

Essay Reviews

Where Are the Organized Public Employees? The Absence of Public Employee Unionism from U.S. History Textbooks, and Why It Matters

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When my 16-year-old son decided to do a National History Day project on the 1968 march on Harrisburg by the Pennsylvania State Education Association that helped win collective bargaining rights for teachers and other public employees two years later, I did what any historian would do. I began to leaf through my U.S. history survey textbooks, in order to provide him with background material on the overall picture of the changes in labor relations and the union movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This background would serve as preparation for the more specialized secondary literature he would need to look at on teacher unionism, and then for the primary source materials on the March 4th demonstration itself. As I surveyed these textbooks I was at first surprised, and soon appalled, at the absence in virtually all survey textbooks, as well as in textbooks of the recent (post-1945) U.S., of any mention of the upsurge in public employee unionism in the 1960s and 1970s. This silence serves all of our students poorly, and reflects a lack of perspective about what has been one of the more important legacies of the 1960s to contemporary life.*

Numbers make the case for the significance of the rise of public employee unions, in both absolute terms and in their increased proportion of union membership as a whole. In 1955 public employee unions had about 400,000 members in total; that figure rose 10-fold, to over 4,000,000, in the 1970s.¹ Of course, this was during a period when public employment itself was growing quickly, but even so the percentage increase of unionization among government workers rose from 13% in 1960 to 39% in 1976.² There were quick spurts of growth during the 1960s: the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) more than doubled its membership in just two years, from 1967, when it had 196,000 members, to 1969, when it had 482,000 members.³ The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) grew from being the 19th largest AFL-CIO union in 1960 to being the sixth largest only a decade later, in 1970.⁴ The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) added only

*See Appendix for a list of U.S. history survey textbooks reviewed for this study.

¹Robert Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 163.

²Steve Babson, *The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877–Present* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 162.

³James Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 233–234.

⁴Sterling Spero and John Capozzola, *The Urban Community and Its Unionized Bureaucracies: Pressure Politics in Local Government Labor Relations* (New York: Dunellen Publishing, 1973), 19.

20,000 members during the 1950s, to reach 59,000 in 1960, but then more than tripled its membership to over 200,000 during the 1960s, when it engaged in several high-profile strikes. It reached 550,000 members in 1980. The National Education Association (NEA), which transformed itself during the 1960s from a professional organization to a union engaged in collective bargaining, already had 700,000 members in 1960, but grew 50% by the end of the decade.⁵

In the field of higher education, in 1966 fewer than a dozen colleges or universities had signed collective bargaining agreements. In 1975 over 400 institutions of higher education had such union contracts, the great majority covering public schools. By 1974, faculty unions, led by the NEA, the AFT, and the American Association of University Professors, had signed agreements representing about 91,000 college and university faculty, or one-fifth of all full-time faculty members.⁶ Union membership in the U.S. continued to rise until the early 1970s, and public employee unions accounted for most of this growth in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷

The opportunity for public employee unions to arise was rooted in major postwar transformations in American life. These changes were at the core of a dramatic increase in overall public sector employment. The number of public employees at all levels of government, 5.5 million in 1946, more than doubled to 11.6 million in 1967. While one can easily recognize that the growth of such federal programs as Social Security, Medicare, and interstate highway construction contributed to growth in employment, by far the largest share in this growth was at the state and local levels, in education, health care, welfare, sanitation, parks, and other programs.⁸ Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs funneled money through local governments, helping facilitate the rise of the AFSCME, in particular.⁹ The baby boom, and growth of the numbers of high-school graduates and college students in the 1950s and 1960s, required far more teachers in the public schools and then in the public universities. Primary school enrollment soared 50% between 1950 and 1960, from 20 million to 30 million. According to one account, in 1950 there were 1 million college students, but 4 million a decade later, and 8 million in 1970, with most of the increase in the public colleges and universities.¹⁰

⁵Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 277.

⁶Joseph Garbarino, *Faculty Bargaining: Change and Conflict* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 4, 87; *Faculty Bargaining in the Seventies*, ed. Terence Tice (Ann Arbor: Institute of Continuing Legal Education, 1973), 243–246; Frank Kemerer and J. Victory Baldrige, *Unions on Campus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), 1–3; G. Gregory Lozier and Kenneth Mortimer, *Anatomy of a Collective Bargaining Election in Pennsylvania's State-owned Colleges* (University Park: Center for the Study of Higher Education, 1974), 33–38. For recent studies of faculty unionism, see Gordon Arnold, *The Politics of Faculty Unionization: The Experience of Three New England Universities* (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 2000) and Philo Hutcheson, *A Professional Professoriate: Unionization, Bureaucratization, and the AAUP* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000).

⁷Jack Barbash, "Unions and Rights in the Space Age," in *The U.S. Department of Labor "History of the American Worker"*, ed. Richard Morris (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 248–269, at 261.

⁸These figures are from Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 164, and are similar to those in Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 208, though Bernstein uses slightly different beginning and ending dates for his comparison.

⁹Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, vol. 2, 598.

¹⁰Paul Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, 1st ed. (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1990), 1027, 1081, 1087. Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 825, gives different figures on college enrollment, but the trend is clear: 2.6 million in 1950, 3.2 million in 1960, and 7.5 million in 1970. On the significance

Public employee unions maintained increased membership even as rates in private sector unions declined sharply after 1976. Union membership in manufacturing declined from 27% in 1983 to 18% a decade later, with similar declines in construction, transportation, and mining. Meanwhile, unionization rates in government remained at about 38% during this difficult decade for the U.S. labor movement, as compared to about 10% in the private sector as a whole.¹¹ Put another way, at the time of the AFL-CIO merger in 1955, public employee unions made up only about 3% of the membership of the union federation. In 1991, by contrast, public employee unions comprised over 20% of AFL-CIO membership, approximately 2.9 million out of 14 million.¹² By the 1990s the NEA, which remained outside of the AFL-CIO, had become the largest union in the U.S., with about 2 million members—600,000 more members than the next largest union, the Teamsters.¹³

The consequences of this rise in public employee unionism for the U.S. labor movement go beyond simple numbers, however. Much of the increase in the membership, and leadership, of women and of African Americans in trade unions has occurred through public employee unions. Younger, independent, and innovative leadership in unions has often come in the most recently organized sectors. In this way several public employee unions in the last 30 years have led the way in challenging business as usual in the AFL-CIO.¹⁴ In the historic 1995 defeat of the “old guard” AFL-CIO leadership, it was the growing numbers and power of the AFSCME and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which by the 1990s were two of only four AFL-CIO unions with more than a million members each, in combination with liberal industrial unions such as the Autoworkers and the Machinists, that allowed the election of John Sweeney over Lane Kirkland.¹⁵ Thus, knowledge of the growth in public employee unionism in the 1960s is essential to understanding trends in the union movement since that time.

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of the growth of public institutions of higher education in the 1960s to faculty unionism, see Garbarino, *Faculty Bargaining*, 1–4.

¹¹Daniel Nelson, *Shifting Fortunes: The Rise and Decline of American Labor, from the 1820s to the Present* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1997), 150–151.

¹²These percentages were derived from the figures on individual union membership and overall AFL-CIO membership provided in Courtney Gifford, *Directory of U.S. Labor Organizations, 1992–93 Edition* (Washington: Bureau of National Affairs, 1992), 57–59. The figures for public employee unions include mainly the AFSCME, the AFGE, the AFT, the postal unions, and unions of police officers and fire fighters, along with half of the membership of the Service Employees International Union. It does not include the portions of the Teamsters, Transport Workers, Laborers, and other primarily private sector unions which have organized some public employees.

¹³Gifford, *Directory of U.S. Labor Organizations*, 42.

¹⁴Green, *The World of the Worker*, 233–235; Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 164, and Ronald Filippelli, *Labor in the USA: A History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 271, all make these points. Filippelli includes a profile of the AFSCME’s Jerry Wurf to demonstrate the greater independence of many public employee union leaders. One may note that the AFT, dominated in a very top-down fashion by Albert Shanker from 1974 to 1997, is in part an exception to this pattern.

