be treated with a level of fairness relative to the historical context. Even though Ford integrated his workforce in order

²⁰ Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 51-52.

to maximize on production, this practice was not common in industrial America. Because of this practice, factories like Highland Park and other Ford plants became symbols of the potential for economic advancement in the United States, particularly for economically marginalized groups. As such, they became destinations for ethnic and racial groups that endured the economic limitations concomitant with prejudice and discrimination. Without comparable economic options, many minority workers in these plants tried to keep pace with the labor demands and, for a time at least, follow the Ford line of opposing unionism.

The Embassy Auditorium

In place-based history the site of labor is the focus, thus providing a center point from which to examine the constellations of groups employed at a single location. Other sites, such as the “third places” that are seemingly unconnected from acts of labor and the labor movement, can serve the study of labor history in similar ways. One such example is the Embassy Auditorium in Los Angeles, a site that became a focus area for a project within historic preservationist Dolores Hayden’s large scale Power of Place initiative. Directed by Donna Graves, the Embassy Project sought to explore the deep histories of women, labor, and ethnicity, as well as the intersections between these groups, which are embedded in this site. Constructed at the corner of Ninth and Grand in 1914, the Embassy was a hotel, within which was an auditorium that could hold 1,500 people. The Embassy auditorium, as it was known, hosted community meetings and entertainment events as well as church anti-union services. This auditorium places the Embassy squarely in the history of progressive social and political movements, for the owners’ open rental policies enabled labor,

civil rights, and other social groups to use the space as a meeting spot from the 1930s through the 1950s, when reactionary politics, racial discrimination, and strong anti-union sentiments ran rampant in California, severely limiting progressive groups' options for large meeting spaces.²¹

The Embassy Project of the Power of Place focused on highlighting the history of three movement leaders who employed the auditorium to further their progressive causes during the 1930s and 1940s. The first figure was Rose Pessota, an organizer for the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) who came to Los Angeles in 1933 to recruit female dressmakers into the union. Conditions in the Los Angeles garment shops were among the worst in the nation; forty percent of workers earned less than five dollars a day, a salary that was well below the California minimum wage. The industry's low wages and other instances of poor treatment were flagrant violations of the California Industrial Recovery Act, which was passed to bring the state's garment industry in line with codes established by the National Recovery Act. In the fall of 1933, 2,000 dressmakers from eighty garment shops in Los Angeles walked off their jobs and onto picket lines to protest these conditions. The Los Angeles Garment Workers' Strike, as it came to be known, garnered support from the ILGWU, and Rose Pessota became a key leader among the Los Angeles dressmakers. Soon thereafter, the union granted them a charter and established Local 96.²²

²¹ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 190-92.

²² Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 83-89.

Although Pessota was an important leader, rank-and-file dressmakers, many of whom were Mexican and Mexican-American, led much of the effort to organize the strike. These leaders' efforts had a profound effect not only in the local textile industry, but also in their own community. Zaragosa Vargas claims, "The Los Angeles dressmakers' strike is credited with initiating industrial unionism among blue-collar Mexicans in this notoriously antiunion city." Spanish-speaking organizers spoke to workers in their neighborhoods—openly defying employers who threatened to report to immigration officials the names of workers who joined the union. This threat, however, had a strong effect on the workers, for recent deportation efforts made many women fearful of joining the local. Organizers of this grassroots movement responded by using Spanish-radio broadcasts and kin networks to spread word of the importance of the union.²³ As a place that allowed the ILGWU to stage rallies and hold union meetings, the Embassy Auditorium became a key facilitator for the unionizing dressmakers' efforts.

The next labor organizer the Embassy Project featured was Luisa Moreno, who immigrated to the United States from Guatemala in 1928. As a seasoned organizer with experience working with cigar workers and pecan shellers, Moreno came to Los Angeles to organize cannery women into the United Canning, Agriculture, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), using the Embassy auditorium as a venue to hold mass meetings. The third organizer was Josefina Fierra. As a Mexican-American woman, Fierra used the Embassy

²³ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 83-89. The almost month-long strike ended on November 6, 1933, with arbitrations in which the employers promised to uphold the codes but did not recognize the union. Unfortunately, the shop owners reneged on many of their promises. Eventually, however, the ILGWU local gained industrial recognition in 1935.

Auditorium to promote various causes relevant to the Mexican community in Los Angeles during the 1940s. These causes included protesting racism in Los Angeles schools and laws that prohibited Mexican-American children from using public swimming pools, as well as fighting against police brutality against people of Mexican descent. As a student of Moreno, Fierra shared the same social views and political sympathies as her mentor. Both maintained ties to the Left during the era of the Popular Front (1934-1939) and suffered during the anticommunist crusades of the second red scare; both faced deportation because of their political backgrounds.²⁴

In 1991, the Embassy Project turned its focus on this auditorium in order to uncover the layers of history pertaining to immigration, women, and labor in Los Angeles. The emphasis was on how historical actors used the structure's space rather than focusing on the structure's architectural design—the significance of this building is rooted in its function rather than its form. The project established its social history focus from the outset, beginning with a public workshop called “La Fuerza de Union,” intended to gather published and unpublished information relating to the lives of these three women. Project organizers garnered the support of community members, historians, and activists who examined the activists' use of the Embassy Auditorium space. Their purpose was not only to provide histories of these individuals, but also to shed greater light on the history of Chicanas in Los Angeles, women in the labor movement, issues of unemployment during the Great Depression,

²⁴ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 195-97.

and discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles during the mid-twentieth century.²⁵

Although the Embassy Auditorium was used for many purposes, the site provides an entryway into examining these issues precisely because it was a site that *facilitated* social and political activism. As a large auditorium, the Embassy provided ample space to enable workers to gather as a collective body and promote labor solidarity. While this may not have been the intended purpose of the auditorium, the union members and organizers turned this space into a site of labor history, a place that became integral to the history of labor organization among a particular set of workers in a specific location. The auditorium illustrates the multiple layers of history within a site or space reflecting the various uses to which it had been put over the years. As a third space of the labor and radical communities of Los Angeles, the Embassy Auditorium illustrates the interconnections between social history, labor history, and architectural history.

Ethnic Halls

By examining places and spaces through the lens of the history of labor activism, scholars can broaden the understanding of the range of places where labor activism occurred, and the roles of key players who performed there. Other sites that enabled labor organizers to operate in hostile social and political climates were ethnic halls, especially those of immigrant groups that had a history of labor activism. One early example of the importance of ethnic halls and the intersection of those spaces with labor activism occurred in the mining areas of the Mesabi Range in Minnesota.

²⁵ Ibid, 198-200.

Controlled entirely by the Oliver Iron Mining Company, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel, the “Oliver,” as it was known, operated mines on the Mesabi and Vermillion ranges in addition to owning several railroads and a fleet of lake ships. The Oliver also established several company-owned towns, reaching a total population of 50,000 by 1910. The increased demand for miners drew workers emigrating from Scandinavia, Slovakia, Finland, and Italy to the iron range, and immigrant families made these industrial communities—company-owned as well as independent cities—their homes.²⁶

The workers in these towns developed a strong class consciousness that often reflected political identities rooted in immigrant workers’ ethnic heritage. “Every town of any size,” historian Donald G. Sofchalk notes, “had a workers’ hall where miners and their families danced, attended plays, listened to lectures (on temperance and socialism), and gathered for political rallies.” The Finns in particular developed a radical working-class political outlook that drew in part from their ethnic heritage, and that was also shaped by the conditions in the iron mines. To promote political and labor agendas, the Finns relied on their foreign language associations as well as their ethnic halls—places that provided space to engage in the practice of cultural heritage, a heritage that included a strong tradition of labor activism. In 1905, the Finns combined their ethnic heritage and political sympathies in establishing the Finnish Socialist Federation in Hibbing, Minnesota, to preserve their ethnic traditions while also remaining connected to political sympathizers in their new home. These halls

²⁶ Donald G. Sofchalk, “Organized Labor and the Iron Ore Miners of Northern Minnesota, 1907-1936,” *Journal of Labor History*, 217-219.

were first put to use in labor activism during a strike in 1907, during which they served as strike headquarters.²⁷

Finnish immigrants continued to use their ethnic halls to promote labor activism in other industrial sectors such as the steel industry. During the early years of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee (SWOC) in the mid-1930s, activists attempted to organize the steel workers of Sparrow's Point, a division of Bethlehem Steel just outside the city of Baltimore, Maryland. Bethlehem Steel ardently fought unionization during the period leading up to World War II and prohibited organizing activity in the mills and within the adjacent company town of Sparrow's Point. With the high level of scrutiny focused on labor activism during the formative years of the CIO, many of the key organizers of the Sparrow's Point plant were foreign-born workers who lived in ethnic enclaves within neighborhoods like that of Highlandtown, a predominantly Eastern European and Finnish area in southeastern Baltimore City. These organizers concentrated on recruiting workers within their ethnic groups, "communicating with them in their native language with references to shared cultural experiences," notes historian Linda Zeidman.²⁸

Much like the dressmakers in Los Angeles and the autoworkers in Detroit, the steelworkers of Highlandtown faced strong opposition from local business, civic, and religious leaders, which made it difficult to find spaces in which to hold union meetings and rallies. They were, however, able to tap into the strong support for labor organization among the Finnish residents. Even though foreign-born workers,

²⁷ Sofchalk, "Organized Labor and the Iron Ore Miners of Northern Minnesota," 222-23.

