

## *The Future of Labor's Past: American Labor History on the World Wide Web*

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Each week dozens of new on-line exhibits, archives, films, sound recordings, charts, graphs, essays, maps, journals, books, curricula, student projects, and syllabi adorn the World Wide Web, charting heretofore uncharted territory.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of history Web sites, indeed, now tender access to millions of primary and secondary sources.<sup>2</sup> Many teachers in the humanities already promote the Web's "chat rooms" and discussion lists, and growing numbers are beginning to make course material available through university sites.<sup>3</sup> Efforts to devise a usable curriculum from this surfeit of material, moreover, have recently appeared at places like the American Social History Project (ASHP) in New York, the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) located at George Mason University, and the American Studies Crossroads Project (ASCP) at Georgetown University—to mention only three prominent examples.<sup>4</sup>

If the World Wide Web promises to play a greater role in history scholarship and pedagogy—at least in the foreseeable future—what will a curriculum drawn from it look like? Much of the existing literature on Web education treats the epistemological or methodological implications of electronic learning.<sup>5</sup> But, without unduly separating

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<sup>1</sup>For a perspicacious discussion of American history and the Web, see Michael O'Malley and Roy Rosenzweig, "Brave New World or Blind Alley?: American History on the World Wide Web," *Journal of American History*, 83 (June 1997), 132–155. Also available at "Center for History and New Media," <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/chnm/jah.html>>, 1997.

<sup>2</sup>In this essay, I have followed the citation guidelines offered by Melvin E. Page, "A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities," <<http://h-net2.msu.edu/~africa/citation.html>>, 1995. Where authorship or copyright data are not available, I have left these spaces blank.

<sup>3</sup>For examples of electronic syllabi, see Michael O'Malley, "On-Line Courses," <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/history/faculty/omalley/teaching.html>>, 1997; University of Virginia and H-Net, Humanities OnLine, "Making History on the Web: A Sample U.S. History Course," <<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/seminar/>>, 1995; and Alan Filreis, "Modern and Contemporary Poetry," <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/home.html>>, 1997. Also see Gary J. Kornblith, "Dynamic Syllabi for Dummies: Posting Class Assignments on the World Wide Web," *Journal of American History*, 83 (1998), 1447–1453.

<sup>4</sup>"American Social History Project," <<http://spanky.osc.cuny.edu/~ashp/>>; "Center for History and New Media," <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/chnm/jah.html>>, 1997; "American Studies Crossroads Project," <<http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads/>>.

<sup>5</sup>My own position, admittedly still underdeveloped, treats the World Wide Web and electronic siblings like CD-ROM not so much as provocateurs of a "new cognitive paradigm"—as detractors and celebrants alike insist—but merely as potentially useful, and occasionally exciting, methods of communication. "New cognitive paradigm" is from Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 153.

form from content, the more prosaic question of substance also demands attention. Will the gains achieved by social history in the past 30 years find expression in cyberspace? Might women's past continue to flourish in new media? Can a traditional history of ideas again rise to prominence?

This essay offers some early assessments about one discipline's presence on the Web: American labor history. In an unsystematic but (hopefully) informative manner, I introduce selected labor history Web sites, and suggest some of the ways in which teachers might use these electronic resources in the classroom. Inevitably, any such synopsis will be preliminary. The Web continues to grow at an overwhelming pace, and no individual can expect to discover, much less inspect, every deserving site.

More fundamentally, I also raise concerns about the future of labor history in cyberspace. Will the Web escape, or replicate, the anti-worker political biases frequently associated with public history?<sup>6</sup> A theoretically egalitarian instrument of communication, the Web blurs boundaries between academic and public history, offering university professors opportunities to capture typically elusive publics. Like other mass media, however, it already betrays the corrupting influence of private money. Will the world of labor thus become invisible in cyberspace, or, perhaps, "appear strange and sinister" (to borrow an apt remark from C. Wright Mills)?<sup>7</sup> Or will scholars and citizens effectively counter the attempts underway at large corporations and among libertarian ideologues to colonize new media in the name of "free" markets?<sup>8</sup> No one who genuinely cares about making connections between past and present can long afford to ignore these questions. Those who remain indifferent or dismissive toward the Web, in fact, may be surrendering without a fight the next decade's most important agent of popular historical representation.