¹⁵Harold Meyerson, “A Second Chance: The New AFL-CIO and the Prospective Revival of American Labor,” in *Not Your Father’s Union Movement: Inside the AFL-CIO*, ed. Jo-Ann Mort (New York: Verso, 1998), 1–26, especially at 4, 8–9; Taylor Dark, “Debating Decline: The 1995 Race for the AFL-CIO Presidency,” *Labor History* 40 (1999), 323–343, at 328, where Dark writes: “AFSCME President Gerald McEntee was perhaps the most important single figure behind the effort to remove Kirkland.” Approximately half of the SEIU’s members work in the public sector, and half in the private sector, according to Meyerson. Note, however, that the AFT, the AFGE, and the postal unions supported Kirkland, while the only other major public employee union to support Sweeney was the Firefighters Association.

Attention to changes in the laws regarding public employee unions in the 1960s is also key to understanding the emergence of such unionism and the long-term evolution of U.S. labor law. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, sponsored by Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York, is, the basis of contemporary U.S. labor law, and all textbooks note its significance. But the NLRA explicitly excluded several categories of employees, including agricultural laborers, and public workers at all levels. One cannot make sense of the rise in public employee unionism without noting President Kennedy's 1962 Executive Order 10988. The order provided for a procedure for union recognition in the federal sector, albeit with collective bargaining limited to non-wage issues and without the right to strike. This opportunity, long sought by the AFL and CIO, had been the subject of a bill introduced in the House of Representatives for over a decade by George Rhodes of Pennsylvania. Rhodes was from the labor stronghold of Reading, and had been a union printer and then the editor of a labor newspaper, the *New Era*, before being elected to Congress.¹⁶

Kennedy's executive order paved the way for the explosive growth of the AFGE and the continued expansion of the postal unions. Executive Order 10988 also helped set in motion a spectacular wave of debates about similar policies at the state and local levels. These issues were among the most volatile in state politics in the 1960s and 1970s. While only Wisconsin provided for collective bargaining rights for public school teachers before Kennedy's executive order, by the end of the 1970s 29 states had such policies. Half of these states enacted this legislation in the turbulent years from 1969 to 1971.¹⁷

Again, there are larger issues and trends at stake here besides legislative history. Labor historian Irving Bernstein has recently argued that among JFK's achievements was that he "updated the New Deal," and this executive order constitutes an important part of his case.¹⁸ One need not fully agree with Bernstein to see the significance of this issue for an evaluation of Kennedy's domestic policies.¹⁹ An evaluation of Kennedy's

¹⁶The best discussion of the background and parameters of Executive Order 10988 is in Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 204–217. On the longer history of federal employee unions, see: Murray Nesbitt, *Labor Relations in the Federal Government Service* (Washington: Bureau of National Affairs, 1976). See also: "The Labor Month in Review," *Monthly Labor Review* 85 (February 1962), III–IV; Michael Moskow, J. Joseph Loewenberg, and Edward Koziara, *Collective Bargaining in Public Employment* (New York: Random House, 1970), chapter 2; Jack Steiber, "Executive Order 10988," in *Collective Bargaining for Public Employees*, ed. Herbert Marx, Jr (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1969), 134–139. For the text of Executive Order 10988, see *Collective Bargaining in the Public Service*, ed. Daniel Kruger and Charles Schmidt, Jr (New York: Random House, 1969), 77–87.

On Rhodes, see also: "55 in House Tests in Pennsylvania," *New York Times*, 21 October 1962, p. 79. While the 1960 Democratic Party platform called for strengthening of collective bargaining, especially through the repeal of those sections of the Taft–Hartley Act which allowed state "right-to-work" laws, there was nothing explicitly in the platform on the coverage of federal employees under labor legislation. See Donald Bruce Johnson, ed., *National Party Platforms, Volume II—1960–1976*, revd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 574–600, especially 583–585. President Richard Nixon strengthened Kennedy's policy with his own Executive Order 11491 in 1969, which provided for binding arbitration if requested by either a union or a government agency. See "Federal Employees," *Monthly Labor Review* 92 (December 1969), 70.

¹⁷Figures compiled from descriptions of state laws in Robert Doherty, "Public Education," in *Collective Bargaining: Contemporary American Experience*, ed. Gerald Somers (Madison: Industrial Relations Research Association, 1980), 487–552, at 515–520.

¹⁸Bernstein, *Promises Kept*, has a chapter titled "Updating the New Deal."

¹⁹For a critique of Bernstein's thesis, see Nelson Lichtenstein, "Irving Bernstein's New Frontier," *Labor History* 37 (Winter 1995–1996), 90–97.

achievements is an important aspect of all textbooks on U.S. history, and an issue with which students of recent U.S. history must engage.

The relationship between political leaders and social movements can be examined through this legislation, just as it has long been an interpretative issue in discussions of the NLRA and the rise of the CIO. In this regard it is more than coincidental that the local enabling regulations which placed collective bargaining for public employees on the national agenda came from the executive order in New York City in 1958, issued by Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr, the son of the author of the NLRA. One would think that textbook writers would love that family connection, which at first glance would indicate that the legislation itself was the decisive variable. But the most comprehensive history of the growth of the AFSCME's New York District Council 37 emphasizes that Wagner wrote the order after years of pressure by city workers. Part of his motivation was to appeal to liberal voters because of a feud with the Democratic Party machine. Implementation of the order required enormous pressure by the labor movement, including strikes by teachers and other city workers.²⁰ One analysis of the implementation of collective bargaining provisions for teachers around the country emphasizes the successful New York City teachers' strike of 1960, predating Kennedy's order, as a stimulus for the demands of other teachers for collective bargaining rights, and for the flurry of state legislation over the next 15 years.²¹ Labor economist and union consultant Jack Barbash has concluded that "These encouraging laws must have tapped deep reserves of sentiment to have evoked such volatile responses," and "Some states enacted their laws under the forced draft of employee militancy."²²

The rise of public employee unionism is a dramatic story, even recognized as such at the time, especially in the case of teachers. Early strikes, such as in New York City, gave way to what *U.S. News & World Report* in September 1967 called a "rash" of teacher strikes across the nation.²³ In the first three months of 1968 there were strikes which closed schools in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Washington, DC, Albuquerque, Manchester (New Hampshire), and Montgomery County (Maryland). A state-wide strike by over 25,000 of Florida's 60,000 teachers lasted over three weeks and affected over 500,000 students. Most of these strikes were illegal, and often led to the jailing of teachers' union leaders. In Pittsburgh, there were mass arrests of picketing teachers—when they could be found. As one newspaper put it, "Pittsburgh teachers played a hide-and-seek game with sheriff's deputies, leaving a school when the deputies arrived and rushing to picket at another school." Thus, teachers engaged in a form of civil disobedience to win their demands for union recognition and higher pay, for lower class sizes and more conducive conditions for student learning, and, in the case of San Francisco, for a more relevant curriculum. A dinner honoring four imprisoned teachers'

²⁰Jewel and Bernard Bellush, *Union Power and New York: Victor Gotbaum and District Council 37* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 47–80, especially 58–59, 66–70; see also: Mark Maier, *City Unions: Managing Discontent in New York City* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), chapter 4; Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 166. Collective bargaining for city workers began in Philadelphia even before Mayor Wagner's New York City executive order; see Spero and Capozzola, *The Urban Community and Its Unionized Bureaucracies*, 41–42.

²¹Doherty, "Public Education," 514, 521.

²²Barbash, "Unions and Rights in the Space Age," 262. For a strong argument that the actions of workers rather than changes in laws were key in building public employee unions, see Michael Goldfield, "Public Sector Union Growth and Public Policy," *Policy Studies Journal* 18 (Winter 1989–1990), 404–420.

