

OXFORD



Carol Quirke
Eyes on Labor

News Photography and America's Working Class

Eyes on Labor

This page intentionally left blank

Eyes on Labor

NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY AND AMERICA'S
WORKING CLASS

Carol Quirke

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research,
scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Copyright © Oxford University Press 2012

Published in the United States of America by
Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without
the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly
permitted by law, by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization.
Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form and you must impose this
same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Quirke, Carol.

Eyes on labor : news photography and America's working class / Carol Quirke.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-19-976822-6 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-19-976823-3 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Labor unions—United States—History—20th century. 2. Labor unions—United States—Pictorial
works. 3. Labor movement—United States—History—20th century. 4. Labor movement—United
States—Pictorial works. 5. Photography—United States—History—20th century.
6. Documentary photography—United States—History—20th century.

I. Title.

HD6508.Q57 2012
331.880973—dc23 2011047913

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

For my Donnas
niece, Donna Lubell Quirke Hornik
and mother, Donna (Radja) Quirke
and for my father, John Quirke

This page intentionally left blank

{ CONTENTS }

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: “The Central Instrument of Our Time”	3
1. “The Quick Nervousness of Pictures Is a New Language”: Organized Labor Before Photojournalism	17
2. Consuming Labor: <i>LIFE</i> Magazine and Mass Production Unionism, 1936–1942	51
3. Bitter Kisses: Pictures of the Hershey Chocolate Sit-Down Strike, April 1937	108
4. “Strike Photos Are Star Witnesses”: Photographs and Newsreels of Chicago’s Memorial Day Massacre, May 1937	149
5. <i>Steel Labor</i> and the United Steelworkers of America’s Culture of Constraint, 1936–1950	186
6. “This Picture Shows What We Are Fighting For”: Local 65 Distributive Workers’ Rank-and-File Photography, 1933–1953	225
Conclusion	270
Notes	285
Bibliography	347
Index	353

This page intentionally left blank

{ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS }

Photographer Lewis Hine said, “If I could tell the story in words I wouldn’t need to lug around a camera.” If a photo had told this story, I wouldn’t have lugged around this project for so long. A historical book is a solitary labor and yet the finished result requires the active help of many.

This work is stronger for the insights of those scholars who have commented on it at conferences, as reviewers, or as friends. Thank you Ann Fabian, Jack Metzgar, Alan Trachtenberg, Laura Katzman, Kate Sampsell, Peter Bacon Hales, Linda Gordon, Janet Zandy, Eileen Boris, Dan Leab, Helen Langa, Tom Doherty, Donald Solfchalk, Carol Giardina, Hilary Anne Hallett, Chris Brown, Jacob Kramer, and Curtis Marez. This book began at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center. There, scholars whose passion for the past did not preclude a commitment to creating a more just future enriched my life and thinking. Kathleen McCarthy, Thomas Kessner, David Nasaw, Carol Berkin, and Barbara Winslow’s support mattered much. Without the CUNY Writing Fellows program, there would be little to read here now.

Archivists and librarians whose support was crucial to the book’s completion include Erika Gottfried at the Robert Wagner Labor Archives at New York University’s Tamiment Library, Pamela Whitenack at the Hershey Community Archives, James Quigel and Barry Kernfeld at the Historical Collections and Labor Archives at Penn State University, Carol Lockman and Marjorie McNinch of the Hagley Museum and Library, Rodney Ross of the National Archives, Denise Gose of the Center for Creative Photography, Mark Pascale of the Art Institute of Chicago, Rosemary Haines of the Library of Congress, Karen Gelles of the Greeley Library at SUNY Farmingdale, and Laurie Wermter of University of Wisconsin’s Memorial Library. Joseph Turrini, formerly of the Catholic University’s Archives, was incredibly helpful with the Philip Murray papers. At the Chicago History Museum, Russell Lewis offered a wonderful welcome and Lesley Martin helped obtain crucial imagery in an awful pinch. William Brewington of Grinberg Assets helped with images of the Memorial Day Massacre. Rosemary Hanes of the Library of Congress helped sort through the Massacre footage. Much appreciation to Laurie Fink-Green, whose expertise got me through the process of securing photo rights, and Diane Aronson who offered editorial insights on some sticky sections.

The small public college where I teach, SUNY Old Westbury, has a historic focus of educating nontraditional students. I honor their wisdom, a wisdom often bought at great cost. I am lucky to work with wonderful colleagues: Liz Ewen and Ros Baxandall, who left a big imprint at the college, and Laura

Anker, Jermaine Archer, Sherry Baker, Aubrey Bonnet, John Friedman, Mandy Frisken, Karl Grossman, Joe Manfredi, Andrew Mattson, Samara Smith, Lois Stergiopoulos, and Denton Watson. Your commitment to our students inspires. Steven Serr aided greatly with photo reproduction. Old Westbury's financial support made this book possible. Special thanks to the provost, Patrick O'Sullivan, to Tom Murphy, director of sponsored programs, to the dean of arts and sciences, Barbara Hillery, for her warm humor and support, and to my union brothers and sisters in the United University Professions.

I am indebted to those who lived through this turbulent time and shared their stories. Mollie West, Yolanda "Bobby" Hall, and Les Orear, all associated with the Illinois Labor Historical Society, generously shared their insights on the Memorial Day Massacre and CIO-era labor journalism. Seventy years after the labor movement revolutionized our lives, nothing has blunted their political engagements. Similarly, former *PM* and Photo League photographer Arthur Leipzig and Mimi Leipzig recollected Arthur's profession as it was being defined in the mid-century. A special thanks to Julian and Sylvia Wolff, who've shared their passion for the world of photography.

To the reviewers of this manuscript, whose close reading and knowledge of the field have pushed me to write a stronger book, thank you. Humanities editor Shannon McLachlan and assistant editor Brendan O'Neill from Oxford University Press have been incredibly supportive, and I am grateful.

"It's all right to have a soft heart as long as you have a hard eye," stated leftist photographer and painter Ben Shahn. These scholars and mentors blessed me with both. Gerald Markowitz's generous spirit and open encouragement taught me the academy could be a friendlier place. He helped me articulate my arguments more boldly. Stuart Ewen opened up his home, his teaching, and his thinking to me. I've learned much from his skillful synthesis of complicated thinkers; his scholarship informs this project. Joshua Freeman always pushed for more and helped figure out how to get there. He is a true advocate for students; his sage advice has been crucial throughout. Lou Masur, now at Trinity College, opened a door for me when I first took his Nineteenth-Century U.S. Historiography course, and he's been opening them ever since. He modeled cultural history at its finest, and he was a nimble advisor, poking me when necessary but otherwise letting me play. Every adverb is here without his consent.

This is a better work for the close, caring readings by friends and colleagues. Nancy Berke, Linda Grasso, Phyllis van Slyck, Linda Camarasana, and Lara Vapnek offered crisp commentary on my work—and a lot of good food, wine, and talk. Marcella Bencivenni, Evelyn Burg, and Dan Wishnoff, fellow Graduate Center students, read and reread portions of this manuscript over many years. You've pushed my work in a stronger direction and always renewed my spirits. Your engagement as scholars, as professors, and as friends nurtures my own.

