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1. Introduction

- 1 The history of the American labor movement is a history of external and internal struggle. The progress of the movement was not only impeded by an array of external opponents, including a federal government that often sided with the entrepreneurial camp; inner divisions along the lines of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, and politics considerably weakened the movement's potential to advance its cause. And yet, as of the end of the 19th century, industrial workers in the United States increasingly made themselves heard—and seen—in the nation's public life. Large-scale strikes, trade union activism, and picket lines frequently made the headlines across the United States and offered a stage upon which workers could draw attention to their plights and demand the improvement of their situation, most essentially in the form of the eight-hour workday, better workplace security, and unemployment insurance.
- 2 Protest actions, including such iconic examples as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the demonstrations at Chicago's Haymarket Square in 1886, or the strike in Ludlow in 1914, often entailed massive violence, which was covered extensively in the media and contributed to catapulting labor activism center-stage. In the midst of such infamous events, which doubtlessly impacted public opinion on "the labor question," other forms of labor activism and protest became marginalized. "Despite its significance," Michael Kazin and Steven J. Ross lamented in 1992, "Labor Day has attracted little historical interest" (1297). Not only is the designation "Labor Day" historically somewhat ambiguous in the U.S.-American context, as will be addressed below; the day that is reserved in the annual calendar to celebrate labor is also not widely explored apart from considerations surrounding festive cultures in the U.S. and memory studies. This

neglect or imbalance serves as a basic point of departure for the following considerations as this article turns toward photographic representation of Labor Day parades and marches in the context of the early 20th-century struggle for workers' rights.

- 3 More precisely, I investigate the intersections between American visual culture in the form of press photographs and contemporaneous notions of social (in)justice and labor rights. During the Progressive Era, i.e., between the 1890s and the early 1920s, photojournalism and documentary photography served as vital tools in the endeavor to raise widespread awareness of (legally and/or ethically) unjust social conditions. Most famously, the photographs by Jacob A. Riis and Lewis W. Hine captured workers, predominantly immigrants, including children under the age of fourteen, in sweatshops, mills, and mines, exposing the hardships connected to industrial production and laissez-faire capitalism.
- 4 Besides these well-known documentarians' photographs, there is a substantial body of press photographs dating from the early 20th century that mediated the question of social in/justice and labor rights in the United States. Photographs taken for the Bain News Service between 1910 and the mid-1920s, for instance, include photographs of political activism such as strikes and labor rights campaigns. As "[commercial] media consistently prioritize conflict and spectacle" Andy Opel explains, "[these] enduring news values have played a central role in shaping media coverage of protests, emphasizing the violent, spectacular imagery in lieu of analysis of the issues driving the protesters. This attention [paid by commercial media] to violence and spectacle has had both positive and negative effects for the protest movements over time" (327). The specific focus of this article is the contextualization and analysis of three different photographs taken during two Labor Day parades and a protest march held in New York City, which was "by far the most overcrowded and disease-ridden" urban center in the United States at the time (Rosenblum 359) and a city in which labor was well-organized early on (Kazin and Ross 1298). Further, New Yorkers were ascribed a particular enthusiasm for parades, as "[parades in New York City] were never clearly only political propaganda, but involved various, sometimes contradicting, expectations" (Jobs 102). As my analysis will demonstrate, these press photographs, taken from the Bain Collection and ranging from full-front portraits to long-distance as well as angled shots, addressed the question of labor rights neither by capitalizing on the spectacle of escalated violence nor by evoking neediness and appealing to viewers' compassion. Rather, as these photographs picture neither turmoil nor victimization and instead visualize the ceremonial character of the parades as well as the non-violent presentation of a strike, the sheer number of its participants, and the pride taken in their trades and the value of their work, (immigrant) workers appear as capable agents in the struggle for labor rights.

