

success making immigrants aware that they will not be questioned about their immigration status if they report a crime.) Because workers who would be terrified to enter a downtown federal building feel comfortable airing their grievances at a non-governmental worker center in their neighborhood, institutions like Bobo's are crucial. (If you were a Guatemalan immigrant being exploited by the nominee for secretary of labor, would you really complain to the DoL?) But neither worker centers nor the private bar are adequate substitutes for federal enforcement of our minimum wage laws.

"Why would one appoint a secretary of labor without significant worker advocacy experience?" Bobo asks rhetorically, in her understated criticism of Elaine Chao. Luckily, the days of Elaine Chao and Linda Chavez are behind us. Barack Obama appointed Hilda Solis, a strong advocate for workers and the daughter of Latino immigrant laborers, to be his secretary of

labor. The last Democratic Congress raised the minimum wage, and this one could raise it further and strengthen enforcement. A system with stiffer penalties—ideally with fines that more than pay for enforcement, on the IRS model—could be enacted to increase the number of wage and hour inspectors. For all the success the right has had over the past three decades in smashing the Labor Department, it lost the ideological battle against the minimum wage. Even the Florida voters of 2004 who sent Bush back to the White House voted to raise the minimum wage. Solis can count on popular support if she pursues her agenda as a tough, law-and-order liberal. Her role model shouldn't be Jane Addams. It should be Frances Perkins.

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Re-interpreting Ludlow

JAMES GREEN

The Archaeology of Collective Action

by Dean J. Saitta | University Press of Florida, 2007 | 140 pages | \$24.95

Blood Passion: The Ludlow Massacre and the Class War in the American West

by Scott Martelle | Rutgers University Press, 2007 | 217 pages | \$25.95

Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War

by Thomas G. Andrews | Harvard University Press, 2008 | 376 pages | \$29.95

For all intents and purposes, the nation's age of industrial violence ended with the Memorial Day massacre in South Chicago in 1937. During the previous fifty-year period, seven hundred deaths were recorded in industrial conflicts, though the actual body count was probably much higher. These grim facts mean

that the United State experienced the bloodiest, most violent labor history of any industrial nation in the world.

During the past seventy years fatalities from other forms of workplace violence have continued to be all too common—more than 28,000 dead from workplace injuries between 2002

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and 2007. But because violent strikes and shootings have been rare in recent times, the living memory of bloody labor repression is dying, along with the generation of workers who fought the bitter battles of the 1930s. It is now up to labor historians, union educators, preservationists, anthropologists, and filmmakers to keep those memories alive.

Three writers have taken up this task in recently published books focused on the Ludlow massacre of 1914. The authors of these books have done more than preserve the memory of a particularly horrifying assault on working-class people; they have also advanced our understanding of what caused that lethal conflict and what its legacy means for us now.

The Ludlow massacre took place on April 20, 1914, in the midst of a massive coal miners' strike against southern Colorado companies; the Rockefellers controlled the largest, Colorado Fuel and Iron. During this protracted struggle of a largely immigrant work force, company guards and hired guns were mustered into the National Guard. When these troopers fired on the strikers' tent colony at Ludlow, many residents fled and took shelter in nearby arroyos. Some women and children hid in a well; others took refuge in underground pits the strikers had dug under the tents for protection. In the early hours of shooting, guardsmen assassinated a union organizer, a Greek immigrant named Louis Tikas, and two other strikers; they also killed two other union men and an eleven-year-old boy. Then they set fire to the tents. When the fires burned out, camp residents made the grim discovery—the bodies of two women and eleven children who had suffocated and died in one pit.

When the news of the assault on the tent colony got out, it sparked fury all through the strikers' camps. Armed with 30-30 carbines (many supplied by the union), a small army of 1,000 strikers launched a coordinated attack on the National Guard, company gunmen, and scabs. Fighting raged on a wide front for several days until the U.S. Army intervened. The death toll in the coal war was unprecedented: at least seventy-five people died. Half of the fatalities were recorded among mine guards, strike breakers, and militia men—an unusual occurrence in mine wars, which usually claimed workers as their sole victims.