The most distressing feature of American labor history on the Web concerns a relative scarcity of sites. While high-quality Web projects dedicated to preserving the nation's past multiply ineluctably, the field of labor history remains seriously under-represented by comparison. For example, a recent subject search of *Yahoo*, a leading web directory, yielded 86 hits for the term "labor history."<sup>9</sup> By contrast, "women's history" yielded 158 hits, and "black history" boasted 245. Even "gay history," a burgeoning yet still new area of study, registered 135. *Excite*, a less scrupulous search engine, also furnished discouraging results.<sup>10</sup> A keyword search revealed that whereas "labor history" yielded more than 2000 hits, the terms "women's history" and "black history" each produced an extensive compendium of more than 11,000 sites. Search engines such as *Yahoo* and *Excite*, of course, imperfectly measure the Web's vast offerings. Generalized queries can be misleading—they produce scores of duplicates and return hits indiscriminately, revealing little of the quality, origin, or nature of the sites they

<sup>6</sup>On popular representations of American labor history, see, for example, Dorothy Sue Cobble and Alice Kessler-Harris, "The New Labor History in American History Textbooks," *Journal of American History*, 79 (March 1993), 1534–1562; Roy Rosenzweig, "American Labor History: A Conspiracy of Silence?" *Monthly Labor Review*, 110 (August 1987), 51–53; and Michael Frisch and Dorothy Larson, "Oral History and the Presentation of Class Consciousness: The *New York Times* v. the Buffalo Unemployed" in Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 59–80.

<sup>7</sup>C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1948), 34.

<sup>8</sup>On these tendencies, see Roy Rosenzweig, "Live Free or Die?: Death, Life, Survival, and Sobriety on the Information Superhighway," a review essay forthcoming in *American Quarterly* (in my possession).

<sup>9</sup>Yahoo Inc., "Yahoo," <<http://www.yahoo.com>>, 1994.

<sup>10</sup>Excite Inc., "Excite," <<http://www.excite.com>>, 1995.

inventory. Nonetheless, these engines can suggest certain patterns. And, in fact, four of the most widely used—*Yahoo*, *Excite*, *Alta Vista*, and *HotBot*—all yield surprisingly analogous results: relative to women's history and black history, the quantity of labor history Web sites remains meager.<sup>11</sup>

Touring a few important history sites provides another, more concrete measure of labor history's somewhat weak presence. Two of the foremost digital keepers of American history, the Library of Congress and the National Archives, render workers nearly invisible. With its American Memory project, the Library of Congress has become perhaps the single most prolific and successful creator of history Web sites. Currently offering 37 digitized, searchable collections comprised of audio, film, illustrations, and text, *American Memory* enables teachers and students to explore a vast assortment of topics through primary sources. Ranching culture in 20th-century Nevada, the evolution of the conservation movement, daguerreotype portraits from the mid-19th century, film representations of the Spanish-American War—even esoteric subjects like “dance instruction manuals” from the year 1600 enjoy prominent coverage.<sup>12</sup> As Roy Rosenzweig and Michael O'Malley wrote last year in the *Journal of American History*, “the depth, range, and diversity of these on-line collections dwarf anything else available for American historians on the Web.”<sup>13</sup>

No site in *American Memory*, however, treats the history of the American labor movement. The Library's only sustained exploration of workers, a presentation entitled *Voices from the Dustbowl*, furnishes a valuable assembly of audio, photographic, and print material relating to migrant laborers in Farm Security Administration camps during the early 1940s.<sup>14</sup> *Voices* reflects a significant effort to probe the experiences of some of the Depression's victims. But without additional projects to relate workers' equally significant political and economic victories during this period, *Voices*, in effect, portrays workers as little else but noble casualties of an ambiguous, “complex set of interacting forces both economic and ecological.” Labor historians should not expect the Library to remedy these deficiencies anytime soon. Most of the upcoming *American Memory* projects investigate politically innocuous subjects such as baseball cards, sheet music, and historic buildings. None of the additional 26 projects currently underway, in fact, concerns the history of organized labor.

Neither do the virtual enterprises at the National Archives underscore the importance of labor history to American life. Of the nine exhibits that comprise the Archives' on-line *Exhibit Hall*, which include posters from World War II, gifts to presidents, and panoramic photographs, only one, *A New Deal for the Arts*, approaches the subject.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>“Alta Vista” <<http://altavista.digital.com/>>, 1995; Wired Digital Inc., “HotBot,” <<http://www.hotbot.com/>>, 1994. HotBot returns 3369 links for “labor history”; 14,943 for “women's history”; and 18,160 for “black history.” Alta Vista gives nearly the same proportion: 5451 for “labor history”; 24,162 for “women's history”; and 31,964 for “black history.” For a useful overview of the promises and perils of these search engines, see Matt Lake, “Desperately Seeking Susan OR Suzie NOT Sushi,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 3, 1998, D1–D7.

<sup>12</sup>Library of Congress, “American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library,” <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/amhome.html>>, 1995.