²³"Back of the Rash of Teachers' Strikes," *U.S. News & World Report* 63, 18 September 1967, p. 54.

union leaders who began a labor movement campaign to lobby for changes in state laws underscored this reliance on civil disobedience.²⁴

The Florida strike was particularly noteworthy, although it could not be called a success. With the benefit of hindsight, we see that this strike illustrated the process by which the NEA was changed from a professional association to a trade union. The NEA opposed teachers' strikes at the beginning of 1968, so to avoid the appearance of a strike, the Florida teachers were instructed to submit their "resignations" to their local school boards. The tactic backfired in a number of ways: for example, it took months after the strike ended before some local school boards hired back their teachers. Despite the setback, the NEA convention that July moved to endorse strikes when necessary, and to call for legalization of teacher strikes, extending its new-found militancy.²⁵ In 1968 the American Nurses Association, several postal unions, and the International Association of Fire Fighters also eliminated strike prohibition clauses in their constitutions.²⁶

These teacher strikes, and strike threats which led to agreements, were not marginal affairs in the late 1960s. They garnered enormous public attention, because they involved parents, who would have to find other arrangements for their children during a strike, because they involved local and state taxation, because they were illegal, and because they were so unprecedented. *Life* magazine ran a photo essay under the headline, "The shock of public strikes," with a subheading, "Ford [strike] was expected—but teachers, firemen, cops!" The photographs showed community support for striking teachers in the union town of Gary, Indiana, but also angry mothers confronting strikers in a Detroit suburb.²⁷ The national PTA went on record opposing teacher strikes, and observers lamented the decline in teacher participation in PTAs as involvement in teacher unions increased.²⁸

It was not just liberal publications such as the *Nation* which had headlines like "Teachers' revolt," but also *Look* ("Our angry teachers"), *Time* ("Fighting mood"), *Newsweek* ("Teacher power"), *Business Week* ("Teachers get militant"), and *Fortune* ("Those newly militant government workers").²⁹ *U.S. News* published a scorecard for

²⁴Information in this paragraph is from the voluminous coverage of teachers' strikes in the *New York Times* during the first few months of 1968. See, e.g., the following articles: 30 January, p. 29; 2 February, p. 17; 6 February, p. 36; 10 February, p. 20; 17 February, p. 60; 18 February, p. 29; 20 February, p. 1; 23 February, p. 18; 1 March, p. 25; 6 March, p. 20; 7 March, p. 49 (on the "hide-and-seek game" in Pittsburgh); 8 March, p. 11; 30 May, p. 33 (on the fund-raising campaign).

²⁵The Florida strike received extensive coverage in the *New York Times* in 1968. See, e.g.: 20 February, p. 1; 21 February, p. 33; 25 February, section IV, p. 11; 17 March, p. 37; 7 July, p. 42; 7 July, section IV, p. 9. For a brief discussion of the tactical problems of the NEA in this strike and the problems caused by its self-conception as a "professional association," see Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 229–231. For a contemporary thoughtful overview, see: James Cass, "Politics and Education in the Sunshine State," *Saturday Review*, 20 April 1968, pp. 63–65, 76–79. For an account by a leader of the rival AFT, see David Selden, *The Teacher Rebellion* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1985), 180–183. For one analysis of why the strike failed, see James Sullivan, "The Florida Teacher Walkout in the Political Transition of 1968," in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940–1995*, ed. Robert Zieger (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 205–229.

²⁶Everett Kassalow, "A New Kind of Unionist," in *Collective Bargaining for Public Employees*, ed. Herbert Marx, Jr (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1969), 15–20, at 18; Ronald Filippelli, "Postal Strike of 1970," in *Labor Conflict in the United States: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Filippelli (New York: Garland, 1990), 423.

²⁷"The Shock of Public Strikes," *Life* 63, 22 September 1967, pp. 30D–34.

²⁸*New York Times*, 26 May 1968, p. 74.

²⁹"Teachers' Revolt," *The Nation*, 25 September 1967, p. 260; "Our Angry Teachers," *Look*, 3 September 1968, pp. 64–66; "Fighting Mood," *Time*, 8 March 1968, p. 43; "Teacher Power,"

its readers to keep track: "Teacher strikes across the nation: who wants what." Their headline writers, evidently taxed by so many stories on the same issue, recycled in 1968 the same metaphor of disease they had employed the previous fall: "The coming rash of teacher strikes."³⁰ The women's magazines could not ignore an issue of such importance to their readers, so *Redbook* explained "Why teachers are striking," and *Good Housekeeping* ran a poll of its readers on whether teachers should have the right to strike.³¹

The tactics and timing of these strikes and union organizing drives show the influence of the civil rights movement, the student movement, the feminist movement, and the questioning of the established order normally associated with the 1960s. The connections became explicit at times: the AFT and the AFSCME were early and enthusiastic backers of the civil rights movement in the South, the Reverend Martin Luther King endorsed the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers during its representation election in 1965, and the AFSCME's 1965 campaign to organize the predominantly African American municipal hospital workers in New York City "meld[ed] the languages of civil rights and unionism," as historian Joshua Freeman has written.³²

The critique popularized by the New Left and the counterculture of increased workplace alienation was noted even at the time in discussions of the rise of teacher unionism.³³ It became especially prominent in comment on the disruptive, and again illegal, national wildcat strike of postal workers in 1970, which was led in several cities by young African American workers, many of whom had at least some college education.³⁴ The rapid rise in women's paid employment during the 1960s and 1970s, and the development of a new feminist movement, helped push some public sector unions to directly address women's concerns in the workplace. One scholar has called this "social movement unionism," at its peak in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁵

Footnote 29 continued

Newsweek, 18 September 1967, p. 65; "Teachers Get Militant," *Business Week*, 17 August 1968, p. 100; "Those Newly Militant Government Workers," *Fortune*, August 1968, pp. 104–107.

³⁰"Teacher Strikes across the Nation: Who Wants What," *U.S. News & World Report*, 11 March 1968, p. 10; "The Coming Rash of Teacher Strikes," *U.S. News* 65, 2 September 1968, pp. 41–42.

³¹"Why Teachers Are Striking," *Redbook*, March 1969, p. 67; "Should Teachers Have the Right to Strike?," *Good Housekeeping*, April 1969, p. 12. These two articles are among the documents reprinted in *Collective Bargaining for Public Employees*, ed. Marx, published that same year.

³²Mark McCulloch, "Glory Days: 1941–1969," in *Keystone of Democracy: A History of Pennsylvania Workers*, ed. Howard Harris and Perry Blatz (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1999), 213–256, at 250; Joshua Freeman, *Working-class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2000), 208.

³³See, e.g., an analysis of the Florida strike quoting a federal mediator who said that teachers had begun to feel like assembly-line workers, in *New York Times*, 17 March 1968, p. 37.

³⁴For near-contemporary accounts of the postal strike by labor historians, see: Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972), 271–274; Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 310–312; Aronowitz and Brecher, "The Postal Strike," in *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements*, ed. Brecher et al. (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1975), 28–39; Stephen Shannon, "Work Stoppage in Government: The Postal Strike of 1970," *Monthly Labor Review* 101, July 1978, pp. 14–22. For a more recent scholarly account, see John Walsh and Garth Mangum, *Labor Struggles in the Post Office: From Selective Lobbying to Collective Bargaining* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1992). For comments on workplace alienation in white-collar jobs in a report commissioned by the Nixon administration, see *Work in America: Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), 38–40.

³⁵Paul Johnston, *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1994); Deborah Bell, "Unionized Women in State and Local Government," in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*, ed. Ruth Milkman (New York: Routledge, 1985),

The growth of public employee unionism did not always merge seamlessly with other social movements of the time, however, which in turn highlights the national importance of one key local strike. The New York City teachers strike of 1968—the “Ocean Hill–Brownsville” strike—was directed against demands by African American groups for “community control” of the schools. This bitter dispute, which still engenders passionate debate among participants and historians, indisputably had several long-term outcomes which are important to U.S. society as a whole. It placed great stress on the labor–civil rights coalition, and it exacerbated conflict between African Americans and Jews, as the majority of New York City teachers and of the union leadership at the time were Jewish. More broadly, it exposed fissures among Democratic Party constituencies. These issues are at the heart of any understanding of American politics and social thought from the 1960s to the present. The Ocean Hill–Brownsville strike helped push the AFT to the right, especially after the accession of the New York City strike leader, Albert Shanker, to the national AFT presidency in 1974. This in turn had an important impact on the trajectory of AFL–CIO politics in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁶

Public employee unions continued to exert their power in the decades following the 1960s. The first state-wide strike of state employees, in Pennsylvania in 1975, occurred during a renewed strike wave around the nation. Public employees were angered by inflation and government cutbacks, but with the fiscal crises of the 1970s and 1980s in states and localities, the gains of public employee unions came more slowly.³⁷ Many Americans blamed public employees and their unions for rising taxes and urban problems. Beginning with the Proposition 13 movement in California in the 1970s, the “tax revolt” formed an important base for Reagan’s rise to the presidency, and was in part a backlash against the gains of public employee unions.³⁸

The Reagan administration symbolically inaugurated the open assault by corporate America on trade unionism in the 1980s with the firing of the striking air traffic controllers, the federal employees who were members of PATCO, in 1981. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the significance of Reagan’s harsh response to the PATCO strikers without making the comparison to the equally illegal strike 11 years before by 200,000 postal workers. This earlier action resulted in major economic gains for the strikers and the government was unable to enforce anti-strike laws during the strike.