Thanks to family members Dolores and David Frost, and Caroline and James Radja for their insights on 1930s Chicago. Friends and family kept me going all this time: Jean Halley and Jacob Segal, Janet LeMoal, Carole Cushing, Diane Frey, Pat Ambrose, Sr. Kieran Therese Quirke, Sr. Mary Cecile Quirke, Eileen Linden, Tom and Jeanne Radja, James and Melissa Barnett, Paul and Marcia Radja, Nicole Radja and Calbee Mundy, Sharon Quirke and Phil Reece, Michael Quirke, and Sheila Quirke and Jeremy Hornik. To all the little stinkers who make me laugh: Milo, Cy, Penelope, and Thomas—and our little man Jay. Those more grown, Alex, Carolyn, and Jakob Reece, provoke loving smiles. Donna Quirke Hornik, your grit and intellectual dexterity and sweet, sweet smile are always with me, even though you are not. I'm saying "yes" with you, somewhere. My mom and dad, Donna (Radja) Quirke and John Quirke, taught me that the road is long and sometimes twisted, but hewing to it, no matter the obstacle, takes you somewhere unexpected. Their paths, and those of my grandparents Celia (Morley) Quirke, Jakov Radja, and Draga (Marasović) Radja, so touched and trammled by a century of history, have made me sensitive to its design.

Quinn—my companion—you console and compass; I ride the roller coaster with you. *Vives en la casa de mi corazón.*

This page intentionally left blank

Eyes on Labor

This page intentionally left blank

{ Introduction }

“The Central Instrument of Our Time”

This project began serendipitously. Before graduate school I was a community organizer with welfare recipients and public housing residents during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. Their neoconservatism blamed the poor for their circumstances, vilified “welfare queens,” and promised that a voluntary “thousand points of light” should address social ills. I wondered about popular visualizations of the poor and working poor during the Great Depression, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal expressed responsibility for the nation’s most vulnerable citizens. I looked at the popular picture magazine *LIFE*, associated with documentary photos of Depression-era victims. *LIFE* lay at the crux of the new, national “culture of sight and sound,” an expanding mass culture that coalesced in the 1930s.¹ Contrary to expectations, *LIFE*’s pages showed few Americans on relief or welfare. Only a few stories, largely critical, discussed New Deal public works projects. *LIFE* documented the nation in black and white, but its America seemed closer to the Technicolor Land of Oz than dowdy, dust bowl Kansas.

LIFE’s portrait of America had something unexpected, however: hundreds of photos of workers fighting to establish unions. *LIFE*’s portrayal was contradictory. Workers appeared heroic, but also menacing and sometimes passive. *LIFE* lampooned labor leaders, but also addressed them with the respect due to America’s corporate heads. Workers’ demands were accepted as a right in a bounteous America, while at other times they were treated with a disdain meted to the overreaching. White workingwomen appeared as sexy starlets, though black, brown, and immigrant women were hardly noticed. African-American and immigrant men were largely ignored as well. *LIFE*’s pages hinted at clashes over American workers’ status at the heart of mass culture. Millions of readers watched as one of the century’s great dramas—the unionization of industrial workers—was waged in *LIFE*. In 1941 critic and author James Agee called the camera “the central instrument of our time,” and unions and businesses, like *LIFE*, used the camera eye to represent workers and their unions.² *Eyes on Labor* identifies and maps this emerging mid-century portrayal of labor, and asks what effect news photography had upon organized labor as it renegotiated its place in U.S. society.

“It Isn’t Only What You Do That Counts, But What People *Think* You’re Doing”

When sociologists Robert Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd returned to their fabled “Middletown” in the mid-1930s, they observed that whenever labor demanded collective bargaining rights from employers, local papers featured front-page photos of strikers being dragged off to jail. Such coverage could be purposeful. Business associations such as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) relied on news photos’ seeming veracity to stem public support for organized labor. In 1937, when questioned by the newly established National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the “King of Strikebreakers” Pearl Bergoff related how one corporate head “staged” violence to discredit labor. News photos in the mainstream press made unionists seem responsible for violence, while identifying corporations and “peaceful [back-to-work] pickets” with “America, free land and all that stuff.” Scholars have noted that NAM appropriated the “forgotten man” for its free enterprise campaigns, and also the significance of corporate right-to-manage campaigns in the 1940s. Little appreciated, however, was how public relations strategies capitalized on news photography’s seeming objectivity to malign labor. These campaigns succeeded in the 1930s, at the height of the New Deal and labor’s uprising.³

J. B. S. Hardman, labor educator and editor, wrote, “It isn’t only what you do that counts, but what people think you’re doing,” and unions noted the growing influence of the news and photography to shape public understanding of their movement. Unions strategized with government officials, news reporters, church leaders, and other allies to ensure that the public interpreted news photographs to labor’s benefit. And unions professionalized their newspapers, increasing their use of photos to attract membership and inform the public. Hardman, who edited the Amalgamated Clothing Worker Union’s *Advance* from the early 1920s, surveyed the labor press in 1928 and found it thrown together with the “proverbial paste jar and scissors.” Two decades later, he and his fellow labor editors considered the labor press a “hardy institution” at its “apex of effectiveness and influence.” Trained journalists now edited labor’s papers, and news photos bolstered the union message.⁴

This transformation in union communications coincided with the explosive growth of the Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO), later renamed the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Working men and women sparked one of the century’s biggest news stories as they recast America’s social and political relations. Throughout the 1930s, workers in hamlets and cities—from factories, coal mines, packing houses, beauty shops, elevators, and even movie projectionist booths—demanded unions. Workers wanted higher wages, greater job security and safety, and better lives for themselves and their families. By the decade’s end, nine and a half million workers were unionized.⁵

Historians first touted labor's new economic and political muscle as a "new phase of national history," a "Third American Revolution," or a "revolutionary response to a revolutionary situation." Laborers—especially white, male laborers and their families—joined in the mass consumer economy in ways unimaginable a few decades earlier. Union contracts won workers more leisure and vacation time, facilitating this participation. While unions never achieved their ambitiously envisioned welfare state, evolving forms of public and private social security shielded workers and their families from economic catastrophe due to disability, illness, unemployment, and old age. Over time scholars became more circumspect about labor's gains, but few contest that American workers commanded greater political, social, and economic authority in 1950 than in 1900 or 1930.⁶

Corresponding with labor's newfound strength was a populist aesthetic that suffused America's visual culture. Hollywood's *Meet John Doe*, the "forgotten man" of *The Gold Diggers of 1933*, and the sassy working girls of *Kitty Foyle* and *Baby Face* entertained movie audiences coast to coast with the exploits of beleaguered but scrappy workers. And images of the strapping male worker embodied the symbolic importance of productive labor to the nation-state. Showcased in *LIFE* photographs, this icon was also celebrated in post office murals and federal office statuary, in advertisements, and even in the architectural bas-reliefs and decorative motifs of capitalism's cathedrals such as Rockefeller Center. Documentary photography also enshrined this era's common man and woman. The Farm Security Administration's (FSA) encyclopedic photographic catalog of American life valorized agricultural laborers, and many other New Deal agencies documented average citizens' lives.⁷ As the nation moved to war, the manly worker and then Rosie the Riveter emphasized workingmen's and workingwomen's contributions to the nation's defense.

