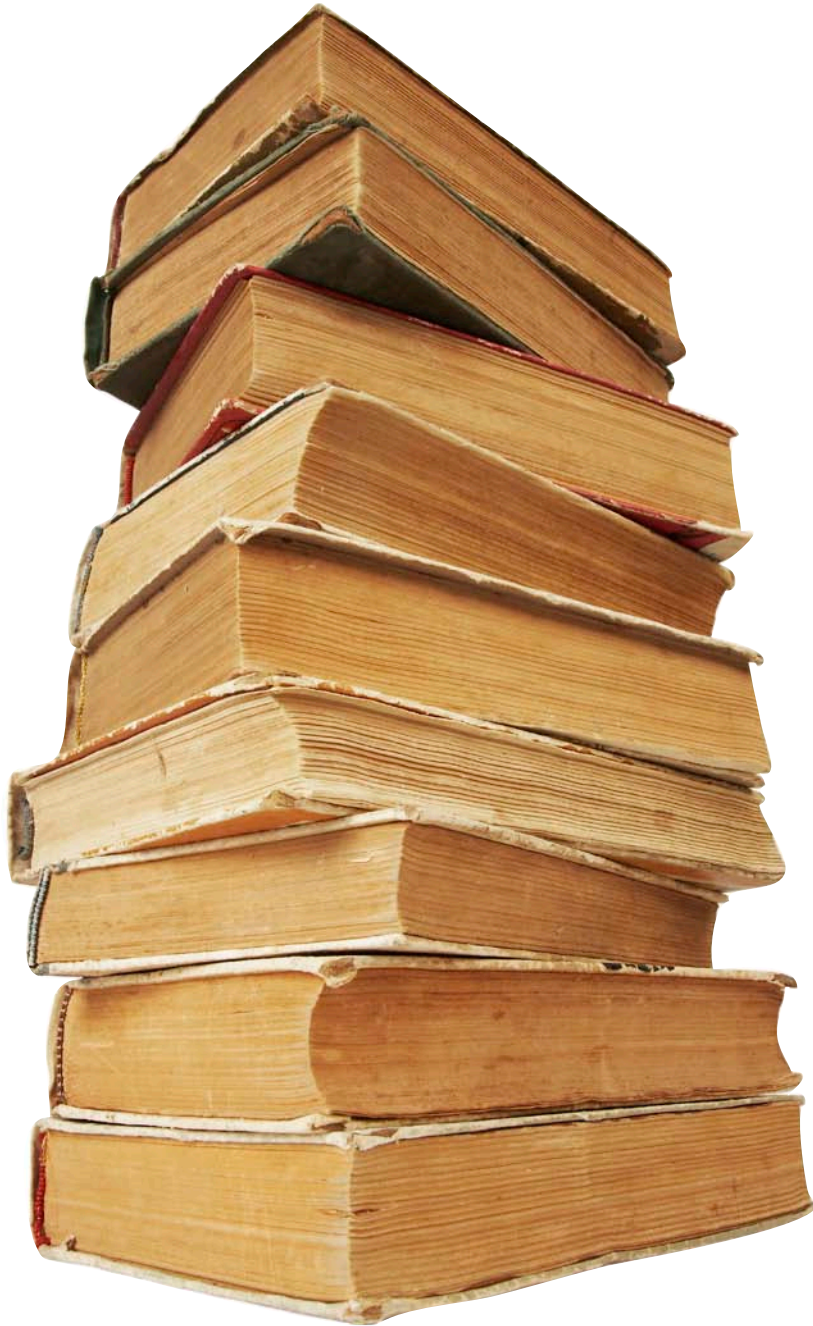


American Labor in U.S. History Textbooks



**How Labor's story
is distorted
in high school
history textbooks**



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American Labor in U.S. History Textbooks:

How Labor's Story is Distorted in High School History Textbooks

He who controls the present, controls the past.
He who controls the past, controls the future.

GEORGE ORWELL, 1984

Not a single labor topic, except industrial vs. craft unions, was adequately described or explained in the majority of textbooks. Not a single U.S. history text did more than mention the political activities of unions, both historically and presently—despite the fact that the very educational institution the student now occupies is, at least in part, a result of such activities. Only two of the history texts went beyond mentioning that all-important labor-management practice of free collective bargaining.

— WILL SCOGGINS

high school history teacher
and University of California researcher,
in a 1966 report on anti-labor bias in school textbooks and curricula



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The Institute commissions original analyses, organizes seminars, sponsors publications and subsidizes selected projects. Its independent board of directors is composed of educators, business representatives, labor leaders, academics, and public policy analysts.

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Paul Cole, the founder and director of the American Labor Studies Center, is doing much to keep the history of labor alive for the next generations, through the Center’s efforts to collect and disseminate labor history and labor studies curricula to K-12 teachers across the nation.

Lori Megivern is a Fulbright Fellow and American Councils for International Education Teacher of Excellence who studied and taught in numerous countries.

Jeff Hilgert brought a deep expertise in labor history and labor studies to this project. He is a Ph.D. candidate in industrial and labor relations at Cornell University, with a focus on workplace health and safety.

In researching this report, these three gave generously of their time, richness of experience and expertise. They enriched this report both through their frontline knowledge as teachers and their activism in current, vital labor issues. We believe that they have produced a compelling, thoughtful document that makes a powerful case: that America’s students suffer an immeasurable loss when labor history is left out of the American story taught in our nation’s classrooms.

We would also like to thank Professor Jeff Mirel, at the University of Michigan for his keen editorial contributions. We deeply appreciate Christina Bartolomeo’s skillful research, editing, and substantive suggestions. Her work was invaluable. Finally, our thanks to historian of education, author, and educational policy expert Diane Ravitch. She first suggested the idea for this report, and has been one of our nation’s leading advocates for rich, quality curricula in American schools, including books, learning materials, and curriculum content that prepare children to be contributing, questioning, thoughtful participants in our democracy.

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Introduction

Bias, neglect, and invisibility: labor in high school textbooks

Imagine opening a high school U.S. history textbook and finding no mention of—or at most a passing sentence about—Valley Forge, the Missouri Compromise, or the League of Nations. Imagine not finding a word about Benjamin Franklin, Lewis and Clark, Sitting Bull, Andrew Carnegie, or Rosa Parks. Imagine if these key events and people just disappeared as if they'd never existed, or rated no more than a glancing phrase. That is what has happened in history textbooks when it comes to labor's part in the American story, and to the men and women who led the labor movement.

In the high school history textbooks our children read, too often we find that labor's role in American history—and labor's important accomplishments, which changed American life forever—are misrepresented, downplayed or ignored. That is a tragedy, because labor played (and continues to play) a key role in the development of American democracy and the American way of life.

This report examines four high school textbooks published by some of the leading publishers in the country.¹ Together, the books in this study represent a significant percentage of the purchasing market for high school history textbooks. Thus, their influence is enormous.

As one scholar has noted, “School children in the United States are one of the largest captive reading audiences in the world today and textbooks account for at least three-quarters of their in-school exposure to the written word. Textbooks are frequently the student's major source of information on a particular subject taught in school, and may even constitute the only exposure the student receives on a given topic within a subject area. Playing such a central role in the dispensation of knowledge, the content of textbooks becomes a critical issue.”²

It is not too much to say that the four textbooks

considered in this report represent *the* version of American history that hundreds of thousands of American students carry into their adult lives. Their omissions, errors, or biases in covering labor's story—and labor's role in the American story—are therefore significant.

A longstanding problem: American school textbooks' neglect of labor

In case someone, in the future, should want to learn the details of my case, from beginning to end, I would like to have it all together...

— JOE HILL

labor activist and songwriter framed and executed in 1915 for a murder he did not commit³

Spotty, inadequate, and slanted coverage of the labor movement in U.S. history textbooks is a problem that dates back at least to the New Deal era. By the late 1960s, a number of scholars had begun documenting the biased treatment of organized labor in high school curricula. In a 1966 study, *Labor in Learning: Public School Treatment of the World of Work*, University of California researcher and high school history teacher Will Scoggins found that the history and government textbooks used in most high schools either ignored or inadequately treated topics such as collective bargaining, unfair labor practices, company unions, strikes, right-to-work laws, and the role of government in labor dispute mediation and conciliation.

Scoggins and other scholars understood that high school textbooks had come to reflect a negative view about unions that was prevalent in the American business community, as well as in politics—often expressed by various business-oriented and ultra-conservative factions of the Republican Party. (Progressive and moderate forces within the GOP have *not* always shared this anti-union outlook, as University of Wisconsin Professor William Cronon has pointed out in tracing the history of Wisconsin's Republican party.)⁴

In a sense, as Scoggins and others found, American history textbooks have taken sides in the nation's intense political debate about organized labor—and the result has

1 The textbooks examined for this report were: Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley, Albert S. Broussard, James M. McPherson, Donald A. Ritchie, *The American Vision* (New York: McGraw-Hill/Glencoe, 2010); Edward L. Ayers, Robert D. Schulzinger, Jesus de la Teja, and Deborah White, *American Anthem: Modern American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston/Harcourt, 2009); Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner, Peter B. Levy, Randy Roberts, and Alan Taylor, *United States History* (Boston: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2010); and Gerald A. Danzer, Jorge Klor de Alva, Larry S. Krieger, Louis E. Wilson, Nancy Woloch, *The Americans* (New York: McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin, 2009). Note: Holt, Rinehart and Winston/Harcourt and McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin are now Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

2 Keith, Sherry, “The Determinants of Textbook Content,” in *Textbooks in American Society: Politics, Policy, and Pedagogy*, ed. Philip G. Altbach et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press 1991), 43.

3 This quotation is from a letter Hill wrote to his attorney, Judge Orrin N. Hilton. The text of the letter can be found in Gibbs M. Smith, *Joe Hill* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 1984), 161-162.

4 Cronon, a distinguished scholar and president-elect of the American Historical Association, described the Wisconsin Republican party's progressive tradition in a March 2011 *New York Times* op ed: “Wisconsin was at the forefront of the progressive reform movement in the early 20th century, when the policies of Governor Robert M. La Follette prompted a fellow Republican, Theodore Roosevelt, to call the state a ‘laboratory of democracy.’ ... The demonizing of government at all levels that has become such a reflexive impulse for conservatives in the early 21st century would have mystified most elected officials in Wisconsin just a few decades ago. When Gov. Gaylord A. Nelson, a Democrat, sought to extend collective bargaining rights to municipal workers in 1959, he did so in partnership with a Legislature in which one house was controlled by the Republicans. ... Later, in 1967, when collective bargaining was extended to state workers for the same reasons, the reform was promoted by a Republican governor, Warren P. Knowles, with a Republican Legislature. The policies that the current governor, Scott Walker, has sought to overturn, in other words, are legacies of his own party.” See: William Cronon, “Wisconsin's Radical Break,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2010. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/22/opinion/22cronon.html?_r=1&ref=opinion.

been that generations of students have had little concept of labor's role in American history and the labor movement's contributions to American workers' rights and quality of life.

One illustration of this trend: In the late 1930s and early 1940s,⁵ conservative, business-oriented groups launched a highly successful attack on the supposedly "left-wing" textbook series written by Harold Rugg, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College and a prominent and innovative educational theorist. Among other complaints, the books' critics denounced Rugg's "positive" depiction of the 1937 Flint Sit-Down Strike against General Motors Corporation as union propaganda whose purpose was to convince students that there was nothing wrong with the sit-down strike. (The Flint Sit-Down Strike led to the unionization of the U.S. auto industry, enabling the fledgling United Automobile Workers to organize 100,000 workers almost at a stroke.⁶) In the early 1940s, these criticisms of Rugg gained traction and his books disappeared from public schools.⁷

After the Second World War, the business community continued to devote significant resources to the development and promotion of a high school social studies curriculum that promoted its vision of society and perspective on U.S. history. This vision was skeptical of government programs and wary of organized labor, as documented in E.A. Fones-Wolf's 1994 study, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60*.⁸

Other studies of organized labor's treatment in U.S. textbooks have found similar biases.⁹ In an August 2002 article in *Labor History*, labor historian Robert Shaffer found that U.S. history textbooks totally ignored the organization of public employee unions, one of the most important union trends in the past half-century.¹⁰ The dramatic growth of the American Federation of Teachers, beginning in the 1960s, for example, eventually caused its chief rival, the National Education Association, to turn to unionism. Together these two organizations now represent about 80 percent of teachers, making teachers the most highly organized sector of the American workforce.

Public employee unionism has been a focus of intense political conflict and media attention in recent months, with

attacks on public employees' union rights and the public sector labor movement arising in Wisconsin, Michigan, Florida, New Hampshire, Ohio, and other states. Shaffer declared:

[There is] an absence in virtually all survey textbooks, as well as in textbooks of the recent (post-1945) U.S., of any mention of the upsurge in public employee unionism in the 1960s and 1970s. This silence serves all of our students poorly, and reflects a lack of perspective about what has been one of the most important legacies of the 1960s to contemporary life.¹¹

As these studies found, the historic role of unions in America's political, economic, social, and cultural life is frequently left out of textbooks. The studies also repeatedly show that, in the few instances when unions are discussed, textbooks rarely depict them as beneficial participants in the American story.

How today's leading textbooks shortchange labor

Today's major high school history texts do not ignore unions and the labor movement altogether. Each of the books we reviewed presents a modicum of important information, including facts about organizations such as the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Still, these textbooks provide what we believe to be a narrow and sometimes seriously misleading view of what unions are and have done in the past; they neglect the labor movement's role in shaping and defending American democracy; and they pay hardly any attention to organized labor in the past half-century.

The textbooks fall short in their coverage of labor in three specific ways. First, they devote little space to the labor movement and the development of unions generally. Second, when they do cover the development of unions, the textbooks' accounts are often biased against the positive contributions of unions to American history, focusing instead upon strikes and "labor unrest." Third,

5 See: Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

6 During the strike, corporate and police brutality against the strikers led Michigan governor Frank Murphy to send in the U.S. National Guard, not to attack strikers or to evict them from the GM plant they had occupied (ways in which as the National Guard was often used against strikers), but rather to protect them, both from the police, who used tear gas against the strikers, and from corporate strikebreakers.

7 Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present*, 245.

8 Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

9 For example, Jon Bekken's 1994 analysis of journalism curricula found unions to be neglected or unrepresented. See: Jon Bekken, "The Portrayal of Labor in Reporting Textbooks: Critical Absences, Hostile Voices" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Atlanta, GA, August 10-13, 1994). Available at: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED375414.pdf>.

10 Shaffer, R. "Where are the organized public employees? The absence of public employee unionism from U.S. history textbooks, and why it matters," *Labor History* 43(3) (2002) : 315-334. Available at: <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledge/clah/2002/00000043/00000003/art00008;jsessionid=h4tids32eeol.alexandra>.

11 Shaffer, "Where are the organized public employees?" 315-334.

their discussions of other important social, political, and economic movements (such as the civil rights movement or the Progressive Movement and their gains) often downplay or ignore the important role unions and their members played in these movements.

The following are some of the most significant examples of these problems, drawn from the four textbooks. The books:

- often implicitly (and, at times, explicitly) represent labor organizing and labor disputes as inherently violent;
- virtually ignore the vital role of organized labor in winning broad social protections, such as child labor laws, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency;
- ignore the important role that organized labor played in the civil rights movement; and
- pay scant attention to unionism after the 1950s, thus completely ignoring the rise of public sector unionization, which brought generations of Americans into the middle class and gave new rights to public employees.

This paper details the major problems with these books. Based on its findings, we ask the publishers of American history textbooks to provide a fairer and more accurate depiction of trade union history and the labor movement. As we describe below, something valuable is lost when the version of history that American students learn fails to give labor its historic place in the American story.

The Case for Labor in History Textbooks

With all their faults, trade-unions have done more for humanity than any other organization of men that ever existed. They have done more for decency, for honesty, for education, for the betterment of the race ... than any other association of men.

— CLARENCE DARROW
The Railroad Trainman (1909)

Why does it matter that labor is so often “missing in action” in history textbooks? In the ongoing debate over the history “canon,” why is this piece of the American heritage special?

Giving the union movement its proper place in the teaching of our history is not simply “special pleading” for the cause of labor, as some critics might assert. Our central argument is that the study of *American history itself* is incomplete and inaccurate without labor history. No matter what the angle from which you examine our country’s

history, and no matter what a particular historian’s views on the labor movement, serious scholars of American history do not deny that the labor movement has played a major role in our nation’s development.

