

WHO BUILT AMERICA? GOTHAM FELLOWS STUDY LABOR HISTORY

In July 1877, in the wake of an economic depression, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad announced a ten percent pay cut for its workers. Already reeling from the faltering economy, the workers in Martinsburg, West Virginia responded with a strike. The railroad countered by requesting assistance from the state militia, violence ensued, and the work stoppage spread to Baltimore. Determined not to take further losses, B & O took the dispute to the federal government. The new administration of then President Rutherford B. Hayes responded by sending the US Army to West Virginia to prevent what he called “an insurrection.” Enraged by the collusion between big business and the government, thousands of other Americans of many different backgrounds—German immigrants in Chicago, African-American militias in Pennsylvania—demonstrated in support of the railroad workers, setting off clashes with law enforcement and additional strikes in Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo, and elsewhere. In New York State, the governor declared martial law. Within two weeks, the strikes had spread to fourteen cities. 100,000 people were on strike; half the freight on the railroads had stopped moving.¹

The Great Uprising, as it became known, was the United States’ first nationwide strike. It was one of the first times different groups of the working class came together—different ethnicities, unionists, immigrant women, the urban poor. It spurred the Knights of Labor to organize on a national level and facilitated the building of political parties like the Populists with a greater emphasis on labor issues. But with over a hundred deaths and millions of dollars worth of property damage, the Great Uprising and its consequences also would energize industrial titans including J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Havemeyer to reorganize their companies.²

The Great Uprising and subsequent events like the Homestead Steel Strike in 1892, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911, and the battles of the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters in the 1920s reflect the reality and history of the experiences of many average Americans. Even as big business expanded and the United States grew, the vicissitudes of boom-and-bust industrial capitalism challenged workers seeking the independence that life in America seemed to promise. At the end of the United States’ first hundred years as a nation, this series of incidents set the stage for struggles, conflicts, and compromises between big business and wage laborers that would shape the country’s development in the Industrial Age and in the century ahead.

For the American Citizen program, the Gotham Center, District 28, and our community partners chose labor history as the theme for our spring 2008 Gotham Fellows professional development seminars. Incorporating events and experiences that directly impacted the lives of ordinary working men and women, we expanded the base of traditional American history studies. We drew on the specialized resources and knowledge of our community partners—such as the collections of photos and maps of the Brooklyn Historical Society and City Lore’s library and archives—and used the American Social History Project’s *Who Built America?* as a text to

create a series of best practices strategies that highlighted labor and social history. Incorporating New York's local history was also key in studying these threads of American history because, as Prof. Edward O'Donnell has noted, "The American labor movement is certainly not only in New York, but because it's New York-- it's the communications capital and the commercial capital of the United States-- what happens in New York matters."³

Dr. Pennee Bender of the American Social History Project at CUNY opened our spring sessions at the Brooklyn Historical Society with an overview of labor history from the 18th century to the present. She demonstrated ways of teaching with primary source documents using as examples an 18th century newspaper ad for a runaway slave, a political cartoon knocking the economic hardship of the Panic of 1873, and an oral history detailing the experiences of a teacher who helped to organize 1946's Montgomery Bus Boycott. Her introduction was followed by a documents-based workshop led by the Brooklyn Historical Society from their History Hunters series. Using Greenpoint as a case study, we examined labor practices in the borough's manufacturing sector and how employers of newly created wage jobs also attempted to create and manage the housing and environments of their workers.



Dr. Pennee Bender discusses the uses of primary sources in the classroom.

