The Women's March: Miners, Family, and Community in Pittsburg, Kansas, 1921–1922

by Ann Schofield

Upon opening their morning newspapers on December 12, 1921, Kansans were shocked to learn that an “army of Amazons”—two to three thousand wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, and sweethearts of radical striking miners—had invaded the southeastern Kansas coal fields. Citizens were shocked, perhaps, but not surprised, since the southeastern corner of Kansas had long been known as the “Little Balkans,” an ethnic, socialist enclave set in the midst of a conservative agricultural state. Kansans were accustomed to turmoil in the Balkans, but the large-scale involvement of women set this demonstration apart from the labor unrest that often disturbed the area. Their participation also linked the Kansas march to a time-honored tradition of women who marched bearing banners of religion or reform or shouting demands for bread. Despite the ubiquity of these incidents, however, historians have only recently begun to analyze the collective behavior of women.

Social historians, perpetually eclectic in their methodologies, have taken a lead from anthropologists in seeking clues in collective behavior about the political awareness, class consciousness, community activism, and potential feminism of working-class women as reflected in such disparate events as kashet meat boycotts, bread riots, and mining strikes.1

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Miners' wives reflect the stereotype of working-class wives who neither work for wages nor participate in production and thus have little sympathy for strikes or labor activity which might threaten their meager family incomes. Ignorant of the male-dominated world of work, they act as a conservative force in any given labor dispute. In mining towns their role evokes figures wrapped in shawls standing at the mine entrances following an accident. They wait for history to act upon them.  

While the bleak image of the mining community is an accurate one, the recent work of historians such as Joan Scott, Louise Tilly, and Meredith Tax has done much to modify the simplistic conception of the working-class wife. We now know that while industrialism created an almost impassable void between the spheres of women and men in the middle-class family, the divisions between work and home were far more permeable for the working class. Indeed, the economic demands of working-class households continued across time and necessitated the ongoing contributions of all members. The family wage economy, as characterized by Scott and Tilly, included women as well as children who worked in factories, did seasonal work, and took in boarders or laundry to sustain the household. Working-class women directly involved in the economic welfare of the family obviously perceived class and politics differently from middle-class housewives who enjoyed more leisurely lives.  

The miners' wives seem to fall outside the distinctive working-class family pattern analyzed by Scott and Tilly, since a limited occupational structure and the physical isolation of the mining areas offered little opportunity for women to engage in wage labor of any kind. In the mining camps surrounding Pittsburgh, Kansas, for example, census records reflect an overwhelming majority of nuclear-family households, few boarders, and a minuscule number of working wives. But in more than one instance, women of American mining communities became public activists by marching to support striking male family members. In Maryland in 1894, on the Mesabi Iron Range in 1916, and in Colorado in 1927, as well as in Kansas in 1921, women expressed community solidarity in addition to the domestic concerns of consumers. These marches indicate the potential commonalities in the relationship of women to the productive process, the impact of the household on the world of work, and the values and political consciousness within the community.

Similarly, the actions of Kansas women seem prompted by several interrelated factors. First, there was the nature of the mining community itself. Small, isolated, and highly homogeneous, it formed an unusually cohesive social unit in twentieth-century America. In many respects, its cohesion resembled that of the preindustrial village more than that of the modern town. The community was also characterized by the active participation of all members in a distinctive work culture. For men, this work culture consisted of obvious elements: a dangerous occupation in an underground work environment, coupled with the power to effect an immediate work stoppage; a shared heritage of myths, songs, and superstitions; and a focal institution, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Women's involvement in this culture was less clear, but nonetheless important. The stark figures of women at the mine entrances conveyed the immediacy of numerous mine accidents for miners' families, accentuated in an age which had few benefits for survivors. On a daily basis, miners' wives were responsible for having food, clean clothing, and hot baths ready for their husbands when they returned weary and encrusted with filth from the mines. Wives shopped in company stores, lived in company houses, and participated in the few social events that were sponsored by the union. Thus, although there was a strict sexual division of labor in the mining towns, the work culture of the mines permeated the community and involved both men and women.