Despite the harsher environment of the later 1970s and 1980s, teachers’ unions, in

Footnote 35 continued

280–299. For more critical interpretations of public employee union policies on women members, see Norma Riccucci, *Women, Minorities, and Unions in the Public Sector* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), and Wayne Urban, “Courting the Woman Teacher: The National Education Association, 1917–1970,” *History of Education Quarterly* 41 (2001), 139–166.

³⁶For one highly critical account of Shanker’s leadership, see Maier, *City Unions*, chapter 8. For a brief, recent overview of the 1968 strike, see Joshua Freeman, *Working-class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2000), 217–227. For a note on the conflict between police unions and African American communities in New York City, see Freeman, 215–217.

³⁷Howard Harris, “Hard Times and New Hopes, 1970–1997,” in *Keystone of Democracy: A History of Pennsylvania Workers*, 275–325, at 291–293. See also contemporary coverage in the *New York Times*, such as 2 July 1975, p. 65, and 6 July 1975, section IV, p. 1. On the causes of the 1974–1975 public employee strike wave, see: Barbash, “Unions and Rights in the Space Age,” 262; Filippelli, *Labor in the USA*, 271–273; and Green, *The World of the Worker*, 235.

³⁸See, e.g.: Maier, *City Unions*, chapter 11; Johnston, *Success While Others Fail*, 3, 37–39, and *passim*. For a poorly argued “scholarly” case that public employee unionism was responsible for these fiscal crises, see Leo Troy, *The New Unionism in the New Society: Public Sector Unions in the Redistributive State* (Fairfax: George Mason University Press, 1994), especially 147–155.

particular, developed impressive reputations for their political power, and became important factors in national and local elections. The alliance of the Democratic Party with the NEA and the AFT, and the equally strong denunciation of these unions by the Republicans as “special interests,” became major focal points of the presidential elections of 1976, 1984, and 1996. One might almost say that the attitudes toward the public employee unions encapsulated the rhetorical divide between Democrats, who claimed that government had a positive role to play in American domestic life, and Republicans, whose public posture was that government itself was the problem in U.S. society. Highly visible political activism in the public employee unions can also be compared to a major issue in late 19th century politics: civil service reform and the demand to prohibit government workers from engaging in political activities.

The rise of public employee unionism, then, is important in its own right as a significant transformation in U.S. labor relations, and as one aspect of recent changes in the U.S. workforce and in the labor movement. It emerged in part because of the baby boom, and forms part of the upsurge of social movements of the 1960s, two of the standard topics of U.S. history textbooks in the postwar era. Because public employee unionization resulted in permanent organizations, one could easily argue that this movement has had a lasting impact equivalent to the other upsurges of the 1960s. In its relation to changes in the nature of the U.S. state in the postwar era, public employee unionism has been at the center of debate in recent decades about the state in U.S. society.

In the spirit of “internationalizing” American history, one might add that historians have long recognized the impact of the European New Left on the workers’ uprisings in 1968 and 1969, especially in France and Italy. Moreover, European New Left theorists, such as Andre Gorz, whose influence extended to the U.S., emphasized the need for the defense, expansion, and democratization of the public sector, including higher education, as a major component of a strategy for radical change.³⁹ Comparative studies of the 1960s should begin to see some commonalities between the U.S. and Europe, not merely differences. For a later period, the thorny issue of public employee strikes can also be placed in transnational perspective, as Reagan fired the PATCO workers as he lionized striking public employees in Poland’s Solidarity movement.⁴⁰

So how do U.S. history textbooks treat this important aspect of our recent history? Of the 12 college textbooks reviewed, only two—the American Social History Project’s *Who Built America?*, and David Goldfield et al.’s *The American Journey*—offer any substantive discussion of public employee unionism. Only one other textbook, Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, even mentions the growth of public employee unionism in the 1960s and 1970s.

The coverage of the post-World War II labor movement in general in most textbooks is superficial at best.⁴¹ There is generally discussion of the anti-union Taft–Hartley Act of 1947, the merger of the AFL and the CIO as part of a description of labor at the

³⁹Andre Gorz, *Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal*, trans. Martin Nicolaus and Victoria Ortiz (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), especially 175–179.

⁴⁰Nesbitt, *Labor Relations in the Federal Government Service*, 368–374, contrasts the American prohibition on public employee strikes with the right of such employees to strike in Canada and many western European nations.

⁴¹Dorothy Sue Cobble and Alice Kessler-Harris, “The New Labor History in American History Textbooks,” *Journal of American History* 79 (1993), 1534–1545, which reviewed seven textbooks from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, make this point; the newer editions of these textbooks exhibit few improvements.

height of its power, and a few paragraphs of text or a graph to show the decline in organized American workers from the 1960s to the present. Exceptions to this neglect are Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union, sometimes with a prominent photograph or as a special feature, and a reference to the crushing of the PATCO strike, often as prelude to a brief discussion of the decline of organized labor in the 1980s. Several textbooks discuss changes in the gender makeup of the labor force and the decline of manufacturing, but only in a few cases does this coverage note growth in public employment, let alone growth in public employee unionism.

All textbooks, of course, include some discussion of Kennedy's domestic policies, but none mention his executive order encouraging collective bargaining on the federal level, or the related legal changes at the state and local levels. Chapters on the social movements of the 1960s follow a fairly standard progression in covering the civil rights and student movements, the New Left, counterculture, and the feminist, Latino, Native American, and gay and lesbian movements.⁴² Some textbooks also have sections on the environmental and consumer movements. Only *Who Built America?* relates these social movements to the unrest among workers, including public employees, in the late 1960s.⁴³

A few specific examples will make the omissions clearer. Most textbooks have no entry in their index for the AFT, the AFSCME, the AFGE, or postal unions, and no discussion of these unions or workers in their pages. Indeed, the only textbook to mention the AFT specifically is *Who Built America?*⁴⁴ Others mention the NEA, or the teaching profession, but in the context of the Progressive Era, not later.⁴⁵ The last mention of the AFL or the CIO in Martin et al., *America and Its Peoples*, concerns the strike wave of 1946 and the Taft-Hartley Act, and the only subsequent references to the labor movement are about the UFW and PATCO.⁴⁶

Of those textbooks which do discuss the labor movement after 1960, the typical analysis focuses solely on decline. Norton et al., *A People and a Nation*, describes the power of unionized blue-collar workers in post-World War II economic prosperity and includes a brief section on "Hard times for labor unions" in its chapter on "The end of the postwar boom." Norton and her co-authors note the membership losses of unions due to the decline of heavy industry, and they add that membership drives in "the high-growth electronic and service sectors of the economy were failing."⁴⁷ Henretta et al., *America's History*, which in general is quite strong on social and demographic trends, and includes among its co-authors the distinguished labor historian David Brody, notes the decline in the unionized proportion of the workforce, especially after 1975, due to plant closings, and the growth of employment in the

⁴²For one of the more extensive examples of this narrative, see Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 883–888, 892–903.

⁴³For a review of the treatment of the 1960s in survey textbooks, which points to certain overall patterns and striking omissions, but which does not address the issue of the labor movement, see Van Gosse, "Consensus and Contradiction in Textbook Treatments of the Sixties," *Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 658–669.

⁴⁴*Who Built America?* (1992), 602; *Who Built America?* (2000), 669–670. The later edition adds a photograph of an empty classroom during the strike, but with an inadequate—even confusing—caption.

⁴⁵See, e.g.: Brinkley, *American History*, 725; Divine et al., *America Past and Present*, 692; Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 620; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 571, 623; Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 672.

⁴⁶Martin et al., *America and Its Peoples*, 777, 898, 900–901, 921.

⁴⁷Norton et al., *A People and a Nation*, 810, 928. For briefer but similar coverage, see Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1615.

service sector.⁴⁸ No one will deny this decline in union membership and power, but accuracy demands some mention of the major areas of trade union growth which have countered, or partially offset, the overall trend.