As we moved through the semester, Dr. Edward O'Donnell looked at the tensions between increasing immigration and the tendency toward Nativism through a brief history of the experiences of 19th century Chinese workers and how labor issues like competition over wages and the boycott of Chinese laundries in New York mirrored national events such as the Chinese Exclusion Act 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1924. His lecture was complemented by a strategy workshop led by City Lore, examining issues of inclusion and exclusion in American society by who was represented in US Census data. April's sessions featured a lecture by Dr. John Splaine on elections, the media, and the shaping of public opinion followed by a strategies workshop in which Fellows created and presented television and radio commercials inspired by recent political ads and drew on primary source documents from *Who Built America?*: an anti-war spot from a Civil War battlefield photograph, a public service announcement questioning working conditions in New York derived from a Progressive Era photograph. Executive Director of the American Social History Project Dr. Joshua Freeman's lecture in May followed the rise of labor in early part of the 20th century and the effects of the movement's increased power including the introduction of the forty hour work week and the rise of the standard of living in America's post-war years and the building of suburbs like Levittown, NY, the first major

community of its kind in the United States. Henry Street Settlement took a specific episode from Freeman's lecture and used drama to examine the Taft-Hartley Act, a federal law passed in 1947 which restricted the activities and power of labor unions and led to many of today's workplace issues. Our final sessions included strategies on ways of teaching with exhibitions at the Queens Museum and with artifacts at Historic House Trust's King Manor, the home of early abolitionist Rufus King in Jamaica. Our Fellows finished out the semester by presenting their collaboratively written lesson plans which highlighted episodes from a century of American labor history from 1849 to 1939 and featured strategies such as using political cartoons to examine yellow journalism at the turn of the last century and role-playing exercises to underscore the struggles of the individual during the Dust Bowl which they presented on our final day in June.

American Citizen's Spring 2008 lectures and workshops explored the lives of working people as the United States industrialized and became increasingly diverse and how they connected to larger historical trends. This fall, our Fellows will take back to their classrooms content and strategies that will enable their students learn key curriculum topics such as geographic growth, economics, and how people effect change and reform with greater depth and greater relevance to their own lives in New York. Episodes from labor history like the Great Uprising demonstrate the significant consequences the experiences of ordinary men and women can have on the shape of American history.



Teachers reenact an escape on the Underground Railroad.

Notes

¹ Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: The New Press, 1997 reprint of 1980 edition), pp. 179-182.

² Clark, Christopher and Hewitt, Nancy, *Who Built America? Volume 1*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), pp. 671-674

³ Gotham Center for New York City History, from a previously unpublished interview with historian Edward O'Donnell, July 8, 2008.

AN INTERVIEW WITH HISTORIAN EDWARD O'DONNELL



Dr. Edward T. O'Donnell is a professional historian, author, and speaker. He earned his bachelor's degree from Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA and his Ph.D. in American History from Columbia University. He is an Associate Professor of History at Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA. O'Donnell is the author of several books, including his most recent, Ship Ablaze: The Tragedy of the Steamboat General Slocum (Broadway Books, May 2003), which tells the story of one of the worst disasters in American history and its impact on a vibrant ethnic community. His previous book was 1001 Things Everyone Should Know About Irish American History (Broadway Books, 2002). O'Donnell is also a professional speaker, delivering history-themed presentations before thousands of educational and business and non-profit organizations since 1991. He is also active in the field of public history. He has curated several major museum exhibits on American history and has provided historical insight and commentary for PBS, the Discovery Channel, ABC World News Now, National Public Radio, the BBC, Bloomberg Radio, WOR Radio, Fox TV, and VH-1 (TV).

The Gotham Center recently spoke with Dr. Edward O'Donnell about his work on New York City history and labor history during a seminar at CUNY.

For the 2007-2008 academic year the Gotham Center chose as its theme as "Who Built America?" How would you answer that question?

I think what they're trying to get at, their ambition there with the question "Who built America?" is to shift focus... When we think of the Industrial Revolution we usually think of Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan and the big titans, when in fact it's important to shift the focus. It's important that the people who did build America, who made Carnegie Steel, for example, the greatest producer of steel in the world, were his thousands and thousands of workers. So it's important to know about the industrialists and the key players at the top of the spectrum, but also to know about the lives of every day people: the mill workers, their families, the ways in which they handled the ups and downs of the economy, where they carved out some autonomy, where they formed unions to get a little more time off, higher wages... That's what most Americans were doing. Most Americans were not Andrew Carnegie. They were on one of the many, many rungs of the economy below him.

