

The Significance of the Lattimer Massacre: Who Owns Its History?

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As we consider the overall significance of the Lattimer Massacre, it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves of a few indisputable facts that may have gotten lost in the course of our discussions. First is that, although the Lattimer Massacre was only one of the many instances of violent class conflict that occurred in the industrializing United States, it nevertheless stands out in its own right. Lattimer was, after all, the site of the single *largest* massacre of American workers in the entire nineteenth century. In terms of the number of workers killed under similar circumstances, the bloodshed spilled there was one of the worst such events in *all* of American history.¹

Another trenchant fact is that this particular class conflict involved certain minority populations. Poles, Slovak, Lithuanians—ordinary immigrants from southern and eastern Europe—confronted a powerful, predominantly nativist, American-born, corporate, police, and judicial establishment.²

A third outstanding fact is that, at the time, broad sectors of the domestic population, including many working people, ethnic groups, the mainstream and radical labor movements, reformers, viewed the Lattimer events perceptively and analytically. They regarded the massacre and the trial that followed it not only as tragedies but also as indictments of “America” itself, or at least of what they perceived as an unjust legal

1. Other, perhaps more famous massacres of American workers resulted in fewer fatalities than the nineteen miners slaughtered at Lattimer. For example, eleven children and two women were killed during the Ludlow Massacre of 1914, and ten steelworkers were murdered in Chicago at the Republic Steel Company during the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937. See James Greene, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 89, 164. One reviewer of *The Guns of Lattimer* commented: “A mere bloody drop in the bucket, perhaps, by today’s standards of American violence, but to that point the Lattimore episode was the most grievous in the annals of American labor unrest.” See Richard Kluger, review of *The Guns of Lattimer*, by Michael Novak, in the *New York Times Book Review*, January 28, 1979, p. 12.

2. The idea that two totally different classes, cultures, and worlds were in conflict appears throughout accounts of the massacre and subsequent histories. See George A. Turner, “The Lattimer Massacre and Its Sources,” *Slovakia* 27 (1977): 9-41.

system that was heavily stacked in favor of corporations and against working people and minorities.³

Despite such basic and obvious truths, today many Americans, including working people and ethnic descendants, have never heard of Lattimer or of what transpired there a hundred years ago. One unfortunate reason for this general lack of knowledge is that reputable historians have so often, mysteriously and unjustifiably, ignored it. For example, the sympathetic authors from America's Social History Project, who aimed to document the diverse, comprehensive history of America's working people in a recent, popular text, inexplicably left the entire Lattimer experience out of their lengthy two-volume history, *Who Built America?*⁴

If some of our friends in labor and ethnic history have overlooked Lattimer, what can we expect from those who are less informed and less friendly? Unthinking members of the general public today, upon hearing of the massacre, might quickly dismiss it. They might rationalize that dismissal, as one man with an ethnic name basically did when he discussed the Lattimer Massacre in his review of *The Guns of Lattimer* twenty years ago. This reviewer for the nation's leading business organ, the *Wall Street Journal*, wrote the following: "It's tempting to ask Mr. Novak why we really need this book. The incident occurred more than 80 years ago. It sounds like a unique event that would best be forgot-

3. That Lattimer put America on trial was a common theme of the day. The *United Mine Workers Journal* [hereafter *UMWJ*] printed the following from the Mahoning City's *Daily Recorder*: "The result of the trial at Wilkesbarre will show whether there is one law for rich and poor in this country." *UMWJ*, 10 February 1898, 4.

In its own editorials, the *UMWJ* was outspoken. "The only justification so far offered by the defenders of Sheriff Martin and his deputies, is the statement that the wounded and killed at Lattimer, Pa., were Ignorant Foreigners." *UMWJ*, 30 September 1897, 4. "They [southern and eastern European immigrants] have learned that this land can be appropriately termed the 'land of the slave and the home of the bound,' and that here as in other countries labor only reserves what it can wrest from capital by united effort." *UMWJ*, 23 September 1897, 4.

The *Amerikánsko-Slovenské Noviny's* report on the massacre ran a banner headline on September 16, 1897: "Massacre of Slavs. In the freest country under the sun, they shot people like dogs. The victims of American savagery are Slavs." After the trial, a Slovak editor wrote: "It seems that before long they will pass laws that make it legal to shoot Slovaks in certain months. Just so, as they do for animals. So it will also be for this animal. This trial shows their touted justice here. Capital is the victor, although it is guilty. The poor worker loses, although he is wronged." Konštantín Čulen, "Lattimerská Jatká," *Kalendár Jednota* 1938: 48, 60.

