

of each month, as well as by appointment. The site is easily accessible and ample parking is provided. The museum website presents a comprehensive synopsis of the history of the boys' case, museum information for visitors and educators, and recent publicity.

Asked whether she fears confrontations today in response to the Scottsboro museum, Washington stresses the significance of this history and adds, "I can't be afraid." Discussions about the erection of a historical marker three blocks from the museum began in 2004. The threats from extremist groups during the public celebration served as reminders that some locals would rather see the history of the Scottsboro Boys buried forever. But others in the community support the commemoration. One student project in the museum's entryway features a twelve-year-old St. Louis student's 80th anniversary, prize-winning poster about the Scottsboro Boys. Some of the town's residents may prefer to see this past buried, but a younger generation across the nation refuses to put it to rest.

Susan Eckelmann Berghel, University of Tennessee Chattanooga

The Sweat of Their Face: Portraying American Workers. Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC. Dorothy Moss, Curator, and David C. Ward, Historian Emeritus. November 3, 2017–September 3, 2018.

In a July 2018 interview with Michelle Miller on CBS *Sunday Morning*, Dorothy Moss, one of the curators of *The Sweat of Their Face: Portraying American Workers*, explained that American portraiture has traditionally been "about the elite, where the wealthy subject was able to hire an artist" to create an image of the patron, commonly presented as larger than life.⁸ *The Sweat of Their Face* offers a counterpoint to the images of the rich and exceptional who stare down at the viewer from the rest of the National Portrait Gallery. The eighty artworks presented range from John Neagle's towering 1828 portrait of Philadelphia blacksmith Pat Lyon, which dominates the main entrance of the exhibition, to the late-twentieth-century photographs of Danny Lyon and Richard Avedon, which populate the conclusion. In doing so, the curators aim to "put faces to the economic history of the United States, serving as documents about the working world and assertions of presence and even resistance."⁹

The beautiful catalog accompanying the exhibition offers up three illuminating essays by Moss and co-curator David C. Ward as well as one by art historian

8 "An exhibition of workers at the National Portrait Gallery," CBS *Sunday Morning* (Columbia Broadcasting System, originally aired July 29, 2018), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/an-exhibition-of-workers-at-the-national-portrait-gallery-the-sweat-of-their-faces/>.

9 David C. Ward and Dorothy Moss, *The Sweat of Their Faces: Portraying American Workers* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2017), 32.

John Fagg. The essays situate the works on display within the history of American portrait painting. Fagg's essay in particular lays out the challenges of fitting these images of American workers within the definition of portraiture. "As [conventional portraiture] was an opportunity afforded to the few," Fagg wrote, "a survey of the portrayal of American workers must make use of many other modes of picture making."¹⁰ As a result, the curators selected not just workers depicted in oil portraits but also images of labor in magazine illustrations by Winslow Homer and J. C. Leyendecke and WWII propaganda posters distributed by the Office of War Information. They also incorporated documentary photographs by Lewis Hine and Dorothea Lange, often taken for government agencies such as the Depression-era Farm Security Administration. Other material included sculptures by twentieth-century artists John Ahearn and Josh Klein and a video installation by Janet Biggs. The artwork in the exhibition included items drawn from both the permanent collection as well as those loaned by other repositories.

The chronological organization of the exhibit allows viewers to see how representations of workers and their workplaces have changed over two centuries. One of the most striking patterns evident is how portrayals of workers shift from images of men and women firmly in control of their labor in the nineteenth century to images in which workers are dwarfed or absorbed by their work and finally to images where workers are dismembered by their workplaces. This narrative can be traced from the 1829 image of Pat Lyon standing at his forge in full command of his tools and environment to Lewis Hine's famous photographs of child laborers and construction workers who stand before machines and atop buildings that are titanic in scale. By the end of the twentieth century, the viewer is left with the heartbreaking portrayal of the precarious lives and labor of the modern service sector workforce in Josh Kline's 2015 sculpture *Nine to Five*, which presents the dismembered body of a janitor neatly arrayed on his cleaning cart.

