

Jon Shelton

Letters to the Essex County Penitentiary: David Selden and the Fracturing of America

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the political and cultural debate over public sector strikes in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s through a close reading of letters sent to the President of the American Federation of Teachers, who had been imprisoned for violating an anti-strike injunction in 1970. These letters help us to understand the relationship between the public sector labor movement, fears of cultural and moral degeneration, and the decline of New Deal liberalism. The article argues that Selden, figuring prominently in a series of advertisements sponsored by the AFT, served as an empty vessel for many other national debates. First, the letters show how public discussions over the crises brought on by teacher strikes fractured the American political center from the ground up as much as—as some historians have argued—from the top-down. Second, responses to Selden's imprisonment show how ideas about the legitimacy of unions changed during the tumultuous course of the late 1960s. Third, the often illegal action of striking by teachers led many to write to Selden that the United States was failing morally, and in a larger sense, culturally. Finally, the many advertisements defaced by newspaper readers and re-encoded with very different messages highlights a space in America's "right turn" that has been under-examined in the historiography—the space in which the individual interacted with the mass media. Taken together, these letters provide a historical window into the moment in which the origins of a new politics and culture emerged in the United States.

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In March 1970, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President David Selden began serving a 60-day prison sentence for violating an injunction forbidding Newark teachers from striking. In addition to Selden, Essex County also imprisoned leaders of the Newark Teachers Union (NTU), and almost 200 rank-and-file teachers who had served on the picket lines also faced prison sentences.¹ Rather than appeal his sentence, Selden chose to serve the prison term. The AFT, in fact, used his imprisonment to highlight their view that anti-strike laws on the books in most states were unjust. The public relations strategy focused on bringing attention to Selden's imprisonment during the jail-term followed by a series of "bread-and-water" receptions after his release to promote anti-injunction legislation. As part of the effort, the AFT bought full-page advertisements in the *New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, and the ads concluded by providing his cell number and imploring readers to write to him in prison. The letters rolled in from across the country that April, and aside from giving the AFT President some doubtless interesting reading material while incarcerated, provide a valuable snapshot to historians of the political and cultural climate of the United States at the very moment when the New Deal coalition was collapsing.

While historians have begun to tell the big narrative of the decline of labor-liberalism in the late 1960s and 1970s, why so many middle- and working-class Americans—turned against labor unions and the liberal state's ability to solve social and economic problems still seems uncertain.² Even more particularly perplexing is *how* this happened. Where were the particular points at which this major part of the New Deal coalition rejected the idea that labor unions and government forces could and should re-shape the market for the better? And further, if the Democratic Party disintegrated as the dominant force in American politics, what were the new

spaces through which individuals made their political decisions? The letters to Selden provide a valuable piece of the puzzle. Indeed, Selden's action provoked a response from Americans concerned about many different things, most of which were much larger than his arrest in support of the Newark teacher strike: the unionization of white-collar workers, the decline of respect for "law and order," and the government's role in sanctioning labor rights. Moreover, during a time in which loyalty to political party was in serious decline, the re-appropriation of the newspaper advertisement itself by many who viewed it helps us to understand that the way individual Americans made political choices changed in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, as the Democratic coalition had begun to break apart over civil rights, urban crisis, and the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, some individuals began to fashion explanations for what had gone wrong that ranged far from the political center. Though Selden and other labor activists argued for an expansion of union rights, those who responded to the ads offered an explanation for what had caused America to lose its way that revolved around the supposed excesses of unions and the liberal state.

David Selden came of age in Detroit, putting himself through college as an automobile worker just before the famous United Auto Workers sit-down strikes in 1936-37. His first teaching job, "in a K-9 school in a slum area in the shadow of the Ford Rouge plant" galvanized him toward union activism, and he was elected President of the Dearborn Federation of Teachers just before WWII. Settling in New York City after the war, he worked as a full-time organizer for the New York City Teachers Guild—the precursor to the United Federation of Teachers (UFT)—and became a leader of the first system-wide teacher strike in the United States there in 1960. After helping the UFT win collective bargaining rights, he worked to extend collective

bargaining efforts in other cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Running for the AFT Presidency as the organization's progressive caucus nominee in 1968, Selden put emphasis on gaining more appropriations for schools, cutting class sizes, and raising teacher salaries. He had almost completed the first of three two-year terms as president when he began his prison sentence.³

The 1970 strike was a confrontation between Newark teachers, who wanted substantial salary increases and reduced class sizes, a school board that was strapped for cash, and an African-American community, led by Amiri Baraka's Community for a Unified New-Ark (CFUN) attempting to keep the schools open. Locally, the controversy hinged on the racial politics of the city, as much of the Italian and Jewish communities supported the striking teachers, while many of the African-Americans did not. Ultimately, the NTU and the Board would reach a middle ground on salaries and solve the strike, but only after garnering national news attention. Though the 1968 series of strikes by the United Federation of Teachers in New York City over local control in Ocean-Hill Brownsville has generated more historical attention, the 1970 Newark strike (and a more protracted strike in 1971) generated an equally divisive welter of racial conflict.⁴

In the more famous New York City strike, unionized teachers—many of whom were Jewish and valued hard fought seniority rights battled an African-American community that believed that black local control—an experiment funded by the Ford Foundation—would improve subpar schools. As the teachers in Ocean-Hill Brownsville mostly lived outside the community, so did many of the teachers in Newark live outside the city. African-Americans in Newark —also fed up with the failed promise of quality education in inner-city schools—sought local control in the form of a rising black power politics led by Baraka and CFUN. These efforts

would bear fruit in late 1970 when Kenneth Gibson was elected the city's first black mayor; Gibson would then appoint several civil rights activists to the School Board—who in 1971 would try to wrest greater control over staffing patterns from the union.⁵

Just as in New York, spatial politics and Newark's resulting demographic changes had led to racial conflict. Since World War II, the African-American population of the city had increased drastically, while the white population had declined significantly. Further, Newark had been the site of one of the most divisive inner-city riots of the 1960s; in 1967, the mostly white police force brutally suppressed African-American rioters fed up with urban poverty. Though NTU President Carole Graves was black, most of the union's leadership was white, as were most of the striking teachers. In response to a strike that he viewed as against the interests of the community, Baraka attempted to organize parents and black teachers opposed to the union to keep the schools open. Working through CFUN, Baraka and his allies sent volunteers to the schools most in need of adult supervision and helped black teachers break through picket lines. Without CFUN's efforts to forcibly keep the schools open, the strike would have likely been a minor footnote. But with divisive conflict in the streets, the city pushed forward with injunctions to end the strike.

Aside from a few responses from the Newark and the New York areas, however, the responses to Selden's imprisonment are astoundingly devoid of overt references to racial conflict or local control. The national discourse around Selden instead focused largely on commentators' shifting views on labor unions, fears of a decline in respect for law and order, and the nation's lapsing cultural values. The city's name, in fact, is scarcely mentioned by those who wrote to him. Indeed, the role of race in the responses to the union president is best defined by attempts to place striking teachers into the racially charged categories of the "urban rioter" and "welfare

cadillac group” (as several who defaced the advertisements did). For these critics, it was striking teachers and the urban poor who were, in tandem, causing America to lose its way.

