



A union exhibit booth at one of the early twentieth-century Interstate Fairs held in Spokane, Washington.  
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## The Pacific Northwest Working Class and its Institutions: An Historiographical Essay

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Zane Grey wrote only one novel about the Palouse country of eastern Washington. He aptly titled it *The Desert of Wheat*, first serialized in the *Country Gentleman* in the spring and summer of 1918, and eventually saw it made into a movie. *The Desert of Wheat* was about Wobblies. The best-selling western writer recognized and exploited their dramatic appeal even as he deprecated them as tools of imperial Germany and approved their violent suppression. Grey's piece of World War I propaganda remains today largely forgotten, though the writing of Pacific Northwest regionalists and labor historians testifies to the Wobblies' enduring appeal. In fact, radicalism, as exemplified by the Wobblies, and two topics generally related to it, strikes and violence, serve as focal points for the bulk of published writing about the Pacific Northwest working class and its institutions. As a consequence, the labor history of the region resembles, in effect, three islands of *terra cognita* surrounded by a vast and still relatively unexplored sea.<sup>1</sup>

A rough quantification of the labor studies published by four major Pacific Northwest history journals from 1960 through 1983 confirms the peculiar configuration of the region's labor history. Approximately eighty articles relating in some way to labor history appeared in these publications during that time: five in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*; twelve in *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*; eighteen in *Idaho Yesterdays*; and forty-two in the *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*. If general studies of ethnic groups—Portland's Italians, Washington's Scandinavians, and Montana's Chinese, for example—were included, the list would grow slightly longer. Articles about the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) constituted about one-sixth of the total, while studies of females or children as special classes of workers did not appear. Rare was the article dealing with a subject such as minimum wage legislation. Approximately one-third of the articles dealt primarily with left-leaning individuals and organizations. Perhaps most notable was that at least one-half of the total focused on strikes and/or violence—especially violence. In the Pacific Northwest the two were frequently related. Articles on violence appeared in all four journals. A similar classification of books about the

region's labor history would no doubt underscore the preoccupation with violence.<sup>2</sup>

Violence is a theme prominent in Pacific Northwest labor history for a number of reasons. Quite obviously, there are several notable episodes for historians to write about. Examples that can be classified as vigilante violence include the Knights of Labor-sponsored crusades to rid the area of Chinese in the mid-1880s and the lynching of Wobblies Frank Little and Wesley Everest during the World War I era. Anti-radical disturbances, a category that often overlaps vigilantism, broke out during Seattle's Potlatch Days in 1913 and was later epidemic during World War I. The well-known Everett Massacre and Centralia Conspiracy are examples of this type of violence. Industrial warfare occurred in Idaho's Coeur d'Alenes, Washington's Cascade coal fields, and the fishing grounds of the lower Columbia River during the late nineteenth century. In a special category is the assassination of former Idaho Governor Frank Stuenkel in 1905 and the subsequent sensational trial of William D. Haywood, Charles Moyer, and George Pettibone. Even with the addition of the periodic episodes of industrial violence in Butte, the labor-supported anti-Hindu riot in Bellingham in 1907, the Wobblies' free speech fights, Coxeyite train stealing in Montana and Oregon, and riot and property destruction occasioned by the Pullman Strike in 1894, the list remains far from complete. Not only have almost all of these episodes of labor-related violence been the subject of serious historical inquiry, but several have also been sensationalized in Sunday supplements of the region's major newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

A second reason for the prominence of violence in Pacific Northwest labor studies is that tales of labor-related disturbances constitute a major part of the region's folklore. Popular accounts of the *Verona's* ill-fated voyage to Everett or the miners' dynamiting of the Bunker Hill concentrator in north Idaho are the region's equivalent to the shoot-out at the O.K. Corral or the James gang's Great Northfield Raid. Or, it is as if recounting the epic David and Goliath struggles between workers and grasping railroad, mineral, and timber barons performs the same soul-stirring function for some Pacific northwesterners that myths surrounding Pickett's charge or resistance to Sherman's march do for many southerners. In the nation's far corner, America's frontier past and its industrial future abruptly intersected in a way that frequently saw the folklore of the former era recycled to encompass labor-related violence in the latter era. Zane Grey's vigilantes in *The Desert of Wheat*, to cite an outrageous example, lynched a Wobbly organizer and affixed to him a placard bearing the cryptic message, "Last Warning. 3-7-77," the numbers representing the dimensions of a grave and being a pointed reference to the Virginia City, Montana, vigilante movement fifty years earlier. In fact, Butte vigilantes attached that same message to the body of Frank Little in 1917.