Part of the reason for the seeming invisibility of public employees appears to be the overly broad use in many textbooks of the term “service sector.” This term seems to cover everything from government employment and the non-profit hospital and health care industry, where labor unions have had reasonable success, to the tourism and financial industries, which have indeed been far more resistant to unions.

Boyer et al., in *The Enduring Vision*, combine this decline motif with an explicit failure to recognize recent trends and legal changes. They attribute the decline of AFL-CIO influence beginning in the 1950s to complacency with success, the loss of blue-collar jobs, and the growth of employment in the “service sector and in public employment, which banned collective bargaining by labor unions.”⁴⁹ Surely with such a statement these authors have an obligation to note the opening of collective bargaining to public employees in the 1960s.

Nash and Jeffrey note that the trade union movement stalled in the 1960s, explaining that: “Unions tried to expand their base by reaching out to new groups—less skilled minority workers and white-collar, service-oriented employees—but these groups proved difficult to organize.” They briefly mention the growth in public employment, but not of unionization in this sector. Thus, when Nash and Jeffrey later state that Reagan’s firing of the PATCO workers was, in part, a message to public employees to be less militant, its impact is less clear than it might be, since readers had not been informed of the earlier rise of government unions and strikes.⁵⁰

Perhaps textbook authors believe that coverage of the United Farm Workers Union’s efforts to organize grape and lettuce workers, and the nation-wide boycott of non-union produce that their efforts sparked, adequately conveys the relationship of social movements of the 1960s to labor issues. As one who spent many Saturday mornings during high school and college urging shoppers to boycott grapes and lettuce, I welcome this space and respect which textbooks devote to this movement. But while the UFW mobilized millions of Americans in the 1960s and 1970s to support its efforts, the public employee unions enrolled, and continue to enroll, millions of members in their ranks. An objective evaluation would surely conclude that public employee strikes had as much of an impact on the lives of Americans as did the UFW’s strikes and boycotts, and that public employee unions have left an imprint on U.S. society at least as significant as that of the UFW.⁵¹ Moreover, if one notes, as several textbooks do, that part of the struggle of the UFW was to overcome through legislation the exclusion of agricultural workers from the National Labor Relations Act, then it is just as important to note the legal changes in the status of public employees. One may speculate that coverage of the UFW in the context of the emergence of the 1960s Chicano movement,

⁴⁸Henretta et al., *America’s History*, 905, 983–985, 1017.

⁴⁹Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 826, 946.

⁵⁰Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 846, 999–1004, especially 1001. Nash and Jeffrey include a graph, at 1001, which illustrates the decline in union membership as a percentage of the workforce, but which visually overstates its case by using a baseline of 14%, instead of a baseline of 0%, so that in 1997 it looks as if union membership has virtually disappeared.

⁵¹In addition to Martin et al., *America and Its Peoples*, mentioned above, textbooks which give prominent coverage to the UFW but nothing to public employee unionism, and virtually nothing to the trade union movement as a whole after 1960, include: Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1452–1453; Brinkley, *American History*, 1070; Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 1045–1046; and Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 1066–1067.

coupled with the virtual absence of public employee unionism in the textbooks, demonstrates that advocates of ethnic inclusivity in U.S. history have had greater success than advocates of attention to issues of class.

There is one additional place in which several textbooks allude to public employee unionism, though the connection is not as explicit as it could be. Most textbooks discuss the assassination of Martin Luther King in Memphis, and a few note that he was there to support striking sanitation workers. Indeed, the statement in Roark et al., *The American Promise*, that King was in Memphis “to support a strike of municipal garbage workers” is the only reference in that textbook to public employee unionism. But only *Who Built America?* specifically identifies the union—the AFSCME—which mounted the organizing drive. Readers of other textbooks would not associate this sanitation strike with the wave of public employee unionization in progress across the country in the spring of 1968. Indeed, readers of some textbooks could be forgiven if they did not realize that these sanitation workers were public employees.⁵² This incident could be a good opportunity for more textbooks to explore the relationship between the civil rights movement and the growth of public sector unionization. It also serves as a vivid reminder that many public employees who joined unions were not white-collar workers, but manual laborers. As Sterling Spero and John Capozzola have noted, the AFSCME organized workers from “A” to “Z”—architects to zookeepers—but at the end of the 1960s its membership was 70% blue-collar.⁵³ The entry of African American workers into low-wage public employment in Memphis and elsewhere may also be related to the mechanization of cotton production by the 1950s and the beginnings of deindustrialization of Northern—and some Southern—cities in the 1960s.⁵⁴

There are other themes which some textbooks raise which represent missed opportunities for discussion of public employee unions. Boyer et al. refer to the impact of the baby boom on school enrollment, and discuss the dramatic rise in college enrollment in the 1950s and 1960s. But these authors do not connect these trends to the growth in public school or public higher-education employment and to the unionization of schoolteachers, college faculty, and other education-related staff.⁵⁵ Faragher et al. have a particularly good discussion of the social programs of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, but they do not make the connection to the expansion of public sector jobs and unionization.⁵⁶ Roark et al., who have one of the more analytical discussions of the

⁵²Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 1043; Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, 584. For weak coverage and connections here, see: Nash and Jeffrey, *The American People*, 958, and Martin et al., *America and Its Peoples*, 887. For better coverage, which at least notes that King was in Memphis to support a strike by sanitation workers, see: Brinkley, *American History*, 1059–1060, Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 894, and Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 1092. On the Memphis strike, see: J. Edwin Stanfield, “In Memphis: More than a Garbage Strike,” in *Black Workers: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Phillip Foner and Ronald Lewis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 585–603 (a contemporary source); Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand: Memphis, the 1968 Strike and Martin Luther King* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989); “At the River I Stand” (film), dir. David Appleby, Allison Graham, and Steven Ross (Memphis State University, 1993); Michael Honey, “Martin Luther King, Jr, the Crisis of the Black Working Class, and the Memphis Sanitation Strike,” in *Southern Labor in Transition*, ed. Zieger, 146–175; Steve Estes, “‘I AM A MAN’: Race, Masculinity, and the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike,” *Labor History* 41 (2000), 153–170.

⁵³Sterling and Capozzola, *The Urban Community and Its Unionized Bureaucracies*, 18.

⁵⁴See Honey, “Martin Luther King, Jr, the Crisis of the Black Working Class, and the Memphis Sanitation Strike,” for a persuasive—and deeply moving—argument about the political and economic conditions which underlay this strike.

⁵⁵Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision* (1990), 1027, 1081; Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision* (2000) 830.

⁵⁶Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 888–892.

achievements and problems of the social movements of the 1960s, could strengthen their worthwhile discussion of “Black nationalism and the end of the civil rights coalition” with a paragraph on the 1968 Ocean Hill–Brownsville strike.⁵⁷ Henretta et al. discuss the problems women have faced in the labor force in recent decades, but fail to note that the major efforts to increase women’s wages relative to men’s, especially in the movement in the 1980s for “comparable worth,” have been pressed by public employee unions.⁵⁸ Roark et al., in a section on feminist organizations founded in the 1970s, assert that “blue-collar women organized the National Coalition of Labor Union Women [CLUW].” At the CLUW’s founding convention, attended by members of 58 national unions, observers noted that delegations from the AFSCME, the AFT, the AFGE, and the APWU were as numerous as those from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the United Auto Workers, the Meat Cutters, and the Teamsters.⁵⁹

Divine et al. mention the organization of the NEA as part of the Progressive Era’s drive toward professionalization in many fields, and could easily return later to note the stresses and strains on the organization in the 1960s and 1970s as it redefined itself as a trade union.⁶⁰ Norton et al. are among the authors who note that in the postwar economic boom industrial workers began to enjoy a “middle-class” lifestyle, an observation which could easily lead to a discussion of the growing interest among “middle-class” professionals in a working-class institution, the trade union. Indeed, some of the best recent work on professional groups which have embraced unionization, such as Daniel Walkowitz’s study of social workers, Marjorie Murphy’s and Wayne Urban’s accounts of teacher unions, and Susan Leighow’s analysis of nurses, note the complex relationship between class and professional status in modern America.⁶¹

Who Built America? is a survey textbook with an explicit focus on the role of “working people” in American life, so it is not surprising that it would have the most complete coverage of public sector unionism, including its impact on shoring up overall labor union membership.⁶² This textbook describes the militancy of teachers and postal workers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, placing them in the context of the other social movements of the era. Noting that most of these strikes were illegal, the authors comment that “public-sector unionism had the flavor of an underground movement, a

⁵⁷Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 1039–1043.