The ads placed by the AFT in three of the nation’s most prominent newspapers began by pointing out how long Selden had been imprisoned. On April 19, 1970, for example, the *New York Times* advertisement featured the headline “Today, Dave Selden spends his 39th Day behind bars” above a photograph of Selden at a lectern. A smaller headline pointed out that seven teachers faced three month prison sentences while “192 other teachers [had been] sentenced from 10- to 30-days.” The text, laid out much like a news story, then asked the reader “Did you know that David Selden, president of the 200,000-member American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, is serving 60 days in Essex County Penitentiary, Caldwell, New Jersey, for walking the picket line in support of striking Newark teachers?”⁶

It then appealed to a tradition of American civil disobedience by asking the reader to “learn from our teachers. All over the nation they face a cruel dilemma: either abstain from striking and watch as our schools deteriorate and their profession is humiliated, or fight back and face jail terms. They concluded that the cause is so urgent that they would rather go to prison than remain passive.” The last section pointed out that in most countries in Western Europe, public sector workers enjoyed the right to strike and finally, it asserted that “INJUNCTIONS DO NOT IMPROVE OUR SCHOOLS!” It concluded by asking readers to “Let Dave Selden hear from you” by writing him in prison.⁷

In trying to change the minds of the public, the AFT was attempting to counteract the anti-union bias of newspapers that clouded coverage of many teacher strikes. David Witwer has shown that organized labor’s growing legitimacy in national politics in the 1930s led to the creation of a “labor beat” by many newspapers that had shaped public opinion toward unions in a

sympathetic direction. By the end of the 1950s, however, this kind of coverage had begun to be “supplanted as a more critical version of labor reporting” led by journalists Wexford Pegler and Victor Riesel emerged. This coverage focused on “exposing” the excesses of labor unions.⁸

Further, the economics of the newspaper industry also caused support for labor unions to erode in both reportage and on editorial pages. First, labor conflicts in the newspaper industry in the 1960s—particularly in New York City—had been highly contentious. The Newspaper Guild strike of 1962-63, which virtually blacked out print news in the city for several months, caused several newspapers to go out of business and raised tempers among the remaining publishers. Second, by the early 1970s, newspapers across the US began to face profit crunches as they continued to struggle to compete with television news and, in urban markets, to maintain readerships after suburbanization had caused the pool of public transit commuters to shrink. Collectively bargained contracts represented an enormous impediment to cutting costs, and efforts by unions to fight mechanization caused some publishers to be more critical of the role of unions.⁹ The advertisements, then, represented an interposition of the AFT’s view into a mostly unwelcoming environment.

Unsurprisingly, Selden received numerous letters of support from AFT leaders like Albert Shanker, from local union leaders across the country, and even from unionized educators in Latin America and Europe.¹⁰ Individual American teachers wrote to Selden that his example had inspired them. A teacher who identified himself as a National Education Association (NEA) member wrote to Selden that he hoped that those members of the rival organization would “have your courage when the time comes” to fight their own battle to improve local schools. Thirty teachers from a junior high school in Evanston, Illinois signed a letter expressing

their “deep gratitude” to Selden in helping to “achieve an educational system that will serve as a model for future generations.”¹¹

What really stands out in the archive, however, is how many people wrote who had no such direct ideological interest in Selden’s prison sentence. Of the letters he received in March and April 1970, thirteen letters of support came from those who were not teachers or union activists in addition to seventy letters that criticized him. Of the latter, twenty-one were defaced newspaper ads. Further, for those who wrote to Selden there was virtually no middle ground: the majority of the letters find the opposite position to be totally unmerited, and many use extreme language to make their point.

Many of those who supported Selden but who were not teachers focused on the injustice of his imprisonment and what it augured for the future of the nation. R.E. Moore, a father from Richmond, Virginia was “disgusted and heartsick over something which I had no idea could happen in my own country.” Moore had a twelve-year-old daughter who aspired to be a teacher, but after he had read about Selden, he was going to “make [her] sit down and read this article after which her mother and I will begin trying in any way we can to correct this situation...or, I guarantee you, my daughter will not be allowed to persue [sic] a career in teaching....” Paula Mather, a student at San Fernando Valley High School in California offered that “reading about your arrest gave me yet another reason not to be proud of America...Your requests are reasonable and justified. Court injunctions and arrests are not.” A college student from Brooklyn asked “do we follow the absurdities that this country indulges on, or do we strike against its backwardness?”¹²

Selden’s detractors believed just as fervently that the union leader’s cause was not only unwarranted but also pernicious. Many expressed these beliefs through vicious *ad hominem*

attacks. James Arbuckle, from Massachusetts, sent a signed check for “\$0,000.00” made out to Selden, to whom he referred as a “Christmas turkey.” Dave Becker also sent a check, making it out to “Not one cent, you dope.” Identifying himself only as a member of “Agnew’s Silent Majority,” another critic called Selden a “parasite,” explicitly comparing AFT leadership, in racially charged phrasing, to the “professional poor and the welfare cadillac group.” An unsigned scrawl on an index card referred to him as an “old ugly and repressive pig” after expressing that “I hate teachers and I hate you.” Al Eischen, from the Chicago suburb of Des Plaines, Illinois, called Selden “self-righteous,” while an unsigned letter called his masculinity into question by asking that Selden “please try to act like a man, even if you can’t be one.”¹³

Some of the AFT President’s critics wrote to tell him that he deserved his prison term and even suggested that it was insufficient. M. Emery, from Minneapolis, wrote to tell him that “you are just where you belong and a lot more ought to be in with you.” A history professor from Dayton, Ohio wrote tersely that “I agree with the court that sentenced you to jail. I can only hope that you spend the remainder of your time meditating on your sins and why you deserved punishment.” A woman who read the ad in the April 17 *L.A. Times* wrote that “I can only say that if the decision had been left up to me you would be serving a much longer sentence.”¹⁴

Some critics went further, acting as vicarious judge to specify just how much longer his sentence should be. Mrs. Fred Knolldoff, from an Illinois town about sixty miles from Chicago, argued that Selden should be imprisoned for “at least six months.” Edward Withing offered his congratulations to the judge who sentenced Selden to 60 days but still believed “it should have been 600.” Arthur Young hoped that prison authorities would “lose your records and keep you in jail for at least five years.”¹⁵

Rick Perlstein's work on the years of the Richard Nixon administration has shown that period to be "the rise...of a nation that had believed itself to be at consensus instead becoming one of incommensurate visions of apocalypse: two loosely defined congeries of Americans, each convinced that should the other triumph, everything decent and true and worth preserving would *end* [italics in original]." In Perlstein's formulation, Nixon not only reflected this larger irreconcilability, but also served as its *provocateur par excellence*.¹⁶ If anything is clear from the letters to David Selden, it is that much of the vitriol that became so prominent in the political discourse in the late 1960s and 70s was not exclusively a top-down phenomenon. Certainly national figures shaped the political rhetoric of the era, and references to the "silent majority" in the letters prove that ideas flowed from political elites to ordinary Americans (the very term "silent majority" emanated from a Nixon speechwriter). But the fact that so many individuals from so many parts of the country responded so quickly and so vehemently shows that this type of discourse also welled up from the very grassroots.