Of all the murderous assaults on strikers that occurred during the "age of industrial violence," none shocked the nation, or troubled its collective conscience, more than the Ludlow massacre. Strike-related fatalities among working men were hardly even newsworthy, but the deaths of innocent women and children provoked outrage that extended far beyond labor, socialist, and progressive circles. The massacre became the most important probed by the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations whose members called upon John D. Rockefeller, Jr., himself to face a public inquiry into causes of the tragic violence directed at his striking workers.

And yet, within a few years, the story of the Ludlow massacre and of the class war in Colorado faded, as progressives focused on the Great War in Europe. This amnesia frustrated socialist writer Upton Sinclair, who had acted immediately after reading the news from Ludlow by calling for a protest at Rockefeller headquarters in New York City. Soon after this demonstration, he set to work on a historical novel called *King Coal*, which appeared in 1917. It was not a best seller; but Sinclair pressed on and wrote a sequel. However, his publisher, Macmillan, rejected the manuscript as "deficient in story interest." It finally appeared in print sixty years later with an excellent introduction by historian John Graham (Upton Sinclair, *The Coal War, A Sequel to "King Coal,"* Colorado Associated University Press, 1976).

A year after Sinclair's first novel came out, few noticed when officials of the United Mine Workers of America dedicated a granite monument next to the site of the lethal pit at Ludlow as a memorial to the women and children who were murdered there. The stone cenotaph represented a coal miner, sleeves rolled up, standing near a woman holding a child in her arms. The names of the union dead—those shot by the soldiers and the women and children who died in the pit—were inscribed on the granite structure dedicated "to those who gave their lives for freedom at Ludlow." From then on, the tent colony grounds and the monument became a site of memory for a relatively small number of visitors who passed by and for pilgrims from afar who knew the story and tried to find the site. It wasn't easy. For years, the only direction to the memorial just off Interstate 25 was a little sign the union erected.

During recent decades, UMWA officers, deeply conscious of Ludlow as a redemptive story of sacrifice, did their best to keep the saga alive in their own publications, as they were struggling to save their union, once the nation's proudest and most powerful. The UMWA hired a caretaker who kept the Ludlow memorial site open for the few travelers who came to see the memorial statue and the remains of the pit.

For a few years, visitors would encounter archeologists conducting a research project at the site of the former tent colony. After an initial dig in 1997, the researchers returned regularly until 2002 and, in the process, organized the Colorado Coal Field War Archeology Project. (www.du.edu/ludlow/cfarch.html). A leader of the effort, Dean J. Saitta, an anthropologist at the University of Denver, has written a monograph about the project's discoveries and their meaning.

In *The Archaeology of Collective Action*, Saitta explains how he used the project to foster awareness of the Ludlow events and their meaning for today through tours and teacher institutes. Saitta's work is a good example of a progressive trend called "public anthropology," through which scholars bring their research outside the academy. Archeologists of this persuasion believe the evidence they unearth, which had been invisible, can illuminate the lives of workers in ways the written record cannot. For example Saitta's dig at the Ludlow campgrounds yielded material evidence of how the shared domestic experience of women and children in the tent colonies and coal camps reinforced the solidarity the men built up in the mine shafts. His team also studied the spatial organization of the ethnic groups in the settlement to show the ways in which the strikers departed from the segregated residential patterns that prevailed in company towns.

During the life of his project Saitta brought some groups of students and interested citizens to the Ludlow site to enhance public awareness, but very few other visitors pulled off of I-25 to see the memorial. Some tourists, Saitta reported, were disappointed because they thought the Ludlow massacre referred to an event in Native American history like the Sand Creek massacre in Colorado, which is now a National Historic Site. There are no national sites or landmarks in

the many places where unarmed strikers were massacred—sometimes for simply picketing, as in Lattimer, Pennsylvania, where, in 1897, deputies killed eighteen unarmed immigrant miners.

