Labor Union Response to Diversity in Canada and the United States

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Canadian and American research finds that organized labor's engagement with race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation until recently has been largely exclusionist. The Canadian labor movement emerges as having been somewhat more responsive to equity issues, particularly gender and sexual orientation, and at an earlier stage than its U.S. counterpart. The American movement, however, did create limited room for African-American issues and unionization from early this century and now shows signs of broader engagement with diversity issues in general. The literature is strong in case studies pointing to exceptional situations involving minority militancy and union acceptance and in highlighting the role of activists inside and external to the labor movement. It suffers from a lack of large-scale analysis and comparison.

Has organized labor been an ally or a foe for women and minority groups seeking equal opportunities and equitable treatment in the labor force and workplace? There is now a substantial body of literature focused on this question, and recent changes in union response to issues of diversity call out for a summary and assessment of this literature. This article considers scholarship on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation in Canada and the United States.[1]

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[1] Although there are other dimensions to diversity, such as religion, language, and disability, so far they have not had much analytical treatment and will not be considered here. This is not intended to diminish their importance, and indeed, they offer important and timely areas for inquiry.

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Our review suggests that through much of their history most unions have been at the very least skeptical of racial minority members and women, regarding them as threatening to higher wages, job security, and union solidarity. Other marginalized groups, including sexual minorities, until recently simply were not acknowledged as significant or legitimate claimants to rights. Although such an exclusionist pattern appears to have been the norm, there exists moving documentation of important and noteworthy exceptions to these broad trends in the past and encouraging signs of broad-based change in the present. Some scholars suggest that a growing union recognition of diversity may be one of the ways the union movement is attempting to reinvent and reposition itself for the twenty-first century.

Within this literature there is a valuable historical scholarship and an equally important body of case studies of more recent developments, some written by academics and some by activists. We are able only to highlight some of the most dramatic and analytically revealing cases. There are also some quantitative analyses of union activity, and once again, we draw on those with a particularly compelling message. Unfortunately, there is only a very small amount of research that examines and compares labor's engagement with more than one equity category and very little that compares across nations.

There are important differences in the Canadian and American labor movements, in particular the relative strength of unions in Canada.[2] Since the mid-1980s, union density in Canada has remained stable at around 32 to 35 percent, whereas in the United States density has been in a period of decline, having dropped to about 14 percent from a postwar high of 35 percent. Coupled with relatively high membership in Canada is greater political strength, although union influence in Canada has suffered as governments of various political stripes have supported or acquiesced in major components of business agendas. In the face of such pressures, Canadian labor has been more militant, with strike rates having been much higher than American and indeed more than the average in western Europe.

Labor movements in both countries have had to confront dramatic change in political context, as well as population demographics and workplace makeup, over the past three decades. Union movements that used to be relatively strong have been forced to adapt to a situation in which they enjoy considerably less power. A labor movement that was once largely white, male, and believed to be largely heterosexual has had to begin adapting to a labor force with very different demographics, attitudes, and forms of activism (Table 1).

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[2] Some observers (e.g., Troy, 1999) have argued against this portrayal by suggesting a pattern of convergence, or at the very least that Canadian developments parallel developments in the United States but with a Canadian lag. Such an argument can only be sustained by factoring out the public sector and by defining it broadly. Further, the argument focuses only on density rates, ignoring other factors clearly differentiating the two industrial relations regimes.

In the United States, long-standing pressure from African-Americans for equal treatment in the workplace became more and more politicized in the post–World War II period. In both countries there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women in the workforce since the 1960s, accompanied by the rise of a political movement focused on gender inequality. In both countries as well, there has been significant immigration from outside traditional European origins since the 1960s, bringing with it many more visible minorities into the workforce. Gays and

TABLE 1

DIVERSITY IN THE POPULATION, LABOR FORCE, AND UNION MOVEMENT

United States		Canada	
Population			
Total (millions)	265	Total	30
Visible minorities (total)[a]	18%	Visible minorities (total)	11%
African-American	13%	Black	2%
Asian and Pacific Island	4%	Asian	8%
Hispanic/Latin American	11%	Francophone[b]	22%[b]
Labor force (millions)	134	Labor force	16
Men	54%	Men	54%
Women	46%	Women	46%
Union memberships			
Union density	14%	Union density	32%
Men	16%	Men	34%
Women	12%	Women	30%
African-Americans		Visible minority[c]	
Men	20%	Men	21%
Women	16%	Women	32%
Asian and Pacific Islander			
Men	13%		
Women	12%		
Hispanics			
Men	13%		
Women	11%		

[a] The total for visible minority in the United States does not include Hispanics.

[b] Francophone refers to the percent for whom French is the home language.

[c] These data are extrapolated from the weighted results of the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics for 1994, conducted by Statistics Canada (data are not available for specific racial groups).

SOURCES: Bureau of U.S. Census, 1998 data; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1996 data; AFL-CIO, 1997 data; Statistics Canada, 1996 data; Statistics Canada (1999a) "Canada at a Glance"; Statistics Canada (1999b) "Unionization in Canada" (using CALURA data from 1995).

lesbians, like other disadvantaged groups, have become more politicized than ever around workplace issues. Activists within these groups often have seen unions as potential allies for meeting their equity goals but also have seen them as needing to change in major ways in order to be supportive and inclusive.

The increased attention to these changes from scholars and other writers arises partly from the fact of changed workplaces and intensified challenges to traditional union practices. However, it also arises from important analytical shifts. Many of those whose perspectives were driven by liberal or pluralist perspectives have come to recognize that the inequalities created by gender and race, for example, are not like other differences of interest or opinion among union members. Most writers operating from more radical approaches now recognize that class relationships do not subsume other inequalities and that the elimination of class inequalities would not do away with marginalization based on gender, race, and sexual orientation. Among writers who adhere to socialist understandings of the depth of class-based oppression, many recognize the importance of different identities and embedded inequalities within the working class. Some are inclined to see fragmentation as bred or reinforced by the interests of capital; others are ready to see inequality and division as partly due to worker prejudice and self-protectiveness. Most agree, however, that unions must respond to diversity in the workforce and that issues of diversity are worthy of careful and sympathetic analysis.

Another analytical shift among radical writers that has created more room for this literature is an increased sense that unions can be engines of progressive change. The kind of social democratic and neo-Marxist perspectives that allowed for the possibility of change in the relationship of labor and capital has long been prominent in Canadian scholarship. Writers within such currents have long been critical of the labor movement mainstream as too dominated by business unionism but have found plenty of exceptions to highlight the potential for change. In the United States, the search for exceptionalism among writers otherwise highly critical of the labor movement has been more prominent among historians than among scholars of the contemporary period, but recent changes in important sectors of the American union movement are prompting new optimism (Lichtenstein, 1999).

Race and Ethnicity

Union movements in both Canada and the United States have been confronted with challenges related to the inclusion and equitable treatment of ethnic and especially racial minorities throughout their histories. In the United States, African-Americans have long been an important part of both the labor force and the union movement, discriminated against and subordinate in both. With post–Civil War industrialization, black men entered the manufacturing sector, and black women were employed in some unionized low-waged manufacturing and service sectors. Neither the history nor the contemporary life of the American labor movement could be told without attending to the race question that has been at the center of that country's political and economic life.

The legacy of slavery is in some respects uniquely American. However, unions in Canada as well as the United States have confronted other challenges over race. From the nineteenth century on, both countries saw Chinese laborers working on railroads and other non-European immigrants employed in low-waged or vulnerable sectors. In the last 20 or 30 years, immigration from non-European countries has increased. From the 1970s on in particular, the proportion of racial minority residents in Canada's largest cities expanded greatly, as it did in a number of American cities. This built momentum in a variety of institutions, including unions, to acknowledge the issues related to race and "multiculturalism" that had long been accorded only a modicum of official recognition. In both Canada and the United States, changed and changing demographics have confronted unions with issues of occupational "ghettoization," job discrimination, refugee and immigrant status, sharp cultural and linguistic contrasts, and differences in religious practice. Some of these issues have been debated for years; others are relatively new. All of them are potentially divisive of union membership itself.

The most important and politicized nonracial ethnic division in Canada is that between francophones and anglophones. The extent to which French speakers are concentrated in Quebec provides a regional dimension to the issue and fuels separatist ambitions. This, in turn, has given the union movement in Quebec a distinctive nationalist coloration, although there has not been the same pattern of marginalization within the union movement as there has been with respect to racial minorities (Palmer, 1992). In the United States, the most politicized of nonracial ethnic divisions involves the broad range of minorities grouped under the rubric of "Hispanic" (often referred to oddly in racial terms). Some Latina/os originate from domestic populations taken over by nineteenth-century American expansionism, and some originate from immigration (both legal and illegal) from Mexico and other Latin American countries. There are also, of course, substantial numbers of Puerto Ricans on the East Coast, along with both immigrants and exiles from Cuba, mostly in Florida.