In your opinion, what sort of relationship do Americans today have to their own history?

That's a very complicated question, because Americans love history on one level, and if you were to think about it in terms of consumption, Americans are consuming more history now than ever before. They are, for example, buying more books on history and watching the History Channel. The latter is phenomenally successful, but it started out as kind of a throw-in. Historic tourism, visits to battlefields, museums -- Americans are devouring more history than ever before. But... at the same time a lot of the history is very comfortable, somewhat self-serving, and very narrow. So Americans know an awful lot about the general outlines of the Civil War, for example, but not a lot really about slavery, not a lot about the real crucial issues that led us to a civil war complex questions such as Why did white non-slave owning Southerners fight in the Civil War? Was what in it for them? Why did Lincoln ultimately sign the Emancipation Proclamation? Things of that nature. Americans are into history, but we like to avoid some of the more difficult chapters.

Another example is Americans' love of immigration history. We love the fact that so many of us, nearly all Americans on some level, have an immigration heritage. And people go to Ellis Island more than ever

before, to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum more than ever before. Genealogy? Apart from pornography, it's the number one profitable business on the internet. So people love heritage and history and family history, but most people don't make important connections. They have a superficial, nostalgic view of immigration, particularly when it comes to evaluating immigration today. They think of immigration as a wonderful thing in the *past* and a terrible thing in the *present*. And if they knew more about immigration history, if they knew more about how poorly received their grandparents were, how hated their grandparents were, how unassimilable their grandparents seemed, how their grandparents seemed to be stealing jobs and drinking too much and bringing the wrong kinds of values to America, then they would have a much greater appreciation and understanding of contemporary immigration... So Americans like history and that's good for people in the history business. But the challenge to people in the history business is to make people think critically and see some of the more difficult uncomfortable, complicated sides of American history.

Why do you think it's important to study American labor history?

Well, I think American labor history is important because... it shifts the focus away from the stars of the show, which are the great titans of industry. In fact, if we think about American history as telling the history of America, most Americans were workers on some level. Even if they weren't in unions, they were wage earning workers living in fairly modest or in some cases quite poor conditions. And labor history is a good example of that kind of complicated history I've mentioned. Most Americans in the 1800s, in the 1900s for that matter would not want to give up the goodies that capitalism produces -- the astonishing aggregate growth of wealth, the growth of material goods, middle class comforts and the health benefits, the varieties of experience, the entertainment -- we love all that stuff. But labor history reminds us that these things come with a cost and that in many cases the goodies, the astonishing things that Andrew Carnegie's empire of steel created--the bridges and railroads and factories and that stuff brought about by steel and eventually Carnegie's largesse, his hundreds of millions of dollars that he gives away--a lot of that is built upon the exploited labor in his factories. So it reminds us that you don't have to be a Marxist to see that capitalism does have exploitation built into it, and part of the story of American labor has been, in various phases, its successes in getting a larger slice of the pie, fighting to get eight hours established as the baseline standard working day, eventually getting a two day weekend, eventually getting minimum wage and health insurance or workman's compensation, etc.. They're small increases in the pieces of the pie, but it reminds us that, sure, industrial capitalism in America has brought us things we would never want to part with. But labor history reminds us that it's a complicated and difficult story within that story. And today it's an international story. I want my \$125 running shoes made by Asics, but I don't know where they've come from. I bet they were not made in America. I hope that they weren't made by nearly slave labor in some dire factory in some faraway part of the world, but there's a very good chance that they were. So there's a global dimension to it now.

What made you want to study history? Was there a specific experience that led you to studying history?

My interest in history I think simply comes from my parents... I think my mother actually majored in history when she went to college. They were born in twenties, so my father just loved history. He was a doctor but he read voraciously. Everything—especially biographies and history—and he really indirectly instilled that in all of us. My brother went to college to become a doctor like his father. He was a history major, pre-med. When I went to college, I was a history major, pre-med. I failed chemistry, so the pre-med card thing kind of blew up. But I kept up with the history, and it's not coincidental that my interest in history has been immigration, because one of the things that my father was quite interested in was the story of immigration, especially Irish immigration. Our family's predominantly Irish-American, so I think that that's probably where it comes from. And then, you know, you just happen to get into a history course in college with a great

professor who's really dynamic and fascinating and encourages you to write, little things like that along the way that encouraged me to become a historian.