²⁸ Linda Zeidman, "Sparrow's Point, Dundalk, Highlandtown, Old West Baltimore: Hole of Gold Dust and the Union Card," in *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History*, Elizabeth Fee, et al., eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 187.

including the Finns of Highlandtown, represented only a small fraction of the Sparrow's Point workforce, their strong support of unionism made them important labor organizers in the steel mills. Similar to the Finnish miners in the upper Midwest, many Finns in Baltimore supported labor activism and allowed the fledgling SWOC to host union events at the Finnish Hall, located at the corner of Foster and Ponca Streets in Highlandtown. As the primary place for social, cultural, and political life in the Finnish neighborhood, the Hall served as an important third space in the community. Because this was a community space physically and culturally removed from the company-controlled spaces of Sparrow's Point, Finns were able to use it to challenge political and social norms. Perhaps the most notable taboo they broke was fostering labor solidarity that crossed racial lines. The Finns welcomed African American workers to union meetings at the Hall, creating an interracial space in a section of Baltimore City that was overwhelmingly white and antipathetic towards racial integration.²⁹ Black workers were integral to the steel industry of Sparrow's Point, a fact that made their support for unionization especially important. This interracial solidarity was not without difficulties, as Sirkka Holm, an activist and resident of Highlandtown during the CIO drives, notes:

We had black steelworkers come into the Hall, and as a result—we lived in an area that was quite racist at the time—quite a few windows were broken at the Finnish Hall. I think that the people in the neighborhood could have stood the Finns being radical, but the fact that they had blacks, that was really unforgivable... And the blacks, of course, didn't trust the whites either, because they had been burned before. But I think the blacks working together with the whites, with the working conditions, sharing the same problems, that was what brought unity to the union.³⁰

²⁹ Zeidman, "Sparrow's Point, Dundalk, Highlandtown, Old West Baltimore," 188.

³⁰ Quoted in Zeidman, "Sparrow's Point, Dundalk, Highlandtown, Old West Baltimore," 188.

Among a multi-racial workforce, including all races and ethnicities was necessary for the formation and survival of a union.³¹ If it were not for integrated organizing spaces like the Finnish Hall, it is questionable whether the CIO would have been able to organize Sparrow's Point and succeed in its long struggle to establish what would become the United Steel Workers of America.

Kake Cannery

In the mills of Sparrow's Point, workers were often segregated by race and ethnicity. This was largely because managers based hiring practices on racial perceptions. For instance, managers assigned Finnish workers to jobs in the hottest areas based on the assumption that their cultural heritage of saunas made them the most able to work in the positions. In other instances, work assignments were based on racial prejudice, for managers often relegated black workers to the hardest and lowest-paying jobs—a common practice in industrial America. In some industries, management used racially based work assignments to disrupt worker solidarity. In the racially mixed labor force in the shipping industry, ship owners tapped into ethnic and racial antagonisms to divide workers in the effort to thwart unionization. One highly effective tactic that employers often used was to give jobs that were traditionally the

³¹ While some union organizers worked across racial lines and fought against employers who tried to use race as a means of thwarting unions, others were not nearly as racially inclusive. Some unions organized African Americans into a separate local and others prevented African Americans from organizing altogether. This not only divided the working class, but it also created a situation in which black workers began serving as strikebreakers, which only exacerbated racial tensions. In Chicago during a building trade strike in 1900, one African American strikebreaker explained, "You don't let us into your unions and then you don't expect us to work; what shall we do—starve?" Quoted in George Leidenberger, *Chicago's Progressive Alliance: Labor and the Bid for Public Streetcars* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 105-106.

purview of a specific ethnicity to members of other groups in order to create social schisms and impede collectivization.³²

The Kake Cannery, a salmon-canning factory in Alaska, provides another illustration of how managers attempted to thwart unionization by stratifying a racially and ethnically heterogeneous workforce. The canning industry was seasonal in nature, and the workers came and went with each salmon season. Even though canning lacked the stability of other industries like automobile or steel manufacturing, work and working-class life in this industry was marked by employer control—which the managers at Kake manifested through enforced racial segregation.

The Sanborn Cutting Company constructed the first buildings for the new Kake canning operation in 1912. The company largely relied on foreign contract workers, mostly Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants, and to a lesser extent Korean, African American, and Mexican workers. Initially, Chinese workers filled the need for labor as the company increased its operations. Canning employers regarded the Chinese as experienced fish butchers and considered them to be a docile workforce that could be easily controlled. Chinese immigrants also worked in unskilled positions as well, which made them critical to every step of the canning process. The Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882 and 1904 directly affected the salmon canneries, however, by cutting the number of skilled butchers. With the absence of low-paid Chinese butchers, the wages of cannery workers rose, which had a corresponding effect on the costs of production. Japanese immigrants were the first to

³² Zeidman, “Sparrow’s Point, Dundalk, Highlandtown, Old West Baltimore,” 188; Linda Ziedman and Eric Hallengren, “Radicalism on the Waterfront: Seamen in the 1930s,” in *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History*, Elizabeth Fee, et al., eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 158, 163, 165.

replace the Chinese during the 1880s through the early 1900s. Filipinos represented the third wave of immigrants employed at Kake and other salmon canneries in the Pacific Northwest. More Filipinos entered the industry after the immigration restriction acts of 1921 and 1924 halted Japanese immigration.³³

According to historians Linda Cook and Karen Bretz, “The division of labor in the cannery was based on race, not ability.” Whites were employed in positions that had more responsibility (e.g. foremen and mechanics) based on racist notions that they were more “trustworthy,” and thus were also the highest paid. The Kake Cannery illustrates how employers divided workers along racial lines on and off the job, as the company established separate bunkhouses for Native Americans, whites, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos. The cultural separation that this sort of ethnic division engendered in some ways helped to keep ethnic tensions at a minimum, but, at the same time, also served to hinder collectivization. What employers at Kake failed to recognize, however, was that their enforced segregation did not, in fact, stop workers’ efforts to unionize, especially during the slack seasons. In fact, some workers created a union that, much like any other, sought to improve wages and working conditions. This union, however, was marked by ethnic homogeneity—a situation that workplace segregation helped to create and reinforce.³⁴

Cannery workers in the Pacific Northwest, particularly Filipinos, used their common ethnic heritage and shared work experiences to form the Cannery Workers’ and Farm Laborers’ Union Local 18257, which began in Seattle, Washington. It was

³³ Linda Cook and Karen Bretz, “Kake Cannery National Historic Landmark Nomination,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1997), 17-18.

³⁴ Cook and Bretz, “Kake Cannery National Historic Landmark Nomination,” 12, 16-18, 20.

the first Filipino-led union, established by “Alaskeros,” migrants who worked in Alaskan salmon canneries during the summer and labored in the farms and orchards of Washington, Oregon, and California during the rest of the year. As it had been for many Asians, Seattle was the point of entry for most of the Filipino migrants, and it served as a major port where workers were recruited and shipped out to the Alaskan canneries. With Virgil Duyungan serving as the initial president, the Cannery Workers’ and Farm Laborers’ Union Local 18257 received an AFL charter on June 19, 1933, the first of its kind. In 1937-38, the CWFLU opted to leave the AFL and join the more racially inclusive CIO. After a unanimous vote, they became Local 7 of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America.³⁵

The Cannery Workers’ Hall, which still stands in the Pioneer Square neighborhood in Seattle, served several important functions for its members and the local Filipino community. Besides being a “third place” for social events—the hall was popular for the annual dances held there—it also served as the headquarters for a union that had a reputation as the most militant Filipino union in the United States. Micah Ellison of the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project writes, “Despite a large Filipino population that was dispersed throughout both the urban and rural Pacific Coast, Local 7 was seen as the one place during the summer where Filipinos in America could get a job en masse outside of farm work.”³⁶ The Local 7 building is

³⁵ Crystal Fresco, “Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers’ Union 1933-39: Their Strength in Unity,” accessed June, 30, 2014, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/cwflu.htm>.

³⁶ Micah Ellison, “The Local 7/Local 37 Story: Filipino American Cannery Unionism in Seattle, 1940-1959,” accessed June 23, 2014, http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/local_7.htm; Crystal Fresco, “Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers’ Union 1933-39: Their Strength in Unity,” accessed June, 30, 2014, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/cwflu.htm>.

further evidence of workers' ability to challenge the cannery operators' anti-union tactic of mandating workplace segregation.