Grey was not the only popular writer to treat the violent side of Pacific Northwest labor history as an up-to-date version of Old West melodrama. Both types of folklore appealed to people for many of the same reasons: they recalled the excitement and drama that was supposedly the frontier, and they portrayed virtue and villainy in simple, easily understood terms. Because accounts of labor-related violence remained popular with both editors and readers, labor historians could hardly be faulted for concentrating their scholarly efforts in an area that generated much interest, even if they sought only to debunk the many myths.<sup>4</sup>

The third and perhaps most significant reason for preoccupation with the violent side of Pacific Northwest labor is that these outbursts profoundly shaped both popular and scholarly awareness of wage workers as a distinct class. Violence was often the only window through which contemporaries viewed labor. The region's first real introduction to what newspapers called "the labor question" was the disconcerting anti-Chinese crusade of the mid-1880s. Fundamentally, it was a struggle over jobs during a brief period of hard times that followed completion of the first transcontinental railroads to the north Pacific slope. Its importance lies in its consciousness-raising effect on people who had previously been uninterested in or unaware of the Pacific Northwest's new and growing class of wage workers and their struggle with periodic unemployment. The anti-Chinese agitation not only plunged frightened residents of a hitherto geographically isolated region into the mainstream of the nation's social and economic controversies, but it also stimulated in America's far corner the first widespread, sustained interest in a radical social and economic critique.<sup>5</sup>

Much of the early discussion of "the labor question" was ill-informed and sensationalistic, and conducted to win converts, sell newspapers, or gain political power. Sylvester Pennoyer, who served as governor of Oregon from 1887 to 1895, was one of the first prominent public officials to call attention to the special needs of the region's wage workers. He did so in spectacular fashion in an 1893 Christmas letter publicly criticizing President Grover Cleveland's inaction during hard times: "Today is the first Christmas in the history of Oregon when more than two-thirds of the people were without employment and more than one-third are without sufficient means of support." Detractors denounced Pennoyer's statistics as absurd but could produce no better ones. The need to move beyond impressionistic treatment of "the labor question" led governments to establish bureaus of labor, but such agencies were late in coming to the north Pacific slope. Twenty-nine other states and the federal government founded labor bureaus before Montana became in 1893 the first Pacific Northwest state to do so. Washington followed in 1897, Idaho in 1900, and Oregon in 1903. Their early compilations of labor reports and statistics attracted few readers because they tended to be uneven and dull. Violent

episodes that grabbed newspaper headlines, and later the historian, continued to stimulate most of the interest in labor in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>6</sup>

A pattern of outbursts followed by publication of popular accounts of the incidents began with the Coeur d'Alene trouble in the 1890s. People appalled by the violence published what were probably the first book-length treatments of Pacific Northwest labor: Mary Hallock Foote, *Coeur d'Alene* (1894); May Arkwright Hutton, *The Coeur d'Alenes, or, A Tale of the Modern Inquisition in Idaho* (1900); and Job Harriman, *The Class War in Idaho: The Horrors of the Bull Pen* (1900). Foote, a novelist, wrote a piece of anti-union fiction. Hutton and Harriman, both radicals motivated by a sense of outrage against the mine owners and their allies, initiated the treatment of labor-related violence in the region as folklore—although when Hutton later became wealthy, she tried to buy up all copies of her embarrassingly amateurish novel. The bloodlettings in Everett and Centralia encouraged other authors to add to the literature of outrage.<sup>7</sup>

The Coeur d'Alene trouble also prompted Congressional investigations that resulted in early documentary accounts of workers in northern Rocky Mountain mining camps and towns. Such government-sponsored studies were perhaps more common north of the border in British Columbia, where labor turbulence in 1903, an anti-Japanese riot in 1907, and tumult caused by a lengthy coal strike that began in 1912 prompted formation of royal commissions to investigate and publish their findings. Once again, though, it was violence that spurred these investigations. If violence was not present, government researchers usually paid scant attention to the working-class experience on the north Pacific slope. When the United States government studied female and child labor, immigrants, or working-class housing, it devoted relatively little attention to conditions in the nation's far Northwest as compared with those elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis on violence that is prominent in traditional primary sources of information about Pacific Northwest labor—newspaper accounts, special government studies, and recollections of participants—has fostered a distorted view of working-class life that labor historians need to correct. For one thing, workers were often the victims and not the initiators of violence. The amount of writing devoted to labor-related trouble might also mislead unwary readers to conclude that industrial relations in this part of the nation were more antagonistic than elsewhere. No scholar, however, has yet devised the yardstick necessary to make meaningful comparisons between labor-related outbursts in the Pacific Northwest and that in other regions such as the Midwest or New England. Furthermore, if violence is defined broadly as physically reckless, aggressive, or destructive behavior, as some scholars have done, the labor historian needs to study mine, mill, and logging accidents as a form of it. Scholars, incidentally, have not yet attempted a general investigation of Pacific Northwest labor-related violence, nor have they analyzed it as

