REVIEW ESSAY

American Workers, American Movies: Historiography and Methodology

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Abstract

"American Workers, American Movies: Historiography and Methodology" surveys the ways in which scholars have examined the relationship between workers and movies. For many years, scholarship about movies and workers took one of two basic approaches: Cinema scholars wrote about images of workers in films, while labor historians wrote histories of union activity within the movie industry. The two schools were usually quite distinct. In the last twenty years, a burst of scholarship in both fields has broadened our understandings of the images that appeared on the screen and, in some cases, how those images were constructed in the first place. The goal of this essay is twofold: to review key themes and recent works in the field, and to suggest ways in which working-class historians might approach and incorporate studies of film into their own work. Indeed, the author calls upon scholars to go beyond simply deconstructing images, and to explore more complicated questions involving the forces responsible for shaping the ideology and class focus on American cinema.

Sometimes the worst interviews turn out to be the most illuminating. In July 1988, I traveled to Seattle to talk with former Teamster president Dave Beck about labor filmmaking during the silent era. Despite his incarceration for grand larceny in the 1950s, Beck had been a militant trade union organizer in the early 1920s, a period when Seattle unionists supplemented workplace activism by making feature films. After repeated queries by me about the union-backed Federation Film Corporation, the feisty Beck finally shot back: "Movies? Who gives a fuck about the movies! . . . Why waste your time on something that don't affect your organization? You're a damn site better spending that money on organizing."[1]

At first, I was crushed by the response. But the more I thought about it, the more I came to realize that Beck's remark pointed to one of the central shortcomings of labor leadership in the twentieth century: their failure to appreciate that cultural struggles were in many ways just as important as workplace struggles. Beck, like labor leaders of his and subsequent generations, never fully grasped the crucial role that movies have played in shaping the ways in which

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generations of Americans would look at and think about the meaning of class, class conflict, and class identity.

Few contemporary institutions have had a greater effect on molding popular understandings of daily events than film and television. Movies have played an especially vital role in the battle for control of the mind's eye. Throughout the twentieth century, many Americans got their first glimpse of what a strike, union leader, communist, or mass movement looked like by watching movies. No one film is likely to determine our vision of the world, but the *repetition* of similar images over and over again until they become commonplace does create a way of seeing the world—a discourse—that appears as the dominant reality to many Americans. Indeed, movies matter most about the things people know the least. When we consider that only a minority of wage earners have ever belonged to labor unions, the constant repetition of negative images about organized labor and what it means to be working-class is bound to have a deleterious effect on the vast number of citizens who do not really know what unions do or what blue-collar life is like. "As any union organizer knows," writes media scholar William J. Puette, "people's values are shaped mostly by experience and emotion and only a little by logical thought. For this reason, the portrayal of unions in the media, particularly in movies plays a major role in shaping the attitudes of Americans toward labor unions." Is it any wonder that Americans today prefer to identify themselves as middle-class when images of workers and unions have "been both unrepresentative and virulently negative."[2]

How should scholars go about understanding the relationship between workers and movies? This is an especially important question for those toiling in working-class history, where movies have remained on the margins of scholarly inquiry; a subject that for many, as Dave Beck suggested, seems tangential to "real" labor history. For many years, scholarship about movies and workers took one of two basic approaches: Cinema scholars wrote about images of workers in films, while labor historians wrote histories of union activity within the movie industry. The two schools were usually quite distinct. In last twenty years, a burst of scholarship in both fields makes it clear that it is not enough simply to deconstruct cinematic images of workers or to write histories of studio labor isolated from the cinematic implications of those struggles. We need to understand how cinematic images of workers are constructed in the first place. To that end, we must realize that what happens off the screen is vital to shaping what is seen and not seen on the screen. Doing all this requires adopting a materialist understanding of the film industry and its changing relationship to workers as cinematic subjects, as audiences, as studio laborers, and as movie producers.[3]

The goal of this essay is twofold: to review key themes and recent works in the field, and to suggest ways in which labor historians might approach and incorporate studies of film into their own work. At a time when many scholars who study the working class lament the declining interest in their field, film is a medium that generates tremendous enthusiasm among students who profess little interest in "labor" issues. Bringing film into the mainstream of working-class history can broaden our constituency by reaching undergraduates, graduates, and

faculty, and interesting them in questions about class, class conflict, and class identity.

Workers on the Screen

For many years, the relationship between workers and film was of marginal concern to historians and cinema scholars alike. The initial histories of the movies were little more than memoirs by early industry participants—producers, directors, studio heads, cameramen, and stars. Terry Ramsaye's *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture Through 1925*, the best of the lot, offered a sweeping overview of the early history of the film industry, looking at its rise from crude side shows and early nickelodeons through the coming of sound. Subsequent works by Benjamin Hampton, Howard T. Lewis, and Mae Huettig covered much of the same ground but with a keener analysis of the business side of the industry. Among early writers, socialist Upton Sinclair was the only one who explicitly focused on the class implications surrounding the rise of Hollywood and the studio system.[4]

The first serious attention paid to images of workers in American film came in the late 1920s and early 1930s as radical film critics like Harry Potamkin and David Platt began writing in leftist journals such as *Close Up*, *New Masses*, and *Film Front*. Their primary concern, however, was less with working-class images than with the larger ideological implications of the Hollywood dream factory.[5] Lewis Jacobs's *The Rise of American Film: A Critical History*, initially published in 1939, was a breakthrough volume in film history. One of the initial faculty of the Potamkin Film School, founded by members of the radical Film and Photo League, Jacobs surveyed the social, political, and economic history of film and the film industry from its beginnings until the late 1930s—with a subsequent edition carrying his analysis to 1947. Covering a wide range of social problem films, Jacobs offered the first sustained synopses of silent and sound films dealing with work, workers, and, to a lesser extent, unions. Jacobs's basic thesis was that filmmakers were generally sympathetic to the plight of individual workers but not to working-class organizations or activism. Union men were portrayed as "mere dupes. . . . Despite the prevailing sympathy for the laboring man as a person, his assertion of rights as a worker was still deemed presumptuous." The tacit assumption in these films, Jacobs argued, "was that the labor had no rights except those granted by the employer."[6] Turning from films that portrayed the travails of individual wage earners to those that looked at collective activity, Jacobs concluded: "Film after film condemned organized action by workers as 'mob violence,' inspired by foreign agitators, led by anarchists, gaining nothing for the workers and resulting only in destruction."[7]

Jacobs also explored how films of the post-World-War-One Red Scare era repeatedly attacked "labor, liberalism, and Bolshevism." Although he failed to connect conservative attacks on screen to similar attacks off screen, Jacobs implicitly shows how anti-Red films helped discredit radicalism in the eyes of the 1920s moviegoing public. It was also during the 1920s that the "camera turned

toward the middle class." Movies now concentrated "not on interpreting the working man's world, but on diverting him from it by showing the problems of the economically fortunate." Filmmakers sporadically returned to the workers' milieu, but "only during national economic crises." Yet even then, sympathy for workers was tempered by hostility to working-class activism. Throughout the Great Depression, the "conflict between organized labor and capital . . . was represented in movies mainly from the viewpoint of the employer. Unionism was smeared, strikers slandered, the causes of industrial conflict identified with personal jealousies."[8]

Jacobs's monograph remained the dominant examination of cinematic images of workers for decades to come. But its reign as the preeminent social history of film came to an end in the mid-1970s with the appearance of Robert Sklar's *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* and Garth Jowett's *Film: The Democratic Art*. Influenced by the rise of the new social history, and especially New Left history, both authors saw film as something more than mere entertainment. Movies were "instruments of social transformation" that were part of larger struggles for cultural and political power. Sklar and Jowett pointed to the intersections of class, ethnicity, gender, the state, and the movie industry, and to the ways in which these intersections were likely to affect films and film audiences. For both authors, movies represented an arena in which dominant and oppositional cultures repeatedly clashed. "On both sides of the struggle," observed Sklar, "movies came to be seen as offering values distinctly different from those of the older middle-class culture." Sklar also stressed the importance of shifting our attention away from analyzing single films in favor of assessing the cumulative impact of film. "For producers, movie workers, audiences and observers alike, the meaning of American movies lay in the multiple and cumulative messages of the more than ten thousand good, bad and indifferent films that played selectively across the vision and consciousness of their viewers."[9]