Conclusion

Each of these examples illustrates how the spaces of labor and labor organization contain multiple layers of history because of the various groups of actors that occupied them. Making the spaces of labor the focal point of historical inquiry enables historians to incorporate the social and cultural groups that made use of the spaces; as such, this approach generates a more inclusive understanding of labor and labor organization. For instance, during the SWOC organizing drives, white activists are largely credited for leading the efforts because they were the most public actors—foreign-born organizers often operated under the radar and in ethnically defined spaces well outside of the social and cultural mainstream. Even native-born black workers remained outside of the public view of organizing because patterns of racial exclusion often prohibited them from operating in clearly defined white spaces. Nevertheless, physical places of the black community in the neighborhoods of West Baltimore, especially churches, became important sites for labor organization. Like the Finnish Hall in Highlandtown and the Filipino cannery workers' hall in Seattle, the spaces of black churches in West Baltimore were physically removed and thus escaped the scrutiny of Bethlehem Steel management.³⁷

The availability of semi-public community “third” spaces could greatly help efforts to organize labor, just as their absence could serve as a significant impediment. While the conditions in a multi-industry city like Baltimore were such

³⁷ Zeidman, “Sparrow’s Point, Dundalk, Highlandtown, Old West Baltimore,” 188.

that black churches could support organizing efforts within one industry (steelwork) this was not the case in communities in Michigan that were entirely dominated by Ford plants. The power of Ford turned the spaces of black churches into bastions of anti-unionism. Labor in most sectors was not exclusively white, ethnic, or black, but rather a mixture of racial and ethnic groups. As such, semi-private spaces like the Finnish Ethnic Hall and the Embassy Theater permitted ethnically and racially heterogeneous groups to work together for the common cause of unionism—challenging anti-labor attitudes as well as de facto and de jure prohibitions on integrated spaces. How working-class communities were able to combine their use of space with the tools of their cultural heritages in order to promote labor organization is the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Shared Space and Solidarity

A key tenet of place-based history is that places are not just where events occur, but that they can actively shape events as well. As Tuan explains, physical places have the power to clarify “social roles and relations,” for “[p]eople know better who they are and how they ought to behave when the arena is humanly designed rather than nature’s raw stage.” Architecture has often been used as a social teaching tool. Style and form indicate a building’s use as well as its meaning in ways that are easily identifiable to community insiders as well as outsiders. Furthermore, size, placement, and styles of buildings correlate to social hierarchy; in residential structures architectural features serve as identifiers of the occupants’ level of power, prestige, and overall status in the community.³⁸

If places help to identify social roles, they can also serve to reify social hierarchies. For instance, in the company town of the Sparrow’s Point steel mills, houses were intended to enforce a social hierarchy. Houses were erected along lettered streets running east to west. A Street started at the waterfront with the town extending up to K Street. Not only did the houses become smaller as one moved down the economic ladder, but also they lacked the stylistic differentiation that marked the homes of management. Furthermore, the spaces separating homes decreased while the size of the blocks remained the same. As such, the social hierarchy was also spatially defined through gradations in population density. The letter of the street that a worker and his family lived on correlated to his position in the mill. According to historian Mark Reutter, “The demarcation of class was writ in

³⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 102 117.

paving stone and gravel in the street plan” and residents knew their place and that of their neighbors. Architecture and infrastructural elements stratified the community visually as well as socially by creating demarcations that corresponded to clearly understood social barriers. In Sparrow’s Point, workers and their families tended to socialize with those in their class bracket; if they moved up a street then they also moved up a level in society, a move that often meant the loss of previously established relationships.³⁹

Space and place also had profound effects on labor organization. Managers often prohibited union organizing or even expressions of union sympathies from company-owned and/or controlled spaces. Industrial leaders also recognized that the spaces that workers shared with each other could foster bonds of labor solidarity. They responded by socially separating employees while at work either by prohibiting socialization or segregating workers on the basis of race or ethnicity. Managers continued this effort off the job as well, often by constructing public and private spaces that kept workers physically apart. Sometimes, however, physical places, especially public spaces, enabled workers in cities, company towns, and even transient camps, to challenge the dominance of their managers. Places therefore also became tools that *aided* workers’ in their efforts to fight for labor reform.

Ybor City

In industries that were remote from towns and cities, racial segregation often applied to the workshop floor and the residential neighborhoods of towns that

³⁹ Mark Reutter, *Making Steel: Sparrow’s Point and the Rise and Ruin of American Industrial Might* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, 2004), 59.

companies constructed to attract and secure workers. Many company-owned towns had sections for white, black, and immigrant workers, and the quality of the housing correlated to a group's standing in the social and economic hierarchy. For example, in Sparrow's Point, the racial divide was marked by Humphrey's Creek, a natural boundary that, as was the case in many towns, demarcated white and black residential sections.⁴⁰ Enforced racial and ethnic divisions even occurred in occupations that were seasonal, evidenced by the circumstances at the Kake Cannery. These racial divisions in industrial communities, of course, mirrored the social circumstances in the rest of the country, as segregation became an entrenched feature of American life by the last decade of the nineteenth century. Yet, some industrial workers managed to circumvent this trend and created pluralist communities that retained a high degree of social cohesion. A key example of this type of community was Ybor City, a single-industry (but not company-owned) city that was the center of the cigar industry in Florida, located outside of Tampa.

During its first several decades in the late nineteenth century, Ybor City was a staunchly ethnic enclave. The predominance of "English spoken here" signs that hung in stores well into the 1930s indicated that *English* was the foreign language. The largest ethnic group in Ybor was Cuban. The initial Cubans had migrated to Ybor from Key West in the late nineteenth century. Immigrants directly from Cuba began to settle in the city shortly thereafter. After the 1890s, Spanish immigrants, especially

⁴⁰ Karen Olsen, *Wives of Steel: Voices of Women from the Sparrows Point Steelmaking Communities* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University State Press, 2005), 19, 21-22. The managers of Maryland Steel, which established the town and mills, chose to racially segregate their town based on assumptions of racial tensions in the South, even though these patterns did not characterize Baltimore at the time of the town's establishment, for the city would not institute residential segregation for another two decades.

from Asturias and Galicia, arrived in the city. By the turn of the century, Italian immigrants, mostly from Sicily, had also arrived. Other ethnic populations included a small group of Germans who dominated the field of cigar box art. Jewish and Chinese immigrants represented the smallest populations, and they primarily labored in mercantile and service industries.⁴¹

According to authors Gary Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, “Dominated by a craft mentality and possessing a full complement of artisan work styles and outlooks, the cigar trade created an industrial ethic based on individual craftsmanship much like the standards of the old-world artisan guilds.” During the early years of the industry, Spanish immigrants were at the top of this ladder, and they dominated the category of salaried worker (foremen, managers, skilled white-collar staff—clerks, accountants, and salesmen). The manufacturers were Spanish and they selected the managers, foremen, tobacco selectors, and packers. The rollers of the most expensive cigars were also Spanish; Cubans rolled less expensive cigars. Afro-Cubans, recent Italian immigrants, and African Americans were employed in the least-skilled positions: sweeping, hauling, portering, and door keeping. Many of the tobacco strippers, another undesirable position, were Italian women who had recently immigrated to the United States. What made this industry particularly unique was a strongly heterogeneous working environment. Mormino and Pozzetta explain, “No other industry permitted blacks, Latin Americans, European immigrants, and women to labor side-by-side at the same workbench.”⁴²

⁴¹ “Ybor City Historic District National Historic Landmark Nomination,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service), 32.

⁴² Gary Ross Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 100-101, 107.

The high percentage of Cubans in the work force infused the community of Ybor with Cuban cultural traditions. They also influenced the working experience on the shop floor by instituting the Cuban practice of hiring lectors to read to workers from a raised platform as they sat at long tables rolling cigars. The workers selected the reader, paid his/her fees, and chose the reading material. “The reader served as an important disseminator of worker information, international news, and radical ideologies,” as readings often focused on “proletarian themes of class struggle.” Radical philosophy, communist and anarchist periodicals, and political novels were common fare.⁴³

The tradition of the lector in cigar manufacturing had a profound influence on the workers’ ideas and views regarding labor organization, for the cigar industry in Tampa experienced numerous strikes during the decades from the 1880s through the 1930s, with major work stoppages occurring in 1899, 1901, 1910, 1920, and 1931. The industry’s ethnic and racial diversity was reflected in the labor struggles, which included workers from almost every social group and cut across lines of racial segregation. During the 1899 strike black and white workers established soup kitchens to feed families of the strikers. In 1900 the union La Sociedad de Tocedores de Tampa, commonly referred to as “La Resistencia,” counted a membership of 1,558 Cubans, 550 Spaniards, and 310 Italians. In opposition to the American Federation of Labor’s (AFL) emphasis on skilled, craft unionism, this union sought to organize all workers in the industry regardless of skill. It was a radical, syndicalist union akin to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). A massive strike to establish closed

⁴³ Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 102.

shops in Tampa that La Sociedad led united workers of various ethnic backgrounds during the early twentieth century. During the strike, a group of local business leaders abducted thirteen union leaders, put them on board a ship with a threat not to return on pain of death, and dropped them off on a stretch of deserted coastline in Honduras—an action that had devastating consequences. Despite sporadic revivals of organizing efforts, the final strike came in 1931, the failure of which hammered the final nail in the coffin of radical organization. It also altered conditions in the factories themselves, as after this strike lecturers were banned from the factory floors.⁴⁴

The ethnic workers of Ybor City were able to use the spatial arrangements of their places of work to augment their education on labor issues—listening to lecturers as they rolled cigars. They also used the spaces of their strongly ethnic and diverse neighborhoods to congregate off the job, and even created shared spaces to accommodate workers and their families during labor strikes. However, these integrated spaces—during periods of labor strife and peace—were uncommon, especially in the Deep South. The violent enforcement of Jim Crow laws and strict racial segregation often made labor organizing difficult, though not impossible, in the rest of the region.

