

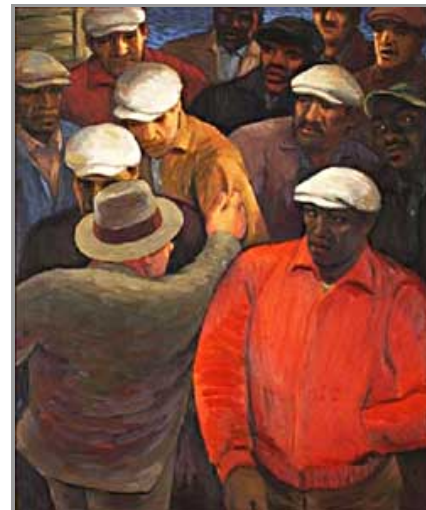
The Big Strike: Labor Unrest in the Great Depression

Vincent DiGirolamo

Baruch College, CUNY

Overview

Although union activity usually grinds to a halt during periods of mass unemployment, picket lines were as common as bread lines in 1934. A million and a half workers took part in some two thousand strikes that year. They were emboldened by Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act, which guaranteed workers the right to form unions and bargain collectively over wages, hours, and conditions. The Act was part of President Franklin Roosevelt's liberal New Deal policies, but many employers saw it as a step toward Communism and brazenly resisted it. They waged murderous campaigns against farm workers in California, autoworkers in Toledo, truck drivers in Minneapolis, and textile workers throughout the country.



James Grosso, *The Shape Up*

This was the backdrop of a monumental showdown between ship owners and longshoremen on the West Coast. On May 9, 1934, 32,000 dockworkers in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, and other ports refused to load and unload ships under hiring and job conditions they deemed intolerable. They objected to the dreaded "shape up," where kickbacks and favoritism determined who got work; to "speed ups" that made accidents and injuries common occurrences; to brutal shifts that lasted twelve, twenty-four, and even thirty-six hours for no extra pay; and to the phony company union that permitted these abuses.

Shippers tried to bring in non-union workers, but the strikers fought back. For two and a half months they battled bosses, "goons", police, red-baiters, and the National Guard, sparking an extraordinary four-day general, or sympathy, strike of all workers in San Francisco. Was the Revolution at hand? Was Roosevelt to blame? Where would this labor upsurge lead?

Objectives

This module invites an intensive study of the 1934 Pacific Coast waterfront strike and the documentary record it produced as a way to explore the broader social, political, economic, and cultural tensions of the New Deal era. It has five objectives:

1. To convey the drama of the strike as a breaking story with contested causes and unforeseen consequences.
2. To stimulate an analysis of issues and events from a variety of perspectives.
3. To provide an opportunity to investigate the rise of organized labor and spread of industrial democracy as both a response and a spur to Roosevelt's New Deal.
4. To encourage a reconsideration of the role of "reds" and red-baiters, women and minorities, and artists and musicians, as well as rank and file union members.
5. To offer a structured way to interrogate and utilize primary sources.

Resources

The strike, like the Depression era itself, is fast receding from living memory as members of that generation pass on. Soon our understanding of those times will be based solely on the surviving documentary record. This module brings together five kinds of sources: written accounts, oral histories, photographs, artwork, and music. Each type of source provides a unique but partial window into the past. Together they can provide a deeper understanding of not just the strike but of the decade as a whole.

Any American history textbook covering the Great Depression can provide sufficient background knowledge of the period to teach or use this module. However, below are four secondary sources - three articles and one radio documentary - that try to put the strike in a broader context, assess its legacy, highlight the role of African Americans, and profile its most charismatic figure, union leader Harry Bridges. For those who want more, a comprehensive list of books and videos on the strike and the union can be found in the instructor's annotation.

Read historian Irving Bernstein's essay, "Americans in Depression and War"

(<http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/chapter5.htm>)

"Unemployment was the overriding fact of life when Franklin D. Roosevelt became President of the United States on March 4, 1933..."



Read journalist Dick Meister's 70th anniversary retrospective on "The Big Strike"

(<http://www.ilwu19.com/history/bigstrike.htm>)

"The Bottom Line Few, if any, strikes have had greater historical impact than the 1934 strike of West Coast longshoremen"



Read Bill Fletcher and Peter Agard's "The Indispensable Ally: Black Workers and the Formation of the CIO" (<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/336.html>)

"The West Coast Longshore strike had a profound impact on Black workers"



Listen to Ian Ruskin's radio documentary, "From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks: The Life and Times of Harry Bridges." (Part 1 at: <http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/politics-of-culture/harry-bridges-part-1> & Part 2 at: <http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/politics-of-culture/harry-bridges-part-2>, 28 minutes each)



Activities

The following three activities may be undertaken in sequence or independently of each other, and either in class or on line.

