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Worldviews And The American West

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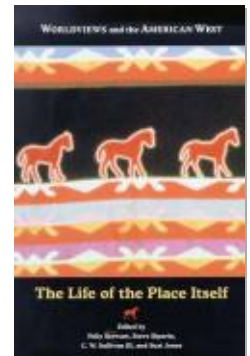
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Visible Landscapes/Invisible People: Negotiating the Power of Representation in a Mining Community

Robert McCarl

On 26 May 1996, two demolitions experts from Morrison-Knudsen set charges under the gigantic stacks of the former Bunker Hill smelter in Kellogg, Idaho. A contest was held to determine who would push the button and send the stacks plummeting to the ground. Lining the freeway, front porches, and rooftops of the denuded hillsides were thousands of people who came to watch the spectacle. Among them were two important factions in the community: One faction comprised those who were there to cheer the destruction of a corporate and industrial symbol that to many of the mining and union families of the Coeur d'Alenes, represented a union-busting, corporate form of greed and callousness toward human life that had characterized this valley since the latter part of the nineteenth century. The other group represented at the "Blow the Stacks" rally had lobbied hard to keep the EPA and the state from going through with their plans. This group, made up of chamber of commerce activists, preservationists, and business people who rely heavily upon the tourist trade, wanted to preserve the still-carcinogenic smokestacks so that they could be turned into an interpretive site for tourists. They sought the establishment of a landmark that would portray the positive aspects of the mining industry in the Silver Valley. The button was pushed; the stacks were blown and buried where they fell. A chapter in the history of this contested landscape is closed, while the cultural issues dividing the community continue.

My goal in this discussion is to examine in some detail the origin, development, and current disposition of the opposing cultural perspectives outlined above. To begin, it will be necessary to consider what Eric Wolf suggests is the unrealized challenge of anthropology, and that is to "engage ourselves in the systematic writing of a history of the modern world in which we spell out the processes of power which created the present-day

cultural systems and the linkages between them” (Wolf 1974, 261); accordingly, I start with the premise that any examination of an intellectual canon must pay attention to the processes of power that engendered it, as well as to its relationship to other cultural and economic interests. I will illustrate the development of a laboring subculture in the Coeur d’ Alenes that began with the industrialization of hardrock mining in the late nineteenth century and continues today in the lives and memories of a large number of valley families. By taking on this task, I also hope to analyze the development of industrial or occupational ethnography as an important but relatively undeveloped subfield of anthropology and folklore studies.

Having laid out my goals, I need to quickly frame and define both the wider and narrower contexts of industrial ethnology—wider in that labor history, industrial archeology, political economy, occupational folklore, capitalism, industrialism, post-industrialism, and on and on are germane to the discussion but take us, perhaps, too wide of our mark; narrower in that the specific constraints and forms of resistance developed at the point of production—the epicenter of work culture that extends from the hand and body of the worker to global networks of production and consumption—can only be partially illustrated in a short essay. Further (as Paul Willis, Ken Kusterer, and Martin Meissner have all illustrated), the expression and form of technique, by its very transformative nature, is not amenable even to the most sophisticated forms of documentation; it too is placed outside the scope of this discussion (Willis 1977, 130–36; Kusterer 1978, 163–95; Meissner 1976).

Centrally, I am addressing the culture of work: knowledge generated in and around the creation of goods and services that is drawn upon to pattern and interpret behavior. Yet is this enough? There is something missing, and it is missing primarily because of the cultural canons and blinders of our own disciplines. Culture helps us see certain things, but it also occludes material that is not culturally anticipated. Herbert Gutman in *Work, Culture and Society*, drawing on the theories of Mintz, Wolf, and Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, develops a definition of culture as a “kind of resource” and society as a “kind of arena.” He goes on to suggest that

this approach allows historians to avoid the many pitfalls that follow implicit or explicit acceptance of . . . the subtle historical processes that explain patterns of working class and other behavior as no more than what Eric Wolf terms the “expansion of one at the expense of the other.” An analytical model that distinguishes between culture and society reveals that even in periods of radical economic and social change, powerful cultural continuities and adaptations continue to shape the historical behavior of diverse working class populations (Gutman 1976, 18–19).

What is missing from both our definition and our approach to the culture of work is our disregard of labor ideology—that ethos and value system born of collective work experience. We variously refer to such an ideology as class, trade unionism, solidarity, or proletarian consciousness. Yet buried within these concepts, in addition to a resistance or opposition to managerial control, is a different sense of morality, a grounded notion of what is right and wrong based on a body of concrete, shared experiences in the workplace.