Interracial Mining in the Deep South

When southern industrialization began to pick up steam in the years following Reconstruction, certain industries in the South, particularly coal mining, maintained an integrated work force. Mining areas in the Deep South did not have the kind of ethnic culture of protest that marked the mining communities in the North, but

⁴⁴ Ibid, 102, 117-18.

southern miners were able to tap into a native-born radical tradition that dated back to the late nineteenth century. Many of the leading African American labor activists began their careers in the 1870s as organizers for the Greenback-Labor Party. While the Greenback movement did not last long, black and white miners again united through the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. After the collapse of the Knights after 1886, miners of both races joined forces once more under the United Mine Workers of Alabama, which lasted until a bitter, failed national strike in 1894. Afterward, miners unified once more under the umbrella of the United Mine Workers of America, with varying degrees of success.

These organizations, besides contributing to the narrative of labor history in the South, also provide critical insight into the racial complexities of a region marked by white-on-black violence, economic inequality, and discriminatory laws. Although not all white union members shed the racial prejudices common to the era, historian Daniel Lewtin argues that through their “very existence as racially mixed enterprises, these associations stood as conspicuous and, to many, unnerving exceptions to the rising tide of Jim Crow.”⁴⁵ This was particularly the case in the mining and industrial towns of northern Alabama, the foothills of the Appalachians.

In the late nineteenth century, the mines and furnaces of the region surrounding Birmingham, the most industrial city in Alabama and much of the South, depended on an African American labor force—those who fled to the city in order to escape the economic and racial oppression that ran rampant in rural areas, as well as

⁴⁵ Daniel Lewtin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 1-2.

convicts leased from local penitentiaries. Near the close of the nineteenth century, blacks and whites (immigrant and native born) formed biracial unions to push for contracts that would improve wages and working conditions in the mines. The coal industry is particularly important in the history of unionization in America, for it was the first one to become organized along industrial lines, rather than by craft. This approach required a more racially inclusive stance than the craft-based unions affiliated with the AFL. As early as 1894, the United Mine Workers of Alabama initiated one of the first interracial labor strikes in the Deep South.⁴⁶

In order to thwart a working-class solidarity that crossed racial boundaries, coal operators often played the race card—using the specter of social equality and integration to divide workers along racial lines. The coal companies' reliance on convict laborers, almost entirely African Americans, to act as *strike breakers* further exacerbated racial tensions in the mines. Coal companies even opened up mines operated by free, although exclusively African American, labor, which served to further divide workers and practically opened the door for racial violence. The union later deflected blame from the imported workers by reporting that the companies lured African American strikebreakers from farming regions to the city with the promise of high wages, and then turned around and held them responsible for paying off the costs for their transportation, room, and board.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Alex Lichtenstein, "Racial Conflict and Racial Solidarity in the Alabama Coal Strike of 1894: New Evidence for the Gutman-Hill Debate," *The Journal of Labor History*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Winter 1995), 64. This interracial solidarity is remarkable not only for occurring in the Deep South, but also for occurring at all. For instance, after the failed strike of 1894, white ethnic miners in the coal mining community of Spring Valley, Illinois rioted in the African American section of town—destroying property, and beating and even shooting residents as they fled (Caroline A. Waldron, "Lynch Law Must Go: Race, Citizenship, and the Other in an American Coal Mining Town," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 20, no. (Fall 2000): 55-56).

⁴⁷Lewtin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism*, 27.

Despite these challenges, miners did attempt to cultivate and maintain some form of class-consciousness that transcended racial boundaries. During the 1894 strike, despite the fact that many white unionists continued to hold racist views, black miners from communities such as Pratt City maintained the strike alongside their white comrades. Furthermore, both white and black miners retaliated violently against black strikebreakers that the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company brought into the city. Black miners also fully participated in the “social and political life of the strike,” attending mass rallies and endorsing Reuben Kolb, a Populist political candidate who promised to end convict labor in the mines.⁴⁸

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this strike was that black and white workers continued their effort in public spaces that were not related to the strike itself. Even though Alabama in general, and Birmingham in particular, was fully immersed in the Jim Crow era, the color line was not as hard and fast among the working class of Birmingham during this decade. According to historian Alex Lichtenstein, “black and white miners socialized together in integrated saloons in Birmingham, and held interracial mass meetings without incident.”⁴⁹ This kind of open interracial solidarity would not last long in the Deep South.

Both of these case studies—Ybor City and Birmingham, Alabama—differ remarkably from one another in terms of the ethnic and racial makeup of the labor force, the types of labor performed, and the geographical location of the sites of labor. However, they both illustrate how workers’ viewed conditions and patterns of work,

⁴⁸ Robert H. Woodrum, *“Everybody was Black Down There”: Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coal Fields* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 13; Lichtenstein, “Racial Conflict and Racial Solidarity in the Alabama Coal Strike of 1894,” 70-71, 73.

⁴⁹ Lichtenstein, “Racial Conflict and Racial Solidarity in the Alabama Coal Strike of 1894,” 70-71, 73

and they reveal how the physical spaces of work fostered labor organizing. This latter point is particularly important because companies and private business owners, and not the workers, were responsible for creating these spaces. In the coal mines of Alabama, workers were mostly black and white. Below ground, miners worked together in close quarters, relied on each other, and even joined forces in organizing to improve their working and economic conditions. This was precisely at the same time that the worlds of blacks and whites were becoming staunchly segregated by custom and law.⁵⁰ This makes the common use of space particularly important for understanding the complexities of racial and labor politics in the industrializing New South.

The cigar workers of Ybor used their workplaces to educate workers about industrial unionism. The practice of hiring lecturers was possible in factories where workers were seated and engaged in a form of labor that did not impede their ability to hear a speaker—conditions that were not present in the much louder industries of canning, foundry work, and automobile assembly lines. Furthermore, many of these workers came from backgrounds that supported labor radicalism, and they were able to nurture these views both on the shop floor and through their ethnic communities—although their actual success at forcing closed shops largely failed.

Cigar workers were able to educate themselves and other workers about labor issues on the shop floor because of a unique cultural tradition and because of the spatial design of cigar factories. Hardly any other industry shared these qualities. Workers in other industries had to manipulate spaces that could serve to facilitate

⁵⁰ Woodrum, “*Everybody was Black Down There*”, 4.

organizing efforts. In company-owned and controlled areas, workers often turned to public spaces to assist in their efforts. Many of these spaces were part of urban infrastructures that the workers had no hand in designing, but they were still able to adapt them to further their goals of labor organization.

Municipal Spaces and Labor Organization

One of the ubiquitous features of the early twentieth century labor movement, particularly among the members and supporters of the IWW, was the soapbox preacher. These public speakers would set up on a street corner, using a box of some kind as a platform, and launch into speeches extolling the virtues of One Big Union as other members distributed fliers to anyone who lingered to listen. Public spaces enabled those sympathetic to the cause of organized labor to join in the fight, even if they were not employed by the industry being targeted; as pro-union workers operated inside the factory walls, pro-union civilians operated on the outside. While city corners were popular hotspots for soapbox preaching, they were not the only municipal spaces that served this purpose. For instance, during the SWOC drives in the 1930s and 1940s, a traffic island at the intersection of Eastern Avenue and Lehigh Street of Baltimore City became an important site for pro-union soapbox speakers. Many of these speakers were women: the daughters, sisters, and wives of steelworkers. Much of the work in the steel mills at this time was restricted to men. Male labor activists, therefore, faced the possibility of unemployment and becoming blacklisted if they were caught organizing. Women, however, did not face this direct

threat and were thus able to use this space to rally support for the union—a space that allowed them to reach a large and varied audience.⁵¹

During labor uprisings, pro-union workers and activists often staged protests and marched in picket lines in front of the factory gates. For labor struggles in industries that lacked a specific site of labor, whole cities became sites of struggle. As with the steelworkers' struggles in Baltimore, the use of municipal space opened opportunities for the union effort to engage a broader constituency beyond those employed in the targeted industry; more specifically, it created conditions for women to become active participants in a male-dominated industry. This was clearly the case during the SWOC drives in Baltimore, and it also occurred during the Minneapolis Teamsters Strike in 1934.