<sup>13</sup>Quotation taken from the digitized version of O'Malley and Rosenzweig, “Brave New World or Blind Alley?” See <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/chnm/jah.html>>.

<sup>14</sup>Library of Congress, “Voices from the Dustbowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940–1941,” <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afctshhtml/tshome.html>>, 1998.

<sup>15</sup>National Archives and Records Administration, “A New Deal for the Arts,” <<http://www.nara.gov/exhall/newdeal/newdeal.html>>, 1997.

Like *Voices from the Dustbowl*, *A New Deal for the Arts* gives a vital yet incomplete record of workers in the 1930s—the only period, it seems, that warrants any treatment at all. Like *Voices*, moreover, *New Deal* treads lightly. “In the extreme,” remarks the exhibit’s text about participants in the Federal Theater Project, “their art became a crude weapon aimed only at exposing capitalism’s abuses and exalting the struggles of the working class.”

The record of the Smithsonian Institution fares slightly better. The Smithsonian’s Web site offers 44 diverse subjects, including African-American History and Culture, Postal History and Stamps, and Armed Forces History. Within these categories, it presents more than 95 items—exhibits, thematic sketches, links, photographs, documents, and other worthwhile expositions. But labor history, not a category, finds expression in only three items: 500-word biographical outlines of the lives of Cesar Chavez, Samuel Gompers, and Frances Perkins; a series of 14 images concerning historic tool chests, and an exhibition—sponsored by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History (NMAH)—about sweatshops.<sup>16</sup> Despite this overall inattention to labor, the NMAH’s *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A History of Sweatshops, 1820–Present* does not shrink from uniting past and present, and constitutes a serious attempt to illustrate employer brutality in the unfettered marketplace.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the treatment of work in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*—a project made possible by donations from K-Mart, Kathy Lee Gifford, and other sufficiently shamed individuals and corporations—marks a welcome improvement upon the feeble efforts of the Library of Congress and the National Archives. Together, however, these three institutions fail to provide students with enough tools to discover that class, along with gender and race, constitutes an integral dimension of American identity.

Why is labor’s past under-represented at these popular and otherwise important public-history Web sites? Perhaps the corporate underwriters of the Library of Congress’ *National Digital Library*, for one, would prefer to exclude discussions of class from a digital history curriculum. The Library has determined to raise the hefty sum of \$60 million for its digital projects, three-fourths of which, it promises, will be solicited from “America’s entrepreneurial and philanthropic leadership.” So far, 33 major American businesses and corporate foundations have agreed to become sponsors.<sup>18</sup> Who are they? Since last year, Eastman Kodak, AT & T, and Lucent Technologies, all Library sponsors, collectively have fired more than 38,000 workers—even as their chief executives have received more than \$106.2 million in compensation.<sup>19</sup> Occidental Petroleum, a fourth benefactor and one of the world’s largest oil firms, threatens to drill in the Columbian rainforest on the sacred land of the indigenous U’Wa people, who promise to commit collective suicide—by jumping off a cliff in the Andes mountains—if the

<sup>16</sup>“Smithsonian Institution,” <<http://www.si.edu/>>, 1995.

<sup>17</sup>National Museum of American History, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A History of American Sweatshops, 1820–Present,” <<http://www.si.edu/nmah/ve/sweatshops/>>. The exhibit promises to offer sound and video recordings of conditions at the infamous El Monte sweatshop in California.

<sup>18</sup>Library of Congress, “A Unique Public–Private Partnership,” <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sponsors.html>>, 1998.

<sup>19</sup>John J. Keller, “Expected AT & T Cuts Put Chief on Spot: Big Work Force Reductions Could Draw Same Fire that Hit Predecessor,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 23, 1998, A3; Ali S. Zaidi, “In the Shadow of Kodak,” *Dollars and Sense*, Mar./Apr., 1998, 9–10. For executive pay, see the AFL-CIO’s on-line database, “Executive Pay Watch,” <<http://www.paywatch.org/paywatch/front.htm>>, 1997.

enterprise goes forward.<sup>20</sup> (For this and other transgressions in the Amazon basin, *Multinational Monitor* named Occidental one of the magazine's "10 Worst Corporations" of 1997.<sup>21</sup>) Yet another sponsor, Jones Intercable Inc., donated 20 free hours of broadcast time to Newt Gingrich's "Renewing American Civilization" television course, in violation of the rules of the House of Representatives.<sup>22</sup> And Ameritech Corporation—by far the most conspicuous contributor to *American Memory*—announced 5000 job cuts (7% of its workforce) earlier this year despite posting 18 consecutive quarters of growth. In 1994, moreover, it fired 11,500 workers, and between 1995 and 1996 gave almost \$400,000 to the Republican party, making Ameritech the G.O.P.'s second most generous donor in the telecommunications industry, behind only AT & T.<sup>23</sup> Leading oil companies, investment banks, and venture-capital firms constitute most of the Library's remaining sponsors.