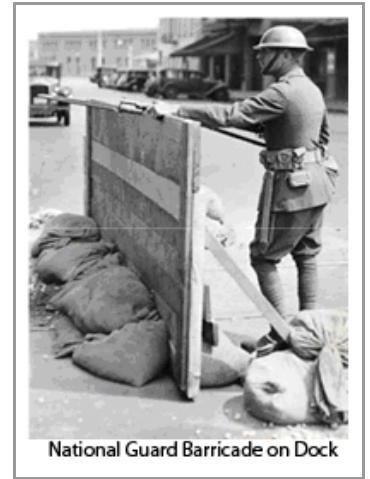
Activity 1: Community Debate

The strike has dragged on for almost two months, paralyzing shipping on the West Coast. The governor of California is considering calling in the National Guard to break the strike and open the port in San Francisco. He has asked for representatives of five groups to meet with him to discuss the issue.

Step 1

Split up into the following groups:

1. Longshoremen's Strike Committee
2. Waterfront Employers Association
3. Newspaper Publishers Association
4. Interfaith Council of Churches
5. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People



Step 2

Read at least three of the primary documents in *A. The Written Record*, and note any pertinent facts or arguments that could prove useful to presenting your case at the meeting.

Step 3

Your professor should set up discussion boards for each of the five groups to caucus. Discuss the issues at stake and the pros and cons of calling in the National Guard until you come to a collective decision about how to advise the mayor.

Step 4

Your professor should set up one more discussion board labeled "Community Meeting." State your positions, in character, on the discussion board, and respond to the advice and arguments offered by others at the meeting. Your professor can play the part of the governor, pressing participants for clarification or elaboration if necessary, and moderating the debate. As mentioned, this meeting can also take place in class.

Activity 2. Document Analysis

Step 1

Divide yourselves into five groups, each of which will focus on one of five kinds of historical sources:

- A. The Written Record
- B. The Oral Record
- C. The Photographic Record
- D. The Artistic Record
- E. The Musical Record

(See below for each record)

Step 2

Skim the sources in their respective record groups and select one or more sources for closer analysis. Write five paragraphs analyzing your chosen documents using the questions suggested in each of these sections.

Step 3

Your professor should set up discussion boards for each of the five record groups. You should post your papers on the appropriate board and respond to the posts of at least two others in your group or in other groups. You may also opt to share and discuss your documents in class.



Document Analysis A. The Written Record

"Notice what you notice."

-- Allen Ginsberg

"Who we are, to some variable extent, determines what we notice and, at another level of intellectual activity, what we regard as worthy of notice, what we find significant."

-- Robert Coles

Select a document from The Written Record that you find particularly interesting and that adds to your understanding of the strike. Post on the discussion board five paragraphs analyzing the information in the document.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- What kind of document is it? Who wrote it, when, where, and for what purpose?
- Who was the intended audience for this document?
- What is the document's point of view (or is it neutral)? Are there hidden biases or distortions in the document that need to be taken into consideration?
- What is the source of the document's information? Can one learn anything from what is not said in the document?
- What does its existence say about who saved it?
- What would you like to ask the author of this document?

Come up with your own questions, and be sure to give reasons for any inferences you make. Respond to the analyses of at least two of your classmates, focusing on those statements with which you particularly agree or disagree.

A1. Read the National Industrial Recovery Act (1933)

"SEC. 7. (a) ...That employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference restraint, or coercion of employers of labor, or their agents..."

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=66>



Government Poster

A2. Read local newspaper accounts of the strike.

"Police used their clubs freely and mounted officers rode into milling crowds. The strikers fought back, using fists, boards and bricks as weapons. Rioting was widespread..."

<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist/thursday.html>

<http://www.ilwu19.com/history/daily.htm>

A3. Read Tillie Lerner Olsen's field report, "The Strike" Partisan Review (Sept.-Oct. 1934).

"Do not ask me to write of the strike and the terror. I am on a battlefield, and the increasing stench and smoke sting the eyes so it is impossible to turn them back into the past..."

<http://newdeal.feri.org/voices/voce05.htm>



Tillie Lerner Olsen

A4. Read “Tillie Olsen: Online Interviews.”

http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m_r/olsen/onlineinterviews.htm

A5. Read an excerpt from journalist Mike Quinn's book, The Big Strike.

<tp://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/124>



Bits Hayden, “Closed till the Boys Win,” ca. 1949

A6. Read Telegram from MacCormack to District Director, INS, Angel Island, California, 05/22/1934.

“IT HAS BEEN REPORTED TO US THAT ALIENS ILLEGALLY IN THE COUNTRY ARE ACTIVE IN FOMENTING LONGSHOREMANS STRIKE AT SAN FRANCISCO STOP...”

<https://research.archives.gov/id/296492>



A7. Read Paul Taylor and Norman Leon Gold's article, “San Francisco and the General Strike,” Survey Graphic (Sept. 1934) Vol. 23, No. 9, p. 405.



