



Shared Strategies of Labor and Civil Rights

Militancy of American Workers and the Fight for Civil Rights

Roadmap

- Brief History
 - The Long Civil Rights Movement prior to 1900
 - Labor Movement prior to 1900
- Militant Strategies of Labor
 - Strategies
 - Labor Militancy
- Intersectionality of Labor and Civil Rights
 - Winston-Salem
- Adoption of Militant Confrontation by Civil Rights

History - Origins of the Movements

Labor

- *Pre-1840s – Organizing into Unions and Conspiracy.*
- *1842 - Commonwealth v. Hunt*
 - *First recognition people can organize into groups as workers.*
- *Erdman Act – 1898 – federal law regulating railroad labor disputes.*
 - *Short lived and was struck down in Adair v. US in 1908*

Civil Rights

- 1619 - The First enslaved Africans are brought to Jamestown.
- 1863 – Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and freed the slaves in the rebelling states
- 1865-1870 – Congress passed and ratified the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments.
 - Slavery ends, African Americans are granted citizenship, and the right to vote was guaranteed to citizens of the US, regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

History - The Boots on the Movement

Labor

- New York Draft Riot
 - Partially motivated by fears of Irish workers who were led to believe they would lose their jobs to freed African Americans.
- 1877 Railroad Strike in Midwest.
 - Last of federal troops from the reconstruction South.
- Lochner Era
 - Freedom to Contract
 - Major setback for labor movement.

Civil Rights

- 1874 - Liberty Place
 - Members of the White League in Louisiana overthrow the elected Republican government.
- 1877 – Reconstruction Ends
- 1896 - *Plessy v. Ferguson*
 - Upheld Constitutionality of racial segregation.
- 1898 – Wilmington Riot
 - A fusion government in North Carolina between Populists and Republicans is overthrown by white supremacists.

History - 1900s and New Deal Era

Labor

- 1903 - Department of Labor is Created
- Colorado Coalfield
- Blair Mountain
- Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) splits from AFL
- 1935 - National Labor Relations Act
- 1937 - End of Lochner Era
 - *West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish*
- 1938 - Fair Labor Standards Act

Civil Rights

- 1905 – Niagara Movement
- 1909 – NAACP is Founded
- 1930s – Anti-lynching campaign
- 1930s – African Americans trend toward the Democrat Party and New Deal Coalition.
- 1940 – NAACP created its legal defense fund, led by Thurgood Marshall
- 1947 - *Shelly v. Kraemer*