There is a very rich U.S. literature on unions and race, though overwhelmingly focused on the African-American experience. There is also a limited historical scholarship on union response to other racial and ethnic groups, e.g., the Chinese, as there is in Canada. Research in both countries has paid little attention to religious or language conflict. Scholarly attention to the contemporary period is less ample in both countries. Perhaps the marked weakness of the American labor movement reduces the number of writers and activists who see it as a major vehicle for economic and political change. The long period over which that movement stuck to a relatively narrow economic agenda probably also has discouraged scholars who might otherwise have entered the field, at least until very recently. In Canada, the relative lateness of large-scale entry of "visible minorities" into the workforce has provided little time for a scholarly literature on unions to emerge, but there is no particular reason to believe that this inattention will last. Perhaps more in Canada than in the United States, there are both activists and academics who hold out the prospect of union embrace of racial diversity and who believe this to be an important development in the broader equity agenda.

Racial and ethnic exclusionism. A significant body of work on race and labor chronicles the pattern of union exclusion of those seen as "outsider" or "other" on ethnic grounds and especially racial grounds. Much of this literature is historical and examines discriminatory practices that few would dispute. Some of it carries the story up to the modern period, arguing that historical patterns have changed only partially.

As Philip Foner says at the beginning of the majesterial history he published in 1974 (p. ix), "from the formation of the first trade unions in the 1790s to the mid-1930s, the policy and practice of organized labor so far as black workers were concerned were largely those of outright exclusion or segregation" (see also Roediger, 1991; Hill, 1985). Foner and other writers point out early exceptions to this pattern and see the rise of industrial unions and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) during the 1930s as an important overall development. Significant numbers of African-Americans and women were added to the labor movement in that period. However, as these observers point out, the U.S. labor movement shifted toward conservatism and a narrow preoccupation with wages and benefits after World War II. The avoidance of issues of discrimination, and of anything thought to be radical, was an accommodation both to the strictures of a state-regulated system of industrial relations and to the widespread rejection of left wing causes through most of the postwar period. Michael Goldfield's *The Color of Politics* (1997) sees the defeat of Operation Dixie—the CIO-led drive for interracial unionism in the postwar South—as a significant marker of the union movement's preoccupation with respectability.

In a substantial article included in a special collection on unions and affirmative action, Cecelie Counts Blakey (1998) provides a very useful historical survey of U.S. union response to racial diversity. She focuses on the African-American experience but includes perceptive commentary on Asians and other immigrants. Her account is nuanced, pointing to the gains represented in the formation of the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World in the nineteenth century and of the CIO in the 1930s, but also to the temporary character or unevenness of those gains and to the gap between official union pronouncements and sustained action. She takes care to avoid simply blaming conservative union leadership, pointing as well to prejudice among white workers. In the same collection of articles, other contributors point to the impact on women and minorities of entrenched systems of seniority so favored by unions (Mantsios, 1998b).

Herbert Hill's (1985) contribution has been to focus on the impact of legislative change and litigation on the discriminatory practices of the labor movement. His volume is devoted largely to the period before the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and constitutes a hard-hitting condemnation of union treatment of African-Americans. Like Roediger (1991), he sees the entire labor movement as having socially constructed the working class in white terms from the nineteenth century onward. Like other observers, he sees the emergence of the CIO as providing many blacks with some of the benefits of union membership, but he is more critical than some in seeing industrial unionism as entrenching discriminatory systems of seniority, job classification, and promotion. Hill's introductory essay treats developments since the 1964 act, and his portrayal of union response to statutory change is highly critical. He points to union resistance to compliance with the law and to the frequent appearance of unions alongside employers as defendants against claims of discriminatory practice. Unions were opposed to judicial "interference" in collective bargaining, but in the process they were defending policies and practices that had clearly discriminatory effects—that in effect were defending white male workers.

Norma Riccucci (1990) examined the role of public-sector unions in combating discrimination against women and minorities, emerging with conclusions that highlight the overall pattern of exclusionism and traditionalism. She points to some unions and some cases in which unions have supported affirmative action and other equity measures, although she sees many instances in which unions have not. She takes care to differentiate the positions adopted by national unions and federations, on the one hand, and union locals, on the other, and cites unevenness and inconsistency within the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees as an illustration. Her data also show how white and male the upper reaches of union hierarchies remain and how seniority systems still discriminate against minorities and women. The argument about job segregation and underrepresentation in leadership ranks also had been made by Foner in 1974 and by Michele Hoyman and Lamont Stallworth in 1987.

The literature on Asians and Hispanics tells a similar story, with workers who are or are seen to be immigrants receiving particularly exclusionist treatment at the hands of unions and their members in the United States (and in Canada as well). By most accounts, the 1880–1914 period in both countries was one of deep conflict between native-born workers and the new "ethnic" immigrants (at this time, of course, mostly from Europe). There were recurrent fears of wages being undercut, intensified by prejudice that could be strong enough in regard to European ethnic groups and that much stronger in regard to those who were racially different. Alexander Saxton's 1971 work explores U.S. union collusion in anti-Chinese mobilization during this same period.

A collection of historical articles on race and ethnicity edited by Robert Asher and Charles Stephenson (1990) covers a broader range of periods, although articles on the turn of the century reinforce the view of craft unions reluctant to admit new immigrants. As they point out, the exclusionary impact of nativism among workers was compounded by employers deliberately fostering interethnic and interracial conflict. Among the contributors to the Asher and Stephenson volume are Raymond Lou (on Chinese workers in the late nineteenth century) and Barbara Posadas (on Filipinos in pre–World War II Chicago). Altagracia Ortiz's account of Puerto Rican garment workers in post–World War I New York discusses the International Ladies Garment Workers Union's (ILGWU's) readiness to discriminate against Filipinos in the 1940s and 1950s, a period in which much of the American labor movement stood still or moved backwards in its treatment of racial diversity.

The substantial waves of a variety of Hispanic immigrants since World War II have had a profound impact on the American labor force, particularly in the Southwest. (Native-born and immigrant Hispanics now make up about 11 percent of the U.S. population; see Table 1.) Until recently, there has been only modest scholarly attention to the extent of union engagement with issues related to Latino/as, Chicanos, Filipinos, Cubans, and other workers in the Hispanic family. A collection of articles on Latino employment and labor organizations, edited by Antoinette Sedillo López (1995), has both historical and contemporary analyses. They document union opposition to Mexican immigrant labor early this century but also discuss successful union drives among West Coast Hispanics in the 1940s and 1950s.

Juan Gomez-Quinones' 1994 book on Mexican-Americans pictures American unions as willing participants in the dual mechanisms of deportation and new immigration that were used to secure and reinforce a constantly intimidated, cheap Mexican labor force. This was despite the fact that Mexicans were familiar with and often supportive of the benefits of unionization and offered the potential for increasing membership.

There is a small American literature (and even smaller Canadian literature) that focuses on the especially vulnerable status of immigrant women. The garment trades have received some historical attention that highlights the potential for union organizing among immigrants. Jewish workers have been examined on both sides of the border, one of the notable contributions to the literature being Ruth Frager's (1992) analysis of unionization in Toronto's garment sector from 1900 to 1940. Jewish workers established a relatively strong union voice, although ultimately Frager concludes that economic downturns, employer and state resistance, and ethnic, gender, and ideologic divisions weakened the movement. Research on the U.S. needle trades (e.g., Weiner and Green, 1984) shows how little attention the ILGWU was paying to gender or ethnic issues despite the number of recent migrants in the industry from Central and South America. Patricia Pessar's (1987) and Roger Waldinger's (1985) work on immigrant garment workers has shown immigrant interest in unions to be modest in some circumstances, although in general the literature on attitudes toward unions acknowledges that traditional union inattention to race and diversity did nothing to draw immigrant women to the labor movement.

There is a quantitative literature on cross-race union membership and attitudes toward unions that reveals the hazards of generalization about any racial group being antagonistic or indifferent to unions. Silverblatt and Amann (1991), for example, found that although African-Americans had relatively favorable attitudes toward unions, Hispanics had less favorable views than "Anglos." Defreitas (1993) shows a dramatic rise in Hispanic union members across the 1980s—a period of overall union decline—even though the increase does not keep pace with their growth as a proportion of the labor force. The same research indicates that among young workers, Hispanics and immigrants as a whole have above-average union affiliation. The Hispanic pattern prevails, as Defreitas indicates, despite the fact that union discrimination and the anti-immigrant positions of many workers have inhibited union membership among those eager to join. James Cockcroft (1986) has shown that Latino workers have had high profiles in important organizing drives in the manufacturing and service sectors since the 1960s. Defreitas' analysis indicates low union membership rates among Asians, although Kim and Kim (1997) find that variations within that group were significant—a function of such factors as length of stay and naturalization status. Union membership among Asian-Americans has increased significantly in recent years (Aguilar-San Juan, 1994).

Through much of their history, unions in Canada betrayed a pattern of racial exclusionism similar to their American counterparts. There were ex-slave black migrants to Canada from the time of the American Revolution and Chinese workers admitted in the late nineteenth century largely for railway work. There were modest numbers of racial minority immigrants in the first half of the current century, but then significant numbers of Caribbean blacks were admitted in the postwar period, largely for domestic work. There is only a small amount of historical scholarship even touching on union response to such groups. That which exists has documented patterns similar to those in the United States, of a union movement explicitly and aggressively exclusionary of racial minorities, in particular those from Asia. Peter Ward (1978) has written about unions in British Columbia being at the forefront of opposition to immigration from China, Japan, and India from the late nineteenth century on, supported by their brethren in other parts of the country. On the West Coast particularly, anti-Asian talk had substantial popular appeal and was used to rally support to the union cause. Immigrants from across the Pacific were portrayed as threatening the wages of white workers, although as in the United States there were starkly prejudicial sentiments at the base of the campaign. (At the turn of the century, about 11 percent of British Columbia's population was of Asian origin, and until World War II, almost all were denied the right to vote in provincial elections.)