4. Bruce Levine et al., *Who Built America?: Working People & The Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture & Society*, 2 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989, 1992).

ten. Besides, American society has changed; American bosses don't act that way toward blue-collar workers anymore."⁵

As we've learned at this conference, Lattimer is not unique nor outdated nor insignificant. Moreover, American business practices in regard to their labor forces remain as controversial as ever. Given the current political climate, it should not be surprising when the representatives of contemporary anti-labor business interests seek to deny the harsh realities of the Lattimers of American history, much as their predecessors did in 1897. Today—as then—some apologists for laissez-faire capitalism tell us that we should engage in role reversal. For them, it is not the slain workers, but those Americans who supported the coal company's rights over the workers and who wantonly fired upon unarmed ethnic demonstrators on a public highway, who are the real victims of the massacre. They tell us that we should not focus our attention on those who were murdered, or on the serious defects of the economic and legal systems, but ask us to forgive—and excuse—the nativist gunmen because they were understandably, if not justifiably, frightened of the "other," of those whose languages, cultures, religions, and values were different from their own.

For just such reasons, it is incumbent upon working people, the United Mine Workers and other labor organizations, the Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak peoples and their respective institutions, to insure that the Lattimer Massacre's real story is told fairly and accurately and that the tragedy receives the significant thoughtful attention it deserves. As the most seriously affected class and groups involved in the Lattimer events, ethnic and labor constituencies naturally have a special interest and bear special responsibilities. Moreover, although no historical event can be private property, the Lattimer Massacre was—and is—simply too important an event in *general* American history to let it be overlooked by friends, distorted by enemies, or left to mere chance for current or future generations to discover.

In any case, the full significance of the Lattimer Massacre is best appreciated when we place it in broad historical context. This tragic event occurred during the 1890s in a critical era which historians often describe as a watershed in the development of modern American society.⁶ It was in the 1890s that large numbers of Americans began to

5. Bernard Wysocki, Jr., review of *The Guns of Lattimer*, by Michael Novak, in the *Wall Street Journal*, 192 (13 December 1978): 24.

6. William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988, 1961), 354-356.

realize, in earnest, that they had not escaped Europe's fate and that America was perhaps not the "exception" that they once thought it was. Classes and class conflict existed in the United States, too. By then, a small portion of the population had consolidated a massive amount of wealth and power in its private hands, the nation's courts had legally redefined corporations as "persons" instead of inanimate constructions, and large numbers of workers had reached the unhappy realization that their wage-labor status might be permanent and that capitalism and market values might not be temporary.⁷

Meanwhile, great distress, a massive depression in 1893, and economic restructuring marked a decade of social crisis. In the anthracite region, which had pioneered in the nation's economic development on a capitalistic basis, powerful interlocking monopolies already owned vast amounts of the coal lands, railroads, banks, stores, and so much else. Throughout the decade, miners and other workers there continued to confront various forms of harsh ongoing exploitation, inequalities, poverty, and the great depressions that accompanied such development.⁸

The 1890s were also a critical time during which governments on all levels often sided with big business, frequently employing new forms of injunctions against the labor movement and otherwise violating its civil liberties, or using private and public police, militias, and state or federal troops to repress strikes forcibly. Throughout industrial America, working people could cite actions similar to those of Sheriff Martin who had secretly met with the coal operators before the massacre. They could recount tales of racial or ethnic bigotry similar to the blatant nativist biases held by the Lattimer gunmen and jury. They could allude to their own examples of the subversion of an impartial equitable justice system by money, corporate influence, and obvious conflicts of interest such as that of Judge Woodward, an anti-union mine owner who ruled accordingly in his court. The Lattimer Massacre, which followed on the heels of Homestead, Pullman, and many other such class conflicts, was far from a unique or isolated event in industrial America.⁹

7. Ibid., 343-370; and Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1975), 29-71.

8. Two excellent works that document historic developments in the anthracite region are Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharpless, *The Kingdom of Coal: Work, Enterprise, and Ethnic Communities in the Mine Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); and Harold W. Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers: The Social Ecology of an Industrial Union 1869-1897* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971).

