

Reproducing the Class Struggle: Class, Gender and Social Reproduction in U.S. Labor History¹

Scholars of traditional labor history and the new working class history share a common belief that their subject is defined largely in the public realm of work and workplace identities. Grounded in nineteenth century theories of class, labor historians have given primacy to productive relations as both the determinant and dominant source of class consciousness and conflict.² While studies in women's labor history and the history of race have made some inroads changing the agenda, even those historians who focus on community and culture have difficulty explaining the relationship between the productive world of work and union struggle and the reproductive sphere of home, family, neighborhood, schooling, sociability, and the state. Having entered the kitchen, the church, and the saloon, labor historians are sometimes puzzled about the route to the picket line; it continues to be at the center of most studies.

Describing the committee investigating the coal strike of 1902, sociologist Peter Roberts wrote that "In the sessions of the Commission, all attempts to limit the scope of the inquiry to the industrial questions which precipitated the conflict were vain. To 80 per cent of mine workers the question of wages meant their whole living and the Commission was forced to listen to the story of these people's life in all its phases."³ Reading the history of the working classes in the United States, we find similar shortcomings. While many labor historians have preferred to explore the "industrial questions," "the story of these people's lives in all its phases" emerges in the documents and testimonies of class witnesses. In effect, the "life story" of the working classes has been subsumed under a market logic of productive relations and market exchange. Only those studies which trace "the people's life in all its phases" have been able to embrace the complexity and multiplicity of working class subjectivity.

Whether on the shopfloor or in the communal laundry, the productive focus in labor history has been premised on a separation between public and private that parallels the divide be-

- 1 Earlier versions of this essay were presented at Law and Society, Amerika Haus-Berlin, and the Organization of American Historians. The author wishes to thank Ron Aminzade, Jim Barrett, Maureen Cain, Sally Deutsch, Nora Faires, Nancy Isenberg, Robin Kelley, Mary Jo Maynes, Sonya Rose, Irmgard Steinisch, David Thelen, Chris Tomlins, and especially Paula Baker for their commentary.
- 2 For critiques of productive determinism, see Linda Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York, 1986); Michele Barrett, "Marxist-Feminism and the Work of Karl Marx," in Anne Phillips (ed.), *Feminism and Equality* (Oxford, 1987), 44-61; Isaac Balbus, *Marxism and Domination* (Princeton, 1982); Jeff Hearn, *The Gender of Oppression: Men, Masculinity, and the Critique of Marxism* (New York, 1988); Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (eds.), *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender* (Minneapolis, 1987), esp. 16-56. See also Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis, 1975).
- 3 Peter Roberts, *Anthracite Coal Communities* (New York, 1904, repr. 1970), V.

tween work and community and places difference among workers squarely in the realm of the local. As an analysis of working class lives, it does damage to our understanding of how class identity is formed, both by ignoring the gendered and racial nature of class but also by neglecting the multiple sites of class formation. In this sense, the logic of production and struggle at the point of production is the logic of capital, not labor. It privileges the productive arena and the public sphere of work in ways that reflect the perspectives of employers but do not illuminate the worldviews of working men and women. Favoring a traditional narrative of labor militancy's birth and decline, most labor historians have thus continued to rely on productivist class analysis in which economic determination not only sets the parameters of discussion but often excludes complicating factors.⁴

In contrast to the powerfully situated category of "class," those of race, ethnicity, and gender have been inscribed as local and parochial identities in most labor historical writing.⁵ One reason is that theories of racial and gender difference are thought to lack explanatory power. Questions of race and gender discrimination and struggles for equality are seen to interrupt the narrative of class struggle and undermine class analysis. In the historical scholarship on labor, sexual and racial/ethnic differences are thus erased. If David Roediger's book, *The Wages of Whiteness* or Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History*⁶ are now frequently cited, there continues to be resistance to the perspectives of race and gender in reshaping the stories we tell.

Drawing upon the findings of the new social history of labor, I want to suggest a model or focus for working class history that reconciles the contradictory pull of a productivist definition of class and the importance of race, ethnic, and gender differences. Simply put, the logic of labor history, of worker opposition and resistance, is best understood as a logic of social reproduction. Defined as the configuration of resources, practices, and institutions which make possible the re-creation and revitalization of human life both culturally and biologically,⁷ social reproduction—not production—has been the unspoken explanatory engine of the

4 This is most apparent in Bryan Palmer's scathing critique of all textual and political analysis in labor history; see *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia, 1990), esp. 48-144. This essay is both a response to such thinking and an extension, albeit in a different direction, from the questions Joan Scott originally raised in essays later published as *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988).

5 See Robin Kelley's essay, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History*, 80 (June 1993), 75-112, for an approach that challenges the dominance of struggles confined to the arena of production in labor and working class history.

6 David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); idem, *The Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London, 1994); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, 1997); Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as Other: Re-defining the Parameters of Labor History," *Labor History* 34 (Spring-Summer 1993), 190-204.

7 There is great interest in cultural reproduction among historians and sociologists concerned with education, but with little impact elsewhere. In this case, the reproduction of class relations also is seen as something which Capital does to Labor, largely through the educational system and the state. The writings of Pierre Bourdieu have been influential; see his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977).

working class history in recent years. Its most accomplished practitioners have recaptured aspects of working class lives which fostered the reproduction and maintenance of families, communities, and subcultures.

In focusing on the realm of production, labor historians have often missed what Carolyn Kay Steedman evoked in her book, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, namely, the *development* of class-consciousness as a "learned position." Children, who have not yet entered the realm of production, "still reach understandings of social position, exclusion, and difference."⁸ Thus, class consciousness as "a way of understanding the world that can be conveyed to children" has been absent from even the new labor history. Exploring the dense social networks which connect kinship, education, work, community, leisure, and the state would aid our understanding not only of the formation of class but its cultural and material transmission.⁹ Indeed, kinship and friendship—the relations of reproduction—determine individual class as much as productive relations. Inheriting systems of belief, codes of behavior, and life chances, men and women are *born* into class relations; they come to consciousness in social families; and they encounter class first as children, as non-workers, and not in the workplace. The idea that class—like race, ethnicity, and gender—is predominantly culturally produced, associated with the construction of identities over the life course, and located in the dynamics of family and community, provides the best way in which to reintegrate working class history into new scholarship on difference.

