

*Research & Books*

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**NOTA BENE**

**'The Archaeology of Collective Action'**

By NINA C. AYOUB

Dean J. Saitta has a warning for archaeology. Its disciplinary practice, he says, is poised on the brink of irrelevancy. Harsh words perhaps, but they are less elegy than rallying cry.

In a new book, **The Archaeology of Collective Action** (University Press of Florida), Mr. Saitta, a professor at the University of Denver, blends a case study in historical archaeology with a call for a critical discipline that is both "explanatory and emancipatory," still rigorous in its science, but politically engaged.

Both elements draw on his work as co-director of the Colorado Coalfield War Archaeological Project and its research on a strike in 1913-14. The strike was marked by heavy violence throughout, but especially by the Ludlow Massacre of April 20, 1914, in which 25 died in a battle between miners and state militia during a raid on a tent colony of strikers. What especially shocked the public of the era were the deaths of 11 children and two women who had taken refuge in an earthen cellar and suffocated when the tent above them was set on fire. Following Ludlow, armed miners began a guerrilla action to take over the coal fields, eventually quashed by federal troops.

After a theoretical prelude, and before project findings, the author offers a background to the strike. The miners were a largely immigrant work force, heavy on Italians and Greeks, who lived under the constraints of company towns and the stresses of a system that paid them not by the hour, but by the quantity of mined coal, and denied wages for what was labeled "deadwork," such as shoring up shaft walls and removing cave-in debris.

In September 1913, they drew up a list of demands, among them an eight-hour day, enforcement of mining laws, payment for deadwork, and representation by the United Mine Workers of America as a bargaining agent. When the company balked, the strike began. Those living in company towns were evicted and moved to tent colonies on land rented by the UMWA.

Excavations at Ludlow shed light on the miners' everyday lives and resistance strategies. Potentially controversial are the results of the project's "battlefield archaeology." For

example, no evidence was found to back militia members' reports that miners fired on them from a network of prepared rifle pits. But excavations also counter claims in the later "vernacular history" of the community that the militia used special explosive bullets and that the raid killed hundreds whose bodies were then buried.

Finally, Mr. Saitta details the project's involvement in public education, including events on the site at a Ludlow memorial, where each year since 1918 UMWA activists and others have gathered to mourn the dead and rally the living.

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