“What really happened in San Francisco's general strike? What were the issues? What do they mean to labor, employers, the community? What of the vigilantes and their violent anti-Red campaign? Two Californians here give the story down to date ...”

<http://newdeal.feri.org/survey/34405.htm>

A8. Read articles and cartoons from the longshoremen’s mimeographed newspaper, Waterfront Worker, 1934 , 1934.

<http://depts.washington.edu/dock/documents.shtml>



The Waterfront Worker
1932-1936

A9. Read Report on “Political Forces: Communist Activities, Seattle, Washington., 10/02/1934. Search Archival Research Catalog for “Communist Activities, Seattle, Washington.” Click on Digital Copies.

“Quoted below are the final decisions of the Communist leaders of the Pacific Coast relative to the maritime strike situation. The decision was arrived at after two days secret meetings between the following men...”

<https://research.archives.gov/id/296493?q=Communist%20Activities,%20Seattle,%20Washington>

A10. Read Franklin Roosevelt's Statement on the National Labor Relations Act (The Wagner Act) July 5, 1935

<http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/odnlrast.html>



Sen. Robert Wagner and Sec. of Labor Frances Perkins watch President Roosevelt sign the National Labor Relations Act

A11. Read Oliver Carlson's "The San Francisco Waterfront" The Nation (Jan. 22, 1936).

<http://newdeal.feri.org/nation/na36105.htm>



A12. Read Louis Adamic's "Harry Bridges: Rank and File Leader," The Nation (May 6, 1936)

<http://newdeal.feri.org/nation/na36576.htm>

"He is a slight, lanky fellow in his early forties, with a narrow, longish head, receding dark hair, a good straight brow, an aggressive hook nose, and a tense-lipped mouth. He wears cheap clothes and is indifferent about his appearance. His salary as head of the union is less than the average wage of the union members..."



Harry Bridges

A13. Read John L. Lewis's speech "Labor and the Nation," delivered before the U.S. House of Representatives, Sept. 3, 1937.

"No tin-hat brigade of goose-stepping vigilantes or bibble-babbling mob of blackguarding and corporation paid scoundrels will prevent the onward march of labor, or divert its purpose to play its natural and rational part in the development of the economic, political and social life of our nation..."

<http://history.msu.edu/hst203/files/2011/02/Lewis-Labor-and-the-Nation.pdf>



John L. Lewis

A14. Read Eleanor Roosevelt's 1941 address, "Workers Should Join Trade Unions."

"I have always been interested in organizations for labor. I have always felt that it was important that everyone who was a worker join a labor organization, because the ideals of the organized labor movement are high ideals..."

<http://newdeal.feri.org/er/er27.htm>



Audrey Wilcke Evans interviewing Eleanor Roosevelt

A15. Read “Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor,” a Congressional subcommittee's 1942 report on the strike.

*for WHIO Radio in Dayton, Ohio,
ca. 1941.*

“The employers painted the strikers in the garb of radicalism. They publicized their own position throughout the negotiations as one of fairness, reasonableness, and conciliation, while the longshoremen were asserted to be arbitrary, unreasonable, and irresponsible...”

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5134/>

Document Analysis B. The Oral Record

"I think we're suffering from what I call 'National Alzheimer's Disease.' That means there's no memory of yesterday."

-- Studs Terkel

"In this matter I am an almost total sceptic... Old men drooling about their youth - No."

-- A.J.P. Taylor on oral history interviews

Select a document from The Oral Record that you find particularly interesting and that adds to your understanding of the strike and the period. Post on the discussion board five paragraphs analyzing the information in the document.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- Who conducted the interview? When? Why? Whose interests did it serve?
- What questions or issues does it raise? What kind of information does the interview provide that might otherwise be lost to the historical record?
- How reliable do you think the information is? Does it ring true? Is it confirmed or contradicted by other kinds of evidence?
- What kinds of things is the person more likely to remember? What kinds of things is he or she likely to forget?
- Does the person seem to be telling polished stories or summoning new data based on the interview questions?
- How typical or exceptional do you think the person's experience is? Does there appear to be any significant omissions or suppression of information?
- How do you think the passage of time – subsequent events or contemporary values – has affected the person's memories?

Come up with your own questions and be sure to give reasons for any of your inferences. Respond to the analyses of at least two of your classmates, focusing on those statements with which you particularly agree or disagree.

B1. Read oral history interviews with strike participants from the ILWU Oral History Project

<http://www.ilwu.org/history/oral-histories/>

"In 1928 we came out to Los Angeles. Times were already bad in rural New York, although this was still before the big crash. In '29, of course, the stock market crash hit and the Great Depression started. That killed whatever personal dreams I had. I'd planned to go to college, but my father was out of work. That's when I got active in the Communist movement..."