Tell us about your work on the history of New York City.

When I came to New York in the summer of 1988, it was a few degrees short of kicking and screaming. I came to New York to attend graduate school at Columbia, and I had a choice between Columbia and Chicago. I chose Columbia, but I thought New York was Sodom and Gomorrah. I thought it was just a bad place. And, in fact, there was not a lot to like about New York in the late 1980s, particularly in Morningside Heights up by Columbia—a lot of homeless, a lot of violence, a rising murder rate, a lot of things. So I had the Army Ranger mentality: get in, get it done, get out. I was just going to get to New York, get my PhD and get the hell out. Within a few months, however, I began to discover how great New York was. Because I was interested in urban and ethnic history, I somehow had the wherewithal to realize that this is the *ultimate* urban ethnic environment. And again another professor had a tremendous influence on me... Jim Shenton at Columbia was Mr. New York, and before long he was taking me on walking tours, and showing me how to do walking tours and how to really see the city as this endlessly fascinating multilayered cauldron of experience. Pretty soon my wife, who was born and raised in Manhattan, said, "You're more of a New Yorker than I am." That story has been replicated a million times over for people who have moved to New York, but for me it was very much a classic; I wasn't really excited about being here and then I couldn't really imagine living anywhere else.

How does New York's labor history reflect the nation's labor history?

I think Mike Wallace said it best in the big Ric Burns documentary. He said something to the effect that "Nowhere was capitalism given more of a free hand than in New York. And nowhere was it challenged more than in New York by a labor movement." And I think that you see a lot of America in New York, usually in extreme form. The American labor movement is certainly not only in New York, but because it's New York— it's the communications capital and the commercial capital of the United States—what happens in New York matters. I'll give you one example. In the spring and summer of 1882 unions in New York were getting increasingly powerful and more aware of their power and this is after the depression decade of the 1870s. But they're also feeling beset by all the rapid changes of industrialization and wage labor and so forth. So a couple of labor leaders in the spring of 1882 say, "We really should have a holiday for labor where we honor the honest working man in America." The next thing you know, September 5, 1882, New York workers, against all odds, against the police department refusing to close the streets and it being a Tuesday in the middle of the week, they held the first Labor Day. They had a big parade through the streets of lower Manhattan that spilled into Union Square, and afterward they had a huge barbecue where maybe ten to twenty thousand people participated on some level. Within just a few years most American cities are holding Labor Day commemorations -- parades and big celebrations with speeches and all. And by the 1890s it's a federal holiday. It's symbolic more than anything else, but it's a good example of how what happened in New York mattered.

Let's take another example: the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. I always show my students the statistics on mining. In the Cherry Mine Disaster in Illinois of 1909... It killed 259 miners. And in that year alone more than 2,600 miners died in America. So why does nobody know about the Cherry Mine Disaster of 1909, a tragedy that included exploited immigrant workers and egregious safety violations—all the same ingredients as the Triangle Fire? It's because the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 happened in New York that you had the newspaper coverage, you had the photographers, you had built-in organizations like labor unions and

do-gooder progressive organizations. So because that fire happened in New York, it became a national story. And it had a big impact on the way people thought about workers, unions, and workplace regulations.

You are active in the field of public history. Can you tell us about some of the projects you've worked on? How does this impact your teaching in the classroom?

I think public history is important. A lot of people in the academic field are disdainful of public history because it's seen as sort of--as Mike Wallace would say--Mickey Mouse history, because it's not very substantive. It's fluffy stuff like museums and the History Channel. But I look at it—getting back to my original point that because Americans are consuming more history than ever before—it's the obligation of historians not to pooh pooh it and dismiss it, but to get in there and do what you can to make sure that museum exhibits are not just happy, feel good experiences but ones that do bring up complicated issues.