Towns with populations ranging from one hundred to one thousand made up the coal mining area of southeastern Kansas. Centered primarily in Crawford and Cherokee counties, the region consisted of...
A deep shaft coal mine at Pittsburg around the turn of the century.

some twenty small mining camps located from two to fifteen miles from the city of Pittsburg. Strip coal mining began in Crawford County in 1850, and the first shaft mine was sunk in 1874. By 1898 fifty-three deep pit mines were operating in Crawford County, the leading coal producing area of the state. Production of coal increased in the county from 221,741 tons in 1885 to 4,508,747 tons in 1920, the year in which production began to decline. The market for Kansas coal included both domestic and railroad use and was dominated by seven to ten large companies.3

As Kansas coal mines expanded in the late nineteenth century, the demand for labor intensified. Between 1877 and 1879, Welsh coal miners migrated from the coal fields of Pennsylvania to Kansas. Following that date until 1898, the need for workers was so great that coal companies sent agents to Illinois and Pennsylvania coal fields as well as to the port of New York to recruit miners. Agents met immigrants at the pier and promised them transportation to the Kansas coal fields if they had been miners in Europe. Miners also came to Kansas from Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) during labor disputes in that area from 1882 to 1895. Once immigrants established themselves in Kansas, they soon sent for family, friends, and countrymen to join them. By the turn of the century, southeastern Kansas was a polyglot area peopled by Italians, Germans, French, Belgians, and a variety of ethnic groups from the British Isles and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Male immigrants worked almost exclusively in the mines, while female immigrants rarely worked for wages (those who had had some form of employment in the Old Country were almost all Italian women who had worked on their fathers' farms). In 1908, 98.4 percent of all foreign-born women were found at home, as compared to 82.5 percent of American-born women.7


7. William Powell, “The Historical Geography of the Impact of Coal Mining Upon the Cherokee-Crawford Coal Field of Southeastern Kansas” (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1979).

5. Mary Heaton Vorse, “Ma and Mr. Davis,” Survey 49 (December 15, 1922):539-60.
This situation had changed little by 1925. The contrast between the ethnic population of the mining camps and the surrounding environment caused one observer to note in 1911, "At no place west of the Mississippi is there a similar large group of industrial immigrants living in the very midst of a flourishing rural community."  

Unlike eastern urban areas, though, work rather than ethnicity determined community in southeastern Kansas. With the exception of the Italians, immigrants did not cluster together into residential patterns, and they formed fewer distinctively ethnic organizations. The Catholic church, for example, did not send priests to minister to one particular ethnic group, and it encouraged the foreign-born to Americanize as quickly as possible. Immigrants frequently married across ethnic lines, and a large number of ethnic men married American-born women.  

Certain groups can be identified with particular trends, however. Ethnicity showed some correlation with household size, at least in 1908. The U.S. Immigration Commission found that although the average household size was 4.92 people for a foreign-born family, it was 5.79 for the Irish and 5.10 for the Slovaks. The Irish and the Slovaks also were less likely to keep boarders. The Welsh and the Irish had the highest proportion of children employed in the mines: the Italians tended to own their own homes, rather than rent. The union, the mine, and the company, though, shaped the community, particularly by the early twentieth century, to a far greater extent than did church or ethnic traditions.  

The coal companies and the mines themselves dominated life in the mining camps. Coal companies built these camps—Franklin, Arma, Mulberry, Camp 50, Chicopee, and a host of others—to house workers as close as possible to the shaft mines. As one geographer explained this pattern of settlement, "There is thus created near the openings of the mines a sort of artificial city, with houses exactly alike which are the 'result' and the necessary 'sign' of the work under-

10. Ibid.  
ground.\textsuperscript{12} Many of these houses, or more appropriately shacks, were owned by the mining companies,\textsuperscript{13} as were the company stores where miners and their wives bought groceries in exchange for scrip. Some camps boasted churches, schools, and dance halls, while others were simply dreary rows of three-room shacks. There was a higher incidence of smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, typhoid, malarial fever, pneumonia, and other respiratory illnesses in the camps than in the surrounding area. Nutritional standards also were lower; stews and soups rather than meat provided the main protein source for families' diets. In a poignant testament to this fact, a Dunkirk schoolchild once began an essay on cows with the sentence: “The meat of a cow is called soup-bone.”\textsuperscript{14} Thus, despite their proximity to a substantially sized city like Pittsburgh, peoples’ lives in these communities were circumscribed by a uniform poverty and insecurity.