Whether in the light of labor’s championship of universal social programs or its formative role in the industrial and post-industrial workplace, or from a dozen other aspects, labor has changed our nation’s history, its economy, and the development of the American social structure as it exists today. There is little disputing that the labor movement has been a key actor in our country’s history, inarguably as important as scores of other figures and movements that cross the stage in history class, from Whigs to prohibitionists, from Daniel Boone to Joe McCarthy.

Here are some specific reasons why not telling labor’s story deprives students of the real American story and leaves them ignorant of forces that continue to shape their lives today:

Labor played a vital role in the establishment and growth of democracy in America. Few high school history textbooks demonstrate that the labor movement in America sprang directly from the movement’s understanding of Americans’ constitutional rights, and a belief that labor rights spring *from* these rights. For example, the Bill of Rights protects “the right of the people peaceably to assemble,” the right known as freedom of assembly. From this right to freedom of assembly *directly* springs workers’ claim to the right of “freedom of association”—the crucial right to meet together, to organize a union. Along with the right to bargain contracts with employers, freedom of association is a central element of both American and international labor rights and standards.¹²

Unfortunately, not one of the American history textbooks we reviewed illustrates that the right to freedom of association arises directly from the right to freedom of assembly—i.e., that labor rights spring from constitutional and human rights as envisioned by the Founders.

Labor activists understood this principle from the movement’s earliest days. In the 1830s, female textile mill workers in the Lowell, Massachusetts mills (often known as the Lowell Mill girls) fought for a living wage and a ten-hour day. In an 1834 proclamation urging other mill workers to join them in a walkout to protest a wage cut, the women wrote:

Our present object is to have union and exertion, and we remain in possession of our unquestionable rights. We circulate this paper wishing to obtain the names of

¹² Labor’s source of inspiration from the First Amendment right of association is aspirational. The rights contained in the First Amendment provide protection against government action that would limit the exercise of the rights of association. The First Amendment does not apply to the actions of private parties. Nonetheless, many of the values imbedded in the First Amendment right of association became the foundation for the National Labor Relations Act which was adopted by Congress and does apply to the private sector. *Jacksonville Bulk Terminals, Inc. et al. v. International Longshoremen’s Association, et al.*, 457 U.S. 702 (1982).

all who imbibe the spirit of our Patriotic Ancestors, who preferred privation to bondage, and parted with all that renders life desirable—and even life itself—to procure independence for their children.^{13, 14}

All the textbooks we assessed provide extensive coverage of the formulation and adoption of the Constitution and enactment of the Bill of Rights, and the importance of rights such as free speech as America’s democracy developed. Yet, not a single textbook provides an analysis of the relationship of freedom of association to freedom of assembly as articulated in the First Amendment. Nor do the textbooks cover the labor movement’s long history of fighting corporate and government attempts to *deprive* American workers of their constitutional rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and due process. Without this aspect of labor’s history, students lose a key narrative about how our democracy was shaped and tested.

Labor has been a crucial force for social progress in America. As a result of the glaring deficiencies in how labor is treated in the standard high school U.S. history textbook, students are likely not to understand that unions have played a crucial role—far beyond benefiting their own members—in helping to achieve decent living standards and vital social programs for all Americans. Most textbooks cover significant social legislation but rarely mention the contribution of the labor movement in its advocacy and adoption.

American labor was central to winning child labor protections, unemployment insurance, workers’ injury compensation, Social Security benefits, the minimum hourly wage, the eight-hour day and other limits on working hours, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, Medicare, and Medicaid. Yet the textbooks are largely silent on labor’s role in these achievements. For example, no mention is made of continual union advocacy efforts on behalf of the Social Security Act of 1935, a key social reform of the second New Deal establishing old age pensions, unemployment insurance, and disability relief. In the textbooks, these laws are credited essentially to President Roosevelt, not portrayed as the result of diligent, nationwide, grassroots mobilization of American workers and their unions. For example, *The Americans* notes:

During the Second New Deal, Roosevelt, with the help of Congress, brought about important reforms in the area of labor relations...¹⁵

The passage goes on to discuss the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, in which the 40-hour week was finally achieved for many workers. Labor was the key player in the fight for the 40-hour week, and supported the FLSA, but is given no credit for decades of advocacy and activism.

Through their role in winning progressive social legislation, unions brought generations of American families into the middle class and kept many Americans out of poverty. The Center for American Progress documented the connection between unions and a strong middle class in their April 2011 report, *Unions Make the Middle Class: Without Unions, the Middle Class Withers*.¹⁶ As the report’s authors put it:

...if you care about the middle class, you need to care about unions.

Critics of unions claim they are unimportant today or even harmful to the economy, but unions are essential for building a strong middle class. And rebuilding the middle class after decades of decline and stagnation is essential for restoring our economy.

Unions make the middle class strong by ensuring workers have a strong voice in both the market and in our democracy. When unions are strong they are able to ensure that workers are paid fair wages, receive the training they need to advance to the middle class, and are considered in corporate decision-making processes. Unions also promote political participation among all Americans, and help workers secure government policies that support the middle class, such as Social Security, family leave, and the minimum wage. ... Indeed, it is hard to imagine a middle-class society without a strong union movement.¹⁷

Yet the central facts about unions’ economic and social contributions to American life are given short shrift in high school history textbooks. If, while driving to school, students happen to see the bumper sticker: “Unions: the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend,” that may be more exposure to American labor’s historic role as a force for social progress than they will ever get in the classroom.

13 From the proclamation, printed in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, February 18, 1834.

14 Thomas Dublin, “Women, Work, and Protest in the Early Lowell Mills: ‘The Oppressing Hand of Avarice Would Enslave Us;’” in *Labor History* 16 (Carfax Publishing Limited: Abingdon, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom 1975), 99-116. Available at: http://invention.smithsonian.org/centerpieces/whole_cloth/u2ei/u2materials/dublin.html As Dublin notes, “At several points in the proclamation the women drew on their Yankee heritage. Connecting their turn-out with the efforts of their ‘Patriotic Ancestors’ to secure independence from England, they interpreted the wage cuts as an effort to ‘enslave’ them—to deprive them of the independent status as ‘daughters of freemen.’” Dublin points out that this proclamation (and, we believe, many of the group’s other writings) makes clear that the women saw their right to band together to fight for better pay and working conditions as a natural outgrowth of the rights defended by their ancestors in the American Revolution and enshrined in the Constitution.

15 Danzer et al, *The Americans*, 705.

16 See David Madland, Karla Walter, and Nick Bunker, *Unions Make the Middle Class: Without Unions, the Middle Class Withers*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, April 2011). Available at: <http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2011/04/pdf/unionsmakethemiddleclass.pdf>.

17 Madland et al., *Unions Make the Middle Class*, 1-2.

Labor has been a leader in the fight for human rights at home and abroad. U.S. labor has a longstanding history of supporting human rights in our country and globally, but little of that history is acknowledged in high school textbooks. Perhaps the most glaring error in the textbooks we reviewed is their failure to cover the role that American unions and labor activists played as key participants in the civil rights movement. While labor leader and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters founder and president A. Philip Randolph is mentioned as an inspiration for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in two of the books,¹⁸ nowhere else in the textbooks do we see a description of the remarkable support that labor then poured into the civil rights movement.

While coverage in the textbooks is lamentably thin regarding the strong relationship between organized labor and the civil rights movement in the 1940s, it is virtually nonexistent from the 1950s and forward. Yet unions and their members gave significant support to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Woolworth Store Sit-Ins, and to the Selma-to-Montgomery marches. Union members were there for the Freedom Rides, and helped to organize the 1963 March on Washington. Indeed, labor's support for the civil rights struggle was deep and many-faceted: For example, in 1963 AFL-CIO President George Meany and other union movement leaders paid \$160,000 in bail to release Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and 2,000 protesters from the Birmingham jail.¹⁹

Throughout his career, King worked side-by-side with labor unions and expressed his belief that the cause of civil rights and the cause of labor are intertwined.²⁰ But the textbooks fail to fully explore King's support for the labor movement, even though that support is well-documented (including in King's own words). The textbooks do mention that when Dr. King was murdered in Memphis in 1968, he had come to that city to support a strike and unionization campaign by black Memphis sanitation workers, but the four textbooks all fail to mention that that campaign took place under the auspices of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). It is an odd omission, as AFSCME was clearly central to the events in Memphis.

The textbooks also fail to mention the many other contributions made by American labor to the human rights struggle around the world—from the work of the

International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) with the Jewish Labor Committee and its outspoken opposition to the Nazi terror, to the active role played in the 1930s and 1940s by organized labor in the U.S. in fighting against totalitarian regimes abroad (both Communist and Fascist); to unions' and the AFL-CIO's active support for the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland in the late 1980s, to the labor movement's efforts to aid anti-apartheid groups in South Africa. In its account of President Ronald Reagan's opposition to the Soviet empire, *American Anthem* describes the success of the Solidarity movement in Poland, for example, but fails to mention the extensive support American labor unions gave to Solidarity.²¹

Today the American labor movement continues to fight for human rights worldwide: for the rights of oppressed workers, women, children, trade unionists, and journalists, from Iran to China to El Salvador. This story largely fails to make it into the high school history classroom.²²

Labor is one of the major American political and social forces of the 19th and 20th centuries—and continues to be a political and social force today. High school history textbooks also simply do not convey the scale and significance of labor as a political and social force in American society for two centuries, and as a continuing force in those areas today. Many students will never learn that, as recently as the late 1960s, around 30 percent of nonagricultural workers in America were union members,²³ and an American might identify himself or herself as a Teamster, Ironworker or ILGWU member, just as readily as he or she might self-identify as a Democrat or a Methodist. Many American communities once centered around the union hall, as much they did around the church or the town hall. Yet the textbooks, which cover other social institutions and movements with some detail, from the American film industry to the conservation movement, give short shrift to labor's decades-long centrality and continuing importance in American life.

The textbooks also fail to portray the role of labor as a political force: as a decisive force in electing presidents, in passing legislation, in energizing political parties, in shaping events in our political history. For example, the American labor movement played a key role in supporting the Marshall

18 Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 864; Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 911.

19 Nathan Newman, "Why Unions? Labor 101," *Daily Kos*, June 13, 2006.

20 In a December 1961 speech to the AFL-CIO Convention, King said, "Negroes are almost entirely a working people. There are pitifully few Negro millionaires, and few Negro employers. Negroes are almost entirely a working people. ... Our needs are identical with labor's needs—decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community. That is why Negroes support labor's demands and fight laws which curb labor." See the excellent compilation of quotations from Dr. King on the labor movement on the web site of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Labor." Available at: <http://www.afscme.org/union/history/mlk/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-on-labor>.

21 Ayers et al., *American Anthem: Modern American History*, 703.

22 For examples, go to the AFL-CIO's "Global Economy" web page: <http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/globaleconomy/> or, see the international labor activism web site, LaborStart: <http://www.laborstart.org/>.

23 For a chart of union membership rates historically, in the U.S. and several other countries, see: Gerald Friedman, "Labor Unions in the United States," *The Economic History Association Encyclopedia of Economic and Business History* (editor: Robert Whaples), March 16, 2008. Available at: <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/friedman.unions.us>.

Plan in the late 1940s. It supported two world wars. It helped pass the Civil Rights Act. And, despite a decline in membership, organized labor's political voice is still strong. For example, in the 2008 election, 21 percent of voters were from union households—despite the fact that organized labor represented only 12.4 percent of workers. Yet, in the textbooks, the labor movement virtually disappears in chapters covering the decades past 1950, except (in three of the textbooks) for a brief (in some cases admiring) mention of how President Ronald Reagan fired air traffic controllers in the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike of 1981.

Learning about labor is part of students' civic education.

"In every democracy, the people get the government they deserve," wrote Alexis de Tocqueville, a famous early observer of the fledgling American democracy. History class is one place where students learn what it means to be a citizen of our democracy—and teaching labor history is a way to educate students to be *questioning, active* citizens in that democracy.

Labor unions possess an encompassing vision of an authentically democratic life that is arguably broader and more inclusive than almost any other force or constituency in American society, and they have worked hard to realize that vision for members and nonmembers alike. When we give students a full and accurate account of labor's history, we are illustrating that it is possible to challenge established social and economic systems and structures and act collectively to bring about change—just as when we teach them about the American Revolution, the Progressive and Populist Movements, the civil rights struggle, and the fight for women's suffrage. The textbooks cover all these in detail, but too often leave out the accomplishments and struggles of American labor. This is unfortunate, because labor is a strand without which the American narrative of principled dissidence and the struggle for social progress by activist citizens is incomplete.

**Our plea to textbook publishers:
tell labor's missing story**

The purpose of this study is to encourage U.S. textbook publishers to improve the treatment of workers' movements and union history in their publications. More broadly, it is a response to the questions posed by the late Paul Gagnon in *Democracy's Untold Story*, a critique of world history texts written nearly a quarter century ago: "How helpful, or harmful, are these textbooks in educating the young to be knowledgeable citizens? How might texts be made more helpful?"

As we considered these questions for this study, our first task was to identify a list of key labor history topics and explore how the textbooks cover those topics. Major weaknesses emerged in the textbooks' coverage.

We undertook this review in a spirit of hope that American history textbook publishers will meet the challenge of covering the labor movement more fairly, accurately, and extensively going forward. We have seen the textbook publishing industry make similar changes in other key areas of American history.

For example, as a result of demands from leaders of the civil rights movement and others over the last 40 years, textbook publishers today produce books that more accurately reflect the contributions of Americans of all races and origins to the country's narrative, its history and its life. We urge them to consider textbooks' coverage of labor in the same critical light, to ask the same questions about labor's contribution to the American story: Are there voices missing? Are there key American events and great American themes being left out?

In December 2009, the state of Wisconsin enacted a law to make the teaching of labor history part of the state's standards for public schools.²⁴ The American Federation of Teachers-Wisconsin testified on behalf of the new law; AFT-Wisconsin President Bryan Kennedy spoke about the value of labor history for Wisconsin students:

This tradition of Wisconsin working people fighting for shared values—justice, equality, and a decent standard of living—is a tradition that we should all take pride in, and it is a tradition that should be taught in our public schools. In fact, labor history coursework will help instill a sense of self-pride for many Wisconsin students. Most students in our state's K-12 public schools are not children of the politicians and CEOs that are held up as heroes in history text books. Learning about the victories and struggles of working-class citizens will shine the light on historic role models that our K-12 students can more readily relate to. This ability to relate to historic figures is more than an interesting exercise—it's opening a doorway to a more meaningful education experience.²⁵

The great American story is simply not complete without labor's story, and our children will be the poorer if they are not taught about labor's history, which, as Kennedy points out, is *their* history. We urge textbook publishers to correct the serious deficiencies in the treatment of labor in high school history books.

24 See the Wisconsin Labor History Society's account of the law's signing and the fight for its passage, at: <http://www.wisconsinlaborhistory.org/?p=265>.

25 "Testimony of AFT-Wisconsin President Bryan Kennedy before the Assembly Committee on Labor, in favor of Assembly Bill 172, the Labor History Bill," April 8, 2009. Text of testimony obtained from AFT-Wisconsin.

A Note on Methods And Approach

The consolidation of U.S. textbook companies, while troubling in many ways, has simplified the task of reviewing U.S. high school textbook curricula.²⁶ As Gilbert Sewall, director of the American Textbook Council, has pointed out, “The rapid consolidation of commercial media transformed textbook publishing during the 1990s. Today’s national field of four major social studies textbook publishers compares with a dozen or more major history textbook makers twenty years ago.”²⁷

Sewall noted in 2003 testimony before a Senate committee:

The consolidation of educational publishing from a domain where many independent, competing companies created and sold textbooks has changed the field. Today, four ... multinational corporations ... offer fewer and fewer standard textbooks for states and teachers to choose from. ... The smaller publishing pool means fewer titles in each subject area.²⁸

We selected the four leading textbook companies (Harcourt/Holt, Houghton Mifflin/McDougal, McGraw-Hill/Glencoe, and Pearson/Prentice Hall) and reviewed the most detailed high school U.S. history textbook from each publisher. We limited our review to the hard-copy student editions. We made this decision because these editions are the actual books to which students are exposed in the classroom. We did not investigate or assess any materials from the teacher editions, nor did we review any supplemental teaching materials. All of the textbooks we examined were written for high school U.S. history classrooms.

Two of the textbooks were published in 2010 (*The American Vision*, *United States History*); the other two were published in 2009 (*The Americans*, *American Anthem*).

Data on the exact market share of these books is not in the public domain, but it appears that these four publishers

may have a combined market share of more than 80 percent of the U.S. high school textbook industry. In an effort to get as accurate a picture as possible, we approached representatives of each publisher at a curriculum conference in June 2009 and asked them for their company’s nationwide market share in the U.S. history textbook market. Each of the four textbook publishers’ representatives said their company’s share was greater than 25 percent of the nationwide market in U.S. history.