In sum, as of 2002, the Ludlow site, located on a remote and desolate plain, seemed to be of more interest to anthropologists than to tourists, or even to trade unionists. It was as though the abandoned strikers' campgrounds on the moonscape of the high desert south of Pueblo were an ancient site of interest only to archeologists of our industrial past.

But then, in 2003, after the archeologists departed, something happened that changed all that. On May 8, the retired UMW member who served as the caretaker of the site drove out to clean up the area for the annual memorial gathering. When he arrived, he was horrified to see that the heads of both figures on the statue had been severed from their torsos along with the left arm of the female figure. The breaks were straight and clean almost as if they had been sawn off.

The caretaker immediately notified local UMWA officials, who contacted the sheriff of Las Animas County. The union representatives demanded an investigation, fearing that the desecration of the monument was connected to a long and bitter struggle in the area between the United Steel Workers of America and Oregon Steel, a firm that operated a mill that was once part of the Rockefellers' Colorado Fuel & Iron Company. Labor unions in the area raised \$5,000 for a reward for information leading to the arrest of the criminals responsible for the desecration. But the sheriff's office identified no suspects and to this day has charged no one with this crime against memory.

Within a few days, the news was circulating among labor historians on the Internet. Word also went out that the UMWA was raising funds to restore the monument. I wrote an article called "Crime Against Memory at Ludlow" on the memorial's desecration for the first number of a quarterly journal called *Labor: Studies of Working Class History in the Americas* and used the essay to call for an effort to make the Ludlow site a national landmark.

When I became president of the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA), I appointed a committee of historians to pursue the landmarking project. The following spring I

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spoke about making the site a landmark at the rededication of the restored Ludlow monument on June 5, 2005.

The National Park Service required a detailed, and very scholarly, site study, which would be reviewed by its advisory board—all Bush appointees. In writing the site study for the Ludlow nomination, the authors relied enormously on existing scholarship, particularly the finding of Saitta's Coal Field Archeology Project. In order to make a case for the "national significance" of Ludlow in American history, the study also benefited from the recent historical studies by Scott Martelle and Thomas Andrews.

Scott Martelle is the latest journalist to tackle one of the epic stories of bloody conflict in labor history—stories passed over by academic historians who assumed they "had been done before." But newspaper writers who wrote history knew these were great American dramas and jumped on them. Top *New York Times* journalists William Serrin and J. Anthony Lukas were the first out of the gate with big books on the Homestead steel workers and the Idaho mine wars—both published in the 1990s. Other journalists followed with popular histories of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire: the Lawrence, Massachusetts, Bread and Roses strike; and the *Los Angeles Times* bombing of 1910, which was blamed on the McNamara brothers, two militant iron workers whose case became a cause célèbre for the labor movement.

Martelle's account of the Ludlow affair is the best of these labor history books by journalists. The author's research is extremely impressive, because he combines the skills of an investigative reporter and a well-read historian. No previous account of the 1913-1914 coal war has included a list of all seventy-five people killed in the struggle, complete with names and occupations. Martelle's meticulous census of the dead provides a strangely powerful and illuminating appendix.

Scott Martelle's talent as a writer is evident in his descriptions of the physical landscape and the larger-than-life characters who fought the great coal war. He is at his best writing about the bosses and their malevolence toward the union. We have read this kind of thing before, but in his hands characters like coal boss Lam-

ont Montgomery Bowers leap to life as men of creepy mendacity. A veteran of the bitter Detroit newspaper strike, the author makes no bones about siding with the workers, even when they gunned down unarmed strike breakers. Indeed, Martelle feels no need to cover up or to excuse violent actions by the strikers.