The mine dictated the rhythms of life not only for the miners but for the entire community. Kansas was no exception to the universal statement that mining is a high-risk occupation. In 1920, for example, there were 21 fatal and 1,011 non-fatal accidents in Crawford County mines. The 7,502 men who were employed in the mines worked an average of 181 days for an average wage of three dollars a day. Therefore, they were idle one-third of the year.\textsuperscript{15} When asked by a reporter how miners amused themselves when out of work, one miner testified to the economic and psychic instability of the miner’s family with his tacturn reply: “What do we do with ourselves when we are out of work? . . . Why sit around or start a fight. There is nothing else to do.”\textsuperscript{16}

Families dealt with this insecurity in a number of different ways. They frequently planted large vegetable gardens and preserved or canned the produce, which they stored in cellars behind their shacks. Italians were especially noted for growing herbs, fig trees, and grapes for wine.\textsuperscript{17} Mining families also kept hogs and chickens for their own use. Both the sameness of their existence and the shared insecurity drew the people of the camps into tight community networks. Unions, work, and sports bound men together, and women were connected by trading products of home manufacture and through the midwives’ visits from house to house. A woman may have worked before marriage as a “hired girl,” but the occupational structure of the camps and the traditional domestic obligations precluded wage work for women. When one miner’s widow was asked if she had worked outside the home to help make ends meet, she answered incoherently, “of course not, no one did—who would take care of the children?”\textsuperscript{18}

The politics of southeastern Kansas were painted with broad, red strokes. Girard, the county seat of Crawford County, a familiar name to students of American socialism, was the site of a press which published a number of socialist periodicals including the national socialist weekly, the Appeal to Reason. Eugene Debs lived in Girard for a number of years and Kate Richards O’Hare, Mother Jones, and other socialist luminaries frequently visited and lectured in the area.\textsuperscript{19} “Mother” especially was well known to the members and leaders of UMWA District 14. The Socialist party had an active following and many camps had several elected Socialist officials; Arma, for example, had all Socialist officials in 1911, and Dunkirk had an entire Socialist school board in that same year.\textsuperscript{20} The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) added to the radical activity in southeastern Kansas, although it organized primarily in the oil fields of Butler County and among migratory wheat harvest workers.\textsuperscript{21} By 1920, activities of the Kansas Communist party attracted the attention of the state attorney general’s office to Kansas’ “red sector.”\textsuperscript{22}

The Republican citizens of Crawford County were clearly distressed by this radical and foreign element in their midst. Their fear of the “enemy within” was heightened by the area’s involvement in the bitter 1919-20 coal strike, as well as by the postwar “Red scare.” Before the 1919 strike ended, mine operators used the National Guard and college boys as strikebreakers. The strike engendered such anti-

14. Ibid.
16. Wood-Simons, “Mining Coal and Maiming Men.”
17. Powell, “Historical Geography of the Impact of Coal Mining,” 299. Those without a cellar stored vegetables under the house and piled straw or dirt over them.
lating the industrial court act, convicted, and sentenced to six months in prison. On the day in September that he began serving his sentence, the miners of District 14 walked off their jobs in protest. John L. Lewis, the international president of the UMWA, condemned this action as a violation of contract and ordered the miners back to work. He suspended the district and installed a provisional president for the region, Van A. Bittner. The miners stayed out on strike without benefits from the national union. Miners’ locals in Illinois, in a show of solidarity, hastened to aid the Kansas strikers and sent money as well as beans, flour, bacon, and coffee to help Kansas mining families. By mid-November, however, some miners began going back to work, and the mines were soon operating at about one-half of their capacity. The stage was then set for the women’s march. Sixty years later, Anna Okorn shook her head when she recalled women’s responses to the strikebreakers. “People were starving,” she said. “And Mr. Howat was in jail and the women felt it wasn’t fair.”