As indicated above, our first task was to identify a list of key labor history topics. Since we could not treat every issue relevant to the labor movement and American workers in detail in this short review, we categorized the major weaknesses in the textbooks’ treatment of labor history into four broad, occasionally overlapping, areas: 1) *freedom of association and collective bargaining*; 2) *just and favorable working conditions*; 3) *social protections and human dignity*; and 4) *equality and freedom from discrimination*.

The sections that follow summarize our general observations, and are not a detailed point-by-point analysis of each textbook’s presentation of workers’ rights and organized labor issues throughout history. In each section, however, we highlight at least one key problem area. We should note that there are several instances in which the textbooks “get it right”—for example, two of the textbooks include a description of the too-often-forgotten Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), which encouraged women to form trade unions, fought for laws to protect the rights of women factory workers, and is credited with establishing the nation’s first strike fund.²⁹ Another example: *The Americans* contains an excellent two-page spread on *NLRB v. Jones and Laughlin Steel Corp.*, the 1937 Supreme Court case that affirmed that authority of the National Labor Relations Board and gave some protection to workers’ right to organize.³⁰

Too often, however, the coverage of labor in these influential textbooks is incomplete, biased, simply missing, or in some other way flawed. In each topic section that follows, we highlight at least one key problem area.

26 Sewall, G. 2005, “Textbook publishing.” Accessed July 10, 2009, from http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k_v86/k0503sew.htm.

27 Gilbert Sewall, *History Textbooks at the New Century* (New York: American Textbook Council, 2000), 13. Available at: <http://www.historytextbooks.org/2000report.pdf>.

28 Gilbert Sewall, “Testimony before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on Intellectual Diversity. September 24, 2003” (New York: American Textbook Council). Available at: <http://www.historytextbooks.org/senate.htm>.

29 See Appleby, et al., *The American Vision*, 435, and Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 558.

30 See Danzer et al., 708-709.

Section One

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

*With a unionization rate dramatically below that of other countries, including Canada, the United States has achieved exceptional status. There remains great interest in unions among American workers; where employers do not resist, unions thrive. In the public sector and in some private employers where workers have free choice to join a union, they are as likely as they ever were, and as likely as workers anywhere. In the past, as after 1886 and in the 1920s, when American employers broke unions, they revived when a government committed to workplace democracy sheltered them from employer repression. If we see another such government, we may yet see another union revival.*³¹

— GERALD FRIEDMAN
University of Massachusetts at Amherst

Workers' freedom of association and the right to organize a union and collectively bargain are the most important elements of both American and international labor rights and standards. Certainly they are the paramount workers' rights recognized in all major international documents on labor and workers' rights, such as the conventions of the International Labor Organization, the United Nations' agency responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labor standards. The ILO's 1949 convention (or resolution), "Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize," declares that "recognition of the principle of freedom of association" is "a means of improving conditions of labor and of establishing peace" and emphasizes that freedom of expression and association are "essential to sustained progress."³²

The establishment of these rights and the ongoing struggle to defend them are seen by many as an important test of American democracy. Yet, coverage of this topic is given short shrift in each of the four textbooks we reviewed.

All the textbooks we assessed provide extensive coverage of the formulation and adoption of the Constitution and enactment of the Bill of Rights. Yet, not a single one provides an analysis of the relationship of freedom of association to freedom of assembly as articulated in the First Amendment and how that right provides the basis for workers to join

together to form a union and to bargain collectively with employers. One example of this omission is illustrated in *The Americans*, in a section entitled "Adoption of a Bill of Rights." The section states that the First Amendment "guarantees citizens' rights to freedom of religion, speech, the press, and political activity."³³ However, the actual wording of the Bill of Rights does not say "political activity," but rather "the right of the people peaceably to assemble." The phrasing difference is an important one, as it is freedom of *assembly* that underpins the right of workers to create and join unions.

Given the lack of discussion in the textbooks on the impact of the First Amendment's right of freedom of assembly on labor organizing, it is not surprising that, in covering labor topics, virtually all the textbooks instead focus extensively on action: the drama of strikes and violence. Major strikes unquestionably warrant coverage in any U.S. history textbook, and certainly there have been key strikes in our nation's history with far-reaching effects. These are strikes that every American student should know about for their role in shaping the struggle for better workplace pay, conditions, and standards. That said, these four history texts tend to over-represent the role of conflict (vs. progress and achievement) in labor history.

Indeed, the books' focus makes violence nearly synonymous with labor unions. For example, section headings such as "Strikes Turn Violent"³⁴ and phrases such as "Strikes Rock the Nation"³⁵ convey the image that the history of labor is one of violent conflict *caused by the workers themselves*. For example, *American Vision's* section titled "Unions," notes that "Many strikes in this era led to violence," and that union's "confrontations with owners and the government led to violence and bloodshed."³⁶ The section's coverage of labor's challenges and ultimate growth in the 1800s emphasizes strikes and "labor unrest" (a phrase the book uses numerous times), including a map titled, "Strikes and Labor Unrest: 1870-1900." Literally, the image given to students is one of labor as predominantly threatening, violent, and disruptive to the national economy. Yet the same section refers benignly to companies' "techniques" to stop workers from forming unions, with no context given that such "techniques" involved the violation of American democratic rights such as freedom of assembly. Only sometimes are these events placed in the context of having been caused by miserable working conditions, or in the context of well-documented management attacks on

31 Friedman, "Labor Unions in the United States." Available at: <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/friedman.unions.us>.

32 "C87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948," published at the web site of the International Labor Organization. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C087>.

33 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 149.

34 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 453.

35 Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 454.

36 Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 428.

workers' freedom of association rights that at times included employers and their agents (such as the famous Pinkertons) killing or injuring pro-union workers (firing and harassing pro-union workers was routine, and sadly, continues to be common in America). Headings such as those above implicitly blame workers for taking steps to improve horrible conditions and employer tyranny. The content of the textbooks often reinforces this impression of the labor movement and strikes as violent, unprovoked, leading to economic or social chaos, or all three.

American Anthem, for example, notes that, "In 1934, unions lost a number of major strikes, as labor-related violence increased."³⁷ One wonders if a textbook author would ever consider describing violence during strikes—which was most often initiated by employers who suffered few penalties—as "management-related violence."

The Americans describes President Calvin Coolidge's intervention in the Boston Police Strike of 1919:

Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge called out the National Guard. ... People praised Coolidge for saving Boston, if not the nation, from communism and anarchy.³⁸

Another example, from *The Americans*: In a paragraph headed, "Truman Faces Strikes" (the title alone makes unions sound menacing), workers are labeled "discontented"—even though the passage acknowledges that they faced higher prices and lower wages. The passage continues:

...Truman refused to let strikes cripple the nation. He threatened to draft the striking workers and to order them as soldiers to stay on the job. Before he could finish his speech, the unions gave in.³⁹

There is no sense in paragraphs such as this that workers were driven to strikes and that strikes may have had a larger and more benign intent of improving workers' standard of living, rather than "crippling the nation." Again, *American Vision* refers three times in one page to workers' "resentment" of low wages and income disparities between the wealthy and the working class.⁴⁰ "Resentment" is a word that manages to both minimize and judge workers' (very logical and strongly rooted) determination to improve their standard of living and the unbearable conditions under which they labored.

The textbooks often describe strikes and labor disputes

as harmful to the nation's economic welfare—not as the actions of Americans who were standing up against a massively biased and unfair system in order to obtain justice, although this is how other American activists and causes—for example, the suffragists or the Progressives—are portrayed. In the four textbooks, workers and their attempts to gain labor rights are described pejoratively time after time. For example, *American Vision* describes workers in the 1894 Pullman Strike as having "tied up the railroads and threatened to paralyze the economy."⁴¹ *United States History* (in a section titled, "The Triumph of Industry") describes the steelworkers' and miners' strikes of the 1890s as "an epidemic,"⁴² and sums up labor activism and mobilization from the 1870s forward in this way:

Striking workers, responding to wage cuts, caused massive property destruction in several cities. State militias were called in to protect strikebreakers ... Finally, the federal government sent in troops to restore order.⁴³

Note the value judgments implied in the language used here. This is language that implicitly blames workers for acting, against the overwhelming forces stacked against them, to defend their democratic and economic rights. Even if property damage was a result of worker protest — incidents that should be stopped — the language used here implicitly and wrongly *condones* the unleashing of federal troops on workers standing up for their rights.

Likewise, discussions of major strikes and labor demonstrations throughout American history (e.g., the Great Railway Strike, the Haymarket Affair, the Homestead Strike, the Pullman Strike, the Anthracite Coal Strike) are at times accompanied by photos or other depictions of violence, which further reinforces the link between unions and violence.⁴⁴ The textbooks present a one-dimensional portrait of many major strikes and labor demonstrations, portraying them as failures, as unnecessarily violent, and as evidence that it was impossible for workers to reform the industrial system.

These textbooks also leave out important parts of the story. For example, consider the textbooks' coverage of the 1886 Haymarket Affair. The Haymarket Affair was a now-acknowledged miscarriage of justice (that even at the time raised protest around the world) in which four labor leaders were wrongly tried and executed (one committed suicide on the eve of the scheduled executions) for a bombing that

³⁷ Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 359.

³⁸ Danzer, et al., *The Americans*, 623.

³⁹ Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 843.

⁴⁰ Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 428.

⁴¹ Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 433.

⁴² Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 455.

⁴³ Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 454.

⁴⁴ Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 709; Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 456.

occurred during massive worker demonstrations in Chicago for an eight-hour workday. The textbooks' coverage fails to include the success of the American Federation of Labor's national strike for the eight-hour day. This strike forced employers to grant shorter hours for 45,000 workers.⁴⁵

The Americans contains a description of the Haymarket Affair⁴⁶ that fails to mention that the 3,000 workers gathered in Chicago's Haymarket Square on May 4, 1886, were there to support the movement for an eight-hour day—both through supporting a national strike and by protesting police brutality in a strike at the McCormick Harvester Plant the day before that, as the description does note, led to the death of two people and the wounding of several others. Failing to mention the Haymarket protest's connection with the eight-hour movement leaves out a huge piece of the story, and makes the Haymarket Affair seem to be just one more example of union-led, violent strikes. Even more egregious, the descriptions in *The Americans* and the other textbooks fail to mention that the conviction of the eight labor and reform leaders accused in the Haymarket bombings (and the execution of four of the men) was seen around the world as a miscarriage of justice. Although *American Vision* does concede that the evidence against the Haymarket defendants "was weak,"⁴⁷ the description in *The Americans* does not mention that no credible evidence was presented at their trial linking the Haymarket defendants to the bombing. Nor, for example, do the descriptions in *The Americans* and *American Vision* mention that the 1893 pardoning of three of the men by Illinois governor John Peter Altgeld specifically acknowledged the injustice of their trial and lack of proof of their guilt.⁴⁸ This is simply poor historical reporting and once again encourages students to take away the impression that the labor movement was synonymous with violence.

In *American Anthem*, the "Haymarket Riot" (the term "riot" itself imputes blame to workers) is described with no mention of the motivation for the protest and its connection to the eight-hour movement. However, the account in *American Anthem* does clearly convey that there was "little evidence" against the Haymarket defenders, that their unionism was one reason they were targeted for prosecution, and that a pardon was issued to surviving defendants.⁴⁹

The description of the Haymarket Affair in *American Vision* adds the sentence:

Critics long opposed to the labor movement pointed to

the Haymarket Riot to claim that unions were dominated by dangerous radicals. One of the men arrested was a member of the Knights of Labor. This association hurt the Knights' reputation and, coupled with lost strikes, led to a steady decline in membership and influence.⁵⁰

Such a statement does not clarify that union leaders were wrongly convicted and later exonerated, and that fears of "labor anarchists" were deliberately inflamed by an anti-union press and business lobby. All the textbooks fail to mention that the Haymarket Affair triggered worldwide outrage at the time. (The term "lost strikes," is interesting: it raises the question of whether other movements for social justice that strove for decades to win progress would be described as consistently as labor in the textbooks is as "losing" in their protests and actions along the way to reaching their goals.)

United States History's description of the Haymarket Affair (titled, "Violence Erupts in Haymarket Square") gives only a glancing indication of the now well-established consensus that the labor and worker leaders tried and executed for the Haymarket bombing were innocent. Here is the book's description:

Eight anarchists were tried for murder and four were executed. The governor of Illinois, deciding that evidence for the convictions had been scanty, pardoned three of the others. The fourth had already committed suicide in jail.

The Haymarket Riot left an unfortunate legacy. The Knights of Labor fizzled out as people shied away from radicalism. Employers became even more suspicious of union activities, associating them with violence.⁵¹

Again, in this passage we see the inaccurate impression given that employers were somehow menaced by labor, when in actuality, the power of the law, of legislatures and Congress, the police and military, the press, and social opinion were amassed on the side of factory owners and employers. It is a small but significant point of language that, repeatedly in the textbooks, organizing workers are described as having "problems" when facing workplace abuses we would call barbaric today, while labor is often described as being "unhappy," "discontented," and "making demands."

It seems ironic that in these texts, labor often fails to get credit for the many achievements in social progress it has won in this country (as we will discuss below), but gets ample credit for strikes, unrest, and violence—no matter how

45 Eric Arnesen, ed., *Encyclopedia of United States Labor and Working Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

46 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, page 453.

47 Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 432.

48 Among other sources, see Dave Roediger, "Haymarket Incident," at The Lucy Parsons website: http://www.lucyparsonspj.org/haymarket/roediger_haymarket.html.

49 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 153. Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 432.

50 Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 432.

51 Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 454-455.

indefensible the behavior of businesses, militias, Pinkerton agents, and strikebreakers in literally attacking striking workers standing up for their rights. *American Anthem* tacitly acknowledges (with perhaps unintentional irony) who usually had the *true* culpability for strike violence in its description of the “complicated situation” GM faced in the UAW sit-down strike of 1936:

[GM] could not use traditional methods of strike breaking—bringing in security forces to scatter the picket line and hiring non-union “scab” labor to run the factory. ... the risk of negative publicity, such as images of workers being beaten or killed, was too high.⁵²

There is an odd sense, in several passages in the textbooks, of simultaneously downplaying the gains unions made in the first hundred years or so of the movement, and indicating that that business and factory owners were “threatened” by the big, bad unions to the point that courts, a president, or militias “had to intervene.” For example, see this passage from *United States History*:

Unions went on strike to force employers to pay higher wages, reduce hours, or improve conditions. In 1834 and 1936, for example, the Lowell Mill girls held strikes when employers cut their wages and increased their charges for boarding. Singing, “Oh, I cannot be a slave!” they left their jobs and temporarily shut down the factory. The Lowell strikes failed to achieve their goals, however. The women eventually returned to work and accepted the reduced pay.

Factory owners sometimes turned to the courts for protection. In 1835, a New York City court convicted 20 tailors of conspiracy for forming a union. Such convictions angered workers. But, neither the union movement nor the Workingmen’s Party prospered in the early 1800s.⁵³

What is interesting about this passage is the odd disconnect—especially the “But” on the last sentence in the passage. There is no coherent conclusion given that unions did not prosper precisely *because* they faced systematic suppression from the laws, the courts, and the social system in America.

As the passage above illustrates, the textbooks do not adequately examine the difficult legal struggle for workers’ human rights that is part of the history of unions in the U.S., especially the resistance of the American judiciary to interpreting freedom of assembly as pertaining to unions and protecting workers’ union activity. There are many examples of this critical omission in the textbooks. One is the lack of coverage of the early acceptance by many U.S. courts of the Conspiracy Doctrine, an interpretation under which, between 1806 and 1842, U.S. courts deemed workers’ attempts to bargain collectively (instead of as individuals) for better wages to constitute criminal conspiracy.⁵⁴ Another is the non-inclusion in the textbooks of the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court chose to define unions as monopoly organizations under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, although the debate and congressional intent around the bill focused on business, and the Act itself is silent on the issue.⁵⁵

Additionally, the textbooks’ treatment of labor law “reform” statutes passed by Congress in the post-World War II years, such as the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 or the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, lack nuanced explanation. These statutes are simply cast as direct responses to public anti-union sentiment, rather than the pro-business lobby’s attempts to break or curb union power in reaction to the post-World War II labor upsurge of 1946.⁵⁶ For example, most of the textbooks do not note that President Harry Truman called the Taft-Hartley Act, which passed over his veto, a “dangerous intrusion on free speech” and “a clear threat to the successful working of our democratic society.”⁵⁷ *American Vision* is a noteworthy exception; it includes a powerful quote from Truman asserting that the Act would “conflict with important principles of our democratic society.”⁵⁸

United States History does highlight the aid and comfort that American courts gave union-busting businesses, noting that:

The outcome of the Pullman Strike set an important trend. Employers appealed frequently for court orders against unions, citing legislation like the Sherman Antitrust Act. The federal government regularly approved these appeals, denying unions recognition as legally protected

51 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 361.