While Sklar and Jowett broadened the social context for analyzing film and introduced class as an important variable in film history, neither focused extensively on the evolution of working-class images or the ways in which class activities off the screen affected class images on the screen. That would come in the 1980s and 1990s with an explosion of books that closely examined movies about workers and their organizations. Kay Sloan, Kevin Brownlow, Tom Brandon, Steven Ross, and Michael Shull looked primarily at images of workers during the silent era, while Peter Stead, William Puette, Tom Zaniello, and M. Keith Booker tackled a much broader span of time. Film, the various authors argue, was a highly political medium in which ideology and entertainment were not mutually exclusive. "Conflicts that challenged the foundations of society," observed Sloan, "found their way into cinema." Concerned with a broad range of social problem films, Sloan's *Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* and Brownlow's *Behind the Mask of Innocence* analyze films about immigrants, workers in general, and unions in particular. They show how early cinema reflected many of the positive and negative aspects of the Progressive era's ideol-

ogy toward workers. While sympathetic to the problems of a wide range of working people, the majority of filmmakers focused on workers as individuals being acted upon and not as a class capable of solving its own problems. "The cinema acted as a diplomat," argued Sloan, "negotiating between owners and workers and inevitably resolving the conflict in a fashion that did not require the massive changes demanded by radical labor activists."[10] While Sloan's study stops around 1917, Brownlow continues into the late 1920s. His encyclopedic chapter on "Industry" offers detailed subsections that describe films about "Child Labor," "Socialism and Populism," "The Red Scare," and "Capital versus Labor."

Although the aforementioned scholars succeeded in deepening our understanding of working-class images in silent film, they examined the travails of workers in the same way they examined the travails of other downtrodden groups in society: immigrants, widows, the elderly, and the poor. Class, per se, was not a concept that was raised with any sustained analytic rigor. To be fair, this is an issue of greater concern to scholars who study the working class than to those writing in other fields. Not surprisingly, then, it was a cohort of people in working-class studies who began addressing the class dimensions and consequences of cinema in a more direct fashion.

Steve Ross, Tom Brandon, and Michael Shull cover similar ground as Jacobs, Sloan, and Brownlow, but are far more interested in understanding the role silent film played in molding ideas about class and class identity in twentieth-century America. My own *Working-Class Hollywood*: *Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* "historicizes" the ideological diversity of silent films and the ways in which filmmakers battled to mold popular visions of what it meant to be working-class. Class identities were in flux during the first three decades of the new century and it was still unclear if the millions of new white-collar and service sector workers were working-class or middle-class. Whether they and the vast number of unorganized blue-collar workers decided they were better off dealing with their bosses as individuals or joining labor unions and engaging in collective action might well be determined by what they saw on the screen. "Class and class consciousness," I wrote, "are not static academic concepts but dynamic human relationships forged in a variety of settings—in the workplace, the neighborhood, the family, the voting booth, and, the movie theater." Movies probably reached more people than any other medium of mass communication. By 1920, movie attendance figures equaled nearly half the population; by 1930, they approached nearly one hundred percent of the population.[11]

Working-Class Hollywood benefited from all the aforementioned scholarship and from Tom Brandon's unpublished manuscript "Populist Film"—a sprawling and incredibly rich study of working-class and radical images in silent and early sound films. Whereas Brownlow insisted that movies "on working-class themes were rare," my study argues that Americans were exposed to such films on a regular basis. *Working-Class Hollywood* divides silent films about working people into two categories: working-class films and labor-capital films. The former was an expansive category that included any film whose plot revolved around working-class protagonists—but could have just as easily used

characters from another class. Labor-capital films were a highly polemical subset of working-class films that explicitly focused on class struggle among unionists, strikers, radicals, capitalists, police, and government troops. These films helped translate abstract and confusing ideas about class, class conflict, and class identity into something people could *see* and hopefully understand.[12]

In telling their stories, labor-capital films advanced one of five basic ideological perspectives on class relations: conservative, liberal, radical, populist, and anti-authoritarian. Briefly stated, conservative films depicted unions, radicals, and mass movements in the worst possible light and rarely explained the reasons why workers went on strike or joined class organizations. Workers were asked to trust their bosses and reject the entreaties of corrupt unionists and violent "outside agitators." Liberal films condemned the exploitation of workers by irresponsible capitalists, called for cooperation between labor and capital, and advocated reform, not radicalism, as the best method for solving the nation's industrial ills. While some liberal films were sympathetic to unions, a far greater number saw their leaders as incapable of controlling members during strikes and therefore called for intervention by outside mediators. Radical films countered liberal and conservative films with unabashedly positive images of socialists and militant trade unionists and equally scathing critiques of capitalists and capitalism. Socialism was portrayed as a peaceful and just alternative to the violence and inequality bred by industrial capitalism. Populist movies preached a gut-level hatred of rapacious monopolists and showed how these "malefactors of wealth," as Theodore Roosevelt called them, consistently undermined the well-being of the nation and its citizens. Anti-authoritarian films did not directly challenge capitalists or capitalism, but were scathing in the caricatures and mocking of authority figures—employers, foremen, landlords, police, and judges—who consistently gave working people a hard time.[13]

The work of a labor historian who ventured into film, *Working-Class Hollywood* is especially interested in the material underpinnings of cinematic ideology. Why do films assume the ideological positions they do?—a question I will return to later in this essay. I explore the changing material and ideological foundation of the film industry by dividing the silent era into two eras: the period before (1905–1917) and after (1917–1929) the rise of the oligarchical studio system that came to be known as "Hollywood." During the first era, for reasons I will explain later, filmmakers were more favorable to workers and their organizations than at any subsequent time in the history of the movie industry: forty-six percent of labor-capital films advanced a liberal point of view, thirty-four percent were conservative, nine percent anti-authoritarian, seven percent populist, and four percent radical. The rise of "Hollywood" during and after World War One was accompanied by a marked shift in the ideology of labor-capital films. Between May 1917 and the end of 1929, sixty-six percent of these films were conservative, twenty-three percent liberal, six percent anti-authoritarian, and five percent populist. No radical films were produced by mainstream film companies. Movies that examined conflict between the classes were supplanted in the 1920s by "cross-class fantasy" films that stressed messages of class harmony and fea-

tured romantic escapades between working-class and upper-class protagonists. At the same time that American workers were trying to heighten class consciousness, filmmakers were arguing that class no longer mattered.[14]

In addition to exploring cinematic visions of working-class life, scholars of the silent era also charted changing depictions of radicals and radicalism. Russell Campbell's "Nihilists and Bolsheviks: Revolutionary Russia in American Silent Film" shows how, prior to October 1917, American filmmakers offered sympathetic depictions of foreign radicals, usually Russian, and their battles against oppression in their respective homelands. Yet, while vividly depicting the murderous activities of Cossacks and Czarist officials, these films never treated radicalism in a serious manner. The "political and social goals of the radical movement," Campbell explains, "were not even mentioned." Opposition to a few corrupt individuals was deemed acceptable, but commitment to revolutionary causes was treated "as an obsessional neurosis." Following the Russian Revolution and Bolshevik rise to power, American filmmakers cast all revolutionaries—those fighting abroad and at home—in a negative light. Campbell goes on to explore a number of anti-Bolshevik films that constituted what he calls the "Red Scare Cycle."[15]

Michael Slade Shull's *Radicalism in American Silent Films, 1909–1929: A Filmography and History* also examines films about working-class and radical activism. Shull is especially interested in the role film played in "stigmatizing liberal intellectuals, strike leaders, socialists, 'free love' advocates, and so on, together with the bloody red spectre of Bolshevism." Like Ross, he finds that filmmakers were far more sympathetic to workers before 1917 than after. Labor militancy, however, was not ascribed to legitimate worker grievances but was portrayed as the work of "cynical individuals—anarchist fanatics or professional labor agitators." Discussing the impact movies had on class relations off the screen, Shull suggests that postwar Red Scare films helped legitimize "a significant switch from private police forces as agents of labor suppression to elements of Federal government." By the conclusion of the Red Scare, he observes in an earlier article, "militant labor had been beaten down and labeled as 'un-American' in the public mind" and radical "voices, particularly those of immigrants, had been silenced, both in the life of the nation and on the screen." Shull's book includes an invaluable filmography that offers plot summaries and categorizes the politics of 436 silent films.[16]