This ideology may expand into the political arena during a strike or a job action, but it is primarily a face-to-face, private experience that binds one generation and one worker to the next. Labor ideology is an ineffable and even noble belief in a common good beyond that of the individual; with a few notable exceptions (Pilcher 1972; Nash 1979; Korson 1938, 1943; Green 1978), folklorists have paid little attention to it. The difference between the study of work and the study of labor can be the difference between scientific management (or Taylorism, Human Relations, TQM—it comes under a variety of names) and a clear-headed examination of the workplace as an arena within which power is negotiated daily. Failure—on the part of workers or researchers—to recognize the importance of that power relationship can result in various forms of dismemberment, disease, dislocation, disenfranchisement, rage, blood, and death. Recognition and use of it by workers can result in what June Nash calls “communitas.” In *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us*, Nash describes strategies used by Bolivian tin miners to “resist against alienation that is the essence of the work system in industrial centers:”

To the extent that the community has these generative bonds of new growth, the people can sustain the most brutal attacks. The mining community has demonstrated the strength of these sentiments that carry it through such periods.

. . . When the company recognized this, they tried to destroy it by firing or sending into exile the husbands of those women who focused on the sentiments of the communitas, thereby breaking the primary base of solidarity. The rituals in the mine . . . and the offerings to the enchanted spirits are all reminders in normal periods of the root sources of communitas. (Nash 1979, 330)

Nash’s trenchant analysis of labor ideology in Bolivia does not completely account for the experience of miners in the United States, but her model provides us with a theoretical seam of concrete cultural experience to which we will return at the end of this discussion. Contemporary miners observe customs, from the initiation of novices to elaborate narratives of legendary miners or union men, that parallel those documented by Nash. The significance of this material lies not only in its demonstration of a response to alienation but perhaps more importantly in its projection of a worldview that

is workable above and below ground. Labor ideology is more than simply a response to specific technical and economic conditions of work; it is a value system and a positive ethos that provides the members of these communities with a unique and little-understood way of operating collectively in a world that exerts continual pressure toward individualism and competition.

In order to better understand the culture of labor in the Coeur d'Alenes, we need to go back to the late 1800s. Not long after the boomers and forty-miners moved on to Alaska or decided to try the Boise or the Wood River basins for gold, the discovery of large deposits of lead and silver ore in the Coeur d'Alenes began to attract experienced industrial miners. "Cousin Jacks" from Cornwall, along with Irish, Scandinavian, and Italian workers, began to sign on with the Bunker Hill and Sullivan, the Last Chance, the Polaris, the Badger, and the Nine Mile. Initially these mines required hand skills—single- and doublejacking by hand to place charges, "bardown" solid rock or "muck," and wheel it out on mule cart. By 1890, however, mine owners had begun to find outside investors to assist them in building a railroad, organizing themselves in a mine owners' cartel, and importing steam and later electric mining drills. May Arkwright Hutton, the wife of a labor activist in the region, wrote in her turn-of-the-century autobiography, *The Coeur d'Alenes: A Tale of the Modern Inquisition in Idaho*:

During the years of 1889 and 1890 the mine owners put machine drills run by compressed air in their mines, with which two men could break down as much rock in one day as ten men could with hand drills.

Old miners who had spent the best part of their lives mining were put back to shoveling, and the shovelers had to perform double the amount of work prior to the advent of the machine drills. (Hutton [1900] 1992, 57–58)

In addition to changes in technology and the resultant destruction of craft, the mine owners decided that they would not support the construction of a miners' hospital in Wallace. (The union had requested that the hospital be supported by diverting a dollar from each miner's paycheck to pay for the construction and staffing of the facility.) This confrontation resulted in a strike, and immediately the mine owners began to implement a prearranged plan to import strikebreakers and non-union miners from around the country. Special trains were loaded in California and at points east with non-union workers, who were shipped into the region. At first, the miners used rhetoric to fight the mine owners' union-busting tactics. Hutton states:

Jock Hazelton was one of the men stationed by the unions at Tekoa, Washington, the point where the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company takes passengers for the Coeur d'Alene mines,

and when non-union men would arrive from various points, Jock made it his business to interview them and if he could not persuade them to return to their homes, he would, with the assistance of the railroad men, who were in sympathy with the union men in their cause, manage to get them into trains going in the opposite direction. (Hutton 1900, 61)