The Depression had hit the Teamsters hard; drivers who still had jobs were fearful of losing them and, as a result, union membership plummeted. However, after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933, which signaled federal support for unions, truck drivers in Minneapolis joined the wave of union efforts that surged throughout American industries. Despite having a membership roster that remained short, a group of Teamsters decided to launch a strike among coal yard workers. When the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) leaders refused to assist in the strike, rank-and-file drivers took it upon themselves to launch and sustain the effort. In January, Teamsters Local 574 voted to strike. The wildcat strike began during the middle of a deep freeze on February 4, 1934, and shut down several coal yards. The Minnesota winter served their purposes well, and the Teamsters won the

⁵¹ Zeidman, "Sparrow's Point, Dundalk, Highlandtown, Old West Baltimore," 187.

strike after only three days. After the success of the coal strike, leaders of Local 574 turned their attention to organizing the entire trucking industry of Minneapolis under a single union. Organizers held a mass meeting at the Schubert Theater on April 15, during which they registered 3,000 new members and planned a strike should employers refuse to recognize the union. With support from the Minneapolis AFL and the Minnesota Farmers' Holiday Association, and bolstered with picketing assistance from unemployed workers throughout the city, Local 574 launched its fight.⁵²

The strike officially began on May 15, and the union's membership ranks almost immediately doubled to 6,000. The union took up residency at a large garage on 1900 Chicago Avenue and members set to work providing food, medical care, and general support for the picketing strikers and their supporters. The Farmers Holiday Association, along with several local grocers, supplied food, and guest speakers and entertainers provided entertainment and encouragement every night to the almost 2,000 Teamsters who attended nightly meetings. Local lawyers provided legal assistance, doctors and medical students provided medical care, and other union members and students joined in walking picket lines.⁵³

The leaders of the Minneapolis Local 574 recognized that they needed to secure the support of women—the wives, mothers, sisters, and sweethearts of the union members—to ensure the success of the union. During the May strike, leaders initiated a Ladies' Auxiliary to assist in strike activities. Historian Marjory Penn

⁵² Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (London: Verso, 1990), 91

⁵³ La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion*, 91-97.

Lasky argues that union members often sought to organize women into auxiliaries primarily to perform functions typically done by women (e.g. secretarial tasks, providing food services, and cleaning the hall) for the union. With Clara Dunn and Marvel Scholl at the helm, the Ladies Auxiliary put women to work. Although they continued to perform primarily domestic functions, the auxiliary members now did these tasks in the public sphere. Women supplied food for picketers, bought groceries for families of striking workers, and nursed injured demonstrators. During one evening, women even joined men on the picket line to stop truck deliveries on Tribune Alley and were subject to the same police brutality as the male demonstrators; all received injuries of some degree and a few were brought back to the strike headquarters with broken legs or in an unconscious state. Although the violence perpetrated against the women demonstrators led the union to restrict women from the picket lines, this did not mean that women left public demonstrations altogether. On May 21, Scholl led a march of women down the streets of Minneapolis to City Hall to demand that the mayor remove the special deputies, fire the police chief, and cease police violence against the demonstrators. While this march was planned so that women could avoid another demonstration at the Central Market that was expected to draw a violent response, the march on City Hall kept the Auxiliary women firmly in the public view. Women also continued to work in public by selling copies of *The Organizer*, a newspaper that the striking workers printed from their headquarters and on street corners, as well as in bars, restaurants, and beauty salons.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Marjory Penn Lasky, "When I was a Person: The Ladies' Auxiliary in the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters' Strike," in *Women, Work & Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*, Ruth Milkman, ed. (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 182, 186, 188, 190, 193. Like many other women's auxiliaries, this one formed in response to a crisis—the strike of 1934—and dissipated after it

While strikes like that of the Minneapolis Teamsters turned whole sections of the city into a strike zone, most efforts were circumscribed to a particular area, especially if the labor and political activity was an ongoing affair. Much like the traffic median that became Speakers' Corner, public parks also became important sites, particularly for politically radical groups like the IWW. One such example is Milam Park in San Antonio, Texas. San Antonio was the hub for all the railroads in the state, and thus a prime spot for recruiting Mexican migrant workers and their families for work in the industrial and agricultural centers of the northern Midwest. During the early decades of the twentieth century, Milam Park, nicknamed La Plaza Zacate, was the place where those looking for work gathered. Itinerant railroad workers, miners from western silver mines, foundry men, packinghouse workers, and seasonal farm laborers all congregated in the hopes of finding labor recruiters. With its reputation as a site of labor recruiting, Milam Park also became a hub for labor radicals—Mexican and American anarchists, IWW organizers, and socialist party members would often preach to the crowds that had gathered. Some spoke through translators and others addressed the workers directly in Spanish.⁵⁵

While Milam Park is a city park, it lacks aesthetic grandeur—a problem that has confounded sites of infrastructure, like Speakers Corner, that are easily overlooked by the public. Yet, as Tuan argues, the significance of a place does not necessarily lie in its “visual prominence”; many places that are important for individuals and groups can easily go unnoticed by those unacquainted with their

ended. Yet, while it existed, the women of the Ladies' Auxiliary played an important role in the Teamster's strike.

⁵⁵ Vargas, *Proletarians of the North*, 18-19, 25.

history.⁵⁶ For sites like Milam Park, Speakers' Corner, and the streets of Minneapolis upon which women marched, the primary significance from a labor history and historic preservation perspective is that of their social value. The idea of social value as a recognized aspect of historical significance originated in the Australian branch of ICOMOS and was incorporated into the Burra Charter, a best practices guide for historic preservation that was released in 1979. The Charter recognizes social value as an important component of cultural significance, along with other qualities such as historical, archeological, and aesthetic values. Rather than emphasizing individual attachments, the category of social value recognizes the significance of a place for a specific community, or a group's collective attachment to a place.⁵⁷ Places like Milam Park and even seemingly insignificant sites like Speaker's Corner are important historical places for local communities as well as the national labor movement. For politically marginalized groups such as the IWW, not many physical places remain to tell their stories. This makes the recognition of other sites that served to help the Wobblies, for instance, in their mission to create One Big Union, especially important.

Conclusion

The case studies in this chapter differ remarkably from each other, but connecting them all is the common thread of space, particularly the active role that space and place played in labor organizing and uprisings. In Ybor City, the spatial arrangement of the workplace and the shared spaces of the pluralist city of Ybor

⁵⁶ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 162.

⁵⁷ Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story*, 4.

helped to unite workers from diverse backgrounds in the mutual effort to form a union. In Birmingham during the 1890s, workers were increasingly constrained by legalized segregation. However, the circumstances of mine work and the spatial nature of this work rendered underground mines an integrated space. Pro-union workers were able to work together above ground because working-class spaces had not been as thoroughly segregated as those of the middle and upper classes. The Alabama strike of 1894 was one of the last interracial efforts in the Deep South during the nineteenth century, and shared spaces played a critical role in making interracial solidarity possible at that time.⁵⁸

In other instances, notably the Teamsters' strike in Minneapolis, people who were sympathetic toward the plight of the struggling unionists were able to use public spaces to join in the effort. Because the strike played out on the streets of a major city, this enabled a broader array of participants to become involved and thus widened the perspective of labor organizing to include women in what was otherwise a male-dominated labor field. By examining the places where these struggles occurred—on street corners, traffic medians, and public parks—historians can achieve a more inclusive understanding of the nuances of participation, particularly for women. As Dolores Hayden argues, reorienting our understanding of place—interpreting homes, streets, and stores as the “spatial dimensions of ‘woman’s sphere’”—allows for a broader and more inclusive understanding of the participants in labor struggles in

⁵⁸ Labor organizers, particularly political radicals like IWW syndicalists in lumber camps, communist organizers of the Sharecropper's Union, and socialist members of the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union, continued to push for interracial labor reform throughout the first half of the twentieth century. However, their political views, coupled with their support for civil rights, pushed them to the margins of social and political life in the South.

addition to widening the understanding of sites that relate to labor that are either already recognized as historical (although for other reasons), or are in need of such designation.⁵⁹ Combining labor history with the significance of social value will aid preservationists and historians in reinterpreting historical places to generate a more socially inclusive interpretation of place. Making an invisible history visible again is not just the job of academic historians, but it is also an activity that is at the heart of public history. As such, place-based history can help in the commemoration of the forgotten past, especially regarding the history of American labor.

⁵⁹ Hayden, *Power of Place*, 22-23.