2. Workers' Holidays, Labor Activism, and Photography

- 5 Examining the state of democracy in industrial America at the end of the 19th century, Rosanne Currarino posits, "Political rights ... were no defense against severe economic distress, and they did nothing to ensure an independent citizenry" (1); large-scale waged labor, in fact, bred dependency and destitution and fostered political debate and activism surrounding the so-called labor question. It was a common denominator in the

otherwise largely divided American labor movement that the rights granted to American citizens under the nation's democratic system needed to extend in a more pronounced manner to the workplace. According to David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, the introduction of shorter workdays and workweeks, more so than other claims, such as better wages, unemployment insurance, and better workplace safety, "became an explosive demand partly because of its unique capacity to unify workers across the lines of craft, race, sex, skill, age, and ethnicity" (vii). The time and the place in which these demands were voiced were often strikes. As of the late 19th century, an annual holiday in honor of the nation's working men, women, and children provided another, different context. Like a strike, a workers' holiday meant a temporary interruption of work. Yet, with the suspension of work limited to the duration of one day and given the primarily celebratory nature of the event, a workers' holiday provided a less conflict-prone framework in which to utter such demands.

- 6 In 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed the bill that turned the first Monday of September of each year into a national holiday in celebration of labor. Today, it is clearly this date that the term Labor Day refers to in the U.S.-American context. Historically, the question of when to gather for labor celebrations was more contested. By 1894, many workers in the United States had already adopted the first of May as their day of celebration (Foner 4). May Day in the early 20th century, as Donna T. Haverty-Stacke demonstrates in her 2009 monograph on the holiday,

provided a forum where alternative definitions of the American experience could be presented in a period otherwise marked by vehement assertions of nationalism. By organizing and participating in the holiday, its celebrants contributed to the construction of their own radical American identities. At the same time, they also publicized alternative social and political models for the nation and for the world.

(3)

- 7 The "alternative social and political models" advocated in the context of May Day included Socialist and Communist ideas, and, in more general terms, a pro-labor legislation that would improve the living and working conditions of America's working class. Both Labor Day in September and labor day in May, or May Day, originated in the United States and coexisted for a while, yet with vastly diverging implications and significations (Foner 17-19, 75-76). "From the first May Day in 1886," Philip S. Foner observes, "the U.S. press has compared the character of the demonstrations on May Day and on Labor Day" (75); the resulting contrast cast May Day demonstrators as foreign-born, unruly, and politically radical and Labor Day demonstrators as native-born, orderly, and politically conservative (75-76). Moreover, the difference between those two days also marked the division between universal patriotism and class sectionalism:

When Labor Day became a national holiday in 1894, the commercial press in the United States pointed out that while European labor had a class holiday on May 1st, the nation as a whole paid its respect to the role of labor in the United States. The papers urged the American Federation of Labor to continue observing the first Monday in September, but to have nothing to do with the European practice of celebrating May First as a labor holiday. (Foner 76)

- 8 In this characterization, the mainstream press diverged considerably from the view presented in left-leaning publications. A contemporary pamphlet by Boris Reinstein, titled "International May Day and American Labor Day" and published by the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party in 1910, confirmed this fundamental difference between the two holidays and declared that "[except] that both these

holidays are dedicated to Labor and are primarily participated in by working people, there is nothing in common between them” (Reinstein 9).