a variety of political action or examined in detail its relationship to radicalism, with which it often appears intertwined.<sup>9</sup>

Radicalism, as noted earlier, has attracted almost as much attention from writers on Pacific Northwest labor as violence, for perhaps many of the same reasons. Not only was there a great deal of radicalism about which to write, but much of it easily passed into folklore, as when the Seattle General Strike, which was neither long nor unusually bloody, became "The Revolution in Seattle." Like violence, radicalism shaped popular and scholarly perceptions of the region's working class. Finally, labor-related bloodshed and radicalism were, in fact, closely linked in everyday life.<sup>10</sup>

The interplay between violence and radicalism in working-class life occurred in several ways. Certain forms of outbursts stimulated popular discussion of contemporary social and economic issues, as happened when anti-Chinese agitation of the 1880s gave rise to an ideology of disinheritance. This ideology, a body of ideas that explained the relationship between the fortunate few and the impoverished many and provided a program of corrective action, flowed like a subterranean stream to link the region's many radical movements, agrarian as well as industrial. In addition, periodic episodes of industrial warfare coupled with widespread economic misery tended to heighten public awareness of the educational work conducted by street corner agitators and radical journalists and thereby encouraged producers—workers and farmers—to side either with labor or capital. That division occurred clearly in a conversation between two antagonists in Zane Grey's *The Desert of Wheat*, Chris Dorn, a struggling farmer, and his son, Kurt:

"Anderson is a capitalist," said Chris Dorn, deep in his beard. "He seeks control of farmers and wheat in the Northwest. Ranch after ranch he's gained by taking up and foreclosing mortgages. He's against labor. He grinds down the poor. He cheated Newman out of a hundred thousand bushels of wheat. He bought up my debt. He meant to ruin me. He. . . ."

"You're talking I.W.W. rot," whispered Kurt, shaking with the effort to subdue his feelings. "Anderson is fine, big, square—a developer of the Northwest. Not an enemy! He's our friend."<sup>11</sup>

Not only did radicals encourage people to take sides, their opponents did, too. In fiction as in fact, especially during the World War I era when the two were not always distinguishable from one another, conservatives drew the battle lines in ways that legitimated the use of anti-radical violence. Thus, in the folklore created by supporters, workers caught up in a struggle with massed capital assumed heroic proportions and became the vanguard of the cooperative commonwealth. At the same time, another group of observers treated labor as a kind of social pathology, literally the "dangerous class," volatile and easily manipulated by traitorous radical agitators, who, for the safety of society, had to be intimidated into silence. The two contrasting views fed on each other, as when a Seattle commercial journal, *The Flour and Grain World*, declared in 1918, "No other

place in the world sizzles more with insolent labor ideas than is daily vomited forth in the sadly pestered city of Seattle." Likewise, the declamations of a parade of anti-Wobbly businessmen before the Spokane Chamber of Commerce foreshadows vigilantism in Grey's *The Desert of Wheat*. Grey, who visited the Pacific Northwest to research his novel, accurately recorded the mood of the region's businessmen. About the time the novel appeared in book form in 1919, *The Manufacturer and Industrial News Bureau* of Portland advised workers: "If you have the backbone of a jelly fish you will bean the next loafer who calls you a 'wage slave'. Thrash your troubles out with your employers but first thrash the agitator who lives by creating trouble for you."<sup>12</sup>

The mere imputation of unconventional action might also be used to undercut and destroy radicals, as Joseph Conlin notes in his revisionist essay "The IWW and the Question of Violence." Though Wobblies often talked and sang about violence, they seldom practiced it. Conlin finds that Wobblies were usually its victims, tagged with an undeserved reputation for initiating bloodshed by their numerous enemies: employers, rival unionists, reform socialists, and anti-labor politicians.<sup>13</sup>