-- Jack Olsen, longshoreman



B2. Listen to Studs Terkel interview future film critic Pauline Kael.

"My neighbors were angry with my mother, because she fed hungry men at the back door. They said it would bring others, and then what would she do? She said, 'I'll feed them till the food runs out...'"

<http://conversations.studsterkel.org/htimes.php>



Soup for the Soup Kitchen.

B3. Read the recollections of Sam Kagel, a member of the 1934 Joint Marine Strike Committee and a future labor arbitrator.

“Well, first, let me tell you what happened on the first day of the [general or sympathy] strike, which was July 16. If you know Market Street in San Francisco, imagine looking up at and seeing nothing. There were no autos – nothing.... I liked the 1930s. The 1930s were a great period. I was full of piss and vinegar and doing what I wanted to do”



Labor Arbitrator Sam Kagel

http://depts.washington.edu/pcls/documents/research/Kagel_1934Strike.pdf

B4. Read Sam Kagel's interview in Carl Nolte's “Voices: Ah, the ‘30s, Full of Struggle And the Joy of Life,” San Francisco Chronicle , May 2, 1999.

“Unions obviously had demonstrated convincingly that by unified concerted action even with limited organization, they could paralyze an entire community.”

<http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/VOICES-Ah-the-30s-Full-of-Struggle-And-the-2933189.php>

B5. Read chapter 2 of Jennifer Marie Winter's 1991 Masters thesis, “Thirty Years of Collective Bargaining Joseph Paul St. Sure: Management Labor Negotiator 1902 – 1966.”

St. Sure was the shipowners' chief negotiator. Winter's thesis in the History Department at California State University, Sacramento makes extensive use of St. Sure's 1957 oral history.

http://apps.pmanet.org/?cmd=main.content&id_content=2023238679

Document Analysis C. The Photographic Record

"It takes two to make a truth."

-- Frederich Nietzsche

"...who are you who will read these words and study these photographs?"

-- James Agee

Select three pictures from The Photographic Record below that you find particularly interesting and add to your understanding of the Big Strike. Post on the discussion board five paragraphs analyzing the information in the photos.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- What is your overall impression of the photographs? Which individual items stand out? (You might want to divide the photographs in quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.)
- What, if anything, surprises you in the photographs? The French scholar Roland Barthes called the most poignant element or "accident" of a photograph its "punctum" – that which shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces you. What is the punctum in your photographs?
- What are the sounds suggested by the photographs? In other words, listen to the photographs. Try to imagine the sounds of the scene depicted or the smells in the air. Use all of your senses.
- What is the photograph's point of view? All pictures are filtered through an individual's imagination and point of view. What is the evidence of this filtering process in the photo? How would you describe their point of view? Are the photographers taking sides in the photographs?

Respond to at least two of your classmates' analyses, focusing on those statements with which you particularly agree or disagree. If you find a particular thread or discussion interesting, you may add to it.

C1. See photographs and documents in the Waterfront Workers History Project's special section, "1934: The Great Strike."

http://depts.washington.edu/dock/34strike_intro.shtml



Marching

C2. See photographs from ILWU Local 23's collection. The Waterfront Workers History Project.

<http://depts.washington.edu/dock/photos.shtml>



Longshoremen unloading cargo from a freighter by handtruck, 1906

C3. View Dorothea Lange's photographs of the strike and San Francisco's waterfront and skid row during the Great Depression.

<http://www.houkgallery.com/lange/lange1.htm>

<http://www.loc.gov/item/fsa2000000828/PP/>

<http://www.loc.gov/item/fsa2000000881/PP/>

<http://www.loc.gov/item/fsa2000000840/PP/>



Dorothea Lange, San Francisco Waterfront, 1934

C4. Read an oral history interview with Dorothea Lange.

"I thought I better go there and see why these people were demonstrating, what it was about. I had more confidence then, because I had gone down with the dregs. This was a social demonstration. So I said, 'I will set myself a big problem. I will go there, I will photograph this thing, I will come back, and develop it. I will print it, and I will mount it and I will put it on the wall, all in twenty-four hours. I will do this, to see if I can just grab a hunk of lightening that is going on and finish it.'"

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-dorothea-lange-11757>



Dorothea Lange

Document Analysis D. The Artistic Record

“Art, then, is not the same as action; it is not identical with science; it is distinct from party program. It has its own special function, the grasp and transmission of experience. The catch lies in the word ‘experience.’”

– Joseph Freeman

“Experience is at once always already an interpretation and in need of interpretation.”

-- Joan Scott

Option 1: Select one or more paintings from The Artistic Record that you find particularly interesting and add to your understanding of the strike. Post on the discussion board five paragraphs analyzing the art work.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- What's going on in the paintings? Consider their formal qualities of subject, composition, color, tone, and style.
- What do the paintings make you think about? Consider them as social documents or visual arguments. What is the artist suggesting perhaps? Do the images confirm or contradict your previous understanding of labor, class relations, and life in 1930s America?