On Sunday, December 11, five hundred women from the various mining camps that surrounded Pittsburg crowded into a church hall at Franklin. They issued a statement in the name of “the wives of the loyal union men of Kansas” in which they condemned both the “Alien Industrial Slavery Law” and the international union. Proudly they proclaimed “it is our duty to stand shoulder to shoulder with our husbands in this struggle.” Finally, they defined their struggle as “the fight for our democracy that we were [sic] to receive after the World War.” Their words echoed feelings of solidarity with male members of the mining community and rhetorically linked the miners’ struggle to American democratic ideals. In so doing, the women identified with ideals of justice and democracy which they felt should have been defended by the international union and, in a larger sense, by the American government. Undoubtedly, they considered their cause one of conserving values, rather than one of revolt.

At 4:00 A.M. the following morning, between two and three thousand women assembled at Franklin and began marching to the mines. During the next three days, militant crowds of singing, shouting women marched from mine to mine, frequently sepa-

23. Mary Heaton Vorse described Howat as an idol to Kansas miners under whose leadership “people stopped being afraid.” Vorse, “Ma and Mr. Davis,” Two labor historians, however, characterize Howat as a “rambunctious, argumentative, and tempestuous” man whose ambitions included the presidency of the UMWA. Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, John L. Lewis: A Biography (New York: Quadrangle New York Times Books, 1977), 32.

24. The Kansas Court of Industrial Relations was created by a special session of the Kansas legislature on January 23, 1920, as a tribunal for the administration of industrial justice. A highly controversial court, it was abolished in March of 1922 and was replaced by the Public Service Commission. John Hugh Bowers, The Kansas Court of Industrial Relations (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1922); Kansas Laws, Special Session, 1920, Ch. 29 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1920), 86; Kansas Laws, 1925, Ch. 259 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1925), 335-36.

25. The identity of the working miners is difficult to determine. Oral and impressionistic evidence leads me to believe that they were not “scabs” imported from other regions but rather came from other camps in the same coal field. One miner’s widow remembered her camp as being “solidly” on strike, but a high school teacher recalled the children of working and striking miners fighting at school. Also, enmity between striking and working miners continued after the strike.
rating into smaller columns. They talked to and reasoned with workers and sometimes, when reason failed, resorted to more violent injunctions. Their mission was to stop the work that was breaking the strike. Despite the straightforward nature of the event, contemporary accounts constructed the narrative of the march in strikingly different ways, reflecting the political tensions between labor and capital. On the one hand, the New York Times, the Topeka State Journal, and the Pittsburgh Daily Headlight, all "establishment" papers, stressed that the march was a male-directed "army of Amazons" (no notice given to the contradiction) which consisted of foreigners acting as a violent mob. On the other hand, the Workers Chronicle, Il Lavoratore Italiano, and the socialist Appeal to Reason emphasized the spontaneous, moral, and peaceful nature of the demonstration.

The Topeka State Journal evoked a military tone as it described the first day of the march:

Headed by the girl's band of Arma, playing martial music, "General" Annie Stovich, the Joan Arc [sic] of the "Amazon army" led her invading hosts, already weary and footsore, into the enemy country, this afternoon.26

The article went on to describe the "pent-up fury of the women" and claimed that "men viewed the situation with alarm, for it was believed that even bayonets will not deter the strong, highly temperamental foreign women . . . ." The New York Times explicitly characterized the marchers as both foreign and unwomanly. In an editorial entitled "Extending the Sphere of Women," it condemned the Amazon warriors from the "Red sector" of Kansas, for "what they did was less a demonstration of courage than a willingness to capitalize and exploit the weakness that is ascribed to them."27

The question of violence during the march sharply divided contemporary journalists—were the women acting out of an appropriate family ethic or brazenly displaying unfeminine qualities? The socialist Appeal to Reason asserted:

The whole episode of the marching women was remarkably peaceful . . . conducted with . . . admirable restraint. The demonstration throughout was more moral than physical in its nature. The wives of the strikers wished to shame the men who had returned to work—to enforce upon their consciousness the fact that they had deserted their comrades in a righteous struggle.28

The New York Times, however, described a different scene when women arrived at one of the mines on December 13:

The workers' dinner buckets were taken and a bombardment of bread, butter, bacon, jelly, eggs and other food was begun. The buckets, as fast as they were emptied were smashed by the rioters. Coffee compartments were opened and the working miners as well as the Sheriff were showered with the drink intended for their lunch. Only two or three of the men resisted the women.\textsuperscript{30}

Stories of violence continued after the march. Richard J. Hopkins, the attorney general of Kansas, complained of the difficulty of finding prosecution witnesses. One potential witness was driving to one of the mines to work. "He was stopped and badly beaten by several of the women and refused to file a complaint although he knew and recognized more than one of his assailants."\textsuperscript{31} The fear of community sanctions seems to have superseeded legal or police pressure. In another explicitly identified incident, Mrs. Nick Bossetti and Mrs. Walter Carbaugh were arrested following the march and accused of assaulting Walter Madden at Central Mine 49. They supposedly dragged him out of the mine office, beating him and tearing his clothing.\textsuperscript{31}

As with the issue of violence, contemporaries were divided on the leadership and the initiation of the women's march. Officials tried to make a case that a few militant elements coerced many women into participating in the march, thus downplaying the significance of the size and the duration of the three-day disturbance. To this end they found several women, including one schoolteacher from Ringo, who repudiated their participation in the march and identified the speakers at the December 11 organizational meeting as Mary Skubitz, a socialist activist, a Mrs. Wilson, and a Dr. P. L. Howe.\textsuperscript{32}

Another effort to discredit the march, at least as an autonomous activity of working-class women, was made by the New York Times, which claimed that "the Howat forces sent their women into the fight..." And journalist Henry J. Haskell wrote in Outlook that "radical Howat followers undertook a policy of terrorism. Women were incited to lead mobs and threaten miners who stood by the International organization."\textsuperscript{33} In a similar vein, Van Bittner, the provisional president of District 14, counseled cowardly men who sent their mothers, wives, and sisters out to riot.

In contrast to this stream of condemnation, the Appeal to Reason stated that the idea of marching was entirely spontaneous with the women. None of the Howat leaders advised this tactic, and Howat from his jail cell, expressed his regret that the violence had occurred.\textsuperscript{34} Another labor paper, the Workers' Chronicle, noted that men were barred from the organizational meeting Sunday night.\textsuperscript{35} Finally, Fannie Wimler, an active participant in the march, responded to Bittner's charges in a letter to the Pittsburg Daily Headlight:

Husbands, sons, and brothers aren't cowards and haven't anything to do with our affairs. We are doing this on our own accord, and what we mean is business. If you don't think we're responsible, we'll just have to put the responsibility on you, for you are the one who is driving us to this. We don't want any blood shed here in Kansas like there was in the Ludlow strike, and in Alabama and Mingo County, W. Va. What we want is our industrial freedom and liberty and we want our men to be good, true, loyal union men and 100 percent American citizens, not like you and your dirty bunch of strike breakers. In the World War we bought liberty bonds...\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to its proclamation of autonomy, Wimler's letter struck the patriotic tone of the marchers' original statement. It reflected also a class-conscious mentality linking their actions to labor struggles elsewhere as well as a conception that their cause was truly American.