Like the writing on labor-related violence, that on radicalism encompasses a remarkable variety of subtopics. These include Wobblies, socialist and anarchist utopias on Puget Sound, Astoria's Finns, Portland's sawmill workers, metal miners in the northern Rockies, agricultural workers on the Pacific coast, socialist parties in Washington and Oregon, the various cooperative commonwealth federations of the 1930s, farmer-labor parties, left-wing journalism, and individual rebels like Portland's John Reed and Charles Erskine Scott Wood. There is an equally rich body of literature on radicalism in British Columbia. My book, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (1979), attempts to bridge the international and scholarly boundaries that too often separate the study of radicalism in the United States from that in Canada, and calls attention to the variety of unpublished material on the subject. Much more study on Pacific Northwest radicalism remains to be done. One finds, for instance, intriguing similarities between sentiments voiced in Alliance, Socialist party, and Wobbly songbooks that might support the notion of a common ideology of disinheritance derived from the unhappy experience of producers in turn-of-the-century America.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, the nonviolent, nonradical aspect of working-class life in the Pacific Northwest remains one of the least explored frontiers in American history. One obvious reason is the enduring popularity of studies of violence and radicalism discussed in the first half of this essay. Another major reason is that American labor history evolved in a way that ignored major aspects of the working-class experience until comparatively recent times. The chronological development of Pacific

Northwest labor history since World War I is the subject of the second part of this essay.

Pacific Northwest workers have never been the subject of the kind of intensive study that Paul Kellogg and associates conducted in Pittsburgh, but perhaps they would have been if Carleton H. Parker had survived the World War I influenza pandemic. Parker, forty years old at the time of his death, was a pathbreaker in the scholarly treatment of Pacific Northwest labor. As the head of the Department of Economics and dean of the College of Business Administration at the University of Washington, he spent much time studying the attitudes and living conditions of Wobblies prior to and during the Great War. His firsthand observations, published as *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* two years after his untimely death in 1918, stand in refreshing contrast to the era's characteristic pro- and anti-Wobbly declamations. Parker treated Wobblies neither as dangerous subversives nor as pioneers of a promising economic order. In a similar vein, another book that appeared just prior to publication of Parker's study—Paul Brissenden, *The I. W. W.: A Study of American Syndicalism* (1919)—was the first scholarly historical treatment of the organization. Neither of these fine accounts, however, signaled attempts by scholars to enter a regional publishing field dominated by either radical pamphleteers or right-wing propagandists like Ole Hanson, the Seattle mayor who authored *Americanism versus Bolshevism* (1920).<sup>15</sup>

Scholarly treatment of Pacific Northwest labor remained at best sporadic until the early 1960s. During the forty-year interval between Parker's *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* and Robert Wayne Smith's 1961 study of industrial violence, *The Coeur d'Alene Mining War of 1892*, only a handful of scholarly books appeared that related even in passing to Pacific Northwest labor other than Wobblies. Among those were Donald L. McMurry's *Coxey's Army* (1929) and Vernon Jensen's *Lumber and Labor* (1945) and *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry up to 1930* (1950). Treatment of the topic in scholarly journals was equally infrequent.<sup>16</sup>

Behind the scenes, in the cloistered halls and libraries of the region's major colleges and universities—and occasionally at schools outside the region—scholars, primarily candidates for the master's or doctoral degrees, made forays into the field of Pacific Northwest labor history. Some even ventured off campus and into Hoovervilles and hiring halls to conduct interviews and surveys. But their studies seldom generated any historiographical controversy and almost all remained unpublished, forgotten even by academics. That is unfortunate because the research done during the 1930s contains material that is today a primary source for the study of unemployment and labor and radical organizations during the New Deal era, to cite but one example. Typically, the first and second generations of academics who were interested in labor were trained in business or

economics and consequently concerned themselves primarily with the labor union as an economic institution. Political scientists and historians whose scholarly interests turned to the Pacific Northwest wrote extensively on its notable infatuation with political and economic reform—especially the Populist and Progressive movements—but not many were interested in the general history of labor or its involvement in the region's politics.<sup>17</sup>