The question, however, is why did Selden's case evoke such a reaction? How could an act of non-violent civil disobedience provoke such intense responses? For those who wrote to Selden, the AFT President's jail sentence seems to have served as an empty vessel. The late 1960s represented a period of profound crisis in the U.S.: political turmoil caused by the Vietnam War, student protests, and assassinations of major political figures; the tumult caused by a series of inner-city rebellions by African-Americans against structural poverty that ushered in a series of racially-coded calls for "law and order" from whites; and the beginnings of the high unemployment and high inflation that would rack economic life in the 1970s.¹⁷ For many middle-class and working-class Americans, the Selden ads symbolized a host of meanings larger than just a teacher strike—meanings about the labor movement, liberal policy, moral values, and

explanations for economic prosperity. Indeed, Selden represented an empty vessel because of the many different ways that teacher strikes impacted American politics.

Most fundamentally, teacher strikes profoundly affected views of labor unions because shutdowns directly and immediately inconvenienced anyone who relied on the public school system. More importantly, though, because teachers were responsible for passing on the cultural values of the nation, public discourse over striking teachers called into question the state of American culture in a way that private sector strikes—and even most other public sector strikes—did not. Teacher strikes were also of significant interest because of the central place education played in so many social conflicts in the postwar world. Landmark civil rights clashes like *Brown v. Board of Education* focused on the public education system, while the 1960s protest movements—such as the Berkeley Free Speech movement in 1964—also revolved around the role education played in the trajectory of the nation. Critics of the countercultural generation often wondered why their teachers had failed to inspire the appropriate respect for authority and hard work. When teachers went on strike, then, these associations almost reflexively became a part of the public conversation, thus heightening an already tense sense of crisis.

Also, in addition to upsetting racial hierarchies (as in Newark and Ocean-Hill Brownsville), teacher strikes upset hierarchies of gender. Going back to the nineteenth century, teaching had traditionally been a female occupation, and though more men had become elementary and secondary teachers by the postwar era, it was still an occupation in which the majority of workers were women. Thus, although most of the union leadership was male, teacher strikes were controversial in part because they “feminized” control over public finances and education policy. Finally, teacher strikes were also of such significance because of their

connection to taxation and spending. When adjusted for inflation, education spending increased 49% in the 1950s, 73% in the 1960s, and 20% in the 1970s.¹⁸ As Americans' tax bills—from income taxes to property taxes—inched ever higher in the postwar period, education spending became more politicized. For many Americans who felt squeezed in the early 1970s by the poor economy and a tax burden which would be made more onerous by inflation, the amount spent on education became an obvious political target.

When David Perry saw the AFT's ad in *The New York Times*, he drafted a letter to Selden that very day. He typed it on letterhead from a company called Automatic Information Dispatching Systems, Inc. based in West Orange, NJ. It is impossible to tell whether Perry owned or merely worked for the company, but in writing the letter on company paper, he was staking a claim as a white-collar professional. Writing from a suburb of New York City, we might expect that Perry wrote to Selden to emphasize the disruptions teacher strikes caused to school students or the hikes in property taxes that could result from higher teacher salaries. Instead, he began by referencing a recent mass resignation by New York City nurses, who, unsatisfied with their pay, were able to “make their point...in a dignified and professional manner.” Perry did not criticize unions *per se* in the brief letter, but he argued that the Newark teachers, in violating an injunction, had acted in a more “‘union’ oriented approach” than an “‘educator’ oriented approach.” The implication was evident: it might be OK for blue-collar workers to form unions and strike, but for “professionals” this was undignified. Furthermore, the behavior was a problem not just because of the indignity of white-collar workers going on the picket line, but also because “when teachers in a town go on strike they are really striking against us, you and me.”¹⁹ This type of language further assumed that the very act of striking set

teachers, as white-collar professionals, outside the realm of the “public” to which Perry believed he (and a teacher like Selden) belonged.

Perry’s letter also speaks to a larger point. Teachers, as both “professionals” and as public employees, represented a departure from the public face of the labor movement in the postwar era—the blue collar production worker. Public sector unions had, from their inception, been controversial in the United States. In the anti-union days before the Wagner Act, public sector unions enjoyed even less legitimacy than those in the private sector, and even after private sector workers gained collective bargaining rights—including the right to strike—with the Wagner Act (1935), public sector unionization remained controversial, as even President Roosevelt famously opposed strikes by public sector workers.²⁰ Though many states had begun to recognize collective bargaining rights for public workers by the 1960s, these state laws often came with strict penalties for striking. In this context, most teachers themselves resisted forming unions well into the 1960s, preferring instead to stay either unaffiliated or within the less combative NEA.²¹ It had taken a series of massive organizing drives—often involving illegal strikes—in the 1960s for public workers in much of the industrial Northeast and Midwest to gain collective bargaining rights, but by the late 1960s, teachers had signed bargaining contracts in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, DC, and Chicago, among many other cities, and membership in teachers unions exploded.²²

In the New York City area, views of public sector workers were especially contentious. Workers in the city had been at the forefront of the national wave of public sector bargaining rights, and it had often required major work stoppages to pressure city administrations into signing deals. The UFT undertook a one-day city-wide strike in 1960 to push for collective bargaining representation (ultimately succeeding), and major strikes by the Transportation

Workers' Union in 1966 and sanitation workers in 1968, along with Ocean-Hill Brownsville, shut down various sectors of city life for a substantial period of time. Public sector labor unions—especially teachers—were intimately connected with debates about the special problems faced by life in Gotham. Because of developments at both the national and the local level, individuals like Perry saw Selden as representing a larger shift in the scope of labor unions, and actions like that of the Newark teachers challenged him to reassess his views of unions. The letters to David Selden, then, give us an especially rich sense of this broader debate about the place of labor unions in the United States. In writing to the AFT President, critics showed how they viewed the legitimacy of all labor unions in the US.

Ralph Curcio was one of the many inspired by one of the ads to draft an immediate letter. Clearly, the AFT campaign served as a convenient way for him to vent his own growing distaste for labor unions. On April 15, he lectured Selden on the teachers' lack of restraint. He began by sarcastically exclaiming "Too bad!" to Selden's imprisonment. "Injunctions," he argued, "serve a useful purpose in our society—to prevent strikes from dragging out ad infinitum." Connecting them to corruption elsewhere in municipal and state government, Curcio asserted that "teachers as well as other public officials have taken unfair advantage of people in the past by stubbornly demanding the last penny." He concluded by pointing out that "fair compensation for anybody's work, whether teacher, policemen, sewer cleaner, laborer or whatever is certainly reasonable. But piggy-ness and greed have no place in contracts [underlining in original]."²³ The letter's fundamental point—that adequate compensation arises naturally and that public sector workers extort the public—gives us a clue into one of the basic contradictions of the growing frustration with unions in the 1970s. In spite of Curcio's characterization of them, teachers had only made significant wage increases through militant action, as it had taken either

strikes or at the very least the threat of them to receive the “fair compensation” to which he believed all workers were entitled.