⁵⁸Henretta et al., *America’s History*, 983–984; see also Norton et al., *A People and a Nation*, 4th ed. (1994), 1047, for similar treatment. On public employee unions and the “comparable worth” movement, see: Bell, “Unionized women in state and local government”; Riccucci, *Women, Minorities, and Unions in the Public Sector*, chapter 6; Johnston, *Success While Others Fail*, *passim*.

⁵⁹Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 1100; Patricia Cayo Sexton, “Workers (Female) Arise!,” *Dissent* 21 (1974), 380–395.

⁶⁰Divine et al., *America Past and Present*, 692.

⁶¹Norton et al., *A People and a Nation*, 4th ed. (1994), 927–928; Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 1st ed. (1990), 1022; Daniel Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*; Wayne Urban, *Gender, Race and the National Education Association: Professionalism and Its Limitations* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2000); Susan Leighow, *Nurses’ Questions/Women’s Questions: The Impact of the Demographic Revolution and Feminism on U.S. Working Women, 1946–1986* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

⁶²Joshua Freeman, the lead author of several chapters in the 1992 edition, has written a major study of an important blue-collar municipal union, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933–1966* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), and more recently authored an account of the postwar New York City labor movement which gives major attention to municipal unionism, *Working-class New York*. Nelson Lichtenstein, the lead author of the revised edition, has written a biography of a major figure in the post-World War II labor movement: *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

consciousness-changing social crusade.” This textbook does not simply celebrate the achievements of these unions, however. It discusses the Ocean Hill–Brownsville strike (the only textbook to mention it), with its legacy of distrust between teachers’ union activists and many African Americans. It also devotes space to the impact of the fiscal crises of the 1970s on public workers and their unions, especially in New York City.⁶³

With its focus on social movements, however, *Who Built America?* neglects to note the legal changes which were essential for the institutionalization of the public union upsurge. Overall, other textbook authors would do well to study the ways *Who Built America?* covers this issue. Professors using other texts should consult *Who Built America?* for material for lectures and discussion questions on public sector unionism.

Some might object that textbooks are already overcrowded, that authors cannot include everything. These are important considerations, of course, but certainly in some textbooks space does not seem to be the main concern. Brinkley’s *American History*, which has not a word as far as I could see on public employee unionism, devotes 10 pages to the music of the 1950s and 1960s and the development of television.⁶⁴ These are important topics, but this 1000-page textbook could easily fit in a profile of a selected teacher strike, or of an AFSCME organizing drive among low-paid workers. Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, has a solid 15 pages on the various social movements of the 1960s, showing their developments and interconnections.⁶⁵ Surely there is space to discuss the impact of these movements on the massive postal strike of 1970, or on the demands for legislative changes to allow unionization of public employees. Roark et al., *The American Promise*, devotes two pages of the text proper to the campus protest movement, along with a four-page feature of documents about student rights.⁶⁶ Some analysis of the carry-over to the faculty unionization efforts of the early 1970s, which often included veterans of the student protest movement, would fit nicely here.

Authors of textbooks designed specifically for courses in post-World War II U.S. history, which one might expect would go into more depth about labor issues and events of the 1960s, do not, in fact, do more than the average survey textbook writers on this issue. LaFeber et al. have one reference to the political clout of the NEA by the late 1970s, but call it a “trade association,” like the American Medical Association.⁶⁷ Moss includes one sentence on the AFSCME’s efforts to unionize white-collar workers, in a section on labor in the 1950s.⁶⁸ Horowitz and Carroll, who overall do a good job on economic and social trends, devote half a sentence to the postal strike of 1970. They accurately situate this strike in the context of worker unrest responding to the rise in government debt, high interest rates, and inflation under Nixon—but they present nothing else on public employees or unions.⁶⁹ Rosenberg and Rosenberg include comprehensive discussions of the labor movement in the 1950s and the 1980s, but nothing on labor in the late 1960s or early 1970s, and nothing on public sector unions at all.⁷⁰ Chafe, whose *The Unfinished Journey* is in many ways a brilliant interpretive essay of the U.S. in the last 60 years, discusses the growing resentment of work by

⁶³*Who Built America?* (1992), 597–598, 602, 617, 652–653. There is similar, although not quite as extensive, coverage in the rewritten edition; see, especially, *Who Built America?* (2000), 667–670, 724–728.

⁶⁴Brinkley, *American History*, 1004–1008, 1011, 1056–1057, 1071–1075.

⁶⁵Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 883–888, 892–903.

⁶⁶Roark et al., *The American Promise*, 1046–1051.

⁶⁷LaFeber et al., *The American Century*, 502.

⁶⁸Moss, *Moving On*, 93–94.

⁶⁹Horowitz and Carroll, *On The Edge*, 462.

⁷⁰Rosenberg and Rosenberg, *In Our Times*, 63–66, 279–282.

blue-collar workers in the late 1960s and 1970s, and he relates these attitudes to the “cultural revolution of the 1960s.” There is no mention of similar trends among white-collar or government workers, however, and indeed no discussion of government employment or unions. Again the only reference to the NEA is to its political role, in Walter Mondale’s 1984 campaign for President.⁷¹ Several of these books note Kennedy’s efforts to raise the minimum wage and his confrontation with the steel industry, but none discuss Executive Order 10988.

Textbook authors, of course, rely on overviews by historians of particular time periods. Of the major accounts of Kennedy’s presidency, Irving Bernstein’s *Promises Kept* stands alone as even mentioning Executive Order 10988. Bernstein’s account, moreover, clearly shows the background to and the impact of the executive order on unionization at the federal, state, and local levels.⁷² Other books on Kennedy at best cover his relations with the trade union leadership and the steel controversy.⁷³

Unfortunately, synthetic treatments of the 1960s as a whole offer little help to authors or teachers in this area. William O’Neill’s early survey covered the Ocean Hill–Brownsville strike, as does David Caute’s transnational review of the events of 1968, but they include nothing else on public employee unionization.⁷⁴ Allen Matusow notes briefly the NEA’s role in the unsuccessful effort during Kennedy’s presidency to expand federal aid to education.⁷⁵ David Farber’s is by no means the only monograph or textbook with a listing in the index for “teach-ins” but not “teachers.” One essay in Farber’s edited collection on *The Sixties* has a sophisticated analysis of the links between economic policy and national and international politics, but even this article does not connect the ideology of “growth liberalism” with increased public sector employment.⁷⁶

The first edition, from 1991, of David Chalmers’s overview of the 1960s also includes nothing on public employee unionism. The slightly revised 1996 edition, however, adds a few sentences which give the alert reader a hint of the long-term interconnections between the 1960s student movement and public employee unions. Here Chalmers notes that one-time Students for a Democratic Society national secretary and longtime community organizer Paul Booth had moved to Washington in the 1990s to become organizing director of the “powerful” public employees union, the AFSCME. But Chalmers missed his chance to demonstrate how the AFSCME became “powerful” in the decade which he is analyzing.⁷⁷

⁷¹Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 448–449, 475.

⁷²Bernstein, *Promises Kept*, 204–217.

⁷³See, e.g.: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965); Henry Fairlie, *The Kennedy Promise: The Politics of Expectation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973); Herbert Parmet, *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Dial Press, 1983); James Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

⁷⁴William O’Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 184–187; David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 411–414. David Burner’s more recent *Making Peace With the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) makes do with only two sentences on that strike (72), and otherwise only the mention that the Reverend King was assassinated while supporting a garbage workers’ strike (64).

⁷⁵Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 105.

⁷⁶David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Robert Collins, “Growth Liberalism in the Sixties,” in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 11–44.

⁷⁷David Chalmers, *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the 1960s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Chalmers, *And the Crooked Places Made Straight*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: JHU Press, 1996), 187.