That changed during the 1960s—a decade that was a watershed in the scholarly treatment of American labor and a time when interest in the subject among scholars surged. The journal *Labor History*, established in the late 1950s, served as a clearinghouse of information as well as an outlet for serious writing about labor. In the Pacific Northwest, likewise, interest in labor history grew, though largely in the subcategories that had dominated the field since before World War I. Wobblies remained a favorite subject, with the appearance of Robert L. Tyler's *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (1967) and Melvyn Dubofsky's encyclopedic *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (1969), which contained much information about industrial labor in the Pacific Northwest. The number of books in print increased with publication of such varied works as Harold M. Hyman's *Soldiers and Spruce: Origins of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen* (1963), Robert Friedheim's *The Seattle General Strike* (1964), Charles Pierce LeWarne's *Utopias on Puget Sound* (1975), and Roger Buchanan's *Dock Strike: A History of the 1934 Waterfront Strike in Portland, Oregon* (1975). Many of the books were based on research for advanced degrees and published by university or local presses—a reflection, no doubt, of the fairly limited market for regional labor studies and a primary reason why many good but specialized studies remain unpublished.<sup>18</sup>

Toward the end of the 1960s an important event occurred with the formation of the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association. Meeting first on an informal basis in 1968 and 1969, members established a more permanent organization in 1970 and elected as their first president, Robert E. Burke of the University of Washington. The Pacific Northwest Labor History Association was from the beginning a mixed body, with its membership divided almost evenly among academics, trade unionists, and local history buffs. Ross Rieder, a leader in the Washington state labor movement, was the group's first secretary-treasurer and later its president. One of the main purposes of the association was to facilitate "a closer dialogue between those actively involved in labor-management relations in the Pacific Northwest and the academic community." Its annual meeting not only served as a forum for the presentation of papers on a variety of topics but also afforded members the opportunity to enjoy the films and songs of the labor movement and the recollections of its former leaders such as Dave Beck. In addition, the association published *Unionism or Hearst* (1978), the William Ames and Roger Simpson study of Seattle's

1936 *Post-Intelligencer* strike, and the first in the association's ongoing series of labor studies.<sup>19</sup>

It is, of course, an overstatement to say that one organization or individual was responsible for the surge of interest in the history of labor in the Pacific Northwest; nonetheless, no one deserves more credit for this accomplishment than Robert E. Burke. As noted earlier, he was a founding father of the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association. As professor of history at the University of Washington, he directed a number of master's and doctoral candidates through the intricacies of labor history. He opened the pages of *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, which he edited, to a variety of labor studies ranging from a documentary account of the Everett Massacre and a bibliography of Washington's early labor newspapers to numerous monographs. As editor of the University of Washington Press's Americana Library series, he fostered republication of several history classics, including two that relate to Pacific Northwest labor: Carleton Parker's *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* and Donald McMurry's *Coxey's Army*. He facilitated publication of Friedheim's *The Seattle General Strike* and a revised version of my University of Michigan doctoral dissertation, *Radical Heritage*. Finally, together with Richard C. Berner and Karyl Wynn of the University of Washington Library's Archives and Manuscripts division, he helped amass what is probably the largest collection of materials on the region's labor history.

Like stones cast into a calm pond, Burke's multiple activities have created many ripples, even waves. One of his recent doctoral students, Jonathan Dembo, not only produced a detailed account of the Washington state labor movement but also published a comprehensive bibliography of Washington's labor history that is now a starting point for anyone interested in the subject. Another of Burke's students, W. Thomas White, completed a study in 1981 of the region's railway workers that bridges the gap between the so-called "old" and "new" labor history.<sup>20</sup>

The basic premise of the new labor history—as stated by one of its foremost practitioners, Herbert Gutman—is that the history of workers encompasses more than the study of labor unions, which were the primary concern of the institutional economist who long dominated the field. It should include the whole network of community relationships, work habits, and the aspirations and expectations that gave meaning to workers' lives—in other words, the working-class culture. The stimuli to the new labor history came from many sources, including the general increase of interest in labor studies noticeable in the 1960s and publication of several seminal works, especially E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) and Gutman's 1973 essay in the *American Historical Review*, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America." The result was research and writing on topics almost totally ignored by earlier generations of labor scholars. David Montgomery's collection of essays,

*Worker's Control in America* (1979), for instance, presents labor's efforts to protect its prerogatives and values on the shop floor as a central issue of the modern industrial age. Several overviews and critical assessments of the new labor history have already been published, and they need not be reiterated here. The question is, what impact has the dramatic expansion of the horizons of American labor history had on studies in the Pacific Northwest? To provide an answer is deceptively difficult.<sup>21</sup>