The patriotic theme was further expressed by the way in which the marchers carried an American flag during the march and sometimes stretched it across mine entrances to prevent miners from entering. In several instances they forced miners to kneel and kiss the flag.\textsuperscript{37} Apparently, the marchers desperately sought to identify themselves as Americans, particularly in light of such statements as Gov. Henry Allen's proclamation that "the Kansas government does not intend

29. New York Times, December 13, 1921. 10. Anna Okorn remembers a "Mrs. Nino" hitting a miner on the head with his dinner pail.
32. On December 29, for example, police arrested Mrs. John Morris of Camp 51, the wife of a miner and mother of seven children. Mrs. Morris and Carrie Dilior of Ringo expressed their regret at having marched, as did Tillie Roitz, a schoolteacher at Ringo. Roitz protested the revocation of her teacher's certificate and pointed out that wives of members of the school board had participated in the march. Her brother, she said, was in World War I and she herself taught Americanism to her students. Pittsburg Daily Headlight, January 17, 1922.
34. Appeal to Reason, December 21, 1921.
35. Workers' Chronicle, Pittsburg, December 16, 1921.
37. This gesture bewildered one observer when "Bob Murray, the mine foreman, was made to kiss the flag. The reason for this was not clear as Murray is known as a thoroughly patriotic American." Pittsburg Daily Headlight, December 13, 1921.
to surrender to foreigners and their female relatives."  

Nor did Pittsburg plan to hang out the white flag as rumors spread that the city would be the next target of the marching Amazons. Following the December 13 march, the Crawford County sheriff (who one informant claimed was thrown into a pool of water by the women) requested a deputized force of one thousand to deal with the emergency. Veterans were recruited to defend the city, and rifles and shotguns were stockpiled in the Stillwell Hotel for their use.  

Local law enforcement efforts, however, did not dampen the enthusiasm of the women's army. On December 15, three days after the disturbances began, three troops of the Kansas National Guard cavalry arrived at Pittsburg and were subsequently stationed at Ringo, Mulberry, and Franklin; Lawrence later sent a machine gun detachment.  

Following the march, sheriff's deputies arrested forty-nine women on charges of unlawful assembly, assault, and disturbing the peace. They were held in bond of $750, rather than the customary $200. The harsh legal reprisals reflected middle-class fears and hostility, while the arrest lists testified to the mixed ethnic character and socialist influence of the event. Italians, French, Slovaks, Americans, and others had joined forces to express shared community and family concerns which superseded ethnic differences. Their leaders included Mary Skubitz and her mother Julia Yownain, socialists and miners' wives; Phil Callery, another local socialist, served as the marchers' defense attorney.  

Just as journalists covered the march in terms of gender, Callery based his case on the defendants' maternal responsibilities. His defense for the women who were arraigned on charges of unlawful assembly, assault, and disturbing the peace was one of "mass Psychology," which he claimed frequently led people to do things in time of labor unrest that they would not do individually. Finally, he cautioned that "the trial of the cases at this time would tend to again stir the passions of the community." In so many words, Callery defined the collective, community-inspired, and gender-specific nature of the march. The court too seemed to understand, for the women pleaded guilty and were fined from one dollar to two hundred dollars, paroled, and ordered to pay court costs.  

This spirited chapter in American labor history unfortunately must be closed on a negative note. On January 13, defeated both by local opposition and the international union, Howat ordered all striking miners back to work. The UMWA gave each local sole power to accept or reject applicants for membership in newly established locals. Each returning miner would have to pay a ten-dollar initiation fee and would be a silent, dues-paying member with no voice or vote in the union.  

Following the march, Kansas authorities tightened their control of the turbulent Balkans with antilabor measures such as laws passed by Girard, Cherokee, Arma, and Mulberry, under pressure of the Kansas attorney general, which made it illegal for men to refuse to work when there was work available in the area. The penalty for noncompliance was ten to thirty days at hard labor.  

The march also fanned the paranoia of local and state officials about subversive female aliens and underscored the distance that loomed between most Kansans and the mining camps. To give two examples, A. J. Curran, judge of the district court of Pittsburg, wrote to Mrs. John Tracy, chairman of the Americanization Committee of the Pittsburg Women's Auxiliary, about the law whereby naturalization of a male alien gave citizenship to his wife, a sensitive issue in light of the political rights and privileges conferred on women by the recently passed Nineteenth Amendment. "It is a known fact that there are anarchists, communists and bolsheviks among the alien women in this community," Curran stated. "As you know it was the lawlessness of the women in this community a few months ago which made necessary the stationing of the state militia in our county for two months to preserve law and order." In another pronouncement, Al F. Williams, the U.S. District Attorney, threatened to deport the "worst radicals" for he claimed that "when a situation like the present arises they all flock and act together like so many sheep." Faced with such sentiments, many marchers fled the area; authorities searched in vain for these women when warrants were issued for their arrest.  