Although most discussions of workers and movies focus on white males, several scholars have explored the relationship between gender and class in silent film. Marjorie Rosen, in her pioneering study *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream*, argued that the "screen abounded with working-girl themes during the twenties." However, recent works by Sloan, Brownlow, Ross, and Shull suggest that working women "were portrayed less as workers than as women in need of constant protection by well-intentioned males; rarely were they shown as powerful actors capable of solving problems on their own." Radical women fared even worse. They were disparagingly portrayed, as Shull notes, as "foreign-born/non-Anglo-Saxon women who are

provocatively lascivious" and who resembled "dark and enigmatic Trotskys in shortened skirts."[17] Recent studies by Nan Enstad, Karen Ward Mahar, and Ben Singer suggest that working women made their most significant appearance in serials aimed at attracting a female working-class audience.[18]

The visions of working-class life and radicalism that appeared during the silent era—especially the conservative denunciations of collective action that dominated the screen by the late 1920s—continued into the sound era. Peter Stead's important synthesis *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society* draws on an extensive but often fragmented scholarship that focuses on specific decades to present a broad overview of workers and film in Britain and the United States from the silent era to the 1980s. Stead's general argument is that while political films were made throughout the history of the movies, explicit political explorations of work and class conflict receded over time. "The great triumph of film, especially the American film," he writes, "was that it had successfully negotiated the mine-field of class." It did so by refusing "to look very closely at the realities of working-class life." Over the course of the years, audiences "came to know a great deal about the work of cowboys and detectives but they were to learn almost nothing about routine labouring, manufacturing, selling, and clerking and they were shown even less of the trade union politics that were associated with those activities."[19] Instead, filmmakers —especially after World War Two—portrayed working people as folks "who were seeking that middle-class life style." Hollywood films negated "the reality of class and the possibility of sustained class struggle" in favor of plot lines that concentrated "on individual men and women and the way in which they were able to cope with all the challenges and dilemmas that they experienced."[20]

Stead makes several claims that undercut his otherwise fine book. He argues that there "was never any question that the movies would become political or radical as the showmen were as opposed to Socialism and labour unions as their fellow American businessmen and, in any case, they remained firmly of the opinion that what they had to give their public was entertainment." This is wrong on two points: There were silent filmmakers (as Sloan, Brownlow, Ross, Shull, and M. Keith Booker have shown) who wanted to politicize American film, and there were filmmakers in the silent and sound eras who believed that entertainment and politics were not mutually exclusive. One could make a politically engaged class-conscious film that was also an entertaining film. By insisting that showmen believed audiences would have found films depicting the "problems of work and the details of politics . . . inherently dull," Stead repeats one of the oldest clichés in the business: that producers give audiences the films they want. Brownlow, Ross, and Shull show that audiences did not find these films dull; they often turned out in great numbers to see labor-made productions.[21]

Despite these critiques, it is worth looking at Stead, and the scholars he draws on, to offer a brief overview of workers and film during the sound era. Taken collectively, these works emphasize four enduring cinematic themes: empathy for workers but not for working-class activism, denunciations of labor and radical organizations and their corrupt leaders, portraits of workers as salt-of-

the-earth but easily manipulated dupes, and a disregard for the underlying causes of class conflict. Expanding on themes first raised by Lewis Jacobs, Stead shows how movies of the 1930s and 1940s remained sympathetic to the hardships faced by working people, but were either ambivalent toward or explicitly opposed to union and radical activity. Even Warner Brothers' celebrated social conscience films, as Al Auster, Leonard Quart, William Puette, and Tino Balio argue, though liberal in their outlook toward individual workers, were far more conservative in their attitudes toward unions and class conflict. Producers loved blue-collar tough guys like James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and others featured in gangster films of the 1930s, but shied away from characters or plot lines sympathetic to collective action. When collective action was visualized, movies such as *Black Fury* (1935), *Riffraff* (1935), and *Racket Busters* (1938) associated strikes and unionism with corruption, violence, mobsters, and/or communism. Scheming "outside agitators" were continually blamed for stirring up trouble among previously content workers. By repeatedly ignoring the roots of working-class discontent—poor wages, long hours, unsafe working conditions, and autocratic bosses—and emphasizing violent confrontation, these films perpetuated images of workers as greedy, ungrateful, and inherently violent dopes. Only a handful of films, such as *Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *The Devil and Miss Jones* (1941), offered positive depictions of so-called "labor agitators" and unionization efforts. Yet, in the latter instance, workers still had to rely on people outside the labor movement—an enlightened department store owner—to solve their problems.[22]

The outbreak of World War Two and ensuing government calls for national unity blunted movie industry interest in making films that critiqued capitalism or dramatized conflict between labor and capital. Drawing heavily on the work of Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, Stead argues that while a number of films paid tribute to the loyal efforts of blue-collar workers, wartime cinema was generally even "less realistic and less concerned with social issues than had been the films of the 1930s."[23] The postwar era witnessed the return of social problem films, but, like their Progressive era predecessors, they focused on problems caused by corrupt individuals rather than a corrupt political or economic system. The growing anti-union politics of Congress, its investigation into communist activity in Hollywood, the Red Scare, and the willingness of movie industry leaders to blacklist alleged radicals meant that when Hollywood dealt with workers, unions, and radicals—subjects they generally preferred to avoid—they did so in explicitly conservative fashion. Postwar prosperity, adds cinema scholar Peter Biskind, "along with the witch hunt, had made class struggle obsolete." Filmmakers continued to insist that honest workers deserved a fair deal, but they were not likely to find them in mob-infested unions—a theme dramatized in films such as *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Inside Detroit* (1956), and *The Garment Jungle* (1957). As radical screenwriter John Howard Lawson warned in 1953, Hollywood films suggested that "working-class life is to be despised and that workers who seek to protect their class interests are stupid, malicious, or even treasonable."[24]

The resurgence of liberal and leftist politics in the 1960s and 1970s was paralleled by a resurgence of films about workers and working-class life—female as well as male. But, as several authors point out, films such as *Rocky* (1976), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), and *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980) focused on individuals and individual problems rather than groups and group action. "In the vast majority of cases," notes Stead, "the new working-class films were to concern themselves with the talents, successes, and accompanying dilemmas of individual heroes and heroines—to that extent they were to conform to well-established Hollywood norms."[25] With the exception of *Norma Rae* (1979), *Reds* (1981), and *Matewan* (1987), feature films dealing with labor-capital relations—such as *Blue Collar* (1978), *F.I.S.T.* (1978), and later *Hoffa* (1992)—continued to emphasize links between unions and organized crime, thereby disparaging the labor movement as a whole and the often sympathetic but hapless dolts who did little to oppose such corruption. These conservative images of class relations were countered by a new wave of pro-union documentaries—*Union Maids* (1976), *Harlan County U.S.A.*(1977), and *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980)—that, as Al Auster and Leonard Quart note, "show men and women whose idealism and commitment remain strong after years of struggle and defeat . . . workers who still believe in a dream, one that stresses collective decency, democracy and egalitarianism."[26]

One of the problems of reading about film is that unless the reader has seen the movie, he or she must rely on the political perspective of the reviewer. Two recent books help remedy that situation by providing extensive guides to films that motivated readers can view on their own. Tom Zaniello's *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Organized Guide to Films About Labor* summarizes and contextualizes 147 feature films, documentaries, and made-for-TV movies dealing with workers from *A Corner in Wheat* (1909) to *Germinal* and *The Burning Season* (both 1994). To make Zaniello's list, a film had to focus on one of five subjects: unions or labor organizations, labor history, working-class life "in which an economic consideration is important," a political movement closely tied to organized labor, or struggles between labor and capital that offer a "top-down" perspective. Of special note is his inclusion of films about African-American workers—such as *The Killing Floor* (1984) and both versions of *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961 and 1980). Listing movies in alphabetical rather than chronological order makes it easier to look up specific productions but harder to follow changes in the focus and politics of labor films over time.[27] M. Keith Booker's *Film and the American Left: A Research Guide* solves that problem with a wonderfully detailed chronological survey of 260 labor and radical films—from *The Strike* (1904) to John Sayles's *Men With Guns* (1998). Each film entry contains an extensive plot summary and further sources that readers can consult. Booker's work, like Zaniello's, is especially valuable for its discussion of films featuring working people of color, a topic absent from most other studies.[28]

Hollywood studios were the pre-eminent filmmakers of the twentieth century, but they were not the only ones making movies. Class-conscious audiences responded to negative depictions of workers and radicals in a number of ways.