From one perspective the new labor history has had very little impact in this region. Few of the thesis and dissertation writers interested in Pacific Northwest labor history have consciously attempted to utilize the conceptual insights offered by Thompson, Gutman, Montgomery, and others. By the same token, there have appeared almost no articles on the subject along the lines of those that Milton Cantor included in his *American Workingclass Culture* (1979), which samples several scholars' writings on labor primarily in the nation's northeast quadrant. A time lag between the development of important new interpretations and their assimilation by students of Pacific Northwest history was perhaps inevitable: whether labeled old or new labor history—or something in between—there has long been too much for them to do and too few to do it.

The number of professional historians who claim Pacific Northwest labor history as their primary field of research and writing has never been great. Some of the most avid students of the subject are trade unionists and local history buffs such as those who comprise much of the membership of the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association and whose interests tend to lie along traditional lines of inquiry. Some of the methods used to do history from the bottom up—to concentrate on the workers themselves—are not likely to be utilized by other than specially trained academic researchers. One popular technique involves combing through city directories and the federal manuscript census to obtain numerical data on a variety of items: a worker's age, sex, occupation, ethnicity, education, and so on. The historian then uses a computer program to transform the raw data into sometimes arcane statistics that must be interpreted with care. The whole process seems formidable and intimidating to many. Nonetheless, scholars combining a variety of concepts and techniques, both old and new, have written a number of exciting social histories. A lucid method of presentation undoubtedly remains the key to generating interest in any kind of serious study of Pacific Northwest labor.<sup>22</sup>

An example of the successful presentation of history that analyzes working-class institutions within the context of the larger community and antedated the vogue of the new labor history is Norman Clark's *Mill Town* (1970), a social history of Everett, Washington. A graceful style of writing combined with a refreshing approach to a popular old subject, the Everett Massacre, earned the book widespread recognition. In some ways, though, *Mill Town's* influence, like that of the new labor history, remains yet to

be seen in the writing on the region's working class. No one has published a similar study of Centralia, an obvious candidate, or some of the communities in which workers in a single industry predominated, such as the railroad towns of Sprague and Auburn, Washington; Huntington, Oregon; and Livingston, Montana. *Mill Town* also demonstrates the importance of probing the attitudes and concerns of a community's businessmen in order to understand their reaction to labor. As the influence of the new labor history increases in the region, *Mill Town's* place as an important landmark in the scholarly treatment of the Pacific Northwest working class will stand out ever more clearly. It is a prototype for the kind of study that draws inspiration from both the old and new labor history and presents its findings in a clear manner that appeals to a broad spectrum of readers.

What does the future hold for Pacific Northwest labor history? The subject has achieved a degree of maturity, but it still seems to lack a central theme. Only geographical proximity links many of the disparate historical studies. In short, further exploration into its many neglected aspects must be accompanied by some responsible reductionism to interpret and give unity to what has hitherto been a very eclectic matter. Foremost, then, is the need to identify those regional characteristics that supposedly set workers in the nation's far corner apart from those elsewhere—if, indeed, they can be. Were they more violent or radical than counterparts in other regions? Perhaps an "index of insurgency" applied to various regions of the United States would give an answer. Would some of the studies of working-class culture in New England communities yield similar results if done in the Pacific Northwest? If not, why? Asking that question helps to focus attention on those aspects of the region's labor history that most need exploration: the working-class family, workers on the shop floor, the working class in the larger community, female workers, and working-class institutions in general.

To be sure, one working-class institution, the labor union, has been studied extensively, but usually from the top down. And only a minority of the region's workers ever belonged to labor unions. What about other working-class institutions: churches, clubs and lodges, and schools? The formal and informal education of the region's early working class encompassed not only public schools but also labor colleges and lyceums, reading rooms in union halls, and labor and radical newspapers. These topics deserve study. And what about scabs? No one has yet produced a general study of scabs, a group that played a very prominent role in the region's labor-management conflict. In the eyes of organized labor a scab was a loathsome being. Walter Lippmann called the scab a "traitor to the economic foundations of democracy." In their own eyes, though, they served a positive purpose, as one scab noted during a Portland strike about 1918. To the tune of "Yankee Doodle" he argued:

A scab's a substance on a sore  
 That keeps us pure and healthy;  
 So we will work and try to make  
 Our country grand and wealthy.

