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ABSTRACT

Although few leaders will attain the legendary status of Mother Jones, social movements depend upon practitioners of drama to interest others in their quest. In the contemporary classroom, the blending of the rhetoric of social movements with the creation and performance of reader's theater in honors public speaking has produced extraordinary results. In one classroom, students created readers theater presentations based upon the militia movement, right to die, and women's suffrage. They then performed their original scripts for other classes on campus, including government, philosophy, and basic speech courses. The activity introduced the students to the power of rhetoric in altering history and defining culture, and gave them the opportunity to perform before an audience. The educator's own interest in social movements resulted in the development of this approach to teaching honors public speaking. What began initially as an effort to bring Mother Jones to life for students is presently evolving into a full-length music drama about the Ludlow Massacre and the coal strike which took place in southern Colorado in 1913-14. This paper provides: (1) a synopsis of historical events; (2) selected examples from the libretto which was developed around these events; and (3) remarks with regard to the integration of the rhetoric of social movements into historic music drama. (Contains 2 notes, 9 references, and libretto excerpts.) (NKA)

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Performing the Past: Echoes from American History

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PERFORMING THE PAST: ECHOES FROM AMERICAN HISTORY

"I have said that I hate violence; I favor drama. We must wake the sleepers somehow, and where blindness can be healed by shock we must provide the shock"--Mother Jones, 1914 (Foner, 1983, p. 510). Obviously, the relationship between rhetoric and drama existed on a conscious level for Mary Harris Jones. Although few leaders will attain the legendary status of Mother Jones, social movements depend upon practitioners of drama to interest others in their quest.

The United Mine Workers of America's use of dramatic discourse and symbolism in the 1913-1914 coal strike in Colorado is typical of social movements, in general. Stewart et al. (1994) incorporated Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism in their examination of symbolism in social movements. They note, "Social movements are created and sustained through action; people articulating problems, defining issues, offering solutions, identifying enemies, stating courses of action, and both recruiting and activating followers (p. 162).

In the contemporary classroom, it is often necessary to "wake the sleepers." Working toward that end, the blending of the rhetoric of social movements with the creation and performance of reader's theater in honors public speaking has produced extraordinary results. This past semester my students created readers theater presentations based upon the militia movement, right to die, and women's suffrage. They then performed their original scripts for other classes on campus, including government, philosophy, and basic speech courses. Students gained an appreciation for the persuasive function of language, music, symbols, and leadership in shaping a social agenda. This activity introduced my students to the power of rhetoric in altering history and defining culture, and gave them the opportunity to perform before an audience.

My own interest in social movements, resulted in the development of this approach to teaching honors public speaking. What began initially as an effort to bring Mother Jones to life for students is presently evolving into a full-length music drama about the Ludlow Massacre and the great coal strike which took place in Southern Colorado in 1913-1914. Speech, performance, and historical research combine to create a dynamic, but predictably effective combination. According to Burke (1966, p. 55) , "if action is to be our key term, then drama is the culminative form of action. But if drama, then conflict. And if conflict, then victimage. Dramatism is always on the edge of this vexing problem, that comes to a culmination in tragedy."

The events leading to the "Ludlow Massacre" follow the dramatic form theorized by Burke and crystallized in many social movements in the following stages: order, action, drama, conflict, victimage, transcendence, redemption, and reestablished order. Thus, my own work has provided an illustration for my students of the applications of dramatistic theory and the integration of research, rhetoric, and performance.

Subsequently, this paper provides: (1) a synopsis of historical events, (2) selected examples from the libretto which were developed around these events, and (3) remarks with regard to the integration of the rhetoric of social movements into historic music drama.

Historical Events Surrounding the Ludlow Massacre

The events leading to the 1913 coal strike, the formation of the tent colony, the enlistment of the Colorado militia, and ultimately the Ludlow Massacre, clearly parallel Burke's dramatistic approach. The initial events follow the pattern of *order, action, drama, and conflict,* and move toward the predictable stage of

victimage or tragedy. The aftermath of the tragedy is best seen as *transcending and redemptive*. Arguably with the passage of time, the events culminated in a *reestablished order* .