With millions of dollars in assets, the mine owners invested heavily in strikebreaking practices, hiring hundreds of Pinkerton agents, restricting the passage of union representatives in the region, and challenging the union's rights at every step of the way. Inevitably, a confrontation between a local mine guard and a union man erupted in gunfire, the death of three union miners, and the response of the unionists in the destruction of the Frisco Mill. Martial law was established; the Army sent troops to "quell the uprising"; union leaders were imprisoned in the bullpen. The events of the strike culminated in the well-known trial of Big Bill Haywood, following the assassination of Idaho's Governor Steunenberg. The mine "war" of the Coeur d'Alenes not only brought into sharp relief the ideological conflicts between miners and mine owners; this period also reflected a political and public expression of labor ideology born in the stope and maintained to this day.

Using this historical conflict as a starting point for understanding labor culture, I would like to analyze the implications of the 1892 battle for both labor history and the development of the industrial paradigm in anthropology. Regarding the former, the miners of the Coeur d'Alenes were not first-time unionists. Labor struggles in Colorado, Nevada, California, and Utah added strength to the Western Federation of Miners, who also played an important role in organizing the region. Many of the leaders and activists in the WFM were former members of the Knights of Labor. Following the destruction of the Frisco Mill in 1892 and particularly after the incarceration of the union men in the bullpen and the killing of Governor Steunenberg, the preoccupation of more radical WFM leaders like Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone opened the Federation to a takeover by the Industrial Workers of the World. Some commentators, like historian Mark Sullivan in his multi-volume opus, *Our Times, The United States 1900-1925*, go so far as to claim that the mine war and the Haywood trial (particularly Haywood's acquittal) was a turning point in American history:

[T]hose who had decried American justice, who had alleged the impossibility of a fair trial for Haywood, found themselves discredited with persons of common sense. Up to that time there had been a country-wide trend toward Socialism as a cure for various ills of democratic government; the hysteria and excesses of Debs and the other extremists among the Socialists, during and before the Haywood trial, had the effect of a brake applied to this trend, indeed almost brought

it to a halt; at a time when in France, Germany and England it was going forward strongly. (Quoted in Grover 1964, 289)

Though this claim for the impact of the trial is perhaps excessive, there is no question that the acquittal did mute the effectiveness of some of the more radical labor activists in the Coeur d'Alenes (Grover 1964; Lingenfelter 1974).

With respect to the formation of the industrial paradigm in anthropology, Eric Wolf links anthropological theory development in the United States to three distinct phases of American political history: "capitalism triumphant," lasting roughly from the end of the Civil War into the last decade of the nineteenth century; "intermittent liberal reform," beginning in the last decade of the nineteenth century and ending with the onset of World War II; and the America of the "present" (late 1960s). Wolf characterizes this era in sixties parlance as the age of the military-industrial complex—in today's parlance, global monopoly capitalism (Wolf 1974, 254). While Wolf's model of a quarter-century ago cannot of course address more recent critical and interpretive theoretical paradigms, it provides valuable insight on our subject.

The era of "capitalism triumphant" in which the early Coeur d'Alene labor struggles took place was, according to Wolf, paralleled in the new discipline of anthropology by Social Darwinism and evolutionary models, whose theories and methods placed emphasis upon cultural results rather than cultural processes. Lewis Henry Morgan, John Wesley Powell, and a multitude of nineteenth-century anthropologists attempted to link existing human populations in a stage continuum of development (Wolf 1974, 252–253). Industrial and occupational researchers carried this model into the work environment in an effort to improve the moral and ethical fiber of the worker, increase his or her allegiance to a capitalist ethos, and increase profits along the way. Yet this attempt to manage labor scientifically (Taylor 1911; Mayo 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939) had surprising results. According to Paul Willis,

Taylorism . . . [is] aimed at increasing the efficient and rational utilization of the forces of production. This involves an objective socialization of production which is likely, in its turn, to bring about what we might think of as a socialization in consciousness where interdependence is massively recognized and used by workers to control production. Taylor sought to eliminate gold-bricking and systematic soldiering, but the very rationalization and expansion of production resulting from his scientific techniques created the conditions for a greater informal control of the work process. Manipulation and control of the forces of production therefore bring visible consequences for the social relations of production which themselves act back on the forces. (Willis 1977, 182)

Retired mineworker Pete Piekarski, who for many years worked in the Bunker Hill smelter, illustrates how shop-floor culture responds to these constraints:

We had one guy come up there that was a new boss over the blast furnace. He wouldn't listen to reason, that we were supposed to take orders from our shifter. He said, By God, you'll take orders from whoever cause I'm telling you, you have [to] do such and such. So he told us to clean the door on the charge cart. He didn't say how clean or anything, he just said, I want those doors clean. So we parked the motor and the car and started cleaning the door. The reason that he said this was because the door didn't shut tight and it'd scatter muck in between the tracks and they'd have to get a guy from the bullgang to clean in between the tracks. He figured that was extra expense to the blast furnace department, so he's gonna put a stop to that. . . . So we were cleaning the doors; it got to the point where there was nothing left to clean so we took chisels and screwdrivers and we were chipping the doors. . . . In the meantime the furnace go[t] down real low and flames were shooting out everywhere and the smoke was rolling out. So our boss came up the stairs because the tappers were complaining about the furnace being down. He came over to where we were and said, What do you guys think you're doing? So we told him, Your boss Frank Sinclair came along and told us to clean the doors, he didn't say how clean to clean them he just said clean them. We're cleaning them hoping he'll come by and tell it's good enough, otherwise we don't know what to do. He said, You roll those doors up and you fill that furnace up and you leave that man to me. (Piekarski, interview, 1985, BTW-SC-A015, tape 1, ms. 103)

As this interview segment demonstrates, and as Willis points out and I will later discuss, labor has options with regard to its use of the informal knowledge of the workplace that management—in its focus on product rather than process—does not enjoy (Willis 1977, 156–59, 179–83). Chief among these options is access to time and to knowledge of technique, by which workers can adjust the industrial process to fit their needs rather than the strident calibrations of the timekeeper's clock.

Following the turn of the century and up until the late twenties, miners in the Coeur d'Alenes were living in the shadow of the blacklist, the infamous hiring practices and corruption of people like George E. Edmonson. Also known as the "king," Edmonson purportedly needed to hear only a whisper of a miner's association with the Western Federation of Miners, the Industrial Workers of the World, or the labor conflicts of the nineties to send that miner packing (Robert Carroll, interview, 1987, BTW-AD-A004, p. 5).

Increased efficiency in industrial rationalization in the mines, the production of higher-grade ore, and the introduction of smelting on site, however, brought in more miners and above-ground workers and ushered in the fight for the eight-hour day. This fight reawakened the wider solidarity of the nineties and opened the door for the emergent Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union. Mine Mill, comprising many former activists from the old Western Federation of Miners, became one of the most thoughtful and egalitarian unions in the American Federation of Labor, and it dominated the labor scene in the valley from the mid-thirties until it lost membership to a company union and eventually to the steelworkers' union after the disastrous 1960 strike (Rosswurm 1992; Norlen 1992).

To develop our understanding of how Mine Mill built on and extended the community solidarity born at the point of production, we need to look more closely at the tension between corporate goals and the way in which workers redefine those goals and redirect them. Robert Carroll, a retired Mine Mill officer and lifetime miner, recalls mining in the Coeur d'Alenes prior to the Second World War:

This foreman told me if I didn't do what he told me to do he was going to fire me. Well, I knew I was fired because he had told me it was impossible to do. There was not much muck on the track or in the ditch. So I decided I'd just take an easy shift and go out and get my time. I was walking down the drift and I seen these chutes that come down out of the stopes, and I noticed they had some muck in them. . . . So I just ran my car down there and filled it full of muck, pushed it back from the chute and brought another one down. Then just before quitting time, I dug him a ditch and got a bunch of mud and dirt and water and threw it on top of them. The motorman came out and took the cars out and I was riding the back one. He looked at that and he said, Well, I'll be damned. There won't be any firing today, will there. That's how rotten they were. . . . And then he put me hand-mucking a drift . . . which isn't, usually they put two men mucking, but they put me on a shift by myself and told me to muck out the drift. We had to hand-tram those and dump them and that was eighteen tons—usually a two-man job. I knew I was going to get fired this time. So we had this big general repairman, repairing a drift above. You know, the shift boss only came through once in the morning and once in the afternoon and they don't stay, they run away. As soon as the shift boss went through, this big timberman, he had been a champion mucker in the mines somewhere in Oklahoma, they mucked in big buckets there, Nieberger was his name, bless his heart, he would come down behind the guy, as soon as the boss'd go, and he'd muck seven or

eight cars in nothing flat. Carroll, interview, 1987, BTW-AD-AOO₄, pp. 1–2, tape 4)

An informal network of communication and labor solidarity in the mine (as exemplified in Carroll's narrative) not only provides a means of resisting rationalization and alienation through covert strategies shared by workers who control bodies of knowledge outside of management's awareness, this labor culture also embodies a philosophy of mutual responsibility and shared creativity directly parallel to, yet a mirror image of, its managerial counterpart.