Anti-Asian activism by unions was tempering by the 1930s, although it appears to have persisted in the B.C. Fisherman's Association. In the 1920s, most unions stopped being central players in political campaigning around the issue, and in 1931, the Trades and Labor Congress dropped its officially exclusionary policy toward Asians. A new social democratic party to which many Canadian labor activists were drawn, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was born with a strong interest in civil liberties, contributing to the pull away from the most obviously racist positions.

Julie White (1993) is one of the small number of writers who have taken up issues of race in the contemporary period. She concluded that unions until very recently had not offered much in the way of response to the disadvantaged position that confronted most non-Caucasians in the labor market. She points out that as recently as the 1970s there were reports of minorities being blatantly denied union membership—the plumbers union in Sarnia, Ontario, being accused in mid-decade of ignoring black applications for membership. Sociologist Ronnie Leah (1993) has attempted to document the contemporary experience of black women in both the labor and women's movements. She concluded in 1993 that racism was no less prevalent in the labor movement than elsewhere, finding people of color to be underrepresented on union committees and staff positions.

The issue of French-English relations within the labor movement has not received much analytical attention, and the issues in any event are quite different from the patterns of exclusionism discussed earlier. There certainly have been long-standing prejudices about francophones among English-speaking workers in Canada, as there have been in the society at large. However, this generally has not translated into the sort of official and unofficial marginalization or exclusion that characterized union treatment of racial minorities. Francophones in Canada also have been concentrated overwhelmingly in the province of Quebec and in areas adjacent to it and in the period since World War II have been no less likely to belong to unions than their anglophone counterparts. Quebec-based workers also are more likely than not to belong to unions with a majority of French speakers and led by fellow francophones. French-Canadian workers outside Quebec are likely to be underrepresented in the leadership ranks of their unions, as are anglophone workers in Quebec, but there is little evidence of seriously discriminatory patterns in either setting. For much of Canada's history until the 1970s, francophone incomes were on average lower than those of anglophones, but this is no longer true to any significant degree. Within Quebec, French speakers largely have supplanted the anglophone business and commercial elite that once dominated the province's economy.

The Quebec movement appears not to have embraced racial diversity with more enthusiasm than unions in the rest of Canada. There are strands of Québécois nationalism that are cross-culturally inclusive, others for whom notions of "solidarity" are restricted to the ethnically French, and still others who are welcoming only to "immigrants" who fully assimilate. The activist networks inside and outside the labor movement raising issues of race are relatively small, so it is reasonable to suggest that

Quebec unions have been even less pressured to take such issues up than their counterparts in parts of the country like Vancouver and Toronto with large concentrations of racial minorities in the workforce.

Case studies of minority militancy and interracial union development. The writing on unions and diversity includes a substantial body of case studies. The vast majority of those which deal with race and ethnicity are chosen to illustrate either the potential for militancy of minority group workers (even those who might be stereotyped as difficult to mobilize) or the possibilities of unions developing multiracial membership. In other words, these are presented as illustrations of the potential for the union movement to take up questions of cultural diversity. Most of this case study material is historical, pointing to particular strikes or disruptions and to particular unions. Some of it includes or focuses on more contemporary examples, the most recent of it pointing to encouraging changes in the U.S. labor movement.

The case study literature on African-Americans points to examples of successful interracial unionism, invariably positioning such cases as exceptional. One of the notable examples is Roger Horowitz's (1997) exploration of the meatpacking industry, which documents some success in bridging gender and racial divides. The United Packinghouse Workers of America, though a relatively small union, resisted the strong pulls toward moderation and centralization that were characteristic of unions within the CIO after World War II. The United Automobile Workers (UAW) is another union that has received case study attention for its relatively progressive social unionism. The work of August Meier and Elliot Rudwick (1979), for example, examines the relationship between the struggle for black civil rights and the UAW.

The relationship between black union activism and the civil rights movement is a theme in Joe Trotter's (1988) book on black workers in Milwaukee that chronicles the movement of African-Americans into northern factories in the early 1900s. He highlights the racist hiring policies of both the owners and unions these workers encountered but shows how these realities led to blacks forming their own unions and developing their own coping strategies, all of which helped lay the ground work for a civil rights movement.

Michael Honey's (1993) study of industrial unionism in the South looks to Memphis for an example of interracial organizing in the 1930s—one that offers a contrast with the widespread pattern of union development after World War II. (Honey's book is part of a revival of interest in southern labor history, evidenced as well in the 1994 publication of a collection of case studies edited by Gary Fink and Merl Reed, although that volume contains more stories of unconstrained exploitation and union defeat than successful multiracial organizing.) The writers citing positive examples are more than ready to point out ambivalences and inconsistencies in union commitment to remedying discriminatory practices and legacies but still argue that these are examples of unions advancing the cause of black workers in their employment and in their larger struggle for civil rights.

The formation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) in the 1920s has been cited as an example of unionization in an occupation dominated by African-Americans to demonstrate the potential for unionization even against great odds and to illustrate the important role that unions can play in boosting workplace solidarity and dignity. One of the most interesting contributions to this story is Melinda Chateauvert's (1998) study of the role of women in the BSCP. As she points out, the centrality of the concept of black manhood in the union's development effectively reproduced the patriarchalism of white craft unionism. The BSCP and much of its "ladies auxiliary" membership fought for a "family wage" that would restore women to the home to play the sort of domestic role that was construed as a prerequisite for respectability and full citizenship. Chateauvert highlights the role of women in this movement.

Sleeping car porters also figured prominently in Canadian black unionization. The formation of the Order of Sleeping Car Porters in 1918 preceded by 7 years the birth of its American counterpart (Winks, 1971). The new union encountered discriminatory practices in both the all-white Brotherhood of Railway Workers and the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, to which it had applied for a charter. In the 1930s, the success of the BSCP in the United States helped them establish themselves in Canada, and that, in turn, improved porter wages and benefits, in the 1950s overturning the most restrictive of the job classifications that had stymied black promotion to other railways jobs.

The literature on racial minorities other than African-Americans tends to focus on the organizing potential of groups traditionally assumed difficult to unionize. In the case study literature, the Asher and Stephenson volume (1990) shows that some immigrants organized "protounions" of their own early on. Mario Garcia, a contributor to that collection, writes about Mexican-Americans in the progressive and racially egalitarian International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers during the World War II period. In a collection of previously published articles edited by George Pozzetta (1991), Gerald Poyo and Gary Mormino write about late-nineteenth-century union organizing and militancy among Cuban and Spanish workers in Florida. The collection of essays edited by Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacick (1984) discusses early organizing among Asian workers—e.g., among Hawaiian sugar cane workers in the 1890s and later on Japanese gardeners in California. In the Pozzetta collection, Howard Dewitt examines the 1930s formation of a Filipino farm workers union and an important strike of lettuce pickers in 1934. Robert Asher's (1982) summary of the findings of several labor historians also cautions against simple generalization. Immigrants in some circumstances were more than ready to join unions and in others highly resistant. In a few cases, unions were open to at least some immigrant members, although there were certainly plenty of examples of nativist exclusion, for example, of Chinese and Japanese industrial workers on the West Coast. The López collection on Latino/as contains case studies of successful unionization, e.g., Hispanics in the 1940s and 1950s. Robert Lazo examines the development of more recent measures by the AFL-CIO to assist Latino/a workers in California, although he acknowledges the opposition at local levels to the sorts of measures taken by regional and national ALF-CIO offices.

"Justice for Janitors" was an American organizing campaign of particular importance to Hispanics and immigrant workers, launched in 1985 by the Service Employees International Union. It too has received case study attention intended to illustrate both the possibilities of unionizing groups once thought to be unorganizable and the potential of established unions to take up progressive positions on ethnic and racial diversity (Waldinger et al., 1998; Kelly, 1997). Goldfield's work on African-Americans (1997), although generally critical of the union movement, points to "intriguing signs" of shifting toward greater attention to race issues and to the work required in organizing racial minority workers, citing among other examples "Justice for Janitors" (see also Labor Research Review, 1993).