Such imagery was long taken at face value, but recently scholars have come to see contradictory impulses and consequences in this obsession with American workingmen and -women. Hollywood's movies put the little guy on the screen, but the dream factories' homespun narratives "dictated the conversion of all political, sociological and economic dilemmas into personal melodramas." One film historian maintains that such films undermined the possibilities for any public, collective response.⁸ And the "heroic laborer" found in sculpture or in the pages of a union newspaper was never simply democratic. Gendering work in the overblown body of the manly worker redressed the failure all classes of men felt, but this gendering of labor coincided with social and economic strictures for American women.⁹ Where scholars once unabashedly celebrated the FSA Photography Section's documentation of the common man, they now allege it produced a nostalgia for the "agrarian, small-town way of life" torn asunder by New Deal technocrats.¹⁰ And scholars of wartime imagery argue that patriotic images of workers had a conservative influence. If feminist historians and filmmakers who first excavated Rosie the Riveter believed that she illuminated women's contribution to the nation's

economic health and war-preparedness, they now assert that Rosie's image offered middle-class women "self-actualization" while demanding "duty" and "sacrifice" from working women. Others argue that motivational posters of workmen "transform[ed] employees into factory combatants," meeting company needs to "instill factory discipline." Idealizing efficient, stable producers, elided labor's collective contribution to productivity and its sacrifices for the war effort.¹¹

This revisionism among visual culture scholars opened up new ways to think of mid-century imagery, but it did not explain the organized laborer who appeared in *LIFE*—or in labor's papers. Many of these studies retain the narrow focus on the same radical or populist imagery: images of the "down and out," farm workers, or Rosie. And many analyses, on specific photographers or institutions like the FSA, do not examine how such populist imagery entered a larger dialogue about working men and women. Historical investigations produced from the standpoint of cultural producers—admen, public relations specialists, or Hollywood filmmakers—often treat class as an abstract relation, ignoring concrete battles between labor and capital.¹²

Neither do labor historians explain workers' representation in *LIFE*, or even in union papers for that matter. Those working in the tradition of E. P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman have been less concerned with how labor is represented. They remain focused on working-class or union culture and seem more interested in what workers *do* than in symbolic struggles over labor. Exceptions do suggest the promise of exploring visual representation: Steve Ross's study of workers and early film, Nan Enstad's examination of news photographs of early twentieth-century garment workers, and Gary Gerstle and Elizabeth Fae's research into labor press iconography.¹³ Scholars have also identified how mass cultural tools like union media strengthened the movement. Lizabeth Cohen's lively chronicle of Depression-era workers, *Making a New Deal*, upended the conception of mass culture as politically anaesthetizing. Cohen argues that mass culture conquered earlier ethnic divisions, and that unionists' use of mass communications, especially radio and labor papers, built their unions and the New Deal welfare state. Similarly, Michael Denning premised a mid-century "laboring of American culture," sharing Cohen's optimistic view that union culture, and unionists' participation in a national mass culture, strengthened unionism through a "cultural front." Neither scholar, however, explores visual imagery to any great degree.¹⁴

News photos of workers deserve attention because of their increasing prominence in the machinery of national public opinion making and their influence on labor relations. By the late 1930s changes in technology permitted images of striking Kentucky miners to make their way into magazines lying in Park Avenue apartments. Just as quickly, workers streaming out of Henry Ford's industrial mecca traveled, in pictures, to rural outposts in Alabama or Arizona. With the more rapid transmission of photographs, U.S. media corporations borrowed the photo journal format pioneered in Europe in the 1920s. Americans

responded with delight. *LIFE* appeared in November of 1936; by 1939 it had built a circulation of over two million. Nearly ten times that many read it each week, making it the nation's most read—and looked at—magazine.¹⁵

Americans increasingly interpreted their world through pictures, and the news photographs they looked at had a particular authority as transcriptions of reality. Their apparent absence of style gave readers the illusion of objective truth. Roy Stryker, who headed the FSA, called news photos "noun and verb pictures"; they seemed straightforward descriptions of reality.¹⁶ Arthur Rothstein, who worked under Stryker at the FSA and who became *LOOK* magazine's photo editor said, "A person viewing a good news photograph should have the feeling that he is seeing reality. He is never conscious of the photographer or of his camera." Even a publication like *LIFE*, known for its innovative use of the photograph, sought photographers who suppressed their personal style for the sake of "photo-truth."¹⁷ As *LIFE* told readers in a 1940 advertisement that met readers' eyes with a blow-up photo featuring a piercing gaze, the publication's editorial viewpoint was based on the camera's neutrality; it was "an all-seeing eye with a brain" (Fig. I.1).¹⁸ News photos' immediate legibility, explained the American Society of Magazine Photographers (ASMP), "embody an idea made clearly apparent." The distinctive "impartial" style of news photography is tied to its institutional context: the purveying of objective facts about "fast moving events."¹⁹ Indeed, the photos under study here often appear banal. Their persuasiveness lies less in their expressiveness than in their commonsense truthfulness.

The photograph's increased prominence came at a time when the "news" was redefined as a product, leading many Americans to read the same news. Over the early twentieth century, chain news corporations developed—including Gannett and Hearst. Wire services and the national syndication of columnists such as Walter Winchell, Dorothy Thompson, and Heywood Brown, boosted standardization.²⁰ While local dailies remained a steady source of news, the modern, national newsmagazine also emerged in the twenties and thirties as publishers extended the mass markets built for women's and family magazines earlier in the century. Media entrepreneurs also enlarged news audiences by altering their rhetoric to appeal across class lines. *LIFE*'s parent, TIME Inc., exemplified such changes. Its founders' idea was that "news" was too cumbersome for busy readers. Americans would appreciate pithy recapitulations instead. The ironic but expressive "Timespeak" of these modern news gatherers mixed high and low cultures and increased the use of photographs to build readership.²¹ As a result of such changes, labor's mobilization reached an expanded public in fundamentally new ways.

Current scholarship tells us much about the multiple and contradictory meanings of the common man, but little about visual images of actual workers at the moment of great collective transformation.²² A generation of scholars has shown how visual imagery reconfigured ideology, culture, and politics, but they have shed little light on one very common way workers were depicted: the



Neither Myopia, nor Hyperopia, nor Astigmatism!

THREE BASIC DEFECTS of editorial vision can easily afflict organs of public information . . .

MYOPIA — the shortsightedness that comprehends little beyond the domestic scene, naively envisioning our land as a self-sufficient, tight little isle.

HYPEROPIA—the farsightedness that is so preoccupied with what's happening over the horizon that it is scarcely aware of tremendous things astir at home.

ASTIGMATISM—the distorted perception that results from eying all subjects from too partisan, too sectional, too romantic a viewpoint.

LIFE, from its inception, has attempted to keep refreshingly free from any such faults of focus. It has, in fact, brought into being not only its own completely new picture-and-word editorial technique but also a completely new editorial viewpoint. And it is this unique viewpoint which has made of LIFE's news-camera a penetrating, all-seeing eye with a brain!

For instance, in covering the biggest news in the world—the War—LIFE forswears both wholehog sensationalism and superficial sugar-coating.

It reveals this great human tragedy with vividness, clarity, and objectivity. It illuminates and interprets history-in-the-making. And, even more



FROM LIFE'S COVERAGE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

important, LIFE functions as an eye that looks two ways at once—it sees and reports the conflict as waged 3,000 miles away . . . and at the same time sees and interprets the inescapable impact of that conflict on present-and-future American living.

It would be, however, evidence of defective editorial vision to let the war monopolize LIFE's

attention. So, LIFE's new editorial technique continues to serve as the most lively, understandable means of helping Americans to comprehend and enjoy intelligently the land they live in.



LIFE SAILS DOWN THE INLAND WATERWAY

For instance, in LIFE's absorbing pages, readers chug 1350 miles with a pretty yachtswoman down

FIGURE 1.1 LIFE touts its “penetrating, all-seeing eye with a brain,” in this advertisement. LIFE, May 25, 1940. Copyright 1940 Life Inc. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.



the exciting Inland Waterway . . . and later go to a Bingo Party in Lowell, Massachusetts, where 3,800 merchants, mothers, mill hands, relievers,



ONE OF LIFE'S FULL-COLOR ART REPRODUCTIONS

every week play America's No. 1 indoor game. They see, as only LIFE can show, the screwball publicity gags of Venice, California, most eccen-



"LIFE GOES TO A PARTY"

tric community of an eccentric state . . . and witness the gloomy pall of a "blackened out" American city—St. Louis, the smoke-ridden.