Returning to the second part of Wolf's historical framework, the years of "liberal reform" prior to World War II were characterized by a concentration on human flexibility and plasticity. In anthropology, Franz Boas's historical particularism, reacting against Social Darwinism, "called into question the moral and political monopoly of an elite which had justified their rule with the claim that their superior virtue was the outcome of the evolutionary power" (Wolf 1974, 255). Further, "Just as the Social Darwinists had made a moral paradigm of the evolutionary process, so the culture and personality schools of the thirties and the forties made a moral paradigm of each individual culture" (257).

Early investigations of work culture were inspired by the street-corner sociology and participant-observations of Park, Warner, and the Chicago School, which reflected this organic and holistic view of culture (Green 1978). The increasing number of cultural descriptions forced anthropologists into addressing issues of political economy—social structure, community and work. Yet even these efforts (as Wolf states) reflected the investigator's biases: they were "turned inside out, all ideology and morality, and neither power or economy" (257). Industrial anthropologists articulated complex descriptions of parallels between the classical ethnographies of pre-industrial people and the variety of sub-cultures, customs, processes, and forms of corporate organization found in industry (Harding 1955; Hughes 1952; Chapple 1953). Remarkable for their almost total neglect of any critical stance toward class, trade unionism, shop floor culture, or work site resistance, these early accounts of industrial ethnography do not acknowledge hegemony or even the wider constraints of regional or global industrial bureaucracies. We read them today as being implicated in the institutional exploitation of the cultures they aimed to understand; yet we ourselves run the risk of historical ethnocentrism if we fail to acknowledge the specific contexts within which they worked.

If industrial anthropologists erred on the side of decontextualized holism, folklorists studying the expressive culture of the workplace during the same era focused on genres and typologies in micro-contexts that paid little attention to the wider dynamics of industrial or capitalist power.

Folklorists George Korson, Wayland Hand, and (later) Archie Green did, however, seek strategies for returning their research findings to members of the local community. Both Hand and Korson explicitly acknowledged their interest in a neo-Redfieldian notion of the work community as a folk enclave which contained a mixture of earlier craft and verbal traditions that industrial rationalization would eventually destroy. Yet they also (Korson more empirically than Hand) recognized and documented the way in which the songs, stories, and beliefs they were chronicling represented both formal and informal modes of cultural resistance on the shop floor and in the wider community (Korson 1927, 1938; Hand 1942a, 1942b, 1969; Green 1965, 1972).

Archie Green critically exploded earlier paradigms that considered only face-to-face cultural expression as legitimate forms of study and drew the attention of cultural workers to the interplay between popular and mass media in carrying oppositional impulses born in the workplace yet carried in a variety of dynamic forms to wider audiences. More importantly, he identified for American working people themselves the variety of forms which this cultural resistance continues to take in our lives. He led the way in engaging both rank-and-filer and union official in developing a dialogue with cultural workers concerning the important role of cultural and political history that supports the continuing struggle for humane working conditions (Green 1965).

We now come to the last part of Wolf's model—the era of the military industrial complex and the current generation of research in industrial ethnology. First, however, if I am to “engage [myself] in the systematic writing of a history of the modern world in which [I] spell out the processes of power which created the present-day cultural systems and the linkages between them” (Wolf 1974, 261), I must examine my methods and theories as they affect and are responded to by the members of the labor community. Accordingly, I return to Silver Valley to bring us up to date on union and community power struggles leading up to and following the 1960 strike, and attempt to link my research to those processes.