Specific points of connection between corporate funding and anti-labor bias in public history typically prove elusive. But who can deny that these massive—and massively reckless—benefactors have a stake in the politics of historical representation? With such corporations dominating the Library's list of sponsors, what kind of *National Digital Library* can labor historians expect? At the least, that the Library has attracted some of the most politically nefarious and morally destitute American corporations evidences that the Web is not immune to the sort of real-world pressures that frequently plague museums, textbooks, and other such forums.

Unlike these more traditional forums, however, the Web's non-hierarchical structure and relatively easy accessibility afford labor educators important opportunities to bring the history of class to the attention of students. And, indeed, while labor history on the Web so far replicates the anti-worker biases generally found in other instruments of mass media, a number of quality projects suggests the promise of electronically assisted instruction.<sup>24</sup> Teachers of the American history survey course who seek to integrate labor into their curricula might profitably mine the Web site of the *Illinois Labor History Society* (ILHS).<sup>25</sup> The ILHS, for example, located in Chicago—near Haymarket Square—presents 45 images and a diverse set of 18 secondary documents, which range from the sheet music of "Solidarity Forever" to biographical outlines of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones and Rabbi Jacob Weinstein and short expositions about the first Labor Day parade.

More importantly, the site also furnishes "A Curriculum of United States Labor

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<sup>20</sup>Terence Freitas, "Occidental Petroleum Relinquishes U'Wa Lands, but Fight Not Yet Over," *North American Congress on Latin America's Report on the Americas*, 32, July/August, 1998, 1–2; Leslie Wirpsa, "Indians Threaten Mass Suicide to Safeguard Oil-Rich Land," *National Catholic Reporter*, 33, Jun. 20, 1997, 13; and Bryan Pfeiffer and Lori Barg, "Indigenous People Say No to Oil Co.," *The Progressive*, Sept. 1998, 15.

<sup>21</sup>"*Multinational Monitor's* 10 Worst Corporations," <<http://www.essential.org/action/focus/focus.9708.html>>, 1997.

<sup>22</sup>*Boston Globe*, Feb. 24, 1995, 7; Robert Scheer, "Special Counsel for Gingrich's Cable Dealings: A Company Angling to Buy PBS Puts the Speaker on \$200,000 Worth of Television Time—Free," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 7, 1995, 7.

<sup>23</sup>Jon Van, "Ameritech Laying off 5,000 to Cut Costs; Operating Profit Sets Record, but Jobs Go Anyway," *Chicago Tribune*, Apr. 15, 1998, 1.

<sup>24</sup>Because my principal goal is to encourage American labor historians to pay more attention to developments in cyberspace, parts of the following discussion may appear overly sanguine about the utility of the Web in the classroom. I wish to emphasize here, then, that although the Web can become a useful supplement, it should never be a replacement for traditional pedagogy. Moreover, new media generally bring drawbacks as well as advantages to the study and teaching of history. See O'Malley and Rosenzweig, "Brave New World or Blind Alley?"

<sup>25</sup>"*Illinois Labor History Society*," <<http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/>>.

History for Teachers” that treats labor politics and economics from the colonial period to the present day. Conceived and written by James D. Brown Jr., “in cooperation with teachers from the metro Chicago area and local union members,” the curriculum divides into 11 chronological sections, each comprised of several elements: a short overview; an inventory of major themes, episodes, and concepts; and a feature entitled “Integrating Labor History into Effective Teaching of the Period.” This last portion recommends questions and lessons for students, and, for several sections, provides primary materials. Thus “The Growth of a New Nation,” section number three, outlines a lesson that asks students to compare Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence with an 1829 essay by George H. Evans—a principal in New York’s Working Man’s Party—entitled “The Working Men’s Declaration of Independence.”

The ILHS’s 11 sections emphasize the gains achieved by organized labor, and invite teachers to “highlight the stark contrast between today’s working environment and the relationship between workers and owners of the past.” Naturally, some sections of the curriculum are thinner than others. More curiously, the site does not furnish any primary documents from the 20th century, and generally relies more on lists than the sort of narrative prose that can enliven the past. But because the mutable character of the Web allows ventures like the ILHS’s curriculum to improve and expand with relative ease—in contrast to printed curricula and textbooks, for which revisions can mean expensive new editions—this site retains a great deal of potential.