While some booed scenes that disparaged labor and the Left, others got so fed up with the constant repetition of negative images that they produced their own movies. By 1911, unionists and radicals were turning out films that explained the causes of labor discontent and offered moviegoers positive portrayals of how workers and their organizations went about solving those problems. The first accounts of these efforts focused on radical filmmaking in the 1930s and were written by people active in oppositional cinema movements. Lewis Jacobs, for example, described how independent leftist films such as *Millions of Us* (1936), *The Wave* (1936), and *People of the Cumberland* (1938) countered conservative Hollywood fare by showing "the unemployed man's awakening to the reasons for organized action in strikes and to the meaning of 'scabbing.'" Producers hoped their films would educate moviegoers, especially working-class fans, "in the benefits of a union, the harm of strikebreaking, and the power of united action."[29]

It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that cinema scholars began fully documenting the activities of radical filmmakers. William Alexander's *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film From 1931 to 1942* and Russell Campbell's *The Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States 1930–1942*, the first book-length studies of radical cinema, trace its roots back to the International Workers Aid (later renamed the Workers International Relief), a communist organization that produced a series of documentaries, such as *The Passaic Textile Strike* (1926) and *Gastonia* (1929), that exposed viewers to scenes of strikes and labor demonstrations rarely presented in commercially produced newsreels. Alexander and Campbell, and more recently Charles Wolfe, focus on the three major filmmaking collectives of the Depression era: the Workers' Film and Photo League (WFPL), Nykino, and Frontier Films. Unlike their Hollywood counterparts, radical filmmakers generally preferred documentaries and newsreels to fictional feature films—a decision prompted by their interest in social realism and the inexpensive cost of such productions. The WFPL's *Workers' Newsreel* (1931–1934) and Nykino's *The World Today* (1936) contained scenes of labor struggles that challenged "the invidious portrayal in the popular film of the foreign-born worker, the Negro, the oriental, the worker generally."[30] Frontier Films' feature-length docudramas *People of the Cumberland* (1938) and *Native Land* (1942) parried years of cinematic stereotypes that linked labor and Reds by portraying workers not as radicals but as patriotic Americans struggling to fulfill the promises of democracy for all citizens.

What distinguished these radical productions from Hollywood fare of the 1930s, remarked Alexander, was that they were "*charged* with an effort to face injustice directly and with an intention of forcing the viewer to do something about it." Historian Roy Rosenzweig praises the WFPL's efforts to document working-class struggles, but critiques them for providing "little insight into the consciousness and behavior of the millions of unemployed workers who did not participate in any formal protests." He also chastises Frontier Films for suggesting that working-class problems could all "be resolved within the American liberal tradition and its 1930s incarnations—the New Deal and the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations]."[31] Campbell and Alexander attribute the de-

cline of radical filmmaking in the 1940s to several factors: studio control over distribution and exhibition that prevented widespread circulation of the films, censors who refused to allow films that "stir up . . . antagonistic relations between capital and labor," the lack of trained workers to make movies, and a scarcity of capital to invest in cinematic productions. I would add a fifth factor: The didactic nature of these films appealed mainly to the already converted and failed to reach mass audiences who, while willing to watch political fare, wanted it presented in more entertaining form.[32]

Salt of the Earth (1954), the most celebrated and written about radical film of the sound era, hoped to entertain a mass audience by telling the story of a strike by Mexican-American mineworkers in the form of a highly personalized melodrama. Made in the midst of the Cold War by a group of blacklisted Hollywood personnel, *Salt* was a "celluloid monument" that, as Jim Lorence recently argued, challenged "the consensus view of race relations, gender roles, and class harmony." One of the few radical films to feature workers of color, the movie depicts the extraordinary power workers can exercise when they overcome divisions of race, gender, and ethnicity and join together to oppose their common enemy. Indeed, collective action and solidarity pay off as strikers go on to defeat the powerful mineowners and, in the process, learn a great deal about each other. Although the film received rave reviews when it opened in March 1954, concerted opposition from a wide array of forces prevented it from being widely shown in the United States. The producers never earned back their investment, thereby discouraging other radical filmmakers from attempting similar ventures.[33]

Most of the pioneering work on radical filmmaking focused on the sound era; however, scholars have recently turned their attention to earlier efforts undertaken during the silent era. Kevin Brownlow, Kay Sloan, Tom Brandon, Steven Ross, and Michael Shull have shown how the inexpensive cost of production, high demand for films, and decentralized nature of the industry allowed a wide range of groups to participate in the fledgling movie industry. Early filmmakers included groups we would not usually associate with the movies: women's suffragists, the American Bankers Association, the Ford Motor Company, US Steel, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the Socialist party, communists, and a wide range of labor activists—all of whom saw film as a vehicle for shaping the consciousness of millions of Americans.

These authors, along with Philip Foner, are especially concerned with charting the rise and fall of a group of worker filmmakers previously unknown to scholars. Beginning in the nickelodeon era with a few modest newsreels and feature films and reaching their peak in the early 1920s with the formation of regular production companies, worker filmmakers—a term that describes films made by individual workers, unions, worker-owned production companies, or radicals in socialist or communist organizations—used the new medium to offer audiences a clear statement of what was wrong with their world and a visual blueprint for changing it. Wrapping their messages in the popular guise of melodramas filled with romance and action, feature films like *From Dusk to Dawn*

(1913), *What Is To Be Done*? (1914), *The Contrast* (1921), and *The New Disciple* (1921) challenged liberal and conservative films by depicting working people as fully capable of making rational decisions, choosing appropriate leaders in a democratic fashion, and solving their problems without outside intervention. Mixing entertainment with messages of empowerment, these films showed workers how they could achieve individual fulfillment through collective action—actions that began with workplace militancy and progressed to unionism and, in some instances, to radical politics. Unlike printed materials, movies allowed audiences *to see* "what victory over capitalists and politicians looked like, what collective efforts by unionists and socialist legislators could achieve, and how a unified working class could transform a nation."[34] Unfortunately, the movement died out by the late 1920s for many of the same reasons that doomed radical filmmakers of the 1930s—with one additional factor: the refusal of the AFL's leadership to offer any support to what they saw as a left-wing campaign that would undermine their legitimacy.

Cinematic class struggles were not confined solely to feature films shown in movie theaters. Battles for control of the mind's eye were also waged in the form of nontheatricals (often thought of as "educational" films) that reached millions of viewers in schools, universities, factories, churches, synagogues, Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCAs), settlement houses, and a wide range of voluntary associations. Beginning in the silent era and continuing through the present, capitalists, government agencies, and labor unions relied on these less expensive productions to sway public opinion about their organizations and goals. The International Typographical Workers' Union (ITU), for example, attempted to combat anti-union propaganda of the 1920s by producing *His Brother's Keeper* (1925). The film contrasted the "lot of the down-and-out [nonunion] worker of a few decades ago" with the many social and economic benefits then enjoyed by ITU members. Labor organizations continued producing nontheatricals—such as *Union at Work* (1949), *With These Hands* (1950), and *1968: Labor's Year of Challenge* (1968)—throughout the second half of the century.[35]

Workers and the Construction of Cinematic Ideology

The first step in creating a thorough history of workers and film required reconstructing the changing images of workers in mainstream feature films—the productions that attracted the largest audiences and set the dominant cinematic discourse about labor in America. Now that a great deal of this work has been done, we need to go beyond simply deconstructing those images and explore more complicated questions involving the forces responsible for shaping the ideology and class focus of American cinema. Specifically, how did images of workers and their organizations get constructed in the first place and why did they change over time? Why, for example, were films more sympathetic to workers and their organizations before 1917 than afterwards? Why did films of the sound era repeatedly link unions to mobsters?