One of the most compelling chapters in the often bloody and inspiring story of miners and their families in the Coeur d'Alenes is their ability to marshal solidarity in the face of implacable odds. By the late 1950s, the leadership of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers was experiencing an aggressive union-busting move on the part of Gulf Resources, the new owners of the Bunker Hill. Cutbacks in the workforce, speed-ups, redbaiting of union leaders, and McCarthy-like witch hunts all came to a head in the sixty strike. Pete Piekarski, recording secretary for the local, describes this period in the following way:

Before the 'sixty strike . . . it kept getting tougher and tougher to get a good contract. When we negotiated with the company, they had

a couple of negotiators on the company's side. One by the name of Ben Mahoney and the other one Pete Nichols. . . . He kept talking all the time about the company's inherent right to manage. A person got the impression that this was the same as the divine right of kings, and was given by God. No matter what you would come up against, they would say that this is our inherent right as the owners. We would point out to them as owners of big property that was a part of society, they had an obligation to society, and it wasn't their inherent right. So one day, we were getting nowhere with them, I believe this was in '59, anyway, I wrote a little thing on a piece of paper, and I told them that as far as I was concerned as a union negotiator, I would conceive that they had inherent rights, if they could reenact the scene where God gave them that right like he did the kings. I says, that was never reenacted, then finally the people threw out the crap about the divine right of kings. There is no divine right to do whatever the hell you damn well please. (Piekarski, BTW-CD-AOll, 1987, Section 13, p. 12)

Once the strike actually began, the membership of the union and their families in the women's auxiliary established a support network of shared resources for striking families. Pete Piekarski relates,

So down in the basement of the strike store, Helen and her crew had a great big crew down there washing and packaging. they had to have a packaging crew, a weighing crew and the store took up an awful lot of people. And at sixteen hours each, unless you could prevail upon some of them to work longer, it was quite a turn over in a matter of one week. Well the assignment desk would send people over to the store, they would send people over to the picketing committee, or the kitchen committee wherever they were needed. (Piekarski, BTW-CD-AOll, 1987, Section 13, p. 37; typescript of Solidarity Committee meeting on August 3, 1990 in Kellogg, Idaho)

Following the failed strike, the company union, Northwest Metal Workers, assisted the new owners in squeezing as much profit as possible out of the Bunker Hill workers in the mine, the smelter, and the zinc plant. This speed-up not only illustrated the changing nature of labor relations in the valley, it also forced Pete and many of the old Mine Millers to realize that in spite of its corporate unionism, a non-mine union contract would be a lot better than anything negotiated by a company union. The steelworkers thus took over representation of the Bunker Hill in 1972, and currently they represent approximately two thirds of the six hundred active miners in the valley. The Bunker Hill shut down in 1982, and the zinc plant and smelter have been almost totally removed or buried as part of the EPA's superfund cleanup effort. This brings us to the current generation of labor culture in the region.

I began working in the Silver Valley in 1986 in an effort to use my skills as an ethnographer to develop community education and action projects that would represent the generations of solidarity that made the Coeur d'Alenes profitable for mine owners but also made Kellogg, Wallace, and Mullan good places to live and raise a family. As a student of labor culture, I had gained experience in developing projects in industrial communities that sought to address labor culture and history on a level that would interest miners and their families (McCarl 1985b). I assumed—since I had worked in a wide variety of union and labor contexts—that these experiences and professional qualifications would hold me in good stead. What I failed to appreciate is that my canonical blinders not only kept me from appreciating some of the more baroque alignments and distributions of power within and outside the labor community, but I also was blithely unaware of how the anthropologists, folklorists, and oral historians who preceded me had left a legacy of cultural exploitation that sat, like the huge tailing piles from the Bunker Hill, as a black shadow of distrust over the entire community.

Ethnohistorians and anthropologists, oral historians and folklorists had periodically swept through the valley collecting material, expounding to outsiders their learned interpretations of local issues and generally reinforcing the view of many valley residents that cultural workers, like the various governmental and educational institutions they represent, are just glib salespeople trying to get old-timers and mining families to part with one more precious possession—their hard-won stories. When I first met Pete Piekarski at a conference I had organized in Kellogg at the Staff House Museum—a Victorian building constructed for mine managers that to this day contains not one example of work culture or union symbolism—he had the following to say:

You know, one of the things that gets me about all of this here . . . I made three tapes, I've been interviewed three different times. Twice by the University of California at Berkeley and one was a video and one was a plain tape and the Smithsonian sent a woman to interview me. I was so disgusted with interviews I said I won't even put it on tape, but after talking a lot I finally said, OK, let's tape. So we got about three hours after that and when she wrote her story in the Smithsonian she didn't even have the courtesy to send me a copy or tell me where I could buy a copy. And when I finally did get a copy from my sister-in-law, she didn't put in a single word. . . . So when I came here, what I'm interested in finding out is are we actually going to get anything done that is going to benefit the people that I am and where I come from—working people. And if it doesn't benefit them I may as well walk out the door. (Piekarski, in *Solidarity Conference Proceedings*, August 3, 1990, Kellogg, Idaho, p.79)

