

law and the state on workers and labor relations. Papers by Lisa Phillips (Purdue University) on “Female Labor Laws in the State of Indiana, 1913–1929,” and by Margaret C. Rung (Mount Allison University) on “The State, Human Relations and Labor Relations: Management in the Federal Civil Service, 1939–1945” attested to this interest. Phillips’s paper explored the role of the state in institutionalizing gender stereotypes through protective labor legislation for women. Rung argued that a drive for professional status and authority on behalf of personnel managers encouraged them to adopt a human-relations approach to management. It enhanced the professional status of personnel managers and allowed them to maintain a sexual division of labor.

The role of the state also received emphasis in the papers by Jonathan Z. Pollack (University of Wisconsin–Madison) on “The American Federation of Musicians’ Recording Bans 1942–44 and 1948,” and Jonathan Rees (University of Wisconsin–Madison) on “The US Army’s seizure and Occupation of the Cudahy Brothers Company, 1944–1945.” Both papers addressed issues of government–labor relations in contrasting ways. While the National War Labor Board did not hesitate to take over a defense-related meatpacking plant, it had little success in influencing labor relations in the music industry.

In conclusion, although regrettably some of the sessions turned into rump panels due to last-minute withdrawals, the Third Social History Conference offered interesting perspectives on labor history.

## North American Labor History Conference

*Eric Fure-Slocum, Kim Nielsen, Dorsey Phelps,  
Anthony Quiroz, Mark Stemen, and Paul Young*  
University of Iowa

Questions about workers’ political lives and citizenship occupied a central place at the fifteenth annual North American Labor History Conference. David Montgomery’s capstone address, “Democracy and the ‘Free Market’ Economy: Some Reflections on the Experience of Workers in the United States during the Nineteenth Century,” superbly addressed many of these themes, while placing them in a larger context. Emphasizing the need to distinguish between democracy and the market economy, both historically and in contemporary discourse, Montgomery charted a history of workers’ citizenship and industrial capitalism’s “discipline of buying and selling” in the nineteenth century. In his account, citizenship was not simply an attained status but a highly contested arena in which the political and social

aspirations of the working class frequently confronted the “needs of the market.” While the state (especially through judicial and police authority) often limited the scope of political action and protected private power in the market economy, workers strove to rescue their communities from the havoc of industrial capitalism. Montgomery, in his call to study and act for the redemocratization of society, pointed to the experiences of African Americans in the rural South as well as those of workers in the urban North.

Many conference participants explored definitions of citizenship. They stressed the need to examine struggles over citizenship in all facets of the community and the workplace and to probe the ways in which working-class people asserted their citizenship: through trade unions, political parties, the vote, migration, consumption, and other forms of individual and collective action. Alexander Keyssar gave a wide-ranging analysis entitled “The Free Gift of the Ballot? The American Working Class and the Right to Vote.” Keyssar argued that the nineteenth century witnessed the increasing restriction of working-class citizenship through the contraction of the electorate. Paul Krause’s striking narrative “The Odyssey of Alexander and Margaret Chavis Proctor: Race, Citizenship, and the African-American Search for the Promised Land, 1835–1875,” examined the relentless struggles and journeys of one family as they sought to claim their citizenship. Susan Levine’s “The Citizen as Consumer: Working-Class Women, the Living Wage and the 1922 Railroad Shopcraft Strike,” Nancy Isenberg’s “Servants of Citizens: Sex, Class, and Contracts in Antebellum America,” and the roundtable discussion of “Women’s Political Activism and Citizenship During the Interwar Years” highlighted the ongoing need not only to “add in” women to the histories of citizenship, but to understand the ways in which the terms of citizenship and class are gendered.

Working-class ideology was the focus of many papers. Andrew Neather, in “Labor Republicanism and the Changing Meanings of Popular Patriotism, 1890–1914,” identified two central themes informing working-class notions of citizenship: nationalism and the ideal of the citizen producer. Employers used the ideology of nationalism to define critiques of industrial capitalism as disloyal. Hence workers, constrained by the ideology of nationalism but motivated by the ideal of the citizen producer, responded by emphasizing their patriotism while attempting to limit rather than transform capitalism. Carl Weinberg, in “Class Consciousness and the Costs of ‘Working-Class Americanism’: Southwestern Illinois Coal Miners in the World War I Era,” argued that employers dissipated the power of the labor movement by channeling worker discontent toward the German Kaiser. Describing a more contemporary setting, Aaron Brenner, in “Striking Against the State: The 1970 Post Office Strike,” contended that postal workers adopted a language of rights (often masculinized) to assert their identity as workers and citizens, a role long denied public servants.