Difference as Social Problem

In the writing of labor history, "difference" has been used to connote both the extent of separation between behaviors, identities, and subjects by degree or kind and the social construction of such differences in language. For the first generation of the Wisconsin school of labor history, both difference and citizenship, membership and exclusion were words which set the parameters of discussion about the labor movement. As institutional economists, these early labor historians weighed into the debate on labor history with a ten-volume documentary history and a four-volume interpretive history of labor in the United States. Their work collectively focused on individual unions and crafts, and they measured the labor movement not merely in terms of institutional power and influence within the broader polity but as a force for integrating new workers, immigrant men and women, into the labor force and the society. Convinced of American exceptionalism in the lack of class consciousness and conflict, Wisconsin school historians proposed that the labor movement had performed a central task

On different usages, see Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives," *American Review of Sociology* 15 (1989), 381-404; Paul Willis, "Cultural Production and Theories of Reproduction," in Len Barton and Stephen Walker (eds.), *Race, Class, and Education* (London, 1983), 107-38. For an empirical case study, see David Hogan, *Class and Reform: School and Society in Chicago, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia, 1985).

8 Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (New Brunswick, 1987), 13-14.

9 Ibid, 123.

in teaching the patterns and paths of democracy to new social groups. In this sense, the only difference recognized as significant was national difference in political cultures.¹⁰

Difference as difference did not appear on their agenda, and there was little concern for historical divisions and cultural conflict. Their institutional focus, however, meant that differences in ethnic, racial, gender, or religious terms entered the literature on labor history as social problems to be solved or obstacles to be overcome by the labor movement. The great question was whether members of specific social groups were to be extended membership in the working class, the labor movement, and the polity. Allegiances and parochial identities such as religion or ethnicity had to be overcome in order to enable integration.

John Commons's classic study, *Races and Immigrants in America*, exemplified this perspective. In it, Commons argued for the integration of some immigrant groups. The example he used was Slavic miners from the anthracite strike of 1902 whom Commons found eager and capable of social and political integration, with the labor movement acting as the educator in democracy, teaching institutional and political norms of behavior. In contrast, Commons viewed African Americans and Chinese immigrants as deviant cases—groups impossible to integrate and under threat from both genetic and environmental causes. They were, in essence, barred or prohibited from integration and solidarity.¹¹

The second major social problem obsessing the Commons' school, including its women adherents, was the problem of the working woman: how to organize, educate, and integrate women into the labor movement. The issue connected motherhood, public health, and insufficient wages to the problems of democracy and the labor movement. In the end, the solution to the problem of working women was adequate wages, especially a living (male) wage, and the protection of women workers through legislation. As long as they were in the labor force, women were to be organized with the men of their class. Their position was defined through difference from men as shaped by normative motherhood. The social problem of working women was solved through integration into the "universal" norm of the male-breadwinner's family.¹²

From 1890 until 1970, the Wisconsin school was the dominant influence in labor history. Institutionally, labor historians were largely employed in departments of labor economics and, increasingly in the postwar period, in industrial and labor relations schools. The few intellectual alternatives, confined to popular and political arenas, were studies of Marxist labor

10 This is particularly true for Selig Perlman, *The Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York, 1926, repr. 1949) which remains unsurpassed as an analysis of labor history. Perlman devoted considerable time and space to explaining differences through his case studies of national labor movements.

11 John Commons, *Races and Immigrants in America* (New York, 1911). In these evaluations, the Commons school scholars echoed the nativist and racist assumptions of the American Federation of Labor; yet, in seeing the Slavic immigrants as potential citizens, they differed from the stance of mainstream labor unions. See Gwendolyn Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Unions, Party, and the State, 1880-1920* (Ithaca, 1986).

12 Alice Kessler-Harris, "Women's Work as History and Myth," *Labor History* 19 (Spring 1978), 287-307; see also her book, *A Woman's Wage* (Lexington, 1990).

historians like Philip Foner or the maverick studies of W.E.B. DuBois, whose *Black Reconstruction in America* was the first to understand the connections between class and race identities and the politics of working-class men and women. These studies often viewed difference in working class history as a problem of political integration, even though the focal point was class, not polity. While prepared to accept greater cultural autonomy for some social groups, they tended to reinforce the "naturalness" of social division, especially around the issue of gender and, with somewhat less certainty, race. In the idea of a "nation within a nation," Marxists accepted cultural and political autonomy as viable for African Americans, but the solidarity which claimed priority was along class lines. Left historians emphasized the point of production in their writings and celebrated the primacy of class allegiance.¹³

Difference as Categorical Difference

The influence of cultural marxism and sociological theory revitalized the Wisconsin tradition and laid the groundwork for "a new labor history" in the 1960s and 1970s. Celebrated as a break from the institutional labor history of the past, the new labor history shifted its attention from the labor movement to collective action, from labor force statistics to community demography, from social reform to working class culture. Yet, in the general revival of social history, "difference" (of race, ethnicity, and gender) played little role *except as categorical differences*. The studies which emerged cross-tabulated endlessly population composition, mobility rates, labor force segmentation, and family type measured as *difference of degree, not kind*.

Most of the labor historical studies focused on the classic period of industrialization when artisanal labor was supplanted by the introduction of factory mass production and the emergence of the industrial proletariat. The shift from traditional—or residual—popular culture to 'modern' working class culture provided the narrative line in an analysis heavily influenced by modernization theories and enlivened, in the U.S. case, by waves of immigration that periodically reintroduced 'traditional' or 'peasant' peoples to the upheavals of modern urban and industrial life. Herbert Gutman's essay, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America,"¹⁴ argued that migration, not birth, was the principal means of recruitment into the working class and the major source of disruption of class identity.¹⁵ If this strategy placed im-

13 See David R. Roediger, "'Labor in White Skin': Race and U.S. Working Class History," in Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (eds), *Reshaping the U.S. Left* (London, 1988), 287-308, for an overview of these scholars' influence.

14 Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976), 3-78. See also his *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. and with an introduction by Ira Berlin (New York, 1987). For a more sophisticated contemporary analysis, see James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History* 79 (December 1992), 996-1020.

15 The idea of American exceptionalism based on exceptionally high rates of immigration is rapidly breaking down. See, for example, the work of Ulrich Herbert, summarized by Mary Jo Maynes in "Immigration, Integration, Foreignness: Foreign Workers in Germany Since the Turn of the Century," *Interna-*

migrant, ethnic, and African American workers on the roster of subjects to be studied, the focus on migration as a social process allowed such studies to overlook that immigration itself was a political issue subject to restriction and control. Further, it had the effect of excluding discussion of native-born working class families and the transmission of class culture not only through immigration but among generations.