9. Dubofsky, *Industrialism*, 33-71.

The 1890s were also a critical era in that racism and nativism were greatly strengthened and reinforced. Supreme Court rulings such as *Plessy v. Ferguson* legalized Jim Crow practices, and Social Darwinism became the dominant ideology of the day. So-called experts reported that inequalities of all sorts were "scientific" and part of the "natural" order. Thus, the capitalist class's domination over working people, the "natural" supremacy of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic peoples over all other racial and ethnic groups and cultures, the "natural" dominion of Western nations over "inferior" races living elsewhere, man's presumed "natural" rights over women's rights at home or in the workplace, acquired valuable respectability and an aura of inevitability. The fit rightfully occupied the top rungs of the social ladder, while the workers and the poor belonged on the bottom rungs. In the presumed "natural" racial and ethnic hierarchy that prevailed, southern and eastern Europeans were "in-between" peoples, not considered as "worthy" as the Anglo-Saxons but not quite as "unfit" as either the Blacks or the Chinese.¹⁰

It was in this context that immigration itself became a contested issue in the 1890s, just as the nation began to experience large-scale immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Many American-born people, Anglo-Saxons, and others from immigrant groups who had migrated to the United States earlier, viewed the incoming Poles, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Hungarians, as the "other," and as undesirable additions to the nation state. Writers began to discuss the negative impact of the invasion of the "Slavs" and other "inferior races" into the anthracite region, and movements were formed to exclude immigrants. Yet mine operators and steel companies, among others, had actively recruited these immigrants, and long before this critical decade, they had already worked out practical formulas and policies to divide and conquer their diverse work forces. By "judiciously mixing" the nationalities so that no one group could gain supremacy, widespread acceptance, or a leadership role, they hoped to avert any possibility of collective action and unionization.¹¹

10. For a probing discussion of the position of central and eastern European immigrants in this hierarchy, see James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "In-between Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (1997 Spring):3-44.

11. Frank Julian Warne, *The Slav Invasion and the Mine Workers: A Study in Immigration* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1904); W. R. Jones to E. V. McCandless, Esq., 25 February 1875, quoted in James Howard Bridge, *The Inside History of the Carnegie Steel Company: A Romance of Millions* (New York: The Aldine Book Company, 1903), 81-82; U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 6, *Immi-*

The Lattimer Massacre occurred within this broad historical context. Given the issues and populations involved, the massacre and the trial that followed it were inevitably both significant class experiences and significant ethnic ones, not merely one or the other. The marching miners who were murdered were workers; the marching miners who were murdered were ethnic people. Too often scholars have spoken of the working class and ethnic groups as mere abstractions instead of as real human beings, and too often, in specific historical situations, they have insisted upon artificially privileging one abstract construction—either class or ethnicity—over the other, instead of viewing them as dynamically interrelated, complex, components of real human experiences.

Ethnic miners themselves often knew better. They didn't live in neatly constructed artificial boxes or categorizations. My own father, a Pennsylvania coal miner who began to load coal with his Hungarian father in the soft coal region in 1914 at the age of eleven, saw no contradiction in simultaneously fighting for his rights as a worker by joining the United Mine Workers, celebrating his ethnic heritage by attending grape harvest dances at a Hungarian hall, and honoring his new land by participating in Independence Day activities on the 4th of July. It was fitting, quite moving, and of more than symbolic importance, that a representative of the United Mine Workers, and that representatives from each of the affected ethnic groups at Lattimer, gathered together here at the centennial ceremony to place a wreath at the foot of the marker which commemorates the massacred victims.

The Lattimer Massacre and the trial that followed were significant ethnic experiences which stimulated the national consciousness of the respective groups. If they had not before, Slovaks, Poles, and other new immigrant nationalities of all classes quickly realized their "middling" unequal position in the racial and ethnic hierarchies that prevailed in Social Darwinist America. Slovak journalists reported that this new consciousness led them to end some of their own internal national conflicts in self-defense. Immediately, ethnic societies throughout the country began to raise money and rally support for the forthcoming trial. Rev. Father Richard Aust from the Polish parish of St. Stanislaus and the Austro-Hungarian ambassador did succeed in their efforts to get murder

charges brought against Sheriff Martin and the deputies.¹²

After the shock of Lattimer was absorbed, these ethnic groups began to mobilize in new ways to challenge generally prevailing and demeaning ethnic stereotypes. They formed new, or strengthened their old, national and community organizations, churches, and fraternal societies. They published news of working conditions, repressive troops, and events such as the massacres of Lattimer, Windber, and Ludlow, in their foreign-language newspapers. They became American citizens in larger numbers in order to have greater political influence.¹³