- 9 In spite of a consensus with the mainstream press about the existence of this contrast between the two holidays, the pamphlet presented a vastly different perspective on their nature. The cover page of the pamphlet already contrasts the two days as “a holiday expressing working class emancipation” and “a holiday exalting labor’s chains” (Reinstein, cover page). Throughout the text, the author condemns Labor Day, which he considers typically American, and praises May Day, which he describes as transnational rather than national, with the former symbolizing American workers’ adherence to the capitalist system and the latter admonishing workers to unite across national boundaries to push for labor rights. Reinstein, in passing, recognizes the vital importance that falls to journalism in labor’s fight for more rights: “in this enlightened age, with the modern press and other means of disseminating knowledge and information all over the globe in a few minutes, bigger strides along the path of progress are made within decades and years than were made formerly within centuries and generations” (3). With the tools provided by a modern press, including news photography, events like May Day parades could be turned into widely visible instances of labor rights activism.
- 10 May Day thus assumed a seminal role and served as a setting for agitational campaigns (Roediger and Foner 181) that were not restricted to the American labor movement. “For the international labour movement,” Matthias Reiss points out, “May Day became the most important occasion for taking to the streets. Probably no other date has had a similar significance for the development of organized street processions since it was first celebrated” (“Introduction” 14). In the course of several decades, the May Day parades organized by political parties and unions in the United States became more and more intricate, featuring banners, floats, and music (Haverty-Stacke 7). And for many years, “the daily press described the floats, banners, music, costumes, and speeches in lavish detail” (Kazin and Ross 1294). Naturally, the news coverage of the event also included photography, with press photographs representing a highly significant category of protest imagery (Fahlenbrach 246). More specifically, news photographs of workers, whether or not in the context of May Day parades, “deserve attention,” Carol Quirke argues in her 2012 study *Eyes On Labor*, “because of their increasing prominence in the machinery of national public opinion making and their influence on labor relations” (6). The analysis of selected news photographs of workers below will thus place the images against the backdrop of their potential impact on public opinion.
- 11 The intersections between photography and representations of workers and of their labor and living conditions are manifold in U.S. culture. One of the first press and documentary photographers who turned to the subject was Jacob Riis. His photographs of the lower classes depict the squalor and filth of the immigrant quarters and sweatshops in New York City at the turn of the 20th century. In the introduction to his 1890 book *How the Other Half Lives*, which included many of his photographs, Riis cites François Rabelais, by stating that “one half of the world does not know how the other half lives” (1), identifying social stratification at large and the ignorance of the upper classes about the predicament of the lower classes specifically as the catalyst for his work. Riis’s photographs circulated widely and even then were credited with raising awareness among the wider public, “the one half,” of the inhumane conditions under which the urban poor, “the other half,” lived and worked. Riis’s photographs are

ambiguous insofar as they draw attention to the workers' predicament on the one hand, but, on the other hand, they do so in a manner that does not do away with class prejudice: "Riis used the camera as a perfect instrument for his own, and our, curiosity about the cultural 'other' Riis could not help seeing with the prejudiced eyes of his contemporaries" (Orvell 72-73). Lewis Hine, Riis's "great successor in the social documentary tradition" (Orvell 73), took a somewhat more sympathetic and less patronizing look at similar subjects. His photographs documenting the plight of laborers across the United States are considered paradigmatic images of American social documentary photography.

- 12 Both Riis's and Hine's images have largely been understood as working toward the reformist agenda of Progressive Era politics and, as such, as instrumental in the efforts to improve (mostly immigrant) workers' living and working conditions and rights (Orvell 71-75). What Riis and Hine further have in common, even if their approaches differed considerably, is that their photographs stress the poverty and deprivation of the downtrodden. Regardless of whether the response that their photographs triggered was condescension, repulsion, sympathy, or pity, this response hinged on a feeling of superiority on the part of the middle-class audience vis-à-vis the working class (cf. also Dimock 37, 43). In contrast to this, the photographs explored in the following depict urban workers during May Day parades and a march in New York City in 1909, 1911, and 1913. While their individual photographers are not known, their distribution through the Bain News Service established the larger context in which they were commissioned, produced, and circulated.

3. Picturing May Day Paraders: Case Studies from the George Grantham Bain Collection

- 13 George Grantham Bain's news service was "one of America's earliest news picture agencies" and "[documented] sports events, theater, celebrities, crime, strikes, disasters, political activities including the woman suffrage campaign, conventions and public celebrations;" most of his photographs pictured New York City scenes and events during the first three decades of the 20th century (Bain Collection).¹ With New York City as a focal point of May Day celebrations in the early 20th-century United States, Bain's agency produced and gathered a plethora of photographs picturing these parades as events that drew considerable attention. Carol Quirke observes a general trend in American mainstream news coverage of organized labor events when she notes that "the news often focused on the violence endemic to labor mobilization. Photos and captions mostly implied that organized labor was responsible for civil chaos" (15). This general tendency provides one of several backdrops against which the photographs below will be positioned. Whereas such a focus on violence cannot be noticed in these photographs, they need to be understood in the context of an overarching representational trend that "othered" workers as unruly, violent, and thus dangerous.
- 14 The three selected photographs analyzed in the following depict festivities held on May 1st of 1909 and 1911, respectively, and of a May Day strike in 1913. This identifies the photographic subjects predominantly as immigrants and therefore as potentially more radical than the more moderate workers who chose to celebrate on Labor Day in early September:

Many radicals ... [embraced] a different workers' holiday, one widely celebrated since the 1890s by workers outside the United States and Canada—May Day In the United States, most early May Day celebrations were spearheaded by recent immigrants and radicals who wanted to present an uncompromising message of class struggle A preference for May Day rapidly became an emblem for one's unswerving commitment to radical doctrine By the first decade of the twentieth century, even in New York, only unions dominated by socialists marched on the 'international workers' day,' and recent immigrants were still conspicuously overrepresented. (Kazin and Ross 1304-305)

Fig. 1. "Labor Day Parade, bakers carrying float of loaf of bread, New York." Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

- 15 Figure one shows a group of bakers as they are carrying a float with a massive loaf of bread during the Labor Day Parade in New York in May 1909. Three men in the foreground are directly facing the camera, with an erect bearing and visible pride posing in front of the bread loaf, the product of their craft. They wear caps with Yiddish inscriptions as well as badges on their coat lapels—probably indicating union membership. Three elements in the background stand out: protest signs written in Yiddish; signs featuring drawings of loaves of bread and the slogan "Buy Bread Bearing the Union Label"; and American flags.
- 16 Not only have the three men supporting the float on their shoulders clearly struck a pose for this picture; several figures on the margins and in the background are also looking directly into the camera. The news photograph in this case appears as a welcome opportunity to make oneself seen. "Even though participants often have no expectations of having their grievances addressed immediately," Reiss argues, street protest ... allows [movement organizations] to use the street as stage to showcase themselves, their beliefs, and their ability to mobilize, control, and direct their supporters [Street protest events] are dynamic processes in which ordinary people became political actors and engage in activities that can change society or history. ("Street Protest" 353)

- 17 As the men turn towards the camera they appear confident and proud of both, the fruit of their labor and their union membership. They serve as representatives of the workers who have turned into political actors, a switch or augmentation of roles both occasioned and expressed by their participation in the May Day parades. They are quite literally backed up not only by their product, which is a staple food across societal groups, but also by the union as represented by the other paraders, the union emblems, and the signs and slogans in the picture. Positioned in the center of the photo, with the American flags to the right and the signs in Yiddish to the left, the workers and their product are conspicuously framed by allusions to their immigrant backgrounds and the values of their adopted homeland.
- 18 Both visual details serve as symbols for their demands, with the former informing their labor activism and Socialist political orientation and the latter signifying the political ideals of freedom and democracy. "Working Americans were not finding satisfactory answers to their problems through the two-party system Working Americans," Gregory C. Leavitt notes with regard to class conflict and the rise of the Socialist party at the time, "were not only striving for better working conditions and adequate social programs, but were also determined to achieve a status that would make them deserving, franchised citizens" (191).
- 19 This photograph showcases the significant connection between Jewish immigrants and the unions in the United States after 1900. Inspired by socialist ideas and led by such influential figures as Samuel Gompers, "the Jewish labor movement ... pioneered the modern American Jewish hyphenated identity, the sentiment and attitude that allowed the unions ... to champion the working class as a whole, to speak Yiddish, and, without the slightest apology, to affirm themselves as properly and fully American" (Berman 60). The bakers pictured in the photograph above exemplify this overlap of an immigrant working-class identity and a claim to an American identity.

Fig. 2. "Labor union parade, NY., May 1, 1911." Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

- 20 The second photograph pictures a May Day procession in New York City in 1911.² Unlike the first picture, this photograph does not show a conscious pose of the participants in front of the camera. Instead of a frontal shot, the camera captures the marchers from a side angle, and the frame thus includes the street scene with paraders and onlookers. The two groups are not only separated by a physical distance of a few feet between them but also by the contrast in color between the row of dark-clad onlookers and the marchers, who mostly wear white shirts and caps. In this picture, too, the paraders carry signs with Yiddish writing on them. Yet, in contrast to the first photograph, which is static and explicit in what it communicates, this second one is dynamic and more implicit in its message:

Participation in a march ... is a deliberate and open act of support, and the march, through its movement, creates a boundary between the static onlookers and the marching participants [Processions] are opportunities during which social or political movements showcase themselves to the public in various ways and solicit support, while the turnout and reaction to the march is a barometer of the interest they create and the backing they enjoy. (Reiss, "Introduction" 3)

- 21 In the labor union parades, the aspects of "movement" and "activism" take on a literal meaning. Taking place in the public sphere, the union parades combine the "occupation" and "navigation" of urban territory as well as the exchange with other people inhabiting this territory (Reiss, "Introduction" 4). The parades render the unions, their individual members, and their political and social concerns plainly visible. As this photograph focuses on the scene of marching, it highlights both the organized activism and the distance between the paraders, who are clearly recognizable as union members, and the audience, who may or may not identify with working-class interests.
- 22 The two photographs share an image of May Day parades as well organized and disciplined. In an effort to disprove the stereotype of the unruly street mob, as Reiss details, "[trade] unionists ... marched in ordered ranks and columns, dressed in their best clothes, and displayed tools or banners of their trade or emblems of working-class organizations" ("Street Protest" 354). Both photographs visualize these efforts on the part of the unionists to come across as disciplined and respectable and thus to counter bourgeois notions of street demonstrations as a way towards anarchy. Yet, unlike in the first photograph, for which the camera was placed facing the paraders meeting their direct gaze frontally, the camera angle in the second photograph allows for more ambivalent responses on the part of the viewers. The paraders are presented as one group sharing a collective protest identity, distanced from the onlookers and the camera position. With the camera perspective originating from behind the audience, the viewers' attitude towards the parade may or may not be sympathetic, depending on whether their political opinions coincide with those of the paraders or oppose them. Less staged than the first photograph, the second photograph in its more observational nature provides the viewers more leeway in siding with or opposing the demonstrators.
- 23 Lastly, figure three below depicts a large number of strikers convening on Union Square on May Day 1913.³ Neither the street nor an audience to the spectacle can be discerned as they are outside of the frame; instead, the image focuses on the densely gathered strikers. Once again, we see signs being held up featuring slogans, this time in English, Italian, and Yiddish. The picture thus allows the viewers to distinguish between the participating ethnic groups. The remarkable juxtaposition of Yiddish and

Italian signs in this picture illustrates the fact that Jewish and Italian workers had managed to overcome their narrow loyalties and reciprocal animosities. “Major achievements for organized labor in the garment industry in the years prior to World War I,” Eli Lederhendler explains, “owed much to the leadership’s policy of consciously and deliberately fostering a new class solidarity between Jewish and Italian workers” (71). The picture is taken from a slightly elevated position, capturing the demonstrators from above to present a kind of overview of the crowd. A sea of dark hats, with occasional glimpses of (parts of) people’s faces, not only conveys the large number but also the anonymity as well as the uniformity of the marching men.⁴ The organized labor presented in this picture appears as an abstract, forceful, and potentially uncontrollable entity.

Fig. 3. “May Day ‘13, strikers in Union Square.” Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

- 24 Instead of singling out individuals from the crowd of demonstrators, the third photograph focuses on the sheer mass of people so that “the homogenous mass of demonstrators attains symbolic qualities as a visual and collective body of contestation, representing the upheavals of a whole social class” (Fahlenbrach 247). This collective body of contestation and the upheavals it represents may signify quite opposing things, depending on the audience and the historical context. While it is a sign of group solidarity and empowerment to a working-class audience, from a middle- and upper-class perspective “the crowd” was often pathologized, viewed as a threat to public order and civilization itself” (Reiss, “Introduction” 14). Without the details of the photograph’s publication history, it remains unclear how exactly it was perceived at the time. Yet, as Bain’s news service typically provided photographs for mainstream media and is not known to have had particular connections to union organs, it is unlikely that this photograph appeared in a pro-union context.