Despite concerns for community, new labor historians continued to focus on workplace struggle that employed variables of family, ethnicity/race, and culture to explain conflict. Their central question was class variation in behavior and degree of social integration. Independent variables of family composition, social mobility, or political belonging were used to measure the range among social groups following a similar path from traditional communal solidarity to modern class allegiance. Race and ethnicity were recognized as benign and innate social identities that divided workers only in market competition. Studies of ethnicity, race, and gender added new categories and stacks of new information. At the same time, such studies often cast aside and ignored their own lengthy introductory chapters on working class community, where gender, ethnicity and race were thought to reside, only to arrive at the "real" site of struggle: workplace and union.

In describing class formation in the United States, the new labor history used families, neighborhoods, saloons, ethnic associations, and informal work groups as interchangeable components of working class solidarity and the building blocks of community. They were not reflections of difference in behavior or ideology but rather typologies of association. Community—not families or individuals—was the primary unit of analysis. It served primarily as a pole of sentiment and a repository of natural solidarities. Like the families on which they rested, communities became cohesive, monolithic, and undifferentiated units. While the large social processes of industrialization and urbanization might eventually modify organic ties, "communities" were seldom seen as internally divided, riddled with structural inequities of power and wealth, or defined by exclusionary rules and practices. Rather, "community", like "family" and the working class, sat on one side of the modernization divide; "society", "individuals", and the bourgeoisie occupied the other.¹⁶

In effect, the essentialist view of community that informed the new labor history had important implications for how gender, race, ethnicity would be brought into the narrative. First, families and communities in the new social history were neither biological nor social units so much as building blocks in the structure of social solidarity. Families thus undergirded the resistance of workers but had no internal life or private behavior. Individuals in families did

tional Labor and Working Class History 48 (Fall 1995), 91-93; Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880-1980: Seasonal Workers/Forced Laborers/Guest Workers* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1990); Laura Tabili, *'We Ask for British Justice': Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, 1994).

- 16 Lawrence McDonnell, "'You are too Sentimental': Problems and Suggestions for a New Labor History," *Journal of Social History* 17 (1984), 629-54. McDonnell is not the only scholar to criticize Gutman's almost apolitical social history. See Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox Genovese, "The Political Crisis of Social History," *Journal of Social History* 10 (1976), 205-20.

not fight or possess disparate and conflicting needs, nor did families have conflicting interests. Racial and ethnic differences in communities and gender divisions within households, workplaces, and political associations were thus subordinated to an overarching narrative of class unity.¹⁷

Such a stance shaped how labor historians would explore not merely community but working class politics as a whole, seeing them as natural phenomena. In his landmark essay on working class culture, historian Herbert Gutman quoted Clifford Geertz to the effect that neither migration or labor could disrupt the "primordial (as contrasted with civic) attachments, the 'assumed' givens... of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connections mainly, but beyond them, the *givenness* that stems from being born into a particular language and following particular social patterns."¹⁸ The attribution of a "primordial" nature to families, communities, and workers revealed a disturbing tendency in labor history to treat worker culture as somehow natural, not socially constructed. The proximity of working class practices to the state of nature, as exemplified in practices of mutualism, nuclear families, and premodern work habits, was the real measure of their value as the subjects of history.¹⁹ Such arguments implied that civic attachments, like public identities and political actions, were outside the boundaries of working class life. While some studies saw politics as the pivot of class consciousness, notably Leon Fink's *Workingmen's Democracy*,²⁰ politics and workers' resistance through cultural means were treated discretely in the new labor history.

17 There is more than sufficient literature on working class families and the feminist critique of family history. See, for example, the classic essay by Heidi Hartman, "The Family as Locus of Gender, Class, and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework," *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6 (Spring 1981), 366-94; Barrie Thorne (ed), with Marilyn Yalom, *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (New York, 1982) as starting points. On the subject of race, the conflict between Herbert Hill and Herbert Gutman is enlightening. See Herbert Hill, "Mythmaking as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 2 (Winter 1988), 132-98; see also below the discussion of race.

18 Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 43, citing Geertz, *Old Societies and New States*, (1963), 109-10. Gutman's project, dependent as it was on the unexplored categories of "ethnicity," "community," "family," and "race," seems to share common assumptions with the sociologists and political historians of his generation, the foremost of whom was certainly Samuel Hays. On the sociology of the 1950s, see Edward Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory* (Lexington, 1976). On the primordial definition of ethnicity, see Kathleen Conzen, et al, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the USA," *Altreitalia* 3 (April 1990), 37-38. The attitude toward politics derives from liberal political theory, its juxtaposition of natural man with his primordial attachments and the unnatural, man-made civic attachments of the social contract. See Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Palo Alto, 1988).

19 See Christopher H. Johnson, "Lifeworld, System, and Communicative Action," in Lenard R. Berlantstein (ed.), *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis* (Urbana, 1993), 55-89.

20 Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana, 1983); Richard J. Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1870-1900* (Urbana, 1986); Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York, 1985), among others. On cultural issues of class, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1983); Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrial City, 1897-1919* (Albany, 1984).

The Difference That Work Makes

In studying work and its role in class solidarity, the other major pole of the new labor history, historians drew their principal inspiration from arguments about changing "work habits" and from the sociology and anthropology of work more generally. In these studies, the interaction of different groups in the workplace took center stage; and families and communities, either as ideological constructs or social locations, were of marginal interest. When the workers discussed were women, family ideology entered into the equation as it shaped women's decisions to work, their work behaviors, and their job assignments. On the whole, the arena of social reproduction was virtually nonexistent—from the Absent Other of workingmen's family life to the negligible consideration of the State, at least outside of its police powers. Sometimes life outside the shop floor was acknowledged. Cooper's *Once a Cigarmaker*, to use one example, found that families played a significant role in shaping women's workplace experience but the intersection of men's work and family lives remained unexplored.²¹ Underlying this neglect was and is the shared assumption that families did not matter to men.²²

Reshaping labor's narrative to incorporate both community studies and the demands of productivist logic, David Montgomery's *The Fall of the House of Labor* remains a showpiece of the new labor history. Its basic premise rooted working class consciousness firmly in the workplace. While the family is, as he argues, "a nursery of class consciousness," "working men's experience introduced them to class first and foremost through conflict at the workplace."²³ Further, according to Montgomery, the most class-conscious sector of the working class were those skilled workers on the edge of technological innovation. Their monopoly on skill and knowledge allowed them to confront employers and battle the introduction of scientific management. At the same time, craft workers in Montgomery's account remain the most detached from community and family concerns.²⁴ While other groups in the workforce—immigrant men working as day laborers and semi-skilled factory hands and women factory operatives—confronted the exploitation of employers in the workplace, it was skilled workers, in particular the machinists, miners, and railway workers, who formulated a

21 A small but representative sample would include Susan Porter Benson's innovative study of department stores, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana, 1986); Barbara Melosh, *The Physician's Hand: Work Culture and Conflict in American Nursing* (Philadelphia, 1982); Patricia Cooper, *Once a Cigarmaker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919* (Urbana, 1987).