Leon Hartman, from New York City, also criticized the tactics of the union, scolding Selden for “resort[ing] to anarchy to prove your point.” He further connected strikes by teachers and other workers to rising prices for everyone: “Have you considered that as a leader of organized labor you and other labor leaders are nursing the fires of inflation? Every time a union goes on strike, (and they always win), the cost of living goes up for everyone.....” The very logic of collective bargaining, it seemed, was destroying the country, and Hartman hoped for a different outcome: “When Labor and Management realize they are sending this country to ruin by their disregard of the public interest some sense will be restored.”²⁴

An advertisement from the *Chicago Tribune*—defaced and mailed to Selden—also blamed unions for inflation but made sure to separate workers from what s/he viewed as self-aggrandizing union leaders. Identifying her/himself as a “citizen who has been badly hurt by inflation,” the writer condemned Selden and all labor leaders: “The unions are all right, but when you and all the other labor union leaders demand and get exorbitant wage increases and plunge our country into an ever expanding inflationary cycle you are guilty of treason. All you finks want is power with no thoughts for the overall benefit of the country. [underlining in original].”²⁵

A postcard, sent from a “teacher” from the Bronx, stated matter-of-factly that “all unions are corrupt....Any teacher who belongs to a union should not be in a classroom.” A defaced ad from the *New York Times* simply argued that “teachers should not belong to a union” and wondered if teachers—stewards for the nation’s youth—could be unionized, who might be next: “Why not unionize ministers, priests, doctors, street ladies, etc. etc.” A postcard signed “Fed up...” and postmarked in San Diego asked why “you union people seem so insistent that you are

above the law?” “Fed up...” went on to ask Selden to “organize the prisoners while you are there, or have you already done that...they need your ‘protection’ also, and I’m sure your gang can use the money....” A “Minnesota mother” accused the AFT teachers of using their position as educators to “push the ideological ideas of your charges to the far left and disrespect for the American constitution....I think the present idiotic actions of a small part of our youth are the results of the indoctrination of your infamous organization.”²⁶

A letter signed by “Just an Ordinary Citizen” from Newark bemoaned the fact that teachers had used the same tactics as other unions. The writer called Selden’s critique of the strike injunction a “false, demagogic statement.” S/he expected such behavior from “a Teamsters official or a garbage collectors union—but not from a teacher.” In separating the interests of union from the rest of the community s/he admonished Selden not to “try to kid the public. If you tell it like it is—that your union is out to get all it can—just like any other union—you might gain some respect, for the public likes people who are honest, even though they may disagree.” Another unsigned letter took this critique even further: “You...and the rest of your henchmen are a complete disgrace to this country, and a continuing threat to this country. The only thing that deters me from signing this epistle is the possibility of threats against my family by some of your ‘stool pigeons’.”²⁷ This commentator clearly did not differentiate teachers unions from other unions with a proven history of corruption like the Teamsters. Through highly public events like the Selden campaign, as the letters indicate, teachers unions had become a key part of the national cultural and political picture of unions.

Others wrote letters that spoke to a growing sense of helplessness. To these commentators, labor unions underscored their own lack of agency. I. Goldberg, who described himself as a “lower middle-class tax-paying citizen,” believed that Selden “got just what [he]

deserved—only not for long enough.” Goldberg bemoaned the fact that he had to simply do his job whether he liked it or not, “without recourse to politicians or union protectionists.” Morton Goldman, from Oceanside, New York, believed the “public is being abused by unions whose membership can paralyze a vital public service.” John Amber, from Marengo, Illinois, argued that “there are other means of achieving desired ends rather than reducing municipalities, states, and the nation to helplessness brought about by striking public workers.”²⁸ These three letters all focus on the victimization of Americans by public sector unions and imply the haplessness of the state in protecting those aggrieved by union excesses. As Alice O’Connor has provocatively shown with regard to conservative intellectuals in the 1970s, think-tanks like the Hoover Institution and the American Enterprise Institute were able to successfully make the argument that both corporations and the white working-class suffered similar oppression as victims of the liberal state.²⁹ These three letters may indicate why this rhetoric was such an easy sell since many Americans already believed the predations of unions to be aided by a state unconcerned with such victimization.

If most of the above letters to Selden are hostile to labor unions—or at the very least—hostile to labor leaders, a lengthy letter composed by a woman in Los Angeles shows that while many commentators were critical of the labor movement, others believed it was still an important component of American democracy. Ann Gettmann came from a union family. Her father, according to her letter, “was a very big part of helping to form the Teamsters Union back in my hometown, when it was just getting its start.” She wrote to Selden with the memory of growing up in the Great Depression era, and remembered well the “jail, harassment, bribery, violence, and financial stress” of the early union movement: “All this he suffered and we with him as he firmly believed he and his fellow members were working to improve the lives of their fellow

men and the generations to come.” Gettmann went on to tell Selden that “without doubt you have the right to organize and have designated people represent you in opinions, salary matters and even in policy matters.”³⁰

Gettmann’s concern, and the reason she wrote a thirteen-page letter to an imprisoned union president after merely reading an advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times*, was with the tactics of the union: “Too often in my life time have I seen the havoc union strikes make of lives of people, therefore I am against them and the people who promote them.” But hers was not a one-sided criticism. She recognized that while teachers were public employees, so were school boards, and as public employees, they had a responsibility to consider the grievances of teachers. She believed that teachers served a vital social role and as such, were not paid enough. Still, she asked that teachers use their organization, instead of striking, to make the public aware of the problems and rely on parents to put pressure on elected officials. .

A special concern with regard to teachers was that while Gettmann agreed that “their [sic] should be no need for injunctions forbidding people to continue their objections to their working conditions...now it is a law and the law should be obeyed if we are to have a peaceful nation.” Teachers set poor examples by violating injunctions and their specific position as educators was especially crucial: “We are fast becoming a nation of people who place personal gain and desires ahead of law and order, discipline, integrity, and patriotism.” Gettmann did not just fear moral declension; she also feared the specter of a new “depression that will make the one of the 1930’s seem like a party.” Along with the responsibility for setting an example of law and order, teacher unions then had an economic responsibility to help ascertain where school revenues might come from. Gettmann speculated that they “could gain more friends if they helped to stabilize our economy and provided solutions rather than more problems to be solved.”³¹

Gettman's letter is instructive for several reasons. First, the problem of striking public sector workers was clearly important to her, and she believed that it was simultaneously an economic and a moral problem. Her political viewpoint was not one in which, as many explanations for the implosion of the New Deal order imply, Americans separated cultural values and economic concerns, choosing the former over the latter. It is also significant because she believed labor unions were legitimate players in American politics; her assumptions about their tactics, however, neglected that, without at least the threat of a strike, workers in virtually any field—private or public sector—do not have the leverage to affect major change against a more powerful employer.

It is worth paying attention to Ann Gettman's letter because it highlights that while, as public opinion polls show, most Americans in 1970 still believed in the importance of labor unions, the commonsense notion—a key part of the liberal mainstream since World War II—that organized labor was fundamental to social democracy and a healthy economy was increasingly up for debate. For this reason, we should re-assess the preeminence in the historiography of anti-union activism in de-legitimizing the labor movement later in the decade.³²

~~Public opinion polls are certainly not perfect, but, when we trace general views of labor unions over time, it is worth noting a trend that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to a Gallup poll in 1953, 75% of Americans approved of labor unions, while only 18% disapproved. In 1965, 71% of respondents answered in the affirmative while only 19% answered in the negative. By 1973, these numbers had shifted drastically, to 59% and 26% respectively.~~³³

~~Clearly, Americans' views of labor unions were changing in the late 1960s and 70s, and it does not seem coincidental that the emergence of public sector militancy—especially by~~

~~unionized teachers—corresponded with this change. The letters to Selden in this section help us to understand why. Some of those who wrote letters projected their preconceived notions of the minority of labor unions who had engaged in corrupt and illegal practices onto unions like the American Federation of Teachers. This might have seemed logical given that Selden’s nonviolent protest had been criminalized, conjuring images of other union leaders like Jimmy Hoffa who had been jailed for far more serious crimes. For others, the teachers’ tactics were the issue, as striking necessarily caused disorder and unrest regardless of whether the strikers’ cause was just.~~