Strategies of the Labor Movement

- *Organizing*

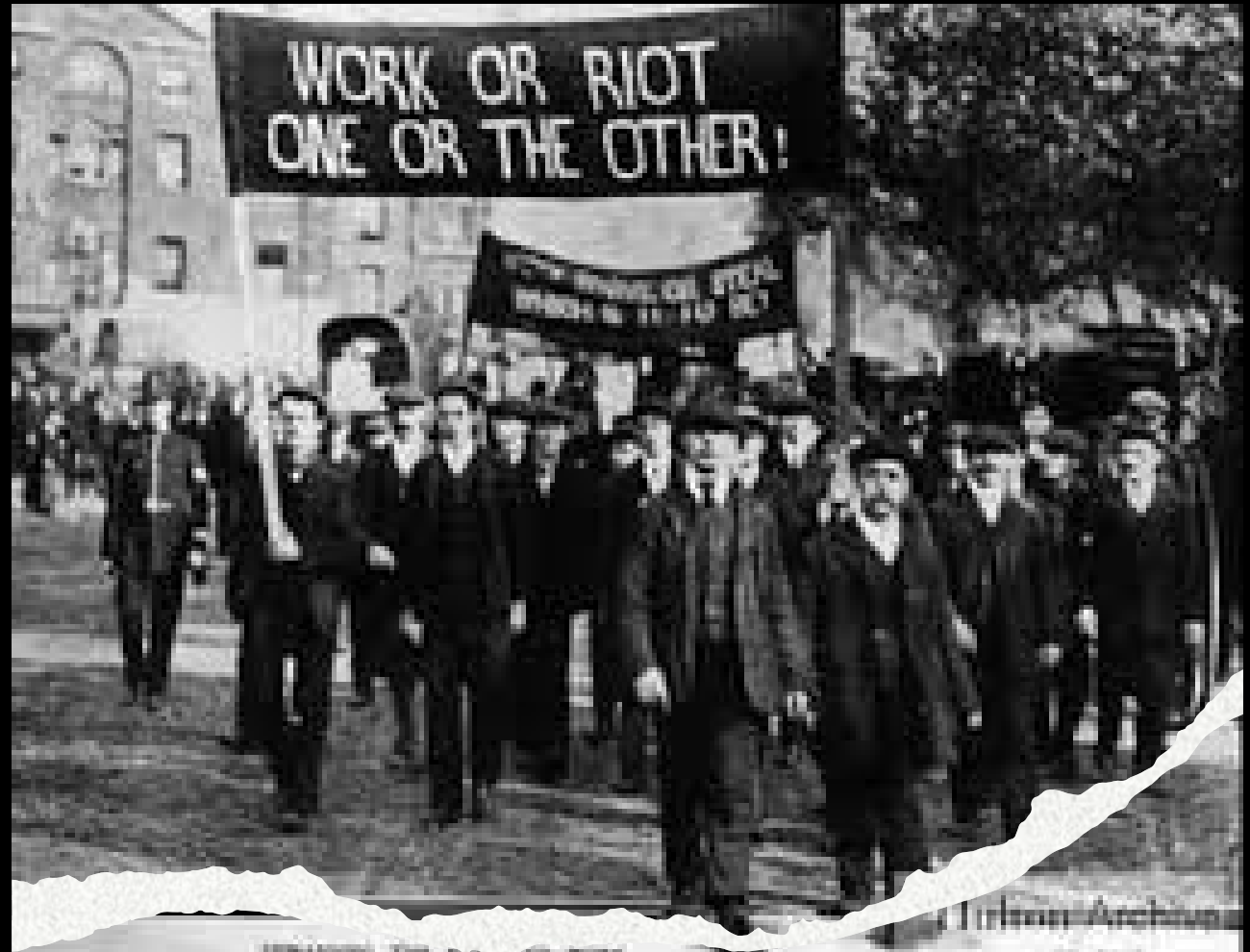
- *Organizing workers into unions*

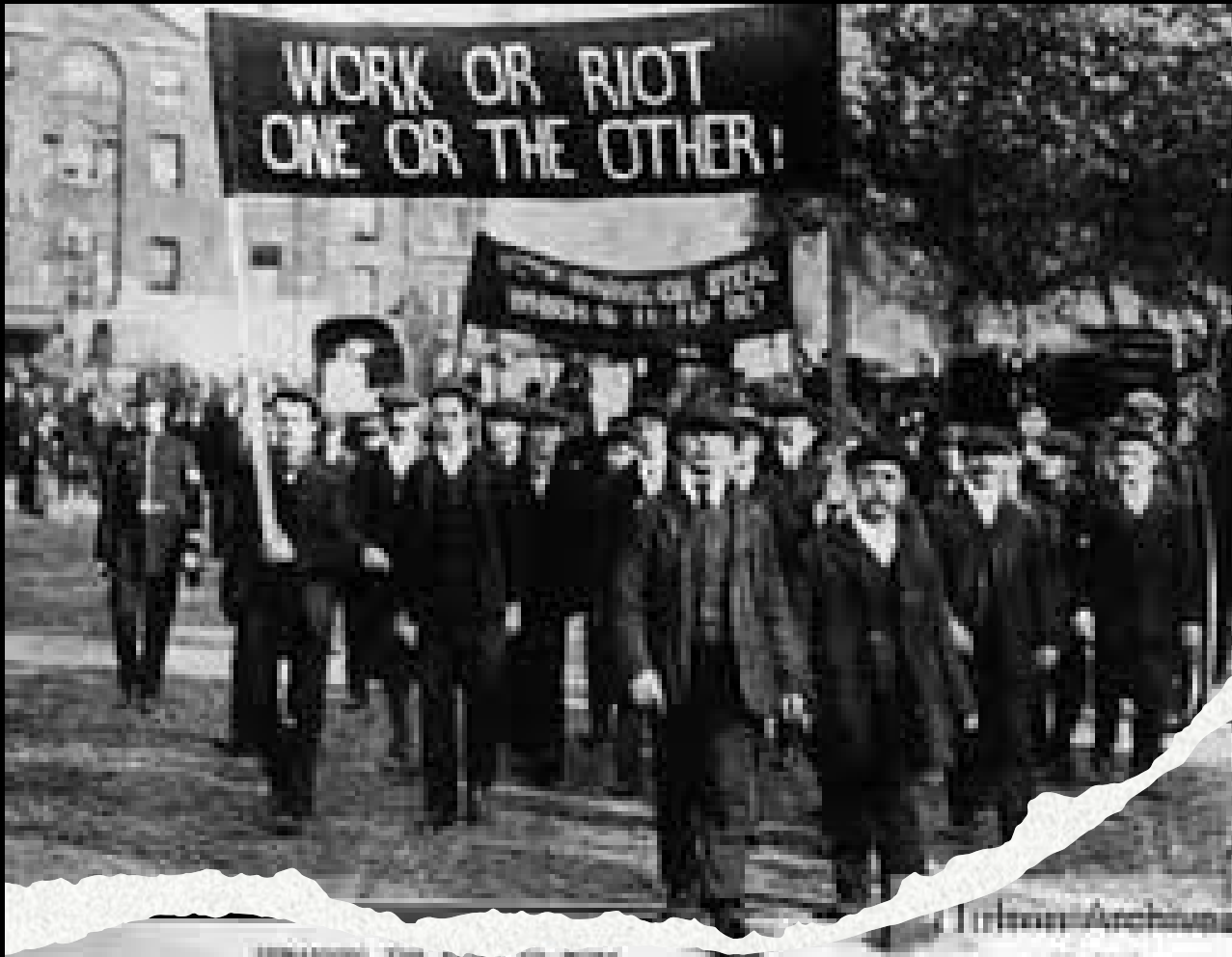
- *Strikes*

- *Organized labor strikes or picketing.*

- *Legal*

- *Court cases and Law*
 - *Not inherently militant*



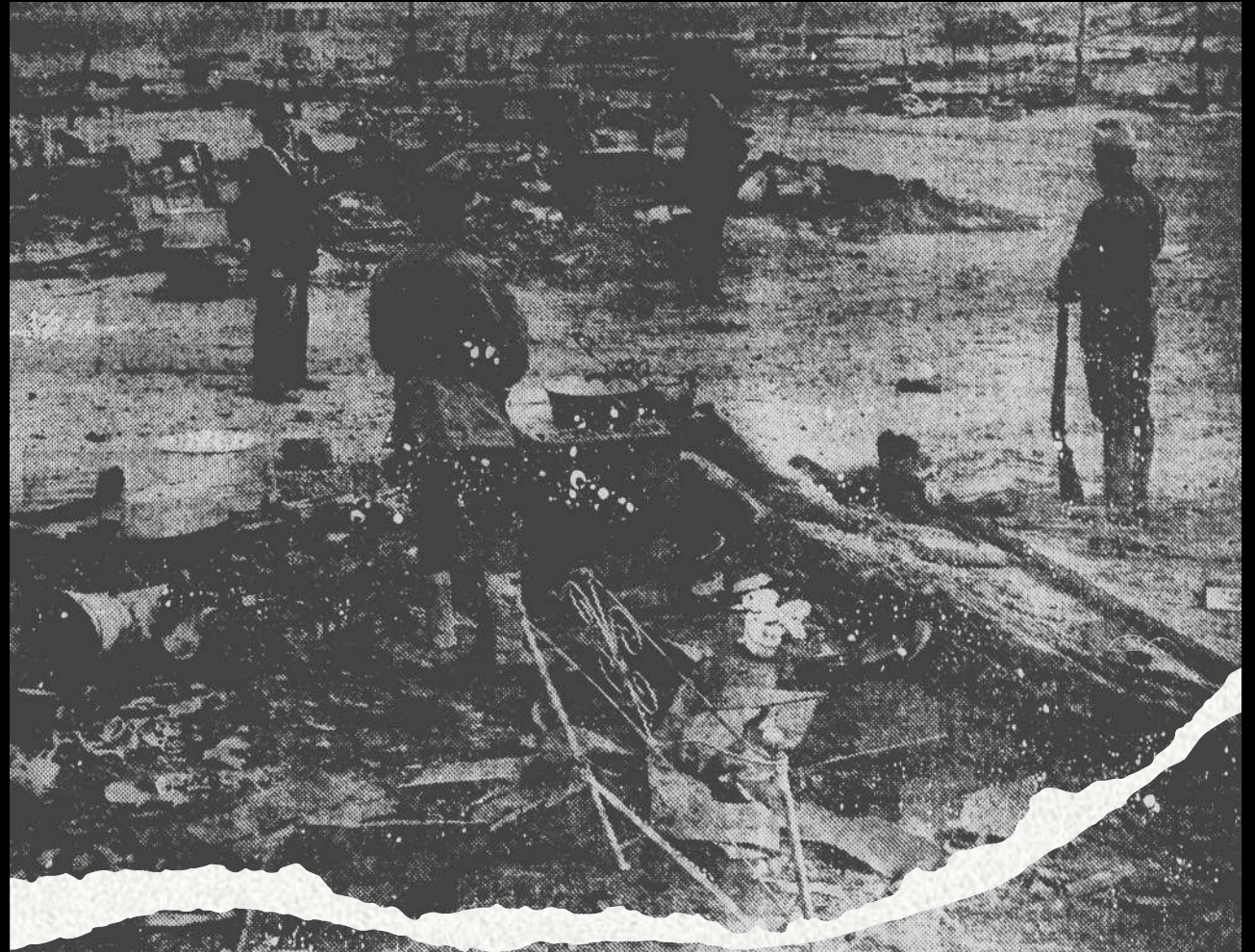


Militant Actions of the Labor Movement

- **1900 – 1930 was the militant era of the labor movement**
 - November 1909 Switchmen Strike
 - St. Paul and Minneapolis
 - Paint Creek-Cabin Strike (1912)
 - Colorado Coalfield Strike/War (1913)
 - 1919 Seattle General Strike
 - Blair Mountain (1921)

Militant Strategies - Colorado

- On September 23rd, 1913, 9,000 coal miners in Colorado go on strike.
- Martial Law declared in October.
- Governor Ammon permits mine operators to bring in strikebreakers.
 - Includes the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency
- April 20th, Ludlow Massacre
- April 28, 1914 – President Wilson sends federal troops to Colorado.



Militant Strategies –Blair Mountain

- During World War I, West Virginia miners received raises and steady employment.
 - Short lived due to a recession.
- United Mine Workers union went on strike in 1919.
- Members of the Baldwin Felts agency got into a gun fight with pro-union sheriff. (*Matewan massacre*)
 - “Detectives” falsely claimed to have warrants for the arrest of Police Chief Sid Hatfield.
 - Resulted in several dead and the local mayor mortally wounded.



Militant Strategies – West Virginia

- In May of 1921, a coal miner strike turned violent in Mingo County West Virginia.
 - After the murder of pro-union sheriff Hatfield