The curators' choice to include artwork diverse in terms of both content and form offers a welcome antidote to those invocations of the mythical "white working class" that dominates today's political discourse. From New Deal Era WPA posters to President Richard Nixon's hippie-punching hardhats, the image of a burly white man in overalls with a lunch bucket has frequently stood in for every mainstream representation of workers in American political discourse. The curators included plenty of images of white workers here, but *The Sweat of Their Face* also includes African American iron miners ("Iron Miner, Bessemer, Alabama" by Peter Sekaer), Chinese storekeepers ("Charlie Mah-Gow, First Restaurant Owner in Town, Yellowknife, Canada" by Gordon Parks), and Latino almond workers ("Almond Poling Crew During Harvest Near Lost Hills, CA. September 16,

¹⁰ John Fagg, "Unit and Gross: Picturing Individual Workers and Collective Labor," in Ward and Moss, *The Sweat of Their Faces*, 39.



John Neagle, Pat Lyon at the Forge (1828). In this image, Lyon stands as a master of his trade in full command of both his tools and workshop. The blacksmith's possession of valuable and difficult to learn skills gave him control over the conditions of his labor that later generations of industrial workers would struggle to achieve. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

2009” by Sam Comen). The exhibition also includes representations of women’s domestic labor, both paid and enslaved. As a whole, this exhibition encompasses the multiracial and multiethnic composition of the American workforce, historically and today. As such, it provides the artistic representations of diverse American workers and puts them in conversation with iconic images of white men in hard-hats used as stand-ins for all American workers.

What is missing are any images of the sorts of unpaid labor that existed outside of the bounds of wage labor or chattel slavery that historically (and invisibly) has been performed by mothers, wives, and daughters within the bounds of the home. The labor relationship between husband and wife is completely absent from the exhibit. There are also almost no representations of intellectual or artistic labor—with the one exception of Francis Hyman Criss who painted himself into his 1935 painting, *Alma Sewing*. Yet as curator Dorothy Moss persuasively points out in her catalog essay, the exhibition itself is a large-scale portrayal



Lewis Hine, Power House Mechanic Working on Steam Pump (1920). This famous photograph displays a young mechanic wrestling with machinery that dwarfs the worker. It offers a good example of how work has changed since Neagle painted Pat Lyon in his workshop. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

of intellectual and artistic labor. These are not just images about workers; they are also images created by workers.¹¹

Despite the diversity of workers on display, there is no bona fide working class represented on the walls of the National Portrait Gallery. By way of explanation, curator Dorothy Moss stated in her CBS interview that “This [exhibition] is not a history of the American labor movement. This is [sic] portrayals of everyday workers . . . the real people.” This deliberate exclusion presents us with an oddly harmonious image of American labor history. The exhibition displays a visual history of work that is dignified and noble (though sometimes degraded—still honorable), but one that seems to show workers who never struggled for control of their workplaces, never rioted, and never struck for higher wages and improved

¹¹ Dorothy Moss, “The Worker in the Art Museum,” in Ward and Moss, *The Sweat of Their Faces*, 49–61.