But it was Lattimer's ethnic miners and other such ethnic workers who were unique in that they suffered from the double burden imposed by class and ethnicity. Consequently, they not only reached out across class lines for support from others within their ethnic groups but, in solidarity, to workers of other ethnic groups, including English-speaking ones. After the Lattimer Massacre, new immigrant anthracite miners not only joined the United Mine Workers in record numbers but set an example. They outdid the Americans, provided practical interethnic democratic leadership in the union's efforts to win workers' rights, and began to define "from below" what it meant to be an American in a multiracial, multiethnic, work force and environment. In so doing, they not only challenged existing nativism and racism within the labor movement and the larger society but the nativist and racist dehumanization of their class enemies, railroad and mine tycoons such as the George Baers, who had once proudly proclaimed: "They don't suffer; why, they can't even speak English."¹⁴

Ongoing exploitation and the injustices of Lattimer had cried out for multiethnic class organization afterward. Without strong immigrant leadership and support, it is difficult to see how miners—or their union—could have made even the modest gains they did in the historic anthracite strike of 1902, given the nature of the corporate opposition confronting them.

The Lattimer Massacre remains a significant ethnic experience today in that it reminds us that southern and eastern European immigrants

12. Čulen, 47-61; Miller and Sharpless, 235; and Victor R. Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1968), 139-151; and Victor R. Greene, "A Study in Slavs, Strikes, and Unions: The Anthracite Strike of 1897," *Pennsylvania History* 31 (1964): 207-212.

13. Čulen, 54-55.

14. Frank Gwisadoskey, "The Anthracite," *UMWJ* 31 March 1898, 1; Greene, *Slavic Community on Strike*, 145-216; Greene, "Study in Slavs, Strikes, and Unions," 212-215; and Miller and Sharpless, 238-239. The Baer quote appears in McAlister Coleman, *Men and Coal* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1943), 72.

had a distinctive historical experience in this country that needs to be acknowledged by others. Because these people occupied a middling position in the Social Darwinist hierarchy, however, that distinctive and complicated experience has often been shortshrifed. Not viewed as fully "white" at the time, they unquestionably encountered harsh racism and nativism.¹⁵ Yet, scholars and others often unjustifiably minimize or overlook that experience because it is easier to deny the problem's existence, or to cite the experiences of other racial groups and minorities who had suffered even more prejudice and oppression at the time, given their lower place in the hierarchy.

Scholars are currently doing a lot of work on how and why members of middling ethnic groups began to perceive themselves as "white" over time. They hadn't always.¹⁶ But as "whites," they automatically assumed a new, higher, place in the old existing ethnic and racial hierarchy. Lattimer thus offers those of us who are ethnic people formidable challenges today. How do we convey our own valid distinctive histories, including our sad experiences with nativism and racism, to others without becoming "white" in a negative sense. Lattimer implicitly, if not explicitly, raises the issue: do ethnics who once faced severe prejudice fight only for themselves so that they can become integrated on a higher rung in the old Social Darwinist hierarchy, or do they challenge prejudice in general and thereby the existence of the hierarchy—of racism and nativism—itsself?

The Lattimer Massacre was undeniably a class experience and of great consequence to the labor movement. The walkout of the mule drivers who were protesting the tyrannical Gomer Jones' new stabling decree, and the subsequent events that led up to the massacre, meant that ordinary immigrant youths and miners were challenging the autocratic dominance of coal companies over their workers, and thereby indirectly challenging corporate America itself. Their modest demands for redress of their conditions were not revolutionary, but their strikes, protests, and interest in the labor movement were nevertheless of great significance. Their actions alone demonstrated their deepest, most

15. References to Slavs as "niggers" and Americans as "whites" appeared in the testimony at the Lattimer trial. See Michael Novak, *The Guns of Lattimer* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 110, 215-216.

16. Among the best works on this subject are Barrett and Roediger; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); and David R. Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London: Verso, 1994).

democratic, aspirations for greater control over their lives and greater social justice.