52 Lapsansky-Werner, et al., *United States History*, 234.

53 See this helpful description of the conspiracy doctrine at <http://law.jrank.org/pages/8042/Labor-Union.html>: “The first efforts to organize employees were met with fierce resistance by employers. The U.S. legal system played a part in this resistance. In *Commonwealth v. Pullis* (Phila. Mayor’s Ct. 1806), generally known as the *Philadelphia Cordwainers’* case, bootmakers and shoemakers of Philadelphia were indicted as a combination for conspiring to raise their wages. The prosecution argued that the common-law doctrine of criminal conspiracy applied. The jury agreed that the union was illegal, and the defendants were fined. From that case came the labor conspiracy doctrine, which held that collective (as distinguished from individual) bargaining would interfere with the natural operation of the marketplace, raise wages to artificially high levels, and destroy competition. This early resistance to unions led to an adversarial relationship between unions and employers. ... Between 1806 and 1842, the labor conspiracy doctrine was applied in a handful of cases. Then, during the 1840s, U.S. courts began to question the doctrine. ... By the end of the nineteenth century, courts generally held that strikes for higher wages or shorter workdays were legal.”

54 William H. Holley, Kenneth M. Jennings, and Roger S. Wolters, *The Labor Relations Process* (Mason, Ohio: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2008).

55 The NLRB website has a “story” section which offers a brief and extremely moderate view of the politics and tensions surrounding the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin Acts, which, while far from adequate, offers some minimal balance. See: http://www.nlr.gov/publications/History/ththe_first_60_years.aspx.

56 The text of Truman’s veto is available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=12675>.

57 Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 795.

organizations and limiting union gains for more than 30 years.”⁵⁹

Passages like these help students understand the challenges the labor movement faced—and how stacked the deck was against labor.

Throughout U.S. history, it has been common practice for companies to strongly resist efforts by their employees to organize unions. What the courts have called “anti-union animus” by U.S. firms toward union organizing efforts has been extensive.⁶⁰ Yet that aspect of union history tends to get only modest coverage in the books we reviewed. Specifically, employers’ retaliatory responses to union organizing are presented as the natural pursuit of economic interests, not as clear violations of First Amendment rights, lawbreaking by employers, or acts of oppression.

In fact, a troubling tendency appears in some of the textbooks to paint American business, especially in the age of the robber barons, in rosy terms. For example, *The Americans* opens its section, “Big Business and Labor,” with a glowing account of Andrew Carnegie’s road to success: “[Carnegie’s] rise from rags to riches, along with his passion for supporting charities, made him a model of the American success story.”⁶¹ Similarly, a vignette in *The Americans* on John D. Rockefeller focuses on Rockefeller’s Horatio Alger story and his pride in his son.⁶²

The chapter does describe Carnegie’s ruthless and controversial business practices, and notes that Rockefeller “reaped huge profits by paying his employees extremely low wages and driving his competition out of business”—but adds these summative sentences one paragraph later:

Alarmed at the tactics of industrialists, critics began to call them robber barons. But industrialists were also philanthropists. Although Rockefeller kept most of his assets, he still gave away over \$500 million...⁶³

This language and framing, which verges on the apologetic, sends children the message that ruthless business practices and worker oppression are somehow excused by philanthropy.

American Vision extends this attitude in its startlingly uncritical account of the rise of discount and “big box” stores.

United States history textbooks should recognize not only

the exceptional (vs. other Western democracies) anti-union policies demonstrated by U.S. companies throughout the nation’s history, but also the more recent rise of the union avoidance industry in U.S. labor relations, a phenomenon well-documented in industrial relations scholarship.⁶⁴ The persistence and virulence of the opposition to unions by American business, and the legislative, judicial, and regulatory bias against unions that runs through modern U.S. history and continues in the present day, are rather unique when compared to labor’s status in other Western industrial democracies—one more compelling reason that systemic anti-labor bias in the U.S. should be accurately presented.

Finally, the textbooks are virtually silent about the great expansion of public sector and professional unionism in the United States since 1960. The analysis we conducted affirms the findings of Robert Shaffer’s 2002 essay on the absence of public employees from U.S. history textbooks, “Where Are the Organized Public Employees? The Absence of Public Employee Unionism from U.S. History Textbooks, and Why It Matters.”⁶⁵

Given the decline of industrial and private sector unions over the last generation and the rise of public and service sector unions throughout the U.S., this omission denies high school students the opportunity to fully grasp how unionism has changed over time, and the implications for American society. While there is considerable coverage in the textbooks of some aspects of worker and labor history through the immediate post-World War II era, unions get *virtually no coverage* after 1960 except for two discussions: the rise of the United Farm Workers (which is mainly described in relation to ethnic, not labor, history; in fact, *American Vision* in a chapter summary describes the United Farm Workers as a “Latino organization,” without appending the words, “and a union”⁶⁶) and the 1981 Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike.⁶⁷

It is startling that little mention is made of the dramatic growth in teacher unionism. Spurred by the militancy and growth of the American Federation of Teachers in the 1960s and ’70s, the more conservative National Education Association took up collective bargaining, lobbying, and political action. Between the two organizations, teachers became the most highly organized union sector in the U.S.

59 Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 457.

60 As per the definition in the University of Hawai‘i-West O‘ahu, Center for Labor Education and Research’s online Glossary of Labor & Legal Terminology, at <http://clear.uhwo.hawaii.edu/Glossary.html>: “Anti-union animus is the official term for anti-union sentiments that may affect various management actions and result in union organizers, members or representatives being harassed.”

61 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 447.

62 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 449.

63 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 449.

64 J. Logan, “The Union Avoidance Industry in the United States,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 44(4) (2006): 651-675.

65 Shaffer, “Where Are the Organized Public Employees?” 315-334.

66 Appleby et al., *American Vision*, 926.

67 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 698.

As we mentioned earlier, some of the textbooks' descriptions of President Ronald Reagan's actions in the PATCO strike are tinged with admiration. Consider *American Anthem's* account, which is anti-labor, admiring of Reagan, and paternalistic:

Reagan's easygoing manner did not prevent him from taking decisive action. In August 1981 Reagan faced a strike by the nation's air traffic controllers. As federal employees, the 13,000 members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers' Organization (PATCO) were forbidden to strike. Reagan warned them—and then he fired them all. Despite the resulting confusion at airports, the public generally approved of Reagan's uncompromising actions.⁶⁸

United States History is the only one of the textbooks to concede that Reagan's actions during the PATCO strike could be seen as union-busting, noting that:

Many Americans admired Reagan's strong, decisive stance. Some union supporters claimed that Reagan's action represented an assault on the labor movement.⁶⁹

It's interesting to note that while the textbooks repeatedly blame unions for causing economic and industrial disruption (and we could have added many examples of these blaming characterizations in addition to the ones provided in this report), in the case of the PATCO strike, such disruption is seen as the inevitable and understandable result of Reagan's "decisiveness" in taking on the union.

Covering the PATCO strike without covering the expansion of public sector unions during the second half of the 20th century, again, conveys an impression of failure and futility about a labor movement that, particularly in the public sector unions, brought millions of Americans into the middle class during those years.

What's more (as we will discuss in detail later), the textbooks' omissions in depicting union's political role in 20th-century American history marginalize the vital role played by labor in civil rights struggles from the 1950s to the present, as well as unions' leadership role in the Progressive Era and New Deal reforms. Moreover, no mention is made of the continuing union voice in the political process today.

Despite a decline in membership, organized labor's political voice is still strong. For example, in the 2008 election, 21 percent of voters were from union households despite the fact that organized labor represented only 12.4 percent of the workforce.⁷⁰ As a result of its political activism, the labor movement continues to play a significant role in promoting state and national legislation on issues related to economic development, health care, and education.

SUMMARY OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

- The key union right of freedom of assembly—as a basic right in the U.S. Constitution and consistent with current international human rights standards on workers' freedom of association—is marginalized by the textbooks in comparison to other First Amendment rights, and even omitted from commentary.
- In some textbooks, labor organizing and labor disputes are mischaracterized as inherently violent social phenomena, leaving readers no conceptual space to consider the exercise of workers' rights as a human rights issue, or the important role that unions have played and continue to play in the democratic process and in bringing about social progress.
- Major strikes are incorrectly used to typify what organized labor is and does. They are often treated as costly failures, as violent, as lacking public support and backfiring against unions. The employer's role in provoking strikes through prolonged, unrelenting worker abuse, and employers' attempts to suppress strikes, often through illegal and violent means, are glossed over.
- The history of aggressive and at times violent anti-union behavior by employers—a signal, and in modern times rather unique, feature of U.S. history compared to that of other Western democracies—is treated in passing comments only. It is neither addressed as a significant legal problem nor is it analyzed as a serious denial of First Amendment rights.
- In all textbooks reviewed, there is no acknowledgement of the emergence and expansion of the public and professional employee movement and the expansion of collective bargaining rights for public sector workers since 1960.

67 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 698.

68 Lapsansky-Werner, *United States History*, 1085.

69 See the union-related questions in CNN's Election Center 2008 polling results, available at: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=USP00p3>.

Section Two

Just and Favorable Working Conditions

The time will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today. — AUGUST SPIES

Haymarket martyr, wrongfully hanged for a bombing that occurred during a May 4, 1886 labor protest for an eight-hour day.⁷¹

“Just and favorable working conditions” is a category that should hold a special significance in U.S. history textbooks, given the history of slavery and sweatshop labor, and the hazardous working conditions in general that have frequently plagued the nation’s workplaces. The topic of sweatshop labor, child labor, and slavery *is* well addressed. Textbook authors *have* made considerable progress over the previous generation in recognizing the historical importance of these issues. However, we highlight here some key issues that are not adequately covered, resulting in an incomplete understanding of worker rights in U.S. history.

Most texts do a good job discussing the deplorable working conditions that characterized labor systems such as slavery and sweatshops, covering key topics such as the factory system, the exploitation of industrial workers in steel mills and mines, and the life of children, women, and immigrants in tenement slums where many workers lived, and early efforts to win a shorter workday. Lamentably, however, the books discuss these issues and conditions simply as matters of labor-management conflict. The moral dimension of such practices is overlooked or downplayed. Moreover, the textbooks neglect the fact that life-threatening workplace safety and health violations, human trafficking, immigrant exploitation, and coerced labor remain serious and highly publicized contemporary social problems in the U.S.

Omissions such as these, which drastically color students’ perceptions of historical and current conditions affecting U.S. workers, workers around the globe, and the U.S. economy, arguably affect both students’ understanding of history and their developing value systems. Such omissions substantiate the point (made by scholar James W. Loewen and others), that textbooks in U.S. history classes often seek to perpetuate a myth of blind patriotism and American exceptionalism by their failure to portray the sad or shameful aspects of our history (such as the institutionalization of sweatshop labor in American industry) alongside the triumphant and outstanding

features of American democracy.⁷²

Such a Bowdlerized approach to U.S. history fails students in many ways. It fails to give them a lens through which to perceive and meet the challenges that still plague our nation’s effort to be a democracy that is an example to the world. It turns history into pablum, which understandably bores and frustrates many students. And it is simply poor scholarship.

In light of the “poor scholarship” charge, consider that the textbooks we reviewed did not come close to adequately presenting the well-documented role of unions in fighting successfully to improve working conditions. Nowhere in the textbooks did we find a comprehensive account of the long struggle unions waged, by organizing and by mobilizing politically, to win state and federal legislation that changed working conditions in our country and transformed the lives of American workers and their families.

Such legislation includes the Keating-Owen Act of 1916, the first federal statute to impose restrictions on child labor; the 1916 Adamson Act, the first federal law that regulated the hours of workers in private companies by establishing an eight-hour workday for interstate railroad workers; and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA) which established a national minimum wage, guaranteed overtime in certain jobs, helped end sweatshop labor, and prohibited many forms of child labor.

The textbooks, unfortunately, leave out the crucial contextual information that the abolition of child labor, the establishment of the eight-hour day and the 40-hour work week, and the end to sweatshop working conditions in the U.S. would never have been achieved without the sustained efforts of union members. The textbooks usually give the credit, instead, to just about every other historical actor, from President Roosevelt to Henry Ford. But in each case, labor played a vital role from the very beginning in sometimes decades-long campaigns to win reform.

It is troubling that the textbooks give so little credit to labor for reforms it was instrumental in winning, often eerily seeming to “airbrush” labor out of the picture when it comes to reforms the labor movement fought for decades to win. For example, the labor movement in America was deeply engaged in and central to the fight for an eight-hour or ten-hour day as early as 1836.⁷³ But in *The Americans*, a section on the Second New Deal titled “Improving Labor Conditions” notes that “During the Second New Deal, Roosevelt, with the help of Congress, brought about important reforms in the area of labor relations...”⁷⁴ The

71 Spies’ quote is taken from the web site, “The Dramas of Haymarket,” a detailed account of the Haymarket Affair compiled by the Chicago Historical Society and Northwestern University, at: <http://www.chicagohistory.org/dramas/overview/over.htm>.

72 James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 204-206.

73 See “Eight-Hour Day,” at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight-hour_day.

74 Danzer et al, *The Americans*, 705.

book goes on to discuss the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, in which the 40-hour week was finally achieved for many workers, ignoring labor’s long and arduous campaign for the 40-hour work week and its strong support for the FLSA.

The U.S. labor movement opposed sweatshop and child labor as far back as 1832, when the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics and Other Workingmen issued a resolution stating that:

Children should not be allowed to labor in the factories from morning till night, without any time for healthy recreation and mental culture, [for it] endangers their ... well-being and health.⁷⁴

The textbooks do not mention that labor unions won key state legislation in several states (as early as 1842 in Massachusetts) limiting child labor and curbing sweatshop labor conditions. A good example of such legislation was the New York labor movement’s successful fight, led by Samuel Gompers, to pass state legislation in 1883 that eliminated the production of tobacco products in homes. (At the time, cigar making work was often done in tenements, with thousands of young children working in the trade. Gompers, who had been a child laborer himself, noted that one company paid \$5 to \$5.75 a week to families who produced 2,800 cigars a week at home, working from 6:30 in the morning to 10 or 11 at night.)⁷⁶

The textbooks do not cover this history of labor-supported, often labor-initiated, state reform. And the textbooks do not mention today’s unions’ efforts toward essential workplace reforms even when it would dovetail with history topics concerning American industry and working conditions. For example, although the textbooks mention the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and its effects, they do not discuss the vital efforts by today’s garment workers’ unions, such as UNITE HERE, to battle sweatshop conditions.

State reforms won by unions, though not as widely effective in ending child and sweatshop labor as proponents wished, paved the way for the strongly labor-supported federal FLSA’s abolition of child and sweatshop labor in many industries in 1938. The labor movement also strongly supported the work of the National Child Labor Committee, which in 1904 began an aggressive national campaign for federal child labor law reform.^{77, 78} Yet while the labor

movement is shown in some textbooks as *organizing* workers in response to child and sweatshop labor, its key role in *ending* child labor is not conveyed. For example, on the same page that *American Vision* discusses the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911 and notes that Triangle was a “nonunion shop” and that “health and safety issues were a major concern for unions,” the textbook’s discussion of child labor reform calls child labor a “progressive issue” and gives credit to muckrakers for “convincing states to pass laws” establishing limits on child labor.⁷⁹ (In the next passage, the book does credit labor leaders in winning a workers’ compensation law.)

Another example of the textbook’s failing to give labor credit for reforms in working conditions: the history textbooks we reviewed largely fail to capture the U.S. labor movement’s *central* role in establishing the eight-hour day. As early as 1791, Philadelphia carpenters went on strike for the ten-hour day. Labor leaders died for this cause in the Haymarket executions of 1886. Unions across the country and in numerous industries—the United Mine Workers in 1898, the Building Trades Council of San Francisco in 1900, the printing trades, led by the International Typographical Union—established the eight-hour day in their industries long before a 44-hour work week became law in the 1938 FLSA.⁸⁰ *The American Vision* does not contain a single mention of the Lowell Mill girls’ early and sophisticated campaign for a limit on working hours.