Respond to the analyses of at least two of your classmates, focusing on those statements with which you particularly agree or disagree.

Option 2: One way to analyze a painting is to “do a think” on it, which is Robert Frost's term for writing a poem. Poetry addressed specifically to paintings is known as ekphrasis. This art of describing, questioning, or interpreting works of art celebrates the power of the silent image even as it tries to break that silence, speaking for them, making them speak. Try your hand at ekphrasis. Write a poem about one of the murals or paintings in this module. Read and discuss it in class or post it on your group's discussion board. Respond to your classmates' poem.

D1. View the federally funded “socialist” murals created in San Francisco's Coit Tower in 1934.

http://www.inetours.com/Pages/SFNbrhds/Coit_Tower.html



D2. View the longshoreman portraits of Pele deLappe, 1935.

<http://www.laborarts.org/exhibits/longshore/delappe/index.cfm>



Pele deLappe, Cap , 1935.

D3. Read Gretchen Giles' article, "Love's Labor Won: Petaluma artist Pele deLappe's passionate journey," North Bay Bohemian (Sept. 12-18, 2002). Search Pele deLappe.

<http://www.bohemian.com/northbay/pele-delappe/Content?oid=2131527>

D4. Listen to Pele deLappe describe her encounter at age 15 with Frieda Kahlo and Diego Rivera.

<https://archive.org/details/pele-frieda>

D5. Read about the furor that erupted over Anton Refregier's depiction of the Big Strike in his 1941 mural in San Francisco's Rincon Annex Post Office.

"Until 1936 and the government sponsorship of art, mural painting consisted of palm trees, nude girls, gold fish, etcetera. It was with the government projects that we had a chance to look at people's lives, connect up with the great tradition of Giotto, Orozco, Rivera, Piero della Francesca..."

http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=Trial_of_the_Rincon_Annex_Murals



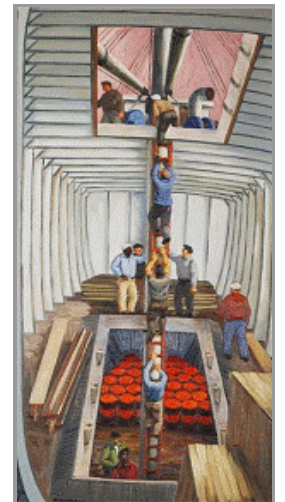
Anton Refregier, mural study, "1934 Waterfront Strike" (1941)

D6. Click here to read an oral history interview with Refregier. Search Refregier.

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-anton-refregier-12689>

D7. View the paintings of longshoreman James Grosso.

<http://www.laborarts.org/exhibits/longshore/grosso/index.cfm>



James Grosso, *Quitting Time* (ca. 1955)

Document Analysis E. The Musical Record

"The most important word in the language of the working class is solidarity."

-- Harry Bridges

"I've had all I can stand, I can't stand no more!"

-- Popeye

Select a song from The Musical Record that you find particularly interesting and that adds to your understanding of the strike or the Great Depression. Post on the discussion board five paragraphs analyzing its words, music, and social uses.

Questions you may wish to consider:

- What kind of song is it? Who created or performed it; when, where, and under what conditions?
- What is the tone or mood of the song? How does it make you feel? How might different audiences have responded to it?
- Is the song a form of propaganda? Was it popular or influential? What role did music play on the waterfront or in the labor movement of the 1930s?
- How are dock workers and dock work represented in the narrative of the song? How are class lines, gender roles, and other social boundaries drawn in the song? Are there recurring motifs?
- What can the song tell us about 1934 strike or the Great Depression that other kinds of sources cannot? What would you like to ask the composer?
- How has the form or function of the song changed over time? Come up with your own questions and be sure to give reasons for any of your inferences.

Respond to the analyses of at least two of your classmates, focusing on those statements with which you particularly agree or disagree.

*I am a simple lab'ring man
And I work along the shore,
For to keep the hungry wolves away
From the poor longshoreman's door...*

E1. "The Longshoreman's Strike" (1875) Read the lyrics and listen to the melody of this 1875 song by Edward Harrigan. (Click the MIDI file for audio.)

*Four hundred strikers were brutally wounded;
Four hundred workers and I left to die;
Remember the day, sir, to all of your children,
This bloody Thursday the fifth of July...*

<http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/pages/tiLNGSHORE;ttLNGSHORE.html>

E2. "The Battle of Bloody Thursday" (n.d.) Read the lyrics.

<http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/pages/tiLAREDST6.html>

E3. “Waterfront – 1934” (1935). Read musicologist Leta Miller's liner notes to the CD “Drums Along the Pacific” by Lou Harrison.