~~In either case, it is evident that the cultural and political place of the labor movement was changing. It might be overstating things to say that the striking teacher became *the* public face, of labor unions in the United States in the 1970s. Unionized industrial workers, blue collar public sector workers, and even athletes organizing in professional sports unions figured prominently in the national spotlight. But, as these letters from across the United States suggest, the image of the striking teacher was suddenly a major part of how Americans understood labor unions.~~

Kim Moody’s pioneering work on labor politics in the 1970s, [for example](#), focuses on the role of conservative institutions like the Business Roundtable in [de-legitimizing the labor movement and](#) paving the way for the assaults of the Reagan years.³⁴ These organizations were unquestioningly important. But the letters to Selden show us that the legitimacy of labor unions was fragile well before the formation of the BR in 1972 and the subsequent political revitalization of groups like the Chamber of Commerce. I certainly do not want to suggest that striking teachers in Newark or anywhere else were somehow responsible for the collapse of the labor-liberal coalition. But strikes by teachers in an already turbulent time served as crisis points

that forced many individuals to re-consider their own political positions with regard to public sector unions, which had become an increasingly prominent part of the US labor movement. It was this vulnerability that groups like the BR and the Chamber of Commerce would exploit later in the decade.

Mrs. Barbara Mancbach, writing on April 14, found the AFT's public relations campaign to be "truly sad." She lectured Selden that he had imprisoned because he "willfully disobeyed the law," and she believed the stakes of his actions were higher than the injustice of the injunction: "I too, feel that many laws discriminate against me, both economically and personally. Millions of other Americans feel other laws are unfair to them. If we all disobey these laws we disagree with we will have anarchy." As her letter continued, Mancbach pointed out to Selden that he and the striking teachers had set a poor example for their students: "You've taught them how to disobey the law. Pick up any paper and read what's happening on college campuses throughout the country. The students have learned well the teachings of their teachers." Indeed, Mrs. Mancbach viewed the actions of teachers as part of a mounting concern that the United States was developing a generation of people without respect for the established legal and moral structure of the nation.³⁵

Mancbach was not alone in this fear. Like her, many others presented a view of Selden not as an overreaching labor leader but as an immoral teacher. Just as some who wrote to Selden viewed him as an empty vessel for their shifting views of labor unions, others saw him—in his role as a teacher—as an arbiter of cultural values. Going back to the nineteenth century, teachers had been central to the mission of American public education, an endeavor in which, in William Reese's words, schools were expected to "strengthen the moral character of children,

reinvigorate the work ethic, spread civic and republican values, and along the way teach a common curriculum to ensure a literate and unified public.”³⁶ If the role of public schools had changed dramatically from the onset of the common school movement, the notion that teachers were integral in inculcating American values had not. If American-ness had meant respect for the rule of law, as Mrs. Mancbach believed, then Selden symbolized both the decline of that respect and its failure to be transmitted to the next generation.

In response to student protests and inner-city uprisings against police brutality, political figures as diverse as California Republican Richard Nixon, Alabama Democrat George Wallace, and Philadelphia Democrat Frank Rizzo stoked fears of a breakdown in respect for “law and order” to political advantage.³⁷ It was in this context that illegal teacher strikes like those in Ocean-Hill Brownsville and Newark took place. Both UFT President Albert Shanker and his NTU counterpart Carole Graves would serve jail time for leading the respective strikes. For many Americans frustrated by the seeming degeneration of law and order, teachers who were willing to strike in defiance of an injunction seemed to be more criminals than martyrs. Indeed, many of those who wrote to Selden disapproving of the teachers’ tactics attempted to define themselves, in contrast to the teachers, as law-abiding citizens. John McKay, who defaced a *New York Times* advertisement from April 29, 1970, for example, asserted that “Selden broke the law, & accordingly, should have to pay the penalty—if we broke the law, we would have to pay.”³⁸ In another defaced ad, this one unsigned, the writer called her/himself a “quiet, law-abiding citizen.” S/he called the ad “dishonest,” pointing out that, among other things, “government employees are stopped by law from striking. They may resign get another job but not strike against me and you and John Doe.”³⁹ Joseph Hobaica from Walpole, Massachusetts, also defined himself as a law-abiding citizen when he began his letter of April 20: “I obey the

law. I expect others to do the same. Anybody who thumbs their nose at a court injunction deserves to go to jail.”⁴⁰ I.E. Davis, from Grosse Pointe, Michigan, lectured Selden with a numerical list of points: His first admitted that “teachers deserve more money,” but his next four points expressed approval for Selden’s sentence in addition to offering some advice:

- “2. Anyone who breaks the law should be punished.
3. You knowingly broke the law to gain an end objective.
4. You are paying for your convictions.
5. Spend the next contract interval in getting the law amended or changed.”

In his final point he sardonically told Selden to “enjoy your stay, it should show you whom parents, police, and judges and teachers have failed most [underline in original].”⁴¹

It is clear from the last statement that Davis hoped rhetorically to link teachers to the growing decline of law and order in the United States. But why did the arrest of a teacher—as opposed to any other striking worker defying an injunction—provoke such a maelstrom of fears about the degeneration of respect for the law? Davis’s letter gives us a clue when he refers to those “whom...teachers failed the most.” Quite simply, teachers were blamed, because of their traditional responsibility for instructing children and adolescents in moral values, for the actions of rebellious youth. That most of the protests on college campuses, sit-ins, and urban riots predated the national phenomenon of teacher strikes was irrelevant. Teacher strikes, as shown by the letters to Selden, served as surrogates for fears that respect for law and order was collapsing.

Other commentators used racially-charged rhetoric to make this point. In coded reference to the wave of urban uprisings in the late 1960s, a defaced ad argued that “RIOTS should not be [teachers’] ‘thing.’” Edward Withing from Caldwell, New Jersey believed that “it

is no wonder our young people riot, burn and destroy with your group showing the way to disobey law and order.” Jack Sherman, from New York City, agreed. Ignoring the chronology of both student radicalism and the inner-city riots in Watts, Detroit, Washington, DC and numerous other American cities, he wrote Selden that “one of the reasons for all the violence and disorder that is going on in this world is because our teachers, who are supposed to teach our children to respect and obey the law, instead...show our children how to become criminals.”⁴²

Other commentators framed Selden’s civil disobedience as the work of extremists bent on rending the country asunder. Eileen Schroeder, from Pittsburgh, explained just how teachers helped to destroy respect for law order: “What do you think our children will surmise when they go to school one day and see their teachers picketing like insane radicals around the school?” Schroeder admitted, as one would expect from a citizen of a city built on union culture, that “striking...was necessary in the early 1900’s when businesses did have too much power over the person” but she then asked, “don’t you think in this day you could get a peaceful settlement?” She concluded that “it is a sad day when our children have to see order disintegrate in the form of their teachers who are supposed to prepare them for this society.”⁴³

In an undated letter, an anonymous person scrawled a short but revealing message to Selden: “Better that you stay where you are than return to teaching and corrupt the minds of the children. Your greed exceeds your wits. Use the democratic process, not stupid strikes and picketing. People like you ruin what could be a beautiful free society.”⁴⁴ Anyone really engaged in the politics of the Newark strike would have known that Selden, as the head of a powerful national union like the AFT would not be going anywhere near a classroom when he was released from prison. And yet, this commentator was not only compelled to write Selden a letter but to charge him with “ruining” society. In making sense of this last letter, it is clear that it was

the disorder and unrest purportedly brought on by the tactics of unionized teachers in general—the “stupid strikes”—that symbolized a larger decline in respect for American moral values (in this case, the “democratic process”). For many Americans in 1970 the fact that teachers engaged in civil disobedience had come to symbolize a larger crisis of what it meant to be American.