Finally, the textbooks don’t show how much the labor movement has done, and is still doing, to fight violations of worker and human rights around the globe. Through its policies and programs, the labor movement historically has supported human rights, internationally as well as within the United States. It is a fundamental principle of nearly all U.S. unions that human rights can be enforced only in democracies and that healthy democracies require free and democratic institutions, including unions. That bedrock principle underscores workers’ fundamental rights and freedoms. It is also the rationale for labor rights in international trade agreements.

Based on these ideas, in the 1930s and 1940s, organized labor in the United States played an active role in fighting against totalitarian regimes (both Communist and Fascist). Again, there are specific examples of significant content and

75 “Child Labor in U.S. History,” at The Child Labor Public Education Project web site. Available at: http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html.

76 To see Gompers’ firsthand accounts of tenements he visited where families made cigars from morning until night, see The Samuel Gompers Papers at: <http://www.history.umd.edu/Gompers/>.

77 Information on the facts cited here, as well as an excellent timeline of the fight against child labor, can be found at: http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html.

78 The NCLC’s work may be familiar to modern readers from the photographs of Lewis Hine, who toured the country in 1910 for the NCLC, taking photos of children working in mines, factories, shrimp canneries and garment shops. For a touching article on Hines’ photos of St. Louis “newsies”—newsboys who hawked papers in big cities for pennies a day—see Tim O’Neil, “A look back: City’s hardscrabble newsboys played role in reforming child labor laws,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 3, 2009, at: http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/article_b76ebadd-efe2-5abb-a26f-69536a94f1ae.html.

79 Appleby et al., *The American Vision*, 527.

80 “Eight-hour day” at Wikipedia site. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight-hour_day.

events in this area that the history textbooks we reviewed do not include. For example, in the search for ways to rebuild Europe after World War II and to address the growing threat from the Soviet Union, both the American Federation of Labor (the AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organization (the CIO) played an influential role in supporting the Marshall Plan in the late 1940s and working with those European trade unions that also supported the plan.⁸¹

Moreover, AFL-CIO representatives in Europe aided free trade unions in their struggle against Communism in the 1950s.⁸² Similarly, in the late 1980s, the AFL-CIO actively supported anti-Communist unions, such as Solidarity in Poland, which contributed to the collapse of Communism. Coverage on that vital assistance is missing in the textbooks. In its account of President Ronald Reagan and his opposition to the Soviet empire, *American Anthem* describes the success of the Solidarity movement in Poland, for example, but fails to mention the extensive support American labor unions gave to Solidarity.

Also missing is any mention of the labor movement's efforts to aid anti-apartheid groups in South Africa⁸³ and American union activism in support of trade unionists around the world. It fought for justice for murdered union leaders in El Salvador and Colombia, worked to end sweatshop conditions in such countries as the Dominican Republic and China, opposed the takeover and pollution of water and natural resources in developing countries by international conglomerates, and lobbied Congress to enforce the labor and environmental provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

One glaring omission in the textbooks is the era of globalization and deregulation, which is considered to have originated roughly around 1970. Surprisingly, the textbooks provide little or no analysis of the impact that globalization has had on trade union vitality in the U.S. and internationally. Labor unions are, again, simply missing in discussions of globalism and today's social issues. For example, in *American Anthem's* section on "Poverty in the U.S."⁸⁴ (where it might be appropriate to give labor at least a mention for its role in fighting poverty through improving wages and living standards for low-wage workers in particular) and its section on "Outsourcing and Trade"⁸⁵

(where you might expect labor's sustained opposition to the outsourcing of U.S. jobs to be included), not a phrase is given to labor (although, interestingly, a photo in this section⁸⁶ shows a protest against contracting-out including the word "AFGE" [American Federation of Government Employees], referring to one of the union's locals).

In his groundbreaking 2007 study of U.S. high school history textbooks, James W. Loewen talks powerfully about the effects on students when schools fail to teach them about economic forces, class structure, and the role of labor in our nation's history:

Why are people poor?" I have asked first-year college students. ... The answers I've received, to characterize them charitably, are half-formed and naïve. The students blame the poor for not being successful. They have no understanding of the ways that opportunity is not equal in America and no notion that social structure pushes people around, influencing the ideas they hold and the lives they live.

High school history textbooks can take some of the credit for this state of affairs. Some textbooks do cover certain high points of labor history, such as the 1894 Pullman Strike near Chicago that President Cleveland broke with federal troops, or the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire that killed 146 women in New York City, but the most recent event mentioned in most books is the Taft-Hartley Act of sixty years ago. Nor do most textbooks describe any continuing issues facing labor, such as the growth of multinational corporations and their exporting of jobs overseas. With such omissions, textbook authors can construe labor history as something that happened long ago, like slavery, and that, like slavery, was corrected long ago. It logically follows that unions now appear anachronistic. The idea that they might be necessary for workers to have a voice in the workplace goes unstated.⁸⁷

If students had the chance to learn about labor's struggle and achievements, and the ongoing ways in which labor fights for a fair society at home and abroad, their view of class inequities and power relationships in American society might change in a way that would make them more engaged, active citizens for a lifetime, much in the same way that learning about civil rights can have a transformative effect

81 For an in-depth account of American trade unions' support of the Marshall Plan, including their efforts in Europe to persuade the European trade union leadership to support the Plan, see: Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 147 and following. See an excerpt online at: http://books.google.com/books?id=EkMDU15j_4C&pg=PA147&lpg=PA147&dq=marshall+plan,+american+labor+movement,+support&source=bl&ots=TWjsmM-lZJ&sig=P62tzw2M7KXh-zbh22d6eKlx4ok&hl=en&ei=06BuTY0PzvaAB5HglUA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=OCBgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=marshall%20plan%2C%20american%20labor%20movement%2C%20support&f=false.

82 Judt, Tony, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

83 See: http://www.historicalvoices.org/pbuilder/pbfiles/Project39/Scheme361/african_activist_archive-a0b5e4-a_12419.pdf.

84 Ayers et al, *American Anthem*, 788-793.

85 Ayers et al, *American Anthem*, 806-812.

86 Ayers et al, *American Anthem*, 810.

87 Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, 204-206.

on some students' worldviews and civic engagement.

In a 1983 speech before the National Strategy Information Center, former AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland said,

The American labor movement does not recognize the split between ideals and self-interest that has plagued the foreign policy debate in this country. Simply stated, we have a vested interest in the promotion of free trade unions and the elevation of labor standards throughout the world. Experience teaches us that trade unions can prosper only in a climate of respect for human rights. Absent freedom of association, of assembly, and of expression, free trade unions independent of the state can neither be created nor sustained.⁸⁸

The labor movement's basic premise is that democracies require free and independent institutions to succeed. The labor movement has always contended—and has shown by its long struggle to promote the dignity and welfare of American workers and workers worldwide—that free and independent trade unions are one of those institutions. These efforts are an undeniable part of American history, and should be reflected in American history textbooks.

SUMMARY OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

- The textbooks devote considerable space to the issues of poor and hazardous working conditions, sweatshops, and the use of child labor. However, they pay insufficient attention to how these abuses occur, who is responsible, how those responsible are or are not held accountable, and the role of organized labor historically and today in opposing these practices in the U.S. and around the world.
- The textbooks too often discuss the issues and conditions that harmed and in some cases killed significant numbers of workers as simple labor-management conflict. The moral dimension of such practices is too often overlooked or downplayed. Moreover, these books neglect the fact

that practices such as life-threatening workplace safety and health violations, human trafficking, immigrant exploitation, and coerced labor remain serious *contemporary* social problems in the U.S., and in the the operations of some U.S. companies abroad.

- Most textbooks highlight the Soviet expansion in Europe following World War II and the subsequent Cold War—but there is no mention of the important role that the American labor movement played in support of the establishment of free and democratic trade unions in post-war Western Europe. American unions helped to thwart Soviet attempts to undermine the Marshall Plan. In addition, there is no mention of the AFL-CIO's support of Poland's Solidarity union, or its efforts to end apartheid in South Africa, bring down the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, or numerous other efforts to support free and democratic unions as a bulwark against totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. These are striking omissions that overlook whole chapters of union history and activism that helped change the world.
- In depriving students of history content that includes the American labor movement's achievements in creating just and fair working conditions at home and abroad, we are depriving students of a vital piece of the ongoing American story. We are also depriving them of history content that would help them develop key cognitive and evaluative skills. Studying labor's efforts towards a fairer, more just society might give students the opportunity to consider America's place in the world economy, the inequities in the American class system, and the complex environmental and social issues that have challenged our country in the past and continue to challenge it, in some forms, today. If we expect students to be thinking, contributing citizens of our democracy, we do them a disservice by not fully portraying the long and continuing fight for worker rights and economic opportunity in America, and labor's central role in that fight.

⁸⁸ Kirkland's speech is quoted in: Paul F. Cole, Lori Megivern, and Jeff Hilgert, *The Untold Story: American Labor in U.S. History Textbooks: A Report by The American Labor Studies Center* (draft, September 7, 2009), 32.

Section Three

Social Protections and Human Dignity

*We got through the rooms ... and everywhere we come across tobacco, tobacco scraps, tobacco stems, and other filth. Even in the yard where the children who are still too young to be able to work—and they have to be very young not to—are playing, great piles of drying tobacco are lying about. ... the atrocious smell ... hovers over everything ... [In one tenement]...two small children were lying on an old lounge not far from the worktable, waiting for sleep to close their weary eyes and perhaps bring them dreams of green meadows and gardens where there is fresh air and no tobacco. But it is probably impossible to dream of anything but tobacco in this atmosphere.*⁸⁹

SAMUEL GOMPERS,

founder of the American Federation of Labor, documenting conditions in the New York cigar-making industry in the 1880s for the labor movement's successful campaign to pass a state law eliminating the manufacturer of tobacco products by children and families.

Most of the history textbooks we reviewed for this study cover significant social legislation but rarely mention the key role the labor movement played in its advocacy and adoption. Unemployment insurance, child labor protection, workers' compensation, Social Security retirement benefits, the legal protection of a minimum hourly wage and limits on working hours, the Civil Rights Acts (discussed further in the next section), the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, Medicare, and Medicaid all became law in part because of the strong and unwavering support of the organized labor movement.

One example of this practice of omission is that while most textbooks describe the Lowell Mill girls as worker activists,⁹⁰ they do not fully describe the Lowell girls involvement and leadership in labor's "Ten Hour Movement," an early effort to limit the working day to ten hours. The books give little detail about the strategically sophisticated, ahead-of-its-time campaign by working women in the Lowell, Massachusetts, textile mills (with some support from the male mechanics' and laborers'

association at the mills)⁹¹ to improve the terms and conditions of work in New England cotton mills in the 1840s, where the female factory operatives worked 14-hour days and 73-hour weeks, toiling on noisy, airless factory floors, breathing in lint and dust. This fight for reasonable working hours was carried on for decades, culminating in petitions to the Massachusetts state legislature signed by thousands of Lowell Mill girls.

Pressure by these women, who were organized for several years into a labor organization called the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (FLRA) (affiliated with the New England Workingmen's Association)⁹² eventually led to Lowell's textile mills reducing the workday by 30 minutes in 1847, and to 11 hours in 1853.

The Ten Hour Movement had enormous social and political significance, and some of the textbooks do make note of the movement—but the books do not fully portray that it was *more* than a reform movement, more than a touching tale of factory girls standing up for themselves. The Ten Hour Movement was really an early and sophisticated prototype of an effective American labor union waging a concerted community and political campaign to improve working conditions. The Ten Hour Movement was also an early expression of labor activism that was derived from republican principles: the women clearly saw their right to protest inhumane working conditions as an outgrowth of democratic freedoms won in the American Revolution. For example, a poem from one of the first Lowell factory workers "turn-outs," or strikes, read: "I value not the feeble threats/Of Tories in disguise [the factory owners]/While the flag of Independence/O'er our noble nation flies."⁹³

The movement spread to other mill towns, showing that large-scale and collective action by workers was possible. Political action to advocate labor reforms was possible too: The women of the FLRA demonstrated that collective *political* action was a powerful avenue for labor to address workers' ills, as they clearly conveyed in this tract:

...there is in this city an Association called the Female Labor Reform Association, having for its professed object, the amelioration of the condition of the [factory] operative.... [I]n the strength of our united influence we

89 To see Gompers' firsthand accounts of tenements he visited where families made cigars from morning until night, from which this excerpt is taken, see The Samuel Gompers Papers at: <http://www.history.umd.edu/Gompers/SG%20tenement%201881.htm>.

90 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 101-02); Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 263.

91 The Ten Hour movement did have support from male allies, including the male mechanics and other male mill employees. However, because 80 percent of the employees at the mills were women, women were at the center of the Ten Hour Movement in Lowell, and in other New England mill towns to which the movement spread.

92 The New England Workingmen's Association also arose out of the demand for a ten-hour day. As the Massachusetts AFL-CIO points out in its history of the NEWA, "NEWA was unique among other labor organizations of the time because of its inclusion of middle-class reformers who stressed issues such as land reform, and women, who frequently found themselves excluded from other groups." For more on the NEWA, go to: <http://www.massafcio.org/1844-new-england-workingmen%2526%2523039%3Bs-association,-lowell-female-labor-reform-association-founded>.

93 This poem is quoted in an excellent web site prepared by Professor Catherine Lavender (Department of History, The College of Staten Island of CUNY), "'Liberty Rhetoric' and Nineteenth-Century Women." The lines quoted here come from a poem that concluded Lowell Women Workers' 1834 Petition to the Manufacturers. See: <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/americanstudies/lavender/lowtext.html#1834poem>.

will soon show these *drivelling* cotton lords, this mushroom aristocracy of New England, who so arrogantly aspire to lord it over God's heritage, that our rights cannot be trampled upon with impunity. ... ye! who have daughters and sisters toiling in these sickly prison-houses which are scattered far and wide ... we appeal to *you* for aid in this matter. Do you ask how that aid can be administered? We answer, through the Ballot Box. Yes! if you have one spark of sympathy for our condition, carry it *there*, and see to it that you send to preside in the Councils of each Commonwealth, men who have hearts as well as heads, souls as well bodies; men who will watch zealously over the interests of the laborer in every department ... who will see that he is not deprived of those rights and privileges which God and Nature have bestowed upon him...⁹⁴

In one of the earliest strategic political campaigns by a labor group, the women succeeded in their attempt to convince sympathetic male voters to turn an anti-worker politician out office. As scholar Thomas Dublin notes:

After the state committee reported unfavorably on the Ten-hour petitions, the Female Labor Reform Association denounced the committee chairman, a state representative from Lowell, as a corporation "tool." Working for his defeat at the polls, they did so successfully and then passed the following post-election resolution: "Resolved, That the members of this Association tender their grateful acknowledgments to the voters of Lowell, for consigning William Schouler to the obscurity he so justly deserves...."⁹⁵

While the Lowell Mill girls and their union did not succeed in transforming the industry, they paved the way for reformers who came after them. As the AFL-CIO web site sums it up:

In the 1830s, half a century before the better-known mass movements for workers' rights in the United States, the Lowell mill women organized, went on strike and mobilized in politics when women couldn't even vote—and created the first union of working women in American history.

The story of the Lowell Mill girls deserves to be told more fully in our history textbooks. To fail to convey fully the labor movement aspects of their struggle, as the textbooks

do, is to fail to give these brave women credit for what they accomplished, who they inspired, and the movement they helped build. Consider this initial description of the Lowell Mill girls in *United States History*:

Their [the mill owners'] system employed young, single women recruited from area farms. The company enforced strict rules of behavior and housed the "Lowell girls" in closely supervised boardinghouses. After a few years of work, most of the young women married and left the factories.⁹⁶

Although the ills of the factory system and the appalling working conditions of factories in general are described later in the textbook, with a brief if incomplete description of the Lowell Mill girls' labor activism,⁹⁷ this initial description makes life in the mills of Lowell sound more like a rather strict boarding or finishing school.

Not only do the textbooks often fail to indicate the role of organized labor as a growing and central factor in early worker protests, they also too often fail to *morally* fault the factory owners who created and defended oppressive factory conditions in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The textbooks, rightly, do not apply this moral neutrality to other "social ills" and human right violations of these eras, such as slavery or the denial of the vote to women.