Composer Harrison and choreographer Carol Beals collaborated on the dance piece “Waterfront—1934,” which debuted in 1935 in the boxing ring of the Longshoremen's San Francisco headquarters. For more information check out Leta E. Miller and Fredric Lieberman's book, *Composing a World: Lou Harrison, Musical Wayfarer* (2004).

<https://web.archive.org/web/20030626100225/http://www.newalbion.com/NA122/>



Lou Harrison, *Drums along the Pacific*.

E4. “Long John the Longshoreman” (n.d.) Explore the Woody Guthrie Archives.

<http://www.woodyguthrie.org/index.htm>



Woody Guthrie

E5. “The Ballad of Harry Bridges” (1942) Read the lyrics.

<http://unionsong.com/u130.html>



“The Ballad of Harry Bridges” (1942)

E6. Read Grif Fariello's “The Life and Times of Harry Bridges (1901 – 1990)”

<http://unionsong.com/reviews/bridges/>

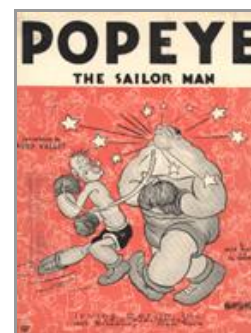
E7. “Popeye the Sailor Man,” by Leon Flatow and Alfred B. Koppell, introduced by Rudee Vallee, 1931.

See the Sam deVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music, ca. 1790–1987, Smithsonian Institute.

<http://amhistory.si.edu/archives/images/d5300lh5.jpg>

<http://amhistory.si.edu/archives/d5300lh4.htm>

*“I'm one tough gazookus
Which hates all palookas
Wot ain't on the up and square...”*



“Popeye the Sailor Man” (1931)

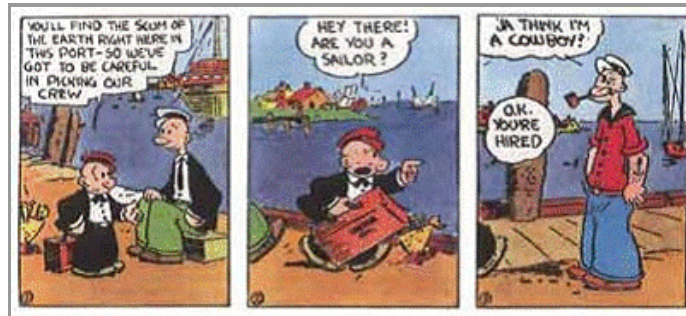
E8. "I'm Popeye, the Sailor Man" (1934). Read the lyrics and listen to the tune of Sammy Lerner's 1934 version.

<http://www.guntheranderson.com/v/data/popeye.htm>

<http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/movies/popeyemp3.htm>

When artists at Max Fleischer Studios struck in 1937, they picketed singing, "We're Popeye the Union Man..."

E9. Read a dissertation on Popeye, "Comics' First Super Hero" who helped popularize the term "goon."

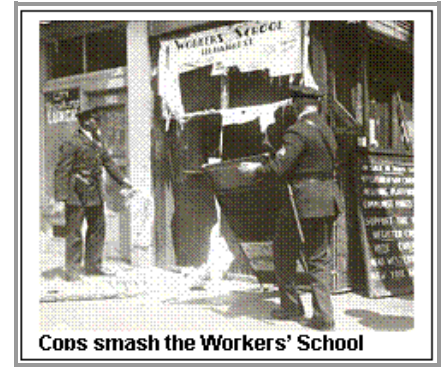


"Popeye the Sailor Man" (1931)

<http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll17/id/678235>

Activity 3. Multimedia Essay or Presentation

Members of the five groups should work together to create multimedia essays and presentations using at least three of the five different kinds of sources in this module. Below are five suggested topics. This final activity can function as a term paper or project. Presentations may be scheduled for one day or spread out over time.



Cops smash the Workers' School

- Option 1.** "Clubs are trumps," joked the cops assigned to the waterfront in striking coastal cities in 1934. Assess the causes, uses, and effectiveness of violence during the strike. Some likened the waterfront to a war zone. Is this analogy accurate or helpful? If the strike was a war, then what kind of war was it? Create an essay or presentation analyzing the labor militancy and state power that characterized the longshore strike and many other labor conflicts during the depression.
- Option 2.** Loading and unloading ships was exclusively men's work in the 1930s, yet women participated in the strike in many ways. Create an essay or presentation exploring the role of women and gender in the strike as exhibited on the docks, at home, in the community, or in government.
- Option 3.** Create an essay or presentation exploring the relationship between art and politics in the 1930s. You might focus on the work or experience of one artist, writer, or photographer featured in the module; use their work to consider the difference between art and propaganda; or discuss whether the Roosevelt Administration was right or wrong to spend valuable tax dollars on art projects during a period of dire need.
- Option 4.** Create an essay or presentation examining the origin, form, use, and meaning of one of the musical works in this module. It may take the form of a music video or live performance that explores the song's value as a historical artifact. Learn to play or sing one of the songs, or write an original ballad based on one of the oral histories. Perform it in class and discuss how the song is a product of its time and an expression of changing experience, ideas, and values.
- Option 5.** Many people in business, government, and the press characterized strikers and their supporters as radicals. Did longshoremen see the strike as a conflict over wages and conditions or part of a larger social movement? What was the role and appeal of Communism to American workers during the Great Depression? Were employers' concerns about the subversive influence of Communists justified? Create an essay or presentation examining the role of "Reds" and Red-baiters in the strike.