In the early part of this century coal was king in Colorado. Over 10,000 men mined over three million tons of coal a year. During this same time period, over fourteen million immigrants flooded into America. These unknown, unnamed immigrant workers were the backbone of industrial America at the turn of the century. The coal mining industry of Colorado was no exception and was a major importer of foreign labor. In fact, in the aftermath of the Ludlow Massacre, labor organizers would argue convincingly that management intentionally recruited polyglot workers who could not unify because they lacked a common language.[1] The task of organizing the miners was made exceedingly difficult because they were primarily recent immigrants--for example in the tent colony of Ludlow formed during the strike, over 26 languages were spoken (McGovern and Gutteridge, 1996).

Both well-known and lesser known social activists, labor leaders, and industrialists became involved in Colorado's political and social upheaval during the 1913-1914 strike. The book The Great Coalfield War, based on former Senator George McGovern's 1953 dissertation, is considered to be the most comprehensive source detailing the events surrounding the coal strike. McGovern (1996) describes the Colorado strike as, "the most hard fought and violent labor struggle in American history" (p. xi). His book supports the contention that the primary issue which lead to this struggle was whether workers, who lived in isolated, company controlled coal camps, were entitled to basic human freedoms.

Labor agitator, Mother Jones was one of the key figures in the struggle. So feared was her ability as an organizer that she was jailed twice in Southern Colorado, and held incommunicado, and guarded day and night by six men (McGovern & Gutteridge, 1996) Nevertheless, she found a way to rally the miners with speeches in between arrests and deportations. Her fiery rhetoric and high profile kept the miners coalesced and the public aware of the strife in Colorado.

The strike was called in September of 1913 and was followed by a period of violent incidents with strikers and mine guards. Eventually, the Colorado militia was called in as a neutral party to keep the peace. Over time the more reasonable element of the militia returned to their towns and cities and the militia units were increasingly comprised of former mine guards and mercenaries. After months of animosity, the Colorado militia and the strikers engaged in a day long battle at the Ludlow tent colony. Although it has never clearly been determined who fired the first shot it seems clear that the militia's troops had become an antagonistic arm of the companies, and were receiving supplies and financial support directly from the major coal companies. The heavily armed troops swept through the tent city shooting indiscriminately and setting the tents on fire. There were several fatalities among the strikers that day, but the tragic news of the following day shocked and repelled Americans nationwide. Violence toward labor had seldom captured the nation's sympathy, but when eleven children and two women were found dead in a pit dug for protection underneath one of the burned tents people were outraged. After this tragedy, ten days of open warfare between strikers and the Colorado militia resulted in further loss of life, and destruction of property. Strikers took control of portions of Southern Colorado, including the city of Trinidad. President Wilson reluctantly agreed to send federal troops to end the violence and the strikers willingly complied.

Even at the time, this was not only billed as a struggle of industrialists vs. labor but also was seen as a test of democratic values. Politically the stakes were whether the government had control over people with vast fortunes, or whether the industrialists, with their private armies hired through detective agencies, were above the law and in control of the local, state, and federal governments.

The novelist Upton Sinclair, a well-known public figure since his 1906 publication of *The Jungle,* became a spokesperson for the Colorado miners as well. Sinclair viewed this conflict as the continuing saga of the giant capitalists' exploitation of the masses. His efforts were directed primarily toward John D. Rockefeller, the principle owner of the largest coal concern in Colorado, the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company.

As late as July, 1914, Rockefeller asked his publicity director to circulate a piece written by economist John J. Stevenson which denigrated the value of labor. Rockefeller described the essay as "one of the soundest, clearest, most forcible pronouncements" he had read (Papanikolas, 1991, p.133). It said,

> Each year sees 700,000 children perish because their parents had insufficient nourishment. If it be true, one must concede that their deaths are a blessing to themselves and to the community. Such children should not have been born. Unskilled labor is merely animated machinery for rough work and adds very little value to the final product. One E.H. Harriman is of more lasting service to a nation than would be 100,000 unskilled laborers. Without a Harriman they would be a menace (Papanikolas, 1991, p.133).

For Sinclair, the Colorado strike had become a cause with which to fight a war for the socialist doctrine, and in Rockefeller he had found the ultimate opponent (Sinclair, 1976). In the aftermath of Ludlow, Upton Sinclair orchestrated events to keep the strikers in the news, while the Rockefeller camp created a public relations campaign designed to exonerate the company.