The Web site of the *Emma Goldman Papers Project*, at UC Berkeley, delivers a more sophisticated curriculum.<sup>26</sup> Dedicated to introducing Goldman’s radicalism into middle- and high-school classrooms, the site features selections from several catalogs and publications by the Goldman Project. It also presents chapters from Goldman’s writings—such as *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1917) and *My Disillusionment with Russia* (1923)—along with selected photographs, cartoons, and newspaper articles, a searchable database of letters, pamphlets, and handbills, and even a 1934 Hearst newsreel, “Famous Anarchist Back from Exile,” which begins to suggest the peculiar contours of this last stage of Goldman’s career.<sup>27</sup>

The curriculum, extremely well conceived, draws from these valuable materials. A series of topically arranged lessons contextualizes the primary sources within 10 “standard social studies and humanities” classroom themes. One lesson, for example, asks students to consider the “dehumanizing effects of sweatshop labor in the textile industry” of the late 19th century by reading and pondering two items: a compelling excerpt from Goldman’s autobiography, *Living My Life* (1931) that describes her unhappy experiences working in a “model factory” in Rochester, New York; and a 1934 essay, in which Goldman recalls her disenchantment upon first arriving in the United States. “I soon learned that in a republic,” she writes, “there are myriad ways by which the strong, the cunning, the rich can seize power and hold it.” Excellent questions and activities, devised by the Project’s staff, follow the materials. Although it might include more documents relating to labor, the site, overall, constitutes a model for creating Web-assisted curricula.

Teachers can also assemble labor history units by reviewing clusters of Web sites that treat a similar theme or episode. Several rewarding sites, for example, pay tribute to the

<sup>26</sup>“Emma Goldman Papers,” <<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/>>.

<sup>27</sup>On the varied posthumous representations of Goldman, see Oz Frankel, “Whatever Happened to ‘Red Emma’?: Emma Goldman, from Alien Rebel to American Icon,” *Journal of American History*, 92, Dec., 1996, 903–942.

146 victims of the March 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. Students might begin by reading the Discovery Channel's site, *The Day it Rained Bodies: The Great Triangle Fire*, which tenders a moving, 1500-word essay about the disaster.<sup>28</sup> Then, they might explore the impressive range of primary-source material at three other sites. The virtual library at the *New Deal Network*—itself a notable enterprise that sponsors a number of on-line curriculum projects—reproduces 11 arresting photographs of the scene. Taken from the collections of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, the images include before and after views of the Triangle factory, as well as a gruesome picture of casualties arranged in a row at a New York City morgue.<sup>29</sup>

Another site, *The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire*, furnishes a broader array of resources.<sup>30</sup> Constructed primarily by the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, this site aspires to help students write papers from primary sources. To that end, it presents numerous primary-source documents—including 14 magazine and newspapers articles, the audio components of three oral histories, 10 photographs, a half dozen political cartoons, excerpts from a report by the 1912 New York Factory Investigating Committee, and nine other contemporary speeches, writings, and eye-witness accounts. The site also reproduces portions of Leon Stein's history, *The Triangle Fire*, which give context to the original sources, many of which derive from the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Archives at the Kheel Center.<sup>31</sup>

Another site, an on-line syllabus for a course in women's history taught at Assumption College, contributes additional primary materials about the fire.<sup>32</sup> *Triangle Strike and Fire*, digitized by Professor John McClymer, features reproductions of four original photographs and sketches, plus a series of perspectives on the fire and its aftermath, including a first-hand account of the blaze from a Triangle worker and a *New York Times* article that summarizes the views of the company's owners. As its title indicates, this site also supplies reports of the 1909 strike that preceded the fire, as well as "Rules for Pickets," a circular distributed by the Ladies' Waist Makers Union, Local 25.

Teachers might press these four projects into a larger investigation of the history of sweatshop reform—incorporating, in this case, the NMAH's *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. Or they might ask students to write papers based on the fire itself. One assignment might ask them to use the primary documents given at Kheel Center's site to test the interpretative claims proffered by the NMAH and the Discovery Channel. Or, perhaps, students might explore the perspectives of various groups involved in the episode. In this sense, McClymer's syllabus proves especially helpful, for it places the fire within a larger story of women's experiences in America. Those who peruse his site can move quickly between documents that explore the Triangle Fire and speeches by Jane Swisshelm, articles from *Godey's Lady's Book*, and ruminations such as Alexis de Tocqueville's "How the Americans Understand Equality of the Sexes." As these connections suggest, theme-based clusters of Web sites can help students develop

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Bedell and Discovery Communications Inc., "The Day It Rained Bodies: The Great Triangle Fire," <<http://www.discovery.com/DCO/doc/1012/world/history/trianglefire/triangle1.html>>, 1996.