Despite its dismal ending, the women's march holds several important lessons for one interested in...

41. Ibid.  
42. Ibid., January 26, 1922. Because the strikers had been out on strike since October, the ten-dollar initiation fee many times proved to be a prohibitive expense. Corruption occurred when the local union had the sole power to decide membership; there were cases where a man who wanted a job would have to go to the head of the local and take a jay of wine and five pigs to get the job. *Pittsburg Daily Headlight*, July 12, 1927.  
questions about American culture and women's history. As social scientists suggest, in episodes of collective behavior, ideologies and myths which lie beneath the surface of a society emerge. Thus the march discloses information about the roles, values, and political consciousness of women in this working-class community. The march itself tells in its own "language" how work, class, and politics shaped the subculture of a community while acknowledging hegemonic pressure from the surrounding district and dominant culture. The way in which contemporary observers structured the narrative of the event, evoking images of "Amazons" and foreign hordes, shows that the women's march represented a clear and distinct challenge to a social order based upon separate social roles of men and women as well as upon docile and subservient foreign workers. The women marchers symbolically used the traditional American flag to invoke a heritage of American democracy and show that they were entitled to the rights of citizens. They went to their kitchens for their weapon of red pepper, and by emptying dinner buckets they conveyed the message that they were now violently taking away the food that as nurturing women they had always given.

Finally, the actions of the women defy the interpretation of conventional labor historiography which characterizes wives of workers and strikers as conservative and frequently antunion and antistrike. The indirect relationship of women to means of production might support this theory. The Kansas women, as indicated earlier, however, were not alone in their public expression of community solidarity. In a number of instances in industrializing America, women marched to support the strikes of male family members. The common occurrence of women's strikes in mining communities seems to imply that the size, isolation, and high occupational health hazards created a sense of shared community involvement in the work culture of the mines. This involvement was unequaled in other industrial settings where the public and the private spheres of life were less integrated and where the lines between the middle and the working classes were less sharply drawn. In addition, the single employment character of the communities and the fact that supplementary income and consumable items were produced in the domestic sphere increased the unity of the community.46

Several issues about such demonstrations remain problematic, however. The first is the political consciousness of the marching women. In the case of the Kansas march, it is clear that miners who returned to work posed a political threat to mining-camp communities. They shat tered the cohesiveness of the working-class communities and broke the balance of cooperation that sustained these communities in tension with the world around them. Women who marched certainly could have perceived the political dimensions of their actions or, like Mrs. Okorn, they could have been motivated simply by the fact that "people were starving and it wasn't fair."

It is tantalizing as well to speculate about the intrafamily dynamics which existed in the mining camps. Studies of the Great Depression and family life indicate that cycles of poverty and unemployment alter the decision-making process, roles, and authority relationships in the working-class family. Clearly, the organization and results of the women's march, as well as the march itself, reflected the strength and initiative of women in the mining community within their households. As the historian Meredith Tax reminds us when writing of the collective behavior of mining women, "These women had their own reasons for wanting to fight. In the company towns and migrant labor camps of the West, people were oppressed as members of family units rather than as individuals."47 Thus it would seem that much of the answer to the original question of why women marched lies within the structure of the community as well as within the working-class family itself.

The massive social changes wrought by industrialization altered the work women and men did and changed the family itself as well. These changes, whether in work, gender roles, or the family, cannot be studied outside of the community context in which they operated, for the community at many levels provided reasons for their existence and a framework in which they functioned. It is good to remember also, in light of the preceding discussion, that women's activities cannot be placed in neat historical categories labeled "gender" without considering class. Historians of American women must be consistently aware of the very permeable membrane between the public and the private spheres of life for working-class women. They must understand that when women marched they marched for bread...and sometimes for roses, too.48