Most studies of the conservative “turn” in the 1960s and 70s focus on organized movements: grassroots anti-communist suburbanites in Orange County, California white-collar anti-busing activists in the metropolitan south, corporate conservatives and free-market ideologues who formed powerful lobbying groups.⁴⁵ The importance of these studies cannot be overstated. Simply put, without these sorts of movements pushing their way into American politics, the Republican party would never have taken the direction it has in recent history—advocating both the deregulation of the market and the (re)regulation of “social values” in shifting the political mainstream of the nation to the right.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that most of those Americans who ratified these big changes at the ballot box were not deregulation ideologues or staunch anti-integration activists. They were, like many of those who wrote letters to Selden, only episodically tuned in to the shifting political controversies of the times. . Furthermore, as Samuel Huntington pointed to as one of the symptoms of “the crisis of democracy” in the 1970s, fewer Americans relied on the apparatus of the political party to make these decisions as they had in the years immediately after World War II.⁴⁶ Whether or not, as Huntington argues, this has made democracy more or less tenable is up for debate; what is not debatable, however, is that political party organization became less significant in the decision-making process of many Americans at the end of the 1960s. Though the 1972 Democratic National Convention—with new delegate rules that pried

away power from an Old Guard led by organized labor—represented a breaking point for the Democratic Party, the coalition had already begun to fracture when Selden received the letters in 1970. Indeed, the party had begun to split over Vietnam, as evidenced by the crackdown on anti-war protestors in Chicago in 1968, and it had begun to split over civil rights, as George Wallace’s performances among the white working-class in Northern state primaries earlier in the same year attested. And yet, many disaffected members of the Democratic coalition had not permanently defected to the Republican Party, either. Instead, many of these voters could cast ballots to re-elect Nixon in 1972, a Democratic majority in the 1974 mid-terms, Carter in 1976, and disappointed again, Reagan in 1980. Thus, if party loyalty could no longer provide political answers, we may ask, how did individuals determine how to interpret critical political events?

As the anonymous letter above charging Selden with ruining “what could be a beautiful free society” indicates, it was the periodic crisis—like a highly contentious strike that saw teachers imprisoned—that forced many Americans to rethink their political views. For this reason, we have to pay attention to what these letters—almost all written by people who did not disclose any political party or advocacy group membership—tell us about the way many individuals were making broader political decisions in the early 1970s. In particular, the fact that a sizable minority responded by defacing the advertisement and sending it to the AFT President shows that an important arena for the splintering of the New Deal coalition was the space where individuals encountered and reacted to the mass media. Egged on by a Nixon administration which represented a pioneer in the art of tarring the media as out of touch “elites”—Agnew in October 1969 had referred to the press as an “effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals”—many individuals who responded to Selden re-fashioned the very message of the advertisement.

The ad, we should recall, resembled a news story. This was clearly the intention, as the bulleted information, bolded sub-headings, and vertical columns were meant to reflect the “objectivity” of familiar news reporting. For this reason, many of those who defaced and then sent a copy to Selden felt compelled to refute, point by point, the evidence presented in the “article.” One reader of the *Chicago Tribune* circled the series of questions: “Did you know—that seven officers of the Newark Teachers Union also received six month sentences?—and that 192 other teachers got 10 to 30 days?—and that not one had a trial by jury?” Next, s/he drew a line to an empty space on the ad and answered, “Yes I know it and I think the penalties should be increased. It is about time somebody started to crack down on these law violators.” S/he then underlined the sentence “Teachers and public employees deserve the full rights of American citizenship” and answered it by arguing “And they should be held accountable when they violate the law.”⁴⁷ A reader of the *New York Times* wrote “good” in the margin next to the query about the jailed Newark teachers, and when the ad mentioned the extensive fines levied on those teachers who had not been arrested, the commentator remarked at length:

TOUGH. WHAT ABOUT LONG VACATION, SHORT HOURS, SICK LEAVE, PENSIONS, MEDICAL BENEFITS EVEN DENTAL THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES THEY ARE BABIED. IT USED TO BE THAT ONLY WELL-BRED DECENT PEOPLE BECAME TEACHERS—NOW IT'S THE RABBLE—SALARY TIME OFF LITTLE SUPERVISION.⁴⁸

What stands out here in the defacings is the implicit importance given to the advertisement itself. An individual could have simply written a letter on a separate piece of paper, but those who defaced the ads did so because they recognized the key role of the media in shaping political outcomes. Many of those who saw the Selden ad understood that its place in a major newspaper and similarity to a news story meant that it would have authority in shaping the way the “public” viewed Selden’s imprisonment and the larger crisis of striking teachers.

Defacing the ad was a tacit admission of the power of the media as well as a way for these individuals to re-shape the AFT's argument toward a more palatable explanation.

The act of defacing the advertisement and sending the disfigured version to Selden, then, was a profoundly political act. These actors took the available material published in the newspaper and altered its very meaning. This is underscored by the defaced ad sent to Selden by John McKay. McKay essentially wrote two messages: the first was addressed to "Mr. Selden" and lectured that he "should be ashamed of [him]self for defying the law and the courts and the ethics of your profession." The second, and more prominently placed message, however, only addressed the AFT President in the third person, suggesting that McKay was vicariously reforming the meaning of the ad: "Selden broke the law & accordingly should have to pay the penalty.... Teachers should uphold—not break, our laws...."⁴⁹

Others remade different meanings from the ads. One commentator scrawled directly over Selden's picture in giant blue script—in the process rendering Selden indistinguishable—with the lines "YOU GOT WHAT YOU DESERVED—CONGRATULATIONS FINALLY JUSTICE!" Here, s/he re-shaped the ad's narrative from one in which Selden was a political prisoner fighting for justice to one in which the only injustice perpetrated was that Selden had escaped punishment for so long (hence the use of the term "FINALLY").⁵⁰ Re-appropriating an ad in the *Chicago Tribune*, another commentator also viewed the AFT President's imprisonment as jubilation. Condemning Selden along with student radicals and urban African-Americans, s/he wrote next to Selden's picture: "CONGRATULATIONS: HOPE YOU SPEND ANOTHER 36 DAYS THERE. WE'RE SICK OF PROTEST DISSENTERS, RIOTS & ALL OTHER LEFT WING ACTIVITIES."⁵¹

Others re-wrote the meaning of the ad into a defense of what it meant to be American, a definition that did not include labor unions. The original ad had pointed out that in many “modern” European nations, “State employees, like all others, occasionally stop work to demand improved conditions.... The right to strike is taken as a matter of course; the disputes end with agreement.” Several commentators disagreed with what it meant to be a “modern nation.” One asked Selden in the margin, “Why don’t you go there? You love alien systems and you don’t belong in this country except in jail.” Another effaced the ad’s message when s/he wrote over the original quote—in the process rendering it unreadable: “Unions are the ruination of this country. Why don’t you go to those countries you love so much!”⁵²

Another defaced ad re-wrote teachers into a larger narrative of union corruption. It expressed a sense of sarcastic jubilation that Selden was in prison and suggested how he might make full use of his time : “Congratulations, Dave. Have fun. Be Happy, Dave. To help pass the time you might initiate a by mail chess game with that other votary of the public weal, Jimmy Hoffa!”⁵³ At the end of the 1960s—a time of increasing pessimism about the ability of social protest movements to create a more democratic society—Selden’s act of civil disobedience was here lumped in with the fraud and bribery convictions of the imprisoned Teamsters President.