So I've worked and helped curate a big exhibit on the Irish in New York at the Museum of the City of New York in 1996 (a long time ago). That was a perfect opportunity to simply present a celebration of the Irish and all the wonderful things that they did in America. And it could be two stories: how poorly they were treated and how they triumphed and made America what it is today. But, you know, if you don't talk about the Draft Riot in the middle of the Civil War in 1863 when Irish-Americans, at the most precarious moment in the nation's history as the war that threatens to destroy the Union is not going well, they riot on a mass scale (it's still the biggest civil insurrection in American history), do \$5 million worth of property damage, and lynch eighteen African-Americans in the streets of New York in horrific ways—tearing them apart, burning them to death, hanging them. You know, if you don't talk about that because it's uncomfortable, you're not doing a good job.

Several of your lectures have detailed the experiences and working lives of new immigrants in the past. What are some of the discoveries you've made in your research?

I guess I've developed this profound sense of how Americans think of immigration now and how they've always thought of immigration. At one point in my presentations I'll put up a picture of Ben Franklin and an anti-German rant he published in the 1750s. Then I read the rant about how Germans won't blend in, and they speak only German, and they educate their kids in German, and on and on. I point out that this comes from perhaps the most open-minded man in the Western hemisphere. And then I reread the rant to them but substituting the word California for Pennsylvania, saying Mexicans instead of Germans, and changing "why are we allowing them to Germanize us instead of us Anglofying them" into "why are we allowing them to Latinize us instead of us Americanizing them." It has this incredible impact, and everybody goes, "Wow. You just changed four words in that paragraph and it's remarkable how consistent the language is..."

Probably one of the biggest insights I've developed is how Americans have a compartmentalized view of American immigration history. We don't see it as a continuum. We think immigration of the past is heroic, it's beautiful, it's when I go to Ellis Island I weep tears, I think of my grandparents, I think of the grainy black and white photos of the immigrants standing on the deck of the ship with the silhouette of the Statue of Liberty in the background... But Ellis Island was not built in the 1890s as a museum honoring the heroism of your grandparents. Ellis Island was built in the 1890s to keep your grandparents out. Or people like them out. It was a huge filter. They didn't want your grandparents here. Nobody did. And yet they got in anyway, and they proved the Nativists wrong. And each generation has had this same sense that immigration was good in the past, but now it's ruining the country. My big specialty is Irish immigration, but I try to study a lot about other groups and the similarities and differences and how the Irish got along with African-Americans and how they got along with Jewish-Americans. I find all that stuff quite fascinating.

What are some of your upcoming projects?

Right now I'm finishing (as co-author) a college-level American history textbook titled ... *Visions of America*... We started out wanting to really reinvent the textbook. Ours would not be just another book written by five historians with an in-house staffer throwing a lot of pictures into it to decorate it and then poorly labeling them. We did not want to treat paintings like photographs; for example, using an 1888 painting of the Constitutional Convention in the Constitutional Convention section with a caption saying "delegates gathered in 1787" as if this was a **photograph** from that time period. Whereas if we used that painting there, we identify it as an 1888 painting and point out what the artist had in mind--why there are bald eagles and why Tom Paine was excluded. We want students to really look at images. We've chosen all of own images, and integrated them into the text. They don't just decorate the text. That's really the idea, so you can see how that plays into some of my presentations. I've developed my own eye for images and how they can be used to teach history.

I'm finishing my book on Henry George. This is my social biography of Henry George and the labor movement in the late 19th century; this is why I was able to rattle on about the founding of Labor Day; it's right in that same time period. I write a weekly column for *The Irish Echo*, basically on anything I want on Irish-American history. I just published something in *Public Historian* about Jacob Riis and the use and misuse of his images in museums... and not quite accurate use. He's another good example of both the power of images and the need for historians to discuss complicated, uncomfortable issues. Riis took these beautiful pictures, and people look at them and go "Ohhh, those poor people. The struggle." And you know, there is that element to Jacob Riis' photographs. But if you read his text—how many people actually read his book where he talks about how Jews love money and blacks are happy-go-lucky and the Irish drink too much and Italians are stiletto-wielding maniacs. Ninety percent of his book is very sympathetic, very humanitarian, very much on the side of these poor people, but every now and again he rattles off these insensitive, even racist remarks... I think it's important to recognize that.