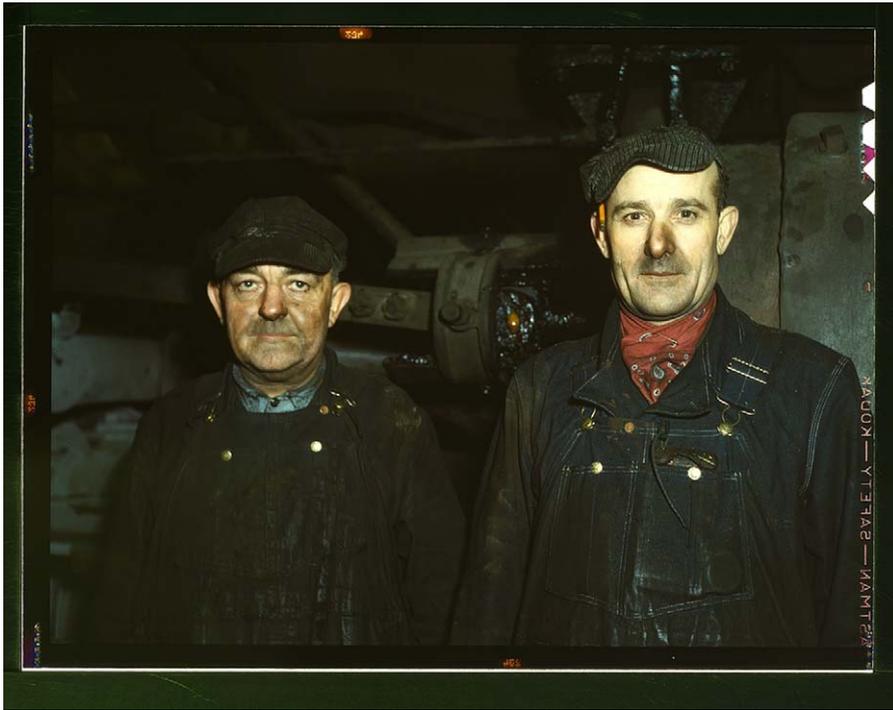


Gordon Parks, Washington DC Government Charwoman (1942.) Images of women's paid domestic labor feature prominently throughout the exhibit. However, images of the unpaid (and often invisible) labor commonly performed by wives, mothers and daughters within the bounds of the home are largely absent. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

working conditions. By excluding images of unrest, the exhibition gives no real sense that workplaces were sites of protracted conflict—and sometimes open warfare—between and among workers, owners, and managers for control over the workplace.

Equally problematic is the absence of any evidence of the pitched and often racialized contest between workers that has punctuated American labor history. Midway through the exhibit hangs Andrew J. Russell's well-known 1869 photograph portraying the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad at Promontory Point, Utah. As described in the exhibition catalog, "posed before Union Pacific Engine 119 . . . and Central Pacific Engine Jupiter . . . workers and luminaries celebrate the meeting of the two trains, some tipping their hats in respect, one raising a bottle."¹² At once a celebration of a technological achievement that

¹² Ward and Moss, *The Sweat of Their Faces*, 90.



Jack Delano, *Workers at the Roundhouse of the C&NW RR Proviso Yard, Chicago, Ill.* (1942). Many of the images of workers in *The Sweat of Their Face* were created by workers themselves. Jack Delano took this photograph while employed by the Office of War Information during World War Two. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

reduced the time it took to travel from New York City to San Francisco from months to days, the photo is also propaganda for a vision of progress in which workers and capitalists healed the nation's wounds after the divisions of the Civil War. And, in that harmony, everyone would supposedly prosper. This vision, however, ignores the thousands of Chinese laborers who physically built that railroad and who have literally been pushed out of the frame by the assembled "luminaries" and their official photographer. In the two decades after Russel took his photograph, the prosperity and virtue of white American workers grew increasingly defined against the alleged degradation of Chinese life and labor. A common racist accusation aimed at typically unmarried Chinese immigrant workers was that, without the moral grounding of being husbands and fathers, they wasted their earnings in opium dens. Furthermore, without families to provide for, these immigrant workers were paid less and depressed the wages of all workers. By contrast, native born white men, by virtue of their position as breadwinners, demanded higher wages in order to sustain their families.¹³ These

¹³ Roseanne Currarino, "Meat vs. Rice': The Ideal of Manly Labor and Anti-Chinese Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century America," *Men and Masculinities* 9, no. 4 (2007): 476-90.



Andrew J. Russell, *Joining of the Rails at Promontory Point* (1869). The completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869 was at once a celebration of national reunification after the Civil War as well as of harmony between capitalists and workers. However, the terms of that celebration are premised on the rigorous exclusion of the thousands of Chinese workers who also toiled to build the railroad—none of whom appear in this famous photo. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

tensions ultimately culminated in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which outlawed Chinese labor immigration, driven in part by this resentment of white workers against immigrant labor. Given how central this story is to the history of work and workers in the American West, the omission of the Chinese railroad workers' story from the exhibit reproduces the racism of the photographer and the luminaries who sponsored him.¹⁴

This absence of class conflict might be a consequence of the decision of the curators to orient the exhibition inwards towards the rest of the collections in the museum, and thereby favor images of dignity over those of conflict. As such, it successfully challenges the underrepresentation of workers throughout the

¹⁴ See for example, the visual resources available through the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America Project at Stanford University: <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/researchmaterials/photographs/page/3/>. See review in *The Public Historian* 40, n. 4 (November 2018): 194–95.

museum by including portraits that embody stories far from those of the great men and women who populate the walls of the National Portrait Gallery. The exhibition fails to do justice, though, to the ways in which labor is embedded within a deeply contested set of social and economic relationships. Without this, the full history of the “real people” remains unfinished.

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