By the beginning of the 1970s, inflation had begun to corrode the buying power of Americans’ wages, urban riots and social protests abounded, and, by the middle of the decade, one of the seemingly ultimate bastions of stability—the school system— appeared to be under assault from both federal attempts to enforce racial integration and striking teachers. Some of those disenchanted by these developments organized, it is true, finding political outlets in such disparate places as the anti-busing Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR) or the Wallace campaign. The defaced advertisements sent to Selden in April 1970 provide a snapshot of an

additional way in which these people were taking action. The ways in which they re-appropriated and refigured the meaning of Selden's imprisonment indicate not only a declining faith in the ability of the liberal state to guarantee economic and social order, but also that these actors believed they needed to interact with the media in order to shape the explanation for the nation's turmoil.

If, as postmodern scholars have argued, the postwar period (and especially the 1970s) brought the collapse of the "meta-narratives" driving the worldviews of "modern" peoples, then it stands to reason that that the archetypal "modern" purveyor of information—the newspaper—would lose its monopoly as the arbiter of what momentous events meant. Jean-Francois Lyotard describes postmodern communication as a series of "language games" in which interlocutors engage in discrete contests to push ideas in new directions.⁵⁴ The act of re-figuring the meaning of the Selden ad was an acknowledgement by the defacers of the importance of the media, in controlling the parameters of the "language games" that showed other Americans what such crises "meant."

"Tough shit Dave."⁵⁵ An anonymous message scrawled on the AFT ad and returned to Selden signified that the sender, in spite of the informal way s/he addressed him, had little sympathy for the union president's incarceration. But beyond the simple message, this anonymous defacer also summed up the direction of the country. The social and economic turmoil of the 1970s were only just beginning; the real "tough shit" would be ever more painful growth of "stagflation", international oil crisis, declining competitiveness of American industry, and revelations of the Nixon Administration's scandalous behavior. But perhaps an equally important meaning of the phrase was that "tough shit" would increasingly be the cynical political

response to social and economic problems—i.e., that the state had few responsibilities to protect citizens from the vagaries of the “market”—when the smoke had cleared at the end of the decade. When President Ronald Reagan remarked in his 1981 inauguration address that government was not the solution to various crises but itself the problem, he was not introducing an idea from on high but instead mobilizing an already emergent discourse. Economic deregulations had already begun in the Carter Administration, and successful assaults on workers’ rights had also begun in earnest before Reagan’s actions against the PATCO workers in 1981. The 1970s ushered in a time in which the response of many politicians—on the right and the left—to the problems of struggling individuals could be summed up as “tough shit.”⁵⁶

In 1970, most Americans did not believe that labor unions were illegitimate or that some mythological version of the “free market” could serve as a panacea for the nation’s economic and social ills. While there is some evidence of the former in the letters to Selden, there is virtually no evidence of the latter. The discursive work necessary for these two interrelated developments happened over the course of the decade. What emerges so clearly in the letters to Selden is that a media saturated with images of striking teachers further catalyzed an already profound sense of crisis. When we consider how big political ideas are imbued with legitimacy, we know that this is not inevitable and does not simply happen overnight. Americans did not immediately throw up their hands and embrace a neoliberal agenda when New Deal guarantees of rights for workers in labor unions and other market interventions appeared to be failing to maintain prosperity and staunch social conflict; one can, in fact, imagine a different outcome—one in which a *more* expansive state (represented by a more powerful version of the Humphrey-Hawkins Act [1978]) or a galvanized labor movement squarely took on the economic difficulties of the 1970s.

Furthermore, the critique of free-market conservatives did not come from nowhere; they had, after all, been pushing back against the New Deal since its inception. In spite of some big victories like the Taft-Hartley Act, however, it was not until the 1970s that conservatives could discredit many of the fundamental assumptions of New Deal policy. As these letters sent to the Essex County Penitentiary indicate, the crisis of divisive teacher strikes represented an important site in which individual actors reassessed their cultural and political assumptions. In this newly opened space, free-market conservatives would later find fertile ground.

The author wishes to thank Julie Greene, Saverio Giovacchini, Robyn Muncy, David Freund, and Stephen Duncan for helpful insights and offer special acknowledgments to Dan Golodner at the Walter Reuther Archives for pointing me to these materials as well as the anonymous reviewer at the *Journal of Social History* whose comments made this a much better piece.

¹ Most of these were then under appeal; eventually the appealed sentences would be reduced, but many still served sentences. More than 100 teachers served 10-day prison sentences over their holiday break in December 1971, for example. Selden was only the third President of a national union during the era of modern labor relations—along with Eugene Debs of the National Railway Union and Mike Quill of the Transportation Workers Union—to be imprisoned for violating an anti-strike injunction.

² See Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton, 1990); Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, 2007); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2002); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York, 2009); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, 2009); Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York, 2009); and Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2007); and Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer (eds.), *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, 2008).

³ David Selden, *The Teacher Rebellion* (Washington, DC, 1985), 4.

⁴ The Newark strikes are covered in ample detail by historian Steven Golin in *The Newark Teacher Strikes: Hopes on the Line* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2002). Among several examples of monographs just on Ocean-Hill Brownsville, see Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven, 2004) and Jane Anna Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict Over Community Control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, 1967-1971* (London, 2001).

⁵ Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York*, 4-5. Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes*. Komozi Woodard, *Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

Press, 1999). Woodard points out that while African-Americans made up just 17% of the city's population in 1950, by 1970, the city was 54% black.

⁶ "Today, Dave Selden spends his 39th day behind bars," advertisement by American Federation of Teachers, Apr. 19, 1970, *New York Times*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David Witwer, "The Heyday of the Labor Beat," *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 10 (2013), 9-29. Reportage in this latter tradition can be found in the perspective of those who closely covered the Newark strike. Though most of his analysis during the 1970 strike focused as much on the harm done to the city's schoolchildren by the strike rather as on the "excesses" of the teachers, Robert Braun—the Newark *Star-Ledger's* primary reporter on the strike—would just a year later publish a scathing exposé on the AFT largely based on the actions of unionized teachers in the 1970 Newark strike. See *Teachers and Power: The Story of the American Federation of Teachers* (New York, 1972).

⁹ James Squires, *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers* (New York, 1994).

¹⁰ Teacher unions in nations such as The Netherlands, Paraguay, Peru, Argentina, Panama, and Bolivia wrote letters of support for Selden and the striking Newark teachers. Organizations include, for instance, Confederación Argentina de Maestros y Profesores, Sindicato Nacional de Profesores de Educación Primaria del Peru, Federación Nacional de Maestros Urbanos de Bolivia, and Federación de Educadores del Paraguay. See Office of the President Collection—AFT Collection, Office of the President's Records, Walter Reuther Archive, Wayne State University, Box 12.

¹¹ Letter from Arnold Durfa, Apr. 21, 1970; Letter from Nichols Junior High School teachers, Mar. 25, 1970; Letter from Laura Pass, Apr. 10, 1970. Ibid.

