

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

To the Editors:

I write regarding the article in *International Labor and Working-Class History* 76 (Fall 2009), “Marking Labor History on the National Landscape,” by James Green and Elizabeth Jameson, about Labor and Working-Class History Association’s (LAWCHA) involvement in restoration of the desecrated Ludlow monument. I want to make clear (as the article does not) how news of the desecration came to historians’ attention in the first place. It did not just fly by itself onto H-Labor. Outraged action from outside H-Labor got it there. For the record, here is what I know, in detail only enough to make the point that remembering and understanding do not come naturally, that even historians will let live pain from the past go by as if it were somebody else’s concern—unless somebody else shakes them awake to the pain and its claim on them as historians.

The desecration at Ludlow happened on May 7-8, 2003. Despite the Colorado United Mine Workers and other unions publicizing the outrage, four weeks passed without a single historian hearing the news and taking it seriously enough to act on it. On June 4, 2003, Sidney Goldfarb, a writer and an old friend of mine who lives outside Denver, told me (in considerable agitation) that he had been reading about the outrage in *The Denver Post* and asked why nobody but Colorado unions seemed to care about it. We agreed that we had to raise holy hell about what had happened. It did not occur to us to appeal to historians, who rarely raise any hell except among themselves. We thought instead of going straight to presumably sympathetic politicians: Fred Harris, then in New Mexico, not far from Ludlow, or George McGovern, who (as Green and Jameson note in their article) had written his dissertation on the strike and massacre. I e-mailed an old friend in Norman, Oklahoma, Frank Parman, a writer with academic, personal, and political connections across the West, asking him how to find Harris. The next day he e-mailed me where to look for Harris (in Albuquerque) and also suggested that Nigel Sellars, author of *Oil, Wheat and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905–1930*, would surely help. Parman himself e-mailed Sellars, who replied that he would post the news on H-Labor and Portside, and asked for more details. That day I called the United Steel Workers’ local president in Pueblo, Colorado, the USW local closest to Ludlow, and he told me more about what had happened, his suspicions of who the perpetrators were, and his wonder that nobody outside Colorado seemed to care about the desecration, or even know about it. I also e-mailed UMW headquarters in Washington, D.C., asking what outsiders like us could do to help publicize the

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outrage and restore the monument. Friday morning, June 6, Parman e-mailed me Sellars's message, and I immediately e-mailed him (Sellars) all my information so far, including the UMW headquarters' word on how to donate for restoration, and asked him to post the message on H-Labor and Portside (which in my electronic ignorance I did not then know how to do). From the apparent nationality or ethnicity of the names on the monument, I further suggested to Sellars that we press the Greek, Italian, and Mexican embassies and consuls in the United States to condemn the desecration; maybe that would get national media's attention. Meanwhile, since we were now dealing with historians, I found James Green's email address and copied my message to Sellars to Green and Howard Zinn. On Saturday afternoon, June 7, Green e-mailed me back, very disturbed (as he wrote) at the "horrible news," hoping to talk by phone with me as soon as possible and to reach the UMW International President Cecil Roberts, to see how we could help. On Sunday, after Green and I missed each other in telephone tag, I e-mailed him various questions about who could best help us publicize the outrage and support the unions in their response to it. And that afternoon Sellars sent his posts to H-Labor and Portside, mainly quoting the reports I had sent him, and urging others on those lists to spread the word "widely and quickly." Monday afternoon, June 8, H-Labor made the post. (I do not know if Portside ever made it.) And on Monday, at James Green's suggestion, I e-mailed Julie Greene, at the University of Colorado, Boulder, who then began to work on the story.

The article by Green and Jameson has the rest—the historians' story of how on H-Labor many historians then expressed their shock, disgust, and sorrow at the desecration and their moral and material support for the UMW's plans to restore the monument, and how LAWCHA did its good work over the next few years to make Ludlow a National Historic Landmark.

But the back part of the story, the pre-historians' story, is nevertheless interesting, because it suggests something missing in the connection between historians and "the public." For my part alone, between June 4 and August 13, 2003, I sent a total of forty-eight e-mails about the desecration, including some to national media, to try to publicize the disgrace and raise support for restoring the monument; never mind the phone calls. Counting the UMW's efforts, the USW's, H-Labor's, and LAWCHA's just in those months, I would guess there were thousands of e-mails circulating, spreading the word and calling for the public's attention. Still, besides Denver, despite all these efforts and no doubt many others, I believe no major US or Canadian media, outside of those in Denver, ever reported the outrage. Beyond Denver I know of only one article on it in a major metropolitan newspaper, an excellent article by Raul Trejo Delarbre (on leads I gave him), in *La Cronica*, Mexico City, on Sunday, June 29, 2003: <http://www.cronica.com.mx/nota.php?idc+72266>.

Most significant is that if not for Sidney Goldfarb and Frank Parman, it might well have taken months or years (maybe forever) for professional historians to learn of the desecration and join the UMW's admirable restoration of the monument. Neither Goldfarb nor Parman is a professional historian, much less

a “public historian,” and neither knows the other. But they care intensely about the truth of the past, especially labor’s past. They both knew Trinidad and Ludlow, had traveled there and seen the old memorial. They too deserve their names in a public record of the restoration, for first making the violation of that sacred place known to historians, in the faith historians could make the public understand what the pain there in 1914 meant, may still mean, and why we should never let it go.

Saludos Fraternos,
John Womack, Jr.
Harvard University

James Green responds:

To the Editors:

All those who helped to restore the Ludlow memorial and who labored to make it a national landmark are indebted to the diligent work John Womack performed—work he fully describes in his letter. I knew some of this story from talking to him after the crime was committed, but I didn’t know the extent of his efforts, which readers of your journal can now appreciate. Our article emphasized the landmarking process and therefore neglected to record the work he and others did to raise awareness and promote action. Now the record is more complete.

James Green, coauthor
University of Massachusetts–Boston

Elizabeth Jameson responds:

To the Editors:

I want to add my thanks to John Womack and all the others who brought the desecration of the monument to wider attention. Ludlow became a site of public memory long before its National Historical Landmark designation through the efforts of the United Mine Workers of America, the countless people who visited there, and historians like George McGovern, whose dissertation remains an indispensable history of the strike. When I spoke at the ceremony at Ludlow on June 28, 2009, I began by thanking those who made the history at Ludlow and those who kept the memory alive. John Womack is one of those and deserves our thanks.

Elizabeth Jameson, coauthor
University of Calgary