It is important to note that this mobilization of anthracite miners in August 1897, which occurred largely for local and regional reasons, did not take place in a vacuum. Nor was it an isolated instance of protest in the coal fields at large. By 1897, soft and hard coal miners increasingly recognized that certain favorable conditions for organizing now existed in the larger environment. The depression of 1893 had ended, and the United Mine Workers had begun to actively rebuild its organization on all levels after the disastrous general strike of 1894. Moreover, the resurgent UMW was in the process of waging a major, well-publicized, national strike in the soft coal fields at the time that the anthracite protests and strikes took place. That crucial successful bituminous strike in 1897 marked a turning point in the UMW's history.¹⁷

Thus, although it may be surprising, at first glance, it was probably not accidental that informed anthracite strikers swallowed any misgivings they had and welcomed the controversial nativist UMW organizer John Fahy in August. As district leader, he would help them organize and become members of the UMW. These pragmatic working people understood that the UMW—an imperfect, class-based, institution—was larger than its John Fahys and the one viable organization that seemed to offer them concrete hope and the possibility of their achieving some success. It was for good reason, and despite its flaws, that rational ethnic miners in the anthracite region gravitated toward the UMW in 1897.

Much has been said at this conference about the faults of the national UMW leadership, the nativism of many English-speaking miners, especially that of John Fahy, who had successfully promoted passage of the state's infamous Campbell Act. These criticisms are valid and necessary, but let's be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water. What do we mean when we say *the* union, anyway, and *who* is it? Is *the* union merely its national leaders, the John Mitchells, or only its district leaders, the John Fahys? Or is *the* union also the rank-and-file coal miners, those from all ethnic groups and races who sought to organize, join it, build it, and perhaps make it live up to its stated ideals?

17. Coleman, 57-58; Andrew Roy, *A History of the Coal Miners of the United States from the Development of the Mines to the Close of the Anthracite Strike of 1902, Including a Brief Sketch of Early British Miners* (Columbus, OH: J. L. Trauger Printing Company, 1905; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), 323-332. For the organizations that preceded the UMWA at Lattimer, see Harold W. Aurand, "Early Mine Workers' Organizations in the Anthracite Region," *Pennsylvania History* 58 (1991):298-310.

Rightly or wrongly, the early but flawed United Mine Workers has frequently been cited as the single best, most successful, progressive model of a labor organization in the United States. Certainly, in the prevailing national climate of racism and nativism in the 1890s, it was exceptional. As a distinctive labor organization, it offered an alternative to the discriminatory American Federation of Labor unions which, from the 1890s on, systematically excluded the unskilled, immigrants, women, African-Americans and other minorities. Unlike other members of the AFL, the UMW was not a craft union but an industrial one that included all those who worked in and around the mines. Unlike other unions, its constitution explicitly prohibited discrimination based on race, nationality, or creed. Although it certainly contained prejudiced racist and nativist miners and union leaders, it also contained others who more closely embodied its stated ideals of brotherhood and solidarity. It was not a monolith.¹⁸

As an organization, the United Mine Workers learned from the Lattimer tragedy. Ethnic miners had disproved nativist stereotypes about their docility and disinterest in the labor movement, and they had suffered severely as a result. Andrew Roy, a Scottish miner who wrote a history of the early UMW a century ago, noted that many American and English-speaking soft-coal union miners had learned a valuable lesson—that southern and eastern European immigrants, like themselves, were organizable—when foreign-born miners mobilized *en masse* at Connellsville during the strike of 1891. Lattimer brought home this lesson to many in anthracite.¹⁹ Another important result of the Lattimer Massacre was that rank-and-file ethnic miners, there and elsewhere, ultimately gave John Fahy reason to regret the Campbell Act. It also gave John Mitchell reason to speak out and try to make the inclusive ideals of the United Mine Workers a reality in 1900 when he said, “The coal you dig isn’t Slavish or Polish or Irish coal. It’s just coal.”²⁰ Ethnic miners who had disproved racial and ethnic stereotypes and joined the union continued to pressure the district and national leadership to live up to the union’s ideals.

18. Chris Evans, *History of United Mine Workers of America*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: n.p., 1918-1921), 1:7. 2:22. 257; Coleman, 55. For a critical thoughtful analysis of the United Mine Workers as a model of industrial solidarity, see John H. M. Laslett, “Introduction: ‘A Model of Industrial Solidarity’: Interpreting the UMWA’s First Hundred Years, 1890-1990” in *The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity?*, ed. John H. M. Laslett (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 1-25.

19. Roy, 292-293.

20. Quoted in Elsie Glück, *John Mitchell* (1929; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1971), 72.

Given a multinational working class, such as existed at Lattimer, both rank-and-file miners and the union as a whole had a vested interest beyond theory in overcoming prejudice and combating racial, national, or religious divisions. Yet, the credit for the UMW's having achieved success as a model of relative diversity and toleration, to whatever extent it actually did, belonged primarily to the unheralded efforts of multinational and multiracial miners, such as those massacred at Lattimer.