I published an article in the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* recently about the Jacob Joseph funeral riot... When the one and only chief rabbi of the Orthodox community died in 1902 there was a big, big funeral on Lower East Side that snaked its way through the streets, past all the old synagogues, and it was on its way to the ferry when thugs attacked the mourners. And if you look at any book of the Jewish-American experience it's always identified as Irish thugs. It's in every book to exemplify the bad relations between the Irish and Jews. I thought, "I want to know more about this. Why are there so many anti-Semitic incidents attributed to the Irish? What's going on there?" So I went to explore this and, as they say, a funny thing happened on the way to the archives. I looked at all the people arrested, and only a handful of them had names like Collins or Sullivan. Most of them have German names, including the real key people who were actually throwing rocks and fighting. So I couldn't find any Irishmen! In the end it's a story about that story about how the historiography went off track because in the original reference to the riot in a memoir from 1932 the guy sort of misremembered to some degree that it was Irish perpetrators, possibly because the police who showed were mostly Irish and they then beat and arrest mostly mourners, mostly Jews. So there is anti-Jewish sentiment in Irish people but it's not quite there in this story... as I said, the story seemed perfect to explain a widely undeniable phenomenon of Irish anti-Semitism but it was too perfect...

I'm also working on an article about Thomas Nast and the Irish....

For more information on Dr. O'Donnell and his work, please see his website at www.edwardtodonnell.com.

FEATURED LESSON FROM NEW YORK CITY AND THE NATION

Dramatizing Historical Points of View from Primary Source Documents

A successful format for our institute sessions has combined scholar talks, hands-on workshops, and discussion of classroom application in a full day of learning. During one such session in April 2008, Julie Maurer of the Gotham Center and Catherine Fletcher of City Lore presented a workshop on exploring point of view in history through document analysis and adapting and dramatizing that document in more contemporary formats: television and radio commercials. Prior to the workshop, historian Dr. John Splaine, Emeritus of the University of Maryland and retired Hostetter Chair, University of Denver, gave a talk on media and its role in shaping elections and history in the 20th century. The workshop built on issues raised in Splaine's lecture. Over seventy NYC public school teachers from grades 4, 5, 7 and 8 took part. We're pleased to share this teaching strategy with you.

Workshop Overview: Our workshop began by reexamining the video clips and quotations participants had seen during the morning's lecture as treating them as primary sources from recent history rather than as merely current events. Using these recent sources as case studies, we explored how the points of view of video, photographs, newspapers, engravings, radio advertisements and the like affect, reflect, or contradict events around us. Participants chose one topic each (such as the Fugitive Slave Law or women's suffrage) from different periods outlined in our chosen textbook, *Who Built America?*, beginning with "The Settlement of the West and the Conflict Over Slave Labor: 1848-1860" through "Labor Democratizes America: 1935-1939." For each topic, groups selected and analyzed a primary source document as a case study, searching for the point of view it represented and how it was responding to events in that period. They then used their observations and inferences to write a short script for a television or radio commercial based on their selected document, which was presented to the whole group. The Gilded Age and Progressive Era are used as a model here.

Student Learning Goals:

- Students will be more aware of point of view in media and contemporary sources and how they affect, reflect, or contradict events.
- Students will explore how different types of media such as print and television communicate ideas differently.
- Students will use primary sources to develop, write scripts and dramatize points of view from history.
- Students will increase their understanding of the connections between primary source documents and larger historical events.