To answer these questions, we need to go beyond the cinematic text and ex-

plore the material context in which movies were made. The changing class images of American film cannot be fully understood apart from the economic, political, and class struggles that gripped the movie industry and American society. Although spatial constraints prevent a thorough exploration of these interactions, I want to suggest a broad methodological approach that might help future scholarship in the field. I propose to answer the questions posed in the previous paragraph by looking at the intersection of two sets of relationships, one internal and one external to the working class. The former involves examining workers as audiences and as laborers within the film industry; the latter involves understanding the evolving needs of the movie industry and the pressures placed on filmmakers by censors, lobbying groups, and government officials.[36]

Movies are first and foremost a business. Like all businesses, the most successful entrepreneurs are those who can attract and maintain a loyal customer base. The class character of the audience, therefore, was bound to affect the class content of film. From the start, movies were a working-class institution. Working-class men, women, and children were the main audiences of the silent era, at least in the teeming cities of urban America—which were the industry's biggest markets. As early as 1910, contemporary observers of commercial recreation reported that workers and immigrants flocked to movies in greater numbers than any other group or class. A survey of Manhattan moviegoers conducted that year found that seventy-two percent of the audience came from the blue-collar work force, twenty-five percent from the clerical work force, and three percent from the "leisure class." Surveys conducted in other cities before American entry into World War One yielded similar results.[37]

The earliest histories of the movie industry, observe Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, acknowledged that nickelodeons "were located in working-class neighborhoods in major urban cities, and were frequented by poor people, especially newly arrived immigrants." Yet these works paid little attention to exploring the experiences of working-class audiences. Indeed, for many years the main debate among cinema scholars centered around when the urban middle class first started going to the movies.[38] That changed in the 1980s, as a new generation of social historians showed how movies and movie theaters functioned as contested terrains of working-class resistance and accommodation to the dominant ideas of the time. Roy Rosenzweig, Francis Couvares, Elizabeth Ewen, Kathy Peiss, and Lizabeth Cohen revealed that moviegoing was an active experience in which blue-collar audiences used their class, ethnic, racial, and religious background to give meaning to the images they saw on the screen—meaning which often differed quite markedly from the intentions of film producers. "Whatever the degree of control of the middle and upper classes over movie content," observed Rosenzweig, "the working class was likely to determine the nature of behavior and interaction within the movie theater."[39]

Given the heavily working-class composition of urban audiences before the First World War, it is not surprising that there were so many films about working-class life. However, the class composition of audiences changed in the 1920s as studios and exhibitors set out to increase their profits by attract-

ing greater numbers of prosperous middle-class patrons while retaining their working-class regulars. They did that, as Lary May, Douglas Gomery, and David Nasaw have shown, by building luxurious movie palaces in "safe" parts of the city and producing lavish films that stressed cross-class fantasies. By bringing together the "masses" and the "classes" to bask together in the plush surrounding, argues May, exhibitors succeeded in "breaking down the class divisions of the past."[40]

The changing class composition of audiences was accompanied by changes in the class focus of American films. "As the poor became less important as the mainstay of the movies," Lewis Jacobs first noted in 1939, "the ideals and tribulations of the masses lost some of their importance as subject matter for the motion pictures." Producers now made films "devoted almost exclusively to pleasing and mirroring the life of the more leisured and well-to-do citizenry." The plush movie palaces in the 1920s, explained silent film expert Kevin Brownlow, "were designed to take people out of their mundane lives, not push them back in."[41] Consequently, labor-capital films that focused on conflict between the classes were superseded by cross-class fantasies that stressed messages of class harmony. A quick look at the American Film Institute Catalog for 1921–1929 reveals that "society" films—as these cross-class fantasies were often called—outnumbered labor-capital films almost five to one.[42]

Three additional factors interacted to alter the ways in which filmmakers looked at workers and their organizations: changing labor relations within the studios, pressure from censors and government officials, and the new economic demands imposed by the rise of the oligarchic studio system known as Hollywood. The first studies of labor relations within the movie industry, written in the 1920s and 1930s, were narrowly focused institutional histories of individual unions. Murray Ross's *Stars and Strikes: Unionization of Hollywood* (1941) cast a wider net, looking at strikes and unionization efforts from the Basic Studio Agreement of 1926 to 1939. In 1963, Louis and Richard Perry offered the first sweeping, if brief, account of movie industry unions in Los Angeles from 1911 to 1941.[43] Although additional studies appeared in the 1950s and 1960s, Robert Sklar and Garth Jowett were the first to incorporate workers into a larger history of the movie industry. Sklar, in particular, examined working conditions, the rise of unions among actors, writers and studio employees, strikes, jurisdictional disputes, and internal union battles against the alleged communist infiltration of Hollywood. Understanding the role of class, Sklar implied, was fundamental to understanding the industry and its films. Movies, he pointed out, were "made by men deeply committed to the capitalist values, attitudes and ambitions that were part of the dominant social order."[44]

Several of the themes raised by Sklar and Jowett were expanded upon by labor historians in the 1980s. In a dissertation and series of articles, Michael C. Nielsen offered a thorough exploration of the history of labor activity in the film industry during the studio era.[45] Taking Nielsen a step further, my own work relied on previously underutilized union records to chart changing labor relations on a studio-by-studio basis, as well as internal conflicts within the Hollywood la-

bor movement. This allowed me to draw specific correlations between studio-labor conflict off the screen and depictions of unions on the screen. The "images of strikes, unions, radicals, and capitalists that appeared on the screen," I concluded, "did not simply represent some general trend in society but were closely linked to the changing economic structure of the film industry, the backgrounds of individual filmmakers, and the state of labor relations within the studios."[46]

If examining studio labor relations helps us understand images that made it to the screen, studying film censorship helps explain the images audiences were not allowed to see. Federal agencies and local censors, as Stephen Vaughn and others have shown, placed enormous pressure on filmmakers, especially during and after World War One, to avoid making films or even newsreels that offered sympathetic depictions of working-class struggles. While censors ordered cuts in films they believed included inappropriate scenes of sex, crime, or violence, they often banned movies and newsreels that they labeled as "calculated to stir up . . . antagonistic relations between labor and capital."[47] Studios could have chosen to fight censors, but the changing structure of the movie industry and the increasingly antagonistic relations between producers and their employees mitigated against any opposition. As studios expanded into production, distribution, and exhibition—largely through the result of floating stocks and bonds on Wall Street—the content of any one film became less important than securing its widespread distribution. Any studio opposing censors would have risked preventing a film from reaching its intended venues on time, thereby threatening profits in all three wings of its business. The leading "six state censor boards," Morris Ernst and Pare Lorentz pointed out, "have the power by law to ruin the big movie companies." Few executives were likely to endanger their career by approving any movie that posed such high risks.[48]

The upshot of these various factors is that studios either stopped making labor-capital films or, when they did, they made films censors were not likely to oppose. As previously noted, before 1917, when audiences were largely working-class and studios faced few problems from weak unions, forty-six percent of labor-capital films offered liberal and thirty-four percent conservative depictions of strikes, unions, and worker activism. However, between 1917 and 1929, the rise of the studio system, the onset of a new era of labor militancy, the courting of middle-class viewers, and the publication of a new self-regulation code in 1924 prompted a dramatic shift in cinematic ideology: As noted above, sixty-six percent of labor-capital films were conservative and twenty-three percent liberal during this period. Michael Shull discovered a similar decline in the number of pro-labor films: from twenty-four released between 1909 and 1916 to eight released between 1917 and 1929.[49]

These factors continued to play a critical role in shaping cinematic ideology during the sound era. The 1930s, as labor historians well know, rank among the high points of labor activism in the twentieth century. Few films of the decade could match the intensity that accompanied sit-down strikes, general strikes, or the rise of the CIO. Yet, despite their drama, these events rarely made it to

the screen. During the 1930s, as well as before and after, audiences did not necessarily get the films they wanted; they got to choose among films that producers were willing to make. Frank Walsh's "The Films We Never Saw: American Movies View Organized Labor, 1934–1954," is a model study of how off-screen pressures affected decisions about onscreen imagery and ideology. Examining a series of studio correspondence and subsequent changes in scripts of *Black Fury* (1935), Walsh shows how Warner Brothers, under pressure from powerful mine owners and the politically conservative Production Code Administration (PCA), the industry's self-censorship body, altered the film so as to downplay class conflict and stress class harmony. What began as a "hard-hitting indictment of the coal mining industry" and endorsement of miners' unions, wound up as a befuddled melodrama in which the union leader was depicted as a vengeful drunk, the strikers his willing dupes, and the causes of the conflict were never made clear. Despite its whitewashing of class conflict, the film was still banned in Maryland and Chicago for being "inflammatory and conductive to social unrest."[50] If censors were unwilling to allow even such a moderately conservative vision of class conflict, it seemed unlikely that studios would risk making more liberal films about working-class activism. After all, studios were more interested in making money than political statements.