22 This was probably best summed up in the pitting of job versus the family for working women; the question was rarely raised for men. For an excellent introduction to this problem, see Rosalyn Feldberg and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Male and Female: Job Versus Gender Models in the Sociology of Work," *Social Problems* 26 (June 1979), 524-38.

23 David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge, 1987), 139-40.

24 For an implicit critique, see Harold Benenson, "The Family and Community Bases of U.S. Working Class Protest, 1880-1920," *Research in Social Movements* 8 (1985), 109-32, and Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Men, Women, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill, 1991).

new ideology for the labor movement, expressing a desire for industrial democracy in the workplace and its attendant benefits in the political realm.²⁵

The workplace focus of *The Fall of the House of Labor* reasserted the division of the world into productive and reproductive realms, with the latter as the repository of traditional unchanging values. In this divided world, workplace issues not only are disconnected from the community, but work identity and alliance supersede those of family, racial and ethnic group, and community. In his essay, „The Stop Watch and the Wooden Shoe,“ historian Mike Davis similarly argued that the work group was and is „a social unit for the individual worker almost as intimate and primal as the family“; it was the „atom of class organization...[and] seed of cooperative action.“ *Steelworker Alley*, a more recent study, endorses the primacy of the work group in constructing class.²⁶ This workplace focus further has demoted the most salient theme in labor history: class divisions based on both ethno-racial and gender antagonisms and the pursuit of exclusionary policies by craft unions. In the Wisconsin school of labor history, such policies were reduced to „job consciousness“ in the face of an expanding labor force and job scarcity.²⁷ For David Montgomery, Mike Davis, and others, emphasis on the political implications of workers‘ control broadened its meaning. They ignored, however, the connections between the shop floor and public politics of skilled workers, their place in working class communities, and their roles in the working class family.²⁸

Historical studies of workers in male-dominated industries have tended to remove them from both family and community and to downplay experiences apart from work and the occasional struggle with strikebreakers. The neglect has been neither unconscious nor inconsequential. More than one recent study eloquently defends the point of production as the only point worthy of consideration in determining class politics.²⁹ Yet, neglecting aspects of social

25 Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*.

26 Mike Davis, „The Stop Watch and Wooden Shoe: Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World,“ in James Green (ed), *Workers‘ Struggles, Past and Present: A Radical America Reader* (Philadelphia, 1983), 85; Robert Bruno, *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown* (Ithaca, 1999) has a chapter called „Born at the Workplace,“ in which he grounds class solidarity and class identity firmly and exclusively in the workplace, in seeming contradiction of earlier discussions of how family origins matter. In a book that celebrates working class fathers, women are almost entirely absent.

27 Exclusion and control were given positive sanction, in large part due to the role that immigrant and black workers play in Commons‘ vision of democracy. See Commons, *Races and Immigrants in America*, esp. 1-21, 221-23; Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*.

28 See also Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana, 1987).

29 For examples, see the profusion of studies on waterfront workers, including Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana, 1988); Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans* (New York, 1990); Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley, 1988) among others. Arnesen carries the argument about the absolute primacy of the point of production and the irrelevance of community the farthest; and it is the rejection of community that concerns me here. For contrasting examples, consider Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-1941* (Urbana, 1997); Toby Higbie, „Indispensable Outcasts: Harvest Laborers in the Wheat Belt of the Middle West, 1890-1925,“ *Labor History* 38 (Fall 1997), 393-412; Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana, 1998); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrants*

reproduction in labor history shortchanges the complex lives and identities of working class men as well as women. Whether single or married, transient or settled, stevedores, sailors, canal workers, truck drivers, and other workingmen had rich lives in their communities. This dimension that begins with the youth gang, the saloon, and the brothel and continues beyond the hiring hall and single men's flophouses into the neighborhoods and homes of married workingmen with wives and children. Many, if not most, had cultural allegiances and political lives apart from work. Even if one were to believe that such communities were not directly related to class politics, there can be no doubt that seaports, mining towns, logging camps, and migrant encampments were in fact important social arenas for laboring men. So too were the families, neighborhoods, schools, and churches, in which they came to adulthood. These institutions powerfully shaped working class attitudes toward work, solidarity, and politics. Further, they gave rise to particular shared ideas about brotherhood, sex, and violence.³⁰ The recent generation of labor historians, influenced by feminist scholarship and critical race theory, has explored such social spaces in which men's class consciousness was given form and expression. Expanding beyond the workplace focus of earlier work, they have drawn the connections between the reproductive and productive spheres and thus refused to isolate work lives and politics from the social reproduction of class for either men or women.

The studies of company towns and small cities, even when they focus on single industries, also have been powerful exceptions to the productivist paradigm. *Like a Family*, a collaborative study of southern textile workers, successfully integrated working class community and work lives with the history of industrialization, mass culture, and the State.³¹ Studies by John Bodnar and Eva Morawska illuminated how workers connected need and desire in the realms of community and work, social reproduction and production. In a more contradictory fashion, David Corbin's *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*, established the historically strong relationships between community and family life and collective action only to abandon them when describing the massive strikes of 1922. Social organization apparently disappeared with the "virtual civil war" in the coal fields, as if anomie suddenly consumed families and communities.³²

grant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930 (Cambridge, 2000); Kimberley Phillips, *Alabama North: African American Migrants, Community, and Working Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana, 2000). These studies, in contrast to the literature cited above, take gender and race seriously in their analysis of class consciousness and collective action, and they also explore the importance of aspects of life that fall under social reproduction—culture, community, and politics.