It is an exciting and enriching experience to fol-

low in LIFE's color pages the contributions America's outstanding painters are making to a genuine American Art. It is healthful culturally, too, to be kept up-to-date, via LIFE's picture-and-word reviews, on the latest movie or play.

And whether it is reporting a college houseparty, a Revenue raid on Southern moonshiners, the terrible trek from the Dustbowl, or presenting a photographic essay on the great Northwest, LIFE provides an absorbing, continuous course in how our fellow-citizens live. People are discovering more and more that its advertising pages, too, are an interesting, integral part of the entire informative, illuminating cross section of modern American living that is LIFE.

Come Mars or high water, LIFE is dedicated

to the proposition that its vigorous, new-age journalism entails a high obligation. It is the obligation to inform many millions of Americans—in LIFE's own unique and modern way—about *all* things that color and shape modern American living.

LIFE, as "America's Most Potent Editorial Force," directs that force wholeheartedly toward effecting a truly enlightened America.

For an enlightened America is the world's greatest hope!

* * *

**Latest figure—19,900,000 audience each week—scientifically established and reported by LIFE's Continuing Study of Magazine Audiences.*



news photos of working people who struggled to unionize in the 1930s and 1940s. By the late 1930s, news photos shaped public opinion as never before, and photos of workers demonstrated news photography's central public role. Labor and business's growing aptitude for crafting visual messages meant that the new national media became an arena for competing messages about organized labor. And because mass media publishers flirted with including working Americans in their audience, they increased their coverage of labor. News photographs documented workers' revolution in the nation's economic, political, and cultural landscape. *Eyes on Labor* argues that news photos also made that revolution.

"The Viewfinder Is a Political Instrument"

Photographs have long been considered the acme of realist representation. As nineteenth-century essayist Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, photographs were a "mirror with a memory"; they reflected what lay before the camera eye. Mimesis had defined Western artistic aims and styles for centuries, and photography's chemical and mechanical processes linked a belief in scientific progress with a belief in nature and God. English photographer William Henry Fox Talbot titled the first photo book, *Pencil of Nature*, divulging that century's view of photography as a scribe for God's handiwork. Writing about the stereoscope for *Atlantic Monthly* readers, Holmes expanded on this view: "It is no toy: it is a divine gift, placed in our hands nominally by science, really by that inspiration which is revealing the Almighty through the lips of the humble students of nature." Artisan-photographers fulfilled God's mission by reflecting their surrounding world in landscape, portrait, and urban scene. The ever astute Holmes also hinted at photography's ability to fabricate meaning: surfaces become solid, the medium could "cheat" the senses, and the proliferation of images would "skin" reality, leaving substance behind.²³ Like Holmes, Americans came to understand that photography could depart from truth, though most never relinquished a belief in the medium's hold on the real.²⁴

Though photographs contain evidence of "the real," photographs are never, as Peter Bacon Hales notes, "a repository of facts, a raw slice of the past."²⁵ This analysis, like much scholarship today, assumes that photography not only reproduces the world, but constructs a way of seeing it as well. These ways of seeing are not neutral; they are political. In Alan Trachtenberg's formulation, "The viewfinder is a political instrument," something that business and labor understood.²⁶

Multiple factors shape what can be seen and how it is seen. Formal elements such as focus, lighting, and angle contribute to a photo's "argument." Photographers make aesthetic and editorial decisions in the field and in the darkroom that determine how "reality" is read. What the photographer includes and excludes from the photo's frame shapes its meaning, as does the photographer's vantage. A photograph taken from behind a line of strikers is more likely to express their

point of view than one taken from behind the gates of a factory plant. A photo shot from below tends to magnify the subject, whether a corporate leader, a workman in uniform, or a mammoth factory. Available technology also shaped what viewers could see. In 1919 photographers documented the largest labor uprising ever, where one in five workers struck, by showing strikers and their opposition—whether Pennsylvania constabulary or Harvard students—in posed, static shots. They had to; the camera and film could not yet capture motion.

Words, in titles, captions, and photo stories, also “anchor” a photograph’s meaning. Together, words and pictures had a lot of pull—*LOOK*’s Arthur Rothstein claimed that twice as many people looked at a photo and its caption than read a story. But the very same photograph could be attached to opposing arguments or story lines.²⁷ A union paper might publish a photo of a line of strikers with a dynamic composition stressing their numbers to emphasize activism’s promise, and a mainstream news source might caption this photo to imply organized labor’s threat to American values.²⁸ Hence, a photo’s institutional context, who commissioned and who disseminated a photo, is crucial to understanding its ideological work.²⁹ A publisher’s desire to capture a market, as well as a publisher and editorial staff’s politics, shaped specific publications’ editorial stance. And labor papers would rarely print stories or photos deemed contrary to union interests. Of course sometimes photographers and editors were constrained by technology, and by the events themselves—things happened so quickly that photos could not be composed as carefully as possible. Photographers’ and publishers’ intents are not definitive in explaining a picture’s reception either—viewers could reinterpret its meaning.

While “noun and verb” pictures predominated in the news, distinct realist styles also circulated, implying different messages. “Evidence-style” realism erased the photographer’s presence to an even greater degree than in news photography. The subject would be centered in the foreground, the camera’s angle straight at the subject, the lighting and focus clear throughout to provide an optimal view of the subject. In this style the subject appeared so neutral that the photo seemed to make no argument whatsoever.³⁰ In contrast, documentary photos, Roy Stryker believed, were “adjective and adverb” pictures. Their realism had depth and tugged at the emotions. For documentary photographer Dorothea Lange, documentary images were “loaded with ammunition.”³¹ The news also featured images typically associated with corporate photography—promotional shots of workers on the job, company towns, and corporate headquarters. Such photography suggested an idealized order authored by the corporation. In these classic, timeless compositions, nothing intruded on the world that the corporation created. Unlike evidence-style photographs that demonstrate what was, these photographs suggest what could be; they were simultaneously didactic and inspirational.³² Also found in the news were photographs that might be called “hyper-real,” photographs that offered affirming visions of the United States and its citizens. Promotional photography idealized but seemed devoid of life. Hyper-real photographs were

vital, exuberant, and burnished, much like a Hollywood production. Unions also availed themselves of this buoyant realism to motivate their rank and file.³³ Whether in new dailies, national news magazines, or labor papers, editors' decisions to depart from the traditional news style and publish alternative forms of realism often signaled a desire to emphasize a specific message.

Teasing meaning from photographs is tricky. Photos appear unmediated, but, as photographer-critic Martha Rosler quips, "Photography is dumb."³⁴ Photographs record reality, but not slavishly: photographs construct how we see that reality. *Eyes on Labor* analyzes photographic technology, visual vocabulary, rhetoric and style, accompanying text, and the institutional context that sought to shape a photo's interpretation. Photos are a slippery evidentiary source for the historian, but as Lawrence Levine concluded in a discussion of 1930s documentary photography, their "contradictions and paradoxes" contain the same challenge of any rich historical source.³⁵

Framing Organized Labor

Despite news photography's growing influence in the mid-century, an uneven archival record makes it difficult to plot a full historical narrative of photography's use by unions, corporations, and the mass media. Labor cared about public perception and employed photography to a greater degree than ever before, but unions left few records about their understanding of this medium. For example, Philip Murray's papers at the Catholic University of America, with records covering his presidencies at the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and the CIO, include very little about publicity or the use of the visual. Similarly, few records in the United Steel Workers of America's papers at Penn State's Historical Collection and Labor Archives are from the union's longtime news editor, Vincent Sweeney.