Recent changes in union responsiveness. Encouraging developments in the AFL-CIO have begun to spawn a more optimistic or hopeful literature, evoking a new, revitalized U.S. labor movement. By the early 1990s, constituency groups had been created for both African-Americans and Asians, in part reflecting changes that had occurred in the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Then, in 1995, the SEIU's John Sweeney and his "new voice" slate won the leadership of the AFL-CIO; its executive then expanded to take in more women and minorities than ever (Kelley, 1997). The launch of the journal *New Labor Forum* in 1997 was an expression of the heightened expectations of the time, containing articles chronicling recent change and proposing new directions [including Kelley (1997) and Lichtenstein (1999)]. One issue alone (Spring 1998) included specially edited sections on unions and child care (Joyner, 1998), workplace change (Rundle and Bronfenbrenner, 1998), and affirmative action (Mantsios, 1998b). Apart from his contribution to that volume, Gregory Mantsios also has edited his own collection on new developments and prescriptions (Mantsios, 1998a). Other recent books that look approvingly on the U.S. labor movement's increased recognition of diversity are that by Michael Yates (1998) and collections edited by Bronfenbrenner et al. (1998) and Mort (1998). The Bronfenbrenner volume, *Organizing to Win*, includes articles on UNITE's organizing of immigrant communities (by Immanual Ness) and "Justice for Janitors" (by Roger Waldinger et al.). The Jo-Ann Mort collection, *Not Your Father's Union*, has an optimism shaped to some extent by its inclusion of contributions from writers working with UNITE, SEIU, and the AFL-CIO themselves and includes an essay on immigrant workers by Hector Figueroa.

By the end of the 1990s, there also were changes in union response to visible minorities in Canada. Both Leah (1989, 1993) and White (1993) were able to report positive developments in several unions, including the Canadian Auto Workers, by 1993, although there were still unions that had not even begun to deal with racial minorities. Since then, more and more union publications have been discussing issues of racism (e.g., Mitchell, 1996), and by 1997, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC, 1997) had released a National Anti-Racism Task Force report outlining the extent of the problem and calling for remedial action. Some of the largest unions in the country now appear poised to devote more resources to combating racism. For example, the Canadian Union of Public Employees is reported to have come out of its first national antiracism conference held in January 1997 with a commitment "to integrating the fight against racism into all our activities, into all our campaigns, into all our fights as a union" (Our Times, 1997:14).

Since none of the literature dealing with race and unions deals with both Canada and the United States, and since little of it even attempts to take the measure of responsiveness to racial diversity across the whole labor movement within either of those countries, direct comparison is difficult. The U.S. movement has been forced to confront race issues focused on the work experience of African-Americans for many decades, many unions being confronted with activist mobilization within and outside labor's ranks that has shaken complacency or disrupted established patterns of discrimination (see Nyden, 1983; Foner, 1979, 1980; Milkman, 1985; Counts Blakey, 1998). Canadian unions have confronted substantial racial diversity in the workforce more recently and have only very recently seen racial minority activism within their ranks. On the other hand, the stronger role of social unionism in the Canadian movement and the significant gains made by feminists in the union movement have provided openings for change that are probably wider than in the American movement. In the absence of systematic analytical and comparative literature, such an assessment has to be tentative.

Race, ethnicity, and labor in perspective. Widespread in the literature on racial differences and unions in both countries is the argument that the principal force of change in union response to diversity is the activism of minority activists themselves. This is frequently paired with the assumption that the main source of resistance to greater equity until recently has been union leadership rather than the rank and file. And further, to the extent that unions take on racial diversity causes, workplace advances are owed to union success in the face of management adversity. The first of these assumptions often makes sense, for there is ample enough evidence of unions being lethargic in taking up race issues. However, it can lead to idealized images of minorities as supportive of unionization and naturally militant. Arguments that racial minorities, particularly immigrants, are difficult to organize are sometimes brushed aside with equally sweeping views that they have not confronted and do not confront willing unions with particularly difficult challenges. Clearly some groups do and some do not.

The implication that change only comes about from the activism of the oppressed also sidesteps other sources of change. On this and other issues, legislation and court interpretation of constitutionally embedded rights have played a role in forcing change on unions. To be sure, internal activism was important, but not in isolation. Herbert Hill (1985) shows that American unions sometimes colluded in the maintenance of discriminatory practices after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but court decisions, resulting from litigation launched by African-Americans and their allies, forced change. More of this sort of work needs doing.

Assumptions about the source of resistance within the contemporary labor movement are more often conveyed by the absence of research than by the explicitness of claims. Workers in the United States and Canada are still seriously divided over issues of race and immigration. Union leaders sometimes proceed cautiously on such subjects because they themselves are comfortable with relatively narrow agendas, but they sometimes do so because they recognize powder kegs when they see them. This is not to justify the slowness of their pace but only to argue that this needs serious analytical examination.

So too do the relative roles of unions and management in setting the racial equity agendas in the workplace. Laws and courts have forced management to change even in the absence of union pressure, and so has pressure from civil rights and other race-based activism outside the union movement. In fact, the relationship between the activism that has occurred within unions and the diversity activism outside has been the subject of some historical scholarship (e.g., by Foner, Goldfield, Meier and Rudwick, and Counts Blakey), but more is needed for the examination of contemporary racial minority activism. There also needs to be research on the role of management, independent of legal and social movement pressures, in proposing equity policies and the relationship between union and management in generating change.

It is not that there is much literature on race and unions that is romanticized or idealized in its portrayal of the labor movement overall. Much of the literature does tend to focus on success stories, but such examples are usually deployed as a way of showing a path not yet traveled. The idealization that it risks is in portraying unions as having more potential to act as motors of transformative change in the workplace than may be the case and of implying that in the absence of such union initiative, race-based inequity would remain unchallenged.

Women and Unions

Margaret Hallock (1997) opens her analysis of the American case with a backward look that probably would apply to Canada and many other countries.

> For decades it seemed that unions either ignored women or discriminated against them. At worst, unions dismissed women as inferior trade unionists. At best, women were viewed as workers with special issues, handicaps or obstacles —who, with special attention, could become valuable trade unionists. But the emphasis was usually on changing women to fit the mould of unions, rather than taking a hard look at the very structure of unions. Union organizers ignored evidence that the workplace is gendered, that women's experience at work is significantly different from men's in virtually every important respect [p. 45].

Large numbers of working-class women have always been in the paid labor force, since they were never as able as their middle-class counterparts to live the domestic life idealized in the nineteenth century and revitalized in the years following World War II. The war itself unsettled traditionally gendered relationships to the labor force, as millions of women in Canada and the United States were recruited into manufacturing jobs. Their expulsion from such jobs at the end of hostilities led to only a short-turn reduction in women's participation in the labor force. The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s saw a steady narrowing of the gap between the labor force participation rates of women and men and an increase in the expectation that even married women with children would have paid employment over most of their adult lives. Now, in both countries, women constitute more than 45 percent of the paid labor force.

Inequalities, of course, have persisted. The labor force in North America, as in most other parts of the industrialized world, has been highly segmented, women's inroads into some male-identified jobs being an almost entirely middle-class phenomenon. Many female-dominated sectors have been weakly unionized historically and have disproportionate part-time work. (The public sector, especially in Canada, has provided an important exception.) The historical legacy of unions treating women as a low-waged threat to men's jobs was combined with widespread belief that women's jobs were unorganizable to produce a substantial lag in labor movement engagement with gender issues. The demands of the women's movement also were seen as divisive of the house of labor and as risking a shift of critical attention from employers to fellow workers.

By the nineties, no union movement could deny the importance and permanence of women's role in the labor force and the indispensability of mobilizing as many of them as possible into the movement. The continuing threat to union membership and strength over the course of the 1980s and 1990s also invigorated the search for new constituencies and new organizing sites. Women are still less likely than men to belong to unions, but the gap has been narrowed significantly (see Table 1).

There has always been a significant portion of the women's movement and of feminist scholarship, especially in the United States, that has dismissed unions as assertively and antagonistically male-dominated—more likely to be part of the problem and decidedly not part of the solution. There is also a portion of the movement, once again more so in the United States than in Canada, that has paid only modest attention to class issues. Both these tendencies have mitigated against a serious examination of union politics. The literature that has taken up the relationship between unions and women, of course, is based on the assumption that unionization is essential for worker dignity. Those who write in this area see unions having at least the potential to act for women, even if they are critical of unions' past record.

The American literature is strongest in the historical treatment of these issues and only very recently has paid much attention to developments before the 1960s. As in the case of race, the tendency to neglect the post–World War II period was in part a reflection of the pronounced weakness of the American labor movement and its tendency toward narrow and cautious agendas. This diminished labor's attractiveness to social movement activists interested in diversity issues and to scholars as well. The Canadian feminist literature has had a more sustained and substantial engagement with union developments, reflecting a union movement that is much stronger than its U.S. counterpart and much more firmly established in the public sector—an area with a high proportion of women workers. There have been important advances in union engagement with gender issues since the 1970s and closer connections between feminist activists inside the union movement and the women's movement more generally than are found in the United States. As with race and ethnicity, there is a literature that is preoccupied with patterns of marginalization and another consisting of case studies illustrating the progress effected largely by women's activism.

The marginalization of women. Much of the literature tracing the historical position of women in unions highlights the fact they were treated as secondary workers and concentrated in hard-to-organize sectors. Most writers acknowledge some change in union response to gender, especially in the recent past, but there are important scholarly analyses employing a wide range of methods that tend toward highly critical assessments. This said, several scholars are hard to categorize as either negative or positive, since they see occasional signs of change amid a larger picture of only very slow adaptation to changes in the workforce. A good example is Johanna Brenner's 1998 thoughtful analysis of gender and class in U.S. labor history.