Peter Levy's 1998 documentary history of the 1960s covers a wider than usual variety of issues and viewpoints, including five sources from or about the labor movement: on Medicare, Vietnam, the integration of construction trades, and farmworkers. Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin's recent entry to the field also includes a bit more than most surveys on the participation of the United Auto Workers in 1960s liberalism and on the role of the AFL-CIO. But in neither book is there mention of teachers' or postal unions or their strikes, or of the growth in public sector employment or unionization.⁷⁸

The standard narrative of the movements of the 1960s—spreading from the civil rights and student movements to the antiwar, feminist, Latino, gay, and environmental movements—is, of course, very powerful, and there are several reasons why it endures and continues to crowd out treatment of public employee unionism. While public employee strikes did engender a lot of media attention and public discussion, they had a hard time competing for attention with student demonstrations, race relations issues, and American military actions and antiwar activity. While the *Reader's Guide for Periodical Literature* for March 1968 to February 1969 devoted a half-page to articles on "Strikes—U.S.—teachers," it had three full pages on "Student demonstrations," about half of which focused on U.S. colleges.⁷⁹ The teacher strikes of March 1968 occurred at the same time that the President's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the so-called Kerner Commission) issued its provocative report which warned that the U.S. was increasingly becoming two societies, one black and one white, and as the U.S. was still fighting to regain control of the cities of South Vietnam in the wake of the Tet Offensive.⁸⁰ Within a month, Johnson's announcement that he was withdrawing from the presidential race, and the assassination of Martin Luther King and subsequent urban riots, had turned the nation's attention away from these strikes. The postal strike of 1970, similarly, preceded by just six weeks the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, the killings of student protesters at Kent State and Jackson State, and the shutdown of college campuses across the nation. Indeed, the invasion of Cambodia and subsequent events postponed by several months Congressional action on a final settlement of the postal agreement.⁸¹

But the focus in the textbooks on the student and civil rights movement, I suspect, also relates to what our current textbook authors were doing in the 1960s. Many were either active in or surrounded by the student movement at the time, or already teaching on the campuses affected by the student upsurge. Those textbook authors who were not yet adults in the 1960s have tended to rely on the accounts of the time by colleagues whose outlook was formed by their campus orientation, and by the overviews of the period which maintain this focus.

Survey textbook authors would gain far more insight into public employee unionism by consulting readily available textbooks on U.S. labor history, which provided many of the statistics and contributed to the interpretations used here. Most at least mention

⁷⁸*America in the Sixties—Right, Left, and Center: A Documentary History*, ed. Peter Levy (Westport: Praeger, 1998); Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷⁹Compare *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature: March 1968–February 1969* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1969), 1140, and 1141–1145.

⁸⁰Compare *New York Times*, 1 March 1968, p. 1 on the Kerner Commission and the fighting in South Vietnam, with p. 25 on the teacher strikes. Sullivan, "The Florida Teacher Walkout in the Political Transition of 1968," argues (not entirely successfully, in my view) that this strike failed in large part because it occurred in the midst of the larger social conflicts of 1968.

⁸¹Walsh and Mangum, *Labor Struggle in the Post Office*, 32–33.

Kennedy's Executive Order 10988 and related local legislation, and many are adept at explaining the sources of public employee discontent which led to the strike wave of the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁸² There is, however, too little attention even in these labor history texts to the NEA, which, while outside of the AFL-CIO, still has the largest number of workers under collective bargaining agreements of any American union. Surveys of labor history on the state and local level may not be first on the list for textbook authors to read, but recent publications on Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New York City workers include valuable material on organizing by the AFSCME, the AFT, and the NEA from the 1950s to the 1970s.⁸³

But labor historians must shoulder some of the blame for the inadequate treatment in textbooks of public employee unionism, as detailed studies of the phenomenon thus far have been few. From 1990 to 2000, *Labor History* published only two articles specifically on government workers, one on the Boston police strike of 1919, and the other on the Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968.⁸⁴ Of the hundreds of books which *Labor History* reviewed during this decade, only six focused specifically on public employees or their unions, while a handful of others touched on this theme.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, the *Journal of American History* published no articles during the 1990s on post-1960 government employee unions, although it ran a number of articles on recent U.S. history.⁸⁶ Even an article reviewing how labor historians have used oral history

⁸²The U.S. Department of Labor *History of the American Worker* (1976) and Green, *The World of the Worker* (1980) are somewhat dated, but still valuable. Filippelli, *Labor in the USA* (1984) and Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions* (1994), a lightly updated version of the 1986 first edition, both emphasize the connections between the civil rights, youth, and feminist movements of the 1960s and public employee militancy and unionization; Zieger adds, at 165, that many of these new union members were children of private sector union members. Of the two most recent labor history surveys, Nelson, *Shifting Fortunes* (1997) and Babson, *The Unfinished Struggle* (1999), the former is more comprehensive on these issues. *Major Problems in the History of American Workers*, ed. Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1991), a compilation of primary sources and scholarly articles, includes the essay cited above by Deborah Bell on women and public sector unionism.

⁸³Milton Derber et al., *Labor in Illinois: The Affluent Years, 1945–1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), especially chapters 4F, 4G, and 8; *Keystone of Democracy*, ed. Harris and Blatz, 249–252, 270–271, 291–293, 326–328; Freeman, *Working-class New York*; Debra Bernhardt and Rachel Bernstein, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: A Pictorial History of Working People in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

⁸⁴Joseph Slater, "Public Workers: Labor and the Boston Police Strike of 1919," *Labor History* 38 (1996–1997), 7–27; Estes, "'I AM A MAN.'" In addition, there was a valuable article on organizing hospital workers in the non-profit sector, an experience with many similarities to organizing government workers; see Gregg Michel, "'Union Power, Soul Power:' Unionizing Johns Hopkins University Hospital, 1959–1974," *Labor History* 38 (1996–1997), 28–66.

⁸⁵The books which focused on public employees and/or their unions, along with the issue of *Labor History* in which they were reviewed, were: Riccucci, *Women, Minorities, and Unions in the Public Sector* (revd Summer 1991); Murphy, *Blackboard Unions* (revd Fall 1993); Walsh and Mangum, *Labor Struggles in the Post Office* (revd Fall 1994); Ruth Jacknow Markowitz, *My Daughter, the Teacher: Jewish Teachers in the New York City Schools* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993) (revd Winter 1994–1995); Johnston, *Success While Others Fail* (revd Winter 1996–1997); Lionel Lewis, *Marginal Worth: Teaching and the Academic Labor Market* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1996) (revd Winter 1996–1997). Books related to this topic, along with their dates reviewed, included: Derber et al., *Labor in Illinois* (revd Summer 1992); Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: A History of Hospital Workers' Union, Local 1199* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989) (revd Spring 1994); Bernstein, *Promises Kept* (revd Winter 1995–1996).

⁸⁶For an article on public employees, but not unions, in a slightly earlier period, see Adam Fairclough, "'Being in the Field of Education and Also Being a Negro ... Seems ... Tragic:' Black Teachers in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 87 (2000), 65–91, which covers the 20th century up to about 1960.

includes no examples of interviews with public employees or their union leaders.⁸⁷ *Pennsylvania History*, an example of a state history journal which regularly publishes articles on working-class history and the trade union movement, from 1990 to 2000 had none specifically on public employees or their unions.⁸⁸ The *History of Education Quarterly* in this time period has had a number of articles on the teaching profession, but few on the recent past and only one focusing on teachers' unions.⁸⁹

While studies are being published in *Labor History* and elsewhere on the post-1960 trade union movement and workforce changes, these have tended so far to focus more around issues of deindustrialization, ethnicity, immigration, gender, and Southern industrial unionism, rather than on public employees and their unions. A recent collection of essays by labor historians on *U.S. Labor Relations, 1945–1989*, for example, contained just a sprinkling of references to public employee unions or bargaining.⁹⁰ The most wide-ranging accounts of the rise of public employee unions, and of the controversy which surrounded them, can be found in a small bookshelf of textbooks and edited collections published between 1968 and 1970 for classroom use in labor economics or labor sociology.⁹¹

With the perspective of time, survey textbooks have begun to include in their discussions of the 1960s several events which had not previously formed part of the standard narrative of the decade. Brinkley's 1999 *American History* includes a section on the gay liberation movement, an issue not even mentioned in the 1987 edition of that textbook, which had been co-authored with three prominent representatives of an earlier generation of historians.⁹² The differences in the treatment of gays and lesbians are similarly stark in comparing the treatment in Boyer et al.'s 2000 and 1990 editions of *The Enduring Vision*, and Norton et al.'s 1994 and 1982 editions of *A People and a Nation*.⁹³

The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 is another example of how recent textbooks have reevaluated events of the 1960s. While the 1987 edition of Brinkley's *American History* included a chart on the increase in immigration in the previous two decades, noting its shift from European to Asian and Latino sources, there was no mention of the law which, by eliminating the discriminatory national origins quotas which dated

⁸⁷Rick Halpern, "Oral History and Labor History: A Historiographic Assessment After Twenty-five Years," *Journal of American History* 85 (1998), 596–610.