<sup>29</sup>The Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, "New Deal Network," <<http://newdeal.feri.org/>>.

<sup>30</sup>Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire," <<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>>, 1998.

<sup>31</sup>Leon Stein, *The Triangle Fire* (New York: A Carroll & Graf/Quicksilver Book, 1962).

<sup>32</sup>John McClymer, "Triangle Strike and Fire," <<http://www.assumption.edu/HTML/Academic/history/Hill3net/TriangleTofC>>, 1996.

a skill that every teacher wants to encourage: the ability to recognize relationships between and among historical actors.

Unfortunately, much of the labor-oriented primary-source material available in cyberspace remains scattered and sometimes buried within the hundreds of thousands of sites that comprise the Web. Effective uses of this material will require labor historians both to erect many more quality gateways, curricula, exhibitions, and teaching-specific projects themselves, and to challenge projects like the Library of Congress's *National Digital Library* to account for anti-worker biases. Currently, teachers who spend a little time exploring will, however, find their efforts rewarded by many interesting documents, essays, films, oral histories, and other items. Collectively, indeed, the number and variety of first-hand records that have been digitized and placed on the Web already exceed even the best labor history archive.

In this sense, the Web can enhance pedagogy in a few ways. First, students at small universities, rural schools, and community colleges—where, seemingly, more and more lower-middle-class and working-class folks are studying—without access to generously endowed libraries can survey this material. Second, teachers of large lecture courses who assign papers can deploy the Web both to reduce competition for printed documents and to avoid the overpriced readers peddled by greedy publishers. And third, teachers in research seminars might add a new element to the standard practice of reviewing papers at the end of the term. That is, instead of merely asking each participant in a seminar to read and remark upon the paper of a fellow student, teachers might require that the commentator also check the paper's conclusions against a body of primary material available on the Web. Duplicating portions of the research, in short, becomes a much more feasible assignment.

For the period between the strike of 1877 and the Great Depression, *History Matters: A U.S. Survey Course on the Web* contains the best, and probably the largest, compilation of primary sources about workers. *History Matters*—designed by CHNM and ASHP to supplement the traditional American history survey course—arranges a huge number of heretofore scattered Web resources into coherent, searchable teaching databases.<sup>33</sup> It reproduces 56 labor-centered items, giving, for each, a short introduction. Topics include the labor conditions endured by Puerto Rican migrants during World War I; the race question at the 1886 Knights of Labor convention; the Haymarket bombing; unemployment in the 1890s, as reported by sociologist William Wycoff; hoboes and tramps of the Great Depression; and the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike. Even more valuable, the site provides 18 audio clips. Thus, students can hear a 95-year-old Kentucky coal miner remember the devastation wrought by the 1919 influenza pandemic. Or, those interested in probing the work lives of African-American women can listen to Hatti Burleson's 1928 "Sadie's Servant Room Blues," a popular song about the troubles facing domestic workers.

Many more fascinating artifacts from this era reside on the Web. For instance, a database of 19th-century books and journals at *Making of America* shows tens of thousands of references to labor.<sup>34</sup> A narrative presentation by the Discovery Channel, *The Long, Dark Ride of George Pullman*, uses selected resources to relate the "dark" and

<sup>33</sup>Center for History and New Media and the American Social History Project, City University of New York, "History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web," <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>>, 1998. As an affiliate with the Center, I have worked on parts of the "History Matters" web site.

<sup>34</sup>University of Michigan and Cornell University, "Making of America," <<http://www.umdl.umich.edu/moa/>>, 1995.

“sunny” sides of Pullman’s endeavors, as well as the “ugly” 1894 strike that changed everything.<sup>35</sup> The New York Historical Society’s particularly interesting site encourages the “reconstruction” of *Seneca Village*, a vibrant community of ethnic laborers demolished by the architects of Central Park.<sup>36</sup> *The Haymarket Massacre Archive*, created by a professor of political studies at Pitzer College, provides links, a handful of images, and a short bibliography to another disaster.<sup>37</sup> Students who want to investigate Haymarket, though, should begin with the *Haymarket Massacre Internet Memorial*, a more elegant enterprise that features excerpts from the autobiographies of August Spies and Albert Parsons; a chapter of Lewis Mumford’s writings on the “underground city”; and selections from Bruce C. Nelson’s *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago’s Anarchists, 1870–1900*.<sup>38</sup>