- 25 Whereas the first two photographs show festive parades, the third photograph shows a mass demonstration, with the strikers not being lined up in an orderly fashion. And still, the unionized protest depicted in the third photograph shows no signs of the violence and chaos feared by the public. Between May 1909, when the first photograph was taken, and May 1913, from which the last photograph dates, labor unions in the United States developed significantly in such a way as to assert their claims more and more vehemently. In late 1909, the “Uprising of the Twenty Thousand,” a large strike organized from within the garment industry and not settled until early 1910, marked “an epoch-making event” (Herberg 18) and made the growing dissatisfaction and increasing organization among workers plainly visible. On March 25, 1911, just before the second picture was taken, the fire at the Triangle shirtwaist factory in Manhattan needlessly claimed the lives of 146 immigrant workers; soon turning into “a central moment in the history of the labor movement” (“Triangle Fire”), the disaster provoked massive protests and, as a result, entailed extensive reforms of the existing labor laws. By early 1913, many trades, such as furriers, waist-, cloak- and dressmakers, had organized themselves in unions and were using strikes as a powerful political tool.

4. Neither Mob Nor Victims: Photographing Workers as Political Agents

- 26 The May Day parades in New York in the early 20th century were located at the intersection between celebration and protest, combining festivities with political activism. May Day participants thus embodied “the combination of satisfaction and discontent, autonomy and incorporation” (Kazin and Ross 1295-296). Drawing on the typology of protest actions as proposed by Kriesi et al., Jonathan Cable argues that the degree to which any given protest activity is confrontational has a direct bearing on “the nature and tone of mainstream media” (60; cf. Kriesi et al.). He further specifies that “political and media opportunities available to a protest group” impact the extent and manner of the news coverage and, ultimately, the effectiveness of the protest activity (60). May Day paraders linked political demands to their festivities as they engaged in a demonstrative event⁵ and could capitalize on the attention paid to them by the media—both in the sense that viewers skeptical of their demands were reminded to take them seriously while viewers sympathetic to their cause were assured of the efforts undertaken for its advancement.
- 27 Regardless of their potential to trigger diverse, if not contradictory interpretations when viewed by audiences with opposite political biases, these particular photographs share a number of characteristics that are significant beyond the angle from which they are viewed and that set them apart from other photographs of workers taken at the time. While these other photographs are comparable in subject matter—i.e., the American working class—they are dissimilar in terms of visual rhetoric. They are more often than not centered either on the eruption of violence during protest events or on the victimization of the workers.
- 28 As has been shown, the three sample photographs differ considerably in their representation of the May Day parades. The first example singled out individuals from the crowd of paraders and depicted craftsmen proud of their daily work. The second example presented the parade in motion and thus focused on the orderliness of the event and on the distinction between marchers and bystanders. The third example,

finally, pictured an assembly of striking workers in one place, from a slightly elevated position, and thus emphasized the multitude of strikers. Yet, what all three have in common beyond their differences is the basic view of the immigrant workers as agents. In contrast to the contemporaneous visual rhetoric that either envisioned immigrant workers as helpless and desperate or even as endangering the social order, as most famously exemplified in the oeuvre of Riis, the photographs in question ascribed agency to their subjects and thus the capacity to actively influence and alter their situation. While social documentary photography at the time frequently aimed to “transform a mundane record of what exists into a fervent plea of what might be” and “this idealism became a basic tenet of the social documentary concept” (Rosenblum 361), the three photographs explored here lack a sense of idealism and refrain from formulating a hopeful plea for assistance from the middle and upper classes. Yet, the photographs also counter the prevailing visual rhetoric that envisioned (immigrant) workers as ready to use violence and instead picture them as well organized.