The author displays admirable discipline, providing limited background information except for sharply drawn biographical sketches. He sticks to the facts and compresses them into a dramatic 217-page treatment that ends abruptly with an account of a mine explosion in 1917. Perhaps Martelle's powerful account will make the significance of Ludlow apparent, but I think readers would have benefited from a more explicit assessment.

Surely, the deaths at Ludlow recall the sacrifices workers, especially immigrants, made to the nation's growth and more: what they contributed to a titanic struggle for social justice was the fight to extend the Bill of Rights to the American workplace.

Reporters like Martelle who write history tell us what happened and who made it happen, but they do not explore in much depth why it happened. Indeed, the author often settles for a pithy one-sentence paragraph to sum things up. For example, he concludes simply that the Colorado coal war was "a proxy war between the classes." You don't have to be an academic to want know more about the meaning of events. For example, how did Americans at the time interpret the Ludlow affair? Did they see it as a class war? If not, why? More specifically, what really accounts for the extremely high death count, specifically the killing of thirty-seven company men? Martelle mentions that many soldiers in the strikers' army were Greek and Serbian immigrants who had been nationalist guerrillas in their homelands. To what extent did these men propel the war of revenge against the troopers?

By contrast, historian Thomas Andrews is not content to be a storyteller. His new book, *Killing for Coal*, is far more than a blow-by-blow account of "America's deadliest labor war." It is an environmental history that seeks to explain strike violence as the natural excretion of an industry that brutalized the earth and the men who worked beneath it. Andrews is one of the

excellent young scholars who have given new life to the field of labor and working-class studies by introducing new questions about race and gender, ethnicity and nationality, and new insights drawn from anthropology and physical geography.

The author makes a compelling argument that the focus on Ludlow as a massacre has presented the strikers as mere victims who needed for union and progressive government officials to protect them from violence. Instead, Andrews presents the strikes and the armed uprising of 1914 as evidence of a deep “culture of opposition” that prepared rank-and-file workers to take on their oppressors and make their own history.

A key experience in shaping this oppositional culture was, in Andrews’s view, the extreme danger workers faced in the mines.

As a result, *Killing for Coal* draws a direct connection between the ecology of coal mining and the violent strikes the industry generated. As sensible as this argument sounds today, previous historians have not embraced it. And that is because the evidence is less than convincing. In the many strikes that took place for decades before Ludlow, coal miners did not usually make safety a main demand. Indeed, their union placed safety concerns near the bottom of its bargaining agenda until the Miners for Democracy changed the UMWA’s priorities in 1972. The reasons for this are subjects for a much longer discussion.

In Colorado, Andrews finds rhetorical evidence that safety was a major concern of striking miners, and yet, it does not emerge as their foremost objective. Summarizing strikers’ issues in 1914, Andrews says they talked about seeing friends die and about bad air, but their other grievances were just as important, if not more so: “pit bosses who demanded bribes..., incompetent superintendents, bullying mine guards, and rapacious company stores.” They also com-

plained about “the government of the companies, by the companies and for the companies.”

In other words, besides demanding better wages and hours and safer conditions, the larger objectives of the Colorado mine workers seemed to be political. They wanted to ensure their freedom by creating a new rule of law in the workplace.

Nonetheless, Andrews deserves credit for writing one of the best books ever published on the mining industry and its environmental impact and for drawing more public attention to the Ludlow story and its significance. In early 2009, Caleb Crain, a writer for the *New Yorker* used *Killing for Coal* as the basis of an essay on the Ludlow events and the lesson they teach us today—the need for democratic means of controlling the hell-bent pursuit of energy and reducing the toll it takes on humanity. Coincidentally, the National Park Service officially announced the selection of the Ludlow campground as a National Landmark.

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CORRECTION

On p. 88 in the Winter 2009 issue, “The Death of ‘Shorty,’” the sentence in line 26 of column 1 should read, “Manes immediately went home, where, he claims, fearing for his safety, he re-treated to the second floor.”

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