Additional Resources

Union Videos

With its archives, booklets, videos, murals, and National Endowment for the Humanities-funded oral history project, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union has pioneered the practice of working people recording their own history. These works tend to be celebratory in tone and unapologetically pro-union, but are produced in collaboration with scholars and provide a wealth of historical detail. They also document a "movement culture" that still emanates from the waterfront.

An appealing introduction to the 1934 strike and the origins and ideals of the union can be found in *We Are the ILWU*, a 30-minute union-produced color video. It features historical photos, film clips, interviews with active and retired members, and an original musical score. It is available for five dollars at: <http://www.ilwu.org/history/books-and-videos/>.

Also recommended is *Harry Bridges: A Man and His Union*, an award-winning video documentary produced by Barry Minott and John Knoop, 1992 (58 mins.), available in VHS for purchase (\$295) or rental (\$95) from The Cinema Guild: <http://www.cinemaguild.com>

A new feature film, "From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks," produced by Ian Ruskin and Suzanne Thompson and directed by Haskell Wexler, is now available on DVD. A trailer can be viewed at The Harry Bridges Project, <http://www.theharrybridgesproject.org/> To obtain a copy contact The Harry Bridges Project, P.O. Box 662018, Los Angeles, CA 90066, or theharrybridgesproject@comcast.net .

Waterfront Writings

The World Wide Web is a vast repository, yet it has not rendered that ancient technology, the book, obsolete. Indeed, the Web's bounty in many areas, including the 1934 Pacific Coast waterfront strike, devolves from printed sources. Below is an annotated bibliography of published works on the strike and the history of International Longshore and Warehouse Union, compiled by historian Harvey Schwartz.

Beechert, Edward D. *Working in Hawaii: A Labor History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985. A comprehensive history of Hawaiian labor with lengthy sections on the origins of the ILWU in the islands.

Bernstein, Irving. *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970. A classic account of labor in the 1930s with insightful sections of Bridges and the 1934 strike.

Buchanan, Roger B. *Dock Strike: History of the 1934 Waterfront Strike in Portland, Oregon*. Everett, Washington: The Working Press, 1975. A description of the 1934 strike in the Columbia River region.

Carson, Robert, ed. *The Waterfront Writers: The Literature of Work*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979. Stories and poetry by ILWU longshoremen inspired by echoes of 1934.

Eliel, Paul. *The Waterfront and General Strikes, San Francisco, 1934: A Brief History*. San Francisco: Hooper Printing, 1934. A history of 1934 done by an employer representative shortly after the strike.

Fairley, Lincoln. *Facing Mechanization: The West Coast Longshore Plan*. Monograph Series, 23. Los Angeles: Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Los Angeles, 1979. An evaluation by a former ILWU Research Director of the union's acceptance of mechanization in the late 1950s and the resultant agreements of 1960-1971.

Findlay, William. *Work on the Waterfront: Worker Power and Technological Change in a West Coast Port*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988. An analysis of the impact of mechanization on union morale in the Los Angeles/Long Beach Harbor Area.

Fox, Joan, ed. *A History of Federated Auxiliaries of the ILWU, 1934-1984*. Seattle: ILWU Federated Auxiliaries, 1993. A compilation of histories of the ILWU's local women's auxiliaries going back to 1934.

Hinkle, Warren. *The Big Strike: A Pictorial History of the 1924 San Francisco General Strike*. Virginia City: Nevada: Silver Dollar Books, 1985. A collection of some of the most famous photos from 1934.

Holmes, Michael T. *The Specter of Communism in Hawaii*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994. An account of the attacks on ILWU leaders and others in the islands during the early Cold War years.

ILWU. *The ILWU Story: Six Decades of Militant Unionism*. San Francisco: ILWU, 1997. An official overview of the union's entire history with text, photos, and oral history testimony.

ILWU. *Men and Machines. A Story about Longshoring on the West Coast Waterfront*. San Francisco: ILWU, 1963. A pictorial essay showcasing photos by Otto Hagel taken on the eve of mechanization and featuring text by ILWU Secretary-Treasurer Louis Goldblatt.