The same can be said for corporations. My research found that even industries most attuned to the visual neglected to articulate or save records about their visual strategies, as other historians have noted.³⁶ At the Hershey Chocolate Corporation, which used imagery to develop its brand from the early twentieth century, their publicist kept voluminous files of internal and external communications. His papers offer detailed evidence of corporate publicity and brand strategies, even as few records directly address imagery. Similarly, the National Association of Manufacturers initiated full-blown public relations campaigns against unions and these are well documented in their papers—but leaders' discussions only glancingly comment on news imagery.

A more daunting obstacle is some corporations' refusal to open their archives, or their licensing fees, for rights to reprint photos. The TIME-LIFE archive has a closed-door policy to most researchers, despite—or perhaps because of—a growing sense of Henry Luce empire's effect on American life. And ironically, some of the mid-century's most seen images are the ones that

companies charge prohibitive fees to reproduce, making scholarly investigation and dialogue more difficult.

Eyes on Labor compensates for these archival limits in two ways. First, I read the patterns of meaning from large bodies of photographs over time, within and across publications, to plot distinctive themes that emerge in mid-century news imagery about labor. Identifying and tracking such patterns demonstrates change over time and space, and confirms the decision making of editors, publishers, publicists, and union and corporate leaders, even when their decisions were not articulated or recorded.³⁷ Such patterns offer important clues about the symbolic battles over labor's status, though, as we'll see, the messages were neither unified nor stable.

Second, the book uses case studies guided by a historian's traditional sources: archival records of internal union and business dialogue, oral histories and memoirs, Congressional investigations, and newspaper accounts. While such records provide limited direct reference to photography, in combination, photos and archival records allow a greater reconstruction of the motives, goals, and reactions to photography produced in this era. *Eyes on Labor* embeds a formalist reading of representative photographs most directly in the histories of labor and of visual culture, but also in the histories of public relations, consumer culture, and the mass media. It identifies critical interactions between news photography and labor's advances and retreats from 1919 through 1950, showing how labor moved from the nation's margins to the mainstream.

The narrative case studies—located in small-town Pennsylvania; in Manhattan, the heart of the nation's publishing industry; in Washington, D.C., congressional hearings; and in Chicago union halls—illustrate the twentieth-century transformations in labor and in publishing, permitting an in-depth analysis of how news photography shaped conceptions of organized labor. Chapter 1 examines stereographs of the 1877 Railroad Strike, photo-gravure and tabloid coverage of the 1919 strike wave, and national news magazine representation of the CIO's founding in the mid-1930s. Photo-journalism was in its infancy, and the chapter identifies the innovations in news photography that made labor's story so visually compelling during the second half of the 1930s.

Chapter 2 tracks *LIFE*'s coverage of labor, particularly the CIO, from the publication's inception in November of 1936 to WWII. While the AFL attracted more members in the 1930s and 1940s, it was the CIO's bold invitation to industrial workers that shook up America's economic equation.³⁸ This study identifies *LIFE*'s hearty embrace of the CIO and its activist strategies. The publication, an emblem of mid-century American culture, featured a complex portrayal of labor that tens of millions of Americans encountered by the time the country entered WWII. Even as *LIFE* accepted organized labor, tensions in its coverage of labor's growing stature suggest larger ambiguities over labor's political and social redefinition in American life.

Turmoil heightened the stakes of labor representation and mobilized unions and corporations to advance claims about organizing workers and their goals.

Chapter 3 elevates the significance of a 1937 sit-down strike at the Hershey Chocolate Company by illuminating news photography's unacknowledged role in labor struggles. Corporate public relations experts used photography to tar a union drive locally, but photos also discredited the CIO sit-down technique to mass audiences created by *LIFE*, *Newsweek*, and other national magazines. Chapter 4 investigates the opposite, highlighting labor's growing awareness and ability to shape the meaning of contested images. This case study establishes how "conclusive" photographic evidence—news photos and a Paramount newsreel—at first proved demonstrators' guilt for the Memorial Day Massacre. The massacre is one of the most commonly represented labor events of the twentieth century, and news photographs made the event infamous. By the late 1930s unions and their allies employed public relations tools and the power of photographic imagery to prove strikers' innocence and condemn conventional union-busting techniques. Both conflicts transpired in 1937 at the height of CIO rank-and-file mobilization. Once this mobilization faltered, union numbers increased modestly until World War II, mostly among AFL affiliates, not the CIO. Moreover, labor relations were increasingly routinized and less fought at the bar of public opinion.

By 1950 some thirty million Americans received a labor paper in their home.³⁹ The book also offers case studies of two newspapers of the CIO, which used mass culture to a far greater degree than the AFL. The *Nation* identified both papers in 1953 as among the labor movement's more sophisticated. Chapter 5 explores *Steel Labor*, the newspaper of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), from 1936 through 1950. This union was the largest in the CIO's first decade, one bankrolled by United Mine Worker leaders for its critical importance to labor's organization. Elizabeth Cohen identifies *Steel Labor* as crucial to broad rank-and-file support for the CIO. *Steel Labor* communicated the importance of rank-and-file discipline and adherence to rule of law with visual imagery. Over time *Steel Labor* radicalized its message to readers, even as it sketched the rewards of unionism in private and personal terms, not as collective gains. This chapter examines photography in tandem with illustration, as the newspaper deployed different types of imagery to communicate distinct messages. Chapter 6 examines one of the CIO's radical New York City unions, Local 65 Wholesale and Warehouse Employees Union, and its newspaper, *New Voices*, also from 1936 through the early 1950s. This union so embraced culture that its paper was entirely written and produced by its members—including the paper's photos. Local 65 left some 30,000 images, an unusual archival trove from which to explore mid-century labor's cultural production. Rank-and-file photographers took images that did the work of a union organizer, enticing workers into union struggle and educating them about collective action. Photographers represented the union as a haven of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity and advanced arguments about workers' rights to live a full, expressive life. These case studies evidence CIO response to the broader political and cultural environment, as well as the diversity and complexity of the CIO's self-representation and representation to the general public.

Eyes on Labor reveals attitudes about workers that divided and that joined Americans, sometimes across class lines. The heroic laborer, for example, is rightfully understood as a mid-century, populist icon. But media companies employed this icon to sound a threat about organized labor, and unions suppressed this icon when leaders felt an activist message was detrimental. And, as common as the heroic laborer was in this period, so were images of workers happily enjoying the consumer goods newly available to them.

Photographs characterized workers, their leaders, and their methods for achieving unionization. Were workers militant warriors establishing their unions, or were they quiescent—directed by bosses or labor leaders? Was rank-and-file activism a necessary, even entertaining jolt to American society, or was it a threat? Were organized labor's leaders a new managerial elite, or were they thugs and dictators? *LIFE's* documentation of the nationwide wave of sit-down strikes in 1936 and 1937 was open and gleeful at first. Unexpectedly, some labor publications' imagery expressed unease about rank-and-file militancy. Even at the height of twentieth-century populism, imagery in mass publications and in labor papers alike ignored workers' collective power, insisting on the power of businessmen, corporate heads, or labor's leaders to forge the good life for workers.