- 29 Indeed, demonstrating one’s opposition to existing structures was key to the May Day parades: “Organizing the event as an annual protest against the characteristics of the existing economic and political system, May Day’s supporters never sought the legitimacy of government recognition” (Haverty-Stacke 9). Rather than asking for help within the framework of public welfare or private charities, workers who paraded on May 1st demanded what they considered their rights as citizens, and the media attention that the May Day parades drew served as a vehicle to transport that message. In the first instance, the street itself functioned as “an important ‘mass medium’” for the workers who were “excluded from the political decision-making process” (Reiss, “Street Protest” 352). Press photography, then, opened up another venue as “[public] protest is intimately connected to media coverage. The place-based actions of individuals gathering at a particular moment often rely on the amplification of those actions through the mass media” (Opel 326).
- 30 The three photographs all visualize scenes from May Day events in early 20th-century New York, and as such visualize aspects of the contemporary labor rights struggle, illustrating such key components as the symbolic claim of the public arena, agency through movement, and internal bonding (Reiss, “Introduction” 12). Without more detailed knowledge about how these images were contextualized and circulated at the time,⁶ it cannot be determined with certainty in which political discourse they were embedded and employed, and what their actual role in the workers’ fight for labor rights was during that period. Nevertheless, the images themselves offer distinct differences in attitude and purpose. As discussed above, in the time frame between 1909 and 1913, union policy changed considerably, growing more and more assertive, so that the differences in the photographs can be understood as an indication of these changes. Thus, given the political climate surrounding the labor question during this period, some more general conclusions about their framing and reception can be drawn. For audiences that adhered to opposing political camps—conservative or Socialist—these images presented vastly different messages. As images of protest, naturally, they were emblems of power as well as sources of affirmation and exhortation for those supporting the protest, but simultaneously they incited unease and concern in those who were targeted or affected by the protest and who accordingly felt threatened by them. While the interpretations of these photographs may range from heroizing to demonizing workers, they all place the workers in a larger narrative of a collective social identity characterized by self-confidence and empowerment, and

they thus diverge significantly from images produced during the Progressive Era and its reformist agendas. While these news photographs are not directly linked to the legislative processes that were to secure workers' rights to better conditions and improve social justice, their impact on public opinion cannot be denied. As "it is obvious that ... images can be used strategically in order to guide viewers' attention and emotions, and maybe even attitudes, habits, and behavior" (Fahlenbrach 245), images depicting a united and strong body of workers incited respect or anxiety by using a visual rhetoric that deviated markedly from contemporary representations of immigrant workers as pitiable, destitute, and in need of help.

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NOTES

1. The George Grantham Bain Collection is located at the Library of Congress and comprises some 39,000 glass negatives and 50,000 photographic prints. The subjects that the collection represents are too vast to be even selectively listed in the present context (Bain Collection).
2. To provide a number as a point of reference for the multitude of people parading and watching the parade on May 1, 1911, Philip S. Foner cites an article in the *New York Times* which reported that 500,000 people filled the streets of New York City that day (79).
3. The *New York Times* wrote about the 1913 May day: "Some 50,000 organized workers ... marched through the streets of Manhattan yesterday to celebrate the 1st of May, the international holiday of workers. They ended in Union Square where a mass meeting was held at which eight-hour work-day resolutions were passed and Socialist speeches made" (qtd. in Foner 79).
4. It was customary well into the early 20th century for women and children to march separately from the men; increasingly, however, women joined the men in the May Day parades (Foner 78-79).
5. According to Kriesi et al.'s typology, "demonstrative events" are the second least confrontational of the five types of protest actions. Only "direct democratic events" are less prone to the occurrence of violence; the violence involved in the respective protest action increases gradually in "confrontational events," "events of light violence," and "heavy violence." Cf. Cable 60.

6. The fact that “[the] photographs Bain produced and gathered for distribution through his news service were worldwide in their coverage” (Bain Collection) suggests that the New York May Day parades were considered events worthy of coverage in this larger context and that these or similar pictures found entry into the mainstream press.

ABSTRACTS

This article investigates American visual culture in the form of news photographs and its engagement with social (in)justice and labor legislation during the first two decades of the 20th century. Press photographs of the annual May Day parades in New York City, taken for and distributed by Bain News Service, depict immigrant workers as they march through Manhattan both to celebrate their labor and demand more rights. In contrast to many contemporary images of immigrant workers as downtrodden and in need of bourgeois charity, in these photographs the workers appear as proud, confident, and capable agents in the struggle for labor rights.

INDEX

Keywords: May Day, Labor Day, labor activism, unionism, news photography, George Grantham Bain, Jacob A. Riis, Lewis W. Hine

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