Miners at such grassroots sites often reflected a democratic cultural pluralism in electing officers from the various groups that constituted the local mining force. In what was a typical action, two days after the Lattimer Massacre, 1,500 miners at the Lattimer mines walked out, joined the UMW, and elected to send a committee of three—a Pole, a Slovak, and an Italian—to present their demands to Calvin Pardee.²¹ It is important to note that, throughout the duration of the anthracite strike, ethnic miners had demanded toleration, respect, “equal” wages with the Americans, and a roughly democratic and egalitarian inclusion in the class-based organization. And if the current resurgence of the labor movement continues its progressive course of action and organizes the unorganized, it will find valuable lessons in the Lattimer experience, in both the mistakes made by members of the United Mine Workers and in what the union learned from it.

Lattimer was also a significant event in *general* American history. It is a great subject for public history because it is of importance to all of us. Historically, it raises fundamental questions about the nature of American society at a critical time in the 1890s and where that society was headed. In polls today, Americans continue to express their concerns about the general direction in which the nation is going. The 1990s, like the 1890s, have been marked by economic uncertainty, restructuring but now on a global scale, social crises, racial, ethnic, and class conflict, cultural wars. The Lattimer Massacre sheds valuable light upon many of the same fundamental questions and the same problems that confront us now. I am thinking of ongoing issues such as nativism and racism; the poverty, exploitation, and the inequalities inherent in capitalism; the rights of labor and the status for working people in a modern society; national immigration policy and the rights of immigrants; the role of government; the meaning of democracy; the gap in

21. Miller and Sharpless, 135.

the power relationships between those who own great wealth and resources and those who do not.

One of the themes that has emerged from this conference is that the United States seems to be returning to many of the dismal social conditions that existed a century ago. Are wealth, privilege, and power *less* concentrated now than then? Is the gap between the rich and the poor narrowing or widening? Who had job security then, and who does now? Is the worker who is "downsized," suddenly forced to become an "independent contractor," or unwillingly confined to part-time status, without benefits, in a *qualitatively different* position from that of the anthracite miner who worked an average of 173 days a year at low pay? Coal companies in the anthracite and bituminous regions of Pennsylvania were among those pioneers who developed conscious policies to "judiciously mix" races and nationalities and capitalize on racism and nativism in order to avert unionization and collective action. Are similar tactics now used by multinational corporations to divide and conquer diverse workers on a global as well as a national scale?

Who owns Lattimer's history? It's not private property, of course, but all of us do own it in that it is an appropriate subject for public history. The general public has much to gain from learning about Lattimer, from confronting the large issues it raises, from debating and contemplating "lessons" that might be learned from it.

But, it also seems to me that ethnic and working people and their institutions have a special claim on its history, along with special responsibilities to see that Lattimer's history is remembered, valued, fairly and accurately portrayed. In this regard, they must be especially vigilant about the numerous private/public partnerships that are propelled by economic development and the profit motive because they contain many inherent dangers. If they don't speak for their own history, it is likely that no one will, or that it will be distorted. Business still frequently claims that it has the right to speak for workers and that *it* represents workers' rights. Why not workers' history as well? I am reminded that we are in the region where, during the anthracite strike of 1902, one particular businessman made a notorious statement that was quickly dubbed a divine-right theory of capitalism. George Baer said: "The rights and interests of the laboring man will be protected and cared for, not by the labor agitators, but by the Christian men to

whom God in His infinite wisdom has given the control of the property interests of this country.”²²

Lattimer was a genuine American tragedy that highlighted many of the injustices that prevailed in a newly emerging industrial capitalist society. Unfortunately, many of the problems and inequalities that prevailed a century ago continue to exist today. Lattimer is therefore as timely as ever. But it is also meaningful in that it continues to offer us hope that some good can come out of tragedy. After all, the massacre served as a clarion call for mobilization by those who were honestly concerned about securing economic and social justice. As such, it is too important for us to allow it to be “denied,” in typical American fashion, or arbitrarily shelved aside by those who want to put it in some narrow, self-contained box such as “labor” history or “ethnic” history. Lattimer offers us an excellent example for arguing that ethnic, racial, and labor history constitute the very core of the American experience, that they are interrelated, and that they are essential for any basic understanding of historic or contemporary American society as a whole.

22. Quoted in Leon Litwack, *The American Labor Movement* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), 66-67.