As many chapters indicate, the news often focused on the violence endemic to labor mobilization. Photos and captions mostly implied that organized labor was responsible for civil chaos. Corporations even fomented violence, knowing that photographs would document it and labor would bear the blame. Unions responded in distinct ways; some depicted wounded members as exemplars of union might, but others ignored strike violence even when its own membership was victimized.

How were the rewards of unionism portrayed in news photos? Labor unions and corporations alike suggested a consumer "fable of abundance" as a prize for union membership. Whether it was the bounty of financial gains expressed in jumbo checks given to workers much as a lottery win in labor papers, or a brightly imagined consumer paradise sketched for workers as one might find in *LIFE*, workers' aspirations, their gains and security, were often spelled out in the concrete and material.⁴⁰ Images of solidarity, community, or collective, public security rarely appeared in photographic prints as something worth fighting for.

Unions, corporations, and media companies often divided workers by race and gender in the news photographs they published. Women workers rarely appeared as coparticipants in the quest for social and economic justice, but rather as objects for consumption. This gendering of labor had implications for how workers were perceived in the larger culture, and how workers perceived themselves. The needs of black workers or immigrant laborers rarely made the news—unless it was in the papers of more radical unions and political organizations. Photos in the labor press and the mass media presented workers as normatively white. Even in the more egalitarian labor press black workers were most often represented as tokens. This too ignored the reality of America's workforce, limiting workers' solidarity.

News photos often addressed proper relations between the classes. Are company heads friends or foes to the ordinary worker? How were workers' and managers' identities depicted? In the mainstream press, corporate leaders like Walter Chrysler or Henry Ford were humanized in folksy fables in which the camera eye perused their domestic lives and hobbies. Such tales made corporate heads "everyman," enhancing identification with corporations. Visual narratives of class harmony were also common in the national press. On the other hand, workers' home lives were often ignored. Workers existed in the vacuum of their institutional or work lives. Hence *Eyes on Labor* considers how these visual silences placed a damper on labor's political and economic demands.

The elisions, ambiguities, and contradictory messages about labor offer historians clues about labor's status in the mid-century. Negotiations over labor's place occurred in front of factory gates in Akron and Detroit, as well as in political centers, state capitols, and Washington, D.C., but they also unfolded in the pages of an ever more national, standard, and photographic news.

Union leaders believed, notwithstanding the populist aesthetic of the New Deal era, that the mainstream media often treated struggles for unionization, and for the rights of flesh and blood workers, unkindly. Organized labor's frustration with the mainstream press is apparent in one 1938 *CIO News* cartoon. It addressed the Copeland Committee, which tracked ties between organized crime and organized labor. The cartoon showed two grinning, corpulent men who represented ship owners and congressional investigators. The investigator painted a canvas of "the American Seaman" with a palette of lies, slander, and red-baiting.⁴¹ The square-jawed model stood in near military precision with arms by his sides, erect posture, and a bland, forward-looking gaze. In the committee's canvas, he was a brute: his simian features were dwarfed by his oversized chest; his tightly grasped club seemed sure to fall on some unhappy object unless pacified by the liquor in his other hand. The caption, "It's an Art," commented on the committee's success in transforming laborers into a menace. It emphasized labor's awareness of its "public relations nightmare" in the press.

Eyes on Labor explores this anti-union bias, but it also shows how workers could be accepted as participants in American life in ways unimaginable prior to the thirties. Messages in news photographs of organized labor never fell along expected lines. Union newspapers promoted consumerism for workers as much as capitalism's cheerleader, *LIFE*. Black workers and women workers were ignored both by the mainstream press and by the labor press. Photo journals celebrated labor's activism as a fad; while labor papers could be more circumspect, using imagery to promote members' obedience. This cacophony of images about organized labor makes sense—labor was asserting a new place for itself in society. Photographs offer crucial evidence about business and labor uncertainty when facing the question of labor's place in the polity, but they also reveal the players' aspirations as they reimagined this polity.

“The Quick Nervousness of Pictures Is a New Language”

ORGANIZED LABOR BEFORE PHOTOJOURNALISM

In 1942, for the first time, a news photograph won a Pulitzer Prize. The winner was an image of eight United Auto Worker (UAW) members pummeling a scab the previous year (Fig. 1.1). The photographer, *Detroit News*'s Milton Brooks, made the walls of Henry Ford's fortress-like River Rouge plant a backdrop.¹ Brooks caught UAW members in full attack, with clubs and fists pulled back before striking. Their ill-fated target held his coat over his head and curled his hands round his face. The strikers' facial expressions draw the eye. Several, intent on their beating, had their tongues out; others bit their bottom lips. Brooks traded on a crucial photographic quality, the capturing of a split second. Yet the photographer framed the attack with timeless compositional rules. The onlookers created a horizontal line along the Rouge's wall, pierced by the triangle made by the inner group of assailants. The wide-legged stance of many of the photo's participants echoed this triangular pattern. This first-ever Pulitzer-winning photo was newsworthy and aesthetically powerful; it also signaled the momentous changes that unionization was making in workers' lives.

When United Auto Worker members beat their opponents at River Rouge the conflict was physical and immediate. But the camera captured and constructed an ideological battle as well. News photography's claim on “the real” offered a potent tool to unions, employers, and news corporations. Each sought to harness the medium's apparent objectivity to make competing claims about workers, unions, labor's aspirations, and ideals for labor-management relations. This chapter charts the intersection of these two revolutions in American life: the growing authority of news photography and organized labor's consolidation into a vital movement.

The complex, contradictory portrayal of labor that emerged in mid-century news photography redefined labor's place in the U.S. polity. As this chapter's examination of the strike waves of 1919 and 1934 demonstrates, a photographic news emerged early in the twentieth century. But photos figured little in labor's



FIGURE 1.1 *Milton Brooks, Strike at Ford Motor's River Rouge Plant, Dearborn, Michigan, April 3, 1941. Reprinted with permission. Detroit News Photo Archive.*

political fortunes in that century's first decades. By the late 1930s, however, technologies and distribution methods brought news photos to audiences more rapidly, camera use was democratized, and national mass audiences were built. Labor's status would be transformed in the pages of an ever more national, standard, and photographic mass media.

"Photography Was Slow"

Images of workers and their struggles had long caught the public's eye. The nineteenth-century industrial revolution augmented the nation's economic might, but it had a reverse effect upon many workers. Millions of skilled and unskilled laborers were reduced to degraded circumstances, dependent on their employers' whims. Workers fought back. In perhaps "the earliest surviving photographs of an American labor dispute," Pittsburgh photographer Seth Voss Albee captured the tumultuous 1877 railroad strike. Considered the first nationwide strike, with outbursts of violence in Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, this strike portended another half century of intense labor turmoil. Albee's forty-two stereograph cards of the conflict were marketed in a set, as stereograph cards often were in this era.² His cards showed the infamous roundhouse, which

strikers burned to the ground, the machine shop's remaining brickwork, and the hulking metal of engines, wheels, and rails (Fig. 1.2). These remnants of labor unrest appeared much like the classical monuments that were such a common subject of the stereographic cards filling American middle-class parlors. In many of the pictures onlookers stood stock-still, overseeing the wreckage and regarding the camera eye before them. This would be the only way that viewers could see these protesters; film technology could not capture motion. These stereographs seemed more like souvenirs of an event than "news" photographs. Similarly, with the 1894 railway strike centered at Chicago's Pullman Car Company, photos of the National Guard protecting the company town circulated as postcards; imagery here too was static.³