Among the prominent American names in the historical scholarship on women and unions are Dorothy Sue Cobble (1990, 1991, 1993), Barbara Wertheimer (1977, 1984), Alice Kessler-Harris (1982), Ruth Milkman (1980, 1985), James Kenneally (1981, 1985), and Philip Foner (1979, 1980)—all of them pointing to the long-standing participation of women in the American labor force and to the preparedness of women to initiate and support industrial action. Their portrayal of American unions until the most recent period, however, is still largely a tale of union marginalization of women. Canadian historical scholarship (e.g., Ruth Frager, 1983) has much the same message, showing women's preparedness to organize and resist, although in the midst of a union movement relatively insensitive to their interests. In the contemporary period, however, Canadian writers tend to be more optimistic about labor's potential and progress (see Julie White, 1980, 1990, 1993, 1997).

In the historical literature, the garment sector has received particular attention, much of it pointing to the extraordinary job pressures on women in that workforce, to their readiness at times to protest and strike, and to the conservativeness of their union leadership. Kenneally (1981, 1985) points out that even when the CIO was adopting progressive stands on women's issues prior to its amalgamation with the AFL in 1957, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) would be actively sustaining or acquiescing in discriminatory workplace practices. There is historical research on Canada with similar findings (Gannagé, 1986; Steedman, 1998); some update the story with case studies and commentary suggesting the continuation of male domination of union leadership and of cautious strategies resistant to women's militancy (Lipsig-Mumme, 1987).

There has been research by historians and other social scientists that takes up the issue of union leadership, the great majority of it pointing to the underrepresentation of women. Ruth Milkman (1985), for example, is certainly ready to flag progress over the years but is quick to highlight the ways in which unions have been painfully slow to change. As she and others point out, in 1972, the vast majority of American unions had not a single woman officer, and among the 24 unions with the largest number of women members, there was a total of only 6 women in high positions. As late as 1975, the AFL-CIO had never had a woman on its executive council and had never had a debate on its policies related to women workers. The unrepresentativeness of union leadership has been addressed by other writers chronicling developments since that time, their research pointing both to the tenacity of traditional norms and practices and to the difficulties facing women trying to balance family, work, and union responsibilities (Roby and Uttal, 1988; Balser, 1987). Some of this research points to increased women's representation at local and regional levels but little at the national level of the American movement (Gooding and Reeve, 1993; O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 1996). By the early 1990s, the ILGWU was 83 percent women in membership, but women made up less than a quarter of its executive board. The newly merged UNITE was 60 percent women in its membership with also less than a quarter women in its leadership. In 1995, 65 percent of the American Federation of Teachers were women, but they represented only 11 of its 34-person executive board. Half the membership of the Communication Workers of America were women, but less than a fifth of the leadership. Even the

UAW still had a disappointing record, its membership 22 percent women and its executive board having only 1 woman among 18 members.

Canadian quantitative research by Chaison and Andiappan (1982, 1987, 1989) points both to underrepresentation of women in union leadership and to the limits of the change that was occurring in the late 1980s. Women who became local officers were more likely to be secretaries or treasurers than presidents, more likely to be from female-dominated locals, and more likely to win in uncontested elections than contested ones. Writing on Quebec unions in the mid-1980s, a time when feminists were applying highly visible pressure on the subject of women's workplace needs, Nadine Jammal (1985) saw labor's leadership as still overwhelmingly male in its demographics and outlook. Sarrazin and Tardy (1988), also studying Quebec unions, do not talk in quite these categorical terms, citing significant increases in women leaders, but they still point to them constituting minorities even in unions with a majority of women members. They downplay the significance of family responsibilities and highlight the persistence of structural and cultural features still heavily shaped by male norms.

To the extent that there have been differential rates of unionization for women and men, research tends to show that the reason is not a more negative attitude toward unions or weaker attachment to the labor force among women (e.g., Vogel, 1971; Kumar, 1991). Thomas Moore (1986) shows that women are even more positively disposed to unions than unorganized men. Some of the research on low rates of unionization focuses on their concentration in sectors that are particularly difficult to organize (Antos et al., 1980; Kochan, 1979; Fiorito and Greer, 1986; Prentice et al., 1996). Others, like Heidi Hartmann (1976), Alice Kessler-Harris (1982, 1985), and Ruth Milkman (1980), attributed lower levels of unionization in substantial measure to the exclusionist policies and discrimination of unions themselves. There is some quantitative research on Canada pointing to similar conclusions, Baker and Robeson (1981) citing the persistence of views of women as cheap, compliant labor and therefore a threat to unions.

Clearly, the continued gender segregation of the workforce is a factor in unequal rates of unionization as well as pay inequity. There are some observers who, like those who deal with racial diversity, criticize unions as collusive in the retention of segregated work patterns. The Canadian scholarship on the matter, more explicitly shaped by socialist feminist perspectives than the American, is more likely to see the problem as a structural one for which only small blame (if any) can be laid at the foot of unions (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1984).

Marion Crain (1991, 1994) is perhaps the most prominent American legal scholar working on women and unions and one of the writers most critical of what she sees as the inattention to working-class women's issues in the union movement, the women's movement, and among academics writing on either labor or gender. In a couple of substantial articles, she examines the relationship between feminism and unionism and in particular the role of law in both producing and reinforcing oppressiveness based on gender and race as well as class. Although understating the intellectual and activist engagement with these issues and the shifts toward recognition of gender in important segments of the labor movement up to the period of her writing, she does make an important point about the role of law (including labor law) in compartmentalizing and separating these issues from one another. This is a particularly vital point in the American context, given the importance accorded to litigation in most social movements.

The American literature on the contemporary union movement and on the persistent differences in unionization rates for women and men includes a number of voices calling for rethinking union approaches to organizing. Several of the contributors to Dorothy Sue Cobble's *Women and Unions* (1993) find examples of innovative responses in particular unions or locals but criticize the widespread tendency to rely on traditional approaches to organizing that are insensitive to the particular circumstances of women workers and to the changes now taking place in occupations heavily populated by women. They also point to the failure to change the composition of the leadership of unions, still "resolutely" male.

Susan Eaton (1992) has authored one of the few comparative assessments of progress made by Canadian and American union movements on the gender front. In a substantial working paper commissioned by the International Labour Organization, Eaton draws together considerable data and analysis documenting women's participation in the workforce and the union movements in both countries. Her work also summarizes information available about women's attitudes toward unions, women's access to leadership positions, and feminist organizing within unions. She finds significant progress in women's unionization, but highly concentrated in the public sector and in clerical work, and less progress at the level of leadership demographics than membership, and often still in unions with uninclusive cultures. In general, she sees more progress among Canada's "national" unions than among either U.S. unions or American-dominated "international" unions.

Case studies of women's activism. More than in the case of racial diversity, the literature on women and unions has a high proportion of case studies highlighting success stories. Many of these stories are, like their race counterparts, pointedly "exceptionalist." Some are historical accounts of women acting militantly in the face of highly exploitive workplace practices and an indifferent union movement; some are case studies of the formation of unions in female-dominated workplaces; others are explorations of the development of feminist networks within the union movement as a whole. Milkman (1985) edited a highly influential collection of essays entitled *Women, Work and Protest* that challenges the earlier scholarly tradition of seeing women as difficult to organize, although she also avoids any tendency toward a romantic view of the scale and intensity of female militancy.

Such historical analysis tends toward the view that craft unionism was more antithetical to women's organizing than the industrial unionism that was represented in the 1930s' formation of the CIO. However, there are case studies of earlier developments that illustrate the risks of overgeneralizing (Kenneally, 1981, 1985). Among them is a respectful account of the early-twentieth-century formation of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) in New York, offered by Nancy Schrom Dye (1980). Dorothy Sue Cobble's (1990) analysis of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (affiliated with the AFL) and her book-length case study of waitress unionization in the 1940s and 1950s (Cobble, 1991) demonstrate that some of the characteristics of craft unionism in general created a degree of space and legitimacy for women-only organizing. Another interesting case study is Barbara Kingsolver's (1989) account of the great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983.

The American literature includes historical accounts of individual women who were particularly active in union organizing (see, e.g., O'Farrell and Kornbluh, 1996). Ann Schofield's *To Do and To Be* (1997) profiles four women whose activism spanned the years 1893 to 1986 and whose stories include experience in the ILGWU (see also Jensen and Davidson, 1984) and the New York Women's Trade Union League. Although not uniquely American, such highlighting of the role of individuals in effecting change is a stronger current in the United States than in Canada.

The Canadian literature also cites instances of early activism, including that which occurred during the period of craft union ascendancy. Histories of women in Canada as a whole (Prentice et al., 1996) and Quebec (Dumont et al., 1987) give prominence to early union organizing and strike participation by women, which are also included in labor histories (e.g., Palmer, 1992). Joan Sangster's (1981) review of historical research points to a concentration of attention on the "progressive" era at the turn of the century. Into this category would fit Wayne Robert's (1976) analysis of women's activism in the Toronto labor movement, Rosenthal's (1979) discussion of Vancouver labor, Ferland's (1989) overview of Quebec's women's industrial activism, and Sangster's (1978) own account of an early strike by telephone workers. The development of teachers unions in several regions across Canada between the period just after World War I and just after World War II, including rural Quebec, is an important part of that story. Frager (1983) cites examples of women's participation in a 1922 Alberta mine strike and a 1929 cotton mill strike in Hamilton, Ontario. On the role of women in the Canadian left generally after 1920, see Sangster (1989).