- UMW union plans to march from Mingo County to Logan County
- August 20 1921 – Sheriff of Logan denounces the “mob”
- August 29 – President Harding demands the mob disperses and threatens to send federal troops.
- September 1 – President Harding orders airplanes to drop bombs on the striking miners.



Militant Strategies – West Virginia

- By September 4th, fighting was ended with the arrival of federal troops
- Hundreds of miners were charged with insurrection and treason and the legal fees bankrupted the UMW union.
- Many aligned with the Caol Company, including the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, were not prosecuted.
 - Includes Matewan Massacre
 - Assassination of Police Chief Hatfield and his deputy.



Intersectionality of Movements

Winston-Salem, North Carolina



Intersectionality Winston-Salem

- The organization of labor in the stemmeries and chewing tobacco division changed little since antebellum period.
- Whites held the majority of high paying machine-tending jobs
- Black workers made up the majority of the 3,500 workers at the stemmeries in 1943.



Intersectionality Winston-Salem

- In the casing and drying department in the cigarette division
 - Hot conditions for hours a day
 - Sexual misconduct from managers against female workers.
 - Worked like dogs
- American Federation of Labor failed to unionize Reynolds Tobacco twice.



Intersectionality Winston-Salem

- What changed in 1943?
- The Congress of Industrial Organizations would successfully organize Tobacco workers.
 - Championed black dignity and self-organization
- The tipping point was on June 17th, 1943, when Tobacco workers, led by black women, went on strike.