Editors of the nineteenth-century illustrated press also explored labor's activism, including the 1877 railroad strike, more localized strikes of the 1880s, and the notorious 1892 strike at Homestead, Pennsylvania. The illustrated press was the primary means by which Americans visually educated themselves about current events. As Joshua Brown writes, illustrations in *Harper's Weekly*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News*, and the *Illustrated American* made the news "palpable," even as events were "constructed . . . into visual performances" that imparted "cause and effect" narratives. These illustrations often resonated with the reading public because they were drawn from on-the-spot eyewitness sketches or from photographs. Yet those directly based on photos often had, in publisher Frank Leslie's words, a "corpse-like literalness."⁴

Illustrations of the 1892 Homestead steel strike demonstrate these diverging modes of representation. In this conflict, the Amalgamated Association of



FIGURE 1.2 Seth Voss Albee, *American*, active 1870–1880. Albumen stereograph card of 1877 Railroad Strike, "Rear of Union Depot, with Ruins of General Superintendent Gardiner's Palace Car in Foreground," 36 x 28½ inches. Photograph © 2011, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW) fought to retain control of the work processes after Andrew Carnegie introduced newer technologies. For more than a decade the union stymied Carnegie's attempts to assert command, winning several strikes. Carnegie then hired Henry Clay Frick, who locked out workers in 1892, fortifying the plant with arms. Workers resisted, keeping replacement workers out. But Frick brought in Pinkerton agents, who sought to force access to the plant. He then called for state support once workers routed the Pinkertons.⁵ *Frank Leslie's* cover drawing of the laborers' initial skirmishes with Pinkertons mimicked Eugene Delacroix's famous 1830 "Liberty Leading the People," with a woman astride a railway track, her arms raised skyward (Fig. 1.3). The working-class crowd carried the instruments of battle and exemplified the fight for freedom, transplanted to an American context. This grand battle scene employed the conventions of historical painting, implying the weightiness of the subject. Inside the weekly were cruder images of crowds of rigidly posed men, based on photos. Similarly, in *Harper's Weekly*, images of the conflict appeared on the cover and interior. W. P. Snyder made the cover illustration of the Pinkertons' surrender to striking unionists from photographs taken by B. H. L. Dabbs. In the image the Pinkerton agents appear noble, even relaxed, before moving up the hill to meet an anonymous mob of strikers

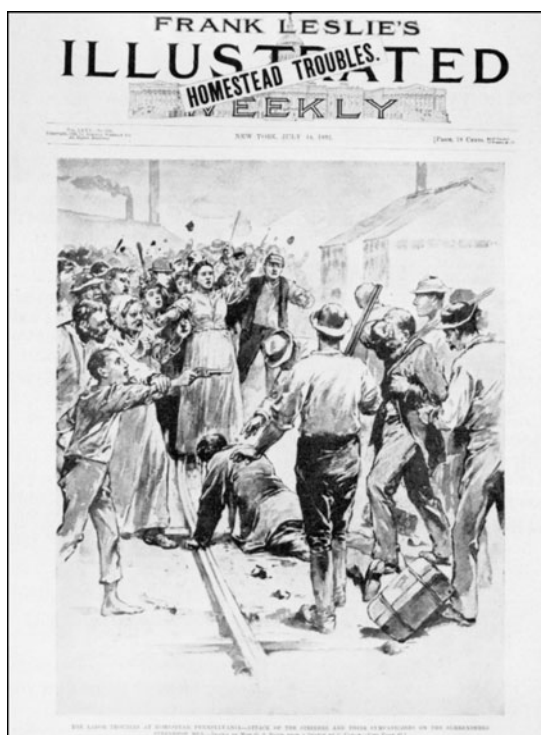


FIGURE 1.3 *Homestead Strike*, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly, July 14, 1892.

poised to club them. Engravings of photos, like the *Harper's* cover, eliminated distracting detail and emphasized a particular narrative. The *Harper's* image, unlike the more populist *Leslie's*, indicated middle-class suspicion of workers. The Amalgamated ultimately lost its battle at Homestead, leaving the union a shell. It would take nearly fifty years for the nation's largest industry to negotiate with organized labor as full partners.

Also for middle-class audiences, but in a different vein, New York reformer Jacob Riis produced studies of working and poverty-stricken New Yorkers. Riis recorded the haunts of "the Poor, the Idle, and the Vicious" in 1888 with the aid of two members of New York's Society of Amateur Photographers. The introduction of mass-produced dry plates in the 1870s increased the number of photographer-hobbyists. More portable cameras, with faster shutter speeds requiring less light and time for proper exposure, also appeared by the 1880s. And *blitzkriegpulver*, or magnesium flash powder, made it possible to capture indoor or night scenes. Riis, a *New York Sun* police reporter, exploited these technological changes and turned the camera eye on urban life. His resulting article, "Flashes from the Slums: Pictures Taken in Dark Places by the Lightning Process," promised a threatening lower-class squalor, as did images titled "White Slaves," "Growler Gangs," and "Street Arabs." Riis then wrote a pivotal Progressive Era text, *How the Other Half Lives*. Its images, such as "Baxter Street Alley" and "Bandit's Roost" recorded working New Yorkers' cramped neighborhoods, though the subjects' assessing gazes and their resolute stances could menace middle-class audiences. Riis's text differentiated the deserving working poor from the "dissolute," laborers from toughs (Fig. 1.4).⁶ But Riis and his colleagues' photographs—of shoemakers, abject English coal heavers, Bohemian cigar makers, and "sewing and starving" sweatshop girls—looked hardly any different from New York's tramps and beer-dive denizens.

Riis and his audiences privileged photographic truth, but they typically encountered the "poor and idle" in crude, single-line wood engravings, as in "Flashes from the Slum," or in more finely crafted line drawings in *How the Other Half Lives*. The halftone, which made it possible to print text and photograph on the same page, remained unusual. Stephen Horgan produced the first halftone for the *New York Daily Graphic* in 1880. "A Scene in Shantytown" showed several workers' hovels on a patch of Manhattan schist. But the halftone's use remained inhibited until the century's turn: newsprint quality was poor, handmade drawings stood out better, and newsroom deadlines made finding pertinent photos difficult. Resistance by sketch and graphic artists also slowed the halftone's use. Photo-friendly papers, like New York's *Herald* or *World*, printed at most four to eight photographs through the early 1890s, and Horgan, who continued to refine the process, was told by one New York paper that "the idea was lunatic." Only magazines and weekly papers—with longer deadlines and better paper—published more. Even in books, illustrations



FIGURE 1.4 “Shoemaker, Broome Street,” ca. 1890. Museum of the City of New York, Jacob A. Riis Collection.

remained the norm—in Riis’s *Other Half* only one-third of the images were halftone photographs.⁷

During the twentieth century’s first decades the news became more photographic as technological barriers shrank, new modes of distribution developed, and publishers sought broader audiences. George Eastman developed flexible film in 1888, and later his Kodak and other “miniature” cameras enhanced interest in photography. More significantly, the Graflex camera, invented in 1898, revolutionized press photography. *Camera: A Practical Magazine for Photographers* described the Graflex in 1902 as a device able to photograph “things . . . precisely as they are seen, at the desired instant, and with the requisite speed.” Photographers could see the image right side up, unlike earlier cameras that inverted the image in the viewfinder, and the camera allowed the photographer to turn the camera vertically or horizontally. The Graflex used glass plates or film, facilitating its use. The development of independent agencies that collected and commissioned photographs for distribution in metropolitan dailies and magazines also led to an increasingly photographic news. George Bain set his agency up, the first, in 1898, followed soon afterward by Harris and Ewing, Brown Brothers, and Paul Thompson agencies.