ILWU Local 500. *Man Along the Shore! The Story of the Vancouver Waterfront*. Vancouver, British Columbia: ILWU Local 500 Pensioners, 1975. A history of the Canadian longshoremen told through interviews.

Kimeldorf, Howard. *Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. A pioneering work of historical sociology that compares the ILWU and the East Coast's International Longshoremen's Association.

Larrowe, Charles P. *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States*. 2nd ed. New York: Lawrence Hill, 1977. The most complete biography of Bridges available pending the appearance of Robert W. Cherney's work in progress.

Magden, Ronald E. *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934*. Seattle: ILWU Local 19 and the Washington Commission for the Humanities, 1991. A history of longshore unionization in the Puget Sound Region.

Magden, Ronald E., and A.D. Martinson. *The Working Waterfront: The Story of Tacoma's Ships and Men*. Tacoma, Washington: ILWU Local 23 and the Washington Commission for the Humanities, 1982. An account of the Port of Tacoma and its unions.

Markholt, Otilie. *Maritime Solidarity: Pacific Coast Unionism, 1929-1938*. Tacoma, Washington: Pacific Coast Maritime History Committee, 1998. A useful port-by-port description of developments in the 1930s that is rich in detail but short on sympathy for Bridges and his supporters.

Nelson, Bruce. *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988. A prize-winning historical analysis of the Pacific Coast maritime union movement and its ideological origins.

Pilcher, William W. *The Portland Longshoremen: A Dispersed Urban Community*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972. A sociological study of one local's membership.

Quin, Mike. *The Big Strike*. Olema, California: Olema Publishing, 1949. Reprint New York: International Publishers, 1979. A classic left history of the 1934 maritime confrontation and the San Francisco general strike.

Raineri, Vivian McGuckin. *The Red Angel*. New York: International Publishers, 1991. A biography of Elaine Black Yoneda, a maritime union supporter during the 1934 strike and a life-long ILWU activist.

Rosswurm, Steve, ed. *The CIO's Left-Led Unions*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992. A collection featuring historical essays by Bruce Nelson and Nancy Quam-Wickham on organizing, race, and job control in the ILWU longshore division.

Selvin, David F. *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996. A journalist/historian's careful account of 1934.

Schwartz, Harvey. *The March Inland: Origins of the ILWU Warehouse Division, 1934-1938*. Monograph Series, 19. Los Angeles: Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Los Angeles, 1978. Reprint San Francisco: International Longshore and Warehouse Union, 2000. The only comprehensive study of the ILWU's organizing campaign in warehouse and distribution.

Ward, Estolv E. *Harry Bridges on Trial*. New York: Modern Age Books, 1940. A profile of Bridges at a famous deportation hearing held in 1939.

Wellman, David. *The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995. A sociological appraisal of how the ILWU longshore contract works in practice.

Winslow, Calvin, ed. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1998. A collection containing an essay by Bruce Nelson on race relations in the ILWU longshore division.

Zalburg, Sanford. *A Spark is Struck! Jack Hall and the ILWU in Hawaii*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979. A journalist's description of how the ILWU brought sweeping social, economic, and political change to Hawaii.

Instructor's Annotations

This module is designed to be adaptable for use in U.S. history survey courses as well as in more specialized courses in labor studies, California history, or the 1930s. I have used all three activities in a survey course in which I devote just two weeks (four class meetings) to the Great Depression. I usually devote the first meeting to lecturing on the stock market crash, President Hoover's response, the agricultural crisis, and FDR's election and first hundred days in office. I focus on other themes (WPA, "Lunatic Fringe," African Americans, the labor movement, etc.) in the second meeting and end by introducing The Big Strike website. Students complete Activity 1, the Community Debate, outside of class for homework (although the community meeting works well in class too).

Activity 2, the document analysis, is probably the most flexible and useful of the activities. It's quite all right to have the students focus on just one set of records, say the oral histories or the photographs. I like them to present their "reading" of the texts or images in class because the students will often challenge each other's interpretations and inferences, and the lessons learned here will carry over to their engagement with primary sources they encounter in other contexts or courses.

It is one thing to analyze a single source, but quite another to use it in conjunction with others to construct a narrative structured around an original argument. Activity 3 is recommended as a term paper option. Here I devote the last day of class to presentations. It is gratifying to see them weaving together government documents, visual images, and oral history quotations to make their arguments. Some students bring in guitars, keyboards, and CDs to sing, play and discuss traditional or original labor songs. Their engagement with the culture, politics, and social movements of the 1930s is palpable and the semester always ends on a good note.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank David Jaffee, Bill Friedheim, Pennee Bender, and Michael Whelen for their guidance, Angelo Angelis and Rebecca Hill for their teamwork, Janet Heettner for her web work, Joshua Freeman for his critique, and Harvey Schwartz for his expertise and solidarity.