Materials: primary source documents from the web, document analysis worksheet, TV, video player

Content Vocabulary: point of view, case study, media, press

Suggested Grade Level: 7-8

Introductory Activity: Media and Point of View in History

Grouping: Individual and Groups of 4 to 5

Description: Begin by defining case study and point of view. Play a contemporary video clip such as the Hillary Clinton 3am phone call ad from YouTube for students. Elicit their initial impressions. Explain that you will play it again but this time they will watch and answer the following questions:

- Who is the author/creator of the clip? Who is the audience?
- What is the central message of this clip?
- Does this clip appeal to your reason or emotion? How does it make you feel?

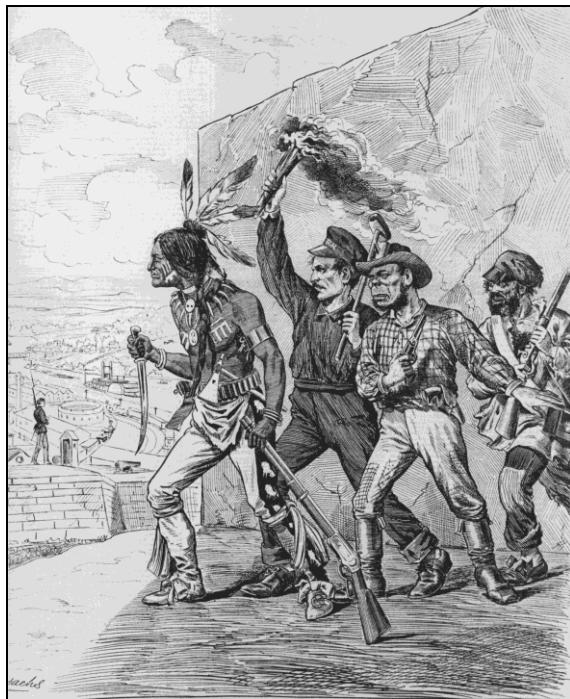
Board student responses: what is different on the second viewing?

Activity #1: Learning to Read a Period Document

Grouping: Individual and Groups of 4 to 5

Description: Building on the contemporary example, students will decode one of six primary source documents from the Gilded Age. Each will serve as a case study for this period.

- Great Strike of 1877 from *Harper's Weekly*, August 11, 1877 (<http://www.ashp.cuny.edu/1877/1877-1.html>)



Ph. G. Cusachs, "Waiting for the Reduction of the Army," New York Daily Graphic, June 14, 1878,
Courtesy of the American Social History Project.

- "Waiting for the Reduction of the Army."-- symbols of disorder cartoon from *New York Daily Graphic*, June 14, 1878 (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6760>)
- Anti-Democratic Campaign Poster, 1884 (Tract #10 [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbpe&fileName=rbpe00/rbpe001/0010190b/rbpe0010190b.db&recNum=0&itemLink=h?ammem/rbpebib:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(rbpe+0010190b\)\)&linkText=0](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=rbpe&fileName=rbpe00/rbpe001/0010190b/rbpe0010190b.db&recNum=0&itemLink=h?ammem/rbpebib:@field(NUMBER+@band(rbpe+0010190b))&linkText=0))
- Standard Oil octopus cartoon by Udo Keppler from Puck, v. 56, no. 1436 (1904 Sept. 7) ([http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?pp/PPALL:@field\(NUMBER+@1\(cph+3a27007\)\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?pp/PPALL:@field(NUMBER+@1(cph+3a27007))))
- Eyewitness Account of a 1909 garment workers' strike (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5659>)
- Anti-Women's Suffrage Poster, 1912 (<http://us.history.wisc.edu/hist102/photos/html/1014.html>)

The observations and inferences gathered here will help students consider a source in detail and be used to write a script for a television commercial equivalent of the document in Activities 2 and 3.

Procedure:

- Divide the class into six groups. Each member of the group will receive the same primary source document. There are a total of six different documents.
- Tell students that they will analyze another primary source, only now they are going back in time, before television, to the Gilded Age.

- Hand out the document analysis worksheets. (Worksheets can be found at the National Archives website: www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets) Explain that they each will use the worksheet to decode their primary source document.
- Each student works individually to decode the document. When the students are finished, they will discuss and compare their results in their group.