By 1915, an extensive Congressional investigation of the events and circumstances largely verified that the coal companies had created feudal kingdoms in which the miners had lost basic political, social, and economic rights (West, 1915). Rockefeller finally visited Colorado, in part, at Mother Jones' request. This trip to Colorado appeared to be a turning point for Rockefeller in his approach to the relationship between management and labor. His biographer wrote, "To JDR Jr. himself it (the Colorado strike) brought a conception of what he called 'the kinship of humanity'--the common hazards, anxieties, and suffering that face all men alike" (Fosdick, 1956, p.167)

The Theatrical Treatment of Social Movement Rhetoric

Because social movements depend upon public interest for survival, they automatically have built in "dramatic" form. As noted previously, Mother Jones was aware of the value of drama and the power of oratory. Consequently, many of her speeches have the flair and timing of a dramatic monologue. Shaping her rhetoric into dialogue for a performance piece is a relatively straightforward task.

The scene in which Mother Jones appears to the miners at a secret meeting (See Appendix A), seeks to introduce her as a speaker with the tunnel vision of a fanatic engaged in a humanist "holy war." Her recollections from her autobiography and passages from speeches recorded by stenographers are woven into both the lines she speaks and the lyrics of the song she sings.

LIBRETTO: (See Appendix A) Secret Meeting

The Congressional investigations produced over 6000 pages of testimony and evidence. Many excerpts provide such colorful and dramatic testimony that they seem more like a script than a Congressional inquiry. For example, Mr. Byrnes is questioning Mother Jones, and accusing her of making inflammatory speeches (Foner,1983, p.400-401).

> Mr. Byrnes: They give you credit with saying (reading): "Just make me governor for one month. I won't ask for a sheriff or a policeman, and I will do business, and there won't a guard stay in the state of West Virginia."
>
> Mother Jones: That is true!
>
> Mr. Byrnes: (resuming reading) Sixty-nine thousand pounds of coal they (the coal company bosses) docked you for, and a few pounds of slate, and then they say... 'give to Jesus on Sunday'...Jesus never sees a penny of it....I wish I was God Almighty. I would throw down some night from heaven and get rid of the whole blood-sucking bunch. 2
>
> Mother Jones: That is true; I guess I did say that. That is not half as radical as Lincoln. I have heard him make a great deal more radical speech.

The second example from the libretto (See Appendix B) presents the courtroom confrontation which is mainly with Rockefeller's public relations man and a Congressional committee member. This is followed by the questioning of Rockefeller. These responses are almost verbatim from the transcript. A more

fictional confrontation between the main Colorado organizer John Lawson and Rockefeller follows. But again, many of the words and all of the ideas are true to the historical accounts surrounding the events.

LIBRETTO: (See Appendix B) Congressional Hearing

The Integration of Social Movements and Performance

This particular event fuels the imagination because it embraces the American experience so completely. This story links the lives of some of the poorest, most disenfranchised people in America, with the wealthiest young man in the world at the time--John D. Rockefeller, Jr.. This is a story about the immigrant experience, the Progressive era of muckraking and risky social reform, the dangers of immense wealth to democracy, and the basic belief that every person deserves dignity. However, most social movements of any consequence could make the same claim. Their nature requires suffering and is sustained by drama.

Throughout this theatrical work there is an effort to preserve the words and speeches and moments which moved the various players to take action. Most of this information would have been lost were it not for the fact that town hall meetings and speeches were important events which played nightly to audiences across America in 1914. The power of the spoken word was exercised purposely and theatrically (and not always accurately, to be sure) to move the masses. Newspapers and magazines with vastly different political agendas were recording events, while new technology had made it possible for news to be disseminated quickly and widely. A new awareness of the power of public opinion created a nationwide audience that had not existed in the same form only a few years earlier.

Although the events of the Colorado coal war could stand alone with regard to being a powerful story, the aftermath of the massacre was played by both sides to the larger audience of public opinion. This orchestration created a host of rhetorical situations for the spokespersons of the various fractions. Upton Sinclair, Mother Jones, and Rockefeller and his many minions attempted to promote a point of view which justified their actions and beliefs.

The manipulation of public opinion was in its infancy with regard to public relations in 1914. Since the advent of radio, and most certainly with television, activists recognize *the media are the movement.* Stewart et al (1994) emphasize the entwined nature of drama and media since the inception of television. They state, "The mass media and news industries have heightened the nature of political drama and, in many ways, have become the nervous system of our society " (p. 163). Although we often think of the "agenda setting," "dramatic impact," approach of modern television as a recent invention, the roots of this interconnection of social/political agenda and media are planted firmly in the past.