For example, in describing the Gilded Age and its "captains of industry," the textbooks, as mentioned earlier, take a morally neutral tone that verges on the admiring. In *American Anthem*, for example, initial descriptions of Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller stress their philanthropy, for example, noting the "huge amounts" Rockefeller gave to "good causes."⁹⁸ Only at the end of this passage (titled "Industrial Tycoons") comes the statement that, "Some Americans viewed the tycoons of the late 1800s as robber barons, destroying competitors with tough tactics."⁹⁹

The phrase "tough tactics" is massive understatement for, to take one example, the Standard Oil monopoly. In a paragraph describing Ida Tarbell's groundbreaking reporting on the Standard Oil Company, the book again describes the company's "business practices" and its "crushing" of the competition, without conveying the extent and effects of Standard Oil's monopoly: the truth is that, by 1890, Standard Oil controlled 88 percent of the refined oil flows in the United States.¹⁰⁰ From euphemistic language such as that

94 *Factory Tracts. Factory Life As It Is*, Number One, (Lowell, MA, 1845), from the web site, "History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web." Available at: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6217>.

95 Dublin, Women, Work, and Protest in the Early Lowell Mills: "The Oppressing Hand of Avarice Would Enslave Us," 99-116.

96 Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 230.

97 Lapsansky-Werner et al., *United States History*, 234.

98 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 151.

99 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 152.

100 <http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1870to1879.html>.

used in the passage above, students can't be expected to understand the pervasiveness and power of monopolies and trusts and their effect to limit the opportunities and impoverish the lives of regular working people.

We are equipping students poorly to be active, engaged citizens of our country and our world if we do not teach them how to apply the lens of right and wrong to *all* violations of human rights—even if such violations are committed by American businesses.

When the textbooks note that success in reforming factory conditions finally came in the 20th century, the pivotal actors in the narrative are portrayed as being employers (who apparently decided to reform themselves!) or political leaders, or Progressives (the textbooks only rarely mention unions as part of the Progressive Movement). Unions are rarely noted for their vital role in this process. The critical importance of union advocacy in providing crucial grassroots political pressure for reform gets scant mention.

An example is the treatment of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911, in which 146 garment workers died, most of them young women who were recent immigrants, and unions' key role in winning the reforms that were enacted after the fire roused public outrage. The workers died either from the fire or were killed when they jumped from the eighth, ninth, or tenth floor of the factory building to their deaths. Workers jumped because exits were blocked; managers had locked the doors to the stairwells and exits in a supposed attempt to prevent theft. As eyewitness Louis Waldman (who would later become a prominent labor lawyer and New York State Assemblyman) described the horrible scene:

Horried and helpless, the crowds — I among them — looked up at the burning building, saw girl after girl appear at the reddened windows, pause for a terrified moment, and then leap to the pavement below, to land as mangled, bloody pulp. This went on for what seemed a ghastly eternity. Occasionally a girl who had hesitated too long was licked by pursuing flames and, screaming with clothing and hair ablaze, plunged like a living torch to the street. Life nets held by the firemen were torn by the impact of the falling bodies.¹⁰¹

There was a criminal trial, but the factory owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris (long known for their anti-union activities), were acquitted. The deaths of the Triangle workers did lead to change, however. Urged by labor unions

and other reformers, the New York State Legislature enacted a series of new laws covering fire safety, factory inspections and sanitation, and employment conditions for women and children, creating a new body of New York's labor law and a state Department of Labor to enforce the new laws.¹⁰²

The Triangle Fire became a rallying cry for the international labor movement, and brought to the forefront the need to protect employees from employer abuses—unionizing being a key way to accomplish that. As Cornell University's extensive web site on the tragedy notes:

The role that strong unions could have in helping prevent such tragedies became clear. Workers organized in powerful unions would be more conscious of their rights and better able to obtain safe working conditions.¹⁰³

As a consequence of the fire, leaders of the Progressive Party called for reform, and individual states enacted injury compensation laws. But behind it all was unrelenting union advocacy for these reforms (in particular the efforts of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, to which some of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory employees belonged), and union membership in the Progressive Party that paved the way for these reforms.¹⁰⁴

In its coverage of Progressivism, *The Americans* fails to include labor among those groups fighting for social progress. While the textbook does describe the founding of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the "Uprising of the 20,000"¹⁰⁵ (the 1909 strike that led to improvements in working conditions for seamstresses), there are other odd omissions in which the book fails to consistently connect labor to reforms in working conditions. For example, in a passage on "Women and Reform," the work of pioneering women labor leaders in the garment and laundry industries is downplayed, despite the sophisticated mobilization and campaigning efforts (such as the Uprising) that these women and their unions deployed.

As noted earlier, the textbooks we reviewed tend to characterize unions as violent, especially when discussing strikes that were actually protesting dangerous, often deadly working conditions, such as those that cost lives in the Triangle Fire. Twisting into significant self-contradiction, the texts on the one hand portray some of the worst employee abuses by 19th and 20th century factory owners and other employers, then disconnect unions' responses to these conditions from the injustices that forced those responses—

101 Louis Waldman, *Labor Lawyer*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1944), 32–33. Also among those who watched with horror as the building burned was Frances Perkins, who later became secretary of labor under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

102 See the AFL-CIO's history of the Triangle Fire, garment workers' activism, and sweatshop reforms at: http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/history/history/uprising_fire.cfm.

103 See Cornell University's in-depth, compelling web site, "Remembering the Triangle Factory Fire: 100 Years Later." This quote appears at: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/story/mourningProtest.html>.

104 For a discussion of these factors, see the article "Progressive Ideas" at the U.S. Department of Labor web site. Available at: <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/mono-regsafepart06.htm>.

105 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 454–455.

implying that unions' actions in striking and protesting for reform *threatened* American democracy and the American economy, rather than strengthening it.

For example, *The Americans* includes this passage on President Theodore Roosevelt's intervention in the Coal Strike of 1902:

When 140,000 coal miners in Pennsylvania went on strike and demanded a 20 percent raise, a nine-hour workday, and the right to organize a union, the mine operators refused to bargain ... Faced with President Roosevelt's threat to take over the mines, the opposing sides finally agreed to submit their differences to arbitration ... President Roosevelt's actions had demonstrated a new principle. From then on, when a strike threatened the public welfare, the federal government was expected to intervene.¹⁰⁶

The passage appears facing a page diagramming the dangerous work of coal mining in the early 1900s—yet the text above makes no concession that, given the conditions depicted in the diagram, the miners may have been entirely justified in striking.

Equally troubling is that the textbooks tend to shy away from characterizing employers who created and sustained horrendous working conditions as representatives of a *consis-*
tent historical and societal complicity in ignoring, downplaying, or openly tolerating such abuses. The truth is, abusive employers, from factory owners to mine operators to steam laundries, were often condoned and defended by American judicial, legislative, and social institutions of their day.

That ingrained societal acceptance of worker abuse as a constant in American history—and the complicity of every social institution, from the courts to the presidency, from the press to Congress—does not often come through in the textbooks. But it would take only a few examples to illustrate this point. Consider, for example, that in the investigation into the Triangle Fire, New York City's Fire Chief John Kenlon stated that his department had identified more than 200 factories where conditions made a fire like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory possible.¹⁰⁷ Historians do not dispute that horrific and life-threatening conditions for workers were often the norm in factories and workplaces in 19th and 20th century America, but our children's textbooks do not represent them this way. Instead, the four textbooks we reviewed repeatedly praise the supposed benefits of the factory system: the prevalence of cheap goods (though

many workers could not afford them), the technological innovations of American industry, and the employment opportunities that brought millions of Americans from farms to cities. These points, while accurate, do not present the whole picture.

And, of course, sweatshop conditions continue to exist right here in America:

Recent studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor found that 67 percent of Los Angeles garment factories and 63 percent of New York garment factories violate minimum wage and overtime laws. Ninety-eight percent of Los Angeles garment factories have workplace health and safety problems serious enough to lead to severe injuries or death.¹⁰⁸

Yet the high school history textbooks we reviewed rarely raise the notion that the factory owners and companies responsible for horrific working conditions in the past (and for the deaths and injuries that those conditions caused) should have been held accountable, thus providing students with little historical background against which they might assess similar contemporary events—such as the recent West Virginia mine disaster, which killed 29 miners, or the Deepwater Horizon oil rig catastrophe, which killed 11 men and produced the worst environmental catastrophe in American history.¹⁰⁹

The textbook treatment of the regulation of wages and hours in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA)—a reform that literally transformed the lives of American workers by establishing an eventual 40-hour work week and drastically curbing child labor in some industries—is another example of textbooks' puzzling omissions of unions' role, omissions that amount to bias. No mention is made in these textbooks, in reporting on the passage of the FLSA, of union activism on behalf of wage and hour legislation, although unions' central role in winning such legislation is decidedly *not* a disputed historic fact.¹¹⁰

Likewise, no mention is made in the textbooks of the continual union advocacy efforts on behalf of the Social Security Act of 1935, a key social reform of the second New Deal that established old age pensions, unemployment insurance, and disability relief. In the textbooks, these laws are credited essentially to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, not described, as would be far more accurate, as also the result of diligent, nationwide grassroots mobilization of

106 Danzer et al., *The Americans*, 526.

107 *New York Times*, "Factory Firetraps Found by Hundreds," October 14, 1911.

108 See: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/story/sweatshopsStrikes.html>.

109 See, for example, Ian Urbina and Michael Cooper, "Deaths at West Virginia Mine Raise Issues About Safety," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2010; also see: Joe Nocera, "BP Ignored the Omens of Disaster," *The New York Times*, June 19, 2010.

110 For an account of the obstacles overcome by proponents of the FLSA in conceptualizing the law winning its passage, including a description of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins' advocacy for the law, see: Jonathan Grossman, "Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: Maximum Struggle for a Minimum Wage," U.S. Department of Labor web site republication of an article that appeared in the *Monthly Labor Review*, June 1978, 101(6):22-30. Available at: <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/flsa1938.htm>.

labor unions and workers over a long period.

It is troubling that the textbooks give so little credit to labor for reforms it was instrumental in winning. For example, the textbooks often ignore labor's contribution to New Deal reforms. Repeatedly, the textbooks refer to labor as being helped by New Deal reforms, as if labor had no part in bringing them about. For example, *American Anthem* notes:

Labor unions benefited, too from the NIRA [National Industrial Recovery Act]. For the first time, labor got federal protection for the right to organize.¹¹¹

This portrayal of labor in the passive voice occurs throughout the texts when it comes to social progress legislation. Again, in *American Anthem*, we see this description of the Fair Labor Standards Act: "Only one major piece of legislation emerged from Congress in 1938: the Fair Labor Standards Act."¹¹² The act is depicted as "emerging" from Congress and the FDR administration, but no mention is made of labor's support for the bill, or for the fact that the bill was in many ways a culmination of a decades-long crusade by labor for higher wages and limits on working hours.¹¹³

Similarly, Presidents Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson are credited by the textbooks with establishing the Medicare and Medicaid health insurance programs for retirees and those in poverty. There is no mention of the essential role played by unions winning legislation in these areas.

We are not urging textbooks to paint unions only in a positive, glowing light, however. For example, one area in which unions' positions and strategies are still evolving, and which has been problematic in the past, is the relationship between unions and environmental causes, which has been strained at times.

The record of unions on environmental issues can appear contradictory. For example, employers who face penalties for pollution or who are fighting regulations designed to reduce smokestack emissions or other environmental hazards often claim that the costs of remediation and clean up will cost jobs. Faced with such threats, and reluctant to support regulation that will cost even a few jobs, unions have frequently lined up with employers against environmental regulation, although the burgeoning "green jobs" movement has helped to swing many unions into the "green" camp.¹¹⁴

Textbooks should paint this nuanced picture—but should also point out that, historically, unions have been the acknowledged leaders in pushing for workplace environmental health and safety protections for their members and other workers. These protections often reach further, to protect the environment and the public's health. The collective bargaining process is the primary tool in this fight. But the textbooks do not cover examples of this dynamic.

Examples of the use of collective bargaining for workplace environmental protection can be found as far back as the 1960s. One high-profile labor dispute involved the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW) which demanded "the right of workers to control, at least as decisively as their employer, the health and safety conditions in the factories and shops" during prolonged confrontation for environmental health and safety committees in their 1972 negotiations with the nation's leading oil producers.¹¹⁵

In 1973, employees of the Shell Oil Company, who were represented by the OCAW, walked off the job and began a national boycott of the company in what the *San Francisco Examiner* called "the first time in American labor history a major strike has started over the potential health hazards of an industry."¹¹⁶

In the 1973 strike, the OCAW staged one of the first major "corporate campaigns" in U.S. history. In its history series, the OCAW recounts how it "forged alliances with the scientific, academic, environmental, and labor communities to fight Shell's position that it would not bargain over health and safety. The union spent nearly half a million dollars to advertise a nationwide boycott of Shell and to educate the public about the need to protect the health of workers and the communities."¹¹⁷

By the end of the first week of the strike, major environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, supported the strike and environmentalists took a new interest in labor law, beginning to identify points of cooperation with unions. Environmental leaders began to see collective bargaining over workplace safety and health issues as a way to "help control environmental pollution at its source."¹¹⁸

After five months, Shell agreed to a strike settlement including a health and safety clause.¹¹⁹

111 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 351.

112 Ayers et al., *American Anthem*, 374.

113 For a description of organized labor's support for the FLSA—and its concerns about various aspects of the law—see Grossman, "Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938: Maximum Struggle for a Minimum Wage." Available at <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/flsa1938.htm>.

114 Joe Uehlein, "Why Green Jobs Should Be Union Jobs," Labor Network for Sustainability, at: <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/post/why-green-jobs-should-be-union-jobs/>.

115 R. Gordon, "Shell no! OCAW and the Labor Environmental Alliance," *Environmental History*, (1998) 3 (4): 460-487.

116 "The First Strike Over Potential Hazards to Health," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 4, 1973, 21.

117 See: "Shell Strike of 1973/OCAW 1-591 History Series; Segment 3" as researched by Douglas W. Erlandson. Available at: <http://www.usw12-591.org/strike1973.html>.

118 D. Shapely, "Shell Strike: Ecologists Refine Relations With Labor," *Science* 13 April 1973:

119 Erlandson, "Shell Strike of 1973/OCAW 1-591 History Series; Segment 3." Available at: <http://www.usw12-591.org/strike1973.html>.

The 1973 Shell Oil Company strike was among the most prominent efforts to use labor's power of collective bargaining for environmental protection, but many other unions also brought forward workplace environmental claims in negotiations and contributed to this movement. The United Farm Workers negotiated contracts restricting the most dangerous of agricultural pesticides, and Cesar Chavez in 1969 argued, "We have come to realize...that the issue of pesticide poisoning is more important today than even wages."¹²⁰

Similarly, the United Steelworkers of America used collective bargaining to give workers a voice on environmental policy. The union also held a U.S. legislative conference on air pollution in 1969, reportedly the first in the nation.

Other unions, representing workers in a highly diverse set of industries, occupations, and professions, have taken leadership roles on environmental issues in their sectors and beyond. Unions such as the Communications Workers Union, Glass Bottle Blowers, American Federation of Teachers, Newspaper Guild, Air Line Pilots Association, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and Pulp and Paper Mill Workers, took very public stands on environmental issues early on. The goal of these efforts was, in the words of one union leader, to make the phrase "unfair environmental practice" as common as the phrase "unfair labor practice."¹²¹

In his excellent article, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," Scott Dewey chronicles labor's largely unknown history of supporting conservation and environmentalism, noting that by the 1980s, a public misconception had arisen that "environmentalism and labor were fundamentally at odds."¹²² Dewey strongly refutes this assumption, noting that:

In fact, organized labor had demonstrated relatively strong support for many environmental initiatives prior to 1970. Long before most Americans became aware of such issues, labor organizations and union members contributed to the groundswell of public concern that produced the environmental movement of the late 1960s. ... Often exhibiting a sophisticated understanding of environmental issues, unions adopted relatively radical positions that were strikingly at odds with the views of the employers with whom they were supposedly allied against environmentalism.¹²³

Dewey traces labor's environmental activism back to the two decades following World War II, noting that in the late 1950s and early 1960s:

workers and their union representatives showed concern about air and water pollution, issues that began chiefly as public health concerns. They similarly took an interest in more traditional conservationist issues such as outdoor recreation and wildlife and wilderness preservation.

Dewey gives numerous examples.¹²⁴ By 1958, Dewey notes, "national labor representatives regularly testified in favor of federal proposals to control water pollution." He describes the AFL-CIO's strong support for the first Clean Air Act in 1963, and its support for an expanded federal air pollution control program during the mid-1960s.¹²⁵ He singles out the environmental activism of the UAW under Walter Reuther:

As early as 1965, Dewey relates, the UAW organized a 'United Action for Clean Water Conference' that "brought together more than one thousand union members and officials, conservationists, and community leaders."¹²⁶

120 R. Gordon, "Poisons in the fields: The United Farm Workers, pesticides, and environmental politics," *The Pacific Historical Review*, 68 (1): 51-77.