- 30 Evidence of the importance of primary relationships, such as kinship groups and friendship networks, can be unearthed in the published autobiographies of labor radicals. Although the strength of these "reproductive" relations was certainly not limited to that self-selected group, the conscious choice to be a witness to one's political awakening and subsequent journey forced the storyteller to articulate the practices of everyday working class lives. See the discussion in Kathleen Brown and Elizabeth Faue, "Social Bonds, Sexual Politics and Political Community on the U.S. Left, 1920s-1940s," *Left History* (forthcoming).
- 31 For exceptions, see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., *Like a Family: The Making of the Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill, 1987); Tamara Hareven, *Family Time, Industrial Time: The Relationship Between Family and Work in a New England Mill Community*, (Cambridge, 1982); David Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields* (Urbana, 1981); Allen Tulos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill, 1989).
- 32 John Bodnar, *Workers' World: Kinship, Community and Protest in an Industrial Society, 1900-1940*

To the extent that labor historians recognize racial differences in the labor force, it is treated gingerly. Working class racism is acknowledged, its role in structuring inequality critiqued, and its socially destructive impact condemned. Most authors, however, ground their analyses in the assumption that racial consciousness and identity—unlike those of class—cannot transcend parochial concerns. Racism, like sexism and ethnic hostility, is condemned primarily because it detracts from the 'real' class struggle. It impedes the process of radicalization; it makes cowards and cheats of honest heroes. Race and racial identity are thus seen to belong to the local sphere of "tradition," "community," and self- and group-interest that stands in opposition to the objective, material, and even universal category of class. Ira Katznelson's *City Trenches* summed it up in the argument that workers in the United States did not have a labor party (i.e. politics that transcend difference) because they were workers at work and ethnics at home. The divide between the positive pull of class struggle and the negative pole of community life seemed fairly unbridgeable, workplace conflicts over hiring, promotion, pay, and seniority notwithstanding.³³ Apart from celebrating the primacy of production and diminishing the importance of racial, gender, and ethnic identities, what is at stake in their demotion to the ranks of the parochial, ephemeral, or natural?

To put it quite simply, in the narrative of labor history, "class" was and to a great degree is used as a unifying concept. Other identities, while interesting subcategories, detract from the main story. In effect, the "new" labor history historicized some experiences of class while marginalizing or denying others. As Ira Katznelson wrote in *City Trenches*, "Class, in short, has been lived and fought as *a series of partial* relationships, and it has therefore been experienced and talked about as only one of a number of competing bases of social life."³⁴ The perception that class is partial, unless it absorbs all other identities or attains primacy over them, is central to the problem of how labor and working class historians fail to come to terms with difference. In *The Nights of Labor*, French historian Jacques Rancière argues in return that the working class is in itself an intellectual category, one constructed by intellectuals to explore their own version of the "representative" and "authentic" worker, the artisan in the 18th and 19th century, the industrial worker in the 20th. Rancière asks, "Might not the intellectual quest for the representative worker be simply a means of repressing the discourse of those workers who threaten the viability of the whole enterprise of writing the history of the working class?"³⁵ The same repression of "difference" has been at work in the new labor history.

(Baltimore, 1982); Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: The Life Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940* (Cambridge, 1985).

33 Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (New York, 1981).

34 Katznelson, *City Trenches*, 19.

35 Quoted in Donald Reid, "The Night of the Proletarians, Deconstruction, and Social History," *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (1984), 456; Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth Century France*, transl. by John Drury, introduction by Donald Reid (Philadelphia, 1989).

Difference as Identity and Social Reproduction

As historical studies of labor began to focus on the interplay of class with race and gender, the story changed, losing some of its coherence, its meaning, and its capacity to absorb the shock of difference among workers. What is more, all of the gains of labor history seemed to be lost in a morass of local knowledge—not just that workers had more than one identity but they had them in different ways in different locales. Already in 1976, Herbert Gutman spoke about the centrifugal forces that pushed the history of immigrants away from the history of women, the history of work from that of community. By 1984, at the DeKalb conference on labor history, there was open despair, at least among some of the participants, that there would ever be one story again. What gender, race, ethnicity, and local study seemed to do to working class history was to divide it too minutely and to make synthesis impossible. Difference had become an obstacle to the new urge to integrate the new social history into the narrative—meaning political—history of the United States; hence the criticism that labor history did not engage the state sufficiently. It was now viewed as impossible to integrate diverse knowledges.³⁶

But over the past decade linguistic theorists, anthropologists, and resurgent materialists have struggled to make sense of difference. The creative nexus where scholarship on gender and/or race meets with working class and labor history has reconsidered and revived concepts in labor history. There is, for example, a new institutionalism afoot that returns to the Wisconsin School's concerns with difference but not as a problem to be solved. Rather, race, ethnicity, and gender are viewed as positive identities. There has been as well a rethinking of racial and gender differences not as stable and universal categories but as social constructs, filled with the meanings of both belonging and exclusion, as dual and multiple subjectivities, with content as well as form.³⁷ Difference, in other words, has become in some of the new scholarship *not degrees of difference but difference in kind*. While this can generate essentialist thinking about the working class past, the attempt to historicize gender, race, and class identities was a step outside the box of productivist thinking. The study of working men and women has become a study not of the universal category of worker but work and class as constitutive of masculinity and femininity. Language is now seen, even in its neutral masks, as gendered; "class," "labor market," and "solidarity" are further construed not merely as gendered but raced concepts.³⁸ Social reproduction—as constitutive of the social and power relations

36 See Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society*; J. Carroll Moody and Alice Kessler-Harris (eds.), *Perspectives on American Labor History: Toward a New Synthesis?* (DeKalb, IL 1989).

37 See the special issue on gender and labor history, *Labor History* 34 (Spring-Summer 1993), especially Leon Fink, "Culture's Last Stand? Gender and the Search for Synthesis in American Labor History," 178-89; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as Other," 190-204; Earl Lewis, "Invoking Concepts, Problematizing Identities: The Life of Charles N. Hunter and the Implications for the Study of Gender and Labor," 292-308. On difference in women's history, see the recent essay by Linda Gordon, "On 'Difference,'" *Genders* 10 (Spring 1991), 91-111.

38 See, for example, Elizabeth Faue, "The 'Dynamo of Change': Gender and Solidarity in the American Labour Movement of the 1930s," *Gender and History* 1 (Summer 1989), 138-158; Ava Baron(ed), *Work Engendered: Toward a New Labor History* (Ithaca, 1991); Sonya Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gen-*

between and among classes—provides new material for understanding not just race and gender but class difference.

By following on the insight that individuals first encounter class as non-workers, we should note that families—even more often than communities—offer us our first and only continuous experience of class, one which connects the aspects of working lives. To begin with, most members of the working class—both male and female—experienced sporadic unemployment, frequent changes in jobs and/or multiple jobs, and periods of inactivity due to illness, accident, or family need. Work experience and workplace struggles have been for the most part episodic and non-continuous for most members of the working class,³⁹ while community origins and family identities have the character of persistence and continuity. That fact alone might shift the balance to an approach to labor history based on an understanding of the wider processes of social and cultural reproduction. The first step is to re-examine concepts such as community, class, and family and our neglect of them as boundary markers for the reproductive arena. We need to make serious efforts as well to interrogate the productive determinism of our historical explanations. Denaturalizing politics in labor and working class history requires an understanding of working class identity as the product of socialization in the household and in community-level institutions, not as the natural product of economic bonds or dependencies.⁴⁰

Establishing connections between family organization, mediating institutions, and class politics is one way of incorporating social reproduction into narrative and explanation in labor history. To the extent that recent community studies have traced the broad outlines of working class experience, they made important connections between production and reproduction. Using knowledge of the importance of friendship networks, kin, culture, education, and voluntary associations, we can employ what we already know to reshape the experiential definitions of class in labor history. The logic of community and household as sites in which workers seek to reproduce and improve the conditions of their existence serve to re-integrate various facets of labor history, as historians such as Herbert Gutman and Alice Kessler-Harris have argued.⁴¹

der and Class in Nineteenth Century England (Berkeley, 1992); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as Other."