Intersectionality Winston-Salem

- The local branch of the NAACP was not active in attacking racial discrimination.
 - Only 100 members in 1942
- NAACP membership exploded to 1,991 by 1946.
 - Most new members were tobacco workers of the Local 22 union.
- While local 22 would not survive accusations of communist influences, Reynolds would continue to abide by what the union won.
- Wage standards, benefits, better working conditions, etc.



Adoption of Strategies

•Organizing

- Increased voter registration through the CIO and the NAACP
- Many black workers did end up joining the NAACP.
- While organized under unions, African American workers learned how to better organize and confront challenges set in front of organizations like the NAACP.



Adoption of Strategies

•Strikes

- The Civil Rights militancy was partially influenced by Labor Movement
- In Winston-Salem NAACP took a more active approach following 1945 and the influx of Tobacco workers
- Local 22 union inaugurated citizenship classes, political rallies, and citywide mass meetings.
 - Such open actions ensured a ten times increase in registered African American voters by 1946.



Adoption of Strategies

- **Legal**

- The legal strategies of the civil rights movement do not appear to have been influenced at all by the strategies of labor.
- Labor was attempting to overcome differing legal issues
 - EX – Labor overcoming the liberty to contract to





Conclusion

- The Civil Rights movement appears to have been somewhat influenced by the strategies of the labor movement.
- Similar to the Civil Rights movement today, the labor movement is on going.