Summary

In the late 1950s the 500 millionth ton of coal mined since the inception of the industry in Colorado was extracted without fanfare by some unknown miner according to the Huerfano Historical Society (1996). Today, the mines are closed, except for one or two which operate sporadically and do the work of thousands of men with a few gigantic machines. The extraction of coal, the boom towns, and most of all, the lives and deaths of a generation of foreign workers, have left few traces on the modern landscape.

Too often, social movements are relegated to the pages of survey textbooks and the rhetoric and rhetors of those movements appear only in upper division or graduate classes. Studying and replicating social movements through an original creative work provides a blend of scholarship and performance. The events of the past, and the people who shaped those events, become three dimensional for the actors and for the audience members. Ideally, the rhetorical experiences of important social movements should be preserved in a performance medium that can be accessed by the general public.

NOTES

[1] In the introduction to The Coal War, Graham discusses this idea which is also alluded to by many other authors. He offers compelling evidence that there was a concerted effort to create communication barriers among workers in the testimony of Senator Thomas Patterson. Patterson, testifying in 1914 stated that a labor contractor had informed him, "when I would get the orders for men frequently I would get them in writing, and they specified the number of one nationality and number of another nationality--all speaking different languages--and no English-speaking nationality." Sinclair, U. (1976). The Coal War. Boulder, CO: Colorado Associated University Press. Introduction by John Graham.

[2] Earlier she is reminded that she said, "Why, Jesus don't know any more about you, than a dog does about his father." This type of irreverent rhetoric is found throughout her speeches. Although she would invoke religion at times, she also ridiculed religion in the face of the pressing worldly needs of the poor.

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MOTHER JONES

(She nods in pleasure and agreement. Mother Jones is a commanding presence with a spellbinding style of oratory.) We don't have a lot of time, so I got one thing to say to you. Until you get some backbone and stick together and organize against those mine operators, you will never be as valuable to them as those damn mules they own. And, men, if you're afraid to fight, we'll get the women together to fight for you and beat the hell out of them!!

MINERS

Cheers and laughter. ad lib)

MOTHER JONES

Glad you aren't Denver church women. They faint when they hear me talk. The way I see it, if I pray, I have to wait until I am dead to get anything; but when I swear I get things here!

CHARLIE

Amen to that! (*Followed by cheers and laughter. ad lib)*

MOTHER JONES

Now, I ask you, do you fear your pitiful little bosses or the Baldwin-felt thugs they hire? They are feeble excuses for men. Why, most of them are so mean and low, they've even been run out of Texas.

MINERS

You tell 'em, Mother! *(More laughter, ad lib)*

MOTHER JONES

A thousand Hungarians were out of work on a strike, back East, and the owner of that railroad said: "They don't suffer--they can't even speak English." *(Pause)* And I went there, and I'm going to tell <u>you</u> what I told them, "Your English is not too good yet, but suffering can be learned pretty damn fast." *(Pause)* You've got two reasons to join the union: dignity and survival!!

PEARL JOLLY

That's right! *(Crowd response)*

MOTHER JONES

John D. Rockefeller, that high class burglar, should miss teaching his Sunday school class in New York City for a Sunday or two and come to Colorado and learn something about brotherhood.

APPENDIX "B"

Scene 6- Washington, a Congressional Investigation

SENATOR WALSH

(With a slight southern dialect) In order to further our investigation into the events in Colorado let us review your, a...role as Mr. Rockefeller's...*(with some disdain)* publicity agent. Mr. Ivy, ...you were responsible for sending 44,000 bulletins out saying that a camp stove turned over and set the tents on fire at Ludlow,--- that the union leaders' salaries were 10 times their actual amount, and that Mother Jones was once a...*(looks at Mother Jones, apologetically, clearing throat)*...my, ...my apologies, ma'am ...a daughter of joy.

MOTHER JONES

Given a choice, I would rather be a daughter of joy than a lying son of a bitch *(Looking at Ivy, laughter from observers)*

WALSH

(Wait for "general" audience laughter before continuing) I must ask that audience members refrain from makin' the noise. Did you send those bulletins?

IVY

That might probably be subjected to a little qualification, and yet that may be absolutely true, sir.

WALSH

Excuse me? *(incredulous at his doubletalk)*

IVY

My mission was to present in the bulletins, "the true attitude of the company operators as they themselves understood it."

WALSH

There is a...a very nice distinction there, so as a publicity agent, your mission was to give the truth as the man you were serving saw it to be???.

IVY

Well, yes, and then again, no.

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