The garment and textiles industries occupy important places in such histories, as they do in American accounts. As we have seen, some of this literature focuses on the conservatism of the major unions in the area, but much of it emphasizes the willingness of women to form unions and act militantly within them. In Quebec histories, the Dominion Textile strikes of 1908 and 1946 are featured prominently (Dumont et al., 1987; Prentice et al., 1996), as is a wave of strikes involving thousands of garment workers in the 1930s (a wave also affecting other garment-making centers in Canada). Such histories do not camouflage the discrimination against women that unions such as the ILGWU supported, nor do they exaggerate the gains extracted for workers, but their point is to emphasize women's organizability and activism (see Brandt, 1985; Gannagé, 1986, 1995).

Research on the period since the 1960s includes studies of the formation of women's caucuses and organizations devoted to raising gender awareness within the movement (Needleman and Dewey Tanner, 1987). The emergence of "second wave" feminism during the course of that decade helped stimulate feminist activism inside the labor movement in both countries and posed questions about the relationship between women's political work inside labor and the broader women's movement. Examples of feminist organizing in the United States include the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), Union WAGE, and 9 to 5 (see Balser, 1987; see also various works by Milkman, Wertheimer, and Foner). Contributors to *Women and the Politics of Empowerment*, edited by Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen (1988), highlight the inequity still facing working-class women but point to the indispensibility of separate women's networks and caucuses for unionizing women and developing leadership among them. Virtually all researchers in this field attribute what shifts there were in union policy and practice to the work of such committees, even if Union WAGE did not last and CLUW has never had the profile it aspired to among rank-and-file women workers. Alex Brown and Laurie Sheridan have surveyed the development of women's committees in a special issue of *Labor Research Review* (1988) that includes other accounts of feminist activism (including that by women of color) within the U.S. union movement. Self-organizing by women seems to have received more attention than equivalent developments for African-Americans—e.g., the formation of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

In the American literature, there is ambivalence and disagreement about how much this wave of activism within the union movement resulted from the explosive growth of the women's movement at the time. There can be no doubt about that movement's overall influence on the gender consciousness of women workers, but Ruth Milkman sees the influence as muted by its individualistic and middle-class slant. Foner's (1979, 1980) history, though, explicitly contests what he sees as the widespread notion that early second-wave feminism appealed only to white middle-class and upper-class women. Nancy Gabin's important account of the UAW (1990) talks of women's activism being influenced and strengthened by the rise of second-wave feminism.

Research on women's activism in the Canadian movement features two books coedited by Linda Briskin. *Union Sisters* [Briskin and Yanz (1983), revised from Yanz and Briskin (1981)] includes articles showing feminist activism brewing inside the union movement from an early period, raising questions about worker solidarity that were as yet not being addressed substantially. Ten years later, Briskin coedited a similar volume with Patricia McDermott (1993), providing new case studies of women's activism, including chapters on major strikes led by women workers. They also have articles on the auto workers, nurses, garment workers, and bank employees, as well as on issues of union leadership, labor law, pay equity, occupational health, and race.

Attempts to establish independent feminist unions in Canada have received some attention. The Service, Office and Retail Workers Union (SORWUC) and the Association of University and College Employees (AUCE) were explicitly committed to incorporating feminist goals and managed against considerable odds to resist pressure to join other unions (Ainsworth et al., 1982). Some observers treat their short lives as independent unions as indicators of failure, whereas others see it as reflective in part of progress made on gender issues in some major Canadian unions. There is a case-study literature focusing on major strikes, intended largely to demonstrate the capacity of women to engage in assertive and militant action against employers (McDermott, 1983; Coulter, 1993; White, 1990). Among the occupational sectors that have received particularly strong analytical attention in Canada is banking (e.g., Lowe, 1987; Warskett, 1988), illustrating that unionization is possible in a sector notoriously difficult to organize. [For another example of the analysis of unionization in female-dominated sectors, see Bernard (1982) on telecommunications workers.]

The American literature does include accounts of women's activism and union organizing in recent years, although there seems less of it than in Canada. Analyses of hospital workers, by Patricia Cayo Sexton (1982) and Karen Sacks (1988), are examples of ethnographic case-study treatment of attempts at unionization, one successful and one not. On the organization of female-dominated occupations, see also Nielsen's 1982 book on the Association of Flight Attendants, one of the few unions in the United States or anywhere else that was led by women from the beginning when it started in the late 1960s.

Union responsiveness to women's activism. Most of the historical scholarship on the United States points to the importance of the CIO's formation in the 1930s as crucial to bringing women into union membership. Even if the focus on mass-production industries led inevitably to heavily male-dominated membership, the logic of including all workers in a factory or worksite led to the unionization of many women, as it had of blacks. The premise here as for racial minorities is the indisputable one that unionization provides significant benefits in material terms and in terms of workplace dignity [see Heywood (1992) on African-Americans and Balser (1987) on women].

Among the industrial unions that has received the most attention from researchers interested in women's issues is the UAW, largely because of its relatively early, progressive record on diversity and other social issues. In the United States, Nancy Gabin's (1990) book stands out, highlighting the significant steps toward gender equity that women in the UAW spearheaded, although acknowledging limited success in getting gender issues to the bargaining table and in achieving equality within union structures.

Pamela Sugiman's (1994) research on the Canadian branch of the UAW also suggests a distinctive commitment to social justice issues. Since its 1983 declaration of independence from the UAW, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) has gone beyond the record of the parent union. Sugiman contends that within the private sector the CAW's leadership stands out ahead of most other labor leadership on women's issues, although she adds the cautionary note that union locals often have been less keen to push the equity agenda.

The 1970s were a period in which there were the beginnings of union response to feminist activism in both Canada and the United States. Americans such as Milkman and Wertheimer see in that decade the first embrace by many unions of such issues as affirmative action and equal pay for work of comparable value and detect an increase in the numbers of women in local union offices. Writing of developments since that time, contributors to *Women and Unions* (Cobble, 1993) and *Organizing to Win* (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998) cite examples of powerful American unions becoming vocal advocates on a range of gender issues and point to examples of innovative union local responses to demands for change in approaches to organizing and bargaining (although not without criticism of persistent widespread traditionalism).

One of the most interesting contributions to American literature calling for new styles of organizing and negotiating is John Hoerr's (1997) engaging account of the 1988 formation of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers. Women were a majority of the constituency and have remained a majority of the union's membership and leadership since its organizing drive. Heorr sees this as contributing significantly to a very different style of union local, one that favored informal conflict resolution, consensual decision making, high rates of activist participation, and continuous organizing. This is part of an emergent literature that juxtaposes such examples to the styles of "business" and "service" unionism so deeply entrenched in postwar American unions (see Gooding and Reeve, 1993).

The mid-1990 election of John Sweeney and others to the leadership of the AFL-CIO provided some encouragement for those who have worked as activists and scholars on the issues of women and unions in the United States (Mort, 1998). The "organizing" model that is given so much importance by feminists, as well as by those whose work focuses on race and ethnicity, appears to have been strengthened by the changeover. Until very recently, the impressive publishing by American labor historians has not been matched by work on the contemporary period. There now seems more interest in the contemporary relationship between U.S. labor and women's issues, although it will be sustained only if the labor movement as a whole can reverse the downward spiral in membership and political influence.

Canadian research dealing with the last decade has more optimistic voices over a slightly longer period than its American counterparts. This sentiment is driven in part by the much larger number of women workers in Canada who have joined unions. At the beginning of the 1960s, women constituted about 16 percent of union membership in Canada; by 1998, the figure stood at around 44 percent, this in a country with a much higher union density rate than its neighbor. This phenomenal change in union demographics in a 30-year period has, in the words of Julie White (1997), "had a profound impact upon [the union movement's] priorities and activities" (p. 92). Not surprisingly, these developments have led to a major increase in both the volume and breadth of literature examining organized labor's engagement with women and gender issues.

White (1980, 1990, 1993, 1997), an independent researcher, is a major chronicler of the Canadian labor movement's treatment of women and gender issues. A 1980 publication lamented the lack of progress on membership rates, leadership posts, wages, and harassment. By 1993, though, she has this to say: "My first attempt to assess the situation for women in the labour movement . . . now reads like a historical piece, interesting to know what was occurring then, but of little use to describe the current reality" (p. 240). She gives the labor movement credit for tangible gains in equal pay provisions, paid maternity leave, and improved discrimination and harassment protection, although she acknowledges that change is not spread evenly across the union movement.

Change appears to have been most pronounced in public-sector unions. Jerry White (1990) and Ronnie Leah (1989) use case studies of Canadian Union of Public Employee locals to illustrate change in union engagement with gender. Teachers' federations in a number of provinces, including Quebec (Beattie, 1986), were among the first unions to attach high priority to such issues. Although some of the research on Quebec cited earlier argues that traditional male dominance continues, there have in fact been significant gains for women (Prentice et al., 1996). For example, Quebec unions effected major improvements on maternity leave provisions for women in 1979, at which time federations were developing progressive policies on child care, harassment, and discrimination.