Having labored in work sites as a cultural worker since 1975, I have had people like Pete walk out, call me an apologist for corporate interests, and respond to my call for demonstrations of work culture on the National Mall with curses and thrown beer cans; I have been laughed at by fire fighters and miners who consider the study of their work culture at best suspect and at worst an unmanly job for a healthy male. Yet I continue. I am currently working with Tom Carter on a community project in the Coeur d'Alene mining region that has returned to the local Solidarity Committee a brief monograph documenting the historical development of labor culture and a well-organized archive of all of the data they and we collected for the study (McCarl 1997). I do not expect, as I may once have expected, to be lifted on the shoulders of community members to march triumphant down the streets of Kellogg. (I fully expect grousing that, for instance, the pictures we chose cropped off a father's head or were actually taken in Butte, not Mullan.) What I do expect and what I hope to conclude with here is a diversity of opinions, perspectives, concerns, and insights into an appreciation and understanding of specific work cultures in the Coeur d'Alenes. This culture is composed of a variety of what Willis terms the "experiences, relationships and ensembles of systematic types of relationship which not only set particular choices and decisions at particular times, but also structure, really and experientially, how these choices come about and are defined in the first place" (Willis 1977, 1).

These concrete experiences extend out into the community as what Willis calls "penetrations" of labor culture into public discourse. As seen in a final example, Robert Carroll describes an incident from 1937 that epitomizes this process, and he lays the groundwork for some preliminary conclusions about the relationship between ethnography and labor culture and ideology:

What I was going to tell you, they undertook to fire these teachers. They were good teachers. If they could teach me, they could teach anybody. Just because they said things that somebody didn't like. So, Mr. Graff was the principal of the school, he was a graduate lawyer. He taught business law. Sometimes we would have what we called a bull session. He'd say, Now everybody thinks that State Workmen's Compensation was made to protect the worker. That's the farthest thing from the truth that ever was. It was made to protect the companies. When a man gets killed in the mine now, his family gets a small payoff and that's the end of it. It used to be that they'd sue the company and maybe get twenty-five or fifty thousand dollars. Which was a fortune in those days. He said, So what happens? Mr. Stanley Easton, who was president of Bunker Hill, and his friend William E. Borah, the lone rider senator from

Idaho, get together and Mr. Easton outlined what they would like and Mr. Borah wrote the law and got it passed into law. And there was the Idaho State Compensation law. Stanley Easton was still the president of Bunker Hill at the time and when that got back to the hierarchy, there was trouble. I remember those little company officials' kids would just squirm. . . . They knew where their bread was buttered. They suspended or laid off a bunch of teachers and. . . . We struck em. We shut them down. Surprisingly, there was four hundred thirty-five of us in the school and all but five of us struck. Striking in the mining industry wasn't new. You know what happened in the bullpen in Kellogg. So some of these people were descendants of those people. But we weren't just a bunch of hot-heads. We begged the school board to meet with our parents . . . but they refused. We struck for five days and won reinstatement for all of those teachers. (Carroll, interview, 1987, BTW-AD-AOO4, p. 8)

Bob Carroll represents a type of labor activist that we associate with the WFM, Mine Mill, and the syndicalism of an earlier era. Yet his articulation of solidarity—his willingness to put collective action in place of individual security—is still alive in the valley today. Workers' memorials, books by Art Norlen, testimonies by Pete Piekarski, and demonstrations like the memorial service for the 1892 miners killed in the conflict continue to embody this ideology. In a parallel manner, Pete brings to his demands for pension reform and senior citizen rights the zeal and tactics he learned in the smelter and used for years in the union.

The question finally is the relationship between the canons of resistance and solidarity born at the point of production and the role of the cultural worker in representing those cultural experiences to wider audiences. Is it possible to do good ethnography without, as Lila Abu-Lughod asserts, creating "a professional discourse [that] by nature asserts hierarchy" (1991, 151)? How can we (to use Abu-Lughod's phrase in dealing with ethnographic or ethnohistorical issues in labor communities) "write against culture"? A key response to this challenge is, I think, to mirror the concretions of the labor experience. Tangible history, artifacts, buildings, sites of strikes and struggles, photographs, and other primary documents provide insiders with a sense that you are assisting them in developing tangible evidence of their lives. Just as Abu-Lughod and Willis encourage us not to revert to generalities or abstractions in dealing with culture as a multi-faceted, contested, and irreducible terrain, we must also recognize that the forces of power that shape and are shaped by laboring culture themselves are concrete responses to difficult and often life-threatening events.