The strikers quit their work,  
 Their family's on starvation;  
 They walk the streets and howl and shriek,  
 They cause their own damnation.

In most histories damnation falls on the scabs. The point is, the subject has for so long been obscured by prejudice that historians do not know much about that aspect of Pacific Northwest labor. But labor history has now reached a degree of maturity that permits vigorous reexamination of the folklore, myths, and impressionistic assertions that have colored treatment of the region's workers.<sup>23</sup>

Within the Pacific Northwest, in another instance, labor studies have tended to focus on workers in certain geographical areas to the exclusion of others. Oregon's labor has received far less scholarly attention than Washington's. The same disparity marks the treatment of the working class east and west of the Cascades. The first step that must be taken to encourage scholarly exploration into neglected areas—labor in eastern Washington, for example,—is better identification of the sources of labor history. Jonathan Dembo's bibliography for Washington labor is an example of the kind of work that needs to be done for the region's other states. I have begun to compile a list of the region's labor and radical papers that indicates where they are available. The July 1980 issue of *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* contained the first installment. Researchers need also a guide to the relevant manuscript materials, some of which are tucked away in places easily overlooked by students of Pacific Northwest history. Whitman College has a large collection of records relevant to union activity in Walla Walla and southeastern Washington. The Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroad collections of the Minnesota Historical Society contain files relating to several aspects of working-class life in the Pacific Northwest: migratory labor, Japanese railroad workers, Wobblies, and the role of railroad police in Everett prior to the 1916 massacre. Photographic collections, such as those compiled by Darius Kinsey and Asahel Curtis, give many details of the workers' world in the turn-of-the-century Pacific Northwest.<sup>24</sup>

This essay attempts to chart the territory that is Pacific Northwest labor history, to identify its salient features. Like early maps of the New World, some parts appear sketchy, tentative, and incomplete; others—possibly the suggestions for further exploration—seem fanciful, even utopian. That, however, is the nature of the subject and explains why in the coming years it will likely remain an exciting frontier to explore.

## The Challenge of Women's History

### EDITORS' NOTE

Women's history is one of the newest of several subfields in Pacific Northwest history. Many standard accounts about this region are heroic chronicles, tales of adventure, and reports of exploration and war in which women are usually left out. Still other well-known historical works emphasize the tribulations of homesteaders and pioneer townspeople, the daring ventures of early merchant princes, and the development of a regional identity and culture. Although women were full participants in all these important events, they seldom receive adequate credit or attention.

In her essay, Susan Armitage surveys the state of the art for women's history and considers the work already done as well as topics still to be explored. Central to her argument is the belief that women's history means more than adding "a few female faces to existing history." Instead, she contends, scholars need "to introduce new kinds of evidence, new issues, new perspectives," and thus contribute to a reconceptualization of the region's heritage. Armitage suggests a number of areas—women's work and community activities, in particular—where new research is beginning to modify older interpretations. For instance, the conventional view of the northwest frontier as a predominantly masculine culture is faulty at best because recent investigation indicates that the settlement of the Willamette Valley, the regional "Cradle of American Civilization," was accomplished largely by families. She also predicts that future scholarship will prove equally fruitful and revealing for topics such as the lives of women missionaries and teachers (as told from their own viewpoint), the supportive networks pioneer women created among themselves, and the political and social significance of women's clubs. In fact, Armitage maintains, historians must never fail to ask this question: "What were women doing while men were doing the things they deemed important?"

Susan Armitage received her B.A. degree in philosophy (1959) from Wellesley College, an M.A. in history (1965) from San Jose State College, and her Ph.D. in history (1968) from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She taught at the University of Colorado at Boulder before coming to Washington State University as director of Women Studies in 1978. Armitage has written a number of articles on western women's history dealing with topics such as oral history as a research tool, black women, housework and childbearing, women's diaries, and attitudes of white women toward American Indians. Among her most recent publications are the theme article "Becoming to Come into Focus: Western Women," for a special frontier women's issue of *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* (Summer 1982), and an introduction for the reprint edition, *Phoebe Judson, A Pioneer's Search for an Ideal Home*, issued by the University of Nebraska Press in 1984 and coedited *The Women's West* (1987). In 1983 Armitage served as the project director and keynote speaker of "The Women's West," the first national conference devoted exclusively to the role of women in western history, held at Sun Valley, Idaho. Her current research concerns the family roles of women in the rise of specific eastern Washington communities.