Some Canadian chroniclers, however, painted developments through the early 1990s as less positive. Briskin and McDermott (1993) talked of "agonizingly slow" progress, continuing union "complicity" in the gendered segmentation of the labor market, and resistance to broader-based bargaining that attaches importance to gender issues. Sugiman (1994) outlined the gap between official policy and local practice in the CAW. In another important study, Kumar and Acri (1992) undertook to analyze collective-bargaining gains in Ontario on gender-related issues and found progress to be very slow and highly uneven across unions throughout the 1980s (see also Kumar, 1993b; Kumar and Cowan, 1989).

In the industrial sector, Mary Margaret Fonow's (1998) assessment of women's organizing in the Steelworkers Union suggests that women have been making gains in recent years and cites the success of a "Women in Steel" module in the union's educational programming, as well as the vitality of women's committees. One of the signal contributions of this analysis is its comparison of the American and Canadian contexts, one indicating that the latter is significantly more conducive to feminists organizing within unions than the American. This is in part a result of Canadian federal and provincial legislation providing more prods to unions on the subject of pay equity and of greater attention to class and union issues in the Canadian women's movement. As well, by 1999, Briskin, a major figure in this literature, felt able to conclude that unions had become "a central vehicle for organizing around women's issues and a key player in the women's movement [p. 169]."

Overall, in the Canadian literature, there is less reference to women's activism within the labor movement being disconnected from the broader women's movement than in the U.S. literature. Second-wave feminism in Canada always has included a substantial socialist strand, less so perhaps than in Britain but certainly more so than in the United States. Thus, while the women's movement was still open to criticism for being predominantly white and middle class, it could never be as easily stereotyped as its American counterpart as ignoring social class issues or downplaying the importance of unions. The principal federal-level umbrella group—the National Action Committee on the Status of Women—has included union activists and others supportive of unions in its leadership for most of its institutional life.

Gender and labor in perspective. In general, while Canadian researchers and activists vary in their assessment of progress inside the union movement, most of them can cite concrete examples of change. These examples are sometimes drawn from the experience of particular locals but sometimes from large unions and umbrella federations. The American literature can point to encouraging developments in some locals and to changes in a few unions (e.g., the Service Employees), but there evidence is more scattered. Claims are more about the potential for change than about the experience of it, although the election of John Sweeny to the AFL-CIO presidency is held out by activists as one of the most positive moves by organized labor in years.

Writing on the mobilization of feminist pressure on the labor movement points to important overlaps with the political agendas of activists focusing on race issues and some similarities in the phasing of changes in union response. The issues at stake on both fronts arose in part from a segregation in the workforce that relegated most women and people of color to lower-paid jobs. These jobs often were difficult to organize, and unions in any event tended to treat them as not worth the trouble. Women and visible minorities were regarded as threats to white male wages and for different reasons not as dedicated to long-term participation in the workforce. If they did belong to unions, they were routinely discouraged from seeking union office and therefore had little say in the establishment of priorities for collective bargaining. If they raised issues of discrimination, they were accused of jeopardizing the solidarity of workers. Demands for affirmative action usually were met with little more than token support for legislative change, without corresponding reconsideration of the discriminatory impact of established icons such as the seniority system. When women and racial minorities made progress, they did so largely by organizing in separate unions or caucuses.

However, the literature also points to differences between race and gender. Women brought to their political agenda a range of new issues that spoke of the connection between the workplace and domestic life. Parental leave and child care policies were being demanded of unions, both in collective bargaining and in their capacity as employer. And while interworker harassment was important for racial minorities, it was doubly so for women. Thus, while both kinds of issues raised challenging questions about the attitudes and behavior of fellow workers, rather than focusing only on the policies and behavior of employers, attention to the personal has been greater among feminists. Another difference, particularly in the United States, has been in the relationship between the broader social movements and labor. For African-Americans, the utter centrality of economic disadvantage has always given workplace issues a high priority for the civil rights movement. Women's movements in virtually all countries have a broad agenda in which such issues, while important, compete for center stage with other issues. In the United States in particular, working-class issues in general and unionized work settings in particular are underemphasized. It is also the case that American writers on both race and gender ignore union questions, in part because of the tendency to underplay the importance of class and in part because of the weakness of unions in the United States.

The literature on women and unions in Canada and the United States suffers from some of the weaknesses of that which takes up questions of race. It often borders on an idealization of women unionists as supermilitants, and some of the literature understates the difficulties unions have faced in even organizing female-dominated workplaces. The literature on the garment and textile sectors is justifiable in its criticism of union conservatism and its support of discriminatory practices, but some of it exaggerates the potential for union leverage in an industry constantly vulnerable to international competition.

This literature also focuses on women's activism as the instigator of change in union policies and practices, like the race literature underplaying the role of other factors. Wertheimer is noteworthy among historians in pointing to the influence of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in forcing change on U.S. unions. (Interestingly, Crain has a quite different view of law in the contemporary period, seeing it as reinforcing resistance to full equity.) More work is needed on the complex relationship between management, unions, legislatures, and courts in effecting progressive change on equity issues.

More research is also needed on the relationship between women's activism within the labor movement and the broader feminist movement. There is a tendency in the U.S. literature, more than in the Canadian, to see the women's movement as dominated by white middle-class women and by organizations oriented toward limited conceptions of legal equality. This probably has never been fair as a characterization of the movement as a whole, even in the United States, where liberalist conceptions of rights are so important in social movement politics. And whatever the makeup and priorities of the women's movement in that country, there can be no doubt that since the 1970s, women working inside the labor movement have been empowered to some extent by feminist activism outside, even if they are quick to deny any affiliation to the word *feminist*. This merits more attention.

Sexual Orientation

The mobilization of pressure on sexual diversity issues in the workplace emerged within the labor movement only in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It followed the wave of feminist activism in the 1970s and in some respects benefited from the institutional and policy inroads made by women. Lesbians and gays, and later on bisexuals and the transgendered, raised issues parallel to many of those which were the concern of feminists and of African-American activists before them—issues about representation within union structures, of broadened bargaining agendas, and of political support for equity campaigns outside the labor movement. What was less of an issue were initiatives to unionize the unorganized, since lesbians and gays were already in unionized workplaces. What was more important was creating workplaces and union settings that were welcoming enough of sexual diversity to encourage members to be “out” about being gay.

A wave of broader political activism around sexual diversity had begun in the late 1960s but had not had much representation within the labor movement. There were issues and institutional targets outside the workplace that seemed more urgent, and in any event the union movement seemed unlikely to offer support. The AIDS crisis helped accentuate the importance of workplace issues, in part by intensifying concerns about discrimination and in part by increasing interest in health-related employment benefits. Another factor increasing the potential salience of unions was the broader movement’s embrace of issues related to relationship recognition. Until the late 1980s, the lesbian and gay movement’s interest in rights largely was restricted to the rights of individuals. In part because of the increased possibilities for same-sex relationships to be lived openly and in part because of AIDS, relationship issues became more important. This raised the issue of employee benefits, and that inevitably implicated collective-bargaining agreements. Activism by gays and lesbians within the labor movement increased quickly.

The most significant American historical scholarship by far has been undertaken by Allan Bérubé, an independent researcher widely respected for his exceptional book, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*. He is currently finishing a history of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union (Bérubé, 1997), which organized over 20,000 workers on luxury liners and other ships plying the Pacific in the pre–World War II period. Bérubé finds that the union routinely defended its members against antigay harassment and violence and had several openly gay men in leadership positions. Although these practices came to an abrupt end during the McCarthy era, they stand as one testament to surprisingly early union involvement in sexual orientation issues. Bérubé’s work has no parallel in Canada.

There is only the beginnings of research on more recent developments in either country and on union response to them. In the United States, there have been some reports in popular publications of trade union activity around issues related to sexual diversity, including accounts of the passage of nondiscrimination policies and the fight for same-sex benefit coverage in collective agreements. For example, a substantial article in *The New Yorker* magazine by Stewart (1997) highlighted the tensions produced within the UAW when an outspoken member decided to confront the leadership on its attitudes and practices toward gays and lesbians. There also have been very brief treatments in such gay and lesbian periodicals as *The Advocate*. Osborne (1997) recently published a very brief history of the gay/lesbian-labor relationship in the United States (see also Susan Moir in Gluckman and Reed, 1997). He talks of that relationship in terms of strain, although he concludes by noting that the labor movement has recently lent support to gay rights struggles.

To the extent that more detailed and analytical work has been undertaken in any country in North America or elsewhere, a good deal of it has been prepared for inclusion in *Laboring for Rights*, a comparative volume edited by Gerald Hunt (1999). Christian Bain's contribution provides an overview of gay/lesbian-labor connections in the United States, tracing a longer history than some might imagine, although, of course, concentrated in urban centers on the East and West Coasts. Miriam Frank has been studying the rise of gay and lesbian caucuses within American unions, seeing strong similarities to feminist caucuses formed before them. Desma Holcomb treats the demand for same-sex coverage in health care and other benefits as crucial in the development of common cause between gays and lesbians and labor, citing unions such as the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) as examples where progressive developments are taking place. On the other hand, Jon Goldberg-Hiller highlights the sorts of tensions that continue to exist between trade unions and the gay community, using organized labor's lack of support for the same-sex marriage issue in Hawaii as a case study.