- 39 We might emphasize the high level of geographic and occupational mobility noted in Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in the Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, MA., 1964); Charles Stephenson, "There's Plenty 'Waitin' at the Gates: Mobility, Opportunity, and the American Worker," in Charles Stephenson and Robert Asher (eds.), *Life and Labor: Dimensions of American Working Class History* (Albany, 1986), 72-91, and the high rates of unemployment documented in Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA., 1986).
- 40 I take my inspiration for this line of argument from Donna Haraway's 'classic' essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," first published in *Socialist Review* 80 (1985), 65-108. Rosalind Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* (Boston, 1983) has a thorough analysis of the evolutionary assumptions of Marxist theory that has some relevance here; so too do the arguments about family theory on the left. See, for example, Michelle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist-Feminist Analysis* (London, 1980).
- 41 See discussion of Gutman above; Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as Other." See also Jeanne

Such an approach would make possible the consideration of labor unions as institutions engaged in the defense and reproduction of families and communities which were the purpose of the labor movement. The role of the State in reproducing and reconstituting relations of dominance should be investigated as well. Exploring the politics of consumption within a social reproductive framework also helps to transform the production dynamic.⁴² Finally, as language and culture help to reproduce class as a cultural system, they too can be integrated.⁴³

Reinterpreting the history of the U.S. working class from this perspective allows us to see, for example, how, before the First World War, progressive era efforts to restrict immigration, pass protective labor legislation for women and children, and promote the ideal of the family wage were central to the project of reproducing the working class.⁴⁴ Stable, skilled work provided the means of insuring family stability, transmission of skill and status from fathers to sons,⁴⁵ and respectability in the working class. Skilled labor's insistence on controlling access to the job market, the duration and speed of work, the rules of workplace behavior, and compensation was the essence of workers' control which underwrote the status and dominance of skilled workers to the benefit of their families and communities.⁴⁶

Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York, 1990).

- 42 On consumption and its debateable use in substituting for production-centered analyses, see Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1915-1929* (New York, 1994). As I argue here, social reproduction, rather than consumption, has far greater transformative possibilities, since it encompasses more than the "expenditure" side of working class life. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 1990), for example, focuses on consumption patterns among workers, but her analysis differs from Frank's in contextualizing consumption within broader working class cultural life, opening the door for an analysis rooted in social reproduction.
- 43 One of the few analyses where a scholar has attempted to establish the links among the history and politics of leisure, culture, and community to working class consciousness and subjectivity is Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working-Class Consciousness* (New York, 1973). In a chapter called "Colonized Leisure, Trivialized Work" (51-134), Aronowitz begins to "connect the dots" between such arenas as education and socialization, the possibilities for rebellion and mobility, and the worlds of leisure consumption and production. While Aronowitz continues to privilege a productivist agenda (the lack of meaningful work and the "purging" of the "desire" for such work are much on his mind) and to denigrate consumption (the puritanism of the Left), his lively experimentation with history and politics and his awareness, however incomplete, of gender and race issues make this one of the most provocative of the productivist analyses.
- 44 The literature here is vast; but consider, for example, the recent study by Gwendolyn Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants*. On the impact of protective legislation, see Judith Baer, *The Chains of Protection* (Westport, CT 1978); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (New York, 1982), 180-214. For a more theoretical discussion, see Gita Sen, "The Sexual Division of Labor and the Working Class Family: Towards a Conceptual Synthesis of Class Relations and the Subordination of Women," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12 (Summer 1980), 76-86; Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today*, 152-86; Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, "Rethinking Women's Oppression," *New Left Review* 144 (March-April 1984), 33-71; and Barrett, "Rethinking Women's Oppression: A Reply to Brenner and Ramas," *New Left Review* (July-August 1984), 123-28.
- 45 We need a close examination of industrial apprenticeships and some work on the father-son dynamic in labor history. Only the suggestive argument in Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, esp. 80-114, comes to mind.
- 46 Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 1989), 128.

In many ways, the dominance of craft unions had the result of creating and reproducing divisions within the working class along ethno-cultural and economic lines. The family economies and codes of respectability of skilled workers marked divisions between old and new immigrants, skilled workers and factory operatives, craft unionists and non-union workers, men and women. Skilled workers set themselves apart as a distinct group through differential family structures and gender practices. The importance of a non-working wife, and later also non-working children, in establishing a worker as both respectable and manly was given its fullest expression in the family wage ideology.⁴⁷ Family size and organization were part of working class reproductive strategies to achieve or increase economic and social power and culturally marked class position.⁴⁸ While working class strategies of social reproduction changed over time, Victorian family ideology long outlasted the abilities of individual workingmen to meet its expectations. By the post-World War II era, the subcultures of single men—whether hipsters, beats, or playboys—merged resistance to the obligations of marriage and family to opposition to the constraints of waged work.⁴⁹

Finally, the socialization and education of working class children bore a reproductive cast. The history of childhood presents us with evidence of class patterns in the role childhood plays in developing individual and collective identities through family formation, the life course, and labor force participation. Further enlarging our horizons, we might also ask how class identities, mediated and shaped by race and gender, are passed on in the families, peer groups, neighborhoods, and communities.⁵⁰ As Ileen De Vault has shown, skilled workers

47 Alice Kessler-Harris, "Where are the Organized Women Workers?" *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1978), 95-110, first examined the gender ideology of the labor movement with particular attention to the family wage as an ideal. See also Martha May, "Bread Before Roses: American Workingmen, Unions, and the Family Wage," in Ruth Milkman (ed), *Women, Work, and Protest* (Boston, 1985), 1-21; Lawrence Glickman, "Inventing 'the American Standard of Living': Gender, Race, and Working Class Identity, 1880-1925," *Labor History* 34 (Spring-Summer 1993), 221-35; Catherine Collomp, "Unions, Civics and National Identity: Organized Labor's Reaction to Immigration, 1881-1897," *Labor History* 29 (Fall 1988), 450-74; for the English case, Wally Secombe, "Patriarchy Stabilized: The Construction of the Male Bread-Winner Wage Norms in 19th Century Britain," *Social History* 11 (1986), 53-76.