121 "The First Strike Over Potential Hazards to Health," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 4, 1973, 21

122 Scott Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970." *Environmental History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan., 1998): 45-63. Available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1762699.

123 Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," 45-46.

124 These examples include the Steelworkers' fight to investigate the October 1948 "Killer Smog" incident in Donora, Pennsylvania, in which industrial fumes killed 20 people; USW members were among the victims. See: Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," 47. On page 54 of the article, Dewey also offers a fascinating account of the pro-environmental values of rank-and-file Steelworkers: "In 1970, Joseph Germano, director of District 31 (Chicago-Calumet-Gary), appeared before the Muskie subcommittee to support increased federal air pollution control efforts...Germano noted that union members in Peoria, in a surprising reversal of traditional assumptions, had threatened to strike on account of the terribly polluted conditions outside the local steel mill. He described air pollution cleanup as a matter of life and death, explaining that if it is necessary to lose 300 or 400 jobs to save the lives of 3,000 or 4,000 people, then that is what is going to happen. Germano supported this position with a telling anecdote. After he had requested Chicago city officials to grant leniency to the Republic Steel plant in South Chicago while the company converted its manufacturing process, local members of the United Steelworkers blasted him for seeking a compromise on pollution control, even though their jobs were on the line in any partial shutdown."

125 Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," 48-49. Dewey points out that, "In 1961, even before the appearance of *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson's famous expose of the pesticide industry, AFL-CIO legislative representative John T. Curran warned congressmen of the known and unknown health hazards and possible ecological risks of various 'new and exotic industrial wastes' ..."

126 Dewey notes, "In 1967, the union created a Department of Conservation and Resource Development under the leadership of vice president Olga M. Madar ... [the new department] encouraged members to take part in solving the air and water pollution problems and other natural resource issues of their various communities, states, provinces, and nations. Under the hard-driving 'Miss Madar,' the union became ever more strident in its public statements and actions on environmental matters. During congressional hearings in 1967 regarding a proposed National Trails System, UAW legislative representative Franklin Wallick ... even urged restraints on the use of automobiles. That same year, Olga Madar testified before the Muskie subcommittee in support of tightened federal standards for controlling motor vehicle air pollution in order to preserve community health, even at the cost of jobs. In direct opposition to the auto industry, which stubbornly resisted further vehicular emission controls, she declared that the union favored this cleanup despite possible adverse impacts on employment. According to her reasoning, auto workers were 'first and foremost American citizens and consumers' who had 'to breathe the same air and drink and bathe in the same water' as other Americans." See Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," 52.

As Dewey observes, in the decades after World War II, some unions were willing to advocate environmental protections even if such protections meant job loss:

By 1970, representatives of OCAW and the Steelworkers were testifying before Congress that pollution control was necessary even if it reduced employment in their industries.¹²⁷

He highlights the efforts of Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers to expose the dangers of modern agricultural pesticides during the late 1960s and early 1970s:

The UFW expanded its brief against them [pesticides] to include wider considerations of community health, and in the process it gained sympathy and support from other concerned groups.¹²⁸

Dewey relates how, in January 1970, just a few months before his untimely death in a plane crash, Walter Reuther held a press conference announcing a new concept in labor-management negotiations:

I think the environmental crisis has reached such catastrophic proportions that ... the labor movement is now obligated to raise this question at the bargaining table in any industry that is in a measurable way contributing to man's deteriorating living environment.

As Dewey documents, during negotiations with employers in 1970, UAW locals made nearly 750 environmental protection demands, and later that year:

In a surprise move, the UAW joined several environmentalist organizations ... in calling for the replacement of the internal combustion engine.

In the 1970s, as Dewey observes, many unions turned away from labor's earlier environmental vision under pressure from management, which often threatened that environmental regulations would cost jobs and force plant closures (a tactic Dewey calls "job blackmail"). But the 1980s and the rise of global trade and outsourcing created a new rapprochement between labor and environmentalists, Dewey points out:

The Reagan administration worked overtime to break the strength of organized labor and systematically refused to enforce occupational safety and health laws. In the unrestrained, pro-business climate of the 1980s, many employers rewarded workers' loyalty ... with layoffs, often shipping factories and jobs overseas to take advantage of generally nonunion labor in Third World nations devoid of meaningful occupational health standards

or environmental controls. This process culminated in the battle against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, which found labor and many environmentalists allied once again.¹²⁹

Today, many unions continue to focus on environmental issues in their collective bargaining practices, aware that these issues are central to lessening workplace health and safety hazards.

Except for the UFW's crusade against pesticides, this story of decades of labor environmental activism—with labor often committing early to environmental standards and regulations, even at the potential cost of jobs—is not told in the history textbooks. Indeed, this history is unknown even to many in labor history circles. But it is a story that should be told, one that could serve as an excellent launching pad for classroom discussion of how human rights, environmental concerns, and economic issues can intersect in complex ways, and is nowhere in the U.S. history textbooks we examined.

SUMMARY OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

- The vital role of organized labor in advocating for broad social protections through history is largely missing in the high school history textbooks we reviewed. This role includes advocacy of Progressive Era and New Deal reforms, such as the Social Security Act of 1935, Medicare, Medicaid, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Also missing is the use of collective bargaining as a tool to create and enforce a wide variety of environmental health and safety protections.
- The role of organized labor in a wide range of political reforms is largely absent from U.S. history textbooks. Social protection legislation is most often cast as originating from "enlightened" politicians rather than from the push and pull of the democratic process, a process in which unions and other progressive groups played an important role—often while political leaders dragged their feet.
- The intersection of union health and safety issues and environmental issues represents an area where unions have evolved, and includes the fascinating history of the Shell Oil Strike, one of the first times when a union and the environmental community worked together to advance common goals. Textbooks ignore this aspect of unions' social protection advocacy, which would make a fascinating case study for students, given that it exemplifies the intersection of environmental, labor, and economic issues in America.

127 Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," 53.

128 Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," 54.

129 Dewey, "Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970," 59.

Section Four

Equality and Freedom from Discrimination

For most Americans the story of how labor organizations like the UAW were key partners in the Civil Rights movement of the mid 20th century is an unknown piece of trivia. ...

Similarly there is little recollection of the Civil Rights' legacy of fighting for economic rights, workers rights, and the right to work. The famed March on Washington in 1963 was titled the March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs and was originally envisioned by the great labor leader A. Phillip Randolph. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis supporting a labor strike. Dr. King's last national campaign was aimed at demanding greater investment into and more opportunity for working class Americans.

The struggle for racial equality has at its core many of the same issues at the foundation of the labor movement, the right to a living wage and the need for greater economic opportunity and equality.

— DEDRICK MUHAMMED

Senior director
for economic programs, NAACP¹³⁰

Since the 1960s, textbook companies have made important, positive changes in their treatment of issues dealing with equality and freedom from discrimination. Still, serious omissions remain. For example, these four textbooks, which are used in so many high school U.S. history classes, do not adequately convey that American workers have suffered (and too often still *do* suffer) discrimination for union activities or union sympathies: discrimination in retaliation for organizing a union, or for advocating for improved safety and health policies at the jobsite. Since at least the latter half of the 20th century, America has stood in stark contrast to Western democracies in its weak enforcement of labor law and failure to uphold workers' rights through our regulatory and judicial systems—but U.S. history textbooks do not indicate this.

What's more, U.S. history books fail to convey organized labor's own role in fighting racial and gender discrimination. No review of labor history in the U.S. is complete without telling the story of organized labor's longstanding and wide-

ranging efforts to combat discrimination and improve working conditions for women and minorities.

For example, some of the textbooks we reviewed cover the development of the women's labor movement, and take note of the 1830s women's labor unions and the Lowell Mill girls (e.g., *The Americans*, pages 260-63). But little mention—except in *The American Vision*¹³¹—is made of the role of women's labor in the Civil War, and the books take no note of the formation of one of the first all-female labor unions, the Troy, New York, Collar Laundry Union, which staged a successful strike against 14 commercial laundries in 1864, increasing wages by 20-25 percent.

The stories of 19th century female labor leaders are not included in the textbooks.¹³³ Students miss out on stories and role models, such as the fascinating biography of Kate Mullany, a co-founder (with Esther Keegan) of the Collar Laundry Union. In 1868, Mullany was appointed assistant secretary of the National Labor Union, the first time a woman had been appointed to a national labor union office. Mullaney was a pioneer in creating worker cooperatives as a way to challenge manufacturers who attempted to shortchange workers and discourage unionization.¹³³

Kate Mullany's story and those of women like her (such as Augusta Lewis Troup, a reporter and typographer who became president of the Women's Typographical Union No. 1 and corresponding secretary of the International Typographical Union)¹³⁴ don't appear in high school history textbooks. Typically, throughout the history textbooks, the women's movement coverage focuses on the efforts of *middle class* women (such as the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention) rather than on the significant contributions of working class women.

The textbooks do acknowledge the early efforts of labor to fight discrimination and improve the treatment of women and minorities. For example, they give credit to the Knights of Labor for their advocacy of social reform, and note that the Knights of Labor were quite inclusive, offering membership regardless of gender, race, and ethnicity.

However, major labor protests in the early 20th century leading to important legislative changes are not adequately covered in the textbooks. One example is the scanty coverage (one textbook does not even mention it) of the Uprising

130 Dedrick Muhammed, "The little known history of labor rights and civil rights," published on the web site of the United Auto Workers. Available at: <http://www.uaw.org/articles/little-known-history-labor-rights-and-civil-rights>.

131 *The American Vision* contains this passage about women's labor during the Civil War: "The expanded use of mechanized reapers and mowers made farming possible with fewer workers, many of whom were women. ...Women also filled labor shortages in various industries. New sewing machines greatly increased the productivity of seamstresses. As more women entered the textile industry, the North produced an abundance of uniforms for soldiers." Appleby et al., *The American Vision*, 329.

132 For a summary of women's labor organizing in the U.S. in the late 19th century, see Jane Johnson Lewis, "Women and Unions: Late 19th Century Labor Organizing by and for Women," at the About.com web site. Available at: http://www.evri.com/media/article;jsessionid=1x1nqk6xqm3cs?title=Women+and+Unions+-+Late+19th+Century+Labor+Organizing+by+and+...&page=http://womenshistory.about.com/od/worklaborunions/a/late_19th_cent.htm&referring_uri=/organization/collar-laundry-union-0xbf36%3Bjsessionid%3D1x1nqk6xqm3cs&referring_title=Evri.

133 For an account of Mullany's life and contributions to the union movement, "Kate Mullaney: A True Labor Pioneer," at the web site of the New York State Public Employees Federation. Available at: <http://www.nyspef.org/katemullaney.htm>.

134 For an account of Augusta Lewis Troup's life as a journalist and labor leader, see the biography of Troup at Princeton University Library's web site, in "Unseen Hands: Women Printers, Binders, & Book Designers." Available at: <http://infoshare1.princeton.edu/rbcs2/ga/unseenhands/printers/troup.html>.

of 20,000, a 14-week strike that ran from November 1909 to February 1910 and was led by the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) in New York City.¹³⁵ The strike was called in response to the same kinds of sweatshop conditions that existed at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory—including exits locked by owners in high-rise buildings. The Uprising of 20,000, led to improved wages and shorter hours for workers, although factory owners resisted the union women's demand for a closed shop. In a sad irony, as the AFL-CIO points out in its account of the Uprising, workers at Triangle went back to work without a union agreement. Management never addressed their demands, including the demand for unlocked doors in the factory and fire escapes that functioned. These continued safety problems would lead to the deaths of 146 Triangle workers on March 25, 1911.¹³⁶

The Uprising is an example of an arguably successful pro-female labor action that is inadequately portrayed. Simply for its scale—20,000 is a huge number for any event or action, even today—one would think that *all* American history textbooks would at least mention the Uprising and give it at least the same amount of space that they give to other labor events, such as the Haymarket Affair. It is discouraging to see how quickly events and movements of such a scale can be eliminated from the record and therefore from the American story.

Similarly, there is little to no mention in the textbooks of the role of labor in fighting Nazi and Fascist dictatorships in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Unions such as the ILGWU denounced the persecution of European Jews in the 1930s, when many U.S. voices were silent on this issue. The ILGWU also supported and worked with the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) and spoke out repeatedly against Nazi terror.¹³⁷ Under the urging of the JLC, the AFL at its 1933 convention came out in favor of a boycott of Nazi-produced goods, and created a fund for victims of fascism in 1934.¹³⁸

Perhaps the most glaring error in these textbooks is the

treatment of the role that unions and labor activists played as key participants in the civil rights movement. For example, while coverage is thin on the relationship between organized labor and the civil rights movement in the 1940s, it is virtually nonexistent from the 1950s on.

In general, the textbook coverage of the civil rights movement is quite good, but the omission of organized labor's contribution to that movement is deeply problematic and seriously distorts the historic record. To be sure, unions have their own troubled history of racial discrimination,¹³⁹ with many unions banning the inclusion of African American members through the 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, African-American workers understood quite well that they needed to organize to protect their rights. Accordingly, in New York City in 1850, black workers formed the American League of Colored Laborers, the first organization of black workers.¹⁴¹

Beginning in the 1930s, however, most large unions began to recruit African American workers into non-segregated unions. In addition, organized labor provided crucial support to the civil rights movement from the 1940s through the 1960s, most of which the textbooks ignore.

The textbooks do mention A. Philip Randolph (the founding president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters who led the union's 12-year fight for recognition by the Pullman Company and won the union entry into the AFL) as both a union leader *and* a civil rights leader.¹⁴² The books concentrate on Randolph's 1941 plan for a march on Washington to protest racial discrimination in the military industries and to propose the desegregation of the American Armed Forces, which led to the Fair Employment Act, an early success for civil rights advocates. When the textbooks move into the 1950s, however, they ignore other strong links between leaders of organized labor and the civil rights movement.

The textbooks do not cover the extent to which many civil rights activists were also labor activists and leaders, and how

135 For an account of The Uprising of 20,000, see "The Uprising of 20,000 and the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire" at the AFL-CIO web site. Available at: http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/history/history/uprising_fire.cfm.

136 For an account of the strike, see: http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/history/history/uprising_fire.cfm.

137 Encyclopedia of United States Labor and Working Class history, Eric Arnesen, ed., New York: Routledge, 2007, 3 vols.

138 The JLC's web site describes how, when the American Olympics Committee declined to heed widespread protests against United States participation in the Berlin Olympics of 1936, "the JLC held a World Labor Athletic Carnival (also known as the Counter-Olympics) at Randall's Island in New York City during August 1936. Dozens of teams representing New York union locals competed, and the main events featured outstanding amateur athletes from across the country. ... The Carnival received extensive nationwide press coverage, and the JLC repeated the event in the summer of 1937." See: <http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/collections/exhibits/tam/JLC/3antinazi.html>.

139 As Wade Henderson, President & CEO, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, put it in congressional testimony: "Although many unions attempted to defy workplace racial hierarchies, others acquiesced and focused primarily on organizing white workers, while either neglecting African Americans or relegating them to the worst job classifications. Notably, the United Auto Workers (UAW) stood bravely athwart some of its own members in demanding equal treatment of African-American workers within Detroit's auto plants." See: Wade Henderson, "A Strong Labor Movement Is Critical to the Continuing Advancement of Civil Rights in Our Nation," testimony before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions, March 10, 2009.

140 For example, the American Railway Union, which was at the center of the 1894 Pullman strike, did not admit black railway workers. See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001). Also see James Gilbert Cassedy, "African Americans and the American Labor Movement," National Archives' Prologue Magazine, Special Issue: Federal Records and African American History (Summer 1997, Vol. 29, No. 2), at: <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1997/summer/american-labor-movement.html>.

