

Analysis incorporating race also was prominent in the symposium on two recent and important works in labor history. *The Wages of Whiteness* by David Roediger demonstrates the racism of European-American workers with regard to African Americans in the nineteenth century. As industrialism expanded, Roediger asserts, attacks on their work rules and living standards led workers of European descent to adopt the concept of “whiteness” to elicit both wage and psychological bonuses. Peter Linebaugh’s *The London Hanged* provides a fresh analysis of the changing class structure in eighteenth-century England, connecting these changes to English colonialism. As Robin Kelley noted, the English working class was transatlantic and “in color.” Equally fascinating is Linebaugh’s description of the criminalization of London’s poor on the basis of new laws against property crimes.

Also reflecting the important role of the state in working-class life, several labor panels explored the relationship between workers and the government. In the roundtable “Reconnecting the Political: Gender, Race, and the State,” panelist Lawrence Glickman examined how class, ethnicity, and gender affected the government definition and application of the “living” and “minimum” wages during the Progressive era. Pointed analysis of gender and the state came in the panel “Legal Discourse and Sexual Difference: Gender, Work and the State at the Turn of the Century.” For example, Lea VanderVelde demonstrated how gender structured legal discourses, showing that actresses—but not actors—seeking freedom from contractual obligations were enjoined from finding work elsewhere by judicial decisions bound with the rhetoric of fidelity.

On subjects as diverse as twentieth-century actresses and seventeenth-century apprentices, New England spinners and Alabama steel workers, this year’s OAH labor panels showcased a wide variety of presentations. While the picture presented was not as far-reaching as that of the conference in general, this breadth of focus ensured an illuminating and enriching experience for the labor historians in attendance.

Ninth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women

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The Ninth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, held at Vassar College, June 11–13, 1993, drew over 2,500 participants to hear 180 panels spread over eight sessions. Numerous scholars of labor and working-class history were in attendance, their presence providing further evidence to

contradict Richard Oestreicher's observation that women's historians and labor historians "remain discrete and largely separate academic tribes." In addition to causing other women's historians to address class, the presence of these scholars in both tribes has led to a reconsideration of the conventions and paradigms of labor history. The continuing impetus to reconceptualize was one of the most striking transformations evident in a conference whose theme was "Transformations: Women, Gender, Power."

Papers by Ileen DeVault and Nancy Gabin, for example, gave attention to previously understudied rural women workers in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States. Both challenged stereotypes about rural workers, describing women engaged in industrial wage work and protest. Commenting on these papers, Shelley Feldman and Jacqueline Jones addressed the limitations of traditional labor history categories like strikes and unions when deployed in a rural context, highlighting the need to reconsider these categories so as to explore other forms of activism, as well as the place of waged work in the rural economy.

A roundtable, "Women and Industrialization," offered other examples of transformations in labor history. Thomas Dublin described the changes in his own work from a focus on the liberating aspects of factory work in antebellum Lowell to a consideration of the various consequences of the range of women's wage work opportunities in New England throughout the nineteenth century. Joy Parr took a still broader view, urging a further transformation in the approach to the history of industrialization. She suggested that rather than specifying gender difference and assuming gender mattered, historians need to ask new questions such as what matters in particular contexts, thereby opening up what is allowed to be formative in identity.

This roundtable also featured papers by M. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly and Barbara Molony on industrialization in Mexico and Japan, respectively. This growing attention to cross-cultural analysis in women's history—also evident in the record number of international participants in this conference—is a further transformation with implications for labor and working-class history. "Women and Welfare in Conservative Eras," a roundtable that compared perspectives from four industrialized societies, was another example of this direction. Kathryn Kish Sklar, pointing to recent tendencies to conceptualize welfare states as "maternalistic," emphasized the necessity to pay careful attention to class and race as well as gender. Jane Lewis agreed, pointing out that an overemphasis on gender alone perpetuates elitism and racism. Birte Siim focused her remarks on the roles women played in restructuring the welfare state, focusing on Denmark as an example. How important, she asked, is individual agency when compared with structural forces? Finally Claudia Koonz used the example of Nazi Germany to illustrate the connections between the discursive category "woman" and specific women in historical situations. The racialized and gendered discourse of welfare policy in the Third Reich

underwrote and reinforced the reich's policies, policies which made its rhetoric come true. Acknowledging the usefulness of the comparative approach, participants at the same time called for greater specificity. Jane Lewis pointed out that comparative work is useful only so far as it is historically specific. Birte Siim called for greater care in drawing comparisons between welfare systems, citing the need to differentiate among Scandinavian countries as one example.

The relationship between women workers and the state was also addressed in a variety of other papers. For example, papers by Beatrix Hoffman on the campaign for health insurance in New York, 1916–1920, Susan Englander on gender-based legal arguments for the ten-hour workday, and Rebecca Mead on labor opposition to minimum-wage legislation in California, 1913–1923, all pointed to the need for changes in Theda Skocpol's interpretation of the relationship between women and the state in the United States. As commentator Robyn Muncy noted, these papers indicate that Skocpol's notion of maternalism does not capture the whole picture, neglecting the ways in which women reformers appealed both to science and to their experience as self-supporting wage earners, as well as motherhood, in support of policies aimed at men as well as women.

A further influence on labor and working-class history evident at the conference is the continuing development of the history of sexuality, as illustrated by two papers on gender and sexual relations in mining communities. Susan Johnson's work on leisure and the California Gold Rush, 1848–1858, and T. Dunbar Moodie's examination of migration, marriage, and gender relations in the South African gold mines in the late twentieth century both gave attention to the previously neglected topic of sexual relations between working-class men.

The papers mentioned here represent only a fraction of those at the conference, but they indicate the wide-ranging influences historians of gender and the working class are bringing to the field of labor and working-class history. While the impact of these influences is still unclear, the conference pointed to the need for a continued dialogue among labor historians. Such a dialogue is part of the process of "learn[ing] each others' history" called for by professor of law Patricia Williams in the keynote address and is helping point the way toward the more fluid views of identity and community envisioned by Williams and other conference participants.