A group of construction workers, mostly men, are gathered outdoors. They are wearing high-visibility yellow safety vests over various work clothes. Some are wearing hard hats. Several workers are holding up blue rectangular signs with white text. The signs have two checkboxes, each with a checkmark, followed by the text 'REJECT THE CONTRACT' and 'YES TO STRIKE'. The workers appear to be in a protest or strike. The background shows some greenery and a building.

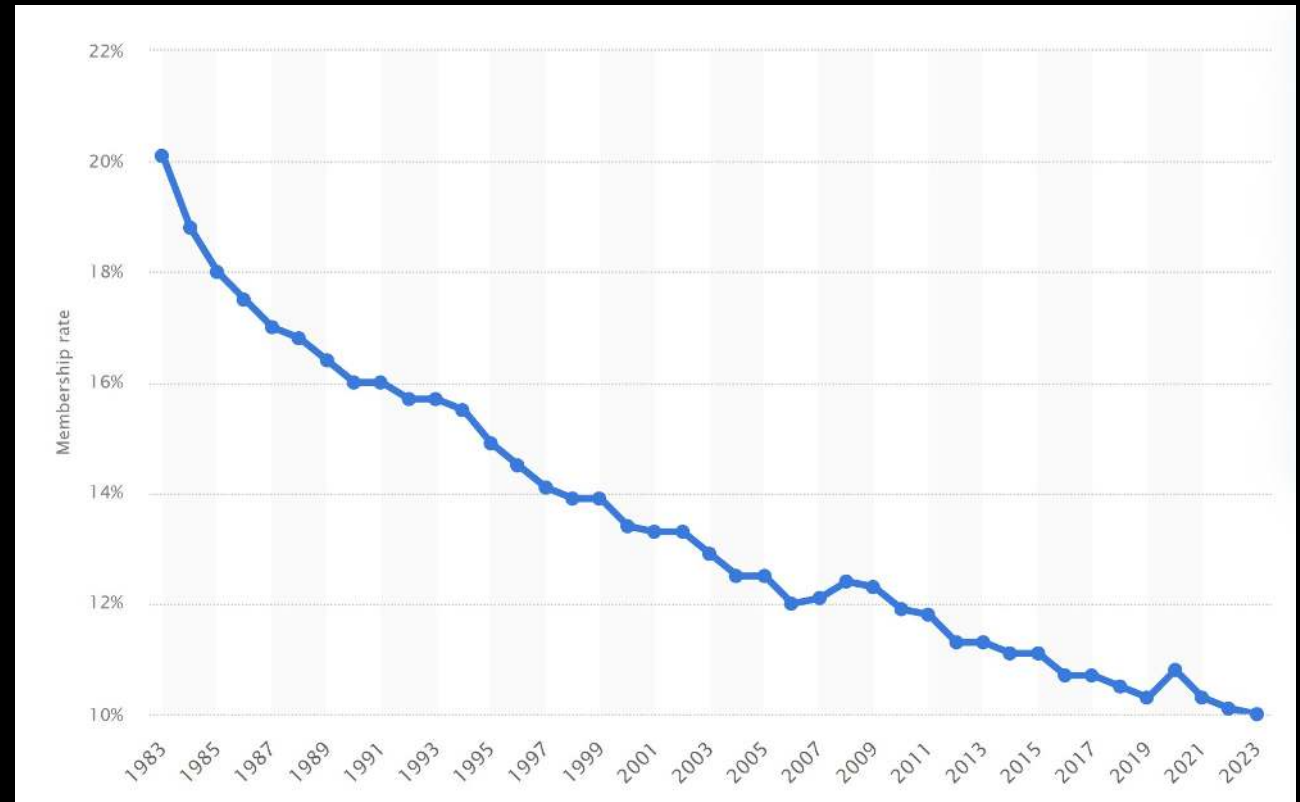
The Present

Regression of Labor

Regression of the Labor Movement

Since 1950, the labor movement has suffered major blows.

- 1981 – President Ronald Reagan fires air traffic controllers on strike.
- 1980-1984 – American union membership dropped by 2.7 million members.
 - Questions of union dues
 - Skepticism of unions
- The rate of union membership of employees dropped 10% between 1983 and 2023.
 - Historic low in 2023, the most up to date rate.



Continuing Civil Rights

• While de jure segregation and discrimination is no longer the standard, there are still examples of de facto inequalities.

- Legacy of redlining
- Early 2020s – BLM Protests
 - Police brutality