⁸⁸Maurine Greenwald, "Women and Pennsylvania Working-class History," *Pennsylvania History* 63 (Winter 1996), 5–16, at 14, mentions women in public employment.

⁸⁹See: Scott Baker, "Testing Equality: The National Teacher Examination and the NAACP's Legal Campaign to Equalize Teachers' Salaries in the South, 1936–63," *History of Education Quarterly* 35 (1995), 49–64; Jack Dougherty, "'That's When We Were Marching for Jobs: Black Teachers and the Early Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee,'" *History of Education Quarterly* 38 (1998), 121–141; Urban, "Courting the Woman Teacher."

⁹⁰*U.S. Labor Relations, 1945–1989: Accommodation and Conflict*, ed. Bruce Nissen (New York: Garland, 1990).

⁹¹*Sorry ... No Government Today: Unions vs. City Hall*, ed. Robert Walsh (Boston: Beacon, 1969), and *Collective Bargaining for Public Employees*, ed. Marx, have the liveliest primary sources. Moskow et al., *Collective Bargaining in Public Employment*, and *Collective Bargaining in the Public Service*, ed. Kruger and Schmidt, are textbooks oriented to the labor economics or labor sociology classroom. See also the recent, but technical, *When Public Sector Workers Organize*, ed. Richard Freeman and Casey Ichniowski (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁹²Brinkley, *American History* (1999), 1081; Richard Current, T. Harry Williams, Frank Friedel, and Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

⁹³Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision* (1990), 1089; Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision* (2000), 874; Norton et al., *A People and a Nation*, 4th ed. (1994), 1005–1006; Norton et al., *A People and a Nation*, 1st ed. (1982), 942.

back to 1924, made that shift possible. In the 1999 revision, Brinkley notes President Johnson's active support for the Immigration Reform Act, which Brinkley accurately calls "one of the most important pieces of legislation of the 1960s, even if relatively unnoticed at the time."⁹⁴

With the benefit of hindsight, textbook authors should make similar reevaluations about the significance both of the legal changes at the national and state levels which began to provide for collective bargaining for public employees, and of the rapid growth of these unions in the 1960s and 1970s. As Kevin Boyle has recently argued in a review of writings on the 1960s, historians of that decade "need to look beyond the story we know so well," beyond the familiar protesters and activists, to tell the stories of others: "children, parents, and retirees, factory workers, secretaries, school teachers, and sales clerks."⁹⁵ Surely some of those additional stories will involve the people who filled the burgeoning public sector jobs, and who tried to improve their jobs through unionization. Moreover, these stories will overlap at times with what we already tell our students about 1960s activism, to give a fuller picture of the breadth and ramifications of those social movements.

Sociologist Paul Johnston, who has also puzzled over the absence of scholarly attention to public employee unionism, has suggested that the "public workers' movement is hard to locate in social movement theory because it appears related both to the 'old' labor movement and to newer social movements," so that it has received its due from neither end.⁹⁶ Movements organized around class have become marginalized in our view of the 1960s and its aftermath, in which we "see" movements based on race, gender, age, "lifestyle," and foreign policy. It is past time for such compartmentalization to end.

There is yet another reason to include public employee unionism in our textbooks. Just as consideration of the historical background of changes in immigration and the rise of the gay and lesbian movement better prepares our students to live in the more diverse American society of the 21st century, attention to the changes in the American labor movement can help them better understand their own future. After all, many of our students will become teachers, professors, social workers, health care workers, urban planners, police and legal workers, and other white-collar workers likely to be employed at some level of government—jobs in which they may very well be asked to join, or to form, a union. Even before that point, our students in public colleges and universities are likely to have professors or teaching assistants in unions, and talk of job actions and even strikes is not uncommon on college campuses. If college textbooks continue to promote the image of a union member as simply an industrial, construction, or agricultural worker, then we will have failed in preparing our students for their own potential relationship to or participation in the labor movement. And all historians would agree that helping students evaluate and develop their own relationship to the social and political movements of society is an important part of the purpose of a college survey course in U.S. history.

⁹⁴Current et al., *American History* (1987), 942; Brinkley, *American History* (1999), 1037.

⁹⁵Kevin Boyle, "The Times They Aren't A-changing," *Reviews in American History* 29 (2001), 304–309, quotation at 308.

⁹⁶Johnston, *Success While Others Fail*, 28.

Appendix

The following U.S. history survey textbooks were reviewed for this study:

- Paul Boyer, Clifford Clark, Jr., Joseph Kett, Neal Salisbury, Harvard Sitkoff, and Nancy Woloch, *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, 4th edition, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
- Alan Brinkley, *American History: A Survey*, 10th edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1999).
- Robert Divine, T.H. Breen, George Fredrickson, and R. Hal Williams, *America Past and Present*, 4th edition, Vol. 2 (N.Y.: HarperCollins, 1995).
- John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, and Susan Armitage, *Out Of Many: A History of the American People*, 3rd edition, vol. 2 (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000).
- David Goldfield, Carl Abbott, Virginia DeJohn Anderson, Jo Ann Argersinger, Peter Argersinger, William Barney, and Robert Weir, *The American Journey: A History of the United States*, vol. 2 (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998).
- James Henretta, David Brody, Susan Ware, and Marilyn Johnson, *America's History*, 4th edition, vol. 2 (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2000).
- James Kirby Martin, Randy Roberts, Steven Mintz, Linda McMurry, and James Jones, *America and Its Peoples: A Mosaic in the Making*, 4th edition, vol. 2 (N.Y.: Longman, 2001).
- Gary Nash and Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, 5th edition, vol. 2 (N.Y.: Longman, 2001).
- Mary Beth Norton, David Katzman, David Blight, Howard Chudacoff, Thomas Paterson, William Tuttle, and Paul Escott, *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States*, 6th edition, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).
- James Roark, Michael Johnson, Patricia Cline Cohen, Sarah Stage, Alan Lawson, Susan Hartmann, *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, 2nd edition, vol. 2 (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002).
- George Brown Tindall and David Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 5th edition, vol. 2 (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1999).
- Joshua Freeman, Nelson Lichtenstein, Stephen Brier, David Bensman, Susan Porter Benson, David Brundage, Bret Eynon, Bruce Levine, and Bryan Palmer [American Social History Project], *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 2 (N.Y.: Pantheon, 1992).
- Nelson Lichtenstein, Susan Strasser, and Roy Rosenzweig [American Social History Project], *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society*, revised edition, vol. 2 (N.Y.: Worth Publishers, 2000).

In several additional cases, I also consulted earlier editions of these textbooks. I also reviewed *National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience: Grades 5–12, Expanded Edition* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA, n.d. [1994]), which is geared toward secondary education, and whose compilation was directed by Gary Nash and Charlotte Crabtree.

The following textbooks, overviews, and sourcebooks on the post-1945 or 20th-century U.S. were consulted:

- William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: American Since World War II*, 4th edition (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- William Chafe and Harvard Sitkoff, (eds.) *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America*, 4th edition (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Robert Griffith, (ed.) *Major Problems in American History Since 1945* (Lexington, MA.: D.C. Heath, 1992).
- David Horowitz and Peter Carroll, *On the Edge: The U.S. in the 20th Century*, 2nd edition (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1998).
- Walter LaFeber, Richard Polenberg, and Nancy Woloch, *The American Century: A History of the United States Since 1941*, 4th edition (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1992).
- George Donelson Moss, *Moving On: The American People Since 1945*, 2nd edition (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2001).
- Norman Rosenberg and Emily Rosenberg, *In Our Times: America Since World War II*, 5th edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995).