Black Fury, Walsh is quick to point out, was not an isolated case. Twentieth Century Fox head Darryl Zanuck ordered changes in *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) that removed scenes of labor unrest and made mine owners more sympathetic. "I'll be damned," wrote the crusty Zanuck, "if I want to go around making the employer class out-and-out villains in this day and age." Likewise, the anti-labor Bureau of Motion Pictures succeeded in persuading producers of King Vidor's *An American Romance* (1944) to remove scenes of a sit-down strike and ensuing violence.[51] Studios continued to give audiences films about workers, but they kept contentious class themes to a minimum. As Thomas Doherty argued in his recent book on pre-code Hollywood, the combination of pressure from the conservative PCA and impassioned lobbying from a wide range of groups led to a "wholesale depoliticizing" of subject matter. "Political currents still welled up," Doherty observed, " but more calmly, with less radical force."[52]

Studio relations with unions also impacted Hollywood portrayals of workers, their leaders, and their organizations. The repeated cinematic association between unions and mobsters, which stretches from *Racket Busters* (1938) to *Hoffa* (1992), was informed by Depression-era relations among real unions, mobsters, and studio bosses. George Dunne, Mike Nielsen, Gene Mailes, James Lorence, and others describe how Chicago gangsters penetrated the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees Union (IATSE)—the industry's main union—in the early 1930s and made sure that George Browne was elected president in 1934. By 1936, IATSE, the mob, and the studios had struck a secret deal: Union leaders promised no strikes and minimal wage increases. In return, union bagman Willie Bioff received $50,000 a year from all major studios and $25,000 from the minor ones. This arrangement lasted until 1941, when Bioff, Browne, and Twentieth Century Fox studio head Joseph Schenck, the pro-

ducers' liaison with the mob, were all sent to prison. Subsequent films that depicted unions as mob-infested organizations never referred to studio complicity in encouraging such corruption, nor did they mention the many unionists who fought against mob control.[53]

The decline of the IATSE-studio-mob alliance and rise of the militant Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) in the 1940s were paralleled by a new era of labor hostility on and off the screen. Larry Ceplair, Steven Englund, David Prindle, Danae Clark, and Laurie Pintar tell how hostile labor relations, prompted by the formation of actors' and writers' unions in the 1930s, peaked in the 1940s as the militant Herbert K. Sorrell led a CSU campaign to restore democracy among studio unions.[54] Sorrell's quest, which often turned violent as police and studio thugs attempted to suppress the strikers, was thwarted by the combined opposition of embittered studio bosses and rabid redbaiters in IATSE and the Screen Actors Guild. The CSU struggle left an unintended legacy: a spate of films in the late 1940s and 1950s and beyond that depicted unionists as violent men who were easily swayed by corrupt leaders and communist agitators to wreck havoc on American workplaces.[55]

Movies . . . So What?

Returning to Dave Beck's skepticism, we need to ask, Why bother studying film? Do movies about workers and their organizations have any impact on American life? Although there are no "smoking guns" that can absolutely prove the case, many people believe the answer is a most emphatic yes. In his opening remarks to the 1947 House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings, Chairman J. Parnell Thomas spoke of "the tremendous effect which moving pictures have on their mass audiences" and observed that "what the citizen sees and hears in his neighborhood movie house carries a powerful impact on his thoughts and behavior." Thirty-two years later, the members of the California Federation of Labor made a similar observation: "Public perceptions of the American labor movement are predominantly determined by coverage in the mass media."[56]

After nearly one hundred years of largely negative cinematic images, is it any wonder that few Americans—at least according to various public opinion polls of the past several decades—want to think of themselves as working-class? Ask any group of students or voters what is the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the words "union," "union leader," "working class," or "strike." In all probability, the answer will not be positive. Indeed, who would want to think of themselves as a worker or join a union when blue-collar wage earners are continually presented on film and television "as sappy, dopey or foolish, and the labor movement is often portrayed as primarily involved with gangsters, cutthroats, thieves and bomb throwers." Workers and their organizations are rarely depicted as rational bodies that seek a better standard of living for all wage earners. "Movies," observes Ken Margolies, "reflect none of the great drama of grievance processing or collective bargaining, preferring the more easily ex-

ploitable action of strikes, and where strikes are portrayed, violence and chaos predominate." As a 1973 government study on *Work in America* concluded: "The view of the worker in the mass media is that he is the problem, not that he *has* problems."[57]

Television has perpetuated many of these negative images and stereotypes. In an article surveying prime time television representations of workers, Ralph Johnson concluded that "workers are portrayed as ignorant, prejudiced, and incompetent. . . . Society is perceived as a place where few work, where the labor movement is virtually nonexistent and collective bargaining/actions is irrelevant."[58] The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers' Media Project, which monitored news and entertainment shows on all three major networks in February 1980, found that television "continues to portray workers in unionized occupations as clumsy, uneducated fools who drink, smoke and have no leadership ability," and shows unions "as violent, degrading and obstructive." Sara Douglas describes how several unions fought back by producing programs for local networks and cable stations, but their shows never reached a significant audience.[59]

Taken collectively, studies of movies and television suggest that American filmmakers have rarely portrayed working people—or their leaders—as capable of recognizing, articulating, and solving their own problems. Future scholarship might attempt to explain and perhaps even remedy this situation by examining a number of critical areas that demand further inquiry. We need more analysis of working-class images in nontheatrical films, television, and radio—especially of women workers and workers of color who have been grossly underrepresented in scholarly studies. Such an analysis should also explore the material forces affecting the construction of visual and oral/aural ideology; this means trying to explain what is not seen as well as what is seen. Finally, and perhaps most problematically, we need to devise ways of measuring the impact of film on popular consciousness and politics. Studies of the silent era offer anecdotal evidence of how class actions on the screen inspired class actions off the screen. However, there is no work that assesses the influence of visual ideology in a systematic manner.[60] One possible way to approach the thorny question of impact is to see film as part of an expanding public sphere. "By 'public sphere,'" Jürgen Habermas explained, "we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed." Movies certainly fit that definition. They are an arena of political education and entertainment, a medium where competing ideas about workers, unions, strikes, and class issues were shown and where public opinion could be swayed. How movies did this and whether they were more or less effective than other media is what we need to figure out.[61]

There is still much to be done to flesh out our understanding of the relationship between workers and film—and great excitement to be had in doing it. After all, who wouldn't enjoy devoting several weeks of research to watching movies? Hopefully, future studies will convey a new appreciation of film as integral to organizing the American workplace and the American mind.

NOTES

1. Author interview with Dave Beck, July 20, 1988, Seattle, Washington.

2. William J. Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor* (Ithaca, 1992), 31.

3. For an excellent overview of the changing focus of cinema studies, see Robert Sklar, "Oh! Althusser!: Historiography and the Rise of Cinema Studies," in *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History*, ed. Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (Philadelphia, 1990), 12–35.

4. Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture Through 1925* (New York, 1925); Benjamin Hampton, *A History of the Movies* (New York, 1931); Mae Huettig, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry: A Study in Industrial Organization* (Philadelphia, 1944); Upton Sinclair, *Upton Sinclair Presents William Fox* (Los Angeles, 1933, reprinted 1970).

5. For Potamkin's essays, see Lewis Jacobs, ed., *The Compound Cinema: The Film Writings of Harry Allan Potamkin* (New York, 1977); for Platt's work, see Anthony Slide, annotator, *Filmfront*, reprinted edition (Metuchen, NJ, 1986).

6. Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of American Film: A Critical History* (New York, 1939; revised 1968), 149.

7. Ibid., 151.

8. Ibid., 397, 156, 518.

9. Quotes are from Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York, 1975, revised 1994), 88, 90, 87; Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston, 1976).

10. Kay Sloan, *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana, 1988), 3, 75–76; Kevin Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence: Sex, Violence, Prejudice, Crime: Films of Social Conscience in the Silent Era* (New York, 1990).

11. Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton, 1998), xiii.

12. Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, 433. By doing some basic extrapolations, I found there were as many as 2,130 working-class and 1,053 labor-capital films released between 1911 and 1915. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 297–98, note 3. The Brandon Collection, which contains his research notes and unpublished manuscript "Populist Film," is an invaluable source of information for anyone working on class and politics in early American film. Thomas Brandon Collection, Film Studies Center, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

13. For an analysis of these ideological categories and the ways in which filmmakers visualized their politics, see Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 56–85.

14. For statistics, see ibid., 47, 116; for cross-class fantasies, see 194–208.

15. Russell Campbell, "Nihilists and Bolsheviks: Revolutionary Russia in American Silent Film," *The Silent Picture* 19 (1974):4–36; quotes are from 12, 19. For "Bolshevik" films made between 1919 and 1920, see Craig W. Campbell, *Reel America and World War I: A Comprehensive Filmography and History of Motion Pictures in the United States, 1914–1920* (Jefferson, NC, 1985).