48 See suggestive hints in Michael B. Katz and Mark J. Stern, "History and the Limits of Population Policy," *Politics and Society* 10 (1980), 225-45; John R. Gillis, Louise Tilly, and David Levine (eds.), *The European Experience of Declining Fertility, 1850-1970: The Quiet Revolution* (Cambridge, 1992). The U.S. literature on fertility is more receptive toward ethnic than class differences in rates; only Michael Haines, *Fertility and Occupation: Population Patterns in Industrialization* (New York, 1979) broached the question.

49 Some of the tensions between this ideology and the "reality" of male wages are at issue in Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY., 1983); see also George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana 1994), 45-68 ff. among others.

50 Some examples are recent sociological studies of children and adolescents, including Paul E. Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (London, 1977); Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in Schools* (New Brunswick, NJ., 1993). For historiographical overviews and recent case studies, see Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (eds.), *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook*, Westport, CT 1985; *idem*, *Children in Comparative and Historical Perspective: An International Handbook and Research Guid*, (Westport, CT., 1991); Eliot West and Paula Petrick (eds.), *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950* (Lawrence, KS., 1992).

influenced the movement of their children out of the shrinking craft labor market and into clerical labor, as a means of protecting family respectability and sustaining class position.⁵¹

The question that remains unasked is whether the road to respectability enhanced or gave power to men in material and/or psychological terms and whether the respectability of the craft unionist—his craft conservatism—was a product of skilled workers' own remaking of masculinity. Far from street culture, the skilled worker found his manhood and maturity in the responsibilities and status of marriage and fatherhood. Siring sons and educating them in the customs of the trade, as well as providing education and trousseau for daughters, may well have been what being a manly worker was all about. From this we might conclude that the respectable working class family was a concept consonant with the code of manliness in the workplace.⁵² It complemented as well the racial definition of manliness in workplace and community.⁵³

Further, immigrant and unskilled workers had a set of reproductive strategies that gave less weight to the control of the workplace as a workplace and had more to do with the use of workplace networks to aid kin.⁵⁴ The conflict between the craft union leadership and the vast majority of unorganized workers had less to do with the nature of work itself than with

There are some interesting studies that would be useful for rethinking the meaning of class and the labor movement in postwar America: August G. Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth: The Impact of Social Classes on Adolescents* (New York, 1949, repr. 1964); William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia, 1990); William M. Tuttle, Jr., *'Daddy's Gone to War': The Second World War in the Lives of American Children* (New York, 1993).

- 51 Ileen De Vault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh* (Ithaca, 1990). For a contemporary article that attempts to think through the connections between class identity and schooling in the curriculum, see Nora Faires and John J. Bukowczyk, "The American Family and the Little Red Schoolhouse: Historians, Class, and the Problem of Curricular Diversity," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 19 (1994), 24-74.
- 52 Gareth Stedman Jones, *The Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983), 218ff. and Laurie, *Artisans into Workers*, 182 ff., use the concept of domestication in describing the growing respectability of the skilled workers. Richard Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis* (Ithaca, 1990), while helpful in placing worker militancy in life course terms and seeing the divergent interests and codes of behavior of skilled/middle aged craft workers and young immigrant laborers, carries with it the presumption that these young rowdies never grow up. See also the essay by Peter Way, "Evil Humors and Ardent Spirits: The Rough Culture of Canal Construction Laborers," *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1993), 1397-1428; and his *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780-1860* (Cambridge, 1993). In his essay, "You are Too Sentimental," Lawrence McDonnell comments on the complacency of the settled and the romanticization of the transient worker. In *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York City, 1790-1860* (New York, 1986), Christine Stansell suggests that the domestication of previously hostile male-female relationships among the working classes had much to do with the need for a united front against employers, a prerequisite for class solidarity, while suggesting that the origins of trade union hostility to working women had to do with divergent family structures and needs.
- 53 See Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as 'Other'"; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; idem, *The Abolition of Whiteness*, esp. 69-81. Such arguments can be derived by applying gender analysis to the study of Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California, 1830-1924* (Berkeley, 1971) among others.
- 54 See Hareven, *Family Time, Industrial Time* and Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, as illustrative studies of the family economies and reproductive strategies of factory operatives.

the issues of fertility, mortality, migration, and the working class family. Even the issue of the family wage, as Ron Rothbart has shown, was not an argument peculiar to the skilled working class; immigrant groups used the language of the family wage to express their desires for stable families.⁵⁵ Entry into skilled jobs, the family wage, and workers' control were salient issues of reproduction that defined working class morality, status, identity, and solidarity.

To shift the focus from the workplace to the life course for women and men might further tell us something about how class shapes personalities, life choices, and ideologies. High mortality rates due to malnutrition, industrial accidents, and death in childbirth suggest the disruption of class transmission and consciousness equal to that of migration.⁵⁶ Child labor, to use another example, would seem to have a dampening effect on class consciousness if father is also boss; it could impede as well as transmit the work ethic. The traumatic impact of strikes on family stability and survival had important effects for the political socialization of children and, even with successful outcomes, reordered domestic relations within households. Further, as Carolyn Steedman reminds us, working class male authority was inherently unstable, given the shifting nature of class relations, an aspect of working class life which might make children more ambivalent or more strident in their sense of class identity.⁵⁷ Male and female socialization within class and race groups set up different parameters for the understanding, experience, and identification of class.

Steedman's powerful connection of childhood and memory, exclusion, and the politics of wanting ("the subterranean culture of longing"), and class feeling as "the social and subjective sense of the impossible unfairness of things" reminds us of the possibilities of autobiography and life history to uncover the roots of identity and politics. Mary Jo Maynes' explorations of French and German working-class autobiographies are useful here in uncovering the uses of childhood in developing political consciousness. The sense of "missing out on childhood" underwrote the politics of class, even as a powerful sense of deprivation stoked working class militancy. In *The Nights of Labor*, Jacques Rancière similarly conveys how deprivation—experienced in childhood and resurrected in the narratives of working class intellectuals—set the context for utopian and revolutionary ideologies. In an American setting, where class was less a part of political discourse but no less a part of historical experience, exploring autobiographies would seem to be vital in reconstructing the social origins of class identity and political activism.⁵⁸

55 Ron Rothbart, "Homes are What Any Strike is About: Immigrant Labor and the Family Wage," *Journal of Social History* 23 (1989), 267-84.

56 For some hint at this, see the demographic parameters for working class families outlined by Steve Ruggles, *Prolonged Connections: The Rise of the Extended Family in Nineteenth Century England and America* (Madison, 1987). Two studies of the effects of high male mortality rates are Frank Furstenberg, Theodore Hershberg, and John Modell, "The Origins of the Female-Headed Black Family," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (1975): 211-33; and Susan J. Kleinberg, *The Shadow of the Mills: Working Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870-1907* (Pittsburgh, 1989), esp. 27-40, 240-50.