In answer to the larger question, our implication in the same canonical contradiction as earlier industrial ethnologists—essentially which side you

are on—must be individually confronted by researchers within the concrete realities of their work. Although we have moved diachronically beyond Wolf's era of the military-industrial complex, our more interpretive and critical paradigms multiply the complexities of our interaction with people like Pete and Maidell and Robert Carroll. We can certainly agree with E. P. Thompson that there is "no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth or change of a culture," but we must also heed his warning that "we should not assume any automatic or over-direct correspondence between the dynamic of economic growth and the dynamic of social or cultural life" (quoted in Gutman 1976, 33). The changes from craft to industrialism, from the WFM to the IWW, Mine Mill, and now the steelworkers reflect, not a total reshaping of labor culture, but only a partial change. There is a cumulative carryover of strategies, legends, experiences, and techniques from one generation of miners to the next, which not only reflects a continuity of experience born of the vicissitudes of the mining experience, but also reflects a conceptualization of self, time, work, place, and community that can only partially be understood through long-term relationships of trust.

Returning to the buried smokestacks in Kellogg, we can see that the cultural and historical contributions of miners and their families also lie, for the most part, beneath the surface: miles of hand-dug drifts and stopes, row upon row of miners' headstones in the graveyards, and page upon page of family pictures commemorating the cradle-to-grave passage of thousands of lives. This material is invisible to outsiders because much of it is private and personal to the miners and their descendants. The public expressions of this culture—union educational and activism campaigns, strikes, opposition to various chamber of commerce and corporate excesses—remain, if only in yellowed strike posters, old newspaper accounts, and the reminiscences of the men and women who participated. International unions today have little use for this information, preferring on the one hand Madison Avenue publicity campaigns of their own or, more commonly, superficial obeisance to the halcyon days of labor struggles in the thirties. This leaves the academic or documenter working in these communities with some dilemmas. How do we distinguish between public and private or personal and oppositional expressive forms? How do we contextualize this material historically, economically, and culturally? And finally, how do we develop the rapport necessary to even begin this discourse?

The answer to all three questions must be based on positioning, on what we might call the angle of engagement between community members and researchers. Our institutional and cultural constraints as documenters differ markedly from those of insiders. A well-told story of sabotage or complicity, no matter how salutary, might have repercussions beyond our knowing. There is a boundary between the levels of insider ethics born at the work-face

and my needs as a researcher. This boundary is not only based on different ways of knowing, it is based on class. My relationship to social and economic power depends upon my production of material that balances “objective” analysis with theoretical and formal praxis. The miners’ relationship to both narrower and wider economic concerns (the cultural politics of a specific work group and the absentee decisions of multinational corporations) exposes them to a different kind of risk. It is as if we run on parallel tracks extending forever toward the horizon. We have found no way in the United States to jump the track to re-establish ties between academics and members of work communities that draw upon a shared language and a shared ethos. Organized labor plays a role in this divisiveness in its anti-intellectual and conservative ideology, while academia arrogantly assumes that empiricism and/or postmodern critique is a sufficient demand on our intellectual talents.

As I return from the mining areas of north Idaho, they are carefully planting trees and removing years of slag from the heaps surrounding Kellogg. Lead mitigation is still a serious problem, and it will affect the people of the Coeur d’Alenes for generations to come. Recreation tourism is now touted as the new economic balm for this once vibrant, industrial landscape and the people who inhabit it. Unfortunately, the voices, memories, images, and blood of those who created these mountains of silver are for the most part mute. We have raised some of the images, issues and concerns to a level of consciousness. Yet, like those trains chugging along on parallel tracks, we continue to pass each other—catching only a glimpse of passengers moving in the staccato flashes of alternative if not opposite directions.¹

Note

1. Readers will gain further knowledge of labor theory, labor history, and Idaho labor history through the following: Burawoy 1979; Cantrell 1995; Fahey 1971; Firth 1948; Gamst 1977; Hand 1946; Kornbluh 1964; Korson 1960; McCarl 1974, 1978, and 1985a; Phipps 1988; Schwantes 1991; Smith 1960; and Wyman 1979.