Follow with a question and answer session about how print documents communicate differently from video and audio.

Activity #2: Writing a Commercial

Grouping: Groups of 4 to 5

Description: Working with the information from the document analysis worksheet, the groups will write a script for a one to two minute television or radio political ad either supporting the position and point of view depicted in the primary source document or opposing it, also considering:

- Whose point of view does it represent—individual, group, geographic?
- What kind of primary source document might reflect an opposing view point to the one your document represents?
- What national event does this source connect to?

A voice-over announcer or other characters not depicted in the document can also be included. Students can also serve as directors or producers or set designers of the ad. Once the script is written, student will rehearse the ad for presentation.

Activity #3: Presenting the Commercial

Grouping: Groups/Whole Class

Description: Each group will present their commercials to the whole class, dramatizing the primary source document they have decoded. Those groups not presenting will try to guess what the other group is depicting. After each group has presented, lead a whole class discussion of what was learned from each commercial and which was the most effective in presenting its point of view. Did the class agree with what was being presented or disagree; why?

Wrap-up / Assessment

Ask students to reflect on the experience and prepare for class discussion. Questions to ask may include:

- Why do you think we need to study primary source documents?
- How does learning from period documents compare to learning from the narrative in your textbook?
- How do you detect bias and point of view in primary source documents?
- What did you learn about the time period after you wrote and performed your script? What did you want to communicate? What did you not want to communicate?
- What is the difference between media of print, audio and television? How do they communicate ideas differently?
- What recent events are taking place and how do we know about them? What do we know about the event from radio vs. television vs print?

Extensions:

- Have students create a timeline of the period with major historical events and place their primary source documents in the appropriate place chronologically.
- Have students conduct a research project on the individuals or issues that are the subject of their primary source document.

Technology Infusion

Have an online scavenger hunt for important events and dates to match their documents. For this time period see the Gilded Age Exhibition from *America's Story* at the Library of Congress:

<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jb/gilded> or a general timeline like the one at <http://www.animatedatlas.com/timeline.html>.

Bibliography and Resources

Books

- Clark, Christopher and Hewitt, Nancy, *Who Built America?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008).
- Edwards, Rebecca, *New Spirits Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
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- Hoose, Phillip, *We Were There Too*, Part 7: Shifting Gears in a New Century. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2001).
- Sante, Luc, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).
- Wiebe, Robert, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966)

Films

- *1877: Grand Army of Starvation.* (American Social History Productions, Inc., 1986).
- *The Age of Innocence.* (Cappa Production/Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1993).
- *Empires of Industry: Andrew Carnegie and the Age of Steel.* (History Channel, 2005).

Websites

- American Social History Project at CUNY <http://www.ashp.cuny.edu>
- Aquifer American Social History Online <http://www.dlfaquifer.org/home>
- Gilded Age Exhibition at the Library of Congress <http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jb/gilded>
- Gilded Age and Progressive Era Resource List <http://www.tntech.edu/history/gilprog.html>
- History Matters at George Mason University <http://historymatters.gmu.edu>

City Lore is a cultural organization, located on Manhattan's Lower East Side, whose mission is to document, preserve and present the living cultural heritage of New York City. Education is central to our mission and informs all of our programs, both school and community-based. For more information about City Lore's education programs, contact Schools Program Director Anika Selbst, at 212-529-1955 ext. 303, or anika@citylore.org.

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Historic House Trust (www.historichousetrust.org) operates in tandem with the City of New York/Parks & Recreation to support houses of architectural and cultural significance spanning 350 years of NYC history. Education programs at Trust houses are designed to reinforce in-school instruction in a variety of curriculum areas for a wide range of grades and are directly linked with NYS Learning Standards. Contact: David Mandel, Director of Education, david.mandel@parks.nyc.gov.

Community School District 28's Teaching American History project staff includes Dr. Gus Hatzimiditriou, American Citizen's Project Director, and Coordinators, John Rooney and Bob Dytell. For more information, contact jrooney@schools.nyc.gov or bdytel@schools.nyc.gov.

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