Another site presents an electronic version of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn’s *Memories of the Industrial Workers of the World*,<sup>39</sup> and *Pluralism and Unity* furnishes an excerpt of Flynn’s 1915 defense of worker sabotage.<sup>40</sup> *The Daniel DeLeon Internet Archive*—part of a much larger electronic project devoted to the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—reproduces the texts of 42 of DeLeon’s editorials published between 1894 and 1914.<sup>41</sup> The *Samuel Gompers Papers* contributes 16 documents and illustrations pertaining to the long-time president of the American Federation of Labor.<sup>42</sup> Students can read the text of the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act* at a site created by Mount Holyoke College.<sup>43</sup> And, as part of its on-line history of the Erie Canal, the history department at the University of Rochester has digitized parts of *Canal-boat Children*, a 1923 report by the Department of Labor’s Children’s Bureau.<sup>44</sup> Through a vivid display of 63 Lewis Hine photographs, *Child Labor in America, 1908–1912* also illustrates the plight of underage workers,<sup>45</sup> while *On the Lower East Side* treats the condition of New York’s laboring classes—especially immigrants and tenement dwellers—with 18 turn-of-the-century articles by reformers such as William Dean Howells and Jacob Riis.<sup>46</sup> At an

<sup>35</sup>Michael J. Weiss and Discovery Communications Inc., “The Long, Dark Ride of George Pullman,” <<http://www.discovery.com/area/history/pullman/pullmanal.html>>, 1997.

<sup>36</sup>New York Historical Society, New York Public Library, and the Institute for Learning Technologies at Columbia University, “Seneca Village,” <<http://projects.ilt.columbia.edu/seneca/start.html>>, 1998.

<sup>37</sup>Dana Ward, “The Haymarket Massacre Archive,” <[http://www.pitzer.edu/~dward/Anarchist\\_Archives/haymarket/Haymarket.html](http://www.pitzer.edu/~dward/Anarchist_Archives/haymarket/Haymarket.html)>, 1996.

<sup>38</sup>K.K. Campbell, “Haymarket Massacre Internet Memorial,” <<http://www.netizen.org/haymarket/>>, 1995.

<sup>39</sup>Eugene Plawiuk, “Memories of the Industrial Workers of the World,” <<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5202/rebelgirl.html>>, 1997.

<sup>40</sup>David T. Bailey and David Halsted, “Pluralism and Unity,” <<http://www.expo98.msu.edu/>>, 1998.

<sup>41</sup>Progressive Sociologists Network, “The Daniel DeLeon Internet Archive,” <<http://csf.Colorado.edu/psn/marx/Other/DeLeon/>>.

<sup>42</sup>University of Maryland, National Historical Publications and Records Commission, National Endowment for the Humanities, and George Meany Memorial Archives, “The Samuel Gompers Papers: A Documentary History of the American Working Class,” <<http://www.inform.umd.edu/Hist/Gompers/web1.html>>.

<sup>43</sup>Mount Holyoke College, “Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882,” <<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/chinex.htm>>.

<sup>44</sup>Department of History, University of Rochester, “History of the Erie Canal,” <<http://www.history.rochester.edu/canal/>>, 1998.

<sup>45</sup>The History Place, “Child Labor in America, 1908–1912,” <<http://www.historyplace.com/united-states/childlabor/index.html>>, 1998.

<sup>46</sup>William L. Crozier, Lower Manhattan Project, “On the Lower East Side: Observations of Life in Lower Manhattan at the Turn of the Century,” <<http://acad.smumn.edu/History/contents.html>>, 1993.

Ohio State University Web site, *The Life and Work of Coal Miners*, students will enjoy yet another excellent collection of contemporary observations about work conditions, this one coupled with discussions of the Avondale calamity of 1869 and the great anthracite strikes of 1900 and 1902.<sup>47</sup>

The years of the Depression yield a number of useful Web documents. The *New Deal Network*, the best place to begin, offers at least 43 items relating to organized labor during the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> An impressive number of Howard Fast's short stories, poems, essays, and reviews appear at *Howard Fast OnLine Texts*,<sup>49</sup> while another site, by the Princeton, New Jersey, Public Library, furnishes a smaller assembly of photographs of *Paul Robeson*.<sup>50</sup> The Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University imparts a fine exhibition, *Labor and the Holocaust: The Jewish Labor Committee and the Anti-Nazi Struggle*.<sup>51</sup> And a visually stimulating presentation, *Art to the People*, lends an international perspective to art and social protest during the 1930s.<sup>52</sup> Students will discover an on-line video concerning the *Famous Flint Sit Down* strike of 1936–37 at a site created by the United Auto Workers.<sup>53</sup> The *Walter P. Reuther Library*, moreover, presents a series of photographs about this formative episode in American labor history.<sup>54</sup> Of course, this essay cannot adequately introduce the scores of additional sites that might contribute to the teaching of labor history; with its refusal to impose traditional limitations of space, the Web, in fact, would be a better forum for such a review.