Chapter 3: Commemorating Invisible History

For much of the twentieth century, the United States was an industrial nation, with the manufacturing sector playing a particularly important role in the national economy. Technological advancements in industry turned the country into a superpower on the world stage, and after World War II the strong industrial economy, along with the power of unions, afforded blue-collar workers access to middle-class lifestyles. While Americans may have identified more as consumers, the country was still a nation of producers. This changed, however, as the United States began to slip into a long period of deindustrialization—an era that began in the late 1960s and is still continuing into the twenty-first century. As American industries relocate production abroad, the spaces of the industrial past often suffer the consequences of neglect. Factories that had formed the entire economic basis of towns and cities remain shuttered, crumbling under the accumulated effects of demolition by neglect. Other sites have suffered the fate of deliberate destruction, torn down to make way for whatever development will take its place on the landscape. This was a fate that befell the massive L Furnace of the former Sparrow's Point Steel Mill, one of the last physical vestiges of the plant, in January 2015.⁶⁰

The loss of these physical places often leads to losing the historical memories that were rooted in their walls. Some historians and preservationists had, however, led efforts to recognize the historical significance of industrial places during the same period that the industry was losing its dominant position in the American economy.

⁶⁰ Mark Reutter, "Symbol of Sparrows Point Set to be Imploded Today," *Baltimore Brew* (28 Jan. 2015), <https://www.baltimorebrew.com/2015/01/28/symbol-of-sparrows-point-set-to-be-imploded-today/>, accessed 23 April 2015.

Designation on the National Register of Historic Places or as National Historic Landmarks helps to secure the standing of places of labor in the public understanding of what is historically important. Yi-Fu Tuan argues that when places gain recognition by official means, government agencies determining the real or symbolic value of a particular place, the place's stature in the public mind is elevated.⁶¹

While the effort of commemorating the physical spaces of labor history has done much to ensure that the structures of this past remain part of the built environment in formerly industrial areas, many sites of labor have few or no physical structures left to tell their stories. This is particularly the case in extractive industries and the agricultural sector. According to Ned Kaufman, places that lack structural integrity but that are historically significant for the national narrative of labor history include ports of entry for immigrants, migrants, and enslaved persons who came forcibly or by choice for labor purposes. Other examples include travel routes that immigrants and migrants followed to establish or settle in new communities, oftentimes routes that led to the promise of greater economic opportunity and places like agricultural fields that “represent the daily experiences of large numbers of people.” Finally, sites of struggle including sites of singular acts of protest or stretches of highways that served as important routes for marches or demonstrations can also fall under this category.⁶²

Even though many of these sites do not have physical remains, their spaces are important to the story of labor in the United States, often because of the events that occurred there or for their association with important historical figures.

⁶¹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 162.

⁶² Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story*, 106-112.

Furthermore, these places are often embedded with memories—with some only existing in memory—and thus can be triggers for eliciting oral histories of specific events as well as large social patterns. For example, Hayden recounts oral historian Linda Shopes' complaint that interviewees for the massive Baltimore Neighborhood History Project from 1978-1980 often talked more about specific places, even those that no longer existed, rather than the overarching social themes that the interviewers sought to discuss. But, as Hayden argues, stories about places often relate to larger issues like immigration, local politics, and work patterns, “and the memories of places would probably trigger more stories.”⁶³ By understanding the strong relationship between places and historical memory, preservationists and public historians can gain access to grassroots perspectives on the past. These perspectives can then become the basis for commemorating the historically significant “invisible” sites that Kaufman outlined in the public realm. Two examples of significant events in labor history that occurred on what now appears as empty space include the Wheatland Uprising in southern California and the site of the Ludlow Massacre in Colorado, which recently received designation as a National Historic Landmark.

The Wheatland Uprising

The Wobblies became particularly known for organizing miners throughout the West, but Cary McWilliams observed that the roots of the organization are located in migrant labor in California. After winning two notorious free speech struggles in Fresno and San Diego in 1910 and 1912, respectively, the IWW began to attract greater attention and set up more locals throughout the state. Even though their

⁶³ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 47.

numbers were small, their reputation loomed large. They were especially known for launching job strikes by organizing laborers in the fields where they worked. Their first major battle occurred on August 3, 1913, on the Durst Hop Farm near Wheatland, California. That year, grower Ralph Durst had advertised for workers throughout California, Oregon, and Nevada. He requested 2700-2800 workers when he really only needed about 1500 in the fields.⁶⁴ Regardless, a huge influx of agricultural workers descended on the farm, taking trains from far-away locations or walking from relatively nearby towns and cities. They represented a mix of races and ethnicities—over half of the workers who arrived on the Durst farm were immigrants from countries including Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, Spain, Syria, and Turkey.

Durst provided the tents for some, but not all, of the 2800 men, women, and children who encamped on a low hill on the property. All residents had to pay a weekly fee of seventy-five cents for space at the labor camp; those who were not able to procure a provided tent had to construct their own with whatever materials they could find. The overcrowded tent camp had nine rudimentary outdoor toilets. The water wells were situated dangerously close to the toilets and other garbage areas such that diseases like typhoid, dysentery, and malaria ravaged the camp. Drinking water was not supplied in the fields, but a Durst family member “provided” powdered lemonade at five cents a glass. Eventually, conditions such as these prompted workers to organize, and a group of one hundred workers, including Japanese, Indian, and

⁶⁴ According to a commission that investigated the incident, Durst advertised for more workers than he needed in order to keep wages down.

Puerto Rican immigrants, joined forces with local IWW representatives to agitate for change.⁶⁵

Workers earned between seventy-eight cents and one dollar a day; at least a thousand workers remained unemployed throughout the season because of the oversupply of job seekers. While wages were bad, it was the abominable living circumstances and unduly harsh working conditions that spurred workers to organize. The strike demands reflected the diverse workforce, particularly the strong presence of female workers. For instance, two of the strikers' demands sought to remedy working conditions that were especially hard for women—such as the absence of “high pole men,” who helped pickers reach hops at the top of the tall vines. The other demand focused on ending the expectation that workers load the hop bags, which could weigh upwards of one hundred pounds, onto the wagons without assistance.⁶⁶

When the Wobbly organizers held a mass meeting on the night of August 3, approximately 2000 workers attended. In the middle of the meeting, the sheriff, local district attorney (who was also Durst's personal attorney), and other figures in law enforcement arrived to arrest the speakers. When a deputy fired a shot in the air, allegedly to cool down the agitated workers, a fight erupted. In the riot that ensued, the district attorney, a deputy sheriff, a Puerto Rican worker, and an English boy were killed. The law enforcement officers fled and the Governor, shocked by descriptions of the riot, sent in four National Guard companies to Wheatland. Panic over the incident sparked a “reign of terror” in which Wobblies throughout the state faced

⁶⁵ Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001), 48-54.

⁶⁶ Vincent DiGirolamo, “The Women of Wheatland: Female Consciousness and the 1913 Wheatland Hop Strike,” *Labor History* Volume 34, Issue 2-3 (1993), 250.

arrest and persecution. Those arrested faced beatings and were often held in confinement and denied access to legal counsel.⁶⁷

“Wheatland was not a strike,” journalist Cary McWilliams wrote in 1939, “but a spontaneous revolt.” It stands out as one of the significant episodes in the long and turbulent history of migratory labor in California. For the first time, the people of California were made to realize, even if vaguely, the plight of its thousands of migratory workers.” It was also a community strike led by both men and women, with women playing a particularly important role. Historian Vincent DiGirolamo argues that the migrant women were responsible for “pressing the Wobblies into action,” and once the strike began they were at the forefront of the action. Furthermore, during the ensuing trial of the IWW leaders, feminist groups and other civic women’s clubs led the effort to provide support for the accused men—generating petitions and fundraising for the cost of their defense.⁶⁸

The events in Wheatland brought Progressive era reform into the agricultural sector of southern California. It sparked an investigation into the conditions of migrant workers by the Commission on Immigration and Housing in California, which concluded that the riot was caused by inadequate housing and poor sanitary conditions. This became the springboard for the commission’s effort to institute health and sanitation regulations in the labor camps of migrant workers. Even though the IWW was ultimately unable to organize workers in Wheatland and other regions of California, this did not stop them from continuing to try. During a convention in

⁶⁷ Daniel E. Cletus, *Bitter Harvest: A History Of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 88-91; Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 85-86.

⁶⁸ DiGirolamo, “The Women of Wheatland,” 250, 252, 241, 249-52.

