

ing “exceptional historians” whose collaboration with empire was both unchallenged and unacknowledged.

This would have been a worse blow to any surviving exceptionalists at the conference had not Michael Zuckerman already convicted them of the graver crime of woolly-mindedness. “American exceptionalism,” declared Zuckerman, flirting dangerously with self-fulfilling prophecy, “is a subject that reduces smart people to prattle.” Yet Zuckerman went on to disprove his own hypothesis with a shrewd review of the “mortification” of recent literature on the topic in his paper and a suggestive presentation of the debate over exceptionalism as a largely symbolic struggle, where the real stakes—America’s imperial project—were obscured in rhetorical smoke.

The centerpiece of the conference was the Commonwealth Fund Lecture, delivered this year by Ira Katznelson, entitled “Rhythms of History: Periodicization and American Exceptionalism.” Katznelson’s paper, a thorough trawl through the political theory surrounding the concept of exceptionalism, focused in particular on the works of Thomas Cochran and Louis Hartz. Katznelson attempted to refurbish Hartz by supplying a context which he clearly believes that Hartz is lacking, but he took pains to emphasize also that without the kind of “supple attention to liberalism’s grammar” that could be provided neither by Hartz nor students of political realignment theory, there could be no meaningful periodization of American history. In the end, Katznelson joined most delegates in foreseeing “a decisive farewell to American exceptionalism.”

Viewing the conference as a whole, however, it seems clear that any “farewell” to exceptionalism was certainly less than decisive, and the issue will live to be debated another day. Many of the conference papers will be available in a forthcoming publication edited by conference organizers Rick Halpern and Jonathan Morris.

## 1994 Social Science History Association

*Kim Geiger and Andrew Grossman*

New School for Social Research

*Roger Horowitz*

Hagley Museum and Library

The 1994 Social Science History Conference in Atlanta once again offered a number of panels crossing disciplinary boundaries between history and the social sciences. This year’s conference showcased some of the innovative work on the American military that combines the political scientist’s traditional preoccupation with “guns and bombs” with the social history of

the soldier and soldiers as workers. Filling a yawning gap in the historiography, U.S. military history is seen not only as about change in strategy and tactics but also as a story about how the military reproduced class (and race) relations within its branches. "Integrating Labor History with the New Military History" was one such panel. William Skelton (University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point) creatively used desertion records and court-martial proceedings as the basis of his essay, "Soldiers as Workers: The Old Army Experience, 1820–1860." In a period when combat consisted of widely scattered skirmishes with Indian tribes, the life of the soldier (likely to be an Irish immigrant) was a dreary one of hard labor in isolated locations, performed under harsh discipline, sparking many cases of individual resistance and an occasional organized protest. "The Soldiers' Demobilization Protest Movement in 1946 and the U.S. Labor Movement" by Steven Ashby (Columbia College) discussed how unionists, and organizations created by unions for veterans, were an influential force in the widespread protests that shook the American military in 1946. Ashby's paper not only highlighted the importance of what political scientists call "political learning" for the short-lived demobilization protest, but perhaps more importantly he illustrated the fact that G.I. behavior was not as complacent or as "forgiving" as the Office of War Information and popular wartime films have suggested. A third paper, David Mindell's (M.I.T.) "The Clangor of the Blacksmith Fray: The USS Monitor and the Birth of the War Machine," seemed out of place in that it drifted away from the subject of the rationalization of slaughter to a more traditional account of the Civil War battle of the "ironclads."

On another panel on "Workers, Veterans, and Unions" the paper by Robert Jefferson (Wayne State), "Marching to the Beat of a Different Drummer: Labor, Culture, and Power in the U.S. 93rd Infantry Division During the Second World War," showed how black soldiers employed culture and their power over work to shape their military experience. The barracks and the daily tasks of soldiering became levers of resistance for aggrieved black GIs and focal points for the development of racial militancy. Other papers looked closely at how labor organizations and activists interacted with working-class soldiers and veterans. Thomas Moore (Wayne State), in "Seniority or Superseniority? The UAW and the Battle over the Interpretation of the Selective Service Act," examined the complex legal and political struggle over the reemployment rights of veterans. He showed how labor unions sought to win the support of returning soldiers by supporting their right to return to their old jobs, while at the same time preserving seniority and other contractual gains achieved during the war years. Frank Koscielski (Wayne State), in "The AFL–CIO and the Vietnam War," looked closely at the process through which labor unions began to change their views on Vietnam.

Turning from military history, a humorous, wide-ranging, and thought-provoking panel on "The Great (Unwritten) Books in Labor His-

tory” drew a large audience. The five panelists were charged to come up with ideal books that should be written, if there were world enough and time, to round out labor history’s topical foci.

One of James Barrett’s (University of Illinois, Urbana—Champaign) books would be called “Labor and Love” and would explore whether identity and love and family relations have been different for workers. Workers’ religious beliefs and practices also need study. Why people go to church is at least as important to understand as why they go on strike, Barrett contended. Another study might be on *strikebreakers*. How were they recruited? What percentage of them were really African Americans or immigrants? Why did they cross picket lines?

Gregory Kealey (Memorial University of Newfoundland) wondered why labor history is seemingly in constant crisis and why labor historians are engaged in endless epistemological debates. Why can different approaches not be complementary? New documentary evidence available in places like Eastern Europe offers rich opportunities for reevaluation of standard interpretations. There should be more synthetic comparisons of national labor experiences. One unwritten book is about socialist paths not taken by the labor movement in the nineteenth century. Neville Kirk (Manchester Metropolitan University) also wanted to see more collaborative projects making comparisons that go beyond compilations of differences among countries. Ideal books would pay attention to economics as well.

Robin Kelley (University of Michigan) contended that a “great book” would speak to problems that underlie *this* moment in history. A panoramic picture of labor today would include things like home work, global processes of proletarianization, and work in the underground economy. Kelley had several other books on his if-only-I-had-time list, including one on “wiggling,” doing creative things on the bosses’ time, with a full-color spread of the products of “goofing off.” Another book would be about child labor, the actual work experiences of children, the process of identity formation, and the development of class consciousness. A third would be called “Chocolate Cities” and would tackle the working-class history of urban crisis, the decline of the working class in urban areas where workers move from skilled to unskilled to no work.

Ileen DeVault (Cornell) called for a multicultural history of the making of working-class consciousness. Although it would be a big project, some of the groundwork has already been laid. A labor history of everyday life would also make a good book. How did union organizing activities, for instance, affect family roles and work? A third book, called “Dance Halls and Cheap Motels: The Personal Politics of America’s Labor Leaders,” would look at what effect men’s personal lives had on their political positions and organizing strategies. After all, women organizers’ personal lives are studied all the time.