

## Reviews

## The Public Archaeology of Class Warfare: The Colorado Coalfield War Project

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Since the 1990s, Dean Saitta, Randall McGuire, Phillip Duke, and others have been excavating archaeological sites associated with the Colorado Coal Field War. The researchers advocate an activist archaeology of class and labor (Duke and Saitta 1998). The project was meant to redress a strong middle-class bias in archaeological theory and practice (McGuire and Walker 1999) and to render archaeology as an emancipatory source of knowledge about the past (Duke and Saitta 1998).

Saitta's website, a product of the long-term project, illustrates one way public archaeological research can amplify its reach (Saitta 2000). The website interprets the results of the Colorado Coal Field War Project, which explored the archaeological remains of the Ludlow Tent Colony Massacre of 1914 in southwestern Colorado. The massacre was a major event in the Colorado Coal Field War of 1913–14. Although mining concerns prevailed in the immediate conflict, the war became a nationwide controversy that ultimately led to improved working conditions for miners. The archaeologists have sought members of the organized labor movement as a public constituency, heirs to the achievements of the Ludlow strikers.

The first section of the site is devoted to a Colorado Endowment for the Humanities–funded Teacher's Institute program conducted in 1999–2000, which introduced K–12 teachers to historical archaeology as a way to explore forgotten history. Saitta conducted the workshops to better incorporate the Ludlow story into Colorado school curricula. The page includes a series of lesson plans addressing such topics as the music of the Coal Field War, the social context of the Progressive Era, and a history of the massacre itself.

The site's "History" section provides a compelling, accessible narrative of the Coal Field War. Photographs of National Guard machine-gun emplacements, with barrels pointed at the strikers' camp, and the "Death Special," an improvised armored car used by private detectives to harass the camp with machine-gun fire, are especially effective.

A protracted stalemate at Ludlow lasted from September of 1913 until April 20, 1914. On that day, the Colorado Minefield War reached a catastrophic climax when gunfire broke out between strikers and the National Guardsmen. Most strikers and their families were able to escape the worst of the ensuing melee, but the battle resulted in 25 casualties, including two strike leaders and three from

the militia. Eleven women and children hiding in a cellar suffocated to death when militia members burned the tent above them.

The site's "Archaeology" section interprets the material remains of these events. The researchers conducted their study from 1997 through 2002 at both Ludlow and the nearby company town of Berwind. The website lays out, clearly and carefully, their research goals and methods. The page also details their public interpretation efforts, which include lectures, a museum exhibit, traveling exhibits, and "classroom trunks" for K–12 students. A curated online exhibit of historic photographs of the Coal Field War illustrates the events of the war and its aftermath. Especially chilling is a "Black Hand" letter to one strike sympathizer: "You had better leave this part of the country as . . . God hates a squealer . . . it is the Last chance you will have[.] Take my advice or take a traitors chance."<sup>1</sup>

The final section of the website, a historical atlas of the Coal Field War, compares archaeological and historical maps with accompanying essays. The maps provide another visual means for the authors to communicate the results of their study.

The current public discourse about class in the United States is incoherent at best, so an activist public archaeology of class conflict presents considerable challenges. Such work must use material remains to cast light on the current situation. Saitta's work does this by presenting intersecting lines of evidence about the Coal Field War that illustrate an important chapter in the nation's long history of class conflict.

To be effective, the work must reach enough people to have the possibility of changing public knowledge or consciousness. To this end, it may be worth time to update the organizational scheme and general look and layout of the website, which is more than a decade old. For instance, it is difficult to see why the first section, which describes the teachers' institution in detail, lies before the contextual sections on archaeology and history. The entire site would benefit from an introductory summary. The look and feel of the website might be updated to better fit the expectations of contemporary users and to allow more efficient navigation. Because the site aims to effectively communicate with the public, such modifications would further its purpose by drawing and retaining visitors. Despite this, the website remains a valuable interpretive work and a useful source of information for those interested in the history of class struggle in the United States.

Radical studies of the past such as the Coal Field War project must seek to change contemporary consciousness by illuminating the origins of contemporary inequalities that seem, on their face, to be natural and ahistorical. To be effective, the practitioners must be sure that the message reaches enough people to justify the effort. Although the Colorado Coal Field War project may not have the reach of a television cable-network news show, where it seems much of the contemporary public discussion of class does (or does not) take place, the project has maximized its reach by presenting its material to important audiences. These include an adopted descendant community of mine workers, a cadre of Colorado teachers who will communicate these ideas to hundreds or thousands of students over the course of several years, and schoolchildren themselves, who receive instruction through classroom trunks and other outreach media. By highlighting the stories of the people of Ludlow who fought and died to win workers' rights, the Colorado Coal Field War Project illustrates not only the depth of the struggle for workers' rights in the past but also the lingering peril of losing those hard-won rights for those who labor in late capitalism.

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#### NOTE

1. See <http://www.du.edu/ludlow/gallery2.html>.

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## A Review of Towson University's "Anthropology by the Wire" Course and [anthropologybythewire.com](http://anthropologybythewire.com)

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Over the past decade, the HBO television series *The Wire* has become part of numerous course syllabi in anthropology, sociology, urban studies, and film studies. Likewise, debate has flourished about the merits and consequences of this trend. Harvard sociology professor William Julius Wilson, whose students watch four of the show's five seasons as they read academic texts for his *Wire* course, is one of the show's greatest defenders. He argues that the series, which tells intertwining tales about cops, drug dealers, and politicians in contemporary Baltimore, "has done more to enhance both the popular and the scholarly understanding of the challenges of urban life and the problems of urban inequality than any other program in the media or academic publication we can think of" (Chaddha et al. 2008).

The anthropology and sociology students and faculty behind "Anthropology by the Wire," a research course and website at Towson University in Baltimore, may not disagree. At least not completely. They know the power of *The Wire* first hand. Rather, they aim to push back against what they call the "representational burden" that *The Wire* has created for the city's residents by practicing a multimedia, public anthropology—or, as they put it, anthropology

"executed literally through 'the wire' via digital media" (*Anthropology by the Wire* n.d.a.).

The course website, [anthropologybythewire.com](http://anthropologybythewire.com), provides a model for a new type of public, urban anthropology. It documents the students' ethnographic research on the streets of Baltimore and, moreover, shows how video and photography, as well as graphics and PowerPoint, serve as powerful methodological tools, alongside or even in lieu of traditional field notes and interviews. And it raises a number of possibilities for faculty and students embarking on fieldwork in the digital era.

During the summer of 2011, Matthew Durlington and Samuel Collins, professors in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice at Towson, led 12 community college students as they conducted fieldwork in Baltimore and posted their digital results online. The website features an assortment of edited and unedited video clips and blog posts chronicling the lives of Baltimore residents and workers, artfully arranged for easy viewing. A video overview of the project, which was funded by a National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduates grant, sits on the top row, in the center, of the site. Images from the students' research scroll past as Durlington describes the community activism, or "direct community projects," that served as the foundation for student's