Kansas City on April 15, 1915, IWW members debuted their official agricultural workers' union. Called the Agricultural Workers' Organization (AWO), the union was based on an industrial unionism with revolutionary goals. Through the AWO, Wobblies would continue to organize in the fields, in "jungles," on rails, and anywhere else migrant agricultural laborers could be found.⁶⁹

The Durst Ranch is important for Progressive era history, the history of labor and political radicalism in the United State, and, especially, the history of migrant labor. Only recently have places connected to this history received formal recognition as significant historic places, and those places that have received designation are overwhelmingly connected to the United Farm Workers of the 1960s. Officially recognizing sites like the Durst Ranch would educate a public audience on the long history of migrant labor in the United States. Yet, there is nothing physically left of the tent camp that was the center of the Wheatland Uprising. This absence, however, is not an insurmountable obstacle. As Hayden argues, even places that have no structural remains "can be marked to restore some shared public meaning, a recognition of the experience of spatial conflict, or bitterness, or despair."⁷⁰

Perhaps the best tool that historic preservation affords that would root the history of the Wheatland Uprising in place is the interpretation of it as a cultural landscape. While much of the emphasis in cultural landscape preservation is on environments that have been cultivated, engineered, or designed, like historic

⁶⁹ Cary McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 154-64; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 88-91; Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 48-54, 85-86; Dick Meister and Anne Loftis. *Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 11-17.

⁷⁰ Hayden, *Power of Place*, 9.

gardens, parks, or even family farms, there are two types of landscapes that those seeking to protect agricultural spaces of the Durst Farm have to their advantage: historic vernacular landscapes and historic sites.⁷¹ The Durst Ranch played an important role in the history of migrant labor in the United States; the sheer *lack* of residential structures surrounding this “factory in the field” illustrates how this enormous tract of land was farmed almost exclusively by a mobile workforce. Therefore, an absence of period structures is a character-defining feature of agricultural industries that relied on the labor of migrant families. Furthermore, the uprising itself and its historical legacy make this site a critical component of the history of California, of agricultural production, and of labor in the United States.

With the absence of structures to “preserve,” others in the field of public history can also become involved in commemorating the history of this place. For instance, a monument could be added to the landscape to inform visitors of the events of 1913. Kaufman argues that monuments, especially those constructed from culturally or historically significant materials, can help protect and preserve histories that only exist in the oral context, for they “give physical presence to an important cultural experience preserved only in oral tradition.” Even though the events of the Wheatland Uprising have been recorded and are part of the historical record, connecting this story with the places in which the events occurred will ensure that this narrative is incorporated into the public understanding of history as well. As with

⁷¹ Charles A. Birnbaum, “Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes,” NPS Preservation Brief 36, <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm>, accessed 2 April 2015.

official recognition, erecting monuments, or memorials commemorating historical people or events effectively sanction these people/events in the public eye.⁷²

The Ludlow Massacre and the 1877 Railroad Strike

A space that can serve as a model for the commemoration of events with few physical vestiges and that also illustrates the importance of historical memorials is the site of the Ludlow Massacre, which also occurred in 1913. During that year, the United Mine Workers (UMW) led strikes in both the northern and southern mining regions of Colorado, demanding union recognition. The UMW dispatched organizers, many of whom were fluent in the various languages of the immigrant labor force, to the office that the union had recently opened in Trinidad, Colorado. Early in September, Mother Jones, a famous advocate for coal miners, arrived to rally workers in the southern fields for a potential walkout. On September 15, the union held a convention to determine a course of action. Delegates representing the miners voted unanimously to call a strike, demanding a series of reforms including wage increases, an eight-hour day, payment for dead work (work prepping a mine but not producing coal), elected check weighmen (employees who weighed the coal tonnage that each miner produced), and union recognition. Company officials staunchly refused to turn their fields into closed shops and both sides began to prepare for a protracted fight.

All workers who joined the strike faced immediate evictions from their company-owned houses. Fully anticipating this course of events, the UMW had begun leasing land near the entrance of the mines to establish tent colonies even before the September convention. Not only did these provide places to move families,

⁷² Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story*, 106-112, 116.

but also their strategic locations facilitated greater ease in monitoring the actions of strikebreakers and maintaining picket lines. The Ludlow camp was the largest of six tent colonies established in Las Animas County. The tent colonies reflected the multiethnic nature of the mining workforce—Greek, Mexican, Italian, German, French, Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Austrian, Tyrolean, and Croatian immigrants joined forces with native-born workers in maintaining the strike. Working together for a common purpose enabled many to overcome their differences and generate a well-functioning pluralist community. Women also played a key role in maintaining the strike—they conducted interviews with the press, greeted public and government officials who visited the camps, and harassed both strikebreakers and guards on the railroad tracks leading to the mines. Many even assisted on the ‘front lines’ of the battle in the camp.

While spats of violence broke out when the UMW began constructing the camps, these paled in comparison to the events of that spring. Acquiescing to pressures from coal officials, Governor Elias Ammons ordered National Guard troops to the strike zone on October 28, 1913. Although the strikers initially accepted, and even welcomed, the troops, their feelings soon soured after a number of arbitrary inspections and arrests. Adjutant General John Chase, an ophthalmologist from Denver, even established his own—unsanctioned—martial law over the area. The situation worsened when, despite threats of arrest, Mother Jones came to Trinidad on January 4, 1914, only to be intercepted by local law enforcement and forcibly held at

a local hospital for nine weeks. On January 21, miners' wives marched through Trinidad demanding Jones' release.⁷³

When the National Guard dismantled the Forbes tent colony, just to the south of Ludlow, the residents of Ludlow began to dig cellars for their defense in case the Guard attempted the same at Ludlow. Indeed, events did erupt on April 20. Although it is unclear which side initiated the fight, the result was a pitched battle that raged through the night—pitting the miners (whose numbers were greater) against the National Guardsmen and company guards (whose weaponry was better and more plentiful). That night, a fire broke out in the camp. Although it is also unclear who started the fire, a military investigation commission later determined that troops spread the blaze throughout the colony with the intention of destroying it. In the midst of the attack, thirteen residents of the colony—two women and eleven children—sought refuge in a cellar beneath one of the tents. When the fire consumed the tent, they died as a result of fire, asphyxiation, or both. For the next ten days miners engaged in direct action against the guardsmen and mine guards in what became known as the “Ten Days War,” before agreeing to a truce. By that December, the strike had ended in failure for the strikers. However, the UMW soon acquired the land upon which the colony had been established and erected a monument in 1918 honoring those who died during the strike.⁷⁴

The site of the Ludlow Massacre already has a historical monument dedicated to preserving the memory of this tragedy. Other sites that lack tangible historical

⁷³ R. Laurie Simmons, Thomas H. Simmons, Charles Haecker, “Ludlow Tent Colony Site,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2009), 13, 16, 27-33, 35-36, 38-40.

⁷⁴ Simmons, et al., “Ludlow Tent Colony Site,” 43-45, 47.

commemorations can still be marked through monuments or historical markers. In recent years, historical markers have been placed at sites where history has been erased. This issue is particularly relevant for dynamic urban landscapes where the structural fabric changes with relative frequency. Historical markers, therefore, have the potential to protect the historical memories embedded in places, especially in cities, that are gone—torn down or neglected to the point of ruin—and have been replaced by other buildings, or that have even just become vacant lots in the urban landscape.⁷⁵ For example, Baltimore City, specifically the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) facilities at Camden Yards, marked the beginning of the massive Railroad Strike that swept across the nation in 1877.

During the 1870s, Americans were suffering from an economic depression that began in 1873. B&O Railroad workers were already subsisting on low wages when management announced another wage cut (while they increased stockholders' dividends) during the summer of 1877. This sparked a wave of wildcat strikes across the country: from Martinsburg, West Virginia, through to Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and even San Francisco. In Baltimore, the headquarters of the B&O, mobs of angry workers and their families clashed with the local militia, which was called out to quell the crowd of almost 15,000 angry demonstrators. The crowds were so large that Governor Carroll wired newly elected president Rutherford B. Hayes to send in federal troops, a request with which the president complied. Soon, what had become the first national strike was over.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 9.

⁷⁶ Robert H. Weibe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Sylvia Gillett, "Camden Yards and the Strike of 1877," in *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History*, Elizabeth Fee, et al., eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 1-14.

Camden Yards was critical as one of the earliest sites of demonstration against the B&O Railroad because it was the center of the company's operations. The location, therefore, is both locally and nationally significant. Yet, nothing of the railroad industry remains at the site itself, for it is located at the center of a dynamic urban landscape, wherein buildings have been torn down, built anew, and torn down again. Currently, this space is the location of the home ballpark of the Baltimore Orioles Major League Baseball franchise, known as the Camden Yards Baseball Stadium. Despite the lack of physical remains, this space remains historically important for the events that occurred on the property. Therefore, in 2013, the City of Baltimore erected a historical marker commemorating the events of the 1877 strike. As such, the events that occurred there have been publically commemorated, and, hopefully, will remain a part of the public history of Baltimore City.