Two of the articles in this volume deal with Canada, where union response to activist demand seems to have begun somewhat earlier and to have spread somewhat more widely. Gerald Hunt finds that by 1998 a significant number of federations and large unions were active on sexual diversity issues, some having been so as early as 1980, but that the level of support was uneven and mixed. As in the response to gender issues, support was strongest in public-sector unions, especially those with substantial female membership (although the CAW was a notable example of pro-activism among unions in neither of those categories). Cynthia Petersen's article acknowledges the importance of the legal victories won by gay/lesbian rights advocates, bolstered by favorable judicial readings of the constitutionally entrenched Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She chronicles precedent-setting cases, including a number backed or initiated by unions. This very recent scholarship builds on work published by Sue Genge (1983, 1998) on pioneering activism by gays and lesbians inside the union movement and an earlier article by Hunt (1997).

Organized Labor's Response to Race, Gender, and Minorities in Perspective

In both the United States and Canada, the 1980s and 1990s have witnessed important increases in labor movement attention to issues of diversity. There were isolated responses to demands for change before then, by unusual unions or in unusual times, but overall the house of labor was slow to adjust to the pressures created (or reinvigorated) by rights-based movements arising in the decades following World War II. Change is still slow, particularly in respect to leadership structures, collective-bargaining priorities, union cultures, and shop floor behavior. Many studies we have highlighted here suggest that a progressive shift in official policy often translates into workaday realities gradually and unevenly and requires something stronger than policy alone. However, significant portions of the literature reviewed herein recognize that the union movements of the late 1990s are quite different from those of the early 1970s. This is in some measure a response to the organized activism of workers themselves. It also comes from union leaders recognizing that they have to improve their representation of the disadvantaged if they are to grow or even survive. Increased attention to diversity issues is now evident in a broad range of unions and in such federations as the Canadian Labour Congress and the AFL-CIO.

Despite important changes in the U.S. labor movement, the Canadian labor movement has been somewhat more progressive in its response to diversity issues. The recent Canadian literature on gender acknowledges significant progress, and union positions on sexual orientation are more positive in Canada than in the United States. These differences may reflect a more sustained commitment to social unionism in Canada, a more substantial union presence in the public sector, a stronger union movement overall, and less opposition from fundamentalist-inspired conservatives.

These differences are less pronounced when it comes to race issues. Canadian unions share much of the sordid history of their American counterparts in their treatment of racial difference and immigrant status. Major changes in workforce demographics are forcing the Canadian labor movement to address race issues explicitly, often for the first time. It is too early to tell how they will respond and what the relationship between formal policy development and the lived experience of minority workers will be. For all the traditionalism and white domination in U.S. unions, they have had more experience in confronting racial diversity and race-based conflict.

Differences aside, the literatures on gender and on race—and they are relatively distinct literatures—often come to similar conclusions. Both are dealing with deeply embedded forms of inequality and a workforce still highly segregated along gender and race lines. In both Canada and the United States, analyses of race and gender portray the labor movements as having made only occasional and isolated adjustments to diversity before the 1970s. However, the 1980s did bring important changes in both countries, even if more pronounced in Canada, and the 1990s are proving to be equally important.

The literature on sexual orientation and unions is just beginning to emerge. It makes the obvious point that this was an issue that arose after gender and that to some extent built on the gains made by union feminists. The mobilization of pressure by lesbian and gay unionists often arose from within women's caucuses and very often was given active support by such caucuses. It was they, too, who mobilized in crucial ways to broaden union agendas into new equity areas and into areas that raised questions about how workers treated one another.

The literature on all aspects of diversity highlights the indispensable role played by activists most directly affected by discrimination—women, racial minorities, lesbians and gays—organized in their own committees and caucuses. This does not suggest that allies were unimportant, for the literature regularly points to supportive men, Caucasians, and heterosexuals. However, it does suggest that the impetus for change has come first from those most directly affected and that allowing a degree of autonomous action is very often an essential first step by a union wishing to take these issues seriously. The research surveyed herein also makes clear that unions learn and change as a result of activism inside the union movement and not outside, perhaps more in the United States than in Canada. There is a respect given to "sisters" and "brothers" within labor that is not easily accorded to others, in particular because social movement activists outside labor are often seen as insensitive to working-class interests. This said, the research in this field may not pay quite as much attention as it should to the influence of the broader activist movements. American scholars are prone to seeing social movements as dominated by middle-class professionals. Some movement organizations are, of course, but even they have had an impact on the political and social climate within which union activists operate. There are stereotypes about rights-seeking movements that seem to prevent serious research on their role in stimulating or encouraging intraunion activism.

As we have already said, the literature risks implying that the activism of the marginalized is invariably the most important impetus for change in union policies and practices. This risks underplaying the role of legislatures, courts, and broader social movements in providing inducements and pressures for change. It also may underplay the role of activists and supporters applying pressure directly on management to change workplace environments and institutional policies. It is not misleading to characterize institutional management in both public and private sectors as instinctively resistant to the development of equitable and inclusive workplaces, but it is distorting to assert or imply that unions are the only sources of progressive change.

As we have seen, there is only a very small amount of research that examines more than one equity dimension. Without necessarily intending to, the literature makes clear that the issues affecting these various groups historically on the margin of the labor force and the union movement are not all the same. There is a widespread rhetorical commitment to the notion that these are all part of the same struggle for equity, and in some ways they are. However, the workplace issues facing women, African-Americans, immigrants, and sexual minorities are not always the same, the reactions of union members are not always equivalent, and the potential for remedy is not always equal. This said, there remain questions about the relationship between gender and race and the linkage between gender and sexual orientation and the extent to which progress on one issue spills over to other issues. These sort of questions deserve much more analytical attention. More research that is carefully and systematically comparative across issues would be enormously fruitful. (One noteworthy exception to this is Jonathon Leonard's account of the effects of unions on the employment of blacks, Hispanics, and women.)

The challenges raised by lesbian and gay activists are in some respects the simplest, for they focus on transparently discriminatory practices. They contest employee benefit programs that fail to recognize their relationships and harassment policies that deal only with heterosexual behavior. However, they are also challenges that confront the deeply held prejudices of many fellow workers, and in the United States especially they are forcefully resisted by groups and individuals on the basis of what is claimed to be religious belief. The capacity of most lesbians and gays to conceal their sexual orientation at work and the continued pressures on most to do so also highlight the issue of visibility in the politics of sexual diversity, setting it somewhat apart from other equity issues. Issues of gender and race also divide union members among themselves, but they are more likely to confront embedded structural impediments. As many writers point out, for unions to move substantially toward equity on all these fronts entails challenging deeply entrenched notions about entitlement, segregated work patterns, and long-standing discriminatory systems of promotion.

There are great strengths and lessons in the writings we have surveyed. One of the most important is that this literature reminds us that class still matters. In accounts of American labor history, for example, there are rich and instructive case studies about the pervasiveness of class boundaries not only between but also within "identity" groups. There is also an extremely useful body of case-study literature on women and unions, some of it on the past and some on the present. The American literature includes cases of women organizing that are particularly important in pointing the way to new styles of localized and participant unionism. It makes clear that unionization provides essential gains for workers, especially so for those on the margins. Whatever limitations there are in union response to issues of diversity and however tenaciously large segments hold onto priorities that can undermine affirmative action, unionized women and minorities are better off than nonunionized women and minorities. They are better off materially, and they are better off in their capacity to stand up for their own rights.

As we have seen, there are also weaknesses, both in coverage and in analysis. The relative paucity of large-scale overviews of labor movement treatment of one issue or another has already been cited. In both countries, the contemporary union response to racial diversity apart from the question of African-Americans needs serious inquiry. The whole area of diversity needs more comparative analysis across countries and issues. A notable exception to the paucity of cross-country comparison is the landmark work of Alice Cook (1981; Cook et al., 1992).

There are areas of surprising gaps in these literatures. Almost no attention has been paid to the impact of union links to political parties on labor's responses to diversity issues, although recent work by Rayside (1998a, 1998b) is an exception. The union movement has long-standing ties to the Democratic party in the United States and the New Democratic party in Canada, and we might imagine that these links have either heightened awareness of diversity issues or perhaps in some cases dampened them. There also has been only the scantiest of detailed analysis of the links between union activists working on diversity issues and the broader social movements mobilizing around such issues—the women's movement, race-based movements, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered movements. The work undertaken within unions is often seen as isolated from the broader movements, but the subtle reciprocal impacts deserve more careful treatment.

Serious research is also needed on questions of implementation. Some scholarly attention has been paid to the gap between policy pronouncements by national unions or federations, on the one hand, and activities at the level of union locals, on the other. However, there is not much systematic research on the question. Nor is much attention paid to the attitudes of union members toward the range of diversity issues. There is a strong tendency in the literatures on diversity to argue that the blockage to progress comes from union structures and leaders or broader systemic forces beyond the union movement. On most diversity issues, however, union members themselves are a source of resistance. This is often acknowledged in principle or in passing but needs more sustained attention. So too do strategies for change at the level of member attitudes.

Whatever its limitations, this is a substantial and important literature. What stands out is how slow, contested, and uneven organized labor's response has been to issues raised by women and minorities. However, as a new century begins, unions appear more receptive to diversity and equity concerns than at any other time in history, and the literature reviewed here suggests that there are grounds for cautious optimism and many openings for research within this fertile domain.

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