57 Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 72-75; see also Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York, 1972).

58 Steedman, 8, 111; Mary Jo Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers'*

Conclusion

In a recent essay, historian David Roediger asks what kind of labor history is best suited for an increasingly diverse labor force and a labor movement in crisis.⁵⁹ Faced with growing numbers of female and minority workers, can either labor history or the labor movement overcome the limitations of productive politics for explaining the behavior of working men and women and their institutions? . Since World War II, it has been true that social movements rooted in the sphere of reproduction have been dominant in world politics.⁶⁰ Labor historians have been slow to realize that the labor movement was and is also a social movement oriented toward the reproduction of life and the political empowerment of workers. Mary Heaton Vorse once wrote that "When you come down to it, the labor movement is about children and about homes. In the final analysis, civilization itself is measured by the way in which children will live and what chance they will have in the world... The workers feel this instinctively. Their immediate way of helping children live in a better world is by a union."⁶¹ The recognition that working class men and women in the 20th century have increasingly pursued class interests and identities in arenas beyond the labor movement contributes to our understanding that the realm of production is only one of many sites of class reproduction. This perception, not that of John R. Commons, may more accurately capture the spirit of a labor history written from the bottom up than those centered in factory politics.

Rather than looking to the multiple and diverse reasons why workers organize, many contemporary analyses insist that the labor movement as a whole was concerned primarily—or solely—with struggle at the point of production, and therefore labor history should be as well. But the question must be raised in what way and to what great extent does the historians' focus on production displace the priorities, perceptions, and experiences of workers in the writing of working class history? Furthermore, in the twentieth century, there has been a substantial change in the ways in which contemporary social theorists and critics explain human behavior, rooting human action in the public and reproductive realms of life. Keeping the focus on the realm of production and giving it primacy over reproductive behavior and politics, means essentially that labor historians are intent on ignoring these shifts in political philosophy and social theory. Certainly, one of the consequences of this neglect is to make some hostile to placing

Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialization (Chapel Hill, 1995); idem, "Autobiography and Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Social Science History* 15 (Fall 1992), 517-37; Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor*. The rich cache of working class, immigrant, and African American autobiographies is another place to begin. For example, on the origins of Samuel Gompers' idea of "class feeling," see the first volume of his autobiography, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (New York, 1924, repr. 1953).

59 David Roediger, "What if Labor Were Not White and Male? Recentring Working-Class History and Reconstructing the Debate on the Unions and Race," *International Labor and Working Class History* 51 (Spring 1997), 72-95. See also Elizabeth Faue, "Antiheroes of the Working Class," *International Review of Social History* 41 (December 1996), 375-88.

60 See, for example, Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question* (Cambridge, 1977).

61 Mary Heaton Vorse, *Labor's New Millions* (New York, 1938), 404.

gender and race, compelling and crucial constructs of history, on an equal plane with class as explanatory and structural factors in a new, revitalized working class history.

The creation of a model of labor and working class history which would center on the sphere of reproduction—or at least give it equal weight with the organization of production—lies beyond the immediate purposes and scope of this essay. Still, it seems crucial to raise the issue of what the place of reproduction is in labor history, for theories of social reproduction might help us understand the relationship between workplace and community in labor history, the conflict and cooperation among skill- and racially/ethnically defined groups, and the role of gender and gender ideology in class consciousness. Such a shift in labor history, from the pole of production to that of reproduction, requires both new research and new theory-building.

The power of arguments about difference has further eroded the confidence and changed the practice of labor historians who have traditionally focused only on the productive realm as a determinant of class and politics. Yet the undertow of class narrative remains. One tendency current among labor historians is to grudgingly acknowledge the existence of gender and race differences while devoting little attention to them in either a narrative or an analytical vein. The persistent but largely unspoken revival of institutional labor history might explain such lapses, as the focus on national labor unions uses the social history of labor and working class communities only as a backdrop for class conflict.⁶² More tellingly, because stories of labor history are told within a traditional narrative of class formation, they focus on the public aspects of class. Further, they depend on a genre or formula of thinking that is elegant and simple, easy to apply and to transmit, as a moral tale or fiction in our political culture. To this end, more thinking about class narratives, especially as they are disrupted and shaped by other narratives of difference (both in degree and kind) will help us tease out the ways in which these stories shape our own.⁶³

Finally, focusing on social reproduction will allow us to integrate the life-world and systemic realms of human history, as suggested by the recent work of Juergen Habermas.⁶⁴ The social

62 Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York, 2000) does attempt to incorporate both mass culture and politics, but he does so without changing his focus on the working class and a largely male, sphere of production. Howard Kimeldorf, "Bringing the Unions Back In (or Why We Need a New Old Labor History)," *Labor History* 32 (Winter 1991), is one of the most formal calls for this approach, but it might also be seen in the recent wave of studies of the American Federation of Labor as well as those discussing labor politics and the state. See, for example, Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (Cambridge, 1998), and Joseph McCartin, *Labor's Great War* (Chapel Hill, 1998), or the call for a liberal labor history in Ira Katznelson, "The 'Bourgeois' Dimension: A Provocation about Institutions, Politics, and the Future of Labor History," *International Labor and Working Class History* 46 (Fall 1994), 7-32.

63 See the "Narratives and Social Identities" special sections in *Social Science History* 16 (Fall-Winter 1992), introduced by William H. Sewell, for an illustration of how narrative analysis can inform theory on social identities. See also the issue on "Identity Formation and Class" of *International Labor and Working Class History* 49 (Spring 1996).

64 See Juergen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1984). On life histories, see

history of labor has been stymied by the failure to synthesize its findings, but exploring social reproduction in all its manifestations restores some order and connections in the divided consciousness of our historical subjects. It might also enable us to see how individual lives are part of larger historical processes in a systematic way. Because the public sphere is interpreted as belonging to social reproduction, this perspective can help incorporate politics and the state into working class history. This program for invigorating the field is ambitious and perhaps futile, but the stakes for our success are high. Due to the political and philosophical divisions among us, we are told, social and political historians have reached an impasse when employing the concepts of community and culture to explain history. Division has long been a part of the historical profession but essentially it is the lack of specific vision that fails us. Turning the tables on the production dynamic in history may be one way of seeing clearly again.

Maynes, *Taking the High Road*; Personal Narrative Group (ed), *Interpreting Women's Lives* (Bloomington, 1989), esp. Karen Sacks' essay, 85-96.