Despite the functional utility of these sites, some commentators continue to insist (usually informally) that excessive attention to cyberspace encourages little else but alienation and atomization—tendencies that weaken the sinews of solidarity. Such concerns have their place, especially when linked to the larger erosion of public space in 20th-century America. Still, the Web has become increasingly useful as a means of sustaining labor communities. Many large unions, including the *AFL-CIO*, maintain Web sites for efficient communication with members, and groups such as *LabourStart*, *LaborNet*, and *Campaign for Labor Rights* regularly furnish work-centered news items, rulings by the National Labor Relations Board, stories by labor journalists, organizing and protesting updates, and details about legislation pending in Congress.<sup>55</sup>

For professional labor historians, *H-Labor* has become a delightful exercise in fellowship.<sup>56</sup> One of several dozen electronic discussion networks sponsored by *H-Net*, *Humanities and Social Sciences OnLine*, *H-Labor* has created a supportive atmosphere in

<sup>47</sup>Ohio State University, "The Life and Work of Coal Miners," <[http://www.cohums.ohio-state.edu/history/projects/Lessons\\_US/Gilded\\_Age/](http://www.cohums.ohio-state.edu/history/projects/Lessons_US/Gilded_Age/)>, 1997.

<sup>48</sup>"New Deal Network," <<http://newdeal.feri.org/>>.

<sup>49</sup>"Howard Fast OnLine Texts," <<http://www2.gol.com/users/steve/>>, 1998.

<sup>50</sup>Princeton Public Library, "Paul Robeson: Princeton's Native Son," <<http://www.princeton.lib.nj.us/robeson/>>, 1998.

<sup>51</sup>Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, "Labor and the Holocaust: The Jewish Labor Committee and the Anti-Nazi Struggle," <<http://watson.bobst.nyu.edu/digicolls/tam/exhibits/JLC/opener.html>>, 1997.

<sup>52</sup>International Institute of Social History, "Art for the People: Walter Crane, Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, Albert Hahn, Frans Masereel and Gerd Arntz," <<http://www.iisg.nl/exhibitions/art/voorstellen.html>>, 1998.

<sup>53</sup>United Auto Workers, "You are There," <<http://www.uaw.org/History/sitdown.html>>.

<sup>54</sup>Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, "The Great Flint Sitdown," <<http://www.reuther.wayne.edu/sitdown.html>>, 1996.

<sup>55</sup>AFL-CIO, "Welcome to the AFL-CIO!" <<http://www.aflcio.org/>>, 1998; Eric Lee, ed., "LabourStart: Where Trade Unions Start Their Day on the Net," <<http://www.labourstart.org/>>, 1998; Institute for Global Communications, "LaborNet," <<http://www.igc.org/igc/labornet/>>, 1998.

<sup>56</sup>H-Net, Humanities OnLine, "H-Labor," <<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~labor/>>, 1996.

which to discuss issues, ask questions, read book reviews, and peruse job prospects. Quite successful—in part due to the work of its especially good moderators—the network has attracted approximately 1400 subscribers in 35 countries in only five years.<sup>57</sup> Participants include a diverse array of undergraduate and graduate students, senior historians, organizers, and labor educators, many of whom could attest to the vitality and sense of shared purpose that *H-Labor* nurtures. In large part, the future success of *H-Labor* will depend upon its inclusiveness. If it becomes another device for overspecialized labor historians to talk only to each other, it will have abandoned one of the most attractive (and subversive) features of the Web: the capacity to communicate a large amount of unfiltered data quickly and cheaply to elusive publics.

Whether new technologies will ultimately strengthen or weaken the notion of solidarity—a question for which we will not enjoy a critical perspective anytime soon—more immediate dangers lie elsewhere. Indeed, if American labor history does not occupy a more prominent position at popular sites like the *Library of Congress* and the *National Archives*, if educators do not work harder to expose cyber-bias and to establish their own virtual projects, and if teachers fail to make good use of existing resources in the classroom, many other questions threaten to become irrelevant. A hyperlinked version of this essay appears at the Web site of the Center for History and New Media (see <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/chnm/essays.html>>).

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<sup>57</sup>Seth Widgerson, ed., “H-Labor” <[sethw@maine.edu](mailto:sethw@maine.edu)>, private e-mail message to John Summers, Sept. 7, 1998.