The conference’s second plenary session, “Activism, Organizing and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement,” focused on the complex issues

facing organized labor in the 1990s and the role of labor historians inside and outside of the university. Peter Rachleff (Macalester College) argued that labor historians and labor activists need each other. For instance, in assessing proposals for labor-management “cooperation” the labor movement can learn from the past how little it should expect from the state and employers. Labor historians, in turn, gain valuable insights to inform their work through day-to-day involvement in the labor movement. (Highlighting this point, members of the University of Iowa’s Campaign to Organize Graduate Students briefly reported on their organizing efforts and urged those on other campuses to do the same.) Dennis Valdes (University of Minnesota) stressed that historians might help labor organizers and leaders to learn from their past mistakes. He pointed to the case of migrant farm workers, largely of Mexican origin, who have been disregarded by the labor movement to the detriment of both the farm workers and the labor movement.

Kim Hodge, organizing director for SEIU Local 79 (accompanied by a dozen member-organizers from her union) also urged the labor movement to reexamine its organizing priorities. Decrying the resources wasted in disputes between unions, Hodge called for a renewed commitment to organizing and a full recognition of the changing composition and needs of the American work force, especially in the growing service sector. Further, Hodge said, the face of union leadership should reflect the increased presence of women and people of color in unions. Similarly, Michael Leslie, organizer of UAW Region 1A, emphasized the need for unions to continue changing and taking on difficult issues. Whether in discovering and challenging workplace health risks or in fighting racism during union elections, Leslie emphasized that the rank and file must be aggressively vigilant to be heard by management and its national leadership. In contrast, Robert Potter, president of UFCW Local 951, maintained that historians and labor activists should acknowledge the positive role that many union leaders have played in addressing working people’s needs. Despite the labor movement’s declining membership, his local has expanded rapidly in recent years and has sought to address the needs of a changing work force.

At a memorial luncheon, conference attendees paid tribute to E. P. Thompson and his exemplary life of scholarship and activism. David Montgomery offered a moving account of Thompson’s work outside the classroom, highlighting his involvement in European Nuclear Disarmament. James Barrett and Peter Rachleff fondly remembered Thompson’s inspiration as an intellectual and an activist, which they witnessed as graduate students while he was visiting the University of Pittsburgh. Laura Frader praised Thompson’s scholarly example and the inspiration he gave to others.

The Detroit conference provided a forum for labor historians to rethink the terms and history of citizenship. Many of the papers demonstrated the degree to which labor historians have successfully integrated social and political history. And while many labor scholars and activists

have begun to understand the importance of gender and race in writing the history of and in organizing working people, the conference also made clear that this is an ongoing project. Ahistorical notions of class, for example, frequently obscure the contingencies and complexities of working-class peoples.

The next North American Labor History Conference, organized under the theme "International and Comparative Labor History," should help to broaden the agenda of labor historians even further. And, as previous conferences have demonstrated, Elizabeth Faue's superb planning and the convenient surroundings of the Wayne State conference center promise to make this a productive gathering. The sixteenth annual conference will be held October 13–15, 1994.

## Eighth Biennial Southern Labor Studies Conference: Race and Culture

*Colin Davis*

University of Alabama at Birmingham

*Michael Conniff*

Auburn University

The Eighth Biennial Southern Labor Studies Conference met in Birmingham October 21–24, 1993. The theme of the conference was "Race & Culture" and it incorporated sessions on both the South and Latin America. The four days of sessions covered a wide range of topics examining the often agonizing and exciting juxtaposition of racial solidarity and segregation.

A session on NAFTA kicked off the conference. The participants included Ed Brown (UAB), Thea Lee (Economic Policy Institute), Thomas Skidmore (Brown), and Greg Woodhead (Task Force on Trade, AFL–CIO). A roundtable discussion followed, examining "Race & Gender." Norma Powell (CWA) and Buddy Watson King (UMW) recited their own experiences as female organizers in a predominately male setting. Mary Frederickson ably mediated. The following day a session chaired by Robert Zieger examined the intersection of class and race during the World War I period. Joseph McCartin (SUNY–Geneseo) and Eric Karolak (Ohio State) spoke on the dynamic role played by the federal government in mediating race relations in wartime industries.

Another session examined the adaptive strategies used by African Americans in the urban environment in Meridian, Mississippi (Elizabeth