¹² Letter from R.E. Moore, Apr. 23, 1970; letter from Paula Mather, undated; letter from [name unreadable] Apr. 19, 1970. Ibid.

¹³ Check sent from James Arbuckle, Apr. 18, 1970; Check sent from Dave Becker, Apr. 19, 1970; unsigned, undated defacing of AFT advertisements; unsigned, undated letter; letter from Al Eischen, Apr. 20, 1970. Ibid.

¹⁴ Letter from M. Emery, undated; Letter from Martin Arbagi, Apr. 17, 1970; Letter from Linda [last name illegible], Apr. 17, 1970. Ibid.

¹⁵ Letter from Fred Knolldoff, Apr. 20, 1970; letter from Edward Withing, Apr. 15, 1970; letter from Arthur Young, undated; undated, unsigned defacing of *Chicago Tribune* advertisement, Apr. 20, 1970. Ibid.

¹⁶ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York, 2008), 746-47. On Nixon's role, Perlstein asserts that "...this man Nixon was able to be so stubbornly successful in answering Americans' yearning for *quiet*; but that, even in a complex admixture, Nixon also rose by stoking and exploiting anger and resentment, rooted in the anger and resentments at the center of his character."

¹⁷ Unemployment increased a full percentage point from 1969 to 1970, while the inflation rate jumped from 4.4% at the beginning of 1969 to over 6% by April 1970.

¹⁸ Kenneth Wong, *Funding Public Schools: Politics and Policies* (Lawrence, 1999), 7.

¹⁹ Letter from David Perry, Apr. 15, 1970, AFTC, Box 12.

²⁰ See Roosevelt's address to the Federation of Federal Employees in August 1937: "Since their own services have to do with the functioning of government, a strike of public employees manifests nothing less than an intent on their part to prevent or obstruct the operations of government until their demands are satisfied. Such action, looking toward the paralysis of the government by those who have concern to support it, is unthinkable and intolerable."

²¹ See Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980*. (Ithaca, NY, 1990); Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes*; and Dennis Gaffney, *Teachers United: The Rise of New York State United Teachers* (Albany, NY, 2007).

²² By the end of the 1970s, as Marjorie Murphy has pointed out, "72 percent of all public school teachers were members of some form of union that represented them at the bargaining table. Before 1961, unions in less than a dozen school districts could claim they represented only a small fraction of schoolteachers." *Blackboard Unions*, 209.

²³ Letter from Ralph Curcio, Apr. 15, 1970, AFTC, WRA, Box 12.

²⁴ Letter from Leon Hartman, Apr. 15, 1970. Ibid.

²⁵ Unsigned, undated defacing of AFT advertisement in *Chicago Tribune*. Ibid. The advertisement is from Apr. 17, 1970.

²⁶ Unsigned, undated postcard, postmarked Apr. 17, 1970; unsigned defaced advertisement from *New York Times*, Apr. 18, 1970; unsigned, undated letter, postmarked from San Diego, CA, Apr. 18, 1970; letter from "A Minnesota Mother," Apr. 18, 1970. Ibid.

²⁷ Undated letter; unsigned letter, Apr. 20, 1970. Ibid.

²⁸ Letter from I. Goldberg, Apr. 20, 1970; letter from Morton Goldman, Apr. 19, 1970; letter from John Amber, Apr. 17, 1970. Ibid.

²⁹ Alice O'Connor, "Financing the Counter-revolution," in Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer, *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, 2008), 148-168.

³⁰ Letter from Ann Gettmann, Apr. 17, 1970, AFTC, Box 12.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Though imperfect, public opinion polls powerfully evidence this trend. According to a Gallup poll in 1953, 75% of Americans approved of labor unions, while only 18% disapproved. In 1965, 71% of respondents answered in the affirmative while only 19% answered in the negative. By 1973, these numbers had shifted drastically, to 59% and 26% respectively. See Seymour Martin Lipset, "Labor Unions in the Public Mind," in Lipset (ed.) *Unions in Transition: Entering the Second Century* (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1986), 301. The poll was developed by asking a random sample to respond to the question, "In general, do you approve or disapprove of labor unions?"

³⁴ Moody, Kim. *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*. London: Verso Press, 1988.

³⁵ Letter from Barbara Mancbach, Apr. 14, 1970, AFTC, Box 12.

³⁶ William Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School Movement to No Child Left Behind* (Baltimore, 2005), 3.

³⁷ Wallace's attempts to profit politically from highly racially sensitive issues like school busing have been well documented, but Rizzo's political career is equally instructive. Rizzo, as Philadelphia's police chief, made his name through violent suppression of black power protests in the City of Brotherly Love, most notably against black high school students demanding changes to the public school system in 1967. Rizzo eventually won the Philadelphia mayoral election in 1971, serving two terms. Further, "law and order" was a key component of Richard Nixon's 1968 bid for the Presidency, and implicit in his famous reference to the "Great Silent Majority" in his November 1969 speech was that support for the Vietnam War lay with the bulk of those law-abiding citizens who disapproved of the student movement's protest tactics. See Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge, 1995) and Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 2006).

³⁸ Defaced ad from *New York Times*, April 19, 1970, AFTC, Box 12.

³⁹ Unsigned defaced advertisement from *New York Times*, Apr. 18, 1970. Ibid.

⁴⁰ Letter from Joseph Hobaica, Apr. 20, 1970. Ibid.

⁴¹ Defaced advertisement of *Chicago Tribune*, Apr. 17, 1970; letter from I.E. Davis, Apr. 20, 1970. Ibid.

⁴² Unsigned, defaced ad from *New York Times*, Apr. 19, 1970; letter from Edward Withing, Apr. 15, 1970; letter from Jack Sherman, Apr. 20, 1970. Ibid.

⁴³ Letter from Eileen Schroeder, Apr. 22, 1970. Ibid.

⁴⁴ Unsigned, undated letter. Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Rise of the New American Right* (Princeton, 2002); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2007); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*.

⁴⁶ Michael Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York, 1975). See Chapter 3 on the United States, written exclusively by Huntington, especially pp. 85-86, in which he points out that in 1950 80% of Americans voted cast straight party ballots while in 1970 only 50% did so.

⁴⁷ Unsigned defacement of *Chicago Tribune* ad, Apr. 14, 1970, AFTC, Box 12.

⁴⁸ Unsigned defacing of *New York Times* advertisement, Apr. 19, 1970. Ibid.

⁴⁹ Defaced ad from *New York Times*, April 19, 1970. Ibid.

⁵⁰ Defaced *New York Times* ad, Apr. 19, 1970. Ibid.

⁵¹ Defaced *Chicago Tribune* ad, Apr. 16, 1970. Ibid. This person actually signed his/her name, but it is unfortunately illegible.

⁵² Defaced *Chicago Tribune* ad, Apr. 14, 1970; defaced, undated *Chicago Tribune* ad (the ad was clipped by the defacer, so I cannot ascertain the date). Ibid.

⁵³ Defaced *New York Times* ad, Apr. 18, 1970. Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, 1984), xxiv, 14.

⁵⁵ Defacing of *New York Times*, Apr. 19, 1970, AFTC, Box 12.

⁵⁶ Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Boston, 2001) ; Joseph McCartin, “‘Fire the Hell Out of Them’: Sanitation Workers’ Struggles and the Normalization of the Striker Replacement Strategy in in the 1970s,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 2 (2005), 67-92.