These agencies built a carefully cataloged cache of photos through freelance photographers; for crucial events they sent photographers out on assignment. In this same period, mass-market periodicals like *Collier's* and newspapers like the *Chicago Daily News* began hiring their own in-house photographers. The Pulitzer and the Hearst organizations also capitalized on photography's pull, which they thought would augment their working-class and immigrant readership.⁸

These changes in photographic practices touched working-class Americans' lives. After Jacob Riis, visual data had become integral to Progressive Era reform. The Russell Sage Foundation commissioned photos from Lewis Hine for their *Pittsburgh Survey*, which delineated the breadth and constraints of workers' lives. And the *Survey*, a periodical for reformers, social workers, and policy makers, published Hine's photo-essays of child laborers. Hine also made posters for the National Child Labor Committee that indicted mass-production, using advertisers' idiom and novel photomontage techniques. As Maren Stange writes, photos were to provide apparently objective, measurable information as the title "survey" indicated; they also publicized reform efforts. Such reform photography circulated in general circulation magazines as well. The middle-class *McClure's* published articles about mining families faced with industrial disasters, or "working girls" tight budgets, accompanied by documentary-style photographs that lent credence to narratives of working-class adversity.⁹ The Bain and Brown Brothers photo agencies and news syndicates like E. W. Scripps's United Press (UP) covered major labor struggles, such as the 1910 strike of Philadelphia trolley workers, which led to a citywide general strike, or the 1912 "Bread and Roses" strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts. In the latter, immigrant workers led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) walked off their jobs after manufacturers cut their pay. Strikers achieved national attention and publicity helped lead them to victory. News photographs were published more, but they were more apt to appear in monthly or weekly magazines, such as the *Literary Digest*, *McClure's*, *American Magazine*, or *Collier's*, than in dailies like the *New York Times*.¹⁰

News photos did figure directly in some labor strikes. In New York City, the nation's publishing capital and its center of garment production, women workers struck in 1909 in the fantastic Uprising of the Twenty Thousand. Angered by long hours of toil, tinderbox factories, and limited pay, women organized the marginalized workers that male unionists neglected. At a Cooper Union mass meeting, Clara Lemlich demanded to speak as union and Socialist leaders dithered over how to meet working women's needs. Lemlich called for a general strike. In support were the "mink brigades" of elite women and middle-class reformers, suffragists, and women's club members, many from the Women's Trade Union League, who joined strikers on the picket line and bailed them out of jail. Immediate gains were ambiguous, as many went

back to work without union recognition, and union officials compromised on safety. Nonetheless, within a decade more than half of all women garment workers were unionists. Women's feat consolidated the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), a bulwark of industrial organizing in the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹

Photos of the uprising built women's confidence in the strike as a strategy and in themselves as political actors. As Nan Enstad posits, the "lady-like" dress of workers photographed by New York's papers echoed workingwomen's sense of "utopian entitlements." Pictures of women strikers allowed other garment workers to imagine themselves heroines in urban struggle—a struggle they might win. Of course, limited safety code enforcement led, less than two years later, to the infamous Triangle Fire, which left 146 men and women dead. Photos of the 1909 uprising and the 1911 fire appeared in local papers, and in national magazines such as *McClure's*, *Collier's*, and the *Literary Digest*. As Ellen Wiley Todd argues, though photos documented the travesty, their framing by news editors might have left some aghast and others transfixed by the spectacle of urban life.¹²

Just five years later, in 1914, photos played a new role in events surrounding the Ludlow Massacre. Here Colorado's United Mine Workers of America (UMW) struck in September of 1913 for union recognition, increased wages and the eight-hour day, as well as for miners' right to rent from whatever boardinghouse, or frequent any doctor, they chose. Their employer, the Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation (CFI) forced 10,000 miners out of company housing into tent colonies. By December the pro-union governor relented to business pressure; the National Guard secured nonunion labor for the corporation. Ongoing skirmishes between the Guard, company security, and strikers ensued. The following April, the National Guard fired point-blank on the tent colonies, and then burned down the tents, leaving thirteen women and children dead. Armed unionists fought back. In total, sixty-six strikers, scabs, security agents, and bystanders died in the protracted coal wars. Middle-class opinion journals criticized the CFI, and the leftist *Masses* offered dramatic illustrations such as John Sloan's cover drawing, which showed a child hanging limp from a miner's hand—in the other hand was a pistol pointing out of the drawing's frame, suggesting protracted turmoil.¹³

Bad publicity stemming from the Ludlow massacre led to two corporate strategies affecting labor. John D. Rockefeller Jr., the CFI's nominal head, commissioned the expertise of W. L. Mackenzie King, who orchestrated what became known as the Rockefeller Plan, or the Colorado Industrial Plan. The plan publicized employee representation plans (ERPs), in which companies organized in-house representation for their workers to prevent unionization. Rockefeller also procured Ivy Lee's services. This pioneering public relations specialist recommended the design of photo-laden posters and employee magazines promoting class harmony, which he produced for the CFI

by 1915. Many companies implemented this strategy. By the 1920s workers contributed their own domestic snapshots to house publications, as Elspeth Brown writes, so that laborers would envision themselves as loyal corporate family members.¹⁴

Even though news photography became far more common, contemporary visual culture should not be read back into the twentieth century's first decades. At that time photos were still seen in limited numbers, often appeared static, and had a smaller audience than they would have several decades later. Todd's study of the Triangle Fire's photographic coverage maintains that New York papers offered 900 photos weekly, which sounds substantial. Averaged out, however, an entire paper might offer only 10 photos daily. In contrast, today's *New York Times* offers over 50 images in the front section alone. Photos still appeared more in magazines than in papers—and a national mass audience was still in the future. In 1910, *Collier's*, at half a million subscribers, and *McClure's* at nearly that, had the most readers. Most publications had far fewer. Also, technology still limited what could be seen. According to a contemporary photo magazine, the Graflex captured motion up to "the speed . . . of an express train," yet most photos still looked motionless and staged. Indeed many were staged. The early professionalization of the field led many news events to be covered from a consistent, fixed vantage, in special areas set up for photographers. This was because changing film magazines and coordinating the aperture and exposure remained cumbersome. With the Graflex, "one little slip and [the] work is in vain." Although the Graflex was considered a "hand camera," photographers were often helped by assistants who toted their camera, plate holders, tripod, focusing cloth, and carrying case. As a result photographers came back to their agencies or papers with only a few images.¹⁵ And news photos recorded events as if rituals. As Peter Bacon Hales writes of news imagery from the Bain Agency, "An observer might be forgiven for seeing the entire urban scene as a synthesis of parades . . . labor parades, commemorative parades, protest parades."¹⁶ Photographs had an immobility suggesting timelessness, not fast-paced events.

Two innovations in news publishing, the rotogravure press and the tabloids, captured labor conflict anew in 1919 and 1920. In the rotogravure, half-toned photos were engraved on a thin copper cylinder that could be put through a high-speed press. Publishers made photograph-packed supplements from this technology, and these supplements typically appeared in a paper's Sunday edition.¹⁷ Fifty papers had them by World War I's end, with New York's *Mid-Week Pictorial* being the most popular. Rotogravures offered a limited national audience a weekly visual recapitulation of the news. The tabloids pushed photo-journalism in another direction. As Michael Carlebach notes, the tabloids were backbone to the 1920s' "spectacle and ballyhoo." Tabloids filled the front, back, and center pages with photographs. Their visual and rhetorical style paralleled the jangle of twentieth-century life.¹⁸