Conclusion

The loss of industrial jobs has been a staple in the national news since the early years of deindustrialization. What has gone relatively unnoticed, however, is the declining number of preserved places that directly tie to industrial history. Mines have been abandoned, and former "factories in the field" have become new housing subdivisions. Sites like furnaces, plants, and other massive structures have been destroyed because their technology and structural types have become obsolete and are not easily adaptable for new use. Others, particularly warehouses and other similarly large and open structures, have been adaptively reused—turned into apartments, converted to art spaces, or even readapted for light manufacturing. Yet, even while these *buildings* have been preserved, the same cannot always be said for the *stories*

embedded within them. Without recognition of some sort, the places have lost the meaning that they had embodied for the people who labored there, and for the communities that developed in the spaces surrounding them.

Historians, preservationists, and artists, have attempted to correct this loss and assisted in the process of commemorating the histories of these industrial places and spaces by erecting monuments and markers, creating works of public art, and even securing official recognition of the significance of these spaces and places through historical designation.⁷⁷ This kind of commemoration can occur for places that lack visible structures either because of the nature of the work that was performed onsite, or because the structures have been lost in the evolution of the built environments of which they were once part. Through these kinds of efforts, the tangible and intangible aspects of labor history are preserved and directed to a public audience such that the history of the workers of America can become a vibrant component of the remembered past and the national historical narrative.

⁷⁷ Many of the case studies that Dolores Hayden highlights in *The Power of Place* have incorporated aspects of public art to connect visitors to a historical past that has few, if any, structural vestiges remaining.

Conclusion: Looking Ahead

With deindustrialization, the United States has lost its producerist identity. Producerism is the concept that labor creates value—that the people who make things are the source of the nation’s wealth. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, American identity was steeped in producerism, whether production was rooted in agricultural, manufacturing, or extractive work.⁷⁸ Of course, Americans continue to make things, but not on the scale they did during the heyday of industrialism. The loss of industry, therefore, is not just a significant economic shift, but also it is a significant *identity* shift. Much of the nation’s historical identity is grounded in the history of industrialism and labor, which makes the need to ensure that this history remains a critical part of the national historical memory especially urgent. Perhaps the best way to secure this memory is through the protection of the tangible elements of the past—aspects of the structural environment that labor built.

Preservationists such as Dolores Hayden, Ned Kaufman, Alison Hoagland, and Andrew Hurley have engaged the question of how to commemorate and protect American labor and working-class history through public history, public art, preservation, and scholarship. Community groups and preservation advocacy agencies in post-industrial, or legacy, cities are also engaged in on-the-ground efforts. Baltimore Heritage in Baltimore, Maryland, and the Preservation Research Office in St. Louis, Missouri, are two examples of preservation organizations that are engaged

⁷⁸ For further information on the long history of the relationship between producerism and the American identity see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955) and Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

in protecting the industrial legacy of these post-industrial cities. Other efforts such as the University of Maryland, Baltimore County's Mill Stories program document intangible aspects of labor history; in this case the focus is on preserving the legacy of Sparrow's Point by recording oral histories of former steelworkers. Even regional museums have joined this effort. The History Center, a progressive social history museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee, will soon open booths where visitors can self-record their stories relating to the various industries that were formerly centered in and around the city.

Perhaps the most significant tools preservationists have to their advantage in protecting sites that lack integrity come from the designation process as established by the National Park Service. For example, even industries that are marked by temporality can be eligible for historical designation as cultural landscapes. Agricultural fields, former logging camps, and abandoned mining areas lie at the nexus of natural and productive landscapes—they are terrains that have been altered specifically for the purposes of exploiting natural resources, which render them prime examples of historic vernacular landscapes.⁷⁹

The most important aid for preservationists of labor history is the National Historic Landmarks Program's Labor History Theme Study. This resource is especially pertinent for properties that lack structural integrity or physical distinction. For instance, the category of significance relating to events of worker protest includes such disparate sites as fields, waterfront sites, train stations, factories, homes, bridges, and railroad yards. This is critical for places such as the Durst Farm and Camden

⁷⁹ Birnbaum, "Protecting Cultural Landscapes."

Yards, which retain few, if any, physical vestiges of their periods of significance. Although the historical recognition of these places may bend rigid conceptions of integrity, they do not break them altogether. The study does, however, provide loopholes. For instance, The National Historic Landmarks Program's fifth criterion, which pertains to Districts of Historic Significance, when applied to labor history includes places "composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively composing an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance; or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture." While places in which historically important buildings have been lost are usually omitted from consideration, the study does stipulate that these rules can be stretched if a particular site has "transcendent importance, possess[es] inherent architectural or artistic significance, or no other site associated with the theme remains."⁸⁰

The theme study directs readers to other methods of recognition as well. If a site is locally important but does not possess the distinctive qualities that render it *nationally* significant, it still can become eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This would afford it the distinction of official recognition, and provide some level of procedural protection should the integrity of the site become compromised by any construction project using federal funds. The study specifically mentions structures or sites that were significant for local farming communities such

⁸⁰ James Green, et al, *American Labor History National Historic Landmark Theme Study Draft* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 2003), 134-36.

as cooperative stores from the Agricultural Wheel or Grange movements of the late nineteenth century.⁸¹

Preservationists have also recognized the power of heritage tourism for generating revenue for preservation efforts and for educating a public audience about the significance of protecting historic sites and historical cultural landscapes. Heritage tourism is a particular strain of tourism that focuses on attracting visitors by selling heritage sites as “authentic experiences”; it is a kind of tourism directly linked to the preservation of historic sites.⁸² During the 1980s, older, post-industrial areas began turning to tourism as a way to strengthen and diversify local economies. National Heritage Areas provide one avenue for connecting thematically related sites that span a wide geographic area, and expanding the audience base for the individual sites within the designated area.

The idea of a National Heritage Area is to generate investment from public and private sources to enhance educational, tourist, and recreation opportunities and improve local economies. According to preservationist Charles Roe, “The blend of resources and interest was thought to encourage partnerships among public agencies and civic and nonprofit organizations.” Heritage Areas provide ways to link heritage tourism with heritage resource development to protect historic resources and provide economic opportunities to local communities.⁸³ The designation of a National

⁸¹ Rachel Donaldson, “From Sun Up to Sun Down: Agricultural Labor in the United States,” draft American Labor History Theme Study (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service), no page number.

⁸² “Public Lands and Tourism Relationship: No Longer Perceived as Oil and Water,” National Parks Service, undated; Peter H. Brink, “Heritage Tourism in the U.S.A.: Grassroots Efforts to Combine Preservation and Tourism,” *APT Bulletin* vol. 29, no. 3/4 (1998), 59, 62.

⁸³ Charles E. Roe, “The Natural Environment,” in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, Robert E. Stipe, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 243-44.

Heritage Area is intended to protect and preserve a “large landscape focused on historic, cultural, and natural sites, as well as active roadways, businesses, and residential industrial districts.”⁸⁴ The emphases on partnerships and catering to local conditions and needs render each National Heritage Area a distinct entity, although they all follow the general premise of “collaborative planning around a theme, industry and/ or geographical feature that influenced the region's culture and history.”⁸⁵

Several heritage areas combine tourism and education and specifically relate to labor and labor history, including Rivers of Steel (focusing on the steel industry in Pennsylvania), Silos and Smokestacks (exploring the history of agriculture in Iowa), and the National Coal Heritage Area in West Virginia. The creation of a National Heritage Area in California based on the history of migrant labor would be a potential means for increasing awareness and interest in sites like the Durst Farm that played an integral role in this history but that lack structural integrity. From the massive farms of the Imperial Valley in southern California to the apple orchards in Washington, the West Coast was a major corridor for migrant labor. The National Park Service, along with the California State Historic Preservation Office, has begun to commemorate sites of significance for the history of migrant labor, including the Forty Acres National Historic Landmark and other sites such as the Arvin Federal Government Camp (a Farm Security Administration camp for migrant laborers, National Register), Migrant Workers Houses in Santa Clara County (local historic

⁸⁴ “National Heritage Areas,” National Park Service Website, <http://www.nps.gov/heritageareas/>, accessed 1 May 2015.

⁸⁵ Alliance of National Heritage Areas, “What is a National Heritage Area?”, National Heritage Areas website, http://www.nationalheritageareas.us/what_is_nha.html, accessed 8 May 2015.

landmark), and numerous others. These individual sites could be linked together as a National Heritage Area that would reveal the significance of this history for the region and even the nation. With travel itineraries that highlight sites that are geographically close, the National Heritage Area format could provide a way to both increase tourism as well as augment efforts to protect the sites of this history such as the former Durst Farm.

While scholars and practitioners in the field of public history have recognized the significance of place for providing a unique perspective on, as well as access to, the historical memory of labor, it is now time for academic historians to join them in taking up the mantle of acknowledging the power of place. By adopting a place-based approach, labor historians can broaden the field even further. By uncovering the multiple layers of history embedded within a site, historians will be better able to explore the intersections among the many social and cultural groups of the working class. Besides broadening the field of labor history itself, this approach will also connect the field more fully to others, such as social, cultural, economic, and political history. Through place-based history, labor and working-class historians can ensure that the historical memory of producerism continues to remain a vibrant part of American history and heritage.

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