16. Michael Slade Shull, *Radicalism in American Silent Films, 1909–1929: A Filmography and History* (Jefferson, NC, 2000), 9, 45, 96; Michael S. Shull, "Silent Agitators: Militant Labor in the Movies, 1909–1919," *Labor's Heritage* 9 (1998):76. Other useful works that explore the relationship between workers, radicals, and film in the silent era include Philip Sterling, "A Channel for Democratic Thought," *Films* 1 (1940):8–14; Ken Margolies, "Silver Screen Tarnishes Unions," *Screen Actor* 23 (1981):43–52; Philip Foner, "A Martyr to His Cause: The Scenario of the First Labor Film in the United States," *Labor History* 24 (1983):103–11; Roberta Pearson, "Cultivated Folks and the Better Classes: Class Conflict and Representation in Early American Film," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 15 (1987):120–28; Peter Stead, *Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society* (New York, 1989); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); Tom Zaniello, *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds, and Riffraff: An Organized Guide to Films About Labor* (Ithaca, NY, 1996); M. Keith Booker, *Film and the American Left: A Research Guide* (Westport, CT, 1999); Campbell, *Reel America*; Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes*.

17. Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (New York, 1973), 85; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 48–49; Shull, *Radicalism in American Silent Films*, 87.

18. Nan Enstad, "Dressed for Adventure: Working Women and Silent Movie Serials in the 1910s," *Feminist Studies* 21 (1995):67–90; Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1999); Karen Ward Mahar, "Offscreen Roles: Women Filmmakers and the Gendering of the American Film Industry, 1896–1928" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1995); Ben Singer, "Female Power in the Serial Queen Melodrama: The Etiology of an Anomaly," *Camera Obscura* 22 (1990):91–129. For an overview of working women and film, see Carolyn L. Galerstein, *Working Women on the Hollywood Screen: A Filmography* (New York, 1989).

19. Stead, *Film and the Working Class*, 239, 240, 243.

20. Ibid., 241, 246, 244.

21. Ibid., 23, 245.

22. For discussions of workers and movies in the 1930s and 1940s, as well as overviews of workers and films in the sound era, see David Manning White and Richard Averson, *The Celluloid Weapon: Social Comment in the American Film* (Boston, 1972); Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, "The Worker and Hollywood," *Cinéaste* 9 (1978):8–13; Al Auster and Leonard Quart, "The Working Class Goes to Hollywood: 'F.I.S.T.' and 'Blue Collar,'" *Cinéaste* 9 (1978):4–7; Al Auster et al., "Hollywood and the Working Class: A Discussion," *Socialist Review* 9 (1979):109–21; Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* (Bloomington, 1981); Ken Margolies, "Silver Screen Tarnishes Unions: How Hollywood Movies Have Given Workers a Black Eye," *Screen Actor* 23 (1981):43–52; Francis R. Walsh, "The Films We Never Saw: American Movies View Organized Labor, 1934–1954," *Labor History* 27 (1986):564–80; Frank Stricker, "Repressing the Working Class: Individualism and the Masses in Frank Capra's Films," *Labor History* 31 (1990):454–67; Mary Beth Haralovich, "The Proletarian Woman's Film of the 1930s: Contending with Censorship and Entertainment," *Screen* 31 (1990):172–87; David Platt, ed., *Celluloid Power: Social Criticism from "The Birth of a Nation" to "Judgment at Nuremberg"* (Metuchen, NJ, 1992); Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939* (New York, 1993); Linda Dittmar, "All that Hollywood Allows: Film and the Working Class," *Radical Teacher* 46 (1995):38–45; David E. James and Rick Berg, eds., *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (Minneapolis, 1996); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1997); Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, 2000); Jacobs, *Rise of American Film*; Sklar, *Movie-Made America*; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*; and sources in note 16.

23. Stead, *Film and the Working Class*, 141–42.

24. Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York, 1983), 173; John Howard Lawson, *Film in the Battle of Ideas* (New York, 1953), 98. For workers and film in the late 1940s and 1950s, see Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, "The Worker and Hollywood," *Cinéaste* 9 (1978):8–13; Lynn Garofola, "Hollywood and the Myth of the Working Class," *Radical America* 14 (1980):7–15; Gregory Bush, "'I'd Prefer Not To': A Research Note on Resistance to Office Work in Some Post World War II American Films," *Labor History* 31 (1990):361–72; George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana, 1994); and sources in notes 16, 22.

25. Stead, *Film and the Working Class*, 223.

26. Auster and Quart, "Working Class Goes to Hollywood," 7. For discussions of workers, radicals, and films from the 1960s to 1990s, see, in addition to previously mentioned authors, J. Lesage, "Resources: Blue Collar Movies," *Jump-Cut* 2 (1974):15–17; Frank Stricker, "Hollywood Meets the Unions," *New Labor Review* 2 (1978):111–18; Paul Thomas, "'I Could Have Been a Contender': Hollywood Discovers the Working Class?" *Film Library Quarterly* 12 (1979):59–63; Gay P. Zieger and Robert H. Zieger, "Unions on the Silver Screen: A Review-Essay of *F.I.S.T.*, *Blue Collar*, and *Norma Rae*," *Labor History* 23 (1982):67–78; Peter Stevens, ed., *Jump Cut: Hollywood, Politics, and Counter Cinema* (New York, 1985); John Sayles, *Thinking In Pictures: The Making of the Movie* Matewan (Boston, 1987); Bryant Simon, "*Hoffa*," *American Historical Review* 98 (1993):1184–86; Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'N' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (New York, 1998); John Sayles and Gavin Smith, *Sayles on Sayles* (London, 1998).

27. Zaniello, *Working Stiffs*, 3.

28. Booker, *Film and the American Left*.

29. Jacobs, *Rise of American Film*, 518. For early writings about radical film, see Hebert Cline, ed., *New Theatre and Film* (San Diego, 1985), and sources in note 5; for memoirs and in-

terviews with radical film pioneers, see Fred Sweet, Eugene Rosow, and Allan Francovich, "Pioneers: An Interview with Tom Brandon," *Film Quarterly* 28 (1973):20–23; "*Native Land*: An Interview with Leo Hurwitz," *Cinéaste* 6 (1974):2–7; Leo Seltzer, "Documenting the Depression of the 1930s: The Work of the Film and Photo League," *Film Library Quarterly* 13 (1980):15–22; Special Section: Film and Photo League, *Jump Cut* 33 (1988):105–15.

30. Russell Campbell, *Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States 1930–1942* (Ann Arbor, 1982), 45; William Alexander, *Film on the Left: American Documentary Film From 1931 to 1942* (Princeton, 1981); Charles Wolfe, "The Poetics and Politics of Nonfiction: Documentary Film," in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise*, ed. Tino Balio (New York, 1993), 351–86.

31. Alexander, *Film on the Left*, 7; Roy Rosenzweig, "Working-Class Struggle in the Great Depression: The Film Record," *Film Library Quarterly* 13 (1980):8, 9.

32. Campbell, *Cinema Strikes Back*, 33. For additional studies of radical filmmaking during this era, see Bert Hogenkamp, "Workers' Newsreels in the 1920s and 1930s," *Our History*, pamphlet 68, (London, 1977); special issue on "American Labor Films," *Film Library Quarterly* 12 (1979); Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York, 1974), 11–28; Peter C. Rollins, "Ideology and Film Rhetoric: Three Documentaries of the New Deal Era (1936–1941)," *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context*, ed. Peter C. Rollins (Lexington, KY, 1998), 32–48.

33. James J. Lorence, *The Suppression of* Salt of the Earth*: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America* (Albuquerque, 1999), 203. For accounts of the difficulties faced in making and distributing *Salt of the Earth*, see ibid.; Herbert Biberman, Salt of the Earth*: The Story of a Film* (Boston, 1965); Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt, *Salt of the Earth* (Old Westbury, NY, 1978).

34. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 87. The efforts of these worker filmmakers are described in ibid.; Sloan, *Loud Silents*; Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*; Foner, "A Martyr to His Cause"; Brandon, "Populist Film"; Shull, *Radicalism in American Silent Films*; Booker, *Film and the American Left*. For the cinematic activities of suffragists, see Shelly Stampp Lindsey, "*Eighty Million Women Want—?*: Women's Suffrage, Female Viewers and the Body Politic," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 16 (1995):1–22; Sloan, *Loud Silents*, 98–123; Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, 226–37. Citations for other groups are mentioned in the following note.

35. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 225. The National Archives houses a vast collection of nontheatricals made by labor, business, and government. Consult the card catalog for entries. For studies of nontheatricals by workers, capitalists, and government agencies, see Steven J. Ross, "Cinema and Class Conflict: Labor, Capital, the State and American Silent Film," in *Resisting Images*, 68–107; Richard Dyer MacCann, *The People's Films: A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures* (New York, 1973); "Films by American Governments," *Films* 1 (1940):5–33; Dwight L. Wardell, "The Business Movie Industry: What It Is and Who Uses It," *Dun's Review* (October 1941):24–30; Daniel J. Perkins, "Sponsored Business Films: An Overview 1895–1955," *Film Reader* 6 (1985); Albert Hemsing, "Labor and the Film," in Cecile Starr, ed., *Ideas on Film: A Handbook for the 16mm Film User* (New York, 1951), 35–58; AFL-CIO, *Film for Labor*, publication 22 (Washington, DC, 1979); Herbert E. Farmer, "A Survey of the Distribution of Non-Theatrical Motion Pictures" (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1955); Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes*; Douglas, *Labor's New Voice*.

36. For a materialist approach to the history of workers and film in the silent era, see Steven J. Ross, "Beyond the Screen: History, Class, and the Movies," in *The Hidden Foundation*, 26–55; Steven J. Ross, "A Journey of Discovery: Researching and Writing *Working-Class Hollywood*," *Stanford Humanities Review* 7 (1999):50–71; Ross, "Sources and Methods for Writing Film History," in *Working-Class Hollywood*, 263–76.

37. These recreational surveys are a wonderful source of information about changing class attitudes towards movies and other commercial recreations. For a list of sources, see Alan Havig, "The Commercial Amusement Audience in Early 20th-Century American Cities," *Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982):1–19; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 284, notes 11–12, 288, note 41, 328, note 7.

38. Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1985), 203. For early debates concerning the class composition of audiences, see ibid., 202–11; Russell Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theaters 1905–1914: Building an Audience," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, 1976), 59–82; Robert C. Allen, "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan 1906–1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon," *Cinema Journal* 18 (1979):2–15. Robert Sklar and Garth Jowett are notable exceptions; both stressed the immigrant and

working-class character of nickelodeon audiences. Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 18–32; Jowett, *Film*, 35–41. For works that reexamine the class composition of moviegoers, see Judith Mayne, "Immigrants and Spectators," *Wide Angle* 5 (1982):32–41; Miriam Hansen, "Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?" *New German Critique* 29 (1983):147–84; Ben Singer, "Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors," *Cinema Journal* 34 (1995):5–35, and responses in *Cinema Journal* 35 (1996):72–128 and *Cinema Journal* 36 (1997):98–112; Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750–1990* (New York, 2000); for a critique of early studies, see Sklar, "Oh! Althusser! Historiography and the Rise of Cinema Studies," 11–35. Scholars have recently pointed out that the class composition of early moviegoing was more heterogeneous in small towns and rural areas than in large cities. Kathryn Fuller, *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture* (Washington, DC, 1996); George Potamianos, "Hollywood in the Hinterlands: Mass Culture in Two California Communities, 1896–1936" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1998); Butsch, *Making of American Audiences*.

39. Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York, 1983), 199. For other key works, see Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877–1919* (Albany, 1984); Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890–1925* (New York, 1985); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York, 1990); for an examination of working-class audiences in the 1930s, see Lawrence Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audienes," and responses in *American Historical Review* 97 (1992):1, 369–430. Cinema scholars who incorporate and, in some cases, go beyond these works, include Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley, 1991); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York, 1990); Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema 1907–1915* (New York, 1990); Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*. For the most recent studies of early audiences and reception, see the two volumes edited by Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London, 1999) and *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London, 1999); Butsch, *Making of American Audiences*. For audiences in later eras, see Bruce A. Austin, *Immediate Seating: A Look at Movie Audiences* (Belmont, CA, 1989). For moviegoing among people of color, see Mary Carbine, "'The Finest Outside the Loop': Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1905–1928," *Camera Obscura* 23 (1990):9–41; Gregory Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896–1930* (Washington, DC, 1995); Junko Ogihara, "The Exhibition of Films for Japanese Americans in Los Angeles During the Silent Film Era," *Film History* 4 (1990):81–87.

40. The relationships among movies, movie theaters, and class identity are explored in May, *Screening Out the Past*, 147–66; May, *Big Tomorrow*, 101–35; David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York, 1993), 220–40; Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours*, 191–221; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 120–32; and Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 173–211. For a perceptive look at the class strategies of Chicago movie palace pioneers Abe Balaban and Sam Katz, see Carrie Balaban, *Continuous Performance: The Story of A. J. Balaban* (New York, 1942).

41. Jacobs, *Rise of American Film*, 271; Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, 290.

42. For the methodology involved in compiling these figures, see Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 335–36, note 62.

43. Paul Fleming Gemmill, *Collective Bargaining by Actors* (Washington, 1926); Alfred Harding, *The Revolt of the Actors* (New York, 1929, reprinted 1973); Robert Osborne Baker, *The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Machine Operators of the United States and Canada* (Lawrence, KS, 1933); Murray Ross, *Stars and Strikes: Unionization of Hollywood* (New York, 1941); Hugh Lovell and Tasile Carter, *Collective Bargaining in the Motion Picture Industry: A Struggle for Stability* (Berkeley, 1955); Grace H. Stimson, *The Rise of the Labor Movement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, 1955); Louis B. Perry and Richard S. Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911–1941* (Berkeley, 1963).

44. Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 90–91; also see Jowett, *Film*. Lewis Jacobs also offered a brief discussion of studio unions.

45. Michael C. Nielsen, "Labor Power and Organization in the Early U.S. Motion Picture Industry," *Film History* 2 (1988):130; also see Michael Nielsen, "Toward a Workers' History of

the U.S. Film Industry," in *The Critical Communications Review. Volume I: Labor, the Working Class, and the Media*, ed. Vincent Mosco and Janet Wasko (Norwood, NJ, 1983), 47–83; Michael Charles Nielsen, "Motion Picture Craft Workers and Craft Unions in Hollywood: The Studio Era, 1912–1948" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1985). For an excellent analysis of musicians and musicians' unions during the silent and sound eras, see James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution 1890–1950* (Baltimore, 1996).

46. For my analysis of changing studio-union relations, see Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 59–62, 115–17, 130–34.

47. Morris L. Ernst and Pare Lorentz, *Censored: The Private Life of the Movie* (New York, 1930), 42. For a sampling of works that explore the pressures censors placed on filmmakers, see ibid.; Ford H. MacGregor, "Official Censorship Legislation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 128 (1926):163–74; Lamar T. Beman, ed., *Censorship of the Theater and Moving Pictures* (New York, 1931); Robert Fischer, "Film Censorship and Progressive Reform: The National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, 1909–1922," *Journal of Popular Film* 4 (1975):143–50; Edward de Grazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors, and the First Amendment* (New York, 1982); Francis G. Couvares, ed., *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington, DC, 1996); Matthew Bernstein, ed., *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era* (New Brunswick, 1999); Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*. For federal pressure on filmmakers during World War One, see James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information 1917–1919* (Princeton, 1939); Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill, 1980); Campbell, *Reel America and World War I*.

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49. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 57, 116, 133, 198; Shull, *Radicalism in American Silent Films*, 126–27.

50. Walsh, "The Films We Never Saw," 565, 568.

51. Zanuck quoted in ibid., 571. For *An American Romance* see ibid., 573–78; Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York, 1987),146–54.

52. Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930–1934* (New York, 1999), 337.

53. The IATSE-mob-studio connection is explored in George H. Dunne, *Hollywood Labor Dispute: A Study in Immorality* (Los Angeles, 1950); Mike Nielsen and Gene Mailes, *Hollywood's Other Blacklist: Union Struggles in the Studio System* (London, 1995); Denise Hartsough, "Crime Pays: The Studios' Labor Deals in the 1930s," *Velvet Light Trap* 23 (1989):49–63; Brett L. Abrams, "The First Hollywood Blacklist: The Major Studios Deals With the Conference of Studio Unions, 1941–1947," *Southern California Quarterly* 77 (1995):215–253; Lorence, *Suppression of* Salt of the Earth.

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57. Barbara Isenberg, "Unions Are Looking for the TV Label," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1980, Calendar Section; Margolies, "Hollywood," 43; Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Work in America* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 34.

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60. Sloan, *Loud Silents*, 59–62; Brownlow, *Behind the Mask*, 505–07; Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood*, 8–9, 107–111; 170–72.

61. Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, eds. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley, 1991), 398. For an excellent study that uses the concept of the public sphere to analyze film and film spectatorship, see Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*.