141 For more see: <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/american-league-colored-laborers-1850>.

142 For a biography of A. Philip Randolph, see: "Gentle Warrior: A. Philip Randolph (1889 - 1979)" at the web site of the A. Philip Randolph Institute. Available at: <http://www.apri.org/ht/d/sp/i/225/pid/225>.

closely intertwined the struggle for African-American workers' labor rights was with the struggle for civil rights. Consider union leaders such as Clarence Coe, who played a key role in building the NAACP in Memphis in the 1930s, worked at Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, and organized the United Rubber Workers Union during and after World War II.¹⁴³

Likewise, none of the textbooks mentions E.D. Nixon, a leader in the Sleeping Car Porters Union and an associate of A. Philip Randolph. Nixon was also a leader of the NAACP in Alabama and the initial organizer of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Montgomery Improvement Association, which managed the boycott. There was no mention in the textbooks of the role of union support for the boycott.¹⁴⁴ Finally, none of these texts introduces students to Bayard Rustin, a master strategist and hero of both the labor and civil rights movements, and the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. Throughout the 1960s, '70s and into the '80s, Rustin was instrumental in linking organized labor and the civil rights movement.¹⁴⁵

Moreover, the textbooks simply fail to reflect the extent and depth of organized labor's support for the civil rights movement, and how closely the two movements—labor rights and civil rights—were intertwined. This close relationship between labor and civil rights is often called “civil rights unionism.”¹⁴⁶

Just a few examples of omitted content on labor and civil rights can demonstrate the extent to which textbooks ignore labor's contributions to the modern civil right struggle. Consider the contributions of just a few of the many unions that supported civil rights, which are not covered in history textbooks. For example, the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) sent money to support the Montgomery bus boycott led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., endorsed a national boycott of Woolworth stores to integrate its lunch counters, and funded voter

registration drives in predominantly black areas. In 1963 alone, the union donated \$100,000 to Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.¹⁴⁷ Dr. King worked out of the national UAW headquarters when he and Rustin were planning the March on Washington. A month before the March, some 200,000 supporters of civil rights marched in Detroit, led by UAW President Walter Reuther and Dr. King. UAW members bussed in large numbers of marchers.¹⁴⁸

Early in its history, the Teamsters Union would not allow Southern locals to follow the practice of segregation, and threatened to pull charters in cases where this rule was violated. By 1906, editorials in the Teamsters' magazine were making impassioned pleas for all local unions, but especially those in the south, to organize African-American workers. The union supported the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and provided money and supplies to many civil rights groups, including more than 700 families living in “Freedom Village,” who faced retribution for registering to vote in 1960.¹⁴⁹ And, few Americans today know of Viola Liuzzo, a civil rights activist and the wife of a Teamster business agent; Liuzzo was shot and killed on March 25, 1965 by Ku Klux Klansmen while driving a Selma marcher home. Dr. King, Teamster leaders (including Teamster General President James R. Hoffa, who offered a \$5,000 reward for the capture and conviction of those who murdered Liuzzo),¹⁵⁰ and other labor and civil rights leaders attended her funeral.¹⁵¹

Another example of union support for the civil rights movement: In 1960, when the Woolworth Store sit-ins began in the South, the New York Central Labor Council organized picketing at the Woolworth stores in New York City. Such unions as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union contributed upwards of 800 picketers per day.¹⁵²

143 See William P. Jones, “Black Workers, Organized Labor, and the Struggle for Civil Rights,” (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2003) at: <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/lh/article/viewFile/5516/4711>.

144 For a biography of E.D. Nixon, see: “E.D. Nixon” at the Encyclopedia of Alabama online. Available at: <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1355>.

145 For more on Bayard Rustin's life and the new, award-winning documentary, “Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin,” see: <http://rustin.org/an6> http://rustin.org/?page_id=2.

146 For an analysis of civil rights unionism and the forces that shaped it, see: Michael Honey, “A Dream Deferred,” *The Nation*, May 3, 2004, available online at: http://www.thenation.com/article/dream-deferred?page=0,0&comment_sort=ASC. Honey, a labor studies chair at the University of Washington, writes: “...it is crucial to remember that *Brown* was as much the product as the precipitator of mass movements. Yes, the decision resulted from the incredibly hard-working and astute battle led by Charles Houston, Thurgood Marshall and others in the NAACP. But it also resulted from mass movements and a vast shift in status among poor and working-class African-Americans, millions of whom moved out of rural areas and into cities and mass-production industries in the 1930s and '40s. They created an expanding membership base for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the NAACP and an American left that challenged segregation at every level. Domestic workers, sharecroppers, day laborers, factory workers and other poor people, especially the women among them, organized economic boycotts, picket lines, marches, sit-ins, strikes, church and community groups, unions, consumer cooperatives and mass meetings. Their role as workers, soldiers and activists in the fight against white supremacy at home and fascism abroad created vast social changes that set the stage for *Brown*. As one example, in the Deep South city of Memphis, African-Americans, who had been organizing unions since after the Civil War, provided the main support that made the rise of the CIO possible, at a time when supporting a union could cost one's life. The purge of the interracial left from the CIO during the cold war undermined civil rights unionism, yet a number of black industrial unionists continued to challenge white supremacy in the 1950s and '60s. Union wages also made it more possible to send children to college, and some of those students led sit-ins and demonstrations against Jim Crow.”

147 For a more detailed account of the UAW's history in supporting civil rights, see: <http://www.uaw.org/node/271>.

148 Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945–1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 176.

149 For more on the Teamsters' support of civil rights, see: <http://www.teamster.org/history/teamster-history/civil-rights> also see: <http://www.teamster.org/content/teamsters-honor-black-history-month>.

150 See Teamster Magazine, “This Day in History,” available at: <http://teamstermagazine.com/day-history>.

151 An all-white jury acquitted the men accused in Liuzzo's slaying. For more on Viola Liuzzo, see: <http://www.teamster.org/content/civil-rights-martyr-viola-liuzzo>.

152 Peter B. Levy, “The new left and labor in the 1960s,” in *The Working Class in American History* (Urbana u.a.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994), 17.

There are many more examples of union participation in the area of civil rights. The American Federation of Teachers and their locals supported the civil rights movement in many ways, among them by filing an *amicus brief* in support of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954; actively supporting the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom; and by giving The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. over \$40,000 worth of station wagons to be used in the voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama.

In 1963, AFL-CIO President George Meany paid \$160,000 in bail to release Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and 2,000 protesters being held in a Birmingham jail.

Other omissions reveal selective bias quite clearly. One glaring example: Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered in Memphis in 1968 while he was aiding a unionization effort of black Memphis sanitation workers under the auspices of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference made the Memphis struggle a focal point of their southern cities organization effort. King believed that unionization was a key part of the struggle for civil rights. Yet, while the textbooks mention the reason why King was in Memphis, none mentions the specific union involved in the strike—clearly a central actor—by name. Worse, not one mentions King’s strong belief that labor rights and civil rights were inextricably linked.

In 1961, Dr. King spoke to the AFL-CIO on the shared values of the organized labor and civil rights movements. This speech should be included in all U.S. history textbooks. In the speech, King declared that:

Negroes in the United States read the history of labor and find it mirrors their own experience. We are confronted by powerful forces telling us to rely on the goodwill and understanding of those who profit by exploiting us. They deplore our discontent, they resent our will to organize, so that we may guarantee that humanity will prevail and equality will be exacted. They are shocked that action organizations, sit-ins, civil disobedience and protests are becoming our everyday tools, just as strikes, demonstrations and union organization became yours to insure that bargaining power genuinely existed on both sides of the table. ... We want to rely upon the goodwill of those who oppose us. Indeed, we have brought forward the method of nonviolence to give an example of unilateral goodwill in an effort to evoke it in those who have not yet felt it in their hearts. But we know that if we are not simultaneously organizing our strength we will have no means to move forward. If we do not advance, the crushing burden of centuries of neglect and economic

deprivation will destroy our will, our spirits and our hope. In this way, labor’s historic tradition of moving forward to create vital people as consumers and citizens has become our own tradition, and for the same reasons.¹⁵³

Finally, there is no mention in the textbooks of labor’s role in supporting the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.¹⁵⁴ In short, the picture painted by U.S. history textbooks simply airbrushes labor out of this vital historical period and, in the process, paints an incomplete picture of both the labor and civil rights movements.

SUMMARY OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

- Many of the textbooks we reviewed do not tell the full story of the existence of the organized *working* women’s movement in the United States, instead often focusing on *middle class* women. For example, the books do not tell the full story of the Lowell Mill girls’ formation of an early, all-female union, including the awareness by the Lowell Mill girls that their union rights stemmed directly from their democratic rights, and their union’s sophistication in launching a public and political campaign against abusive mill owners. Another example: the books fail to mention important women union leaders of the 19th century, such as Kate Mullany and Augusta Lewis Troup. The books do not adequately cover key events spearheaded by women’s labor unions, such as the massive 1909 Uprising of the 20,000, led by the ILGWU.
- A glaring problem in these textbooks is their omission of the role that organized labor and labor activists played as key participants in the civil rights movement. For example, while coverage is thin on the relationship between organized labor and the civil rights movement in the 1940s, it is virtually nonexistent regarding labor’s extensive and sustained support for the civil rights struggle from the 1950s on. This is despite the fact that many unions (such as the UAW) and many leaders of organized labor (e.g., Walter Reuther, A. Philip Randolph) played important roles in securing the legislative and other successes of the civil rights movement. The books fail to mention Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s belief that civil rights and labor rights were naturally intertwined, and Dr. King’s own support for the labor movement. The books fail to mention the specific union involved in the sanitation workers strike that Dr. King had gone to Memphis to support when he was assassinated in April 1968, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.

153 James Melvin Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 202-203.

154 See: “Major Features of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” on the CongressLink web site. Available at: http://www.congresslink.org/print_basics_histmats_civilrights64text.htm.

Conclusion

Our Recommendations for Textbook Publishers

1. Textbooks should recognize that there is a history of working people and the labor movement in the United States that is significant, intelligible, and coherent. It is an important component of American history and the story of our democracy. We urge the publishers and authors of U.S. history textbooks not to let this history be lost. We urge them to add textbook content that includes the historic struggle of unions to fight for just and fair working conditions and to achieve social progress.
2. We also urge textbook publishers and authors to convey the ongoing international aspect of union work in the field of democracy and human rights, as well unions' ongoing struggle, at home and abroad, to achieve better lives for workers regarding essential, bread-and-butter workplace issues such as wages, hours, and health care benefits. In short, publishers should provide students with a comprehensive and complete story of the contributions American organized labor has made and is making to economic, political, social, and cultural life in America and around the globe.
3. Textbooks should analyze labor and workplace issues in the context of the role unions have played as a pillar of a healthy democracy. The right to organize a union and bargain collectively is a fundamental right set out in the First Amendment of the Constitution (freedom of assembly) and in federal labor and employment laws. From the writings of the earliest American unions, to the most recent demonstrations in Wisconsin, it is clear that unions' ongoing struggle to defend the constitutional rights that are inherent in labor rights is a struggle that is at the core of what defines American democracy.
4. Textbook depictions of conflict between labor and management (and occasionally government) should be fair and balanced. Textbooks should not present union organizing or labor protests against abusive or unconstitutional working conditions as an intrinsically and exclusively violent action. The social setting and background in labor disputes usually tells a much more complicated and nuanced story: one that demonstrates that American social, judicial, regulatory, and communications institutions have too often been biased in favor of employers who inflicted on workers cruel and dangerous working conditions, including child labor and sweatshop conditions—and who ruthlessly suppressed unions.
5. Textbooks should tell the missing half of the story: that strikes, protests, and campaigns by labor arose in response to—and often have been the only viable and available response to—systemic abuse and deprivation of American workers, including children, women, and minorities.
6. We urge textbook publishers not to fail to depict past shortcomings by unions that should be included or to paint unions rosily, but simply to remember to also present a balanced view: to also highlight the positive consequences and achievements of major strikes and labor demonstrations in American history. The role of, and rationale for, strikes should be explained, and the context in which they occur should be given and linked to the decision to strike. Textbooks should also note that strikes are employed in very rare but highly publicized cases (according to the News Media Guild, 98 percent of union contracts in the United States are settled each year without a strike), and that the right to strike is an internationally-recognized worker and human right.
7. Collective bargaining should be presented both as an exercise in workplace and American democracy, in which workers and employers seek to mutually agree on the terms and conditions of employment as well as the steps to resolve differences.
8. History textbooks should spotlight the legal and regulatory obstacles to workers' freedom of association supported by the U.S. business community and created by legislation and the judiciary throughout U.S. labor history. Textbooks should also note that the systemic suppression of unions and systemic violations of worker rights are among modern Western industrialized democracies, almost uniquely American.
9. The individual achievements and contributions of more labor union leaders should be acknowledged in U.S. history textbooks, just as the contributions of American political, industrial, technical, and military leaders have been, so that students understand that our nation was shaped by labor leaders' vision, work, and, in many cases, bravery in the face of imprisonment, injury, or death.
10. Textbooks should highlight the significant role that the organized labor movement has played throughout U.S. history in advancing state and federal legislation to promote economic, political, and social equality. They should stress that unions routinely focus on social and economic issues that affect the broader society and go well beyond their members' workplace concerns.
11. Union membership in the U.S. is declining. We urge textbook authors and publishers, however, to portray

some of the real reasons for the decline of unions: the erosion of American manufacturing; outsourcing and offshoring; laws and regulatory systems that are hostile to unions and labor rights; and the ongoing anti-union campaigns of employers which are sadly tolerated by our society and our legal, political, and regulatory systems. We urge textbook publishers and authors not to

portray unions as irrelevant (recent events in Wisconsin and other states certainly indicate that that is far from the truth). We also urge them to fully portray the political strength of union members, their families, and their supporters, which recent events demonstrate is far from irrelevant.

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The web site of the American Labor Studies Center (www.labor-studies.org) offers an extensive array of materials and resources for elementary and secondary teachers for integrating labor studies into the curricula in Social Studies, English, and other subjects.

FIGURE I**Labor History Reviewed**

The Early Nation

Early national labor policy; slavery, indentured servitude
American Revolution and the drafting of the Constitution
The Bill of Rights and the freedom of assembly
The anti-labor Conspiracy Doctrine, 1792-1805
Early labor organizing efforts, working life and working conditions
Workingmen's Parties

Civil War Era, Reconstruction

Early slave rebellions, the Abolitionist Movement
The early women's rights movement, women's working conditions
Craft labor organizations in the Civil War, early union efforts

The New Industrial Revolution

Early labor union federations to the founding of the AFL in 1886
Industrialization and labor activism in union organizing
Labor policy and the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890
Child labor and the working conditions of industrialization

The Progressive Era, World War I and the 1920s

Government involvement in labor dispute conciliation and arbitration
Legislation regulating working conditions
The labor/management partnerships of World War I
Discrimination, the treatment of women and minorities
Post-World War I nationwide strike wave of 1919
Federal government suppression of labor unions, 1919 - 1922

Great Depression and New Deal

National Labor Relations Act and New Deal Labor Policy
The creation of industrial unions and the CIO upsurge
Enactment of social protection legislation, minimum wages, working hours
Unemployment and the social strife faced in the Depression

World War II and the Cold War Era

Labor, management and government relations in World War II
FDR's executive order barring discrimination in contracting
Post-World War II Labor Strife in 1946
Labor law reform including the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947
The impact of the Red Scare on labor unions
The 1955 AFL and CIO federations merge
Kennedy's executive order on federal workers' organizing rights

Civil Rights and the Vietnam War

1960s Grape Boycott and the United Farm Workers
Labor's contribution to the civil rights movement and civil rights laws
Public employees organizing movement and state legislation
Protective legislation such as OSHA, Medicare, Medicaid, the EPA

The Global Era

Reagan administration's anti-union labor policy
Globalization, trade policy, NAFTA's impact on labor unions
The changing labor market, precarious work, the service sector
Union decline and employer opposition to labor unions
Failure of labor law reform and anti-union NLRB policies
Changing demographics of the working class, immigration reform

Author Biographies

Paul F. Cole is the founder and executive director of the American Labor Studies Center (ALSC), a not-for-profit organization that collects and disseminates labor history and labor studies curriculum to K-12 teachers nationwide through its web site: www.labor-studies.org. The ALSC is located at the Kate Mullany National Historic Site in Troy, New York. He taught social studies at Lewiston-Porter Senior High School in Youngstown, New York, for 23 years and served as a member of the Board of Directors of the New York State United Teachers and a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. He served as secretary-treasurer of the New York State AFL-CIO from 1984–2006. He is an emeritus member of the Cornell University Board of Trustees and a member of the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations Advisory Committee.

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Teacher of Excellence she traveled to Russia, taught in Russian schools, sponsored student and educator exchanges, and published her Russia-U.S. joint classroom technology experiment in ISTE Magazine. She was awarded advanced study opportunities at Cambridge University in England, the Foreign Policy Research Institute at Bryn Mawr, the Pearl Harbor Institute in Hawaii, and the Hobart, William and Smith College Educators to China program. She has been named a Fulbright fellow and a Keizai Koho fellow (studied in Japan), an Armonk fellow and a Goethe Institute International Outreach fellow (studied in Germany), a Leopold Meyer fellow (studied in France), and a 2009 Korea Society fellow (studied in Korea). In 2009, she was selected to serve on the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Board of Examiners. She is the Vice President of New York State Council for the Social Studies (NYSCSS), serves on the NYSCSS Subject Area Committee, and has been elected as a local union president since 1994.

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